

Name: _____ Class: _____

Excerpt from "The Trip of Le Horla"

By Guy de Maupassant
1887

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was a French writer known as the master of the short story. In this excerpt from a short story, a narrator recounts his travels in a flying balloon. As you read, take notes on how the narrator describes the world around him.

- [1] Captain Jovis is now ready and calls all the passengers.

Lieutenant Mallet jumps aboard, climbing first on the aerial net between the basket and the balloon, from which he will watch during the night the movements of Le Horla across the skies, as the officer on watch, standing on starboard,¹ watches the course of a ship.

M. Etierine Beer gets in after him, then comes M. Paul Bessand, then M. Patrice Eyries and I get in last.



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But the basket is too heavy for the balloon, considering the long trip to be taken, and M. Eyries has to get out, not without great regret.

- [5] M. Joliet, standing erect² on the edge of the basket, begs the ladies, in very gallant³ terms, to stand aside a little, for he is afraid he might throw sand on their hats in rising. Then he commands:

"Let it loose," and, cutting with one stroke of his knife the ropes that hold the balloon to the ground, he gives Le Horla its liberty.

In one second we fly skyward. Nothing can be heard; we float, we rise, we fly, we glide. Our friends shout with glee and applaud, but we hardly hear them, we hardly see them. We are already so far, so high! What? Are we really leaving these people down there? Is it possible? Paris spreads out beneath us, a dark bluish patch, cut by its streets, from which rise, here and there, domes, towers, steeples,⁴ then around it the plain, the country, traversed⁵ by long roads, thin and white, amidst green fields of a tender or dark green, and woods almost black.

The Seine appears like a coiled snake, asleep, of which we see neither head nor tail; it crosses Paris, and the entire field resembles an immense basin of prairies and forests dotted here and there by mountains, hardly visible in the horizon.

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1. the right side of an aircraft when one is facing forward
 2. rigidly upright or straight
 3. giving special attention and respect to women
 4. church towers
 5. **Traverse (verb):** to go or travel across

The sun, which we could no longer see down below, now reappears as though it were about to rise again, and our balloon seems to be lighted; it must appear like a star to the people who are looking up. M. Mallet every few seconds throws a cigarette paper into space and says quietly: "We are rising, always rising," while Captain Jovis, radiant with joy, rubs his hands together and repeats: "Eh? this varnish?⁶ Isn't it good?"

- [10] In fact, we can see whether we are rising or sinking only by throwing a cigarette paper out of the basket now and then. If this paper appears to fall down like a stone, it means that the balloon is rising; if it appears to shoot skyward the balloon is descending.

The two barometers⁷ mark about five hundred meters, and we gaze with enthusiastic admiration at the earth we are leaving and to which we are not attached in any way; it looks like a colored map, an immense plan of the country. All its noises, however, rise to our ears very distinctly, easily recognizable. We hear the sound of the wheels rolling in the streets, the snap of a whip, the cries of drivers, the rolling and whistling of trains and the laughter of small boys running after one another. Every time we pass over a village the noise of children's voices is heard above the rest and with the greatest distinctness. Some men are calling us; the locomotives⁸ whistle; we answer with the siren, which emits plaintive,⁹ fearfully shrill wails like the voice of a weird being wandering through the world.

We perceive lights here and there, some isolated fire in the farms, and lines of gas in the towns. We are going toward the northwest, after roaming for some time over the little lake of Enghien. Now we see a river; it is the Oise, and we begin to argue about the exact spot we are passing. Is that town Creil or Pontoise — the one with so many lights? But if we were over Pontoise we could see the junction of the Seine and the Oise; and that enormous fire to the left, isn't it the blast furnaces of Montataire? So then we are above Creil. The view is superb; it is dark on the earth, but we are still in the light, and it is now past ten o'clock. Now we begin to hear slight country noises, the double cry of the quail in particular, then the mewling of cats and the barking of dogs. Surely the dogs have scented the balloon; they have seen it and have given the alarm. We can hear them barking all over the plain and making the identical noise they make when baying¹⁰ at the moon. The cows also seem to wake up in the barns, for we can hear them lowing; all the beasts are scared and moved before the aerial monster that is passing.

The delicious odors of the soil rise toward us, the smell of hay, of flowers, of the moist, verdant¹¹ earth, perfuming the air — a light air, in fact, so light, so sweet, so delightful that I realize I never was so fortunate as to breathe before. A profound sense of well-being, unknown to me heretofore, pervades me, a well-being of body and spirit, composed of supineness,¹² of infinite rest, of forgetfulness, of indifference to everything and of this novel sensation of traversing space without any of the sensations that make motion unbearable, without noise, without shocks and without fear.

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6. a liquid that is spread on a surface and dries to form a hard, shiny coating
 7. instruments for measuring atmospheric pressure
 8. vehicles that run on rails and are used for moving railroad cars
 9. **Plaintive (adjective):** sounding sad or mournful
 10. barking or howling loudly
 11. green with grass or other vegetation
 12. inactivity

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the intended meaning of the phrase “he gives Le Horla its liberty” in paragraph 6 of “The Trip of Le Horla”? [RL.4]
 - A. the balloon’s appearance
 - B. releasing the balloon
 - C. the travelers’ freedom
 - D. leaving France

2. PART B: Which detail from paragraphs 6-7 of the passage supports the answer in Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. “cutting with one stroke of his knife the ropes that hold the balloon”
 - B. “We are already so far, so high!”
 - C. “Are we really leaving these people down there?”
 - D. “Paris spreads out beneath us, a dark bluish patch, cut by its streets”

3. PART A: Which statement describes a theme in “The Trip of Le Horla”? [RL.2]
 - A. Taking risks can help one escape life’s unhappiness.
 - B. Disappointment may occur in the face of adventure.
 - C. Travel may lead to newly discovered feelings of connection to one’s homeland.
 - D. Unusual experiences can cause unexpected wonderment at a familiar world.

4. PART B: Which detail about the narrator helps develop the theme from Part A? [RL.3]
 - A. his discussion of the travelers who have been left behind
 - B. his growing awe and detailed perceptions of the flight
 - C. his reflections on life in the French countryside
 - D. his excitement at the recognition of familiar sights and sounds

