

Guy vanderhaeghe's
short story "the
watcher" essay
sample



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Guy Vanderhaeghe's story, "The Watcher" is a rousing and intricate story of the eleven year-old boy Charlie. The plot reveals his initiation from innocence to experience when he was forced to stay on his grandmother's farm.

There are several themes in the story, all interacting in many different levels. One central idea is the person's metamorphosis as a result of certain events. Charlie is the " watcher" in this story. He is a sickly boy and was always treated by his mother with care. This has allowed him to acquire a knack of observing other people unobtrusively. " I suppose it was having a bad chest that turned me into an observer, a watcher, at an early age", Charlie says. The image of illness presents the underlying perception of helplessness, both of Charlie's and his mother's. For him this means that he is powerless against life's ebbs and flows. In a sense, his being is defined by what happens in his environment, him being a passive observer. This will all be changed by a turn of events later on in the story, where his character is transformed.

Charlie's initiation to the adult world was also brought about by him having a " bad chest". Being sheltered in his house afforded him the time and opportunity to develop his skill of spying on people and an acquisition of knowledge of rumors and gossips. This made him form observations of the human nature: " adults could be immensely interesting and entertaining if you knew what to watch for." This gave him to have an inadequate and

limited understanding of the world, but his experiences on his grandmother's farm changed this.

In the story, a struggle arises between Charlie's grandmother and Thompson, his aunt's new boyfriend. Here we can draw a line in the clash between the urban sophisticate, and the hard-talking prairie dweller. Charlie made friends with Thompson, the latter teaching things about Buddhism and how to take advantage of people. This puts him inside the world of adult conflict and divided loyalties. This could be illustrated in the following exchange between Charlie and his grandma: " He must be an awful smart fellow to be studying to be a professor at a university," I commented... " One thing I know for sure," snapped my grandmother. " He isn't smart enough to lift the toilet seat when he pees. There's evidence enough for that."

Charlie's act of killing Stanley the rooster could be considered a metaphor foreshadowing the events leading to his betrayal of Thompson. In this experiment with violence, he was able to come out of the shell of passivity and finally learns how it feels to take control of a situation, in this case, by determining whether the rooster lives or dies.

The story's ending comes as unexpected when he goes against Thompson. When he was questioned by the police regarding the incident where Thompson was beaten up by the Ogden boys, he denied any knowledge, even though he saw it. This gave him an opportunity to take charge, and to weigh the advantages and disadvantages that his actions may produce. In the story, it was Thompson who introduced him to the ways of the world and how to play the game by taking advantage of a situation. Ironically, Charlie

learned to do exactly that when he finally took his grandmother's side and implicated Thompson, and eliminating Thompson from their lives. He says: "I had watched their game from the sidelines long enough to know the rules... And now he was asking me to save him, to take a risk, when I was more completely in her clutches than he would ever be. He forgot I was a child. I depended on her."

Charlie discovers the pleasures and benefits of having control over others. This story is a stirring and dramatic one wherein the characters in the story had played a crucial part in his development. And finally, those events triggers Charlie's transformation from the " watcher" to someone with control, a key player in the power-struggle in the grown-up world.

Bibliography

Vanderhaeghe, Guy. " The Watcher." *Man Descending* . Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982.