

Chapter III

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Combating Existential Vacuum

Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) has delineated that a person who is not engaged in a task that added meaning or value in his life would sooner or later experience a sense of emptiness within. This feeling is termed as existential vacuum and in such a situation a man is unable to fathom the reason behind his existence and eventually begins to feel lost, which can be a dangerous thing as he would gradually end up losing all zest for life:

Let us consider, for instance, "Sunday neurosis", that kind of depression which afflicts people who become aware of the lack of content in their lives when the rush of the busy week is over and the void within themselves become manifest. Not a few cases of suicide can be traced back to this existential vacuum. Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them. This is also true of the crises of pensioners and aging people. (112)

Research has proved that a certain amount of stress is beneficial to mankind. A man who has no work to do is prone to illnesses as much as a person who is overburdened with work. A person who has no substantial work to do or nothing to look forward to accomplishing in the future will eventually grow tired of life and his mind would wreak havoc which would impact the health of the body sooner or later. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has also echoed Frankl's viewpoint in his book *Discovery of India* (1946):

The tortured mind seeks some mechanism of escape, the senses get dulled from repeated shocks, and a feeling comes over one that so much evil and misfortune shadow the world that a little more or less does not make much difference. There is only one thing that remains to us that cannot be taken away: to act with courage and dignity and to stick to the ideals that have given meaning to life. (24)

Viktor Frankl has explained that the process of discovering meaning succeeds after the pursuance of three major steps. The first step is to do something for the betterment of humanity, the second step is to experience something good or share healthy relationships with people and the third step is to adopt the right attitude in the midst of suffering. An individual who has nothing to look forward to or no task to perform falls prey to existential neurosis, which would have a degenerative effect on his mind, which in turn would encourage him to live in a haphazard, shoddy fashion which would eventually suck the passion of life out of him:

In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive. The same conclusion has since been reached by other authors of books on concentration camps, and also by psychiatric investigations into Japanese, North Korean and North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camps. (Frankl, "Man's" 109)

Frankl confessed that had he not kept his mind engaged with the tasks that he would accomplish once he was released from the concentration camp, he would never have succeeded in pulling through the horrors of camp life. The manuscript of his book

had been destroyed by the Nazis and Frankl undertook the enormous task of rewriting it despite lacking even the basic resources with which he could proceed. Nevertheless, he managed to complete the task and the feeling of accomplishment that followed served in boosting his morale, which in turn, made him view life favourably and such a person seldom loses the zest for life: “I am sure that this reconstruction of my lost manuscript in the dark barracks of a Bavarian concentration camp assisted me in overcoming the danger of cardiovascular collapse” (Frankl, “Man’s” 109-10).

The novel *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* depicts strong personalities who had overcome the horrors of the German Occupation and the Second World War by indulging in tasks that added meaning to their lives and made it worth living despite being in the grip of dire circumstances. The horrors of the outside world ceased to create turmoil in their mind as they had occupied themselves fruitfully and their inner world was in a state of perfect harmony.

Juliet Ashton offered her services as a fire warden during the war. She took up that job so that she could rescue people and salvage their belongings. It was a perilous task and involved a very huge amount of risk, including being charred to death. Yet she remained unmindful to all the dangers, as she wanted to engage her time by indulging in something meaningful, which would add value to both her life and that of those she would be in a position to help.

Juliet attempted to rescue books from a library that had been bombed as she found it impossible to remain an idle spectator when her beloved books were being consumed by the raging fire. She therefore jumped into action to salvage whatever she could, to conserve the books for posterity. However, her act was not appreciated by others as they

viewed it as a worthless operation to put one's life in jeopardy to rescue lifeless things. Thereby, she was debarred from offering her services as a fire-warden as a punishment for her foolhardiness. Nevertheless, she remained undeterred and joined another fire service.

Juliet Ashton also dedicated her time to write humorous articles in order to uplift the mood of the readers during the tragic time of the Second World War. Her intention behind devoting herself towards that work was to be of some service to her fellow citizens who must have endured untold miseries during the war. She used to work as a fire warden during the day and by night, she wrote articles that would portray war in a humorous vein. She juggled between jobs in order to be of some service to humanity and make lives better and easier for her fellow human beings: "She was free to occupy her nights however she chose. Doubtless it included the writing of more light journalism, for the Spectator engaged her to write a weekly column on the state of the nation in wartime—under the name of Izzy Bickerstaff" (Shaffer and Barrows 40).

Her intention in penning articles in a lighter vein was not to belittle war or to derive any sadistic pleasure out of it. She had applied the technique of bibliotherapy unintentionally, wherein a doctor would prescribe a book based on the nature of the patient's illness. A person suffering from depression would be explicitly forbidden from reading anything that would depress them further. Dr. Viktor Frankl has also validated the benefits of humour in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. He had equated humour with self-preservation and stated that it equipped man with the power to rise above any pathetic situation.

After the culmination of the war, she decided to write a book and she chanced upon Guernsey Island and the book club during the course of her communication with

Dawsey. She decided to write a book about the islanders and thereby began writing letters to them regularly, to get to know them intimately. However, she did not deal with them as mere subjects of her story, but was humane in her approach and thereby won the hearts of the inhabitants of Guernsey. She sent books to Dawsey and blocks of wood to Eben which were not available on the island, though she herself had to do a great deal of searching to obtain them.

She went to the island to meet the people personally and stay there for a while to write her story. She developed a strong rapport with everyone in the island and they began looking upon her as one of their own. A special bond was born between her and Kit, who was the orphaned daughter of Elizabeth. They became inseparable with the course of time and Juliet began considering the option of adoption, but was unsure whether Kit would be happy in a city like London, away from the people who loved her. Eventually, all her dilemmas were resolved as Juliet and Dawsey fell in love with each other and decided to tie the knot. She even sought Mrs. Maugery's permission to adopt Kit who was extremely happy and relieved at the proposal as she believed that Kit was in safe hands and her future was secure.

Juliet was orphaned at the age of twelve and she remained a bachelorette till the age of thirty-two. She only had two friends Sophie and Sidney to support her. The war had been a rather harrowing experience for her with her flat being bombed. Yet, she overcame all the hurdles that life had thrown at her without being disheartened as she chose not to focus on chasing her happiness. Rather, she invested her energies in making others happy by writing humorous articles and volunteering her services as a fire warden.

She thereby found a reason to spend her time meaningfully which prevented her from slipping into a state of existential vacuum.

Elizabeth McKenna, another vital character in this novel, also battles existential vacuum by indulging in a spate of activities that would eventually enrich her own life. She too was orphaned at an early age like Juliet and was under the tutelage of her master. He owned a palatial house in Guernsey and used to spend his vacations over there and Elizabeth accompanied him during these visits. A thick friendship was cemented between her and a girl named Jane of the Guernsey Island during the course of these visits, and Elizabeth remained a loyal friend until Jane's last breath.

When the Germans were on their way to occupy the Guernsey Island, boats were sent from London to rescue the children. Jane was pregnant at that time and her husband was away in England. Elizabeth decided to stay back in the island till her friend delivered her child and also to look after her son Eli. The whole household revived with the arrival of Elizabeth as both Jane and her son found a friend in Elizabeth. Eben was also immensely relieved as he had another person to assist him during those difficult times.

