

The Interlopers



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAKI

Born in Burma when it was still a British colony, Saki moved to England as a two-year-old after his mother, pregnant with another child at the time, died shortly after being charged by a runaway cow. Saki's grandmother and aunts raised him and his siblings in a strict, harsh household while their father continued to work for the Imperial Police in Burma. Following a prestigious boarding school education, Saki, like his father, was posted in Burma as a member of the Colonial Burmese Military Police. When Saki contracted malaria after two years, he returned to England. He began a career as a journalist, writing with a satirical wit that was critical of Edwardian British society that is also present throughout his stories. Saki went on to work as a foreign correspondent in the Balkans and Russia, a novelist, and a writer of short stories. Never married, he may have been gay, but given the unaccepting politics of the time, this would have been a closely guarded secret. When World War I began, Saki was 44 years old, far older than the age of required enlistment. However, he volunteered to fight as a soldier, refusing an offer to become an officer. A German sniper fatally shot Saki, whose reported last words were, "Put that damned cigarette out!"

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Saki likely wrote this story near the beginning of World War I. The feuds between nations that led to World War I and its millions of dead were immensely bigger and more impactful than the personal feud at the center of this story, but Saki may have believed that the causes of World War I were borne out of similar inflated pride, devotion to property, and strict adherence to custom.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Often compared to fellow masters of the short story O. Henry and Dorothy Parker for his ability to craft fables and critique society with wit, Saki ends "The Interlopers" with a surprise reminiscent of O. Henry. In "The Interlopers," Saki also provides a portrait of the corrupting influence and ultimate meaninglessness of society's obsession with status and property. Works by Edith Wharton and Thomas Hardy contain similar depictions of the sad ultimate result of a man or woman focusing only on power within society, and losing hold of the stronger meaning and power of the natural world. In books such as Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Melville's *Moby Dick*, the conflict of man vs. nature is central, but in these works, unlike in "The Interlopers," the men don't forget that nature is their primary

foe. However, perhaps because they're trying to defeat it, the men still don't have an easy time getting along with nature.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Interlopers
- **When Written:** Early 20th century
- **Where Written:** Unknown, potentially in the trenches during World War I
- **When Published:** 1919, in the collection, *The Toys of Peace, and Other Papers*
- **Literary Period:** Naturalism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** The Carpathian Mountains (a mountain range across Central and Eastern Europe), the early 20th century.
- **Climax:** The men give up their feud and become friends, though remain stuck under the fallen tree.
- **Antagonist:** Both Ulrich and Georg would consider the *other* man to be the antagonist.
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Spare the rod. Saki's aunts may have relied on corporal punishment to raise him and his siblings. This severe child-rearing likely inspired some of the characters in Saki's fiction.

Gone. Saki's sister, Ethel, destroyed his personal papers after he died.



PLOT SUMMARY

It's a blustery winter night in the eastern reaches of the Carpathian mountains. Even the animals are restless. Ulrich von Gradwitz, a wealthy landowner, roams a narrow stretch at the edge of his extensive forest property, holding a **rifle**. He's left his party of men waiting in ambush at the top of the hill, but he and his men aren't hunting for game.

Ulrich's grandfather seized this particular strip of forest from a neighboring family in a court battle. While the piece of forest isn't notably good for hunting, the lingering claim to the land from the rival family means that Ulrich guards it more closely than any of his other land. Georg Znaeym, the descendant of the man who lost the forest patch, continues to hunt on the property, believing it to be rightfully his.

Ulrich hopes to meet, and kill, Georg alone in the forest, and when he rounds a huge **beech tree**, he does. Georg holds a rifle

too, and like Ulrich, the desire to kill the other man fills his heart and mind. However, neither man can immediately shake off his training in social norms, and shoot. While they hesitate, the storm sends the beech tree crashing toward the ground and the two men.

