

## Second Best by D H Lawrence Part 2

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**Level:** Advanced

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Aims:** In this lesson the students will:

1. recap Part 1 of the story;
2. listen for gist and detail;
3. listen to the effect of short sentences on mood;
4. interpret the story and try to clarify the enigmatic last sentence;
5. visualize the story from a film-maker's point of view.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (long extract), Track 2 (short extract), Track 3 (the rest of Part 2) and Track 4 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

**Summary:** The story tells of a young woman looking for love after a disappointing affair. It is told in two parts. In Part 2, the sisters walk through the countryside and come across Tom Smedley, an admirer of Frances. She makes the conscious decision to move on from Jimmy and choose second best.

### Activity 1

**Aims:** to recap Part 1; to examine the theme of the title

1. Hand out the worksheet. Ask the students to think back to Part 1 and answer the questions in Activity 1.

**Key:** 1. Frances and Anne; 2. Frances is Anne's older sister.; 3. They are in the countryside near their village.; 4. They've been talking about two men: Tom, who invited Anne to a feast but is taking someone else instead, and Jimmy, who Frances was 'sweet on' but who is now engaged to someone else.; 5. They find a mole.; 6. Neither can kill it so Anne decides to take it home for her father to kill.; 7. The mole bites Anne's finger.; 8. students' own answers

2. Use the students' answers to question 8 to field a discussion about Frances's relationship with Jimmy. Ask them what they would do in Frances's situation to get over their emotional turbulence.

### Activity 2

**Aims:** to listen for gist; to prepare students for the encounter with Tom

1. Ask the class what they would do with the mole if it had bitten them. Explain that while they listen to the first extract from Part 2,

they should answer the questions in Activity 2. Play Track 1.

2. Give the students time to discuss their answers in pairs before allowing some time for whole-class feedback. Hand out the transcript and have the students check their ideas by reading it up to the end of Track 1.

**Key:** Anne drops the mole to the ground but it doesn't run away and hide. Anne is angry and, using Frances's walking cane, kills it. Frances is shocked at first, but quickly calms down and becomes indifferent to the mole's suffering.

### Activity 3

**Aim:** to listen to the effect of short sentences on mood and pace

1. Ask the students to turn over or cover the transcript. Indicate Activity 3 on the worksheet and put them in pairs to work together to replace the missing punctuation.

2. When the students are ready, let them listen to the extract to check their answers. Play Track 2.

3. Ask them what they notice about the length of the sentences. (**Answer:** They are mostly very short.) Ask them what effect this has on the mood of the text and let them listen again. Play Track 2 again. Field suggestions. (**Answer:** The short sentences

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*increase the sense of urgency; they increase the pace of the narrative, emphasizing the moment of panic and heightened emotion.)*

### Activity 4

**Aims:** to listen for detail

1. Indicate Activity 4 on the worksheet. Elicit suggestions for what the inaccuracy in the first sentence might be. For example, it may be that one sister walks alone, or they walk along a path, or they walk through two fields, or Tom doesn't stop working, etc. Ask the students to work in pairs to complete the activity.

2. Play Track 3. Ask them to check their predictions.

**Key:** 1. *They walk through two fields.;* 2. *He hasn't had problems with girlfriends; he didn't ask her because he thought that she wasn't interested.;* 3. *She is completely aware of what she wants and is in no way confused, as she was previously about Jimmy.;* 4. *Tom and Frances speak before Anne interrupts to show him the mole.;* 5. *Tom says he'll try to talk more nicely.;* 6. *Anne prefers Tom.;* 7. *She spends a long time searching for a mole.;* 8. *He asks her out.*

3. Let the students read the transcript to check their answers.

### Activity 5

**Aim:** to consolidate the students' understanding of the story

1. Ask the students to find the two references to death that don't concern the mole. (**Answers:** 1. *'Something had died in her, so that things lost their poignancy. She was calm, indifference overlying her quiet sadness.'*; 2. *"Yes," she replied, in a dead voice. But there was a thrill of pleasure in this death.*) Put the students in small groups and ask them to discuss these quotes and write answers to the questions in Activity 5 on the worksheet.

2. Monitor the groups, helping where necessary. When the groups have written their answers, ask them to share their ideas with a neighbouring group, or groups. Finally, with the whole class's attention, ask students for their ideas.

