

PACKING

Jerome K. Jerome



Jerome Klapka Jerome (1859-1927), English novelist and playwright, was born in the borough of Walsall. Jerome was financially supporting himself by the age of 14, as his family had little money. After clerking, teaching, and acting, he turned his attention to writing and editing. Two books, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886) and *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), represent his greatest success as a writer. Reminiscent of Mark Twain's travel writings, these works combine wit and anecdote with common sense and compelling description. Jerome had his greatest success in the theatre with 'The Passing of the Third Floor Back' (1908). The present passage has been taken from *Three Men in a Boat, Not to Speak of a Dog*.



Have you ever gone to a trip? Have you ever helped anyone in packing? Have you ever forgotten to pack the most important things for the trip? How did it make you feel? Did you burst into laughter or become angry with yourself?

I said I'd pack.

I rather pride myself on my packing. Packing is one of those many things that I feel I know more about than any other person living. (It surprises me myself, sometimes, how many such things there are.) I impressed the fact upon George and Harris and told them that they had better leave the whole matter entirely to me. They fell into the suggestion with a readiness that had something uncanny about it. George put on a pipe and spread himself over the easy chair, and Harris cocked his legs on the table and lit a cigar.

This was hardly what I intended. What I had meant, of course, was, that I should boss the job, and that Harris and George should potter about under my directions, I pushing them aside every now and then with, "Oh, you!" "Here, let me do it." "There you are, simple enough!" — really teaching them, as you might say. Their taking it in the way they did irritated me. There is nothing that irritates me more than seeing other people sitting about doing nothing when I'm working.

I lived with a man once who used to make me mad that way. He would loll on the sofa and watch me doing things by the hour together. He said it did him real good to look on at me, messing about.

Now, I'm not like that. I can't sit still and see another man slaving and working. I want to get up and superintend, and walk round with my hands in my pockets, and tell him what to do. It is my energetic nature. I can't help it.

However, I did not say anything, but started the packing. It seemed a longer job than I had thought it was going to be; but I got the bag finished at last, and I sat on it and strapped it.

"Aren't you going to put the boots in?" said Harris.

And I looked round, and found I had forgotten them. That's just like Harris. He couldn't have said a word until I'd got the bag shut and strapped, of course. And George laughed — one of those irritating, senseless laughs of his. They do make me so wild.

I opened the bag and packed the boots in; and then, just as I was going to close it, a horrible idea occurred to me. Had I packed my toothbrush? I don't know how it is, but I never do know whether I've packed my toothbrush.

My toothbrush is a thing that haunts me when I'm travelling, and makes my life a misery. I dream that I haven't packed it, and wake up in a cold perspiration, and get out of bed and hunt for it. And, in the morning, I pack it before I have used it, and have to unpack again to get it, and it is always the last thing I turn out of the bag; and then I repack and forget it, and have to rush upstairs for it at the last moment and carry it to the railway station, wrapped up in my pocket-handkerchief.

Of course, I had to turn every mortal thing out now, and, of course, I could not find it. I rummaged the things up into much the same state that they must have been before the world was created, and when chaos reigned. Of course, I found George's and Harris's eighteen times over, but I couldn't find my own. I put the things back one by one, and held everything up and shook it. Then I found it inside a boot. I repacked once more.

When I had finished, George asked if the soap was in. I said I didn't care a hang whether the soap was in or whether it wasn't; and I slammed the bag shut and strapped it, and found that I had packed my tobacco-pouch in it, and had to reopen it. It got shut up finally at 10.05 p.m., and then there remained the hampers to do.



Harris said that we should be wanting to start in less than twelve hours' time and thought that he and George had better do the rest; and I agreed and sat down, and they had a go.

They began in a light-hearted spirit, evidently intending to show me how to do it. I made no comment; I only waited. With the exception of George, Harris is the worst packer in this world; and I looked at the piles of plates and cups, and kettles, and bottles, and jars, and pies, and stoves, and cakes, and tomatoes, etc., and felt that the thing would soon become exciting.

It did. They started with breaking a cup. That was the first thing they did. They did that just to show you what they could do, and to get you interested.

Then Harris packed the strawberry jam on top of a tomato and squashed it, and they had to pick out the tomato with a teaspoon.

