# At Hiruharama

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PENELOPE FITZGERALD

Penelope Fitzgerald was born in 1916 to a family of writers and scholars, though she did not begin writing until she was 58. Her father, Edmund Knox, was the editor of *Punch*, an influential humorous and satirical weekly magazine, and her mother, Christina, was one of the first women to attend Oxford University. Penelope attended boarding school before graduating from Oxford University in 1938. During World War II, she worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation and married Desmond Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald was an officer in the British military who went on to become a lawyer, but he was later disbarred when he was caught forging checks. In the 1950s, Penelope and Desmond edited a literary magazine together titled *World Review*, which published work by writers including J. D. Salinger, Bernard Malamud, and Norman Mailer. Fitzgerald began her own writing career at age 58 when she wrote a biography of the artist Edward Burne-Jones. Two years later, she wrote a biography of her father and uncles. In 1977, she published her first novel, *The Golden Child*, a comical murder mystery that she wrote to amuse her husband while he was dying. She published four more novels over the next five years—*The Bookshop*, *Offshore*, *Human Voices*, and *At Freddie's*. *Offshore*—about a community of people that live on houseboats, as Fitzgerald once did—won the Booker Prize in 1979. Her final novel—*The Blue Flower*, published in 1995—was based on the life of 18th-century German Romantic poet Novalis and won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first British colonists arrived in New Zealand in 1840 after William Hobson (a Captain sent by the British government) and about 40 Māori leaders signed the Treaty of Waitangi, not long before the events of "At Hiruharama" take place. Conflicting interpretations of the treaty led to the New Zealand Wars, which lasted from 1845 to 1872 with Māori people and sympathetic settlers fighting against British colonial rule. The terms of the 1840 treaty declared that people of Māori descent could only sell land to the British government, not to settlers themselves. The British government bought the bulk of usable land and sold it to the New Zealand Company, a company founded in the United Kingdom to colonize New Zealand by enticing wealthy British people to buy land with the promise of cheap labor from British immigrants who would hope to earn enough to then buy land themselves. The New Zealand Company sold the best parcels of land to British settlers and then used the profits of those sales to finance the travel of immigrants from Britain.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Fitzgerald's short story "The Means of Escape" was written around the same time as "At Hiruharama" and concerns people from England living in 19th-century Australia; both stories were also published in her posthumous story collection *The Means of Escape*. A. S. Byatt was another English novelist and Booker Prize winner, and she also wrote an introduction to *The Means of Escape*; Byatt's novel *Possession* won the Booker Prize and concerns the romance of two fictional 19th-century poets. Fitzgerald covered similar territory in her novel *The Blue Flower*, a fictional retelling of the life of 19th-century German Romantic poet Novalis. Byatt also said that Penelope Fitzgerald was "Jane Austen's nearest heir for precision and invention." Austen's best-known works include *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** At Hiruharama
- **When Written:** Early 1990s
- **When Published:** The story was published posthumously in 2000 in the story collection *The Means of Escape*.
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Short Story, Literary Fiction, Frame Narrative
- **Setting:** The rural area of Hiruharama, New Zealand
- **Climax:** After Tanner helps Kitty through labor, the doctor arrives and finds a second child in the afterbirth, which Tanner had thrown away.
- **Antagonist:** The story does not have a traditional antagonist, though the Tanners' neighbor, Brinkman, serves as comic relief throughout.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Famous Pupils.** Penelope Fitzgerald worked as a teacher at a test-prep school, where her students included fashion editor Anna Wintour, actor Helena Bonham Carter, and novelist Edward St. Aubyn. Fitzgerald's novel *At Freddie's* is a fictionalized version of her time working at that school.

**First Publication.** The magazine that Fitzgerald co-edited with her husband, *World Review*, was the first place that J. D. Salinger's story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" was published in the United Kingdom.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Mr. Tanner and his family are leaving New Zealand, and so he tries to explain (to an unseen character) how they ended up with a **lawyer** in the family who will take care of the legal necessities that accompany the process. To explain this, though, Mr. Tanner says that he will first have to tell the story of his grandfather, Tanner.

In the flashback, Tanner is an orphan in Stamford, England who is sent to apprentice for a wealthy family in Auckland, New Zealand. When he arrives, he finds out he is treated more like a servant than an apprentice. He soon meets Kitty, who has also come from England and is in a similar situation: she thought she would be a governess (a kind of private tutor) for a wealthy family but is instead also treated as a servant. Tanner and Kitty hit it off, and they decide to get married in three years, which will give Tanner time to save up money.