### Film-making task

**Aim:** to further explore the characters and themes of the story

1. Ask the students to imagine that they are going to make a film of this short story. Ask them to listen to some questions and write down any answers that occur to them. Emphasize that you are not expecting them to answer every question, just those for which they have an answer. Read the questions to them one by one, pausing between each one to give them time to think and write. (**Note:** You may want to pre-teach the meanings of the words in bold, or check understanding as you go.)

- What does Frances look like?
- What does Anne look like?
- Who plays her?
- What does Tom look like?
- Who plays him?
- Where is the story **set**?
- Where will you **shoot** it?
- Whose point of view will the film be from?
- Will you add any **scenes** from before the beginning of the story, such as Anne's interaction with Tom or scenes from Liverpool?
- What happens in these extra scenes?
- Will you add any scenes from after the end of the story? Which ones?
- What is going to be the most important scene in your film? Why?

2. Put the students in pairs or small groups. Have them compare their ideas and choose the best ones.

3. When groups are ready, invite them to present their film outlines to the rest of the class. Encourage other groups to comment on the ideas presented. The class could vote for the film most likely to be made by a major studio.

### Follow-up tasks

1. Suggest that the students use the transcript and complete a summary of the story.

2. Ask the students to write Frances's diary entry for that day.

3. Suggest that students write the screenplay for a scene from the film.

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### Activity 1

Before you listen to Part 2, answer the questions below.

1. What are the names of the two main characters?
2. What is their relationship?
3. Where are they?
4. What have they been talking about?
5. What do they find?
6. What do they decide to do with it?
7. What happens at the end of Part 1?
8. Why do you think the story is called *Second Best*?

### Activity 2

Listen to an extract from Part 2 and answer the questions.

1. What happens to the mole?
2. How does this affect Frances?

### Activity 3

Replace the missing punctuation.

‘Oh!’ she cried ‘he’s bit me’ she dropped him to the floor dazed the blind creature fumbled round Frances felt like shrieking she expected him to dart away in a flash like a mouse and there he remained groping she wanted to cry to him to be gone Anne in a sudden decision of wrath caught up her sister’s walking-cane with one blow the mole was dead Frances was startled and shocked

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### Activity 4

Read the summary of the end of the story. In each sentence there is one inaccuracy. Discuss in pairs what the inaccuracy might be and make the necessary corrections.

1. The sisters walk through a field and there they meet Tom, who stops his work to watch them as they approach.
2. He would have asked her to be his girlfriend before, but because of relationship problems with other women he hasn't been available.
3. Frances isn't aware that she now wants Tom, and is confused by her agitated state.
4. Anne starts the conversation by showing Tom the dead mole.
5. Tom and Frances both indicate how they would be willing to change to please the other: Tom by being good to her sister, Anne, and Frances by killing moles when she finds them.
6. After they leave Tom, Anne expresses her preference for Jimmy over Tom.
7. The next day, Frances happens to see a mole in the garden, kills it and takes it to Tom to show him that she likes him.
8. She asks him out and they touch.

**Listen and check your answers.**

### Activity 5

**Answer the questions.**

1. How would you interpret the last sentence of the story?
2. What does it tell us about Frances's changing attitudes to love?
3. Is this a happy ending?

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### Part 2

‘Oh!’ she cried, ‘he’s bit me.’

She dropped him to the floor. Dazed, the blind creature fumbled round. Frances felt like shrieking. She expected him to dart away in a flash, like a mouse, and there he remained **groping**; she wanted to cry to him to be gone. Anne, in a sudden decision of **wrath**, caught up her sister’s walking-cane. With one **blow** the mole was dead. Frances was startled and shocked. One moment the little wretch was fussing in the heat, and the next it lay like a little bag, **inert** and black – not a struggle, scarce a **quiver**.

‘It is dead!’ Frances said breathlessly. Anne took her finger from her mouth, looked at the tiny **pinpricks**, and said:

‘Yes, he is, and I’m glad. They’re **vicious** little nuisances, moles are.’

With which her wrath vanished. She picked up the dead animal.

‘Hasn’t it got a beautiful skin,’ she mused, stroking the fur with a forefinger, then with her cheek.

‘Mind,’ said Frances sharply. ‘You’ll have the blood on your skirt!’

One ruby drop of blood hung on the small snout, ready to fall. Anne shook it off on to some **harebells**. Frances suddenly became calm; in that moment, grown-up.