Unfortunately, the exuberance was short lived as the time to take the toughest decision of their lives had arrived. They had to make a choice between keeping the child with them and sending him away to London. Keeping the child would result in endangering the child's life and sending him away would mean to live in a constant state of uncertainty about his well-being. Elizabeth aided them in taking this difficult decision and Eli was sent away to live amongst strangers for an indefinite period of time:

It was Elizabeth who did what was needed to get Eli on the evacuation ship. We Islanders were given only one day's notice when the ships were

coming from England to take the children away. Elizabeth worked like whirlwig, washing and sewing Eli's clothes and helping him to understand why he could not take his pet rabbit with him. When we set out for the school, Jane had to turn away so as not to show Eli a tearful face at parting, so Elizabeth took him by the hand and said it was good weather for a sea voyage. (Shaffer and Barrows 69)

Even after Eli's departure and the news of the Nazis' definite arrival, Elizabeth put her own life in jeopardy and decided to stay back in the island to be with her friend Jane till she delivered her child. This might appear to be an impulsive and rash decision to others but Elizabeth's decision had added value to her life as she earned the love and respect of Jane's father Eben Ramsay and the islanders. Neither did Jane survive the parturition nor did her newborn child. However, Elizabeth's presence during Jane's final moments was a great solace to both Jane and Eben:

After Jane died, Elizabeth and me, we stood in the hallway, numb and staring out of the window. It was then we saw seven German planes come in low over the harbour. They were just on one of the reconnaissance flights, we thought- but then they began dropping bombs- they tumbled from the sky like sticks. We didn't speak, but I know what we were thinking- thank God Eli was safely away. Elizabeth stood by Jane and me in the bad time, and afterwards. I was not able to stand by Elizabeth, so I thank God her daughter Kit is safe and with us, and I pray for Elizabeth to come home soon. (Shaffer and Barrows 69-70)

Elizabeth took up the job of a nurse despite having no experience in that field. She did it purely out of a charitable desire to ease the sufferings of humanity. Her humorous disposition was a boon to many patients as she was instrumental in giving her patients a new lease of life. She thereby added value to others' lives and unintentionally, her own as well, by engaging in selfless service instead of being preoccupied by the miseries that life had heaped upon her. Her patients remembered her with great tenderness and were indebted to her for having been with them during the most crucial time of their lives: "That is where I met my friend Elizabeth Mc Kenna. She helped the nurses on my ward. The nurses were always kind, but Miss McKenna was kind *and* funny. Her being funny helped me in my darkest hour" (Shaffer and Barrows 125).

The book club was the brainchild of Elizabeth. It was her invention done on an impulse to save her skin and that of her friends from the Nazis, after they had broken the curfew. The Germans released them momentarily, but Elizabeth was very sure that they would return and check someday for themselves. She thereby set about buying books and invited the islanders over to attend the meeting and forced them to read books. People who had never touched a book since their school days, found themselves reading under the surveillance of Elizabeth. The islanders thereby discovered the pleasures of reading because of her and always remembered her with immense gratitude.

John Booker is a character in the novel whose life was tremendously affected by what Elizabeth did for him. When he was forced to read, he discovered the Roman philosopher Seneca and fell in love with his writing. His love for Seneca soon overpowered his fetish for alcohol and Elizabeth was indirectly responsible for having saved Booker from the degrading life of a dipsomaniac.

Booker was a servant of Lord Tobias Penn-Piers and when the Germans arrived, he left the island. Booker chose not to follow him, so that he could become his own master and the sole owner of Lord Tobias' wine cellar, but his decision could have cost his life as he had Jewish roots and the Germans were giving identity cards that were marked *Juden*. Elizabeth had the prescience to sense that this marking would have ramifications on a future date and she decided to set things right before it was too late. She therefore advised him to impersonate Lord Tobias and got the other islanders to serve as an eye-witness.

She even surmised that the Germans would definitely visit Booker, who was now in the guise of Lord Tobias, and ask him to hand over his palatial house. She thereby trained him to behave like Tobias and drew a portrait of Booker as if he belonged to the sixteenth century, to give the Germans an impression that the portrait belonged to an ancestor of his. This was done to eliminate any vestige of suspicion that might linger in the minds of the Germans, who had an acute sense to smell treachery: "It was a masterly stroke, for, not two weeks later, a body of German officers (six in all) appeared in my library- without knocking. I received them there, sipping a Chateau Margaux 1893 and bearing an uncanny resemblance to the portrait of my 'ancestor' hanging above me over the mantelpiece" (Shaffer and Barrows 81).

Elizabeth was the nurse of an old man, Peter Sawyer. A Jew, who was employed as a Todt worker by the Germans had entered Peter's garden to forage for some food and had fainted out of exhaustion. Peter carried the boy into the kitchen and when Elizabeth visited him the next day, Peter warned her of a danger lurking within the walls of his home and suggested that she should go away if she wanted to stay away from trouble.

Elizabeth however chose to become Peter's accomplice and entered the home and tended to the needs of the Jew, though she was aware that she might end up in the concentration camp if she was caught:

Well, Elizabeth nursed him. There wasn't any medicine but she got bones for broth and real bread on the Black market. I had eggs, and little by little, day by day, he got his strength back. He slept a lot. Sometimes, Elizabeth had to come after dark, before curfew. It wouldn't do for anyone to see her coming to my house too often. People told on their neighbours, you know- trying to curry favour, or food, from the Germans. (Shaffer and Barrows 189)

Somebody reported Peter and Elizabeth and they were both carried away to different camps. Peter was released after a week as he was bound to a wheelchair and they had no use of an old invalid man but Elizabeth was not as lucky as him. Nonetheless, even the camp failed to dampen her spirits and she continued to remain a source of cheerfulness to all those around her, especially Remy, whom she had befriended in the camp. Elizabeth continued to help people even in the concentration camp. She absolved an inmate named Alina, of the blame of having stolen a potato by owning the mistake, as Alina had ulcerated corneas. Had the Germans noticed it, they would have assumed that she was going blind and would have killed her instantly. Elizabeth therefore went to the punishment bunkers for a week to save the life of another person. Elizabeth's philanthropy eventually resulted in her death. She tried to save a girl from being beaten up by an overseer by snatching the rod away and hitting the oppressor. This act turned out to be her final noble deed as she was shot at the back of her head and killed.

Her decision to trash the overseer seemed very rash to everybody, but Elizabeth had the satisfaction of having lived a life dedicated to service and had no regrets while being led to the place where she was to be shot. She bravely marched towards the place unaided and quietly met her end. Nevertheless, she continued to live in the memories of the islanders even after her death, as she had touched so many lives by serving them in every possible way, which is a sign of a great life and Elizabeth had attained that stature in her community.

Dawsey Adams is another important character in the novel, who overcame his feeling of loneliness and boredom by dedicating himself to the welfare of the islanders. He was a shy and taciturn pig farmer who stuttered while speaking, which propelled him to withdraw himself from society. Dawsey had no family and his propensity to remain aloof rendered him friendless. The war only served in adding insult to the injury as he was expected to give his pigs away to the Germans and eat insipid things that were rationed out. Nevertheless, he did not fall prey to the miseries prevailing around him, as he rose to the occasion and made himself indispensable by helping out the islanders. The shy Dawsey who shunned company had thereby metamorphosed into an individual who was constantly sought after.