After Kitty and Tanner marry, they move to a more remote part of New Zealand called Hiruharama. Two years later, Kitty tells Tanner that she is pregnant. Tanner goes to see the closest doctor, who lives miles away in the town of Awanui. The doctor says that Tanner will have to send for him when Kitty goes into labor, but since Awanui is so far away, the baby will probably be born before he arrives. On his way out of Awanui, Tanner borrows racing pigeons from Parrish, who has the last homestead on the road out of town. Tanner plans to use the pigeons to send for the doctor when Kitty goes into labor.

A few months later, when Kitty goes into labor, Tanner releases the pigeons and calculates that it will take the doctor over three hours to arrive. At six o'clock, Kitty and Tanner hear someone coming down the road but not from Awanui. The person turns out to be their closest neighbor from the other direction, Brinkman, who has shown up for the half-yearly dinner they share, which has become an informal kind of tradition. Brinkman enters, and Tanner tells him that Kitty is in labor. "Then she won't be cooking dinner this evening, then?" Brinkman responds. He then sits down and begins to smoke, hoping that the Tanners will still serve dinner at some point.

The doctor then arrives along with his wife's widowed sister, who is or used to be a nurse. Tanner has already delivered the baby and greets the doctor and his sister-in-law "covered in blood, something like a butcher." Tanner tells the doctor that everything went smoothly and that he already threw away the afterbirth in the garbage. The doctor goes to inspect. When he comes back, he announces that what Tanner had thrown out wasn't afterbirth at all; it was "a second daughter, smaller, but a twin."

This daughter, Mr. Tanner tells his conversation partner, eventually became a lawyer in Wellington and "did very well." Meanwhile, back at Mr. Tanner's grandparents' homestead, Brinkman continues to sit and smoke, hoping that he might one day get married and, moreover, that the Tanners will eventually serve him dinner—after all, he figures, they'll have to eat at some point.

## CHARACTERS

**Tanner** – Tanner is the story's protagonist. He is an orphan in England who is sent to Auckland, New Zealand to be an apprentice, but the wealthy family he works for treats him more like a servant. He meets Kitty, who is in a similar situation, and they begin a romance. After they marry, they move to a homestead of their own in the more rural area of Hiruharama. Throughout the story, Tanner is depicted as calm, resourceful, and hardworking, and he insists on seeing the best in people. For example, when the doctor calls the Tanners' neighbor Brinkman "a crank," Tanner says that Brinkman is a dreamer, showing that where some people might find a reason to be annoyed, Tanner finds a way to be charmed. In the story, Tanner makes one significant, almost dire mistake: he puts his second child (an unexpected twin) in the garbage, thinking the baby is just his wife's afterbirth. The doctor, though, finds the child. That mistake, which could have become a tragedy, instead becomes a principle that guides the Tanners through their lives: namely, that they shouldn't throw anything away, or, in other words, that they should look for the value in what at first might be overlooked, neglected, or discarded.

**Kitty** – Similar to Tanner, Kitty comes to New Zealand from England to find a better life. She was promised the role of a governess (a private tutor for a family's children) in a well-off family, but when she arrives, she finds that she is treated more as a servant. After meeting Tanner, the two plan a life together. Three years after they first meet, they marry and then move to their homestead in Hiruharama. Two years later, Kitty gets pregnant. At the end of the story, she gives birth to twins, and one of the children—the daughter Tanner discards thinking she is afterbirth—goes on to be a **lawyer**. Like Tanner, Kitty also looks for the best in others, though she is not afraid to push others to reach their potential. When she first meets Tanner, for example, she gleans that he cannot read. Instead of questioning his worthiness as a suitor based on his social station or opting to find someone of a higher social standing, Mr. Tanner speculates that Kitty insisted that Tanner learn to read before they married.

**Brinkman** – Brinkman is the Tanners' nearest neighbor, who lives about 10 miles from them. He eats dinner with the Tanners every six months or so; otherwise, they rarely see him. Tanner says that Brinkman often complains about being lonely and not having a wife, which inspires the doctor to call him "a crank." Tanner, showing his generosity, says he considers Brinkman more of a dreamer. In the story, Brinkman serves mostly as comic relief. He shows up for the biyearly dinner tradition while Kitty is in labor (it's never fully made clear

whether or not Tanner and Kitty care about this dinner tradition themselves). Instead of asking how he can help, or leaving to come back another day, as one might expect him to do, Brinkman instead sits down, begins to smoke, and waits for dinner to be served. Instead of getting annoyed or asking him to leave, as might seem reasonable in the situation, the Tanners instead treat Brinkman as a kind of odd member of the family, content to let him sit on the porch while a grand drama in their lives plays out.