‘I suppose they have to be killed,’ she said, and a certain rather dreary indifference **succeeded** to her grief. The twinkling crab-apples, the glitter of brilliant willows now seemed to her trifling, scarcely worth the notice. Something had died in her, so that things lost their poignancy. She was calm, indifference overlying her quiet sadness. Rising, she walked down to the brook course.

‘Here, wait for me,’ cried Anne, coming tumbling after.

Frances stood on the bridge, looking at the red mud trodden into pockets by the feet of cattle. There was not a drain of water left, but everything smelled green, succulent. Why did she care so little for Anne, who was so fond of her? She asked herself. Why did she care so little for anyone? She did not know, but she felt a rather stubborn pride in her isolation and indifference.

They entered a field where **stooks** of barley stood in rows, the straight, blonde **tresses** of the corn streaming on to the ground. The stubble was bleached by the intense summer, so that the expanse glared white. The next field was sweet and soft with a second crop of seeds; thin, straggling clover whose little pink knobs rested prettily in the dark green. The scent was faint and sickly. The girls came up **in single file**, Frances leading.

Near the gate a young man was mowing with the **scythe** some **fodder** for the afternoon feed of the cattle. As he saw the girls he **left off** working and waited in an aimless kind of way. Frances was dressed in white **muslin**, and she walked with dignity, detailed and forgetful. Her lack of agitation, her simple, **unheeding** advance made him nervous. She had loved the far-off Jimmy for five years, having had in return his **half-measures**. This man only affected her slightly.

Tom was of medium stature, energetic in build. His smooth, fair-skinned face was burned red, not brown, by the sun, and this **ruddiness** enhanced his appearance of good humour and easiness. Being a year older than Frances, he would have **courted** her long ago had she been so inclined. As it was, he had gone his uneventful way amiably, chatting with many a girl, but

Track 1

Track 2

Track 3

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Part 2

remaining unattached, free of trouble for the most part. Only he knew he wanted a woman. He hitched his trousers just a **trifle** self-consciously as the girls approached. Frances was a rare, delicate kind of being, whom he realized with a queer and delicious stimulation in his veins. She gave him a slight sense of suffocation. Somehow, this morning, she affected him more than usual. She was dressed in white. He, however, being matter-of-fact in his mind, did not realize. His feeling had never become conscious, **purposive**.

Frances knew what she was about. Tom was ready to love her as soon as she would show him. Now that she could not have Jimmy, she did not poignantly care. Still, she would have something. If she could not have the best – Jimmy, whom she knew to be something of a snob – she would have the second best, Tom. She advanced rather indifferently.

‘You are back, then!’ said Tom. She **marked** the touch of uncertainty in his voice.

‘No,’ she laughed, ‘I’m still in Liverpool,’ and the undertone of intimacy made him burn.

‘This isn’t you, then?’ he asked.

Her heart leapt up in approval. She looked in his eyes, and for a second was with him.

‘Why, what do you think?’ she laughed.

He lifted his hat from his head with a distracted little gesture. She liked him, his quaint ways, his humour, his ignorance, and his slow masculinity.

‘Here, look here, Tom Smedley,’ broke in Anne.

‘A **mouidiwarp!** Did you find it dead?’ he asked.

‘No, it bit me,’ said Anne.

‘Oh, **aye!** An’ that **got your rag** out, did it?’

‘No, it didn’t!’ Anne scolded sharply. ‘Such language!’

‘Oh, **what’s up wi’ it?**’

‘I can’t bear you to talk broad.’

‘Can’t you?’

He glanced at Frances.

‘It isn’t nice,’ Frances said. She did not care, really. The vulgar speech **jarred on her as a rule**; Jimmy was a gentleman. But Tom’s manner of speech did not matter to her.

‘I like you to talk *nicely*,’ she added.

‘Do you,’ he replied, **tilting** his hat, stirred.

‘And generally you *do*, you know,’ she smiled.

‘I s’ll have to have a try,’ he said, rather tensely gallant.

‘What?’ she asked brightly.

‘To talk nice to you,’ he said. Frances coloured furiously, bent her head for a moment, then laughed gaily, as if she liked this clumsy hint.

‘Eh now, you mind what you’re saying,’ cried Anne, giving the young man an admonitory pat.

‘You wouldn’t have to give your mole many knocks like that,’ he teased, relieved to get on safe ground, rubbing his arm.

‘No indeed, it died in one blow,’ said Frances, with a flippancy that was hateful to her.

