

The Last Dance



a short story for English
reading and speaking

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Introduction

Is there such a thing as true love forever?

Do you know any couple that have been in love for many years?

Do you think this kind of love is still possible in the modern age? Why/why not?

The Last Dance

Stanley shifted his weight.

These hospital beds were the most uncomfortable thing he had ever slept on. And he had slept in some pretty terrible places.

During the war, he had slept on the ground of a trench.

He woke up in three inches of water.

But he was young then. He was scared witless at times, just like all the other lads.

But they seemed to laugh it off. A grim sense of humour managed to get them through it all.

He wanted to be in his own bed. With his Iris.

Stanley turned his head and there she was, staring back at him.

‘Do you need to go?’ she asked him.

‘No, I went this morning,’ he said.

She rolled her eyes at him. She had been rolling her eyes at Stanley Marsh for the last seventy years.

‘That was this morning,’ she said. ‘Don’t you need to go again?’

‘No, I’m fine,’ said Stanley.

He moved his body to the right.

‘Why d’you keep moving around then?’ she asked him.

‘Every time you move like that, I know you need to go.’

Stanley stared back at her, giving her one of his big winning smiles.

She rolled her eyes again.

‘You silly dope,’ she said. Then her face broke into a broad smile. All the lines on her face creased up.

More lines on your face than an old road map, Stanley always said to her.

‘I wouldn’t mind getting up for a bit,’ he said. ‘Just to sit up straight for a change. All this lying down is making me feel like I can’t do anything.’

‘The doctor said you got to lie down,’ said Iris. She nodded

at him like this was final.

Stanley took a breath, then pulled the bed sheet away from his body.

He was wearing hospital pyjamas.

They were itchy.

He wanted to yank them off his body and feel the cool air across his skin.

‘What are you doing?’ said Iris. She got to her feet and waddled around the bed to his side.

He tried to pull one foot off the bed and managed to get it halfway down to the floor. The other one remained under the sheet.

‘Give us a hand, love,’ said Stan.

‘Doctor said —’

‘I know what the doctor said,’ Stanley spoke in a firm voice. The one he used when something was final. ‘Now give me a hand.’

Iris rolled her eyes again and helped him get his left foot out from under the sheets. She arranged his legs so that his knees were together and his feet closer to the ground.

Then Stanley edged to the side of the bed. Iris helped him, holding onto his shoulders.

Eventually, Stanley managed to get to his feet, and he stood up straight.

He felt a slight blurry rush to his head and giddiness washing over him. He held onto Iris for support.

Stanley blinked a few times and waited for the moment to pass.

It was just the feeling of going from horizontal to vertical.

He took one final breath and opened his eyes.

He gave Iris a big smile.

‘Good morning, breakfast!’ he purred at her. His imitation of the cat in that old cartoon they used to watch years ago.

Iris couldn’t help but laugh. He always made her laugh.

Stanley Marsh. Her Stanley.

Soon to be only her. But for now, he was still here.

Stanley nodded to the transistor radio on the side of a small set of drawers.

‘How about a bit of music?’ he said.

‘Music?’ said Iris. ‘What are you on about now, music... ‘

‘You know, music. Tunes, melodies, lyrics. That kind of thing.’

Iris held onto Stanley for a second and made sure he was not wobbling around too much.

Once she was sure that he could stand on his own for a second or two, she went to the radio and turned it on.

She had brought the radio from their home two weeks ago. Stanley loved to listen to the radio.

He sang along to all their old songs.

At home, she always did the cooking, and he always did the washing up afterwards.

Iris sat on the sofa, listening to her Stanley singing away to his heart’s content.

The radio buzzed into life, some static, and Iris turned the dial until a familiar tune spilt out of the speaker and filled the sterile room with life.

‘Oh, I love this one,’ said Stanley.

He immediately began humming along to it, swaying his hips to and fro and doing jazz hands in front of himself.

‘Be careful, Stanley,’ said Iris, rushing back to him. ‘No

prancing about.'

She went close to him, to protect him, look after him.

Stanley wrapped one arm around her waist. The other clasping her left hand up high.

'Fancy a dance, my love?' he said.

'You're so silly,' said Iris, but she buried her head against his shoulder. A place she loved.

A place of safety. Of belonging.

Stanley hummed along to the song on the radio.

A tune the two of them had heard a thousand times.

