

# Gilray's Flower-Pot

By J.M. Barrie

**Directions:** Read the short story and answer the questions that follow. Refer to the text to check your answers when appropriate.

I charge Gilray's unreasonableness to his **ignoble**<sup>1</sup> passion for cigarettes; and the story of his flower-pot has therefore an obvious moral. The want of dignity he displayed about that flower-pot, on his return to London, would have made any one sorry for him. I had my own work to look after, and really could not be tending his **chrysanthemum**<sup>2</sup> all day. After he came back, however, there was no reasoning with him, and I admit that I never did water his plant, though always intending to do so.

The great mistake was in not leaving the flower-pot in charge of William John. No doubt I readily promised to attend to it, but Gilray deceived me by speaking as if the watering of a plant was the merest pastime. He had to leave London for a short provincial tour, and, as I see now, took advantage of my good nature.

As Gilray had owned his flower-pot for several months, during which time (I take him at his word) he had watered it daily, he must have known he was misleading me. He said that you got into the way of watering a flower-pot regularly just as you wind up your watch. That certainly is not the case. I always wind up my watch, and I never watered the flower-pot. Of course, if I had been living in Gilray's rooms with the thing always before my eyes I might have done so. I proposed to take it into my chambers at the time, but he would not hear of that. Why? How Gilray came by this chrysanthemum I do not inquire; but whether, in the circumstances, he should not have made a clean breast of it to me is another matter. Undoubtedly it was an unusual thing to put a man to the trouble of watering a chrysanthemum daily without giving him its history. My own belief has always been that he got it in exchange for a pair of boots and his old dressing-gown. He hints that it was a present; but, as one who knows him well, I may say that he is the last person a lady would be likely to give a chrysanthemum to. Besides, if he was so proud of the plant he should have stayed at home and watered it himself.

He says that I never meant to water it, which is not only a mistake, but unkind. My plan was to run downstairs immediately after dinner every evening and give it a thorough watering. One thing or another, however, came in the way. I often remembered about the chrysanthemum while I was in the office; but even Gilray could hardly have expected me to ask leave of absence merely to run home and water his plant. You must draw the line somewhere, even in a government

office. When I reached home I was tired, inclined to take things easily, and not at all in a proper condition for watering flower-pots. Then visitors would drop in. I put it to any sensible man or woman, could I have been expected to give up my friends for the sake of a chrysanthemum? Again, it was my custom of an evening, if not disturbed, to retire with my pipe into my cane chair, and there pass the hours **communing**<sup>3</sup> with great minds, or, when the mood was on me, trifling with a novel. Often when I was in the middle of a chapter Gilray's flower-pot stood up before my eyes crying for water. He does not believe this, but it is the solemn truth. At those moments it was touch and go, whether I watered his chrysanthemum or not. Where I lost myself was in not hurrying to his rooms at once with a tumbler. I said to myself that I would go when I had finished my pipe, but by that time the flower-pot had escaped my memory. This may have been weakness; all I know is that I should have saved myself much annoyance if I had risen and watered the chrysanthemum there and then. But would it not have been rather hard on me to have had to forsake my books for the sake of Gilray's flowers and flower-pots and plants and things? What right has a man to go and make a garden of his chambers?

All the three weeks he was away, Gilray kept pestering me with letters about his chrysanthemum. He seemed to have no faith in me--a **detestable**<sup>4</sup> thing in a man who calls himself your friend. I had promised to water his flower-pot; and between friends a promise is surely sufficient. It is not so, however, when Gilray is one of them. I soon hated the sight of my name in his handwriting. It was not as if he had said outright that he wrote entirely to know whether I was watering his plant. His references to it were introduced with all the appearance of afterthoughts. Often they took the form of **postscripts**<sup>5</sup>: "By the way, are you watering my chrysanthemum?" or, "The chrysanthemum ought to be a beauty by this time;" or, "You must be quite an adept now at watering plants." Gilray declares now that, in answer to one of these ingenious **epistles**<sup>6</sup>, I wrote to him saying that "I had just been watering his chrysanthemum." My belief is that I did no such thing;

## Vocabulary

1. **ignoble**: not honorable; not noble
2. **chrysanthemum**: a flowering perennial plant native to China
3. **commune**: to converse together with sympathy and confidence
4. **detestable**: stimulating disgust; offensive; shocking
5. **postscript**: extend a letter, often noted with the abbreviation *P.S.*
6. **epistles**: letters

or, if I did, I meant to water it as soon as I had finished my letter. He has never been able to bring this home to me, he says, because he burned my correspondence. As if a business man would destroy such a letter. It was yet more annoying when Gilray took to post-cards. To hear the postman's knock and then discover, when you are expecting an important communication, that it is only a post-card about a flower-pot--that is really too bad. And then I consider that some of the post-cards bordered upon insult. One of them said, "What about chrysanthemum?--reply at once." This was just like Gilray's **overbearing**<sup>7</sup> way; but I answered politely, and so far as I knew, truthfully, "Chrysanthemum all right."

