

The Girl in The River



**a short story for English
reading and speaking**

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Introduction

What is an urban myth?

How do stories like this develop?

Do you know any urban myths?

The Girl in The River

It was late, and no one was outside.

Tony decided to make it an early night. He turned the For Hire light off on the top of his taxi and turned around in the empty street.

The thought of getting home to his wife and their newborn son, a quick cup of tea and then bed. No point in staying out on a night like this.

Then he saw her.

She stood by the side of the road, her clothes dripping wet. Staring out into space like she was not there.

Without a second thought, Tony pulled the taxi over to the side of the road.

He looked out at her. She couldn't have been more than eighteen or nineteen.

What was she doing out with her clothes all wet?

“Are you okay?” he called out to her.

She turned and her eyes opened wide like she had been woken from a dream.

Tony called out again. "What happened? You're soaking wet."

The girl shook her head.

"I — I fell in the river," she said, her hand reaching up to tug at her wet hair.

Tony got out of the taxi and approached her.

"Get in my taxi," he said. "I'll drive you home."

"I don't have any money," she said. "My bag — my purse. They fell into the river. I don't even have my keys."

Tony shook his head. "Don't worry about money. Get in. You'll catch your death of cold standing out here like that."

The girl gave Tony a weak smile and stepped into the back of the taxi.

Tony asked her where she lived, and she told him. He knew the streets of London by heart. He had been a taxi driver for five years.

He had seen some strange things but nothing like this.

"What happened then?" Tony asked her. He thought it would be a good idea to make light of the situation. "You went for a swim?"

He could barely make out the girl's face in the back of the taxi.

"No. I just fell in. I just fell."

They arrived at her address, and Tony stopped.

“I’ll come to the door with you,” he said. “Make sure you get in okay.”

“No,” said the girl. “My mother is at home. Don’t worry about me.”

Tony shrugged. The girl went to her door and Tony saw her knock on the door. He drove on and assumed she would be all right.

But what a state. Who falls into the river? She was lucky nothing terrible happened.

As he drove on, he glanced into the rear-view mirror.

It was then that he saw a pair of women’s shoes.

Her shoes. Left on the seat. A small pool of water gathered beneath them.

Tony pulled the taxi to the side of the road and turned around to look at the shoes.

The girl had been in such a daze; it was like she wasn’t even there when he spoke to her.

Falling in the river must have given her such a shock. Maybe she had banged her head on something.

He considered just driving off, but then his conscience got the

better of him. He would just take the shoes back to her house, knock on the door and return them.

Then go home. At least he had a funny story to tell his wife in the morning.

He turned the taxi around and went back to the house where he had left the girl. He stopped and opened the back door and took the shoes out.

Water dripped all over the seat.

The whole street was empty. No sound at all. The only light was from the street lamps.

The girl had gone to the last house on the terrace so it was easy to remember.

Tony trudged up to the door and gently knocked on it. There were two glass panels on the door and no light on inside. The girl had probably gone straight to bed.

Tony peered through the glass but could not make out any movement. He knocked again, this time a little louder.

Then he saw a little light appear at the top of the stairs. He could just make out a figure coming down to the front door.

A quiet voice spoke out: "Who is it?"

Tony cleared his throat. "You left your shoes in the taxi."

The door cracked open two inches. Behind the door an old woman's face. She stared out at Tony with suspicion.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Tony. "I thought you were the young girl from before." He held up the pair of wet shoes. "I think your daughter left her shoes in my taxi."

He smiled back at her to put her at ease, but she just stared back at him with an icy gaze.

"Is this some kind of joke?" she said.

"No," said Tony. "I picked your daughter up. She was soaking wet. She said she fell in the river."

The woman shook her head. She made a strange noise from deep in her throat.

"Get out of here," she said. "Leave me alone."

Tony's eyes flicked over the old woman's face, her wild hair, her cold eyes.

"I'm sorry," said Tony. "But I saw her come to this house. I just want to return her shoes. That's all."

"You are very cruel," said the woman.

Tony placed the shoes on the doorstep. "I'll just leave them here," he said.

He went to leave and heard a kind of growl from behind him. He turned and the old woman was leaning against the back of the door. She looked ancient and he could make out the inside of the house, all old and decrepit.

“My daughter drowned in the river twenty years ago,” said the woman. “She died. So what are you talking about? And whose shoes are these?”

Tony edged slowly away from the house.

Away from the old woman and away from the old decaying smell that came from inside.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Who is the main character in the story?