'Remember this one, love?' said Stanley. 'I think we danced to this one on holiday one time.'

And Iris remembered. She remembered every moment with Stanley.

Her Stanley.

Stanley hummed along to the tune. Iris closed her eyes and tried not to think of the future.

What would she do?

Stanley shifted his shoulder so that Iris opened her eyes again and looked up at him.

'This might be our last dance together, my love,' he said.
'Our last one.'

'Oh Stanley,' she said. 'You're such a silly old dope.'

And the music played on.

Stanley and Iris Marsh dancing together in a hospital room
in the suburbs of the town where they had lived for so many
years.

Children fully grown.

Grandchildren in university or finishing high school.

But this evening was theirs.

The last dance for the two of them.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Who are the two main characters in the story?

Where does the story take place?

What is Stanley lying on at the beginning of the story?

Does he like this bed?

What does he compare the hospital bed to?

What was Stanley's experience during the war?

Where would Stanley prefer to be?

Where is Iris sitting? What is she doing?

What does Iris think Stanley needs to do?

When did Stanley last go to the toilet?

What action does Iris often make in response to things Stanley says?

What action does Stanley towards Iris that wins her affection?

What does Stanley compare Iris' face to? Why does he say this?

What does Stanley want to do later in the story? Why does he want to do this?

What does Iris say about the doctor's orders?

What is Stanley wearing?

Does he like these clothes? Why/why not?

Why does Stanley need help from Iris to get out of bed?

How does Stanley feel when he stands up?

What causes this feeling?

What does Stanley say to Iris when he opens his eyes?

Where does this line come from?

How does Iris react when Stanley says this to her?

What does Stanley want to listen to?

Does Iris turn the radio on or off?

Who does the radio belong to?

Who makes dinner when they are both at home?

Who does the washing up?

When Iris turns the radio on, how does Stanley react?

When Iris runs to hold Stanley, what does he do?

Where does Iris place her head?

Does Stanley remember the song on the radio? What does

he say about it?

What does Stanley say to Iris while they are dancing?

Where are their children and grandchildren?

True Or False

Look at the statements below.

Say whether they are true or false.

If you think a statement is false, correct it and make it true.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

Stanley loves to sing along to radio songs.

Stanley and Iris have been married for 70 years.

Stanley always does the washing up at home.

Iris brought the radio to the hospital two weeks ago.

The hospital beds are comfortable according to Stanley.

Stanley and Iris have grandchildren in kindergarten.

Iris does all the housework at home.

Stanley wanted to be a doctor when he was young.

Stanley was a soldier during the war.

Iris is not concerned about Stanley prancing about in the hospital room.

Stanley and Iris live in the suburbs.

Stanley and Iris have a cat named Breakfast.

Essential Vocabulary

comfortable	love	vertical
scared	shifted	imitate
laugh	uncomfortable	melodies
hospital	trench	lyrics
smile	woke	sterile
doctor	grim	familiar
breath	sense of humour	humming
radio	edged	belonging
dance	horizontal	suburbs

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:

Comfortable — *something that provides physical ease, free from stress.*

Scared — *a feeling of fear or being frightened.*

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

The hotel room was so comfortable that they decided to book it for an extra night.

He was feeling scared, so he stepped away from the edge of the cliff.

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

What is the Correct Synonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct synonym on the right.

A synonym is a word of similar meaning.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

Comfortable	Clean
Love	Mimic
Vertical	Flat
Shifted	Ditch
Imitate	Affection
Trench	Physician
Lyrics	Upright
Sterile	Cosy
Doctor	Words
Grim	Moved
Horizontal	Outskirts
Suburbs	Gloomy

What is the Correct Antonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct antonym on the right.

An antonym is a word of similar meaning.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

Comfortable	Contaminated
Vertical	Hill
Scared	Vertical
Shifted	Horizontal
Laugh	Patient
Trench	Cry
Smile	Cheerful
Sterile	Brave
Doctor	Uncomfortable
Grim	City
Horizontal	Stationary
Suburbs	Frown

Words and Meanings

Look at the table of words below.

Comfortable	Love	Vertical
Scared	Shifted	Imitate
Laugh	Uncomfortable	Melodies
Hospital	Trench	Lyrics

Now match each of the words with the correct meanings below.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

A long, narrow ditch or excavation in the ground, typically deeper than it is wide.

Moved or changed from one position, direction, or place to another.