Towards the end of 1941, salt became unavailable and the only way left was to extract salt by boiling the seawater, but most of the islanders were either malnourished or old to carry out this humongous task. Dawsey volunteered to do this work and thereby employed his time meaningfully by serving others:

That worked well enough for flavour, but there were many older people who couldn't manage the walk into town or haul heavy buckets home.

No one had much strength left for such chores. I have a slight limp from a badly set leg, and though it kept me from army service, it had never been bad enough to bother me. I was very hale and I began to deliver water to some cottages. (Shaffer and Barrows 84)

Another essential commodity that became a rarity during the war was soap. People were allowed to have only one bar of bathing soap for an entire month. However, the soap was of very poor quality and made no lather and thereby served no purpose. Soap powders available for dishes and clothes were rationed too and they were no better than their bathing counterparts. Lack of soaps, resulted in poor hygiene and people had to put up with a grimy existence. This affected the ladies greatly and the crisis was viewed as an assault on their self-esteem. It was Dawsey who came to the rescue yet again. He made soaps for these ladies with his own hands using the minimal resources that were at his disposal:

One day, Mr Scope's pig died of milk fever. Because no one dared eat it, Mr Scope offered me the carcass. I remembered my mother making soap from fat, so I thought I could try it. It came out looking like frozen dishwater and smelling worse. So I melted it all down and started again. Booker, who had come over to help, suggested paprika for colour and cinnamon for scent. Mrs Maugery let us have some of each, and we put it in the mix. (Shaffer and Barrows 70-71)

Dawsey cared for Elizabeth's daughter Christina, Kit being her moniker, with great tenderness. He cared for Elizabeth's daughter despite the fact that the child was an illegitimate one, and he did not view the child as a personified form of moral turpitude or

sever his friendship with Elizabeth on that account. He empathized with Elizabeth as he knew that she did not mean to digress from the moral code of conduct and had planned to marry Christian shortly after the war. Kit's father Christian Heller was a gentleman and despite being a German, his loyalties were not with the oppressors of the islanders. Christian thereby earned the friendship and respect of several people on the island.

Unfortunately, he was killed and the marriage was never to take place. The members of the book society did not hold it against Elizabeth or Kit and loved her like a member of their family. After Elizabeth was taken away to the concentration camp, the entire book society contributed to the safekeeping and upbringing of the child. They were grateful to be of some help to Elizabeth as they considered that they collectively owed a moral debt to Elizabeth for all that she had done to them.

Mrs. Amelia Maugery, an elderly lady is another prominent character who overcame her sufferings and loss in the novel. She was the most respected person on the island. It was in her home that several people who were later to become the members of The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society had congregated for a low-key dinner party. When she managed to rear a pig secretly, she cooked a delicious meal and readily invited several islanders to partake the delicacy at the behest of Elizabeth. She had her own share of troubles as she was a widow and had lost her only son to the war. However, she found the strength to overcome her formidable personal loss by rendering her services to her needy neighbours.

She became indispensable to Elizabeth as Kit was placed under the care of Mrs. Maugery owing to Elizabeth's commitments as a nurse. When Elizabeth was sent to the concentration camp, it was Mrs. Maugery who looked after Kit. Even after Elizabeth's

death, Kit spent most of her time with Mrs.Maugery, though the entire book club took up the responsibility of collectively bringing up their beloved Elizabeth's child.

Mrs.Maugery could easily have sunk into the depths of depression as her only son was killed in the war and she had no relatives to call her own. She had endured all the painful sufferings that war had heaped upon them. Constant exposure to death and destruction has the capacity to take a toll on anyone. Lack of sufficient food and hygiene products was another discomfort that she had to put up with. She however managed to surpass all her troubles as she dedicated her life to serving others instead of focusing on herself and searching for her own happiness.

Food was scarce in the island, however, the islanders were magnanimous enough to give away whatever little they had to the Todt workers as the Germans had reduced them to a mere bag of skin and bones. The sight of the emaciated people being worked to death made their hearts twinge with pain. They tried to assuage themselves by offering what little they had and derived a mild satisfaction from the fact that they were able to be of a little help to the ones who had been terribly wronged:

Most of the slave workers came to the Islands in 1942. They were kept in open sheds, dug-out-tunnels, some of them in houses. They were marched all over the island to their work sites: thin to the bone, dressed in ragged trousers with bare skin showing through, often no coats to protect them from the cold. No shoes or boots, their feet tied up in bloody rags. Young lads, fifteen and sixteen, were so weary and starved they could hardly put one foot in front of another. Guernsey Islanders would stand by their gates to offer them what little food or warm clothing they could spare.

Sometimes the Germans guarding the Todt work columns would let the men break ranks to accept these gifts- other times they would beat them to the ground with rifle butts. (Shaffer and Barrows 93)

Mister Pip is another work set in an island under foreign occupation similar to Guernsey Island. The novel has a powerful character named Mr. Watts, a White man, who carved a niche for himself with his deeds, in an island inhabited by Black people. Mr. Watts was an outsider just like Elizabeth was in Guernsey Island, but both of them played a pivotal role in bringing the islanders together for a common purpose and worked towards the betterment of the islanders. Mr. Watts was the last White man left on the island when everybody else had fled it during the onslaught of the civil war. He thereby decided to teach the children of the island as all the teachers had fled the island as well. Since he did not have any teaching experience, he adopted a unique method of pedagogy.

Mr. Watts invited the family members of his students to the classroom and every single day, the students had a different learning experience. The people who were invited over were not educated and thereby they merely shared their experiences and their observations. The topics were extremely commonplace but gave a new insight and offered a fresh perspective to the ordinary and mundane things. Some of the information shared by the native people were merely a figment of their imagination but Mr. Watts encouraged them nevertheless because he was astute enough to know that a powerful imagination was an asset of great value that allowed an individual to see the world in a refreshingly new light altogether:

‘Today, we have been very lucky. Very lucky. We have received a handy reminder that while we may not know the whole world, we can, if we are

clever enough, make it new. We can make it up with the things we find and see around us. We just have to look and try to be as imaginative as Daniel's grandmother.' He put a hand on the shoulder of the old woman. 'Thank you,' he said. 'Thank you so much.' (Jones 51-52)

Mr. Watts taught them certain basic things that the children required to learn. However, the component which set his teaching methodology apart from others was his decision to read out the novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. He wanted to make a difference in the lives of the children and was happy to be instrumental in bringing in that change. The story that he read out to the children gave them another world to delve in. The children went back home and shared the story with their families too. The parents were thereby curious to know the development of the story as well, and a practice of storytelling was born in island. There were parents who attended the class along with the children to hear the story being read out:

Over and above my own enjoyment I had to listen very carefully because later that night my mum would want an update on Pip. I paid special attention to Mr Watts pronunciation. I liked to surprise my mum with a new word she didn't know. What I didn't know at the time was all of us kids were carrying instalments of *Great Expectations* back to our families. (Jones 27)

Mr. Watts played a pivotal role in educating the children of the island, who in turn shared their experiences with their families. He thereby gave a respite to the islanders during those troubled times. The person who was most profoundly influenced by Mr. Watts was Matilda. She owed everything in her life to Mr. Watts and it was he, who

played the role of the powdered keg that set the fire to acquire knowledge burning in her forever. When she joined her father back in Australia, she devoted herself to learning, but was partial to the books authored by Charles Dickens. She devoured all the books written by Dickens after she recommenced her education in Australia. Her knowledge of the English language and literature was fortified by her partiality to the oeuvre of Dickens and she began to excel in her studies in a new country despite the break in her formal education.

