

Class 12 – Vistas – Ch. 1 - The Third Level

Text and Explanation:

(Black – Text from Book, Maroon – Word Meanings, Blue - Explanation)

THE presidents of the New York Central and the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroads will swear on a stack of timetables that there are only two. But I say there are three, because I've been on the third level of the Grand Central Station. Yes, I've taken the obvious step: I talked to a psychiatrist friend of mine, among others. I told him about the third level at Grand Central Station, and he said it was a waking dream wish fulfillment. He said I was unhappy. That made my wife kind of mad, but he explained that he meant the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and all the rest of it, and that I just want to escape. Well, who doesn't? Everybody I know wants to escape, but they don't wander down into any third level at Grand Central Station.

Stack- a pile of objects, typically one that is neatly arranged

Timetables- a schedule showing the departure and arrival times of trains, buses or aircraft

Waking dream- an involuntary dream occurring while a person is awake

Wander- walk; roam

The story begins with the mention of a third level at the Grand Central Station (which only has two levels in real). The narrator (protagonist) himself is aware that even the Presidents of New York Central and the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroads would express great confidence in the existence of only two levels but he himself has been to the third level. Considering the entire scenario, Charley, the protagonist had a word with his psychiatrist friend. He explained that Charley was experiencing a waking dream wish fulfillment or in other words, hallucination. According to the psychiatrist, Charley was unhappy (the fact his wife did not like). Upon explaining further, it became clear that it is the burden of all the modern problems and frustration that is pushing him to experience the apparent perception of something not present. He tends to escape the reality. Charley agreed with what his psychiatrist friend had to say but he still found it a bit odd to have been to the third level of the Grand Central Station.

But that's the reason, he said, and my friends all agreed. Everything points to it, they claimed. My stamp collecting, for example; that's a 'temporary refuge from reality'. Well, maybe, but my grandfather didn't need any refuge from reality; things were pretty nice and peaceful in his day, from all I hear, and he started my collection. It's a nice collection too, blocks of four of practically every U.S. issue, first-day covers, and so on. President Roosevelt collected stamps too, you know.

Refuge- the state of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger or difficulty

First day cover – a new stamp used on an envelope, dually stamped with date by a post office.

Charley begins to believe in the possibility that he has been experiencing all this to escape the harsh realities of the modern world. His friends agreed to it as well. Even his stamp collecting is a sort of asylum he resorts to in order to feel protected. On the other hand, he starts thinking otherwise. His grandfather started his stamp collection but in those days, they had not seen the consequences of war and there was peace, harmony and security. His grandfather must have not been insecure. The collection, moreover was amazing, with blocks of four of practically every U. S. issue. Even President Roosevelt collected stamps.

Anyway, here's what happened at Grand Central. One night last summer I worked late at the office. I was in a hurry to get uptown to my apartment, so I decided to take the subway from Grand Central because it's faster than the bus.

Subway – Underground electric rail road, Passage.

Grand Central – (here) Railway Station in New York.

He starts explaining what exactly happened and begins with how he chose to take the Subway to his apartment instead of the usual bus after a late night shift. He did this in order to save time.



Now, I don't know why this should have happened to me. I'm just an ordinary guy named Charley, thirty-one years old, and I was wearing a tan gabardine suit and a straw hat with a fancy band; I passed a dozen men who looked just like me. And I wasn't trying to escape from anything; I just wanted to get home to Louisa, my wife.

Tan - Brown

Gabardine - a smooth, durable, twill-woven worsted or cotton cloth

He describes himself as an ordinary man of 31 dressed in a tan gabardine suit and a straw hat with a fancy band. It was so ordinary that he could see other similar men at the station. He explains how he was in his normal state of mind not wanting to escape from anywhere. All he wanted was to be with his wife Louisa at that hour. He still doesn't understand why this happened with him.

I turned into Grand Central from Vanderbilt Avenue, and went down the steps to the first level, where you take trains like the Twentieth Century. Then I walked down another flight to the second level, where the suburban trains leave from, ducked into an arched doorway heading for the subway - and got lost. That's easy to do. I've been in and out of Grand Central hundreds of times, but I'm always bumping into new doorways and stairs and corridors. Once I got into a tunnel about a mile long and came out in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel. Another time I came up in an office building on Forty-sixth Street, three blocks away.

Suburban- residential

Ducked- lower the head or body quickly

Arched- curved

Bumping- knock or run into something

Charley comes to the part of the incident where he entered the Grand Central from Vanderbilt Avenue and took the stairs to the first level where one boarded trains like the Twentieth Century. Then he went down another floor to reach the second level from where the suburban trains leave. From there he entered an arched doorway and got lost. It was nothing unusual for him because even if he had come to that station a thousand times, there were occasions he bumped into new corridors and doorways. Once he entered the wrong lobby and reached Roosevelt Hotel and another time in an office building which was three blocks away.

Sometimes I think Grand Central is growing like a tree, pushing out new corridors and staircases like roots. There's probably a long tunnel that nobody knows about feeling its way under the city right now, on its way to Times Square, and maybe another to Central Park. And maybe - because for so many people through the years Grand Central has been an exit, a way of escape - maybe that's how the tunnel I got into... But I never told my psychiatrist friend about that idea.

He wondered that Grand Central was expanding at a very fast rate just like a tree and with its roots. He says, it is no big deal that they even have a secret tunnel under the city to the Times Square or maybe the Central Park. He feels it might be because Grand Central is a place of exit for innumerable persons - he also managed to escape reality because of the same reason. Though, he never shared it with his psychiatrist friend.

The corridor I was in began angling left and slanting downward and I thought that was wrong, but I kept on walking. All I could hear was the empty sound of my own footsteps and I didn't pass a soul. Then I heard that sort of hollow roar ahead that means open space and people talking. The tunnel turned sharp left; I went down a short flight of stairs and came out on the third level at Grand Central Station. For just a moment I thought I was back on the second level, but I saw the room was smaller, there were fewer ticket windows and train gates, and the information booth in the centre was wood and old looking. And the man in the booth wore a green eyeshade and long black sleeve protectors. The lights were dim and sort of flickering. Then I saw why; they were open-flame gaslights.

The unusual corridor he had entered into began angling left and slanting downward which he felt odd about but nevertheless, he kept on walking. There was no one except him and the voice of his feet echoed. He finally heard the sound of people talking from a distance, then he took a left and walked down the stairs again and reached at the third level of the Grand Central. He thought he had somehow made his way back to the second level but as he noticed, the room was smaller, there were fewer ticket windows and train gates, and the information booth in the centre was made of wood and old-looking. The man in the booth was also different and the station was dim-lit for there were open-flame gaslights.