**Mr. Tanner** – Mr. Tanner is the grandson of Tanner and Kitty, whose story he tells to an unknown and unseen character. Mr. Tanner's family has just recently decided to leave New Zealand, and his main purpose in telling the story is to explain how they ended up with a **lawyer** in the family. Mr. Tanner interrupts his own story occasionally—including when he speculates on how Tanner learned to read—though, for the most part, he sticks to the narrative of his grandparents.

**The Doctor** – The doctor lives in the town of Awanui, which Tanner calculates is about two and a half hours from his own homestead. The doctor ostensibly oversees Kitty's prenatal care, her labor, and the birth, though he tells Tanner that Kitty shouldn't come to see him before labor and that by the time he shows up for a birth, he is often "not needed." He has a somewhat brusque demeanor and doesn't seem to want to go out of the way to help Tanner and Kitty. When he arrives for Kitty's birth, though, he brings his sister-in-law, who was or is a nurse, and he is the one who finds the second child, saving the Tanners from tragedy.

**Parrish** – Parrish has one of the last homesteads on the outskirts of Awanui. He keeps Blue Chequer racing pigeons, two of which Tanner borrows so that he can use them to send for the doctor when Kitty goes into labor. Parrish is willing enough to lend Tanner the pigeons, but when he does, he tells Tanner that he can only help him because the Tanners' house is on the pigeons' pre-existing route. "If you'd have lived over the other way I couldn't have helped you," Parrish says to Tanner, showing that he is willing to help only insofar as it doesn't cause him (or his pigeons) significant inconvenience.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### VALUE AND PERCEPTION

"At Hiruharama" explores the often-overlooked value of neglected or abandoned people, places, and objects. The story contends that value is determined not so much by intrinsic qualities but by perception. This idea is exemplified most explicitly during the story's climax. After Tanner helps his wife, Kitty, deliver their child, the doctor arrives and discovers a second child in what Tanner mistook for afterbirth. What Tanner perceived as garbage turned out to be, on closer inspection, a human child (who goes on to become a **lawyer**). This notion of finding value in what might otherwise be overlooked is underlined by the tinplate the Tanners hang in their kitchen, which reads, "Throw Nothing Away," meaning that something of importance can often be found in the things people take for granted or fail to fully consider. Similarly, when the Tanners are looking for a place to move, they find a plot of land that has been abandoned by its past tenants, even though it contains a "**standpipe** giving constant clear water from an underground well"—something that the story suggests is quite priceless, despite the fact that nobody else seems to recognize its worth. The Tanners then proceed to turn that abandoned plot into a thriving homestead. Even Tanner himself is described as abandoned, an orphan who aims to become an apprentice with a wealthy family but is instead treated as a servant. When he meets his future wife, Kitty, she soon gleans that he can't read. Instead of rejecting him based on his social standing or perceived shortcomings, though, Kitty sees a deeper, intangible value in him and encourages him to learn to read, thus illustrating the story's implication that it's often beneficial to refrain from writing people (or things) off before considering their potential.

### COMMUNITY

In "At Hiruharama," community is often presented as flawed and comically imperfect, but those imperfections don't invalidate its worth or mean that it doesn't have value. Though the Tanners' home is miles away from their closest neighbors, the story portrays them as still belonging to a community, as a number of people help them in small but significant ways. Their distant neighbor, Parrish, lends them racing pigeons so they can notify the doctor when Kitty has gone into labor. And the doctor, for his part, not only travels to attend to Kitty, but also brings along his sister-in-law, a nurse. Even Tanner's sister, who lives far away in England, sends a book about childbirth that, though barely applicable and quite late to arrive, is nonetheless appreciated. Finally, there is Brinkman, the Tanners' closest neighbor, whom the doctor describes as a "crank," Tanner describes as a "dreamer," and who comes off as self-centered at the very least, as he hangs around the Tanners' house expecting dinner while Kitty gives birth. Even his presence doesn't seem entirely unwelcome, though, and his foibles are seen, by Tanner at least, as more comic or sympathetic than off-putting. These people—who find each other knit in the fabric of each other's lives by mere happenstance—might be highly flawed, but they still show up for the Tanners when they're needed most (except,

perhaps, for Brinkman, whose presence is mostly for comedic effect). In fact, the community as a whole, is ultimately responsible for discovering and saving the life of the Tanners' second child. Although the story depicts the idea of community in far from idealistic or utopian terms, then, it nevertheless suggests that even seemingly random (or even flawed) people can come together to provide indispensable communal support.

