

THE GUM DROP AFFAIR

It's a sort of detective short story written by Ralph E. Hayes- a West Virginian writer.

It focuses on the undeniable truth that exteriors are deceptive and that humans should not be judged by their external appearances which are, more often than not, misleading and beguiling.

The short story revolves around Addison Barnby- a secret service agent.

Barnby has lost the trust of his superiors for quite some reasons. He has come of age being around 40, has put up fat, has balded considerably and also seemingly lost smartness. He also lacks killer instinct, a trait inseparable from a detective. He never carries a gun lest he should kill anybody even by mistake. It is because he loves mankind. However later on he starts carrying a gun in his holster but not before making sure that it is unloaded and does not have a single bullet in the magazine. It's because of these so called disqualifications that he is posted in far off places like Africa.

Once the department assigns the task of testing Barnby's "fitness" to another agent Brain Thompson, whose report would determine Barnby's future in the department. Barnby is asked to carry a bag full of jelly explosives (actually Gum Drops) to Thompson's hotel room. Thompson begins with irritating and insulting Barnby in order to test his patience, vigilance, keen observation and other such qualities necessary for a secret agent. Later the two are engaged in a scuffle in which Barnby overpowers Thompson by using a trick or two of judo as a substitute for using a loaded gun. When he is about to leave Thompson handcuffed with the hotel room bedpost, the secret is disclosed to him with the news that he has passed the test.

CHARACTER SKETCH

ADDISON BARNBY:-

Addison Barnby is the hero of Ralph E. Hayes- "The Gum Drop Affair" a deductive short story conveying the message that human personalities cannot be and should not be judged by exterior appearances but by inner content of the person.

Addison Barnby is a senior member of a detective agency. He has lost the good will of his superiors not because of any fault or mistake on his part but because of his growing years, adding weight getting bald and above all lacking "Killer Instinct" all too important a trait supposed to be possessed by secret agents. His lacking killer instinct is not because of cowardice but because of his instable love for mankind. However, he makes up for this lack by using a trick or two of judo, on his enemies to overpower such is his abhorrence for killing that, on departments' insistence, he does carry a gun but not before making sure that it is unloaded. He seems to have lost the distinctive traits of a secret agent namely vigil, keen observations, alertness, patience etc. but he possesses them to the extreme when put to test. It is on account of his all too ordinary external appearance that the department always posts him far off places thus justifying the statement that he is "more sinned against than sinning".

He is a dedicated, sincere and honest worker as he gives extra time to his assignments and never leaves them unresolved.