Knowing that there was no explaining things to Gilray, I redoubled my exertions to water his flower-pot as the day for his return drew near. Once, indeed, when I rang for water, I could not for the life of me remember what I wanted it for when it was brought. Had I had any forethought I should have left the **tumbler**<sup>8</sup> stand just as it was to show it to Gilray on his return. But, unfortunately, William John had misunderstood what I wanted the water for, and put a **decanter**<sup>9</sup> down beside it. Another time I was actually on the stair rushing to Gilray's door, when I met the housekeeper, and, stopping to talk to her, lost my opportunity again. To show how honestly anxious I was to fulfill my promise, I need only add that I was several times awakened in the watches of the night by a haunting consciousness that I had forgotten to water Gilray's flower-pot. On these occasions I spared no trouble to remember again in the morning. I reached out of bed to a chair and turned it upside down, so that the sight of it when I rose might remind me that I had something to do. With the same object I crossed the tongs and poker on the floor. Gilray maintains that instead of playing "fool's tricks" like these ("fool's tricks!") I should have got up and gone at once to his rooms with my water-bottle. What? and disturbed my neighbors? Besides, could I reasonably be expected to risk catching my death of cold for the sake of a wretched chrysanthemum? One reads of men doing such things for young ladies who seek lilies in dangerous ponds or **edelweiss**<sup>10</sup> on overhanging cliffs. But Gilray was not my sweetheart, nor, I feel certain, any other person's.

I come now to the day prior to Gilray's return. I had just reached the office when I remembered about the chrysanthemum. It was my last chance. If I watered it once I should be in a position to state that, whatever condition it might be in, I had certainly been watering it. I jumped into a **hansom**<sup>11</sup>, told the cabby to drive to the inn, and twenty minutes afterward had one hand on Gilray's door, while the other held the largest water-can in the house. Opening the door I rushed in. The can nearly fell from my hand. There was no flower-pot! I rang the bell. "Mr. Gilray's chrysanthemum!" I cried. What do you think William John said? He coolly told me that the plant was dead, and had been flung out days ago. I went to the theatre that night to keep myself from thinking. All next day I **contrived**<sup>12</sup> to remain out of Gilray's sight. When we met he was stiff and polite. He did not say a word about the chrysanthemum for a week, and then it all came out with a rush. I let him talk. With the servants flinging out the flower-pots faster than I could water them, what more could I have done? A coolness between us was inevitable. This I regretted, but my mind was made up on one point: I would never do Gilray a favor again.

#### Vocabulary

7. **overbearing**: bossy, domineering, or arrogant
8. **tumbler**: a drinking glass without a handle or stem
9. **decanter**: a glass for liquor
10. **edelweiss**: a plant with small white flowers in a dense cluster
11. **hansom**: a carriage
12. **contrive**: to devise; to plan; to scheme; to plot

**Gilray's Flower-Pot | Reading Quiz**

1. Which is **not** an accusation that the narrator makes against Gilray?

- a. Gilray was too cheap to pay someone to care for his plant
- b. Gilray took advantage of the narrator's kindness.
- c. Gilray fooled the narrator about the difficulty of the task.
- d. Gilray choose the wrong person for the job.

2. What is the narrator implying in the following?

*"Gilray had owned his flower-pot for several months, during which time (I take him at his word) he had watered it daily"*

- a. He is implying that Gilray never really had a plant.
- b. He is implying that Gilray doesn't have a social life.
- c. He is implying that Gilray could be lying.
- d. He is implying that Gilray is inexperienced.

3. Why does the narrator disbelieve that Gilray got the plant as a gift?

- a. He believes that Gilray traded his watch for it.
- b. He argues that ladies find Gilray undesirable.
- c. He accuses Gilray of stealing it from a garden.
- d. He claims that Gilray got boots and a gown instead.

4. Which is **not** one of the excuses that the narrator uses to defend his actions?

- a. He was denied access to Gilray's room.
- b. He was too tired after work.
- c. He was not allowed to bring the plant to his house.
- d. He was too busy reading and entertaining friends.

5. Which best explains why the narrator mentions Gilray's smoking habits in the first paragraph?

- a. He is concerned for Gilray's well-being.
- b. He is informing the reader of pertinent information.
- c. He is trying to raise awareness of health issues.
- d. He is defaming Gilray.

6. Which best describes the narrator's reaction to receiving reminder letters from Gilray?

- a. The narrator receives a reminder just in time to save the plant.
- b. The narrator is thankful for the reminders but does not act on them.
- c. The narrator is offended that Gilray would doubt him.
- d. The narrator appreciates Gilray's concern but ignore the reminders.

7. With which statement would the **narrator** most likely **disagree**?

- a. Gilray expected unreasonable things from the narrator.
- b. Gilray's right to turn his room into a garden is questionable.
- c. Gilray shares very little blame in what happened.
- d. Gilray set the narrator up to fail.

8. Which technique is used in the following sentence?

*"With the servants flinging out the flower-pots faster than I could water them, what more could I have done?"*

- a. Simile
- b. Metaphor
- c. Personification
- d. Hyperbole

9. Which conclusion is best supported by text?

- a. The narrator convincingly proves that Gilray is at fault.
- b. The narrator acknowledges his faults and wants to make amends.
- c. The narrator accepts little to no responsibility for what happened.
- d. The narrator accepts his fair share of the responsibility.