To express mirth, pleasure, derision, or nervousness with an audible vocal sound.

Musical sounds in agreeable succession or arrangement; a sequence of single notes that is musically satisfying.

An institution providing medical and surgical treatment and nursing care for sick or injured people.

Causing or feeling slight pain or physical discomfort; uneasy.

To mimic or copy the actions, appearance, or mannerisms of someone or something.

Afraid or frightened; filled with fear.

Providing physical ease and relaxation; free from stress or tension.

The words of a song, especially when set to music.

Being in a position or direction perpendicular to the plane of the horizon; upright.

A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection.

Missing Words

Look at the table of words below.

Comfortable	Scared	Laugh
Doctor	Vertical	Hospital
Familiar	Lyrics	Sense of humour
Dance	Edged	Belonging

Now put all of the words in the correct gaps in the sentences below.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

The couple took the _____ floor and mesmerized everyone with their moves.

After moving to a new city, he finally found a sense of _____ in his community.

The loud thunderstorm outside made the little girl feel

_____.

His sharp _____ made him popular among his peers.

The scent of freshly baked bread was _____ and comforting.

She found a _____ spot on the couch and settled in with a good book.

The _____ reassured the patient that everything would be fine.

He carefully _____ the picture frame into the perfect position on the wall.

The tall skyscraper stood _____ against the city skyline.

She spent hours memorizing the _____ to her favourite song.

His jokes never failed to make the whole room _____.

After the accident, she was rushed to the nearest _____ for treatment.

Discussion Questions

How does Stanley feel about being in the hospital bed?

Why does he want to get up?

Describe Stanley and Iris's relationship. How do they interact with each other?

Do they love each other do you think?

Why does Iris roll her eyes at Stanley? What does this show about their relationship?

What memories does Stanley recall from his past? How do these memories contrast with his current situation?

Why does Stanley want to listen to music? How does it affect him?

What does the radio symbolize in the story? What connection does it have with Stanley and Iris' life at home?

How does Iris react when Stanley wants to dance? Why does she react this way do you think?

Is Iris angry at Stanley for moving around? Or is she just

worried about him?

Why does she have this feeling do you think?

What do you think the phrase "The Last Dance" means in the story?

How does Stanley's humour help him cope with his situation?

Does his humour have more benefit for him or for Iris? Why do you think this?

Discuss the significance of the setting of the hospital room in the story.

Why are Stanley and Iris there?

How does the story describe the characters' emotions without directly stating them?

Why does Stanley mention that this might be their last dance together? How does Iris respond?

What do you think will happen to Stanley and Iris after the story ends?

How does the story explore themes of love and ageing?

Compare Stanley and Iris's relationship now to what it might have been like in their younger years.

How does the story portray resilience in the face of challenges?

Discuss the role of memories in the story. How do they influence Stanley and Iris's actions?

What do you think Stanley means when he calls Iris "my love"?

How does the story's ending make you feel? What emotions does it evoke?

There is a line that says: Soon to be only her.

And another line: 'This might be our last dance together, my love.'

What do these lines mean do you think?

What is happening to Stanley?

How do you think Iris is feeling at this moment?

Do you think love can last forever?

Do you know any couple like Stanley and Iris?

Do you know a couple who have been married for a long time?

How does their love stay so strong do you think?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

Title: The Last Dance

Choose a partner to do the role play with together.

There are two characters in the role play:

Stanley

Iris

Go through the script below.

Now act out the scene in front of the class.

Scene 1: Hospital Room

(Sound of hospital equipment beeping softly. Stanley shifts in bed.)

Stanley: (grumbling) These beds, Iris... Can't sleep a wink.

Iris: (softly) You've slept in worse places, Stan. Remember

the trenches?

Stanley: (nostalgic) Cold, wet... scared witless. But we laughed, didn't we?

Iris: (chuckling) You always did have that silly sense of humour.

Stanley: (smiling) And you've been rolling your eyes at me for seventy years.

Iris: (playful) Seventy-one, if you count today.

Stanley: (decisive) I want to sit up, Iris. Just for a change.

Iris: (concerned) The doctor said you need to lie down, Stan.

Stanley: (firm) Give me a hand, love.

Stanley: There we go. (giddy) Vertical again!

Iris: (supportive) Easy now, Stan. No prancing about.

Stanley: (teasing) Fancy a dance, my love?

