

# Priscilla the cambodian – close passage analysis essay



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There has always been prejudice in the world. Everyone has had experience with prejudice at some point in their lives. Some, sadly to say, have had more experience with prejudice and worse experiences with it. Some people live in a life full of prejudice that is far beyond name calling and mental bullying. Some people have the unfortunate experiences dealing with a harsh physical abuse as well. In "Priscilla the Cambodian" a short story in Sightseeing written by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, Priscilla and her family represent some of the prejudice that occurs all over the world.

This passage shows just how violent and insensitive people can be towards people who are not their own. It's a deep, intriguing passage in the story that is important and has a lot of meaning; that without it, this story would not be complete. It was the middle of the night when the boy woke up to his father and friends making noise. His father and friends had "high, excited voices." (Lapcharoensap 114) The men were actually excited and looking forward to what they were about to do. They were hyped up.

The boy gets out of bed to watch the men. He is curious what is going on. With the talk earlier before he went to bed, about the Cambodians, he knew what may be about to occur. The men are standing in the yard, "nodding their heads in unison." (Lapcharoensap 114) The men are all agreeing on something they were apparently debating on. Everyone else is "standing around my father in the yard" (Lapcharoensap 114) which meant that his father is most likely the one initiating the plan and making sure it is being seen through.

In this context, it seems his father is the leader for what is about to happen. This is making the boy uneasy. When the men get into the pickup truck, the narrator now says “ the men climbed in, their deep, drunken voices murmuring up to my window. ”( Lapcharoensap 114-115) The narrator went from saying the men had “ high, excited voices”( Lapcharoensap 114) to “ deep, drunken voices”( Lapcharoensap 115) within a matter of a few sentences. The narrator also uses the word “ murmuring” in that sentence, which could be interpreted as the men were speaking in confidentiality.

At the beginning, the men were excited and hyped up but as the small amount of time passed, getting closer to following through with their plan, they became drunker, quieter, and more secretive. Becoming more drunk and enraged would make it easier for them to actually follow through with what was planned. In the next sentence down, it says “ They left their empty bottles on the straw mat in our yard” ( Lapcharoensap 115). By empty bottles, the narrator is speaking of bottles that were once filled with alcohol.

Whatever sorts of alcohol were in those bottles, it didn't matter, because the men finished it all. He goes on saying “ for some reason I thought about how Mother and I would have to pick up the mess in the morning.

”( Lapcharoensap 115) The boy sees what his father and his friends left behind. He has a feeling he knows where they are going, but attempts to not believe it. Instead he thinks of what is going to come in the morning. He automatically assumes him and his mother will have to take responsibility for the mess his father left.

This could mean that he and his mother have had to clean up his mess before, that this isn't the first time his father got drunk with friends and left their mess and that when his father had left his mess, he never took responsibility in cleaning it up the next day. If this is the case, this would mean that his father and his friends were no saints. Throughout the story, his father and the people of his society looked down on the refugees because they were considered dirty and a lesser person. They looked down on the refugees because they were ruining their neighborhood.

Yet, there is nothing classy about leaving drunken messes on a front lawn. The people are pretending they live in this perfect society and that the refugees are going to ruin it, but in reality, the neighborhood wasn't perfect at all. It may look nice on the outside, but on the insides of the homes, there were no perfections. The people living in the nice homes were no different, at least, no better, than the refugees. Moving on, the narrator says " The truck pattered down the street, the men chanting now, as if working up the courage to do something valiant. ( Lapcharoensap 115) Pattered here meant that they were going down the street casually and in an unhurried manner. The men were chanting, getting enraged and hyped up even more. The narrator believes they were chanting in order to work up courage to do something valiant, or brave and courageous. Were the men not sure about what they wanted to do? They are going through a lot to go through with what they have planned. They have had to become drunk and now they have to chant to work up more courage. Maybe, deep down, these men don't really want to do what they are about to do. Yet, they think it's the only way to solve the problem.

It's odd the narrator uses the word valiant. I suppose the men could be acting as if they are about to do something excellent and worthy, but the use of the word through the narrator's point of view is odd seeing how he is against the men's thoughts about the refugees. He uses the word valiant because that is indeed how the men are acting, but he never comes back and says that what they are doing isn't brave and courageous, it's scary and torturous. Yet, he doesn't have to say that this is how he really feels because the next sentence down he says " I walked down the stairs with my heart in my mouth. ( Lapcharoensap 115) He now is admitting to himself that these men are about to do what he didn't want to believe before. When he says his heart is in his mouth, this means his heart's racing and he is extremely nervous and terrified at this point. The last sentence in the paragraph says he " started running into the night, down the street and out toward the railroad tracks. "( Lapcharoensap 115) The boy is anxious and wants to get somewhere. He, unlike the men who were puttering, is running. It's late and dark and he knows exactly where to run to.