What is Tony's job? How long had he had this job?

Why did Tony decide to stop working for the night?

Is Tony married? Does he have a family?

What does he see by the side of the road?

Describe the girl Tony saw by the side of the road.

Why is the girl soaking wet?

What story does she tell Tony about this?

Does Tony offer to help the girl?

What suggestion does he make to her?

How does she respond?

Where does Tony take her? Does he take her to her door?

Why/why not?

What made Tony think the girl might have banged her head?

What does Tony see in the back of his taxi? How does he see them?

What does he consider doing?

What does he decide to do instead?

Can Tony see into the house through the door?

What does he see?

When Tony goes back to the house who does he meet there?

Describe this person.

Tony offers to return the girl's shoes. How does the woman react?

What kind of conversation takes place between Tony and the woman in the house?

What does the woman say about her daughter? What does she think Tony is doing?

Why does the old woman think Tony is being cruel to her?

What does the old woman say about her daughter?

How does Tony feel when the old woman reveals this piece of information?

What does Tony do at the end?

Describe the atmosphere of the street where the old woman lived.

Essential Vocabulary

decided	make it an early night	For Hire light
newborn	no point	dripping
staring	staring out into space	without a second thought
pulled the taxi over	soaking	to tug
approached	catch your death of cold	a weak smile
by heart	to make light of the situation	barely
make out	shrugged	assumed
state	glanced	rear-view mirror
pool of water	gathered	beneath
daze	shock	considered
driving off	conscience	got the better of him
terrace	trudged	glass panels
peered	cleared his throat	cracked open
two inches	suspicion	at ease
an icy gaze	flicked	wild hair
cruel	doorstep	growl
ancient	decrepit	edged
decaying		

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Decided — *past tense of decide; make a choice from a number of alternatives.*

Make it an early night — *to go home or go to bed early.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

I decided to finish all my homework before having dinner.

I was exhausted, so I thought I should make it an early night.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

What kind of story is this? Do you think it is a true story?

Why/why not?

Why do you think Tony decided to stop and help the girl?

How would you have reacted if you were in Tony's position?

Do you think the girl's wet clothes were a sign of something unusual? Why or why not?

Why do you think the girl was standing by the side of the road soaking wet?

What do you think happened to her?

Was Tony performing an act of great kindness? Or great stupidity?

What kind of person is Tony to do something like this?

Tony tried to make a joke with the girl. He asked her if she had gone swimming in the river.

Was this an insensitive thing to say?

Or was he trying to help her relax?

The girl seemed reluctant to let Tony walk with her to the door.

Why was this so?

Imagine you were Tony, and you saw a pair of shoes in the back of the taxi.

What would you have done?

Would you continue driving? Or go back to return the shoes?

Why do you think the girl left the shoes in Tony's taxi?

Did she just forget them?

Or did she want Tony to go back?

Why did the old woman react the way she did when Tony tried to return the shoes?

Can you think of any logical explanation for the girl being by the side of the river?

Why was she there?

Was she waiting for Tony?

At the end of the story, the old woman says: "My daughter drowned in the river twenty years ago".

So what did she mean by this?

What actually happened to her daughter?

The old woman said that Tony was "very cruel". What did she mean by this?

Did you find this story scary? Why/why not?

Are these kinds of stories popular in your country or culture?

Why/why not?

This story could be an Urban Myth. What do you think this phrase means?

Are there any urban myths in your city or country? Can you tell the class one of these stories?

Have you ever had a strange encounter with a stranger? Can you describe it?

Why do people tell these stories? Why do people like them?

Were you surprised by the twist at the end of the story? Why or why not?

Is there any truth to stories like this? How can they be explained?

How do these stories start? Try to think of a reason how this story of the girl in the river started. What was the process to make this story? How did it evolve?

Do you believe in ghosts? Why/why not?

How do stories like this make you feel?

At what age should young people not read or hear stories like this?

Are these kinds of stories frightening? Or entertaining?

Is there a lesson we can learn from this story? What is it?

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

You are going to write a short story.

The title of the story is:

The Girl In The River

You are going to tell the original story about the girl in the river.

- Who was she?
- And why did she drown in the river?
- Did she take her own life?
- Or was she pushed into the river by someone else?
- Was she in love with someone who didn't love her?
- Or did her mother refuse to let her leave the house?

Think about all these questions and any others that you can think of by yourself.

Write your story.

And when you are ready, read it out loud in front of your classmates.

Or give it to your teacher for review.

Credits

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