## UPWARD MOBILITY AND COLONIALISM

"At Hiruharama" tells a multi-generational story of upward mobility, extolling the virtues of resourcefulness, enterprise, hard work, and having a positive outlook. The story begins with Mr. Tanner excited to explain how he ended up with a **lawyer** in the family—a clear sign that he's proud of what his family has accomplished after starting out with so little. As he tells the story of his grandparents, Tanner and Kitty, he details how they both came to New Zealand with nothing and gradually worked their way to a point where it was possible for one of their daughters to become a lawyer. This story seems to posit that the family's upward mobility results primarily from the Tanners' own hard work, enterprise, and resilience, as evidenced by their willingness to cultivate an abandoned homestead, raising hundreds of chickens and a few pigs on land that the owner before them apparently found untenable.

By emphasizing the family's humble beginnings, the story effectively celebrates the Tanners' ascent to financial stability. In fact, their trajectory aligns with the popular narrative surrounding British colonialism at the time. An England-based conglomerate called The New Zealand Company tried to attract wealthy British people to settle in New Zealand with the promise of cheap labor from less-well-off British immigrants—a class to which Kitty and Tanner initially belonged. What made laboring for rich Britons attractive to people like Kitty and Tanner was the promise that they would eventually be able to acquire some land of their own. In other words, Kitty and Tanner specifically come to New Zealand in the hopes of attaining upward mobility, and they ultimately succeed in lifting their family out of poverty. At the same time, though, while "At Hiruharama" celebrates this opportunistic, enterprising spirit, it doesn't engage with the more troublesome aspects of colonialism, ultimately stopping short of acknowledging that this kind of resourcefulness was really only possible at the time for white colonizers like Kitty and Tanner, not the native Māori people who were in New Zealand long before the British.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

## THE LAWYER

The lawyer in the Tanners' family serves as a twofold symbol of the family's quest for upward mobility and of their guiding motto to "throw nothing away," or to look for value in overlooked and neglected places. "At Hiruharama" shows why that phrase became important for the Tanners by telling the story of how Tanner almost accidentally threw away his daughter, thinking she was afterbirth. After the doctor saves her, the Tanners hang a tinplate in their kitchen with the phrase "Throw Nothing Away," reminding themselves to look for value in overlooked places and to approach each day with clarity and care. But the value of the almost-discarded daughter doesn't end with her discovery; in the eyes of Mr. Tanner, her value is compounded by what she does later in life. In contrast to her twin sister, who "never got to be anything in particular," this almost-discarded daughter ultimately becomes a lawyer, fulfilling the promise of upward mobility that the Tanners sought when they first came to New Zealand.

## STANDPIPE

The standpipe adds significant value to Tanner and Kitty's homestead and symbolizes the theme that value can often be found in overlooked or neglected places. When Kitty and Tanner find their new house, they don't even have to buy it; because of its out-of-the-way location and the poor condition of the surrounding land, the previous owner abandoned it. Even though the house has been abandoned, it has something that the Tanners view as priceless, something that "you could give a thousand pounds for and still not get": a standpipe giving "constant clear water from an underground well." In many places, the statement suggests, one could spend seemingly unlimited amounts of money to dig a well and still get dirty, brackish, or otherwise tarnished water. But in this out-of-the-way, neglected, and abandoned homestead, the Tanners find a standpipe giving constant, perfectly clear water, a symbol of the value that can be found in overlooked, neglected, or abandoned places.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Cambridge University Press edition of *Stories of Ourselves: Volume 1* published in 2018.

### At Hiruharama Quotes

Mr Tanner was anxious to explain how it was that he had a lawyer in the family, so that when they all decided to sell up and quit New Zealand there had been someone they could absolutely trust with the legal business.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Tanner

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 408

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the first sentence of "At Hiruharama," Fitzgerald introduces the story as a frame narrative, or a story within a story, in which Mr. Tanner tells an unseen character how he came to have a lawyer in his family. Mr. Tanner's excitement about telling that story also hints at the theme of upward mobility by showing just how proud he is of his own family's rise from relative poverty to financial stability. Establishing the frame narrative enables Fitzgerald to expand the story of Tanner and Kitty into a multigenerational one of upward mobility that shows the full impact of Tanner and Kitty's decisions.

Though Fitzgerald does not thoroughly examine the topic, the quote also obliquely references the history of colonialism in New Zealand and the way that economic incentives led people from England to colonize New Zealand only to leave once they had achieved their own aims.

They didn't have to buy their place, it had been left deserted, and yet it had something you could give a thousand pounds for and not get, and that was a standpipe giving constant clear water from an underground well.

**Related Characters:** Tanner, Kitty

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 408

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Tanner and Kitty marry, they decide they cannot afford a home near Auckland, so they look for one north of Awanui, where prices are cheaper. The homestead they eventually find has been abandoned by its previous tenant—because it is so far away from its closest neighbors and the land is relatively poor—but it has something invaluable: a well that gives constant, clear water through a standpipe, highlighting one of the story's main themes about how value can be found, if one looks for it, in the most overlooked, neglected, or abandoned places.

