



## The Shrimp and the Anemone

*L.P. Hartley*

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An evocative account of a childhood summer spent beside the sea in Norfolk by brother and sister, Eustace and Hilda.

### **The Shrimp and the Anemone Details**

Date : Published April 3rd 2000 by Faber Faber (first published 1944)

ISBN : 9780571203826

Author : L.P. Hartley

Format : Paperback 217 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, European Literature, British Literature

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### **Karen says**

\* 1000 novels everyone must read: the definitive list: Family and Self

Selected by the Guardian's Review team and a panel of expert judges, this list includes only novels – no memoirs, no short stories, no long poems – from any decade and in any language. Originally published in thematic supplements – love, crime, comedy, family and self, state of the nation, science fiction and fantasy, war and travel – they appear here for the first time.

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### **Gary Power says**

was made to read this for school and ended up loving it. It broke right through my cynicism.

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### **Nicole says**

Oh, L.P. Hartley, why are you forgotten?

This is the second Hartley book I've read (the first was *The Go-Between*), and if anything this one was even better. Both of the books take a double view, with a main character seeing things from childhood and the reader having access to what the adult world probably actually looks like. This is the same technique that makes *The House in Paris* so enjoyable, and what I wanted from and did not find in *What Maisie Knew*, though of course for the latter, it may just be that I find James' prose extremely heavy going, like trying to swim through some kind of boring and viscous liquid.

I think perhaps part of the attraction for this book was also that I recognize this inner state, and this theory about child-raising: that correction is more important than praise, and that praise will certainly lead to being spoiled, and that being spoiled is somehow the same as not submitted, as expressing one's own will. Eustance's various terrors seem real and convincing and even, from the point of view of such a childhood, reasonable. I'd like to read the two others in this little series of novels, though I wonder how Hartley will hold up as his characters reach adulthood. Of course, the gap between an inner life and an outer one does not disappear with adulthood, even if it doesn't take the form of nightmares and a complete lack of understanding about capital versus interest. And of course lovely prose is good for all purposes.

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### **Jim says**

Sometimes it seems as if it were the British who invented childhood, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. L P Hartley's *The Shrimp and the Anemone* made me think repeatedly of my own childhood, of my own lack of understanding of the adult world, especially where money was concerned. At one point, Eustace thinks if he had the money, he would not have to do anything but hunt and shoot and visit foreign

destinations.

Of course, I did not have what Eustace Cherrington had, a sister like Hilda who looked after him and helped him along when he fell. And I certainly did not have an ailing Miss Fothergill who left me a fortune. Somehow, I managed on my own; but I was not as disadvantaged as Eustace was. Not quite retarded, Eustace was a bit slow and had what appeared to be a weak heart.

I think of Eustace's crush on the unworthy Nancy Steptoe, and how she manages to lord it over the poor boy. Fortunately, by the end of this first volume of the **Eustace and Hilda** trilogy, Eustace begins to understand what is in store for him but has no idea on how it will affect the simple things he loves.

I look forward to following his adventures in the following volumes, **The Sixth Heaven** and **Eustace and Hilda**.

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### **Donna says**

Well what a most annoying book. It had such great reviews, is set in Norfolk and promised so much, and yes I know it's taken me ages to read but it was so boring and pointless! I just don't get what it was about. 217 pages of ramblings, written in the genre of children but by an adult... Most frustrating and annoying. I have no idea how the book got so many great reviews...what a waste of my time but I was determined to finish it in the hope it got better. However it is possible - I think - to see the sibling rivalry and sibling love shining through it. But that's about as pleasant as I can be - sorry!

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### **Leslie says**

3½ stars.

This first book in the Eustace & Hilda trilogy takes place during one summer in the 1930s with Eustace at 9 years old & Hilda 13. He is an odd little boy, at once fanciful and submissive, perhaps due to his poor health. Despite the fact that he is unlike any small boy I have ever known, I quickly became sympathetic to him. The book was a fast read but has some ideas in it that I am still mulling over. I look forward to reading the rest of the trilogy!