The redskins had burnt down the houses along with the belongings of the entire island. The islanders thus had to live like aborigines without a decent shelter, an additional pair of clothes or a larder. However, Matilda kept her mind entertained with the story of *Great Expectations* and that is when realization dawned upon her that nobody on earth had the power to destroy a person's imagination and inner life and she considered herself indebted to Mr. Watts for having introduced that to her:

At another time, all this talk of rooms and voices might have confused us. But the loss of our houses helped us to understand that what they had kept safe was more than our possessions; our houses had concealed our selves that no one else saw when we lay on our sleeping mats at night. Now Mr Watts had given us all another room to lounge around in. The next stage was to furnish it. (Jones 108)

Mr. Watts returned to the classroom to teach the children even after the islanders had burned down his home and belongings. He did not bear any animosity towards them, as he empathized with their loss and understood that they had merely given a vent to their pain. By his forbearance, he taught Matilda what it meant to be a gentleman. Matilda was thereby able to forgive her mother and empathize with her for having hidden the book

and being instrumental in the unleashing of a monumental destruction, as her character was now being moulded by her observation of Mr. Watts and his slightly improvised version of the fictitious character Pip.

Mr. Watts therefore was a prototype of a gentleman and he presented himself as an example of how one ought to conduct oneself during trying times. He continued teaching the children even after he lost his wife, who was the reason behind his decision to stay back in the island and be the last White man on it. Even after the spate of miseries that battered him, he refused to be cowed down by them: "I wasn't sure how long Mr Watts' mourning would last. Some of us worried that he would not come out of his house again—that, like Miss Havisham, he would become stuck. So it was a surprise, three days later, when Mr Watts sent Gilbert to find me and ask why I wasn't in school" (Jones 126).

He proved that he was not Miss Havisham of *Great Expectations*, who was unable to digest the fact that she was jilted at the altar. She was so affected by the tragedy that she did not stop with merely reminiscing about it, but went to the extent of maintaining her environment in a way that would suit her mental agony. Everything about her was therefore arranged in a fashion to remind her of the day she was set to tie the knot. The clock was stopped at the time the incident occurred and cobwebs had gathered around it. Her wedding cake still found a place on the dining table and she continued to wear her wedding gown forever.

Mr. Watts taught by example that the key difference between him and Miss Havisham laid in his decision to carry out his responsibilities as before whereas, Miss Havisham chose to abandon everything and obsess herself with what had passed.

Matilda unconsciously ingrained this trait of Mr. Watts and applied it in her own life when her mother was killed.

Mr. Watts encouraged the children to recreate the lost book, instead of mourning over its loss. The minds of the children thereby became a beehive of activity and there was no place in it for depressing, mournful thoughts. Most of the children who had heard the story conjured up the events of the story from their memories and set about to compile them. This task engrossed them to such an extent that they became oblivious to all the sufferings that accompanied the loss of their homes. The lonely hours at night were spent in recollecting excerpts from the novel *Great Expectations* which left them with practically no time to focus on the unfortunate circumstances that life had thrust upon them. The desire to accomplish the task at hand was so overpowering that their inner life became a treasure trove and they turned a blind eye to all the extraneous discomforts. They thereby discovered that every human had an innate ability to overcome the horrors meted out on him by unleashing the creativity lying dormant within.

Mr. Watts had thereby saved a lot of young minds from getting brutalized by all the hardships that they were being exposed to. He prevented quite a good number of them from going wayward and joining the rebels as he had managed to hook them on to his stories, and challenged them with the task of recreating their own version of the renowned classic *Great Expectations*. Every man has a proclivity to engage in challenging tasks and it is the desire to achieve and attain something that makes life worth living. In his book *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* (1978), Frankl has stated that boredom is more complicated than it appears to be as it promotes addiction, causes depression and fosters the development of suicidal tendencies: "In fact, if an individual is not challenged by any tasks to complete,

is *spared* the specific tension aroused by such tasks, a certain type of neurosis- noogenic neurosis- may ensue” (95).

Mr.Watts took up the task of taming the rambos, or the rebels, who had returned to the island. The rambos had become extremely brutalized by constant exposure to violence and were creating havoc in the island. They partied noisily all night and people feared for their safety as they might invite trouble in a state of intoxication. It was Mr.Watts, who engaged them with a story every night and the whole island congregated to hear him out, because he had promised them to tell a story about his life. However, he did not stick to the real details and improvised it a lot to concoct an engaging tale and thereby managed to keep his audience spellbound and enabled them to pass the night peacefully.

Dedicating himself to the task of educating the children of the island was what made living seem bearable to Mr.Watts in an island, where he was a complete outsider. He got accepted and was respected for the noble task he had undertaken in the bargain. The full extent of what Mr.Watts had done for the children of the island dawned on Matilda at a later point in time, when she tried to read *Great Expectations* on her own:

It was more wordy than I remembered. Much more wordy, and more difficult. But for the names I recognized on the pages I might have been reading a different book. Then an unpleasant truth dawned on me. Mr Watts had read a different version to us kids. A simpler version. He’s stuck to the bare bones of *Great Expectations*, and he’d straightened out sentences, adlibbed in fact, to help us arrive at a more definite place in our heads. Mr Watts had rewritten Mr Dickens’ masterwork. (Jones 193)

After the murder of Mr. Watts and her mother, Matilda was sent to live with her father in Australia and she got the opportunity to begin living her life afresh. She engrossed herself in the oeuvre of Dickens throughout her life as a student and had always experienced a strong urge to make others read the novel and experience the magic wielded by the book. Nonetheless, she managed to restrain herself fearing that not everybody would be able to appreciate it as she had, and thereby did not thrust it upon anyone. The opportunity to share the love for her book with others presented itself when Matilda worked as a relief teacher for a while and it was in her class that she read *Great Expectations* aloud to the students.

Finally, Matilda took the remarkable step to commemorate her favourite author and his works. She began her thesis on the works of the great writer belonging to the nineteenth century England, who had managed to alter the lives of children in a faraway island by penning a great novel with a universal theme. She felt that it was her only way to pay a small tribute to him, whose work had offered her a refuge during the tumultuous period of civil war in the island. Matilda also decided not to repeat the mistake committed by Pip and return to her island instead, in order to be of some service to the society and people whom she owed a lot.