The quote also points to one of the steps on the Tanners' path toward upward mobility. They are not at the beginning of that journey—they're no longer servants working for wealthy families—but they still need to be resourceful and make do with what they have. The story suggests that the Tanners' ingenuity and positive outlook directly lead to the upward mobility that allows them to have a lawyer just one generation later. And two generations later, also because of Kitty and Tanner's choices, Mr. Tanner and his family will feel financially comfortable enough to sell their land and leave New Zealand.

"What's it called?"

"Hiruharama."

"Don't know it. That's not a Māori name."

"I think it means Jerusalem," said Tanner.

**Related Characters:** Tanner, The Doctor (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 409

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Kitty tells Tanner that she is pregnant, he travels to Awanui to consult with the doctor about the next steps they will need to take. When Tanner explains to the doctor where he and Kitty live, the doctor says he doesn't know the place and remarks that it is not a Māori name.

While Fitzgerald does not directly engage with the history of colonialism in New Zealand, this quotation illustrates one way that colonialists interact with the people and history of the places they colonize. Hiruharama is, in fact, the Māori word for Jerusalem, adopted during an influx of British Christian missionaries to the region in the 1840s. The doctor says explicitly (and incorrectly) that Hiruharama isn't a Māori word, and Tanner responds by saying that *he thinks* it means Jerusalem. The interaction demonstrates how a colonialist history can remain uninterrogated and forgotten by those who enact and benefit from it.

"He's a crank, I dare say."

"He's a dreamer," Tanner replied. "I should term Brinkman a dreamer."

**Related Characters:** Tanner, The Doctor (speaker), Brinkman

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 410

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Tanner is consults the doctor about Kitty's pregnancy and their plan for the birth, he explains that their closest neighbor, Brinkman, often complains about living alone and not having a wife. The doctor says that Brinkman seems like "a crank," to which Tanner's responds by saying that he thinks Brinkman is "a dreamer." This comment shows Tanner's propensity to look for the best in people and to find value in places where it might otherwise be overlooked.

Along with being a positive personal characteristic, the story posits that this tendency—to find value in overlooked places—is central to the Tanners' success. That ability helps them find one another, and then to find their homestead. And, as can be seen in Tanner's defense of Brinkman, finding value in overlooked places is central to the Tanners' ability to build community—a community that eventually saves the Tanner family from tragedy.

❝ Parrish didn't mind because Hiruharama, Tanner's place, was on a more or less direct line from Awanui to Te Paki station, and that was the line his pigeons flew.

"If you'd have lived over the other way I couldn't have helped you," Parrish said.

**Related Characters:** Parrish (speaker), Tanner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 410

**Explanation and Analysis**

On his way out of Awanui after visiting the doctor, Tanner stops at Parrish's house and asks to borrow pigeons, which he will use to send for the doctor when Kitty goes into labor. Parrish agrees, and Fitzgerald's description of the interaction between Tanner and Parrish offers a precise portrait of what community looks like for the Tanners and their neighbors.

Parrish comes off as friendly, and he accommodates Tanner, but he is unsentimental and matter-of-fact in his offer. His offer echoes the kind of help the doctor offered in the scene before, which seemed practical but also made it clear that he wouldn't go out of his way to offer assistance. Despite both men demonstrating personal characteristics that might be seen as shortcomings, the help from Parrish and the doctor ultimately proves invaluable for the Tanners and provides a bulwark for them against tragedy. The helpfulness, from Parrish in this case, reiterates the story's central theme that value can be found in unlikely places by showing that community, and people in general, don't have to be perfect to have value or to be, in their own small ways, heroic.

❝ He had made the pigeons' nest out of packing-cases. They ought to have flown daily for exercise, but he hadn't been able to manage that. Still, they looked fair enough, a bit disheveled, but not so that you'd notice. It was four o'clock, breezy, but not windy. He took them out into the bright air which, even that far from the coast, was full of the salt of the ocean. How to toss a pigeon he had no idea. He opened the basket, and before he could think what to do next they were out and up into the blue. He watched in terror as after reaching a certain height they began turning round in tight circles as though puzzled or lost. Then, apparently sighting something on the horizon that they knew, they set off strongly toward Awanui.

**Related Characters:** Tanner, Kitty, The Doctor, Parrish

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 411

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Kitty goes into labor, Tanner releases the pigeons, which will fly back to Parrish's house, and then Parrish will let the doctor know that it's time to go to the Tanners. The description of Tanner releasing the pigeons serves, in some ways, as a metaphor for Tanner's journey as a whole. When he arrived in New Zealand, Tanner might have had a sense of what he wanted to accomplish, but there was no road map telling him what to do or how to do it, and it's easy to imagine him fear-stricken while thinking that he had no idea how to navigate this newfound life.

