



Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca
PL01 – ESAME DI STATO DI ISTRUZIONE SECONDARIA SUPERIORE

Indirizzo: LI04 - LICEO LINGUISTICO

Tema di: LINGUA STRANIERA - INGLESE

C – LETTERATURA

When it came to concealing his troubles, Tommy Wilhelm was not less capable than the next fellow. So at least he thought, and there was a certain amount of evidence to back him up. He had once been an actor – no, not quite, an extra – and he knew what acting should be. Also, he was smoking a cigar, and when a man is smoking a cigar, wearing a hat, he has an advantage; it is harder to find out how he feels. He came
5 from the twenty-third floor down to the lobby on the mezzanine to collect his mail before breakfast, and he believed – he hoped – that he looked passably well: doing all right. It was a matter of sheer hope, because there was not much that he could add to his present effort. On the fourteenth floor he looked for his father to enter the elevator; they often met at this hour, on the way to breakfast. If he worried about his appearance it was mainly for his old father's sake. But there was no stop on the fourteenth, and the
10 elevator sank and sank. Then the smooth door opened and the great dark-red uneven carpet that covered the lobby billowed toward Wilhelm's feet. In the foreground the lobby was dark, sleepy. French drapes like sails kept out the sun, but three high, narrow windows were open, and in the blue air Wilhelm saw a pigeon about to light on the great chain that supported the marquee of the movie house directly underneath the lobby. For one moment he heard the wings beating strongly.

15 Most of the guests at the Hotel Gloriana were past the age of retirement. Along Broadway in the Seventies, Eighties, and Nineties, a great part of New York's vast population of old men and women lives. Unless the weather is too cold or wet they fill the benches about the tiny railed parks and along the subway gratings from Verdi Square to Columbia University, they crowd the shops and cafeterias, the dime stores, the tearooms, the bakeries, the beauty parlors, the reading rooms and club rooms. Among
20 these old people at the Gloriana, Wilhelm felt out of place. He was comparatively young, in his middle forties, large and blond, with big shoulders; his back was heavy and strong, if already a little stooped or thickened. After breakfast the old guests sat down on the green leather armchairs and sofas in the lobby and began to gossip and look into the papers; they had nothing to do but wait out the day. But Wilhelm was used to an active life and liked to go out energetically in the morning. And for several months,
25 because he had no position, he had kept up his morale by rising early; he was shaved and in the lobby by eight o'clock. He bought the paper and some cigars and drank a Coca-Cola or two before he went in to breakfast with his father. After breakfast – out, out, out to attend to business. The getting out had in itself become the chief business. But he had realized that he could not keep this up much longer, and today he was afraid. He was aware that his routine was about to break up and he sensed that a huge trouble long
30 presaged but till now formless was due. Before evening, he'd know. Nevertheless he followed his daily course and crossed the lobby.

Rubin, the man at the newsstand, had poor eyes. They may not have been actually weak but they were poor in expression, with lacy lids that furled down at the corners. He dressed well. It didn't seem necessary – he was behind the counter most of the time – but he dressed very well. He had on a rich
35 brown suit; the cuffs embarrassed the hairs on his small hands. He wore a Countess Mara painted necktie. As Wilhelm approached, Rubin did not see him; he was looking out dreamily at the Hotel



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40 Ansonia, which was visible from his corner, several blocks away. The Ansonia, the neighborhood's great landmark, was built by Stanford White. It looks like a baroque palace from Prague or Munich enlarged a hundred times, with towers, domes, huge swells and bubbles of metal gone green from exposure, iron fretwork and festoons. Black television antennae are densely planted on its round summits. Under the changes of weather it may look like marble or like sea water, black as slate in the fog, white as tufa in sunlight. This morning it looked like the image of itself reflected in deep water, white and cumulous above, with cavernous distortions underneath. Together, the two men gazed at it.

[776 words]

Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, [first ed. the Viking Press, New York, 1956] Kindle edition 2013.

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

Answer the following questions. Use complete sentences and your own words.

1. Who is Tommy Wilhelm?
2. Where does he live?
3. What seems to be making Tommy nervous when he comes down from his room?
4. What does he see when he gets out of the lift?
5. Who are the guests at the Hotel Gloriana?
6. Why does Wilhelm feel out of place there?
7. What do the hotel guests do after breakfast?
8. What has Wilhelm done in the last months?
9. What does Rubin look like?
10. Why do Rubin and Wilhelm gaze at the Hotel Ansonia?



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PRODUCTION

Choose **one** of the following questions.

Number your answer clearly to show which question you have attempted.

Either

1. Alienation or sense of separation is one of the dominating themes in Bellow's novel *Seize the Day*. Saul Bellow is primarily concerned with the well-worn modern dilemma of the individual: desperately isolated and profoundly alone in a society whose only God is money. Discuss the topic in a 300-word essay by referring to other literary and/or philosophical texts you have read and to your experience.

Or

2. That day Wilhelm "was aware that his routine was about to break up and he sensed that a huge trouble long presaged but till now formless was due." Have you ever started a day with the feeling that something bad was going to happen? How did the day progress? What did you do? Write a 300-word composition on your experience.