

Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions that follow:

Arlington Stringham made a joke in the House of Commons. It was a thin House, and a very thin joke; something about the Anglo-Saxon race having a great many angles. It is possible that it was unintentional, but a fellow-member, who did not wish it to be supposed that he was asleep because his eyes were shut, laughed. One or two of the papers noted "a laugh" in brackets, and another, which was notorious for the carelessness of its political news, mentioned "laughter." Things often begin in that way.

"Arlington made a joke in the House last night," said Eleanor Stringham to her mother; "in all the years we've been married neither of us has made jokes, and I don't like it now. I'm afraid it's the beginning of the rift in the lute."

"What lute?" said her mother.

"It's a quotation," said Eleanor.

To say that anything was a quotation was an excellent method, in Eleanor's eyes, for withdrawing it from discussion, just as you could always defend indifferent lamb late in the season by saying "it's mutton."

And, of course, Arlington Stringham continued to tread the thorny path of conscious humour into which Fate had beckoned him.

"The country's looking very green, but, after all, that's what it's there for," he remarked to his wife two days later.

"That's very modern, and I dare say very clever, but I'm afraid it's wasted on me," she observed coldly. If she had known how much effort it had cost him to make the remark she might have greeted it in a kinder spirit. It is the tragedy of human endeavour that it works so often unseen and unguessed.

Arlington said nothing, not from injured pride, but because he was thinking hard for something to say. Eleanor mistook his silence for an assumption of tolerant superiority, and her anger prompted her to a further gibe.

"You had better tell it to Lady Isobel. I've no doubt she would appreciate it."

Lady Isobel was seen everywhere with a fawn-coloured collie at a time when everyone else kept nothing but Pekinese, and she had once eaten four green apples at an afternoon tea in the Botanical Gardens, so she was widely credited with a rather unpleasant wit. The censorious said she slept in a hammock and understood Yeats's poems, but her family denied both stories.

"The rift is widening to an abyss," said Eleanor to her mother that afternoon.

"I should not tell that to anyone," remarked her mother, after long reflection.

"Naturally, I should not talk about it very much," said Eleanor, "but why shouldn't I mention it to anyone?"

"Because you can't have an abyss in a lute. There isn't room."

THE JESTING OF ARLINGTON STRINGHAM

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3688/3688-h/3688-h.htm>

(i) For each word given below, choose the correct meaning (as used in the passage) from the options provided: [2]

1. Censorious

- (a) Curious
- (b) Critically disapproving
- (c) Boastful
- (d) Generous

2. **Gibe**

- (a) Praise
 - (b) Insult
 - (c) Suggestion
 - (d) Laugh
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(ii) Which word in the passage is closest in meaning to the opposite of "serious"? [1]

- (a) Thorny
 - (b) Conscious
 - (c) Humour
 - (d) Endeavour
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(iii) Answer the following questions briefly in your own words: [8]

- 4. Why was Arlington Stringham's joke considered thin, and how was it received?
 - 5. How did Eleanor react to Arlington's attempt at humour at home?
 - 6. What is meant by "treading the thorny path of conscious humour"?
 - 7. Why did Eleanor mention Lady Isobel, and what does this reveal about her feelings?
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(iv) In not more than 50 words, narrate the sequence of events from Arlington's first joke in the House to Eleanor's comment about the abyss. [8]

(i) Vocabulary Questions: [2]

1. **Censorious** — (b) Critically disapproving

("The censorious said she slept in a hammock" — criticising Lady Isobel.)

2. **Gibe** — (b) Insult

(Eleanor's "further gibe" shows she made a cutting or mocking remark.)

(ii) Antonym-Based Question: [1]

3. **Word closest to the opposite of 'serious'** — (c) Humour

(Arlington's humour contrasts with seriousness.)

(iii) Short Answer Questions: [4 × 2 = 8]

4. **Why was Arlington Stringham's joke considered thin, and how was it received?**

His joke about the Anglo-Saxon race having many angles was very weak. However, a fellow-member laughed to appear attentive, and newspapers noted it as "a laugh" or even "laughter," exaggerating its impact.

5. **How did Eleanor react to Arlington's attempt at humour at home?**

Eleanor viewed his attempts at humour with suspicion and disdain. She feared it marked a change in their marriage, calling it "the beginning of the rift in the lute," and responded coldly to his remarks.

6. **What is meant by "treading the thorny path of conscious humour"?**

It refers to Arlington's deliberate but awkward efforts to make jokes, a difficult and painful path for him, unlike natural humour. It suggests his struggle and self-consciousness in trying to be amusing.

7. **Why did Eleanor mention Lady Isobel, and what does this reveal about her feelings?**

Eleanor mentioned Lady Isobel sarcastically, implying that only someone with questionable wit like Lady Isobel would appreciate Arlington's humour. It reveals Eleanor's irritation, jealousy, and deepening resentment towards her husband.

(iv) 50-Word Narrative Summary: [8]

Arlington made a poor joke in Parliament, which was mildly received but exaggerated in reports. Eleanor disapproved, fearing it signalled deeper issues. Arlington continued attempting humour at home but faced her coldness and sarcasm. Eventually, Eleanor declared their rift an "abyss," deepening her sense of emotional separation.