The tree pins Ulrich and Georg to the earth, nearly killing them both. Bloodied, in pain, and relieved to be alive, the men struggle against the branches, but can't free themselves. Georg gives up fighting the tree to insult Ulrich, and calls him a thief. Ulrich calls Georg a poacher in return. Georg answers with the threat that if his party of men is the first to arrive on the scene, they will roll the beech's trunk over Ulrich, killing him. Ulrich returns the same threat of death.

Ulrich uses his remaining strength and one somewhat free arm to take a wine-flask from his pocket. The alcohol warms and comforts him. When he looks over to Georg, he feels pity, and offers him the flask. Georg refuses it.

In his pain and weariness, Ulrich feels his intense hatred for Georg fading. He tells Georg that if his men are the first to arrive, he will ask them to save Georg first, instead of killing him. Ulrich now believes there are things to life more important than borders. After he suggests that they end their quarrel, he asks Georg to be his friend.

Georg takes so long to answer that Ulrich thinks he might have fainted out of pain. But then, Georg imagines out loud the effect of ending their feud. He thinks that it would mean peace not just for the two men, but for all the forester folk they know. Georg declares that he has also changed his mind from hatred, and agrees to be Ulrich's friend.

The men still hope that their party will be the first to arrive, but now they want their men to save their former rival, instead of killing him. When the wind calms for a moment, Ulrich and Georg decide to join their voices in a call for help. They send a hunting call across the forest.

Ulrich cries with joy when he sees figures approaching through the trees, down the hillside where he left his men behind. The figures run. Ulrich and Georg wonder whose group of men it is. Georg realizes that there are more of them than his crew. He repeatedly asks Ulrich if they are his men. Ulrich answers no, laughing with fear. Georg asks again who the men are. Ulrich says, "**Wolves.**"

never accepted the court's decision, and have continued to hunt in the forest patch. Ulrich has become even more devoted to protecting the land and defeating the Znaeysms than the earlier generations of his family were. He roams the forest with a posse of men and his rifle, hoping to shoot Georg instead of game. However, when Ulrich is finally alone with Georg, a near-death experience causes Ulrich to rethink his priorities, and offer peace and friendship to his life-long rival.

Georg Znaeym – A relatively poor forester and hunter from a family of foresters and hunters, Georg continues to hunt on the strip of land at the edge of Ulrich's forest because he believes it should still belong to his family. Georg, like Ulrich, has a gang of men who roam the forest with him, rifles ready to shoot game or the opposing party. When Ulrich and Georg become trapped together beneath a large tree, Georg declares that his men will roll the trunk over Ulrich and kill him if they are the first to arrive. And when Ulrich reconsiders their feud and offers friendship, Georg is skeptical at first. Ultimately, though, Georg accepts the peace with Ulrich, and happily imagines what the new phase in their relationship will mean for them and the rest of the people they know.



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.



POWER, PROPERTY, AND IDENTITY

Ulrich and Georg both believe that a patch of forest on the edge of Ulrich's property rightfully belongs to their own, different, families. This family feud has intensified over the past two generations, even though the land is not that large or productive. The fact that Ulrich and Georg, men decades away from being able to determine certain ownership of the forest, take the land dispute even more personally than their grandfathers did suggests that the feud itself, and the ambition to win it, outweighs attachment to the actual forest.

Rather than hunt for wild animals, at the story's opening the men hunt for each other. The fact that they share the objective of murder shows that they value the forest because it provides the opportunity to beat, or hunt, the other man. After Ulrich and Georg become trapped beneath a fallen tree, they first see it as a chance to finally kill the other. They both hope their men will be the first to arrive to the scene, so that their party can roll the trunk over the other.

