



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F65

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## An Encounter

Adapted from James Joyce

Joe Dillon introduced us to the Wild West. He owned a small collection of old adventure magazines like *The Union Jack* and *The Halfpenny Marvel*. After school, we met in his back garden to play games inspired by these stories. Joe and his younger brother Leo, who was chubby and lazy, defended the stable's loft while we tried to attack it. Sometimes we fought battles on the grass. No matter how hard we tried, we never won. Every game ended with Joe dancing around, shouting like a Native American from the stories. He wore an old tea-cosy as a hat, banged a tin with his fist, and yelled, "Ya! Yaka, yaka, yaka!"

Joe's parents went to church every morning, and their house felt calm and religious. But Joe played too roughly for us younger boys, who were more timid. Everyone was shocked when we heard Joe wanted to become a priest. It seemed impossible, but it was true.

His wild games made us feel rebellious. We forgot our differences and joined together—some bravely, some just for fun, and others, like me, because we didn't want to seem weak or too studious. The Wild West stories didn't match my quiet personality, but they offered an escape from boring school life. I preferred American detective stories, especially ones with tough, beautiful girls who appeared now and then. These stories were passed around secretly at school. One day, Father Butler, our teacher, caught Leo Dillon with a copy of *The Halfpenny Marvel* during a history lesson.

"What's this?" Father Butler said, frowning at the magazine. "The Apache Chief? Is this what you read instead of studying Roman history? This is rubbish! The writer probably drinks too much. I'm surprised at boys like you reading such nonsense. Get back to your work, Dillon, or you'll be in trouble!"

Father Butler's words made the Wild West seem less exciting. Leo's embarrassed face reminded me of my own guilt. But when school was over, I wanted adventure again. The evening games in Joe's garden became boring, just like school. I wanted real adventures, not pretend ones. I realized that real adventures don't happen at home—you have to go find them.

The summer holidays were close, and I decided to skip school for one day. I planned this with Leo Dillon and a boy named Mahony. We each saved sixpence for the trip. We agreed to meet at ten in the morning on the Canal Bridge. Mahony's sister would write an excuse for him, and Leo would tell his brother to say he was sick. Our plan was to walk along Wharf Road, see the ships, take a ferry across the river, and visit the Pigeon House, a power station in Dublin. Leo worried we might meet Father Butler, but Mahony laughed and

said, “What would Father Butler be doing at the Pigeon House?” That made us feel better. I collected sixpence from each of them, showing them my own to prove I was serious. The night before, we were excited. We shook hands, laughing, and Mahony said, “See you tomorrow, mates!”

That night, I couldn’t sleep well. I lived closest to the bridge, so I arrived first. I hid my schoolbooks in the grass near our garden’s ashpit, where no one would find them, and hurried to the canal. It was a warm, sunny morning in early June. I sat on the bridge’s stone edge, looking at my clean canvas shoes, which I’d whitened the night before. I watched horses pulling a tram up the hill, their movements slow and steady. The trees along the canal had bright green leaves, and sunlight shone through them onto the water. The stone under my hands felt warm. I was happy, humming a tune in my head.

After a few minutes, I saw Mahony coming, wearing a grey suit. He climbed up beside me, smiling. He showed me a catapult he’d brought, explaining how he’d improved it. I asked why he had it, and he said he wanted to scare some birds. Mahony used a lot of slang and called Father Butler “Old Bunser.” We waited fifteen more minutes, but Leo didn’t come. Mahony jumped down and said, “I knew Fatty would chicken out.”

“What about his sixpence?” I asked.

“It’s ours now,” Mahony said. “We’ve got more money this way.”

We walked along North Strand Road until we reached the Vitriol Works, a factory, and then turned onto Wharf Road. Once we were out of sight, Mahony started acting like a Native American from Joe’s games. He chased a group of poor-looking girls with his empty catapult. Two boys threw stones at us to defend the girls, but I said they were too small to fight. Mahony agreed, and we kept walking. The girls’ friends shouted “Swaddlers!” at us, thinking we were Protestants because Mahony wore a cricket badge on his cap. We tried to stage a pretend siege at a place called the Smoothing Iron, but it didn’t work because we needed at least three people. We were annoyed with Leo and said he’d probably get in trouble with Mr. Ryan, our teacher, later.

