

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?

Why did Tony decide to stop working for the night?

What does Tony plan to do when he gets home?

What did Tony see that made him stop?

How old does Tony guess the girl is?

How does the girl seem when Tony first speaks to her?

What reason does the girl give for being soaking wet?

What does Tony do to help her?

What does the girl say happened to her bag and keys?

How does Tony respond to her lack of money?

Why does Tony decide to help her anyway?

How long has Tony been a taxi driver?

What does Tony think about this situation?

What joke does Tony make about the situation?

How does the girl respond to Tony's question?

What does Tony offer to do at the girl's house?

Why does the girl tell Tony not to come with her?

What does Tony see the girl do before he drives away?

What does Tony notice in the back of the taxi?

What is strange about the shoes?

What explanation does Tony give for the girl's behaviour?

What does Tony suspect might have happened to the girl?

What does Tony first consider doing?

Why does he decide to go back?

What does Tony plan to do with the shoes?

How does the story describe the street as he returns?

How does Tony find the house again?

Why does he think the girl might not answer?

What does Tony see through the door?

Who responds to Tony's knock?

What does Tony say to the person at the door?

How does the old woman respond to Tony?

What does Tony assume about the old woman?

How would you describe the woman's attitude?

What does Tony try to explain to the old woman?

What physical description is given of the old woman?

How does the woman interpret Tony's actions?

Why might the woman think Tony is being cruel?

What final thing does Tony do with the shoes?

What shocking information does the old woman reveal?

How does this change the meaning of the story?

What is Tony's reaction to this revelation?

Describe the atmosphere of the house and street at the end.

The Girl In The River – story and reading comprehension questions

Section 1

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- Who is the main character in the story?
- What is Tony's job?
- Why did Tony decide to stop working for the night?
- What does Tony plan to do when he gets home?
- What did Tony see that made him stop?

Section 2

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- How old does Tony guess the girl is?
- How does the girl seem when Tony first speaks to her?
- What reason does the girl give for being soaking wet?

Section 3

"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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What does Tony do to help her?
- What does the girl say happened to her bag and keys?
- How does Tony respond to her lack of money?
- Why does Tony decide to help her anyway?
- How long has Tony been a taxi driver?
- What does Tony think about this situation?

Section 4

“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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What joke does Tony make about the situation?
- How does the girl respond to Tony's question?
- What does Tony offer to do at the girl's house?
- Why does the girl tell Tony not to come with her?
- What does Tony see the girl do before he drives away?

Section 5

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What does Tony notice in the back of the taxi?
- What is strange about the shoes?
- What explanation does Tony give for the girl's behaviour?
- What does Tony suspect might have happened to the girl?

Section 6

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What does Tony first consider doing?
- Why does he decide to go back?
- What does Tony plan to do with the shoes?
- How does the story describe the street as he returns?

Section 7

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?"

Reading Comprehension Questions

- How does Tony find the house again?
- Why does he think the girl might not answer?
- What does Tony see through the door?

Section 8

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- Who does Tony see when the door opens?
- What does Tony say to the person at the door?
- How does the old woman respond to Tony?
- What does Tony assume about the old woman?
- How would you describe the woman's attitude?

Section 9

"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.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What does Tony try to explain to the old woman?
- What physical description is given of the old woman?
- How does the woman interpret Tony’s actions?
- Why might the woman think Tony is being cruel?

Section 10

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

- What final thing does Tony do with the shoes?
- What shocking information does the old woman reveal?
- How does this change the meaning of the story?
- What is Tony’s reaction to this revelation?
- Describe the atmosphere of the house and street at the end.

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.

Reading Comprehension Questions --Answers

Who is the main character in the story?

Tony is the main character.

What is Tony's job?

He is a taxi driver.

Why did Tony decide to stop working for the night?

It was late and the streets were empty, so he decided to go home early.

What does Tony plan to do when he gets home?

He wants to have a quick cup of tea and go to bed.

What did Tony see that made him stop?

He saw a young girl standing by the side of the road, soaking wet.

How old does Tony guess the girl is?

He thinks she is about eighteen or nineteen.

How does the girl seem when Tony first speaks to her?

She seems dazed and unresponsive, like she has been woken from a dream.

What reason does the girl give for being soaking wet?

She says she fell in the river.

What does Tony do to help her?

He offers her a ride in his taxi and tells her not to worry about the fare.

What does the girl say happened to her bag and keys?

She says they also fell into the river.

How does Tony respond to her lack of money?

He tells her not to worry and insists she gets into the taxi.

Why does Tony decide to help her anyway?

He is concerned for her health and safety, since she is wet and cold.

How long has Tony been a taxi driver?

He has been a taxi driver for five years.

What does Tony think about this situation?

He thinks it's strange—he has seen odd things before but nothing like this.

What joke does Tony make about the situation?

He jokingly asks if she went for a swim.

How does the girl respond to Tony's question?

She says quietly, "I just fell. I just fell."

What does Tony offer to do at the girl's house?

He offers to walk her to the door to make sure she gets in safely.

Why does the girl tell Tony not to come with her?

She says her mother is at home and tells him not to worry.

What does Tony see the girl do before he drives away?

He sees her knock on the front door of the house.

What does Tony notice in the back of the taxi?

He sees a pair of women's shoes left on the seat.

What is strange about the shoes?

They are wet with a small pool of water beneath them.

What explanation does Tony give for the girl's behaviour?

He thinks she may have been in shock or possibly hit her head.

What does Tony suspect might have happened to the girl?

He thinks she might be confused or injured from the fall into the river.

What does Tony first consider doing?

He considers just driving home and forgetting about the shoes.

Why does he decide to go back?

His conscience tells him to return the shoes to the girl.

What does Tony plan to do with the shoes?

He plans to knock on the door and give them back to her.

How does the story describe the street as he returns?

It is quiet and empty, with no sound except the street lamps glowing.

How does Tony find the house again?

He remembers it was the last house on the terrace.

Why does he think the girl might not answer?

There are no lights on in the house, so he assumes she's gone to bed.

What does Tony see through the door?

At first, he sees no movement, but eventually a light appears and someone comes down the stairs.

Who responds to Tony's knock?

An old woman with wild hair and cold eyes answers the door.

What does Tony say to the person at the door?

He says he's returning her daughter's shoes that were left in his taxi.

How does the old woman respond to Tony?

She is suspicious and cold, and asks if this is some kind of joke.

What does Tony assume about the old woman?

He assumes she is the girl's mother.

How would you describe the woman's attitude?

She is cold, distrustful, and becomes angry.

What does Tony try to explain to the old woman?

He explains that he picked up her daughter earlier and is just returning the shoes.

What physical description is given of the old woman?

She has wild hair, an old face, and cold eyes. She looks ancient.

How does the woman interpret Tony's actions?

She thinks he is playing a cruel trick on her.

Why might the woman think Tony is being cruel?

Because she believes her daughter died years ago, and Tony is bringing up painful memories.

What final thing does Tony do with the shoes?

He places them on the doorstep and prepares to leave.

What shocking information does the old woman reveal?

She says her daughter drowned in the river twenty years ago.

How does this change the meaning of the story?

It suggests the girl Tony picked up might have been a ghost.

What is Tony's reaction to this revelation?

He backs away slowly, disturbed and unsure what to think.

Describe the atmosphere of the house and street at the end.

The house is old and decaying, the street is silent and eerie, creating a spooky and unsettling mood.

Credits

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