

1. The Photograph

I was ten years old. My grandmother sat on a string bed under the mango tree. It was late summer and there were sunflowers in the garden and a warm wind in the trees. My grandmother was knitting a woollen scarf for the winter months. She was very old, dressed in a plain white sari. Her eyes were not very strong now, but her fingers moved quickly with the needles and the needles kept clicking all afternoon. Grandmother had white hair but there were very few wrinkles on her skin.



I had come home after playing cricket in the *maidan*.
I had taken my meal and now I was **rummaging**

through a box of old books and family **heirlooms** that had just that day been brought out of the **attic** by my mother. Nothing in the box interested me very much except for a book with colourful pictures of birds and butterflies. I was going through the book, when I found a small photograph between the pages. It was a faded picture, yellow and foggy. It was the picture of a girl standing against a wall and behind the wall, there was nothing but sky. But from the other side, a pair of hands reached up, as though someone was going to climb the wall. There were flowers growing near the girl, but I couldn't tell what they were. There was a creeper too, but it was just a creeper.

I ran out into the garden. 'Granny!' I shouted.

'Look at this picture! I found it in the box of old things. Whose picture is it?'

I jumped on the bed beside my grandmother and she **walloped** me on the bottom and said, 'Now I've lost count of my stitches and the next time you do that I'll make you finish the scarf yourself.'

Granny was always threatening to teach me how to knit which I thought was a **disgraceful** thing for a boy to do. It was a good **deterrent** for keeping me out of mischief. Once I had torn the drawing-room curtains and Granny had put a needle and thread in

my hand and made me stitch the curtain together, even though I made long, two-inch stitches, which had to be taken out by my mother and done again.

She took the photograph from my hand and we both **stared** at it for quite a long time. The girl had long, loose hair and she wore a dress that nearly covered her ankles, and sleeves that reached her wrists, and there were a lot of bangles on her hands. But **despite** all this drapery, the girl appeared to be full of freedom and movement. She stood with her legs apart and her hands on her hips and had a wide, almost devilish smile on her face.



'Whose picture is it?' I asked.

'A little girl's, of course,' said Grandmother. 'Can't you tell?'

'Yes, but did you know the girl?'



'Yes, I knew her,' said Granny, 'But she was a very wicked girl and I shouldn't tell you about her. But I'll tell you about the photograph. It was taken in your grandfather's house about sixty years ago. And that's the garden wall and over the wall there was a road going to town.'

'Whose hands are they?' I asked, 'coming up from the other side?'

Grandmother **squinted** and looked closely at the picture and shook her head. 'It's the first time I noticed,' she said. 'They must have been the sweeper boy's. Or maybe they were your grandfather's.'

'They don't look like Grandfather's hands,' I said. 'His hands are all bony.'

'Yes, but this was sixty years ago.'

'Didn't he climb the wall after the photo?'

'No, nobody climbed up. At least, I don't remember.'

'And you remember well, Granny.'

'Yes, I remember ... I remember what is not in the photograph. It was a spring day and there was a cool breeze blowing, nothing like this. Those flowers at the girl's feet, they were marigolds and the bougainvillea creeper, it was a mass of purple.'

You cannot see these colours in the photo and even if you could, as nowadays, you wouldn't be able to smell the flowers or feel the breeze.'

'And what about the girl?' I said. 'Tell me about the girl.'

'Well, she was a wicked girl,' said Granny.

'You don't know the trouble they had getting her into those fine clothes she's wearing.'

'I think they are terrible clothes,' I said.

'So, did she. Most of the time, she hardly wore a thing. She used to go swimming in a muddy pool with a lot of **ruffianly** boys and ride on the backs of buffaloes. No boy ever teased her though, because she could kick and scratch and pull his hair out!'

'She looks like it too,' I said. 'You can tell by the way she's smiling. At any moment something's going to happen.'

'Something did happen,' said Granny. 'Her mother wouldn't let her take off the clothes afterwards, so she went swimming in them and lay for half an hour in the mud.'

I laughed heartily and Grandmother laughed too.

'Who was the girl?' I said. 'You must tell me who she was.'



'No, that wouldn't do,' said Grandmother.

I pretended I didn't know, but I knew because Grandmother still smiled in the same way, even though she didn't have as many teeth.

'Come on, Granny,' I said, 'tell me, tell me.'

But Grandmother shook her head and carried on with the knitting. And I held the photograph in my hand looking from it to my grandmother and back again, trying to find points in common between the old lady and the little pig-tailed girl. A lemon-coloured butterfly settled on the end of Grandmother's knitting needle and stayed there while the needles clicked away. I made a **grab** at the butterfly and it flew off in a **dipping** flight and settled on a sunflower.

'I wonder whose hands they were,' whispered Grandmother to herself, with her head bowed, and her needles clicking away in the soft, warm silence of that summer afternoon.



Ruskin Bond

New Words

rummaging	searching
heirlooms	articles handed down from generation to generation
attic	upstairs room for storing unused items
walloped	gave a hit
disgraceful	shameful
deterrent	to make the child avoid doing something
stared	looked at someone or something for a long time
despite	in spite of
squinted	peered with narrowed eyes
ruffianly	rough and violent
grab	to catch roughly
dipping	low

Comprehension

A. Answer these questions.

1. Describe the narrator's grandmother.
2. The narrator found something that fascinated him. What was it? Explain.
3. What deterrent was his grandmother always threatening to use?



4. Describe the girl in the photograph.
5. What was Grandmother's reaction to the photograph?
6. What did Grandmother remember which was not in the photograph?
7. Why did Grandmother consider the clothes the girl was wearing terrible?

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *Look at this picture! I found it in the box of old things.*
 - a. Who is the speaker and to whom is he speaking?
 - b. Where had the box of old things been found?
 - c. Who was the picture of? Describe the person.
2. *But she was a very wicked girl.*
 - a. Who do you think the girl was? Who is speaking?
 - b. Where and when was the photograph taken?
 - c. What was strange about the hands?
3. *I wonder whose hands they were.*
 - a. Who is the speaker and who is being spoken to?
 - b. What was the speaker doing at this time?
 - c. Which insect interrupted this peaceful moment and how?

C. Explain these phrases from the story.

1. family heirlooms _____
2. yellow and foggy _____
3. a good deterrent _____
4. devilish smile _____
5. a lot of ruffianly boys _____
6. scratch and pull his hair out _____

Activity

A. Look at these pictures. These are everyday articles that were used once but are now obsolete. Identify them and write their uses.





B. Have you seen old photographs of your family, especially your grandparents? How are they different from the photographs you see now?

Paste an old photograph of your grandparents in this frame.



How different are their clothes, background and the picture quality? Discuss in class.



Skill Drill Reading

This project focuses on understanding different perspectives in different stories, poems, plays, novels, etc.

1. Pick any story or poem from the coursebook or any other book from the library.
2. Read it thoroughly and understand from whose perspective the story/poem is written. It can be:
 - a. first-person narrative: One of the characters himself/herself tells the story.
 - b. third-person narrative: There is an invisible narrator who tells the story about other characters.
3. Make notes on what you think could have been a better narrative. Do you think the story/poem could have been better if written from someone else's perspective? Do this exercise for four or five stories/poems.

