



CLASS X

ADDITIONAL ENGLISH

CHAPTER 4 – AFTER 20 YEARS

O. HENRY

NOTES

SUMMARY

“After Twenty Years” is a short story by O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter. He made a name for himself with his unexpected ‘twist’ endings which became his trademark.

O. Henry’s “After Twenty Years” tells the story of Jimmy and Bob, two childhood friends who made a pact to meet up after twenty years. Jimmy Wells and Bob were raised in New York City and grew up as very close friends. As young adults, their paths diverged when Bob moved to the West to make his fortune and Jimmy stayed in New York. Before they parted, Bob and Jimmy made an agreement to meet in twenty years’ time at the restaurant owned by Big Joe Brady where they last saw each other. After twenty years have passed, Bob is waiting for Jimmy at the appointed time and location. There, a policeman on patrol walks up and asks Bob what he is doing. He explains that he is waiting to meet an old friend and tells the policeman his story. Bob boasts of how well he has fared and tells that he has no doubt that Jimmy will show up though they are not in touch for a few years. The policeman departs and offers his hope that Jimmy shows up.

Later, a tall man claiming to be Jimmy arrives. And as they walk into the lighted area Bob discovers that this is not the same Jimmy he knew because twenty years cannot change a man’s nose. The man reveals himself to be a plainclothes policeman who arrests Bob. Before going to the police station, he gives Bob a letter from a policeman named Wells. After reading the letter Bob realizes that the policeman he met earlier was in fact Jimmy Wells. In the letter, Jimmy explains that when he arrived at the designated location and realized that his old friend Bob was the criminal that the police were on the lookout for, he did not have the heart to arrest him. Instead, he sent a plainclothes officer to do so.