And then it was George's turn, and he trod on the butter. I didn't say anything, but I came over and sat on the edge of the table and watched them. It irritated them more than anything I could have said. I felt that. It made them nervous and excited, and they stepped on things, and put things behind them, and then couldn't find them when they wanted them; and they packed the pies at the bottom, and put heavy things on top, and smashed the pies in.



They upset salt over everything, and as for the butter! I never saw two men do more with one-and-two pence worth of butter in my whole life than they did. After George had got it off his slipper, they tried to put it in the kettle. It wouldn't go in, and what was in wouldn't come out. They did scrape it out at last, and put it down on a chair, and Harris sat on it, and it stuck to him, and they went looking for it all over the room.

"I'll take my oath I put it down on that chair," said George, staring at the empty seat.

"I saw you do it myself, not a minute ago," said Harris.

Then they started round the room again looking for it; and then they met again in the centre and stared at one another.

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," said George.

“So mysterious!” said Harris.

Then George got round at the back of Harris and saw it.

“Why, here it is all the time,” he exclaimed, indignantly.

“Where?” cried Harris, spinning round.

“Stand still, can’t you!” roared George, flying after him.

And they got it off, and packed it in the teapot.

Montmorency was in it all, of course. Montmorency’s ambition in life is to get in the way and be sworn at. If he can squirm in anywhere where he particularly is not wanted, and be a perfect nuisance, and make people mad, and have things thrown at his head, then he feels his day has not been wasted.

To get somebody to stumble over him, and curse him steadily for an hour, is his highest aim and object; and, when he has succeeded in accomplishing this, his conceit becomes quite unbearable.

He came and sat down on things, just when they were wanted to be packed; and he laboured under the fixed belief that, whenever Harris or George reached out their hand for anything, it was his cold damp nose that they wanted. He put his leg into the jam, and he worried the teaspoons, and he pretended that the lemons were rats, and got into the hamper and killed three of them before Harris could land him with the frying pan.



Harris said, “I encouraged him. I didn’t encourage him. A dog like that doesn’t want any encouragement. It’s the natural, original sin that is born in him that makes him do things like that.”

The packing was done at 12.50; and Harris sat on the big hamper, and said he hoped nothing would be found broken. George said that if anything was broken it was broken, which reflection seemed to comfort him. He also said he was ready for bed. We were all ready for bed. Harris was to sleep with us that night, and we went upstairs.

We tossed for beds, and Harris had to sleep with me. He said:

“Do you prefer the inside or the outside, J.?”

I said I generally preferred to sleep inside a bed.

Harris said it was odd.

George said:

“What time shall I wake you fellows?”

Harris said:

“Seven.”

I said:

“No — six,” because I wanted to write some letters.

Harris and I had a bit of a row over it, but at last split the difference, and said half-past six.

“Wake us at 6.30, George,” we said.

George made no answer, and we found, on going over, that he had been asleep for sometime; so we placed the bath where he could tumble into it on getting out in the morning, and went to bed ourselves.

Glossary

uncanny /ʌn'kæni/	strange or mysterious; difficult or impossible to explain.
cock kɒk	to lift or raise a part of the body.
boss (v) bɒs	to assert someone's superiority over someone.
potter about (v): 'pɒt.ər/ɒə'baʊt	to do unimportant things.
slave (v) sleɪv	to work very hard at something.
superintend ,su:pərɪn'tend	to be in charge of something.
haunt həʊnt	here, to cause somebody unease, worry, or regret by continual presence or recurrence in his life.
hunt (n) hʌnt	act of chasing.
hunt (v) hʌnt	to chase.
rummage 'rʌmɪdʒ	to search for something by moving things around carelessly.
chaos 'keɪɒs	a state of total confusion and lack of order.
slam slæm	close forcefully.
hamper 'hæm.pər	a large basket with a cover that is used for carrying food, especially in picnics, or a basket used for holding soiled laundry.
trod trɒd	past tense of tread, to walk slowly.

smash smæʃ	break into pieces, destroy.
indignant ɪn'dɪgnənt	angry because of something which is wrong or not fair.
conceit kən'si:t	when you are too proud of yourself and your actions.
squirm skwɜ:m	to move from side to side in an awkward way because of nervousness, embarrassment or pain.
stumble (n) 'stʌmbəl	fall.
row rəʊ	dispute.
split the difference splɪt/ðə/'dɪf.ər.ənts	agreed at the midway timing of 6:30.



