

Rich for One Day

☞ Suzanne Jacob

Learning Goals

Compare values
of ideas in a
text with your own

Examine an
author's use of
symbols

Explain the role
of literary devices
such as irony,
metaphor,

personification,
and symbol

and present

thematic
conflict and
evaluation of
the story

Aline decided to open her eyes. She had no idea of the time but by the sounds in the house that came down into her small room in the basement, she knew that just about everyone was well into their day. The theme music of Phil Donahue made its way through the ceiling, four o'clock. Aline grunted with pleasure. Was there anyone else like her who just woke up and for whom four o'clock meant only a delicious nest under a thick white sheepskin, it was most unlikely and Aline felt her good mood grow, she was incredibly lucky, and she took pity on the rest of the world.

Propping herself up on one elbow, she looked around her room. There were lots of crayons, paint bottles of all colours, notebooks, sheets here and there, and photographs, piles of photographs on the large yellow piece of plywood that she had made into a work table. Aline laughed sweetly and scolded herself that she should get serious, that the mess on the table ordered her to hours of work and that one must work to live. She sighed and she laughed as she hid her laughter in her warm pillow. How sweet it is.

Then she remembered, she was rich today. She had eight dollars, a fortune. She could allow herself thousands of things. Sitting up in her bed, she stretched her arms towards the ceiling; acknowledging her hands, she yawned with relish. She pulled her old worn cords and loosely knit sweater towards her and put them on under the sheets to stay warm. She got up.

It was wonderful. She could go to the movies and have popcorn and Coke. The telephone rang, it was Lucien, all excited, he offered her a contract. A designer needed a photographer for his spring collection, would Aline be interested?

"You," said Lucien, "are you sleeping or are you listening?"

Aline told him that she was listening very carefully but that she was not quite awake and that she felt too rich today to give an answer. Lucien sighed, he explained to Aline that she would never be successful if she insisted on not taking things seriously, not jumping at opportunities when

they came her way. Aline answered that she agreed totally with Lucien's opinion and that she often berated herself for this flagrant lack of maturity on her part, but that she really just got up and that she couldn't help it, and if he could call back . . . Lucien hung up and Aline put on the *Deep Purple* record already out of its jacket.

It was risky to open the black burlap curtains that held out the light. The sky could be too bright, it could be too much, Aline was careful, she preferred to take the sky outside all at once, not here in this basement. She turned on her work light and poured a glass of orange juice. She kept only orange juice in her room. Usually her friends invited her to eat with them. She wasn't difficult, whatever you say. She examined some of the negatives lying on the table, they could wait. Last Saturday's paper was open to the entertainment page, but Aline preferred to submit herself to the good taste of the schedulers at the Cinéma Outremont, expecting a surprise, she would go there and take her chances. It may be easy to find her capricious, but difficult she was not, she said to herself.

She put on her boots and looked everywhere for her keys. She wrapped herself up warmly and climbed the stairs. The street was full of people hurrying to get home, people who had finished their day, their Thursday. It was their duty to fill each day from morning to evening and to think of her day as perfectly empty; Aline felt like converting the whole world to her style of living. She got to Côte-des-Neiges.

The air was humid, the sidewalks were banked by dirty snow, a swollen sky rolled from one roof to another. Aline felt invulnerable, she was absorbed by a small stubborn happiness that warmed her from inside and her small happy steps carried her home from one storefront to the next. The shop window of Renaud-Bray Books was an old friend of Aline's, always full of new items. Aline decided to go in and browse.

She opened the fat books and fingered them, she caressed and congratulated them. Books were thousands of little heaters, Aline's hands were warm and she felt good. There were other customers, they also moved from one universe to the other with the pages they turned and that made pockets of heat, no doubt about it, Aline thought to herself. It didn't occur

to her to buy anything. For years now she had been in the habit of enjoying things that were available to her without feeling like she had to buy them. She didn't need anything.

To get to the movies, she would have to take two buses, the 165 and the 160. The 165 stop was just by the bookstore but there was a line and the first bus, packed, went by without stopping. Aline walked to the next stop at the corner of Lacombe. In her oversized coat and her scarf that was too long, she felt loved and fulfilled, another bus arrived, she let it pass and continued on to the next stop across from the liquor store at the corner of Edouard Montpetit. She didn't really feel like taking a bus. She said to herself that when she was grown up, she would be very, very rich, and that she would have a car and a chauffeur, and that she would have the whole back seat to herself, and that she would be surrounded by very rare things, very beautiful things, and very astonishing things, and she would never cease being astonished at all these things around her. And she would travel, she would spend all her time in this car, and she would stroll over the whole world and not just one or two sidewalks. Because the light is too harsh in buses, Aline didn't like them. There is not much that Aline didn't like and she walked on to the next stop.

It started to snow and Aline hailed a taxi. She said to herself, "This is the way to live," she had the whole back seat all to herself, and the chauffeur drove where Aline wanted to go.

Then she settled herself in a seat at the movies and enjoyed the arrival of other people that came in with hands full of popcorn, gloves, mittens, hats and scarves. The lights went out and Aline started to eat her popcorn. The first image lit up the screen. I love life, thought Aline.

Translated by Susanna Finnell

¶ As well as writing short stories, Québécois author Suzanne Jacob writes poetry, plays, essays, and novels. In 1984, her novel *Laura Laur* won the Prix Paris-Québec and the Governor General's Award. In 1998, she received another Governor General's Award for her collection of poems *La Part de feu*. Many of her works have been translated into English. (*Born Amos, Québec 1943*)