

On Guard

Evelyn Waugh is regarded as one of the finest prose satirists of the 20th century literature. His satirical writings on the foibles of contemporary society have the sting of wasp interwoven with a tinge of humour. In Waugh's world anything may happen. There are few writers of his calibre whose imaginations can run with such lunatic logic.

On Guard is the amusing study of an odd society seen through the eyes of a dog. From the very beginning, Waugh establishes an immediate rapport with his reader. "Millicent Blade had a natural head of notably beautiful hair." This is his style: crisp, comic and economic with a penchant for humour.

Hector fell in love with Millicent but had to leave for Kenya to hunt his fortune. Millicent was never serious about her relationships, so before leaving, Hector left her with a puppy. The dog carried the same name as Hector. Hector hoped that the dog would remind her of him in his absence. Millicent's remarkable nose brought her many admirers, but no one could cross the hurdle named Hector. The dog managed to drive them all away from her presence.

However, Hector could never return from Kenya as fortune kept eluding him. The story narrates some hilarious episodes where Hector with his sharp 'dog sense' protects the lady until Alexander arrives on the scene. Even for Hector he is a tough nut to crack. But the story ends with a checkmate situation: Millicent continues her life as an ageing spinster; Hector as a last measure did something that put a final curtain on her dreams of a romantic married life - he robs her of the most attractive part of her face: he bites her pretty nose off.

By the time Waugh closes, he leaves the impression of a comic artist with a tragic sense of reality. Poor Hector kept chasing a dream that he could never realise, whereas Hector the dog remained on guard protecting Millicent vigorously from the onslaught of her suitors. No one gains anything till the end except the guard on duty.