We reached the river around noon. The streets were noisy, with high stone walls, cranes, and carts. Drivers shouted at us to move. We saw workers eating lunch, so we bought two big currant buns and sat on some pipes by the river to eat. We watched Dublin’s busy port—barges with smoke rising, fishing boats near Ringsend, and a large white ship being unloaded across the river. Mahony said it would be fun to run away to sea on one of those ships. Even I, looking at the tall masts, felt the geography I’d studied in school come to life. School and home seemed far away, and their rules felt weaker.

We took a ferry across the Liffey River, paying a small fee. We shared the boat with two workers and a small man carrying a bag. We were serious, but when our eyes met, Mahony and I laughed. On the other side, we watched the big ship being unloaded. Someone said it was Norwegian. I tried to read the ship's name but couldn't. I looked at the sailors, wondering if any had green eyes, though I wasn't sure why. Their eyes were blue, grey, or black. One tall sailor, whose eyes looked slightly green, shouted "All right!" every time wooden planks fell, making the crowd laugh.

We got tired of watching and walked into Ringsend. The day was hot and heavy. Grocers' shops had old biscuits in their windows. We couldn't find a dairy, so we bought raspberry lemonade at a small shop and drank it as we walked through dirty streets where fishermen's families lived. Mahony chased a cat down an alley, but it escaped into a field. We were both tired and sat on a sloping bank by the Dodder River. It was too late to reach the Pigeon House, and we had to be home by four to avoid getting caught. Mahony looked at his catapult, disappointed. I suggested taking the train back, and he cheered up a little. The sun hid behind clouds, leaving us with our tired thoughts and leftover crumbs.

We were alone in the field. I chewed a green stem and felt lazy. Then I saw a man walking slowly toward us from the far end of the field. He wore a worn-out, dark green suit and an old-fashioned hat. He looked older, with a grey moustache. He glanced at us quickly as he passed, then turned back after a few steps. He walked so slowly, tapping a stick on the ground, that I thought he was looking for something in the grass.

He stopped near us and said, "Good day." We replied politely, and he sat down carefully on the bank. He talked about the weather, saying it would be a hot summer. He said things had changed since he was young, a long time ago. He said the best time in life was being a schoolboy and that he'd give anything to be young again. His words bored us, but we stayed quiet. Then he asked if we'd read books by Thomas Moore, Sir Walter Scott, or Lord Lytton. I lied and said I'd read them all so he wouldn't think I was ignorant. He said he loved those books and owned them all. Pointing at Mahony, he said, "He's different. He likes games, not books."

Then he asked which of us had the most sweethearts. Mahony said he had three girlfriends, joking. I said I had none. The man didn't believe me and insisted I must have one. I stayed quiet. Mahony boldly asked, "How many did you have?" The man smiled and said that when he was our age, he had many sweethearts. "Every boy has a little sweetheart," he said.

His words seemed strange for an older man. I thought he was being open-minded, but I didn't like how he said it. He shivered sometimes, as if he was cold or scared. He started talking about girls, saying they had soft hair and hands, but not all were as good as they seemed. He kept repeating this, his voice low and strange, like he was sharing a secret. It felt like he was stuck on the same idea, circling it again and again. I looked away, staring at the ground, but kept listening.

After a while, he stopped talking. He stood up and said he'd be back in a few minutes. He walked away slowly. Mahony whispered, "Look what he's doing!" I didn't look, but Mahony said, "He's a strange old man!" I suggested we give fake names if he asked—Mahony would be Murphy, and I'd be Smith.

The man came back and sat down again. Mahony saw the cat from earlier and ran after it, throwing stones when it climbed a wall. The man watched, then turned to me. He said my friend was very rough and asked if he got punished at school. I wanted to say we weren't the kind of boys who got whipped, but I stayed quiet. He started talking about punishing boys, saying a rough boy needed a good whipping, not just a slap. His voice was soft, almost kind, but his words were strange. He said if he caught a boy talking to girls or lying about a sweetheart, he'd whip him hard. He described it slowly, like it was something he loved. His green eyes stared at me, and I looked away, feeling uneasy.