Thinking about the Text

1. How many characters are there in the narrative? Name them. (Don't forget the dog).
2. Why did the narrator (Jerome) volunteer to do the packing?
3. How did George and Harris react to this? Did Jerome like their reaction?
4. What was Jerome's real intention when he offered to pack?
5. What did Harris say after the bag was shut and strapped? Why do you think he waited till then to ask?
6. What "horrible idea" occurred to Jerome a little later?
7. Why did Jerome have to reopen the packed bag?
8. What does Jerome say was Montmorency's ambition in life? What do you think of Montmorency and why?
9. Of the three, Jerome, George and Harris, who do you think is the best or the worst packer? Support your answer with details from the text.
10. How did Montmorency 'contribute' to the packing?
11. Do you find this story funny? What are the humorous elements in it? (Pick out at least three; think about what happens, as well as how it is described.)



Language work

Papaya is the healthiest fruit with a list of properties that is long and exhaustive. Belonging to the family of Caricaceae fruit, it is commonly known as Papaw in Australia and Mamao in Brazil. It first originated in southern Mexico and neighboring Central America, but is now available in every tropical and subtropical country. Papaya favours digestion as well as cures skin irritation and sun burns. You can munch on it as a salad, have it cooked or boiled or just drink it up as a milkshake

or juices. Modern science confirms the age-old beliefs that papaya has much to contribute to the health cause. The most important of these virtues is the protein digesting enzyme in the milky juice or latex. The enzyme is similar to pepsin in its digestive action and is said to be so powerful that it can digest 200 times its own weight in protein. It assists the body in assimilating the maximum nutritional value from food to provide energy and body building materials.

Papain in raw papaya makes up for the deficiency of gastric juice and fights excess of unhealthy mucus in the stomach dyspepsia and intestinal irritation. The ripe fruit, if eaten regularly corrects habitual constipation, bleeding piles and chronic diarrhea. The juice of the papaya seeds also assists in the above mentioned ailments.

The juice used as a cosmetic, removes freckles or brown spots due to exposure to sunlight and makes the skin smooth and delicate. The paste of papaya seeds is applied in skin diseases like those caused by ringworm. The black seeds of the papaya are highly beneficial in the treatment of cirrhosis of the liver caused by alcoholism, malnutrition, etc. A tablespoonful of its juice, combined with a mint of fresh lime juice, should be consumed once or twice daily for a month. The fresh juice of raw papaya mixed with honey can be applied over inflamed tonsils, for diphtheria and other throat disorders. It dissolves the membrane and prevents infection from spreading.

Complete the following

The other names for papaya are

Though now found in every tropical country, Papaya fruit originated in

One of the most important virtues of papaya is

Intestinal irritation can be overcome

Diseases cured by papaya are.....

Throat disorders can be cured

Ringworm is cured by Papaya juice/Papaya seeds/Papaya fruit/raw papaya. (Tick the correct answer.)

I. Match the words/phrases in **Column A** with their meanings in **Column B**.

Column A	Column B
1. slaving	(i) a quarrel or an argument.
2. chaos	(ii) remove something from inside another thing by using a sharp tool.
3. rummage	(iii) strange; mysterious; difficult to explain.
4. scrape out	(iv) finish successfully; achieve.
5. stumble over	(v) search for something by moving things around hurriedly or carelessly.
6. accomplish	(vi) complete confusion and disorder.

7. uncanny (vii) fall, or step awkwardly while walking.
8. (to have or get into) a row (viii) working hard.

II. Use the following phrases in your own sentences:

Toss for
Toss about
Fall into
Fall out
Search for
Scrape out
Mess about

Writing Work

1. You have seen how Jerome, George and Harris mess up their packing, especially of the hamper. From their mistakes you must have thought of some do's and don'ts while packing. Can you give some tips for packing by completing the paragraph below?

First pack all the heavy items, especially the ones you don't need right away. Then ...

Here are some words and phrases you can use to begin your sentences with:

- Then
- Next
- Now
- Remember
- Don't forget
- At last/Finally

2. Have you ever seen a humorous movie? Sketch your favourite character.

Discussion

“To get somebody to stumble over him, and curse him steadily for an hour, is his highest aim and object; and, when he has succeeded in accomplishing this, his conceit becomes quite unbearable.” This is a humorous remark. What produces humour in the remark?

Invent humorous remarks, episodes and exchange them with each other.

Learn about the leading humorous writers from your teacher.

Suggested Reading

Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow by Jerome K. Jerome.