Tanner feels terrified when he releases the pigeons to send for the doctor. The stakes couldn't be higher. If something goes wrong with the pigeons, the doctor won't come, and if the doctor doesn't arrive (though Tanner doesn't know this at the time), then the second child will most likely die. Sensing the pressure of the situation, Tanner is afraid. Though it is not often referenced, there are traces of a

similar kind of fear throughout the story, and that fear would certainly be present in the next scene when Tanner delivers a baby with no training, a delivery that involves crying that he had never heard before, not even in a shipwreck, and leaves him "covered with blood, something like a butcher."

The pigeons ultimately find a landmark and begin their flight. And on the whole, the story posits that because of Tanner's ingenuity, resourcefulness, and personality, no matter the setbacks, things end up working out okay for him and his family.

> The doctor emerged, moving rather faster than he usually did. "Please to go in there and wash the patient. I'm going to look at the afterbirth. The father put it out with the waste."
>
> There Tanner had made his one oversight. It wasn't the afterbirth, it was a second daughter, smaller, but a twin.

**Related Characters:** The Doctor (speaker), Tanner, Kitty

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 412

**Explanation and Analysis**

When the doctor arrives at the Tanners' house, he goes to the bedroom where Kitty has given birth. After that, he comes out "moving rather faster than he usually did," sensing that something might be amiss.

This depiction of the doctor leads to a more nuanced picture of who he is as a person than provided earlier. The first time that Tanner meets the doctor, the doctor comes off as pragmatic but perfunctory, not quite giving Tanner his full attention. Though he knows that Tanner will most likely deliver the baby alone, the doctor doesn't explain what Tanner should do, and he doesn't ask to see Kitty beforehand. Tanner also wonders to himself, based on the doctor's demeanor, if the doctor "drinks," or whether he might be an alcoholic.

In contrast to that earlier scene, when the doctor arrives at the Tanners' house, he has taken the extra step to bring his sister-in-law to help. And after he sees Kitty, he snaps into action. When the need is the greatest, the community that Tanner and Kitty rely upon rises to meet that need, and the doctor then finds the most valuable thing of all—the second daughter—in what Tanner had mistakenly thought was the afterbirth.

> "I think of myself as one of the perpetually welcome."

**Related Characters:** Brinkman (speaker), Tanner, Kitty

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 412

**Explanation and Analysis**

While Kitty gives birth, the Tanners' neighbor Brinkman sits at the table, waiting for dinner to be served. When the doctor's sister-in-law sees him, he tells her that he is a neighbor, visiting for dinner, and that he thinks of himself as "one of the perpetually welcome." "Suit yourself," she responds.

On the one hand, Brinkman's presence can be interpreted as comedic relief. His obliviousness to his surroundings and to the lives of the people around him is so astounding that it becomes funny. On the other hand, as self-important as it might sound coming out of Brinkman's mouth, it might be true that he is actually "one of the perpetually welcome" at the Tanners' house. And, if true, that fact further illuminates how the Tanners' perspective shapes their lives for the better by showing how their positive outlook leads to good fortune.

While the doctor views Brinkman as a "crank," Tanner thinks of him as "a dreamer." In the scene when Kitty gives birth, Brinkman comes off as intrusive and self-centered, even if these characteristics are played for laughs. Each of these interpretations might have some "truth" to them—Brinkman might be a bit of a crank, sort of a dreamer, and also a self-centered intruder—but the story argues that it is more worthwhile to choose the most sympathetic reading, to see Brinkman as a dreamer, thereby choosing to see the value in what others might dismiss. Those kinds of choices, the story seems to posit, are what ultimately allow the Tanners to achieve the upward mobility they seek both by building a community and by finding value wherever they look.

> After that the Tanners always had one of those tinplate mottoes hung up on the wall – Throw Nothing Away. You could get them at the hardware store.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Tanner (speaker), Tanner, Kitty, The Doctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 412

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the doctor discovers a second child in what Tanner mistakenly thinks is afterbirth, the Tanners hang the tinplate on the wall that says: "Throw Nothing Away." There are two ways of reading this summation of the story's main theme: on the one hand, there's the straightforward injunction to "Throw Nothing Away," a claim that value can be found in what might be mistaken for garbage. That idea animates much of the story's action, and the story also seems to posit that this disposition is central to the Tanners' success.