Iris: (affectionate) Oh, you're so silly, Stanley.

Stanley: (singing softly) "Our last dance together, my

love..."

Iris: (tearfully) Oh, Stanley...

(The sound of music from a radio fills the room. They begin to dance.)

Stanley: (nostalgic) Remember this one? Holiday, was it?

Iris: (wistful) Yes, our holiday...

Stanley: (softly) Our last dance, Iris.

Iris: (emotional) You silly old dope...

(They continue dancing, lost in the moment.)

Narrator: Stanley and Iris Marsh, dancing together in a hospital room, their last dance.

End of Scene

Writing

This is a writing exercise.

Title: The First Dance

Write a story of when Stanley and Iris first met.
Where they meet is up to you.

Stanley is a young man, and he sees Iris. He is smitten with her and plucks up the courage to ask her for a dance.

What do they talk about?

How does Stanley try to win her affections?

How does Iris react to him?

And how does the story end?

Will they see each other again?

Write your story.

When you have finished writing your story, read it out loud

in front of the class.

Your classmates can give you some feedback and a review of your writing.

Or you can hand your story in to your teacher. They can give you a full critique of your story.

True or False — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

How many did you get right?

True. Stanley and Iris have been married for 70 years.

True. Stanley was a soldier during the war.

True. Iris does all the housework at home.

False. Stanley wanted to be a doctor when he was young.

True. Iris brought the radio to the hospital two weeks ago.

True. Stanley loves to sing along to radio songs.

False. Stanley and Iris have grandchildren in kindergarten.

True. Stanley always does the washing up at home.

False. Iris is not concerned about Stanley prancing about in the hospital room.

False. The hospital beds are comfortable, according to Stanley.

False. Stanley and Iris have a cat named Breakfast.

True. Stanley and Iris live in the suburbs.

What is the Correct Synonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Were you successful?

Comfortable	Cosy
Love	Affection
Vertical	Upright
Shifted	Moved
Imitate	Mimic
Trench	Ditch
Lyrics	Words
Sterile	Clean
Doctor	Physician
Grim	Gloomy
Horizontal	Flat
Suburbs	Outskirts

What is the Correct Antonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Did you win?

Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Vertical	Horizontal
Scared	Brave
Shifted	Stationary
Laugh	Cry
Trench	Hill
Smile	Frown
Sterile	Contaminated
Doctor	Patient
Grim	Cheerful
Horizontal	Vertical
Suburbs	City

Words and Meanings — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Time to celebrate?

Comfortable: (adjective) Providing physical ease and relaxation; free from stress or tension.

Love: (noun) A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection.

Vertical: (adjective) Being in a position or direction perpendicular to the plane of the horizon; upright.

Scared: (adjective) Afraid or frightened; filled with fear.

Shifted: (verb) Moved or changed from one position, direction, or place to another.

Imitate: (verb) To mimic or copy the actions, appearance, or mannerisms of someone or something.

Laugh: (verb) To express mirth, pleasure, derision, or nervousness with an audible vocal sound.

Uncomfortable: (adjective) Causing or feeling slight pain or physical discomfort; uneasy.

Melodies: (noun) Musical sounds in agreeable succession or arrangement; a sequence of single notes that is musically satisfying.

Hospital: (noun) An institution providing medical and surgical treatment and nursing care for sick or injured people.

Trench: (noun) A long, narrow ditch or excavation in the ground, typically deeper than it is wide.

Lyrics: (noun) The words of a song, especially when set to music.

Missing Words — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

How many did you get right?

Comfortable: She found a **comfortable** spot on the couch and settled in with a good book.

Scared: The loud thunderstorm outside made the little girl feel **scared**.

Laugh: His jokes never failed to make the whole room **laugh**.

Doctor: The **doctor** reassured the patient that everything would be fine.

Vertical: The tall skyscraper stood **vertical** against the city skyline.

Hospital: After the accident, she was rushed to the nearest **hospital** for treatment.

Familiar: The scent of freshly baked bread was **familiar**

and comforting.

Lyrics: She spent hours memorizing the **lyrics** to her favourite song.

Sense of humour: His sharp **sense of humour** made him popular among his peers.

Dance: The couple took the **dance** floor and mesmerized everyone with their moves.

Edged: He carefully **edged** the picture frame into the perfect position on the wall.

Belonging: After moving to a new city, he finally found a sense of **belonging** in his community.

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