

Literary material exemplar

The passage describes the visit of Aunt Daisy to her sister's family in Chicago.

Sometimes, late at night, from the dark of their bedroom, I could hear my mother and father talking in low tones.

'But we haven't got room for her,' my father would argue. 'And besides, it costs something to board her.'

But my mother, who had not seen her youngest sister for many years, kept at it. The letters piled up.

Toward the end of June my father, worn away, gave in. My mother wrote to Boston telling her sister to come, and when the train arrived my oldest brother met Aunt Daisy at the station. He brought her home. My oldest brother, about twenty at the time, was somewhat of a dandy, wore a wide straw sailor with a colored ribbon, and was thus delegated to be the family's reception committee. I remember we watched him going up the street toward the trolley on his way to the station, and when he reached the corner he waved back at us because he knew that we were looking, though he really could not see us.

He brought Aunt Daisy home. It was late dusk when they came. The street lamps had not yet lit up, and from the windows we could see Milt struggling with two heavy bags while a little woman walked jauntily at his side. In the fading light we couldn't see her face, and when they got closer to the flat we went away from the front windows because she might look up and see us, so when at last the bell rang we were all excited and her entrance was something of a dramatic event. I could hear the bags bumping as my brother struggled with them up the stairs

Then we opened the door, Milt set the bags down in the hall, and Aunt Daisy, with a little cry, rushed forward into my mother's arms. My mother couldn't talk for a while; she hadn't seen her sister for over fifteen years.

Milt came inside, shut the door, and dumped the bags in the parlor. 'It's dark here!' he shouted. 'What's the matter?' and he struck matches and lit the gas-lamps in all the rooms of the flat.

In the sudden light we looked at our mother's sister - we stood there gaping, the whole crew of us, six kids. We saw a small, dark, vivacious woman, who looked to be about twenty, flashing us a smile. There was something vibrant about her, about her nostrils, her eyes and hair, and we fell in love with her at once. On her head she wore a small hat with gray and brown feathers, and she had a way of tilting her chin, of flashing her smile, of looking pertly alert that made me think of a bird. Yes, she was a warm little bird.

She took her hat off right away and stared brightly at us in friendship. My mother's eyes were misty as she saw her sister counting us briskly by placing her forefinger saucily against our foreheads, one by one, and trilling "Tra-la-la-la!"

'I'm your aunt Daisy,' she said, then bent down and kissed every one of us while our mother stood by, choking and happy. When she came to my oldest brother, she stopped, flashing us all another smile. 'I kissed Milt at the train, but I guess I can kiss him again,' and she gave him a real loud smack on the lips. My kid brother, who was about six at the time, jumped up in the air and clapped his hands, so my aunt had to kiss him again also.

Then she breezed through the flat, through the six large gloomy rooms, her heels rapping against the floor, while my mother, middle-aged, gray, tired out by childbearing and household drudgery, walked behind her.

When we reached the front room, we all stood at the windows looking down the darkening street, and at that moment the arc lamps lit up with a sudden burst of light. 'See!' she cried as glare and shadow cut the pavement below, and she raised my kid brother in her arms and kissed his cheek again. She was in love with him right away.

On the outskirts my sister, thirteen and lonely in a house of many brothers, edged silently away, and with a sad, lost look stared down at the shining asphalt. She had been dreaming and thinking of our aunt for weeks and wanted so much to have someone to talk to. She stood there with her soft yellow hair in two long plaits hanging down her back, and by the set of her small jaw I knew she was hating her little brother. But Aunt Daisy suddenly turned to her, cuddled her hand, and brought her over. My sister was awkward at first, but it was evident that she liked Aunt Daisy.

Then we heard that well-known heavy tread on the bottom stairs. All of us stood crowded in Aunt Daisy's bedroom, waiting. The door slammed.

'Is there a show going on?' shouted our father when he saw all the lights in the flat burning. 'What's the meaning of this?' and he strode through the house, turning off all the gas except the parlor jet. He was grumbling to himself, a short, stocky, testy man.

At the threshold of the bedroom he stopped. 'Oh,' he said, taken slightly aback, and stood looking at my mother's sister, at the trembling smile she flashed at him. What fine teeth she had! They greeted each other quietly, and he asked if the train ride had been hot and dusty. Then he went into his bedroom.