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### **Sandra says**

I found this disappointing, totally unable to find much of interest, or sympathy, in either Eustace or Hilda despite the unmistakeable excellence of the writing.

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### **Jake Goretzki says**

Frankly, this is gorgeous. It's a short novel, yet it took me almost a week as it asks for the slow read (the child's thoughts are unsteady and self-conscious).

I haven't come across a depiction of childhood as tender and nuanced as this since, well, David Copperfield or Great Expectations. Hartley does here what Dickens does so well - he captures the voice and perspective of a boy in an adult world. The boy may sound precocious, but the lost child is there throughout: (I kept thinking of Pip's line to Magwich: 'Also Georgiana - Wife of the Above'). Like Copperfield, Eustace is also incredibly easy to like (and a million miles away from the pompous little knickerbockered fuckers in, for example, Stella Gibbons' 'Wildwood'). To write about kids and not irritate the fuck out of the reader is no mean feat. To do so in a child-wary, knickerbockered past is amazing. This could be a child in 2016.

Copperfield - or 'Copperfield in miniature' too - because, well, here are the servants gossiping; here's the indiscrete coach driver ('an Edwardian 'Barkis is willin"') I mean, look: it's even by the sea and there are donkeys. Adults are making plans and kids don't know what's going on (Mursdstone, etc). And behold, Mrs Fothergill: a sort of Miss Havisham meets Betsey Trotwood. I found her portrayal very touching.

The handling of the theme of death was fantastic. Eustace's mother's recent death is a powerful background explainer for the set up the novel happens in; we the reader know the household is traumatised, but the children haven't absorbed this yet (they're just on a long stay in a seaside town - a sort of Indian Summer). What might superficially read as a well written tale of children growing up is actually a picture of a household coping with death. Father is a sitcom Dad who's gingerly trying to cope with his world falling apart, I suspect.

And lastly, the title. That image is almost cinematic, really and it's a really thought-provoking metaphor. We want to liberate one from what's holding it down, but in doing so we kill something in the other? Or is this more about being freed from the superstitions of childhood? I don't know. But it's an absolute charm of a novel.

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### **Sana Abdulla says**

This book speaks of a child's world, and his feelings, his fears and his relationship to those around him. The children are so innocent and immature for their age but at the same time very sensitive to every word and action from the adults that control their lives. This is a depiction of a world no longer in existence where children were extremely well behaved and respectful that I had difficulty empathising with the characters. Somehow I kept thinking of Great Expectations by Charles Dickens although they are entirely different stories.

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### **Geoff Wooldridge says**

Hartley has an obvious aptitude for capturing the thoughts, feelings and habits of young boys in his writings.

In his 1953 classic, The Go-Between, he exquisitely captures the innocence, devotion and emotional development of young Leo Colston as he becomes inexorably embroiled in his role as messenger in a secret

tryst between two young lovers.

In *The Shrimp and the Anemone*, published in 1944, Hartley presents the activities, flights of imagination and childlike innocence of Eustace Cherrington, who is 9 - 10, and his sister Hilda, 4 years older, during their time in an English coastal town sometime in the early 20th century.

Eustace is somewhat frail, treated as delicate by his family, and he is cared for tenderly by a nurse, Minney, and especially by sister Hilda.

Hilda is devoted to Eustace, despite their age difference, although she is disposed at times to push Eustace into situations where he is obviously reluctant.

Eustace is religious, well-mannered, normally cautious but occasionally intrepid, and he has a vivid imagination that can draw him into fancifully wild and invalid conclusions.

The events of the novel cover the period of about one year, and are left in a state that clearly invites further exploration of the lives of Eustace and Hilda. In fact, this is the first book of a trilogy; *The Sixth Heaven* and *Eustace and Hilda* complete the trilogy.

This novel, although charming, lacks the polish, nuanced sophistication and endearing qualities of *The Go-Between*, but it is nevertheless simple and effective, evoking both amusement and empathy in the reader.