On the other hand, by stating that theme so clearly, the story also invites readers to question it. The phrase—"Throw Nothing Away"—is printed on a tinplate that the Tanners buy at a hardware store. A modern equivalent might be a poster with "Live, Laugh, Love" or "Waste Not, Want Not" printed on it, phrases that have been repeated so many times that they have become platitudes.

"At Hiruharama," though, captures the Tanners' hopes and fears and their brush with possible tragedy (what would have happened if the doctor hadn't found the second baby?), all of which explains their emotional connection to their "Throw Nothing Away" tinplate. By doing that, the story uncovers the poignancy and profundity that underlies what might seem like a platitude. And it suggests that the opposite of a cliché doesn't necessarily come with innovation or experimentation, but with intimacy, with the exploration of subtlety and nuance that can be achieved when you are familiar with something in a way that no one else can be.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### AT HIRUHARAMA

Mr. Tanner and his family have decided to leave New Zealand, and he's excited to explain (to an unseen character) how they ended up with a **lawyer** in the family who could handle the legal business of selling their property. To explain where the lawyer came from, Mr. Tanner has to tell the story of his grandfather, Tanner. In the flashback that Mr. Tanner narrates (which lasts for the rest of the story), his grandfather, Tanner, is an orphan from Stamford, England. He's sent to live with a well-to-do family in Auckland, New Zealand, ostensibly to be an apprentice, but when he arrives, he cleans knives, attends to the horses, chops wood, serves food, and is treated like a servant.

*Fitzgerald begins "At Hiruharama" by establishing a frame narrative, or a story within a story. In this case, Mr. Tanner tells the story of his grandfather, Tanner. Narrating the story as a frame story—instead of simply telling Tanner's story without Mr. Tanner narrating—allows Fitzgerald to highlight the theme of upward mobility by telling a multi-generational tale that shows how Tanner's humble beginnings in New Zealand eventually led to a lawyer in the family and to Mr. Tanner's prosperity decades later.*

While running an errand to a dry goods store, Tanner meets Kitty, who also came to New Zealand from England. Like Tanner, she thought she would be a governess, but the family that employs her also treats her as a servant. A few weeks later, at a Methodist social, Tanner asks Kitty to wait for three years while he saves money so they can marry. Kitty agrees and tells Tanner he should write to his sister to tell her their plans. When Tanner at first demurs and then says that he'll think it over, Kitty realizes he can't read or write.

*Tanner and Kitty both come from humble beginnings and come to New Zealand to try to find a better life for themselves. When the two hit it off, Kitty faces a choice. Should she accept the proposal of someone who cannot read or write and will need three years to save enough money to marry, or should she wait for a "better" option to come along? Kitty ultimately accepts Tanner's proposal because she finds intrinsic value in who Tanner is as a person, apart from his social station, and she places more value on Tanner's personal qualities than his status.*

Years later, Kitty and Tanner find a remote country place where they start to build their lives together. They don't even have to buy their plot of land; because it's so isolated, the previous tenant has abandoned it. But the plot comes with a three-room house replete with a bed, a stove, and a back room where they can store vegetables. Even more valuable, the land comes with a pipe that gives constant clear water from an underground well. Tanner and Kitty grow root vegetables and keep 200 chickens and a few pigs.

*Kitty and Tanner take one of the first steps on their journey to upward mobility when they acquire their own homestead and outfit it with chickens and pigs. What's more, the abandoned homestead has a standpipe that gives constant, clear water. No matter how much money one spends on a well, the story suggests, it could still give contaminated water. The fact that the abandoned homestead has a perfect well makes it a priceless discovery, showing how much value can be found in some of the most overlooked and neglected places.*

About two years later, Kitty tells Tanner that she's pregnant. Tanner drives into the nearest town, Awanui, to meet with the doctor. The doctor tells Tanner that he shouldn't ask him if his wife will have twins, as there's no way to know beforehand. The doctor asks if there is anyone nearby who might be able to help Tanner while his wife is "laid up," and Tanner says their nearest neighbor is a man named Brinkman. Brinkman, Tanner says, often complains about the loneliness of his life. The doctor says that Brinkman sounds like "a crank," and Tanner says he would call Brinkman "a dreamer." The doctor then tells Tanner that there is no need for Kitty to come see him, and when she goes into labor, Tanner will have to send for him (the doctor), though he's often no longer needed by the time he arrives.