Similarly, the character of Aaliya Saleh in the novel *An Unnecessary Woman* is also a powerful depiction of a lonely woman's battle against all odds heaped upon her. The novel delineates how Aaliya managed to lead a meaningful existence, battling against all odds. Death of a parent, divorce, poverty, social isolation and war are considered to be traumatic events that take a toll on the mental health of an individual. Aaliya had endured all of this with stoic courage owing to the way in which she managed her activities and thoughts. She might not appear to be an accomplished woman if her external

circumstances are taken into consideration. Nonetheless, she led a rich inner life and bore all her misfortunes with exemplary fortitude owing to the tasks she busied herself with.

Aaliya lost her father early in her life and her mother was married away to her father's brother. She became deprived of her mother's love as her mother dedicated herself entirely to her new husband and their sons, rendering her an unwanted daughter. Her uncle, who was now her step-father was a kind man, but he did not care to spare his attention towards the children and she was largely ignored during her entire childhood.

She was then married off at the age of sixteen to a man with whom she had no compatibility, and was divorced four years later, rendering her an unwanted wife. A divorcee was definitely a disagreeable member in a patriarchal, conservative society and was looked upon with contempt. However Aaliya remained unperturbed and bore the situation with tremendous equanimity and she, as a matter of fact, felt relieved that she did not have to put up with the sham that her marriage was, anymore. She worked to purge the house of every vestige that would remind her of her husband so that she could begin her life afresh.

No emotional or moral support came her way after her divorce. Instead she was being pressurized to vacate the house she was occupying, both by her husband's family as well as her own. It was her mother and brothers who were more stubborn and insistent that she swap her spacious flat with the cubbyhole they lived in, as a single woman would not require a spacious home. However, Aaliya did not relent and she thereby earned the wrath of her family and they stopped communicating with her altogether but did not stop harassing her about the flat.

During these challenging times, she engrossed herself with a creative work that demanded all her time and required her to engage all her mental faculties. She was adept

in Arabic, French and English and thereby decided to translate books written in French into Arabic. She had no plans to publish it as she neither craved for recognition nor monetary gains. She pursued the task nevertheless for the sheer joy that was involved in the process of carrying out the work, which she valued more than the end result. She undertook the prodigious task of translating one novel a year, which not only kept her busy round the clock but also gave her a feeling of satisfaction and boosted her sense of self-worth:

At the end of the year, before I begin a new project, I read the translation I've completed. I do minor final corrections, set the pages in order, and place them in the box. This is part of the ritual, which includes imbibing two glasses of red wine. I'll also admit that the last reading allows me to pat myself on the back, to congratulate myself on completing the project.

(Alameddine 3)

She managed to find work in a bookshop in order to make her ends meet and found happiness in her job amongst the books. She was offered the job with great reluctance as the owner had believed that someone with more experience and more class would be a preferable choice to be the face of the bookstore. She was then offered a temporary job till one of the older employees turned up. However, none of them came to reclaim their job and it was Aaliya who became the face of the bookstore for fifty years: "Yet of all things, the flint that sparked a flame in my soul was the huge, darkly desk where the owner sat. To a practically penniless twenty-year old divorcee, sitting behind such a desk seemed so grand, so luxurious- something to aspire to. I needed grandeur in my life" (Alameddine 22-23).

The happiness she experienced while working in the bookstore was not an unadulterated one, as Beirut was in the grip of Civil War and the possibility of an imminent death always lingered near. Even a simple mundane task like bathing turned into a luxury as water became a scarcity during the war. There was also the constant fear of thieves breaking into the house and thereby, Aaliya procured an AK-47 and slept by its side, in order to defend herself from marauders.

Aaliya admitted that the goal she had set for herself filled her with the zest for life. To steer clear of a state of boredom, Aaliya herself chose a laborious task but it was a labour of love and she eagerly looked forward to the arrival of another year, so that she could pick up a new book and carry on with her assignment:

Tonight I feel alive-blue hair and red wine alive. The end of the year approaches, the beginning of a new year. The year is dead. Long live the year! I will begin my next project. This is the time that excites me most. I pay no attention to the Christmas decorations that burst into fruitful life in various neighborhoods of my city, or the lights welcoming the New Year. This year, Ashura falls at almost the same time, but I don't care.
(Alameddine 5)

Aaliya delineated her relation with the work she had undertaken by saying that she did not nurture ambitions of making herself renowned. The only reward she expected to reap out of her work was the pleasure that ensued from it. She cherished her work and did not care to subject it to the critical world. However, she did not work on it in a haphazard fashion just because it was not intended for publication. She translated each and every word unlike popular translators, who skipped words or paragraphs they were

uncomfortable with. By doing so, Aaliya made an attempt to challenge herself and it is this trait of hers, which proved to be invaluable in evading a state of existential vacuum:

Let me come out and state this, in case you haven't deduced it yet: I have never published. Once I finish a project, once the rituals of the end are completed, I inter the papers in a box and the box in the bathroom. Putting the project away has become part of the ritual. When I finish my final edit, I lay my manuscript aside for a few days, then read the whole thing one last time. If it is acceptable, I place it in its box, which I tape shut, hoping the seal is airtight, and attach the original books to the outside for easy reference. (Alameddine 106-7)

After the death of her boss, his family closed the bookstore and Aaliya had to retire. She was given the oak desk that she had admired in her youth and occupied for half a century as a gift. Retirement generally acts as a huge blow as it generates a feeling of being unwanted. People who were accustomed to going out and accomplishing a work throughout their adult life are rendered jobless. Retirement is thereby viewed as a period that can deteriorate a person's mental health and self-worth as retired people view themselves as an unnecessary appendix to their family and society. The feeling of accomplishment which had acted as a reward all their lives is suddenly seized away and many succumb to depression as a result. Aaliya however showcased exponential mettle during this stage in her life and decided to occupy her time by translating works and meditated on the wonderful feeling of security that her creative activity would endow her with:

How safe I will feel once I begin my translation, how sheltered, seated at this desk in the dark night, as Sebald as Jacques Austerlitz described,

seated at this desk “watching the tip of my pencil in the lamplight following its shadow, as if of its own accord and with perfect fidelity... from left to right”- right to left in my case- “line by line, over the ruled paper.” (Alameddine 24)

The next novel *The Book Thief* depicts an assortment of characters who make their lives meaningful by reaching out to those in dire circumstances and helping them out. Mrs. Rosa Hubermann, who was Liesel’s foster mother, lacked the skill of endearment and therefore came across as rather brusque. The girl who had lost her brother and was separated from her mother was not cajoled or petted, but ordered into the house. Liesel was filled with dread and it was her foster father Hans Hubermann, who made her feel welcome in her new home. The couple Rosa and Hans had children of their own who were grown up and lived away from home. Moreover, the family was steeped in penury. Nevertheless, they decided to adopt Liesel during times of adverse hardships which turned out to be a blessing for Liesel as well as her benefactors. Rosa and Hans got a young child in their household, who would serve as a reason for them to carry on with their lives. They also attained the satisfaction of having given a secure childhood to a girl whose mother had been taken away to the concentration camp.

