

Growing Up

-Joyce Cary

The story at hand by Joyce Cary revolves around the theme of growing up. Apart from the physical growth of the teenage girls, Kate and Jenny, the story also focuses on the 'emotional growing up' of their middle-aged father, Robert Quick, our protagonist of the story. The story having a simple outline begins with Robert returning home from a business trip for the weekend. He finds a note from his wife that the two girls-Kate and Jenny, their daughters, were in the garden and that she would be back by four. Expecting a warm welcome from the girls, he at once made for the garden.

He had missed his two small girls and looked forward eagerly to their greeting. He had hoped indeed that they might, as often before, have been waiting at the corner of the road, to flag the car and drive home with him.

The author then gives a brief description of the Quicks' garden which seemed to be a 'wilderness'. Except for a small vegetable patch near the pond, and one bed near where Mrs. Quick grew flowers for the house, it had not been touched for years.

Old apple trees tottered over seedy laurels, unpruned roses. Tall ruins of dahlias and delphiniums hung from broken sticks.

The excuse for the neglect was that the garden belonged to the children, while the truth was that neither of the Quicks cared for the garden. However, the excuse had eventually come true and the garden belonged to the children, with all its unshaven grass- suggesting 'a bit of real wild country', or a place for picnics as Robert thought.

He went to the garden to find his two little girls lost in their own world. Quick greeted them but got no response and for a moment he thought that they may have missed him. A little disappointed and dismayed, he recollected that the last time the when he had missed the girls, two years before.

First, he caught the sight of Jenny, the younger of the two, lying on her stomach by the pond with a book under her nose. She was twelve and had lately taken furiously to reading. He made for the pond with long steps calling out and waving to her.

But Jenny merely turned her head slightly and peered at him through her hair. Then she dropped her cheek on the book as if to say, "Excuse me, it's really too hot."

He now saw Kate, sitting with an air of laziness and concentration, on the swing leaning sideways against a rope, with her head down, apparently in deep thought. Her bare legs were blotched with mud, with 'one foot hooked over the other' as she replied in a faint muffled voice to her father's calling, barely looking at him.

Quick was amused at his own disappointment. He said to himself, 'children have no manners but at least they're honest-they don't pretend.'

Although his daughters took no notice of him, Mr. Quick, never the one to demand affection, brought out a deck chair and began to read the morning paper. He generally believed that his daughters were naturally impulsive and affectionate and would grow up to be exciting women.

And the mere presence of the children was a pleasure. Nothing could deprive him of that. He was home again.

After a while, Kate playfully scolded Snort, their cocker bitch, for disturbing her. Jenny joined in and when the bitch didn't go away even after an energetic kick from Kate, she hurled a bamboo stick at the dog like a spear. The dog was startled at the sudden uproar of the girls as they came running towards her, unsure 'if this was a new game or if she had committed a grave crime'.

Jenny gave a yell and rushed at her. She fled yelping. At once Kate jumped up, seized another bamboo and threw it, shouting, 'Tiger, tiger.'

The two sisters ran after the dog, laughing, bumping together, falling over each other and snatching up anything they could find to throw at the poor creature-pebbles, dead daffodils, bits of flower-pots and lumps of earth. Snort was horrified and overwhelmed. She ran around barking hysterically in desperate submission and finally, crept whining between a broken shed and the wall.

Steadily their game became too rough and it disturbed Mr. Quick. He asked the girls to stop but instead they turned towards him and 'rushed at the man with the rake carried like a lance' in their hand and staggering with laughter threw themselves upon their father. They tore at the man, strangling him hard, and even though it was a game, Mr. Quick was frightened and shocked by their savagery.

It seemed to him that both the children, usually so gentle, so affectionate, had gone completely mad, vindictive.

Meanwhile Snort too, recovered and joined the girls. Paying no heed to their father's yelling, the girls battered at him, Kate was jumping on his stomach while Jenny seized him by collar as if to strangle him.

Her face, close to his own, was that of a homicidal maniac; her eyes were wide and glaring, her lips curled back to show all her teeth.

Soon the chair gave away and they collapsed in a heap. Snort was frightened scratched Mr. Quick's face. The man did not have the heart to reproach the girls but was dazed at the 'primitive and brutal' force of his daughters. It seemed to him that something new had broken into his old, simple and happy relation with his daughters ; and that they had receded into a world of their own in which he had no place.

Seeing him hurt, both Kate and Jenny nursed his wounds. They fetched water and applied iodine and plaster on them. The sudden switch seemed like playing another game. In a little while, Mrs. Quick arrived along with her friend Jane Martin-the Chairman of Welfare Committee and announced that that committee was coming for tea.

The girls were now dressed in smart clean frocks and served the guests with 'demure and reserved looks'-they knew how to behave at a tea or a party. Seeing this, Mr. Quick realised that his daughters were growing up and felt-

In a year or two more I shan't count at all. Young men will come prowling, like the dogs after Snort-I shall be an old buffer, useful only to pay bills.

Feeling a 'sense of stiffness', filled with self-pity, and dejected by the thought, he wanted to go to the club for some male company- he wanted to go to a familiar place, where people don't change moods like this. He could not bear cards but hoped to find old Wilkins there. Wilkins at seventy was crashing, dreary bore, who spent half of his life at the club. But, Quick thought he could have a game with the old man and even dine with him- his wife wouldn't mind; and go back home only when the girls are in bed.

He stole away when the committee members pulled out their agenda but was stopped at the garden wall by Jenny who wanted to look at his wounds. He lifted her on the garden wall which made her about a foot taller than himself. Having reached the superior position, she poked the plaster, examining the wound and checking if it was still sticking or not.

Quick found it difficult to recognize the expression of her face-

What was the game, medical, material? Was she going to laugh?

But Jenny frowned, as if 'she was also struck by something new and unexpected' and saying 'good-bye', ran off. As the man walked slowly towards the club, a sudden realisation donned upon him.

"No," he thought, "not quite a game- not for half a second. She's growing up- and so am I."

Significance:

The story 'Growing Up' revolves around Kate and Jenny, the two sisters who are entering their teenage and are undergoing a number of behavioural changes as a part of their growing up, the revelation of which comes to their father, Robert Quick in the course of the story. He realizes that the girls are not as intimately involved with him as they were earlier and had crossed the age where family is the only world. He wishes to share their new world, but is little welcome in it. The change in their moods from their ignoring him at first, to their violent 'game', followed by the dignified behaviour at the tea and finally to the caring and tending of his wounds at the end suggests the growth in the characters of the girls which is unpredictable and alarming for their father. He felt that they had one hand become more practical and sensible, knowing their responsibilities while on other were still a little immature. The swings in mood and change in mood from loving children to aggressive teenagers to responsible daughters, reveal that they were growing up. The contrasting behaviour is an indication to their parents that they too need to grow with their growing children and have to adjust emotionally to their growing needs and moods.

For Robert quick:

The theme of growing up applies to their father as well; Robert quick is a middle aged man who is going through an emotional growing up. He is extremely fond of his daughters and having played with them for so many years, he now feels cut off from their own created world. His wife too, remains busy socializing with people and does not have time for him. He has to come to terms with his diminishing relevance in the family and especially, in his daughters' lives.

He is actually aware of the growing distance between them and the changing dynamics of their relationship. He now feels uneasy and decides to go to the club to find male company, or company of people with uniform and familiar moods and attitude. He realizes that in a few years, he would only be useful to pay the bills of his daughters. At the end, he acknowledges the challenges of growing up and sees it as a part of life, recognising that everyone needs to grow with changing times and adapt to the realities of life.