

The War of the Worlds by H.G Wells

Book Two- Chapter Four - Part One

On the sixth day of our imprisonment I caught the curate drinking in the scullery. I snatched in the darkness. My fingers caught a bottle of burgundy.

For a few moments there was a tussle. The bottle struck the floor and broke. I desisted and rose. We stood panting and threatening each other.

In the end I planted myself between him and the food. I divided it into into rations to last us ten days. I would not let him eat any more that day.

All day and all night we sat face to face, I weary but resolute, and he weeping and complaining of his hunger.

For two vast days we struggled in undertones and wrestling contests. There were times when I beat and kicked him madly, times when I cajoled and persuaded him.

Once I tried to bribe him with the last bottle of burgundy, for there was a rain-water pump from which I could get water. But neither force nor kindness availed. He was indeed beyond reason. He would neither desist from his attacks on the food nor from his noisy babbling to himself.

Slowly I began to realise that my sole companion in this close and sickly darkness was a man insane.

On the eighth day he began to talk aloud instead of whispering, and nothing I could do would moderate his speech.

“We have sinned, O God!” he said, over and over again. “We have fallen short.!”

Then he would suddenly revert to the matter of the food I withheld from him, praying, begging, weeping, at last threatening.

He began to raise his voice—I prayed him not to. He threatened he would shout and bring the Martians upon us. For a time that scared me; but any concession would have shortened our chance of escape beyond estimating. I defied him.

He talked with his voice rising slowly, through the greater part of the eighth and ninth days. Then he slept awhile, and began again so loudly that I must needs make him desist.

“Be still!” I implored.

He rose to his knees, for he had been sitting in the darkness near the copper.

“I have been still too long,” he said, in a tone that must have reached the pit, “and now I must bear my witness.”

“Shut up!” I said, rising to my feet, and in a terror lest the Martians should hear us. “For God's sake——”

“Nay,” shouted the curate, at the top of his voice, standing likewise and extending his arms.

“Speak! The word of the Lord is upon me!”

In three strides he was at the door leading into the kitchen.

I put out my hand and felt the meat chopper hanging to the wall. In a flash I was after him. I was fierce with fear. Before he was halfway across the kitchen I had overtaken him.

With one last touch of humanity I turned the blade back and struck him with the butt. He went headlong forward and lay stretched on the ground. I stumbled over him and stood panting. He lay still.

Quick Check: True (T) False (F) or Not Stated (NS)?

1. The curate drinks a bottle of wine.
2. The narrator divides the food into ten days of rations.
3. The curate appears to be losing his mind.
4. The narrator sings to himself.
5. The curate quotes from the Bible.

Writing/Understanding

1. Describe the behaviour of the curate? Why do you think he does this?
2. Why does the narrator attack the curate? Do you think he is justified?
3. What is the 'one last touch of humanity' the narrator provides. Why do you think he mentions this?