The importance of being involved in a task has been asserted upon in Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. He has cited the example of people who were unemployed and stated that the people without a job always used to view unemployment as tantamount to being worthless. He used the term ‘unemployment neurosis’ to describe this phenomenon. Frankl advised them to volunteer their services for the betterment of the society and they immediately obliged. A remarkable change could be observed in

their behaviour after they had carried out the allotted tasks. Though, there was no monetary benefit whatsoever and their financial circumstances were as strained as before, yet, a feeling of positivity and exuberance replaced the initial feelings of helplessness and hopelessness (142).

The Hubermann family also engaged themselves in tasks, not only to earn but also to be of some service to the society. During the war, everything was rationed. Moreover, Hans was poor and the family lived a hand to mouth existence. Rosa used to do the laundry of the affluent people to earn money. Hans was a painter but did not receive many offers as he had refused to enlist himself as a member of the Nazi Party for a long time and then, when he finally caved in to the pressure due to lack of jobs, he did so with reluctance. However, he was not allowed to join because he used to help the Jews. Hans had once painted the slurs scribbled on the walls of a Jew and the Nazis had taken a note of it. The denial of a membership forced Hans to suffer in poverty, but that did not prevent him from being humane towards the Jews.

During Christmas, Hans ensured that Liesel got her present and he gifted her two books because he knew that Liesel was an avid lover of books. He had managed to purchase the books by selling the cigarettes he loved the most. The next noble yet pernicious deed done by Hans was to give asylum to Max Vandenburg, a Jew. Hans was the friend of Max's father and he felt that he owed his life to him, as he had been instrumental in preventing him from going to the battlefield on a day, when almost everybody who went were killed. Hans had promised Max's mother to help the family whenever the need arose. Max thereby sought shelter in Hans' home, as Jews were being persecuted all over Germany. Hans hid him in the basement and both Rosa and Hans ensured that they took care of him despite

the possible danger of being sent to the concentration camp if Max was discovered.

The couple now had two extra mouths to feed, when both of them did not have jobs and had embraced jeopardy unflinchingly to keep up a promise and to repay the moral debt Hans owed to his friend.

When air raids commenced, the windows had to be painted in black to prevent even a streak of light from escaping. Despite being placed under an unofficial ban, people flocked to Hans with requests to paint their windows. Black paint was however not available but Hans was an expert at his work. He began to improvise and mix hues or ingredients together and proceeded to paint the windows. There were a lot of poor people who would also request Hans to paint their windows. Despite being poor himself and not having enough paint left, he would not turn down their requests and conjure up some concoction and paint their windows for something trivial in exchange. He made himself indispensable as a painter not just with his skills and innate talent, but also with his kindness towards the poor, despite being no better than them financially:

‘Tomorrow’, he’d promise, ‘first thing’, and when the next morning dawned, there he was, painting those blinds for nothing, or for a biscuit or a warm cup of tea. The previous evening, he’d have found another way to turn blue or green or beige into black. Never did he tell them to cover their windows with spare blankets, for he knew they’d need them when winter came. He was even known to have painted people’s blinds for half a cigarette, sitting on the front step of a house, sharing a smoke with the occupant. Laughter and smoke rose out of the conversation before they moved on, to the next job. (Zusak 363)

Hans is a portrayal of the immense potential lying dormant in every human being, irrespective of the circumstances he is placed in. Empty nest, poverty and war were the challenges that Hans had to face. People in his neighbourhood, facing similar situations were disillusioned with life. Ilsa Hermann, the wife of the mayor of the city, who had lost her son, was never able to recover from the shock. She was reduced to a walking corpse and carried on mechanically with her life. Another neighbour named Frau Holtzapfel, lost all the zest for life after she lost one of her sons in the war. It did not occur to her to bounce back to normalcy for her other son. Even after the bombings began, she had to be entreated to leave her home and come to the basement, as she had no desire to save herself and carry on with her life. Nevertheless, her son desired to live and he went to the basement all by himself which later made him succumb to guilt. Finally, unable to overcome his guilt, he committed suicide. This was another cruel blow to Frau Holtzapfel and she did nothing but await the arrival of her death from then on.

Hans, however, managed the situation in an entirely different way from the others. He adopted a girl and thereby enriched both Liesel's life as well as that of his own. Despite being unofficially ostracized, he continued to add value to both his life and the lives of people around him with small acts of kindness. His life is a proof to the fact that a man's desire to live a meaningful life surpasses his desires for material pleasures. The rich mayor's wife could never find solace in her wealth or position as she had built a cocoon around herself with her problems and ended up making her life miserable. Hans, on the other hand, dedicated himself to the welfare of humanity, and continued living a meaningful life despite being in a far worse situation.

Max Vandenburg, who was a Jew hiding in the basement also realized the importance of being involved in some task to employ his free time. He began exercising in order to distract himself and keep his body warm and fit, as the basement was a cold place and he had no access to the sunlight. Despite being bereft of health, money and freedom, he had a strong desire to give Liesel a present on her birthday. The only book he owned was *Mein Kampf* and he did not want to corrupt Liesel's impressionable young mind with any propaganda material. He therefore tore off the pages from the book, painted them white, stuck the pages together and wrote a story on it and presented it to Liesel. He thereby invested his time doing something special for Liesel and in the process of doing so, he had let his own creative juices flow. It was a story about the time that Liesel and Max spent together, and was a piece to commemorate her, who was his source of inspiration and strength.

Max is another prominent example of the latent powers present in every man. Despite having nothing to look forward to, he managed to make every single day worth living. He exercised to keep his body fit, fantasized to keep his mind lively and remained in touch with the outer world by asking Liesel to describe what she had seen. He busied himself writing stories for Liesel and thereby added value to his life by bringing her joy. His life is another proof to the fact that man adds value and meaning to his life only by being of service to others. A self-centered approach to life will only suck out all the zest and no amount of wealth and comfort would be able to make amends for it.

Liesel, the protagonist, was a sprightly young girl who was the apple of her papa's eyes. She used to read with him, accompany him on his painting expeditions and even learnt to play the accordion. During the initial days of her arrival she used to go along

with Rosa to fetch the laundry and later on, she used to go on her own. Thus, the girl was always steeped in some activity or the other, which prevented her from being plagued with depressing memories of the past.

When Max contracted an illness which seemed to be of a very grave nature, Liesel helped her foster parents nurse him. She began reading out aloud near his bedside two or three times a day, as if words had curative properties. She decided to indulge in some task or the other assuming that her actions would be of some help to Max. Liesel's decision had prevented her from getting paranoid about the consequences that would follow, if Max failed to recover and died.

Liesel desperately wanted to buy some gifts for Max but her financial condition prevented her from buying anything for him. She wanted to give him something as soon as he recovered from the illness and opened his eyes. She felt that it was essential to do this, in order to make him feel loved and accepted. She wanted to prevent Max from thinking that he was a millstone around their necks or a source of perennial hardship for the family. Liesel construed that the gifts might make the affection the family harboured in their hearts for him, more conspicuous and he might not believe that he was an undesired appendage. She thereby decided to collect trivia that had been discarded or lost by others, so that she would have a decent collection of presents for Max:

Whenever she walked to and from school now, Liesel was on the lookout for discarded items that might be valuable to a dying man. She wondered at first why it mattered so much. How could something so seemingly insignificant give comfort to someone? A ribbon in a gutter. A pine cone on the street. A button leaning casually against a classroom wall. A flat round stone from the

river. if nothing else, it showed that she cared, and it might give them something to talk about when Max woke up. (Zusak 329-30)

When cities were attacked with bombs, people took refuge in the basements marked out by the government. The atmosphere was saturated with fear and uncertainty as people huddled together, waiting for the attack to be over and the wailing children only aggravated the miserable situation. Liesel decided to unleash the magic of words at this juncture, and the children were instantly pacified. The elders were also caught in the spell of the soothing words and the situation they were trapped in was momentarily forgotten as they were transported to an altogether different world. Liesel read to the gathering during every attack and the people eagerly lapped up every word of the story.