When he paused, I stood up quickly. I pretended to fix my shoe to hide my fear, then said I had to go. I walked up the bank, my heart beating fast, afraid he might grab me. At the top, I turned and shouted, "Murphy!" My voice sounded brave, but I felt ashamed of my fear. I called again, and Mahony ran to me, as if coming to help. I felt guilty because, deep down, I had always looked down on Mahony a little. Now, I was grateful for him.

## **2. Comprehension Questions and Answers**

Question 1: Who introduced the Wild West games to the boys?

Question 2: What did the boys plan to do when they skipped school?

Question 3: Why didn't Leo Dillon join the adventure?

Question 4: What did Mahony bring with him on the adventure?

Question 5: What did Father Butler find in Leo Dillon's pocket?

Question 6: Where did the boys eat their currant buns?

Question 7: What did the boys see being unloaded across the river?

Question 8: How did the strange man look when he first approached the boys?

Question 9: What did the man talk about that made the narrator uncomfortable?

Question 10: Why did the narrator feel guilty at the end of the story?

## **Answers**

Answer 1: Joe Dillon introduced the Wild West games to the boys.

Answer 2: They planned to walk along Wharf Road, see the ships, take a ferry across the river, and visit the Pigeon House.

Answer 3: Leo Dillon didn't join because he was scared and didn't show up at the Canal Bridge.

Answer 4: Mahony brought a catapult to scare birds.

Answer 5: Father Butler found a copy of The Halfpenny Marvel magazine.

Answer 6: They ate their currant buns on some pipes by the river.

Answer 7: They saw a large white ship, which someone said was Norwegian.

Answer 8: He wore a worn-out, dark green suit, an old-fashioned hat, and had a grey moustache.

Answer 9: The man talked about girls' soft hair and hands, and how he would whip boys who talked to girls or lied about sweethearts.

Answer 10: The narrator felt guilty because he had always looked down on Mahony but was grateful when Mahony ran to help him.

### 3. Grammar Page



**Listening Practice:** Repeat these sentences after your teacher.

- Direct* : Rahim said to Sabnam, "I'm unwell today."  
*Indirect* : Rahim told Sabnam that he was unwell that day.  
*Direct* : Pukar said to Rahul, "I'm doing my lessons now."  
*Indirect* : Pukar told Rahul that he was doing his lessons then.  
*Direct* : Anita said, "I may go away tomorrow."  
*Indirect* : Anita said that she might go away the next day.  
*Direct* : Tina said to Remo, "Where are you going?"  
*Indirect* : Tina asked Remo where he was going.  
*Direct* : He said to me, "Will you give me your pen?"  
*Indirect* : He asked me if I would give him my pen.  
*Direct* : Tina said to him, "Show me your album."  
*Indirect* : Tina told him to show her his album.  
*Direct* : She said, "What a beautiful doll it is!"  
*Indirect* : She exclaimed with surprise that it was a beautiful doll.



**Grammar Practice:** Underline the changes in the following sentences.

- Direct* : He said to me, "My brother will come here tomorrow."  
*Indirect* : He told me that his brother would come there the next day.

change in the reporting verb

change in the person

change in the tense

change in the place adverbial

change in the time adverbial

- Direct* : He said, "I'm in the middle of a meeting now."  
*Indirect* : He said that he was in the middle of a meeting then.  
*Direct* : He said, "I'll call you back this afternoon."  
*Indirect* : He said that he would call me back that afternoon.  
*Direct* : He said, "You can meet my secretary if something urgent has come up."  
*Indirect* : He said that I could meet his secretary if something urgent had come up.  
*Direct* : He said to me, "I'll certainly give your message to my secretary."  
*Indirect* : He told me that he would certainly give my message to his secretary.  
*Direct* : He said, "Will you meet me tomorrow?"  
*Indirect* : He asked me if I would meet him the next day.  
*Direct* : Riya said to Suman, "Please give me your notebook."  
*Indirect* : Riya requested Suman to give her his notebook.  
*Direct* : The doctor said to me, "Take a complete rest from football."  
*Indirect* : The doctor advised me to take a complete rest from football.  
*Direct* : The hijackers said, "We'll kill one passenger every hour if our demands are not met."  
*Indirect* : The hijackers threatened that they would kill one passenger every hour if their demands were not met.