However, Ulrich and Georg ultimately come to see being stuck under the tree as a chance to be gracious toward, and free, the



CHARACTERS

Ulrich von Gradwitz – The wealthy owner of wide stretches of hunting grounds and forest in the Carpathian Mountains, Ulrich most closely guards one particular strip of forest because Georg Znaeym also claims ownership over it. In Ulrich's grandfather's time, his family used the court to seize the land from the neighboring Znaeym family, who the Gradwitzs believed illegally possessed the land. The Znaeysms

other. Put another way, each man's desire to get the better of the other man is not lost, just the expression of that desire has changed. Ulrich and Georg still want their party to be the first to arrive, but now they hope that their men will come so that they can act as the other's savior. Even when reconciled, the men seek validation from an action performed on the other. The forest matters to Ulrich and Georg because of how their ownership of it, and actions within it, will be known and understood by others.



CHANGING INTERLOPERS

The question of who "the interlopers," or intruders, are permeates this story. At the story's outset, Ulrich and Georg both see the other as interloper

in his forest, and they see other men as interlopers as well. First, Georg says he is glad that he and Ulrich are alone to settle their quarrel without any "interlopers" to get in the way. Georg believes outsiders would interrupt the murderous dispute between the two men, and prevent them from reaching their goal: to kill the other. But after Ulrich makes a peace offering, Georg says that if they choose to reconcile, there will be "no interlopers from outside" to interfere with the end to their feud. Georg sees outsiders as people who would ruin the chance for violence, and then as people who would ruin the chance for peace. Georg believes that potential "interlopers" will get in the way of what he and Ulrich want, but his idea of what the potential interlopers want changes. This may suggest that Georg's intense feud with Ulrich determines his view of other people. Although he no longer sees Ulrich as an interloper, he continues to see other men as interlopers. Georg still wants to own the land, and so he considers other people on it intruders.

At the end of the story, after the men have been trapped by the falling tree, wolves approach the men, suggesting that Ulrich and Georg may be the true intruders, or interlopers, in the natural world. In an alternative reading, the wolves observed at the end of the story may actually be their men, but Ulrich and Georg, crazed from cold and pain, see them as wolves. In this reading, when the men reject the feud they inherited, they also reject their relationship with the rest of society. All other men become "interlopers," and even unrecognizable as fellow men. This confusion aligns with Georg's belief that outsiders will always get in the way of what the men want, whether it be violence or peace. Other people are external to the personal feud between Ulrich and Georg, to the point where their men are no longer seen as human.



MAN VS. NATURE

The wish of each man to dominate the other plays out in each man's ambition to dominate the land.

Georg goes hunting in the disputed border-forest to claim ownership over it. Ulrich stalks through the forest with

his rifle because he hopes to kill Georg. Each man is angry about the other's claim to the border-forest because he believes that the trees and animals within it belong to him. Ulrich and Georg both feel that the other man thwarts the authority he has over nature. However, instead of either of the men murdering the other when they round a large tree and come face-to-face, the force of the storm fells the tree, and it traps them both. Nature forces the men to lie beside each other, robbed of the simple ability to walk away from or toward each other.

After nature causes this near-death experience, the two men reconcile. Georg imagines that the new peace between them will mean that they dominate nature together. He thinks they will go hunting. Yet once they make amends, the men realize that even when they shout for help together, their voices are not loud enough to reach anyone through the trees and wind. No "interlopers," and not even Ulrich and Georg's own hunting parties, notice the break in the feud. (Perhaps each man exaggerated the proximity and presence of his own group of men, in an effort to intimidate or impress the other man.) Instead of either group of men arriving, wolves appear over the hillside. Neither Ulrich nor Georg is killed or rescued by the other man. Both men will receive the same death, from a natural world that does not recognize which one of the men owns it.



DEATH

Ulrich's rifle brings the potential for death into the story's first sentence, and the threat of death lasts for the duration of the story. Initially, Ulrich and

Georg think murdering the other would be victory. Yet, when given the brief chance to shoot the other, both men hesitate, showing that the potential to kill feels different, and perhaps more difficult, once it becomes real.