She was then invited by Frau Holtzapfel to her home, in order to continue reading the rest of the story and offered to give her some ration in exchange for the trouble. She thereby started going to Holtzapfel's house despite finding it as an exhausting ordeal, just to please her mom and earn some food for the family. However, she soon began empathizing with the old woman's plight, after the death of her son. Liesel realized that she was the only human visiting her and the story that she read out, was the only solace that was available to Frau Holtzapfel at that point in time, though it did not seem to visibly uplift her mood. However, Liesel derived the satisfaction of being a companion and the sole visitor of a lonely, desolate woman. Even when Frau Holtzapfel's son Michael committed suicide, Liesel was present to read to the bereaved mourners:

Later, when the lives of her foster parents, her only friend Rudy and her beloved neighbours were claimed in a bomb attack that ravaged Himmel street, Liesel managed to retain her sanity and cope with the situation by involving herself in some work or the

other: “When the war was over and Hitler had delivered himself to my arms, Alex Steiner resumed work in his tailor shop. There was no money in it, but he busied himself there for a few hours each day, and Liesel often accompanied him” (Zusak 552).

Liesel is portrayed as a nine year old girl at the beginning of the novel. She experienced numerous sufferings at a very early stage in life. However, she did not fall prey to the challenges thrown at her by life. Her journey from being a victim to emerging as a victor has been crafted out and she stands out as a source of inspiration to people with a traumatic childhood. She started out as a girl having atrocious nightmares of her dead brother. However, the trajectory of her growth as she got older was commendable. She became the sole companion of lonely women like Ilsa Hermann and Frau Holtzapfel. She turned into a provider of solace to the people in the basement during a bomb raid. She extended a hand of friendship to a lonely ostracized Jew and made him feel wanted.

After having lost everyone dear to her for a second time at the age of thirteen, she coped up with the loss by reading, writing and helping her neighbour Alex Steiner in his shop. She thereby became adept in the art of living a meaningful life as she had inadvertently discovered that a person’s life becomes worth living when it is dedicated to a task that makes others’ lives better. Between reading and helping others, she had managed to set an example for mankind that is still battling existential anxiety or searching for a meaning in life.

The next novel *Of Human Bondage* focuses on the life of Philip Carey. Unlike the characters portrayed in the novels analysed so far, Philip had to struggle to identify the task that added worth to his life. He was orphaned at an early age and was under the care of his paternal uncle and aunt. He had a club-foot which was a source of great distress to

him. To add insult to the injury, he was constantly bullied at school. He thereby developed a deep-seated hatred for everything around him and wanted to go abroad to start life afresh.

Philip developed a keen interest to learn German and he left for Germany. He read voraciously and took up several courses to advance his knowledge. He once offered monetary assistance to his teacher who was extremely poor and experienced the satisfaction of being charitable. It was precisely at that point in time that realization of being blessed with a good life dawned upon him. All his life, he believed that life had treated him unfairly, as he was orphaned and had a deformity. However, when he met the poor teacher who lived a hand to mouth existence, he realized that there were far more grievous troubles than the ones life had laden him with and he was grateful for the first time in life:

He was so young, he did not realize how much less is the sense of obligation in those who receive favours than in those who grant them.

Monsieur Ducroz appeared again five or six days later. He tottered a little more and was very weak, but seemed to have overcome the severity of the attack... 'If it hadn't been for the money you gave me I should have starved. It was all I had to live on.' (Maugham 113)

It was in Germany that he lost faith in his religion. Philip then, wisely chose to practice the moral values prescribed in the tenets of his faith and thereby, remained unaffected during the strenuous period of loss of faith. He realized that every man's faith depended on the society he was a part of and therefore it would be improper to think that others are heading towards ruin. He thereby, released himself from the shackles of

religious propriety imbibed in his childhood by his uncle, which was the perennial source of his fears. He retained only the virtues, the most important aspect being the one that asked man to be of service to mankind and resolved to adhere to it.

After his trip to Germany and the changes he experienced pertaining to his religious beliefs, there was no question of his trying to get ordained. He then tried his luck as a clerk and later on, as a painter. Both the vocations failed to strike a cord with him. When he revealed his intentions to his uncle, he was extremely disappointed as he felt that Philip was behaving frivolously and he would amount to nothing if he continued in this fashion. He pointed out that a deformed person had limited career choices and he should learn to be more perseverant. However, Philip was not disheartened with his uncle's jibes, as he learnt from experience that people referred to his deformity whenever they were angry with him and it was a trick used by others to have the last word in the argument. He thereby exercised restraint and did not allow any of these snide remarks to weaken his resolve. He carefully pondered over the career options that would give him a sense of freedom alongside being meaningful. However, it was by accident that he stumbled upon the conclusion of his search and settled for the medical profession:

He had thought of doctoring among other things, chiefly because it was an occupation which seemed to give a good deal of personal freedom, and his experience of life in an office had made him determine never to have anything more to do with one; his answer to the Vicar slipped out almost unawares, because it was in the nature of a repartee. It amused him to make up his mind in that accidental way, and he resolved then and there to enter his father's hospital in the autumn. (Maugham 295)

Armed with a newfound purpose, Philip was almost impatient to begin his life afresh. He was desperate to act after having spent a considerable amount of time introspecting and reading different philosophical works. He desired to practice the theories he had learnt thus far and believed that his wisdom would enable him to lead a life filled with purpose. The boy who had hitherto waded across life and scuttled between professions was on the outlook of a life filled with purpose: “And so, on the last day of September, eager to put into practice all these new theories of life, Philip, with sixteen hundred pounds and his club-foot, set out for the second time to London to make his third start in life” (Maugham 310).

Philip found the course tedious but had a strong feeling that this was his calling and therefore never wavered from his decision despite numerous crippling challenges that came his way before the completion of his studies. A waitress name Mildred had a great sway over his feelings and the love he felt for her only made him more miserable as she was cold-hearted and calculative. Mildred was in love with a German named Miller, who was already married and went away to live with him after having spurned the love of Philip. Mildred was aware that life with Philip would be filled with drudgery and poverty till he completed his studies, for which she would have to wait for a very long time and she preferred Miller over Philip believing that he would provide her with all the comforts that she sought in life.

However, when Mildred became pregnant, Miller forsook her and Mildred turned to Philip for help. Despite her cruel treatment in the past, Philip arranged for her lodgings and offered her monetary assistance during the most difficult and lonely phase of Mildred's life. After the child was born, Mildred wanted to send it away to someone who

could babysit it, as she wanted to search for work and did not want the child to be a hindrance in her career. Philip saw to it that the child was deposited in safe hands though it meant shelling out more money.