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### **CQM says**

L. P. Hartley knew how to write children. *The Go-Between* was filled with wonderful insights into the mind of young Leo, his fears and embarrassments. This book, the first in the Eustace and Hilda trilogy, is more of the same but without the tragedy of *The Go-Between*. If you are looking for excitement, drama or thrills then this really isn't for you. It's a slow thoughtful book whose events we see through the eyes of young Eustace. He's a sweetly nervous boy who wants to please everyone, most of all his older sister Hilda. As to plot there really isn't one, just a sequence of, to Eustace, notable events over the course of a few months. As I said, it's slow and thoughtful it's also occasionally beautiful and sometimes a little heartbreaking and Hartley writes children I for one can empathise with. It's no *Go-Between* but what book is?

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### **John says**

Before I read *Shrimp and the Anemone*, I never imagined that I would enjoy reading about a nine year old boy and how the world appears from his perspective. But this story is written with such sensitivity and skill that it reawakened past emotions I thought had faded over the years and been lost forever. What a great writer L.P.Hartley was.

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### **Cleo Bannister says**

Having absolutely adored *The Go-Between* last year I eagerly sought out another book by this twentieth

century author.

The Shrimp and the Anemone is the first of a trilogy about siblings Eustace and Hilda. Eustace is the younger, a mere nine years old when we first meet him and Hilda is his older sister by four years. Hilda is strongly committed in making sure young Eustace follows the path of goodness, she is his moral guardian in all things. In fact Hilda is scary in the way she both makes Eustace do things, such as talk to an old invalid lady, which I am certain she would not have, whilst also making sure he never strains himself, being in the Edwardian parlance of the day 'a sickly child'

The book opens with a description of a shrimp being half-eaten by an anemone and the children impotently trying to rescue it with the shrimp ultimately dying but not without it having a profound effect on poor Eustace. The author shows his immense skill in not labouring the point he is making, there is not 'see the lesson' tone to this part but the luminance of the writing does set the reader up well for the rest of the book.

Set in inter-war Hunstanton, on the north-west Norfolk coast L.P. Hartley renamed the area Anchorstone and the children spend hours on the beach building fantastic moats with an air of seriousness of endeavour that seems to have quite disappeared in the intervening near century. Set at the time it is, there is no escaping the importance of class, and 'knowing your place' with the children's father a working man, albeit in an office, is subtly compared to the man who picks them up in the trap to take them on a day-out where Eustace is allowed to sit on the box with the driver as a special treat.

The beauty of the book is in reading about the children's pastimes, Eustace's illness and their relationships with other members of the household whilst at the same time glimpsing the way they are both mystified by the actions of the adults around them. One thing you can't accuse this author of is not being able to recreate the way that children view the world, which often authors spectacularly fail to capture in all its facets. As the book progresses we meet others in the vicinity, including Dick Staverly who takes a shine to Hilda who is growing to be a beautiful young lady. Hilda is aware of the effect she has, and that there is a rival for Dick's attention so all eyes are on her method of handling this quandary which serves to lend another facet to her character.

While the characters of the two children are exceptionally vivid, the rest of the family is far more sketchy. Their father is in turns jovial and irritated by his children, their mother died soon after the birth of their youngest sister, a mere baby. The household is completed by the stern and severe aunt who bustles in and out of the story-line mainly trying to impress the father to take more interest in his offspring.

Whilst there are parallels with The Go-Between this is a far more benign tale, so whilst a secret is at the heart of the book, it isn't of the same type of moral nature, although it's important enough for me to want to find out what happens to this family in the next book; The Sixth Heaven.

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### **Hollyanne says**

Having read 'The Go Between' and finding it entertaining I figured there wasn't much to lose in purchasing one of his other novel especially as it was sitting tragically alone in a sale bin for only £1, I'm glad I rescued it... The prose in this book, in my opinion far surpasses that of 'The Go Between'. Hartley manages to capture the beautiful innocence and naivety of a 9 year old boy whilst still using an expanse of wonderful vocabulary. There's something I just can't explain but the soul of this individual is just so clear in the way it is written.

It is a simple story that follows the life of Eustace and Hilda a brother and sister living in a sea side town. There something so pure about this book and I look forward to re-reading and exploring the sequels.

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### **Andrew says**

Very sweet portrait of a close bond between brother and sister. Just a bit too dry for me.

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