*When Kitty becomes pregnant, Tanner turns to the community for help, specifically to the doctor in Awanui. The doctor offers to help, but in a way that seems reluctant when he says that there's no need for Kitty to visit beforehand—he also suggests that he's often no longer needed by the time he shows up to deliver a baby. While he does help Tanner prepare for Kitty's birth, he is not the model of a perfect, attentive doctor. His comment about twins foreshadows the later birth scene. When the doctor says that Brinkman seems like "a crank," Tanner responds by saying that he's a dreamer, showing again Tanner's generosity and his tendency to look for value in overlooked and neglected places.*

Tanner leaves the doctor's office and goes to the post office, where he writes a letter to his sister. In the present, Mr. Tanner thinks that, upon learning that Tanner couldn't read, Kitty said she wouldn't marry him until he learned how. In the letter, Tanner relays news about the child soon to be born and asks his sister to send a book on childbirth. He then goes to the house of a man named Parrish, who keeps racing pigeons. Tanner asks to borrow two of the birds so he can send a message to the doctor when Kitty is in labor. Parrish says that because Tanner's house is in line with the route his pigeons normally fly, he's happy to help.

*When Kitty discovers that Tanner cannot read, Mr. Tanner surmises that instead of rejecting his proposal, Kitty stipulated that she wouldn't marry him unless he learned. Not only does Kitty see the intrinsic value in who Tanner is as a person, but she becomes a catalyst in Tanner's path toward upward mobility by helping him learn to read. After leaving the doctor's office, Tanner turns to other members of the community, who, like the doctor, help in imperfect but ultimately important ways. Parrish, for example, lends pigeons to Tanner, which will be instrumental in alerting the doctor when Kitty goes into labor. But before he does so, he makes sure to add that he is only lending them because Tanner lives on the route that the pigeons already fly.*

More or less when they expected, Kitty goes into labor. Tanner uses the pigeons to send for the doctor and calculates that it will take him over two and a half hours to arrive. At six o'clock, Kitty is in bed "no better and no worse," sweating from head to toe. She and Tanner hear someone coming down the road from the opposite direction of Awanui. When their closest neighbor, Brinkman, comes into their house, he continues "with the course of his thoughts, which were more real to him than the outside world's commotion." Brinkman comments to Tanner about the gray hairs he's recently discovered on his head, and when Tanner tells him that Kitty is in labor, Brinkman responds by saying, "Then she won't be cooking dinner this evening, then?" and makes no attempt to leave.

*Parrish's pigeons do exactly what Parrish promised they would, flying toward Awanui to fetch the doctor with little prompting from Tanner. When Brinkman arrives and makes himself at home without once offering to help or get out of the Tanners' way, Tanner's earlier assessment of him as "a dreamer" is shown to have been especially generous, underlining Tanner's capacity to find value wherever he looks.*

The doctor eventually drives up with his wife's widowed sister, who used to be a nurse. Tanner comes out covered in blood and tells the doctor that he managed to deliver the baby. The doctor tells his sister-in-law that he's going to look at the afterbirth, which Tanner initially threw away. He discovers that Tanner has made a crucial oversight: the afterbirth is actually a second child. Mr. Tanner interjects to clarify that the Tanners, his grandparents, would later go on to have nine more children, and one of their later sons would become his father.

*Even though the doctor might have seemed reluctant to help at first, when he finally arrives, he brings reinforcements in the form of his sister-in-law who is, or was, a nurse. Even more importantly, he discovers that what Tanner mistakes as afterbirth is really a second child. The doctor's discovery exemplifies the crucial role that community plays in the story, ultimately saving the Tanners and the second daughter from tragedy. The doctor does this by looking for value in the most unlikely place: the garbage.*

The doctor brings the second child into the kitchen. In the years after, the Tanners always keep a tinplate on the wall of their kitchen, bought at a hardware store with the saying "Throw Nothing Away" written on it. Mr. Tanner says this is the point he's been trying to make: while nothing special happened in the life of the first child, he says, this second daughter grew up to be a **lawyer** with a firm in Wellington and "did very well."

*The story's theme that value can be found in the most unlikely places is summed up by the tinplate the Tanners hang in their kitchen, instructing people to "Throw Nothing Away." The message is further exemplified by the second daughter's life; by becoming a lawyer, this second daughter helps fulfill the Tanners' dreams of upward mobility.*

Brinkman continues to sit at the table and smoke his pipe, thinking about the possibility that he might one day find someone who will marry him. In the meantime, he thinks, the Tanners will "have to serve dinner sometime."

*The story ends on a comical note, as Brinkman is still engrossed in his own thoughts while the rest of the house buzzes with the aftermath of the birth. While it can be tempting to write off Brinkman, like the doctor does, as "a crank," or as someone too self-absorbed to form connections with other people, his place at the very end of the story reiterates the theme that value can be found wherever one looks. Brinkman becomes part of the community, then, by being just who he is—flawed and certainly imperfect, but still graciously and generously welcomed and accepted.*

## HOW TO CITE

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