After a large tree falls on the men, and they both face the near, real possibility of death, Ulrich's hatred for Georg "dies down." The imminence of death changes Ulrich's priorities. He decides that life is worth more than winning a property dispute. Georg agrees to become Ulrich's friend, showing that the near-death experience has also reset his values. Ulrich and Georg begin to see rescuing the other from death as an opportunity for graciousness. They each hope that their respective hunting party will come, so that their men can save, instead of kill, the other.

However, although the relationship between the men has changed, it does not help either of them to move the tree off of the other. Wolves, instead of a rescue party, appear over the hill in response to Ulrich and Georg's shared call to their men. Trapped beneath the tree, Ulrich and Georg will not be able to fend off the wolves. In the story's opening the men believe that owning the land will give them power. Their near-death experience shows them it does not matter, but even this

realization is not enough to prevent the approach of death. The story's ending suggests that death will come no matter one's status in or understanding of the world.



CLASS

Georg is from a lower class than Ulrich. Ulrich sees Georg as a lowly poacher, who should be disposed of, and Georg sees Ulrich as a greedy landowner, who should give up the small patch of forest. When the men reconcile, Georg sees the class barriers between them disappear. He imagines that Ulrich will come and spend the night under his roof, and that he will go and feast in Ulrich's castle.

The men may be able to make peace because they are trapped alone in the forest, without any observers there to maintain and enforce the social hierarchy. That Georg considers all other men to be "interlopers," may suggest that he considers the structured social world an unnatural one that infringes upon the natural, equal relationship between him and Ulrich. The predicament of being trapped beneath a tree also equalizes the two men. Despite his wealth, the most Ulrich has to offer is a sip of wine. And despite their different means, neither man is more able to move the tree and prevent his own death, or help the other.

As wolves approach the men at the end of the story, Ulrich laughs like a man "unstrung with hideous fear." The wolves will not recognize his class, and he understands that his wealth is no protection against nature. When the tree falls and when the wolves approach, nature does not distinguish between Georg and Ulrich, suggesting that class distinctions are artificial, and become irrelevant at the end of life.



SYMBOLS

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



RIFLES

The **rifle** that Ulrich von Gradwitz holds as he searches for Georg Znaeym, and the rifle that Georg also carries, represent the threat of death. The men probably acquired their rifles with the intention of hunting game, and not other men. The fact that the men now intend to shoot each other shows how the feud has corrupted their ambition and actions.



THE BEECH TREE

Despite Ulrich and Georg both being armed with the intent to shoot, a huge, falling **beech tree** is

what nearly kills them when they finally come face-to-face. The tree immobilizes the men, and in pinning them, prevents either man from using his rifle to murder the other. The force of a winter storm fells the tree. On one hand, this event shows the random power of nature, and how it doesn't abide by man's feuds or allegiances. On the other hand, nature's perfect timing—felling the tree just as the two men round it and see each other—might suggest some sort of divine order, one in which nature teaches the two men a lesson about their limited power.



WOLVES

The **wolves** that appear over the hill when Ulrich and Georg call for help also demonstrate both the power of nature and its disregard for men or their concerns. Pinned, neither man will be able to fight off the wolves or death. And the wolves, like the Beech tree, will not recognize the different class levels of the two men. Both Ulrich and Georg were initially convinced that whoever's group was first to arrive would kill the rival forester. After their reconciliation, the men believed that the first group of foresters would save the former rival. In their narrow focus on their own relationship, they forgot about the natural dangers of the forest, twice.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *The Complete Stories of Saki* published in 1993.