Mildred's entry into his life for a second time turned him into a new leaf. He became more attentive towards his studies as he did not want to fail and cut a sorry figure in her presence. He began performing better in his examinations as he found a renewed interest in his pursuit and he owed it all to Mildred's arrival, as she was responsible for the happy state he was in. His kindness to Mildred and her child was doing more good to him than he realized.

Mildred however repaid his kindness with treachery. She revealed that she loved his friend and was with Philip only for the financial support that he was offering her. This was another blow to Philip but this time, he was more in control of how he handled the situation. He did not let this incident disrupt his life and though he turned poor after all his charity, he managed his financial affairs prudently, by shifting to cheaper lodgings and maintaining a spartan existence. He devoted his attention in bettering his medical knowledge and began learning new subjects and putting his knowledge into practice. His shoddy approach to learning was a thing of the past and he started attending lectures earnestly.

Ample opportunities were available to serve humanity in the medical profession and he thoroughly enjoyed his work as numerous helpless patients used to surrender themselves to him and he was in a position to treat them and change them into a better state: "He found the work of absorbing interest. There was humanity there in the rough, the materials the artist worked on; and Philip felt a curious thrill when it occurred to him

that he was in the position of the artist and the patients were like clay in his hands”
(Maugham 466).

Philip also took the trouble to nurse his friend Cronshaw personally. Cronshaw was wasting away due to ill-health and was in a state of indigence. Though Philip did not fare any better than him economically, he decided to tend to him till he recuperated. His benevolence had many unpleasant ramifications as Cronshaw was a very troublesome and irritable patient. However, Philip empathized with him and attributed his misbehaviour to the agony he was undergoing. Cronshaw eventually succumbed to his illness and the funeral expenses were also borne by Philip.

Life was back to normal after Cronshaw’s death and Philip was enjoying a wonderful life with a good career and it was precisely at this time that Mildred reappeared into his life. Philip found her on the streets, smiling at men and with a rude shock, he realized that she had turned into a harlot to make her ends meet. Despite all the betrayals in the past, he decided to accommodate her to save her and the child from the wretched life that she had begun to lead. He did not experience the same passion for her anymore and his offer to help her came with no expectations.

Philip was not in a position to spare even an extra penny, but found it revolting to think about being economical when someone he knew was undergoing such degradation. He thereby asked her to move into his lodging along with her child and occupy the spare room. In return, he expected her to cook and clean for him and decided to relieve the woman who had been appointed to do that hitherto, from her service: “I don’t want you to mistake me. I’m just giving you a room which doesn’t cost me anything and your food. I don’t expect anything more than that you should do exactly the same as the woman I

have in does. Except for that I don't want anything from you at all. I daresay you can cook well enough for that'" (Maugham 521).

Mildred was initially grateful, as she got food and shelter and did not have to worry about anything anymore. However, she gradually began to return to her old ways and she told her neighbours that she was married to Philip. Mildred was extremely confident that she still had considerable power over Philip and he would sooner or later come groveling to her and it was just a matter of time. However, when she realized that Philip was a changed man and was only being charitable towards her, she was scared out of her wits thinking of her future and began to insist that he should marry her. When Philip singularly dismissed the idea, she abused him in the vilest possible language and when Philip left for work the next day, she destroyed all his belongings and left his home forever.

Philip who was already poor was now bereft of furniture and other household articles too. He changed his lodgings and carried only a few clothes which Mildred had thankfully overlooked and a box full of books. After this ultimate betrayal and display of her ingrate nature, he plunged into his work with additional fervour and it gave him immense pleasure to be of some service to his patients. He was loved by them for his gentleness in dealing with them and he was one of the rare doctors who did not treat the patients in a perfunctory fashion: "Philip was a favourite with the patients; he treated them good-humouredly; and he had gentle, sensitive hands which did not hurt them: some of the dressers were a little rough and happy-go-lucky in their methods" (Maugham 563).

Philip had invested all the money in his possession in buying stocks and it was exactly at that time that the war began and showed no signs of ending. The stock markets crashed and he became insolvent. He was in such dire circumstances that he was unable

to purchase food or pay rent and thereby began living on the streets. He wrote to his uncle requesting for some money as a loan but he flatly refused to lend him anything and all he received was some homily. It was at the house of the Athelnys that he found food and shelter. Athelny also tried to fetch him a job as lack of funds had forced Philip to discontinue his education temporarily and Athelny himself was not affluent enough to support Philip.

He found employment in an apparel shop as a salesman. The work was beneath the dignity of a person of his education and class but he took it up nonetheless as jobs were scarce during the war and he lacked the requisite resources to make ends meet. It was here that his artistic pursuit in Paris came in handy. He got an opportunity to design a costume for a customer and the design was well appreciated though he was deprived of all the credit that was due to him. However, such trivial things ceased to bother Philip anymore and he revelled in the beauty of his creation. He was eventually given the job of a designer and the opportunity to sketch presented itself once again alongside providing him with a livelihood: "The work was put in hand at once, and Philip felt quite a thrill of satisfaction when he saw the costume completed. The buyer and Mrs Hodges took all the credit of it; but he did not care, and when he went with them to the Tivoli to see Miss Antonia wear it for the first time he was filled with elation" (Maugham 619).

Philip was approached once again by Mildred and this time she wrote him a letter asking him to meet her. Philip was neither able to resist the invitation, nor able to quell his curiosity and thereby set off to meet her. She asked him to diagnose her for a sickness that ailed her and to his horror, he realized that she was suffering from a sexually transmissible disease. He advised her to give up her horrendous profession as she would

put others in danger too. However, when he realized that she was in no mood to pay heed to his words, he left the place and that was the last time he ever met Mildred, the woman who had so greatly affected his life.

After the death of his uncle, he inherited the money of the dead relative and his financial condition improved. He was finally able to complete his studies and begin his practice as a doctor and spend the rest of his life in the service of humanity. Philip thereby managed to bring his life on track and did not squander it like many of his friends because he had realized that the secret to living a perfect life is to carry out the tasks that life offers from time to time effectively and revel in the companionship of a family:

He thought of his desire to make a design, intricate and beautiful, out of the myriad, meaningless facts of life: had he not seen also that the simplest pattern, that in which a man was born, worked, married, had children, and died, was likewise the most perfect? It might be that to surrender to happiness was to accept defeat, but it was a defeat better than many victories. (Maugham 711)

This chapter has elucidated the importance of indulging in an activity or dedicating one's life for the betterment of loved ones or the community at large, which would eventually make the life of the individual more meaningful. An analysis of the lives of the character has revealed the fact that no problem is mighty enough to destroy the spirit of man. The hurdles and challenges thrown by life might vary according to the individual, but the truth that every life has a meaning is universal. Irrespective of the circumstance man is placed in, if he chooses to participate in life instead of being a

passive spectator waiting for the meaning to dawn upon him, he would be able to unravel the meaning of life.

The forthcoming chapter would offer an insight into the importance of nurturing valuable relationships and the role it essays in adding meaning to one's life. It would also make an attempt to highlight the impact that love, friendship and beauty has on the human mind and soul.