

The Perfect Solution

by Hilton Ayrey

Kate was very happy with the new arrangements. Eighteen years old and alone on her first overseas adventure, she had spent an exhausting month couch-surfing with random friends-of-friends and vague acquaintances, always feeling guilty and on edge. Now she had a place of her own for the next three months right in the very heart of the city. Everything was at her finger tips; a selection of the best cafes in the bustling metropolis, cinemas, museums and art galleries, the most expensive restaurants. Not that her meagre savings would allow her to indulge in any frivolities, but it was a comfort to know it was all there and she often wandered the exclusive shopping precincts marvelling at the style and fashion available in one the world's biggest and brightest cities.

It had happened quite miraculously, a case of being in the right place at the right time. The family had been desperate for a house-sitter in their expensive downtown apartment while they travelled for their summer vacation. There was a small catch; the family pet dog needed some special attention. Pills and potions to be taken three times a day were a little inconvenient but one couldn't complain given the stunning living quarters, the view over the park, and all the other benefits of downtown city living.

However, on the sixth day of her sojourn she awoke to an eerie silence. Usually Bernard would have been scratching on the bedroom door ready for his early morning constitutional. Today he lay still in his basket ...too still. Closer examination confirmed her worst fear. Bernard had passed away. What do you do with the body of a 20 kg Doberman in the middle of the city? Her only option was to take the body to the vet and have him dispose of it. The family had left contact details if anything went wrong. A quick google search of the vet's website wasn't very comforting. It was the weekend so there was going to be a hefty after-hours fee and an 10 kilometres trip across town. She would have to take the tube. She remembered seeing a huge suitcase in the cupboard and with great effort (she was just a small girl), managed to squeeze the corpse in.

Out on the sidewalk the wheels on the suitcase creaked under the load but no one would have thought she was anything but another anxious, weary traveller bustling through the early morning traffic as she wheeled her way to the local tube station. On the train, she was very careful not to draw attention to herself, very conscious of her dodgy luggage. Across from her a pleasant looking man smiled at her, a beacon amidst the stony-faced urbanites who were lost in their own troubles as the tube clattered on monotonously to its underground destination.

Finally she reached her stop and rose to her feet, awkwardly navigating her way to the opening doors. Her next problem would be the stairs from the platform to the street above. There was no escalator. As she paused to gather her strength for the haul, the man from the train materialised beside her. "That looks like a very heavy case. Can I help you with it?" he enquired. He seemed so willing to help she could not refuse. "What have you got in here?" he asked, testing the heaviness of the suitcase. "Ahhh..." She had to think fast... "Just a heap of computer equipment." The weight didn't seem to be a problem to him as he heaved the bag up the first flight of stairs. In fact Kate was having trouble keeping up with him. An elderly man and his wife were directly in front of her as she tackled the second flight of stairs and now she had lost contact with the man and her suitcase. She started to panic. By the time she got to the street he was 30 metres ahead of her. She called out but now he was hurrying away from her, pushing rudely through the bustling foot traffic, and then he was gone swallowed up by the crowd.

She stood there on the pavement perplexed ... and then she smiled. She was very happy with the new arrangements.

Notes on Story Structure

Characters
Setting
Problem
Feelings
Action
Outcome
Themes

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ACTIVITIES

Short Stories 3:9

REMEMBERING - What are the facts

1. Make a list of all information you can find in the story about Kate and the man on the train. Show this information on **CHARACTER WEBS**, one for Kate and one for the man.
Draw a picture of each character in the centre of their character web.

UNDERSTANDING - Reading between the lines

2. Why was Kate exhausted at the beginning of the story?
How did Kate get the house-sitting job?
For each answer try to find a quote from the story to support your ideas.
Write your own question that requires the person answering it to read between the lines.

APPLYING - Using what you know from the story

3. **NEWSFLASH:** Write a news story for the TV news about the subway thief who got so much more than he bargained for. Include an interview with Kate. Remember to write a strong wrap-up to end your news story.
Practise with a friend and be ready to present it to your group or class as a role play.
4. **POETRY:** Write a poem or a rap song about 'the perfect solution' to Kate's problem.

ANALYSING - Breaking down the story to show how it works

5. **STORY MAP:** Draw a story map of all the settings in this story and how they are linked. Use labels to show the places mentioned and the events that took place.
Be prepared to explain your Story Map to others.
6. Create a **STORY WEB**. You may have started this or talked about it when you read the story. Include ... CHARACTERS → SETTING → PROBLEM → FEELINGS → ACTION → OUTCOME

CREATING - Coming up with new ideas

7. **OTHER POINT OF VIEW:** Rewrite the story from the man on the train's point of view.
8. **DESIGN BRIEF:** Design some luggage that cannot be stolen. Include three levels of security so that it is absolutely thief-proof.
Label your drawings or write descriptions to explain your interesting ideas.

EVALUATING - Exploring ideas and rating stories

9. SEEING BOTH SIDES

"Never accept help from strangers"

Make a chart and list your reasons for agreeing and disagreeing with this statement.

I agree with this statement because ...	I disagree with this statement because ...

Share your ideas with other people in your group. Ask if you can present a short debate.

10. HOW GOOD IS THIS STORY

Give this story a rating out of 5 for each of the following criteria (1 = weak, 5 = excellent)

- ◆ **CHARACTERS** - Has the author created interesting characters?
- ◆ **STORY STRUCTURE** - Does the story have an interesting problem and a satisfying ending?
- ◆ **LANGUAGE FEATURES** - Has the author used words in an interesting way to tell the story?
- ◆ **THEME** - Does this story have something important to say about how people think and behave?

Write a short review of this story based on the ratings you have given it.