The Interlopers Quotes

●● The forest lands of Gradwitz were of wide extent and well stocked with game; the narrow strip of precipitous woodland that lay on its outskirts was not remarkable for the game it harboured or the shooting it afforded, but it was the most jealously guarded of all its owner's territorial possessions.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 391

Explanation and Analysis

These lines near the beginning of the short story introduce the small strip of woodland that provides the setting, the contested ownership of which fuels the feud between Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym. Ulrich von Gradwitz is a landowner with a large property "of wide

extent," and his forest lands are "well stocked with game." However, it is the unremarkable, small strip of land on the outskirts that is "the most jealously guarded of all" Ulrich's possessions. The high value Ulrich places on this property, which wouldn't otherwise be special, shows that what he values is not the land itself, but the power that the land connotes. Ulrich's family, an upper-class family, took the land from Georg's lower-class family years in the past, but each family believes they are the rightful owners and the other is merely an interloper. They hate each other, and struggle over the land and the power over one another that it represents.

☞ The roebuck, which usually kept in the sheltered hollows during a storm-wind, were running like driven things to-night, and there was movement and unrest among the creatures that were wont to sleep through the dark hours. Assuredly there was a disturbing element in the forest...

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 392

Explanation and Analysis

Though Ulrich's family owns the land, Georg still hunts on the land and uses it. Ulrich has gathered his men not to hunt for game, but to keep an eye out for the "prowling thieves" he suspects are currently on his property. The reason he believes they are out this particular night is given in the excerpt: the roebuck (male deer) are running around, and the creatures that usually sleep through the night are restless. Instead of keeping shelter, the animals are acting up. This indicates to Ulrich that something must be disturbing them, some interloper intruding on the land. These lines indicate the presence of Georg as an interloper in Ulrich's eyes, as well as an interloper interfering with nature and the animals' natural habitat. Furthermore, this passage sets a rather ominous tone for the action to follow, hinting at the constant presence of death and danger in the stormy forest.

☞ If only on this wild night, in this dark, lone spot, he might come across Georg Znaeym, man to man, with none to witness - that was the wish that was uppermost in his thoughts.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz, Georg Znaeym

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 392

Explanation and Analysis

Ulrich has left behind his group of men as he descends deeper into the windy wilderness with the hope of meeting his foe. Here we see Ulrich's hope of catching his human enemy and meeting him face to face, "man to man, with none to witness." The description of his location as a "dark, lone spot" in a "wild night" adds to the sense of solitude, isolation, and darkness which signal imminent death. The hope for no witnesses shows that Ulrich does not want to publicly shame Georg as an interloper and trespasser on his property—rather, Ulrich hopes to murder his enemy, without any "interlopers" to interfere or witness the act. This competition and desire for death at this moment is central to Ulrich's identity, and "uppermost in his thoughts."

☞ But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilisation cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbour in cold blood and without word spoken, except for an offence against his hearth and honour.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz, Georg Znaeym

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 392

Explanation and Analysis

As Ulrich steps around a large tree, his desire is fulfilled: he and Georg meet face to face, each with a rifle in hand. Each man wants to murder the other, but neither has the nerve to shoot instantly. The quote here says that since both men were brought up "under the code of a restraining civilization," they cannot shoot a neighbor "in cold blood and without word spoken." While they want to murder each other, they are not able to shoot right on sight.

This hesitation shows a moral sense that transcends class and this power struggle. Both men believe they have honor, and though they want to kill, they also want to adhere to the moral codes of neighborliness, even with a neighbor who is loathed. This hesitation also might suggest that the reality of killing another man outweighs the bitterness of their rivalry, or that by killing the other man, the mastery which

they desire would not be as wholly achieved as over a living enemy.

☞ And before the moment of hesitation had given way to action a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both.

Related Characters: Georg Znaeym, Ulrich von Gradwitz

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 392

Explanation and Analysis

These lines are in reference to the hesitation that both Ulrich and Georg feel when they meet face to face. They want to commit deadly violence, each believing the other to be an interloper on their land. But they hesitate, and before they can act on their desire for violence, nature itself acts against both men, who can be seen as interlopers from the perspective of the forest. A "mass of falling beech tree" falls and pins both men to the ground, altering the plot, the feud, and the course of Ulrich and Georg's lives. Rather than figure this as an act of chance, Saki personifies Nature and depicts it as lashing out in violence (or perhaps an act of justice) against human interlopers. We can note that Nature "overwhelmed them both"; it overpowers the men.