‘You’re not so good at knockin’ ‘em?’ he said, turning to her.

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'I don't know, if I'm cross,' she said decisively.

'No?' he replied, with alert attentiveness.

'I could,' she added, harder, 'if it was necessary.'

He was slow to feel her difference.

'And don't you consider it *is* necessary?' he asked, with misgiving.

'Well – is it?' she said, looking at him steadily, coldly.

'I reckon it is,' he replied, looking away, but standing stubborn.

She laughed quickly.

'But it isn't necessary for *me*,' she said, with slight contempt.

'Yes, that's quite true,' he answered.

She laughed in a shaky fashion.

'*I know it is*,' she said; and there was an awkward pause.

'Why, would you *like* me to kill moles then?' she asked tentatively, after a while.

'They do us a lot of damage,' he said, standing firm on his own ground, angered.

'Well, I'll see the next time I come across one,' she promised, defiantly. Their eyes met, and she sank before him, her pride troubled. He felt uneasy and triumphant and **baffled**, as if fate had gripped him. She smiled as she departed.

'Well,' said Anne, as the sister went through the wheat stubble; 'I don't know what you two's been **jawing** about, I'm sure.'

'Don't you?' laughed Frances significantly.

'No, I don't. But, at any rate, Tom Smedley's a good deal better to my thinking than Jimmy, so there – and nicer.'

'Perhaps he is,' said Frances coldly.

And the next day, after a secret, persistent hunt, she found another mole playing in the heat. She killed it, and in the evening, when Tom came to the gate to smoke his pipe after supper, she took him the dead creature.

'Here you are then!' she said.

'Did you catch it?' he replied, taking the velvet **corpse** into his fingers and examining it minutely. This was to hide his trepidation.

'Did you think I couldn't?' she asked, her face very near his.

'**Nay**, I didn't know.'

She laughed in his face, a strange little laugh that caught her breath, all agitation, and tears, and **recklessness** of desire. He looked frightened and upset. She put her hand to his arm.

'Shall you go out wi' me?' he asked, in a difficult, troubled tone.

She turned her face away, with a shaky laugh. The blood came up in him, strong, overmastering. He resisted it. But it drove him down, and he was carried away. Seeing the **winsome**, frail **nape** of her neck, fierce love came upon him for her, and tenderness.

'We s'll 'ave to tell your mother,' he said. And he stood, suffering, resisting his passion for her.

'Yes,' she replied, in a dead voice. But there was a thrill of pleasure in this death.

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### Glossary

- grope** to search for something you cannot see, using your hands
- wrath** (formal) very great anger
- blow** a hard hit from someone's hand or object
- inert** (formal) not moving
- quiver** a slight shaking movement or sound
- pinprick** a very small round spot of something, as though caused by a pin
- vicious** extremely violent
- harebell** a wild plant with small pale blue flowers shaped like bells
- succeed to** (old-fashioned, formal) to follow or replace someone or something
- stooks** (agricultural) bundle, sheaf
- tresses** long pieces, usually of a woman's hair
- in single file** in a line, one after the other
- scythe** a tool used for cutting long grass or grain
- fodder** food, especially hay or straw, to feed animals such as cows and horses
- leave off** to stop doing something
- muslin** a light thin cotton cloth
- unheeding** (mainly literary) paying no attention, without thought
- half-measures** half-hearted actions or feelings
- ruddiness** red and healthy look
- court** (old-fashioned) to (pursue, or try to) have a romantic relationship with someone, usually leading to marriage
- trifle** (formal) slightly
- purposive** (old-fashioned, literary, very unusual) with an aim or purpose
- mark** (mainly literary) to notice
- mouidiwarp** (dialect) mole
- aye** (dialect) yes; really
- get your rag out** (dialect, colloquial phrase) to annoy you, to make you angry
- what's up wi' it?** (dialect, colloquial) what's wrong with it?; what's the problem?
- jar on** to make someone feel uncomfortable or slightly annoyed
- as a rule** in general, on the whole
- tilt** to move something so that one side is lower than the other
- baffle** if something baffles you, you cannot understand it or solve it
- jaw** (dialect, colloquial) to talk
- corpse** a dead body, normally a person
- nay** (dialect, colloquial) no
- recklessness** not thinking or caring about the possible bad effects of your actions
- winsome** (mainly literary, old-fashioned) with an attractive appearance or manner
- nape** the back of the neck