He goes toward the railroad tracks because the refugees live right on the other side of them and he knows that this is where he will find all of the men, including his father. The first paragraph set the scene for the next paragraph. It showed us how the men were acting and what was possibly to come out of their drunkenness and anger. It showed us the boy's emotions and how nervous he was becoming, as he should have been. His thoughts on what might happen were becoming reality. As he was running, he realized he didn't have to run any longer. He was tired and out of breath.

He was half way to his father when he stopped and said he already saw “ all I needed to see. ”( Lapcharoensap 115) He already knew something bad was going to come out of the men’s drunkenness and enragement from earlier, but didn’t want to think it would happen. Now, seeing for himself, he couldn’t pretend anymore. What he didn’t want to happen, happened, and with his father being one of the men. The men torched the Cambodian “ shantytown. ”( Lapcharoensap 115) The narrator here is using the word shantytown, which means it’s the area inhabited by very poor people.

Although true, by using the word, it seems as though he is still looking at them as someone less than he is. If he wanted to be more sincere, it would seem that he would have said they were torching the Cambodian’s homes or something that wasn’t a negative connotation. At this moment in time, the boy still has yet to finally see the light of how he feels. Although he is close to realizing the massive extent of damage going on, he isn’t quite there yet. “ A light red glow bloomed at the end of the development’s main street, like a second sun rising in the night. (Lapcharoensap 115) This is a beautiful sentence. The “ light red glow” is fire. When he says bloomed, he means it is huge and growing. He says that the fire is “ like a second sun rising in the night. ” It’s a horrible event going on, yet the narrator uses such beautiful words and metaphors to describe what’s going on. Also, we know that it must be starting to get earlier in the morning if the fire is like a second sun rising. In order for it to be a second sun rising, the sun must be starting to rise and it is probably slowly getting lighter outside.

Now, the boy begins to describe more details into what he is not only seeing, but what he is also hearing. “ I heard gruff, exasperated voices, the high-  
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pitched screams of women. Something exploded. Glass shattered. Somebody yelled profanities. " (Lapcharoensap 115) There is a lot going on here, especially for the boy to take in all at once. The voices he is hearing are hoarse, annoyed, angry and enraged. The women are terrified, overwhelmed, and scared beyond belief. He hears a lot of emotion in all the different voices he is hearing. More emotion than he could probably have ever imagined.

Things are exploding and shattering and a lot of damage is being done and the probability of people ending up hurt is high. Then the boy " stopped walking then and sat cross-legged in the middle of the street. "

(Lapcharoensap 115) The boy is by himself. He doesn't know what to do except to just watch. He clearly doesn't care that he's sitting in the middle of a road, nor is the road in high use anyways. " I watched a rat scuttle into a sewer grate, appear once more to forage for food. "( Lapcharoensap 115)

This sentence is more than what it seems.

Not only is the boy speaking about this rat that he is watching, but when talking about this rat, he is relating it to the Cambodians. Both the rat and the refugees have a lot in common, especially now. They have no home and they are going to have to search for food. The last sentence ties the whole passageway together and it ends very smoothly. " Watching that awful red flickering in the distance, I felt so weak and dizzy that if the rats had emerged to eat me alive I couldn't have done a thing to stop them. "

(Lapcharoensap 115) The boy is nauseous from what he has encountered watching throughout the night.

He was exhausted and tired as well. When he finally uses a word to describe what he thought of the fire. This word was “ awful”. From the beginning to the end of this passage we see his emotions that this event is unsettling for him, but now he uses the word “ awful” to tell us in a word what he thought of the situation. When he speaks about the fact he couldn’t have done a thing to stop the rats from eating him alive, he isn’t really talking about the rats. He is talking about the men and his father. If he even tried to stop them, nothing would’ve worked. There was nothing he could do. There was nothing the Cambodians could do.

It was a hopeless situation that the boy was sick to his stomach over and it’s a sad event that had occurred. Throughout the passage, there is a lot of emotion. This society is prejudice towards the refugees that had recently moved there. Emotions are the key in this passage. In the beginning, there are the drunken men who go back and forth between excitement and quietness, gathering up courage for their night of destruction. The boy in the passage never directly comes out and says how he feels about the things going on until the end when he talks about watching the awful red flickering.

Yet, his emotions tell us everything about how he felt. His heart in his mouth, when he runs to follow his father, and just the way he describes overhearing his father and friends we can tell he is very nervous and scared about what is going to happen. The boy wants nothing more than to fight for the Cambodians, and even more, his friend Priscilla. If he was to do that, he wouldn’t be accepted in his society and he wouldn’t have been able to do anything about it on his own anyways. That night, he sees more than just the fire. He sees the monsters people can be.

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He was prejudice at the beginning of the story, but learned that there is so much more to people once you get to know them. This boy is more mature than any of the men that he knew, including his father. That night he realized that his society is wrong for judging and harassing these refugees. His views towards other races had changed and they had changed for the better. Although it's possible for some people to learn that prejudice is ignorance, some people will never learn.

Works Cited Lapcharoensap, Rattawut. " Priscilla the Cambodian. " Sightseeing. New York: Grove Press, 2005. Print