☞ We fight this quarrel out to the death, you and I and our foresters, with no cursed interlopers to come between us. Death and damnation to you, Ulrich von Gradwitz.

Related Characters: Georg Znaeym (speaker), Ulrich von Gradwitz

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 393

Explanation and Analysis

In these lines we see another form of "interlopers" which both men seem to agree on. Pinned under the tree, they have taunted one another and threatened each other. Even

here, Georg says he hopes to fight the quarrel "out to the death" and wishes for "death and damnation" for Ulrich. But he also cherishes the opportunity to fight this feud in the seclusion of nature, without "cursed interlopers to come between us." In this way the two men are figured as intimate (while they sit pinned together, feet from each other). They share in this feud, and any outsider attempting to mitigate their violence or quarrel is an interloper to their space. They disagree about property ownership and hate one another, but they agree on the terms of their feud and hatred, believing it should be ongoing and isolated.

☞ Both men spoke with the bitterness of possible defeat before them, for each knew that it might be long before his men would seek him out or find him; it was a bare matter of chance which party would arrive first on the scene.

Related Characters: Georg Znaeym, Ulrich von Gradwitz

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 393

Explanation and Analysis

The men continue to insult and berate each other. Both have said that their fellow men are on the way, and have promised to kill the other once they are freed. Though they insult each other and try to seem confident, they both speak "with the bitterness of possible defeat," since they know that it could be a very long time before anyone finds them. What's more, it is total chance that determines which party finds the pair first and thus which man will live. Though they have disputed with another, nature has made them powerless and immobile (literally). Nothing they can do here dramatically increases or decreases their chances of death. The act of nature has stripped them of their agency and left their lives up to chance. Though they speak bitterly, in the face of peril they will soon appear to change their values.

☞ In the pain and languor that Ulrich himself was feeling the old fierce hatred seemed to be dying down.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 394

Explanation and Analysis

Both men have given up trying to free themselves. Ulrich manages to get out his wine-flask, and suddenly asks Georg if he wanted some. Georg responds that he couldn't reach it if he wanted to, and that he doesn't share drinks with enemies. As they sit there silently, a miraculous idea slowly begins forming in Ulrich's mind, an idea that grows stronger every time he looked over at his struggling enemy.

The quoted lines are the last before Ulrich breaks the silence. In his state of "pain and languor" (tired stuckness), Ulrich's "old fierce hatred" seems to "die down" (another kind of "death" to add to the story's overarching theme). In the face of mortality, Ulrich begins to get over the battle for property, pride, and power, and his view of Georg as only a lower-class interloper deserving of death. As they are both stuck in the same place, struck down by nature and facing possible death, Ulrich overcomes his hatred and turns with forgiveness to his neighbor.

☝☝ Lying here to-night thinking I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz (speaker), Georg Znaeym

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 394

Explanation and Analysis

Ulrich has had a change of heart. He tells Georg that he has changed his mind, and that if his men come first, he'll have them help Georg as if he were a guest. We see Ulrich change the way he identifies Georg, now seeing the former enemy as a neighbor and a guest instead of a mere "interloper."

Lying under the beech tree, he realizes that they have been "rather fools" in their years of feuding. The simple truth is that "there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute." In the face of his own death, Ulrich comes to realize the error of his ways. The act of nature and

threat of death enable a time of self reflection, and Ulrich realizes that the dispute, the class difference, and the land are all meaningless and unimportant on the large scale of life. He asks Georg to bury the hatchet and to be his friend.

☝☝ And each prayed a private prayer that his men might be the first to arrive, so that he might be the first to show honourable attention to the enemy that had become a friend.

