**UNIT 4**

**SHORT STORIES**

**1 - “GOD SEES THE TRUTH, BUT WAITS”**

* **Leo Tolstoy**

**About Author:-**

**Full Name:** Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy

Known For: Russian novelist and writer of philosophical and moral texts

**Born**: September 9, 1828 in Yasnaya Polyana, Russian Empire

**Parents**: Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy and Countess Mariya Tolstoya

**Died**: November 20, 1910 in Astapovo, Russian Empire

**Education**: Kazan University (began at age 16; did not complete his studies)

**Selected Works**: War and Peace (1869), Anna Karenina (1878), A Confession (1880), The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886), Resurrection (1899)

**Spouse**: Sophia Behrs (m. 1862)

**Children**: 13, including Count Sergei Lvovich Tolstoy, Countess Tatiana Lvona Tolstoya, Count Ilya Lvovich Tolstoy, Count Lev Lvovich Tolstoy, and Countess Alexandra Lvona Tolstoya

**Notable Quote:** “There can be only one permanent revolution—a moral one; the regeneration of the inner man. How is this revolution to take place? Nobody knows how it will take place in humanity, but every man feels it clearly in himself. And yet in our world everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself.”

**SUMMARY**: “GOD SEES THE TRUTH, BUT WAITS”

“God Sees the Truth, but Waits” is a short story by Leo Tolstoy originally published in 1872. The story, a parable about forgiveness that explores religious and spiritual themes, tells of a man sent to prison in Siberia for a murder he did not commit. The story has been adapted for various media, including films and radio programs. This guide refers to the 1990 Norton Critical Edition.

Set in Tolstoy’s contemporary Russia, the story is narrated in the third person in a simple and straightforward style. The main character is Ivan Dmitrich Aksenov, a successful merchant from the town of Vladimir. Aksenov is a carefree man who led a somewhat wild youth before settling down and starting a family.

One summer, as Aksenov prepares to leave town on business, his wife approaches him and begs him to delay his departure. She recounts an ominous dream in which she saw Aksenov return from his journey and take off his cap, only to reveal that the hair underneath had turned gray. Aksenov casually dismisses his wife’s concerns and sets out.

During his journey, Aksenov meets another merchant, an acquaintance of his, on the road. The two spend the night at the same inn. The next morning, Aksenov rises early and continues his journey without waking the other merchant. Soon, however, the police stop and question him, revealing that the merchant with whom Aksenov stayed the night before was murdered. While searching through Aksenov’s baggage, the police find a bloody knife and conclude that Aksenov murdered the merchant and stole his money. Aksenov insists that he is innocent and the knife is not his, but the police do not believe him. They arrest Aksenov and take him to a nearby town, where he is imprisoned.

Aksenov is charged with murdering the merchant and robbing him of 20,000 rubles. His wife visits him, bringing their children with her. She is overcome when she sees her husband, asking him what to do and reminding him that she warned him not to leave town when he did. She then asks if Aksenov really committed the murder. Aksenov is horrified that even his wife suspects him. After his family leaves, he determines that only God knows the truth and that he must turn to God for mercy.

Aksenov is convicted, flogged, and sentenced to hard labor in Siberia, where he spends 26 years as a convict. During this time, he acquires a reputation for piety and meekness; the other inmates nickname him “Grandfather” and “The Saint.”

One day, a new prisoner named Makar Semenich turns up at the prison camp. Aksenov suspects that Makar is the man who really murdered the merchant. He experiences a moral crisis, longing for vengeance against the person who caused all his suffering.

The conflicted Aksenov soon happens upon Makar digging a tunnel out of the prison. Makar tells Aksenov of his plan to escape and promises to get Aksenov out too if he cooperates, but he threatens to kill Aksenov if he reports the tunnel. The next day, the authorities discover the tunnel and interrogate all the prisoners. When they ask Aksenov if he knows who is responsible, he considers betraying Makar and letting him pay for ruining his life. However, he decides to keep silent and responds that it is not God’s will for him to speak.

Makar, deeply moved, approaches Aksenov that night and begs for his forgiveness, confessing that it was he who murdered the merchant 26 years before. He promises to tell the truth to the authorities so that Aksenov can go home. Aksenov is reluctant to forgive Makar, saying that he no longer has a home to go back to. Makar breaks down in tears, still begging for forgiveness, and Aksenov weeps with him. Finally, Aksenov tells Makar that God will forgive him; he himself identifies with Makar as a sinner. At this moment, Aksenov is released from all desire except the desire to die. Though Makar confesses to the authorities, Aksenov is dead by the time the order for his release arrives.

**Moral**

When the world is up against you, God alone knows the truth. No matter what and how much time has passed, the truth always wins.

**2 - The Devoted Friend**

* **Oscar Wilde**

**Oscar FingalO’Flahertie Wills Wilde** (16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900) was an Irish poet and playwright. After writing in different forms throughout the 1880s, he became one of the most popular playwrights in London in the early 1890s. He is best remembered for his epigrams and plays, his novel The Picture of Dorian Gray, and the circumstances of his criminal conviction for gross indecency for consensual homosexual acts in “one of the first celebrity trials”, imprisonment, and early death from meningitis at age 46.

**Summary**: “The Devoted Friend”

The storty is narrated by a songbird to a water rat and a duck. There are two characters in the story little Hans and Hugh the miller.

Little Hans was a simple, innocent, kind-hearted and sincere fellow. He was a hard working gardener and earned his living by selling the fruits and flowers into the market of the town. Hugh the miller was a rich but clever and selfish man. He always claimed that he was a devoted friend of little Hans.

In the summer season, the miller would go to the garden of Hans and bring plenty of flowers and fruit without making him any payment. He never gave anything to Hans. Hugh the miller repeatedly exploited Hans. Sometimes, he sent Hans to Market with a heavy sack of flour. Sometimes, he asked Hans to drive his flock of sheep to the mountains for grazing. He would also ask Hans to work on his flourmill or do some work of repair in his barn.

In return, he merely made a promise to give his invalid and damaged wheelbarrow to Hans, free of cost. The miller called it an act of great generosity. Unfortunately, the promise was never materialized.

It is so happened that on a rough and stormy night, Hugh the miller sent little Hans to bring the doctor because the miller’s little son hand been seriously injured. As usual, little Hans showed compliance and left for the doctor’s home as he could never think of displeasing the miller. When poor Hans was returning with the doctor, the strom grew more fierce and he lost his way in the dangerous rocky region. He stranded on the moor and fell into a deep pool of water, where he was drowned. In this way, the innocent fellow lost his life for the sake miller.

**Moral**

The story suggests that friendship is a noble and respectable bond based on bilateral love and cooperation. Mutual interest is the essence of true friendship.