

The Skylight Room: Summary & Theme

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In this lesson we will learn about Miss Elsie Leeson, a hopeful, driven young woman in the short story, 'The Skylight Room' by O. Henry, and discuss how her story is used to demonstrate idealism, deliverance, and other similar themes.

Summary

Hope is important. It is the thing that allows us to feel excitement and joy. It is the thing that allows us to move beyond the present moment. Read on to learn about a young woman in the short story, "The Skylight Room" by O. Henry, that uses hope to light up the darkness in her life.

The Skylight Room

The story begins in second person, the narrator speaking to you as if giving advice about talking to **Mrs. Parker**, a woman that owns a boarding house. The narrator takes you through the systematic way Mrs. Parker would show her rooms by price, and how she would get angrier and more judgmental if you could not afford an expensive room.

On the tour, the skylight room was shown last, but not by Mrs. Parker. Instead, her colored maid was left with the task. The room was very small with storeroom closets. The room had the bare necessities and was \$2 to rent, but it had a small skylight that showed "a square of blue infinity."



The skylight room was the cheapest and smallest in the house, reserved for those with minimal income.

The narrator recalls a day when a woman named **Miss Elsie Leeson** came looking for a room, and Mrs. Parker gave the usual contempt since she was not a wealthy doctor or a dentist. This meant she could only afford the bottom of the barrel. The tour eventually ended with the maid showing her the skylight room and Miss Leeson accepting the deal.

Miss Leeson would go to work every day and come home and finish her work on the stairs in the company of the other boarders. The others, mainly men, would gather around her, thrilled to be in her joyful company. However, the women of the house did not feel the same. They were annoyed with her imaginative curiosity and happy demeanor.

A Dying Star

One night, Miss Leeson tells the boarders of a star she can see through her skylight. She named the star Billy Jackson. Miss Longnecker, annoyed by the attention and lack of education, tells Miss Leeson the real name of the star, and as she begins a diatribe about its relations to other stars, some of the men jump to defend Miss Leeson's star gazing. She describes the beautiful view of the star from her room and how it is the only thing she can see in the darkness.

One day, Miss Leeson becomes unemployed and struggles to find more work. There even comes a time when she couldn't afford food. One night, Mr. Hoover, another boarder, asks for her hand in marriage, but Leeson pushes him away from her and carries herself wearily up the ladder steps to her room.

Exhausted, she falls on the bed but smiles up at Billy Jackson who is waiting for her. She says goodbye and tells Billy of how he was her light in a world of darkness. He was the thing that kept her moving forward when all hope seemed to be lost.



*Miss Leeson would stare up at the stars each night through her skylight,
looking to one in particular that she named Billy Jackson.*

The next morning when Miss Leeson doesn't come down for work, the maid and crew push the door open to find Elsie passed out on the bed. Mrs. Parker and her staff try everything to wake her and reluctantly call an ambulance, because selfishly Mrs. Parker didn't want trouble at her home. The ambulance doctor, ironically named William Jackson, races up the stairs when told which room she was in, knowing the situation that awaited him. He came down carrying Miss Leeson with the look of the dead on his face. He told the driver to rush them to the hospital.

The story seems to end here, but the narrator gives the reader comfort by reading a line in the newspaper that stated the patient found at 49 East will recover from starvation.

Themes

While the story has what we could call a happy ending, there is a lot to be learned from Miss Leeson's troubles. Let's take a look at some of the themes present in the tale.

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