Related Characters: Ulrich von Gradwitz, Georg Znaeym

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 395

Explanation and Analysis

After hearing Ulrich's proposal of friendship, Georg is silent at first. He reflects on the offer and the way it would be perceived, and seems to refigure his idea of society as "interlopers" on the friendship in the same way that he saw them as interlopers to the quarrel. He imagines the benefits of the friendship and ultimately accepts Ulrich's offer.

Sitting in silence in their new friendship, but still pinned by the beech tree, each man prays privately that his own party will be the first one to arrive. Each wants to be "the first to show honorable attention to the enemy that had become a friend." From this secret wish we learn that while both men value and understand the weight of what has transpired between them, they are still selfish. They recognize how important it is that they no longer view one another as enemies or interlopers, and that their new friendship transcends class and the years of property and power feuds. However, each man still wants to outdo the other, only now it is in terms of honor and kind gestures instead of murderous threats.

☝☝ "Who are they?" asked Georg quickly, straining his eyes to see what the other would gladly not have seen.

"Wolves."

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 395

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final, ironic lines of the story. Georg and Ulrich have decided to call out in hope of being rescued, but they are only answered by the wind. Georg is blinded by blood in his eyes, and he relies on his new friend to describe the situation he sees. Ulrich sees what he believes to be men approaching, but soon he begins to laugh a terrified laugh.

"Who are they?" Georg asks, still unable to see "what the other would gladly not have seen." Ulrich's defeated, one-word answer ends the story: "Wolves." The two friends who once believed each other interlopers are still interlopers in the eyes of Nature. Nature struck them down and allowed them to bond and finally end their years of feuding, but nature also denies them the chance to live in their new friendship and to share the experience of overcoming

hatred with the world. In the end, Nature wins, and the story implies that the men die. Despite their momentous self-realization, the feud may very well be carried on by their children, since the wolves will prevent them from telling their families that the quarreling can cease. The status of their feud and their reconciliation, like their class or beliefs about property, does not matter in the slightest to the forces of Nature.

In another, alternate interpretation of the story, the "wolves" are actually men, but Ulrich and Georg have become so crazed with fear and cold that they hallucinate them as wolves. Furthermore, this hallucination would show how detached from society Ulrich and Georg have become because of their reconciliation and rejection of a "civilized," inherited feud—to the point that they see other men as a foreign, dangerous species.



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.

THE INTERLOPERS

On a stormy, winter night, Ulrich von Gradwitz, holding his **rifle**, roams a narrow patch of forest on the outskirts of his property. He searches for Georg Zneaym, who hunts in this narrow strip of forest because he also considers it his. Ulrich's grandfather took legal ownership of the land from Georg's family many years ago, but Georg's family never accepted the Court's decision. Georg continues to hunt on the land, and Ulrich watches it closer than any of his other property, even though it isn't the best place to find animals to shoot. He watches for Georg instead of animals.

Ulrich leaves behind the group of men he has brought with him to help look for Georg. As his men wait on the hill, ready to ambush Georg and his party, Ulrich descends deeper into the windy wilderness, hoping to find Georg when there is no one else present to witness the encounter.

After stepping around a huge **tree**, Ulrich meets Georg face to face. Also alone and holding a **rifle**, Georg, like Ulrich, feels intense hatred for his enemy, and wishes to murder him. However, neither man has the nerve to shoot the other immediately. As they hesitate, a burst from the winter storm topples the tree that the men stepped around. A mass of branches traps them both on the ground.

Injured and relieved to be alive, Ulrich and Georg taunt each other. Ulrich claims Georg is a poacher. Georg calls Ulrich a thief. Each says that if his men are the first to arrive, they will roll the **tree's** trunk over the other man, killing him. Georg says he is glad that they have the chance to end their feud with death, with "no cursed interlopers" to come between them.

