

Name \_\_\_\_\_ **Cliffhanger**



# Cliffhanger

The term “cliffhanger” has its origin in a novel by Thomas Hardy called *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, which was published serially in a magazine between September 1872 and July 1873, one chapter each month. At the end of one of the chapters, Hardy’s main character, Henry Knight, was left hanging onto the edge of a cliff. From then on, abrupt and unresolved endings have been called “cliffhangers.” Read the excerpt from the story below. how does Hardy create suspense in this scene?

Haggard cliffs, of every ugly altitude, are as common as sea-fowl along the line of coast between Exmoor and Land’s End; but this outflanked and encompassed specimen was the ugliest of them all. Their summits are not safe places for scientific experiment on the principles of air-currents, as Knight had now found, to his dismay.

He still clutched the face of the escarpment—not with the frenzied hold of despair, but with a dogged determination to make the most of his every jot of endurance, and so give the longest possible scope to Elfride’s intentions, whatever they might be . . .

From the fact that the cliff formed the inner face of the segment of a huge cylinder, having the sky for a top and the sea for a bottom, which enclosed the cove to the extent of more than a semicircle, he could see the vertical face curving round on each side of him. He looked far down the facade, and realized more thoroughly how it threatened him. Grimness was in every feature, and to its very bowels the inimical shape was desolation . . .

However, Knight still clung to the cliff . . .

The wind, though not intense in other situations was strong here. It tugged at his coat and lifted it. We are mostly accustomed to look upon all opposition which is not animate, as that of the stolid, inexorable hand of indifference, which wears out the patience more than the strength. Here, at any rate, hostility did not assume that slow and sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest: determination; not an insensate standing in the way.

Knight had over-estimated the strength of his hands. They were getting weak already. “She will never come again; she has been gone ten minutes,” he said to himself.



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This mistake arose from the unusual compression of his experiences just now: she had really been gone but three.

“As many more minutes will be my end,” he thought.

Next came another instance of the incapacity of the mind to make comparisons at such times.

“This is a summer afternoon,” he said, “and there can never have been such a heavy and cold rain on a summer day in my life before.”

He was again mistaken. The rain was quite ordinary in quantity; the air in temperature. It was, as is usual, the menacing attitude in which they approached him that magnified their powers.

He again looked straight downwards, the wind and the water-dashes lifting his moustache, scudding up his cheeks, under his eyelids, and into his eyes. This is what he saw down there: the surface of the sea—visually just past his toes, and under his feet; actually one-eighth of a mile, or more than two hundred yards, below them. We colour according to our moods the objects we survey. The sea would have been a deep neutral blue, had happier auspices attended the gazer it was now no otherwise than distinctly black to his vision. That narrow white border was foam, he knew well; but its boisterous tosses were so distant as to appear a pulsation only, and its plashing was barely audible. A white border to a black sea—his funeral pall and its edging.

The world was to some extent turned upside down for him. Rain descended from below. Beneath his feet was aerial space and the unknown; above him was the firm, familiar ground, and upon it all that he loved best.

Pitiless nature had then two voices, and two only. The nearer was the voice of the wind in his ears rising and falling as it mauled and thrust him hard or softly. The second and distant one was the moan of that unplummeted ocean below and afar—rubbing its restless flank against the Cliff without a Name.

Knight perseveringly held fast.

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