The fact that Ulrich holds his rifle in the hopes of shooting Georg, not game, and that Georg values the disputed property despite its low-quality hunting, shows that each of the men want to own the patch of land not for its qualities but so that they can have power over the other man. Each of the men strongly believes that the other is the interloper, which suggests a class division as well as an old family feud. Georg sees upper-class Ulrich as a thief of his family's limited wealth, and Ulrich sees lower-class Georg as a poacher who steals from the rich.



Ulrich, determined to win the feud, is willing to leave behind his own men on a dangerously stormy night, and attempt to kill another man, Georg, if it means there will no longer be any contest to his ownership of the forest patch.



In their hatred for each other, the two men have become similar in their actions. When faced with the opportunity to murder, neither is able to, perhaps because the frightening reality of actually committing murder exceeds the bitterness of their rivalry (or the fantasy of gaining mastery by committing murder). And a tree intervenes, showing that a more real threat of death may come from nature, a force which doesn't recognize feuding.



Georg's comment about "no cursed interlopers" is strange because the men have both been boasting about how their men will arrive to help them. Georg's narrow focus on the feud may be causing him to see everyone as interlopers, because he thinks they have the potential to get in the way of his ownership of the forest.



While exchanging insults, Ulrich and Georg give up on struggling to get out from under the **tree**. Ulrich uses his remaining strength to pull a wine-flask from his pocket, and drink from it. Warmed by the wine, he looks at the wounded Georg with pity. He offers Georg his flask. Georg refuses the offering, but Ulrich feels his hatred for Georg “dying down.” He announces that he no longer cares about the disputed forest and that if his men are the first to come, he will ask them to free Georg first.

Georg doesn’t respond at first, but eventually he imagines out loud what would happen if he and Ulrich made peace. He says that if they choose to end their feud there will be “no interlopers from outside” to interfere. He imagines that they can feast together at Ulrich’s castle, and that he and Ulrich can go hunting together in the marshes. George announces that he has also changed his mind from hate, and that he will be Ulrich’s friend.

Georg and Ulrich reflect quietly, thrilled by the reconciliation. Each man prays that his party will be the first to arrive, so that his men can be the ones to lift the **tree** from the other.

The wind from the storm eases, and the men decide to use their voices together to shout for help, “in a prolonged hunting call.” Only the wind answers them, but then Ulrich sees figures coming down from the hill, where he left his party. The pair yells again and the figures run toward them. Georg urgently asks Ulrich if they are his men. Ulrich begins to laugh a terrified laugh. Georg asks him again who the men are. Ulrich answers, “**Wolves.**”

Proximity to death resets Ulrich's values. He seems to realize that who owns the land doesn't matter in the end. The tree has also flattened (literally) the class differences between the two men. Despite his wealth, all Ulrich has at the end is a wine-flask, and it, and peace, are all he can offer Georg.



Now, Georg sees all those who aren't him or Ulrich as interlopers who would interfere with peace. This idea suggests that anyone else might reinforce the class barriers between the two men which have disappeared under the threat of nature. Georg agrees to peace, and imagines it as a state where he and Ulrich will continue to own and conquer nature, but will do so together.



The men are still competitive with each other, and seek to define themselves by what they can do to the other, but now they are motivated by ambitious generosity as opposed to hatred.



Even when united, the men's voices are not loud enough to reach their men. Wolves answer their call. The men will likely die, perhaps signaling that the two of them were the true interlopers in the natural world, which does not recognize their class or ownership and will not hesitate to kill them. Unless, in an alternate reading, the two men have let their feud and reconciliation drive them so far from society that they are now seeing their own men as wolves.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Carney, Abigail. "The Interlopers." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jul 2015. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Carney, Abigail. "The Interlopers." LitCharts LLC, July 22, 2015. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-interlopers>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Interlopers* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Saki. *The Interlopers*. Wordsworth Classics. 1993.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Saki. *The Interlopers*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics. 1993.