

Greetings, everyone! My name is Laurence, and this is *English in Practice*!

MUSIC

Welcome to this bonus episode of *English in Practice*. Today, I shall read out a short story by David Batteiger, an American writer of flash fiction. This particular piece is called *Nerve* and was published in May 2020 by Bandit Fiction. As always, you can find the link to the story in the description, should you wish to read along.

I'm sorry this episode is coming late, but I was away in the mountains a couple of weeks ago. And no, that is not a way of saying that I was drunk – that's *away with the fairies*. Although I must admit that some of those traditional schnapps I drank did hit me fairly hard – or maybe I should say *fairy* hard, if you'll excuse the pun.

Anyway, if you wish to download the transcript for this episode, or indeed any other, simply visit my website: www.jamesfable.com. Remember, James Fable is my penname. My real name is Laurence.

Before we move on, I'd just like to remind you that you would do me a big favour by liking this podcast on whatever platform you use or by sharing it on social media. I also greatly enjoy hearing from my listeners and learning a bit about them, so please don't hesitate to get in contact. The best way to reach me is by email; simply send a message to englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com. Otherwise, you can contact me through the Facebook page, 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' A 'like' there would also be greatly appreciated.

Good. Without further ado, let's go over the key terms that come up in David Batteiger's story, *Nerve*!

MUSIC

Okay, so here is some of the vocabulary that appears in this story. There may be other words or phrases in there which you have not heard before – if so, I encourage you to

look them up afterwards – but the following are the ones that I consider the most important for understanding the storyline.

Nerve = In the literal sense, a nerve is an enclosed bundle of fibres in your body that transmits electrical impulses. Sensory nerves, for example, carry information relating to your senses, such as touch or smell.

However, we also use the term *nerve* in two important figurative ways. One of these is as a synonym for ‘boldness,’ ‘gall’ or ‘daring.’ For example, ‘I don’t have the nerve for skydiving’ is another way of saying: ‘I’m not daring enough to try skydiving.’ Another example: ‘Mark will never work up the nerve to ask out Jane.’ In other words: ‘Mark will never find the confidence to ask Jane out on a date.’

We also speak sometimes of *a raw nerve*. This is a metaphor for someone’s sensitive spot, something they are self-conscious about, and it can be any number of things. Perhaps an example will help. Imagine you have recently lost your job and are now arguing with your partner, who speaks almost constantly about their work. You say, ‘Can you please shut up about your work for once?!’ And your partner replies, ‘At least I still have a job.’ This would probably touch a raw nerve, make you even angrier and also feel shame, because you have recently lost your job, have recently been fired. I hope that’s clear.

Unfailing = This has a few meanings, but in the upcoming story it is used in the sense of ‘constant’ or ‘unchanging.’ For example, if someone is renowned for their ‘unfailing optimism,’ that means they are known for being an optimist at all times. A comedy act of ‘unfailing entertainment’ would be a comedy act that never fails to entertain.

To brighten one’s mood = This is a synonym of ‘to lift one’s mood.’ It means, to put you in a good mood. For example, when I’m a little sad, I sometimes find that reading a novel brightens my mood.

Good. I think those are the only essential terms for understanding the upcoming story. Most important of all, of course, are the two metaphorical meanings of *nerve*, so I suggest that you listen to those explanations again if you haven’t fully understood.

Feeling ready? I hope so. Here comes David Batteiger’s story, *Nerve*!

SOUND EFFECT

Read along: <https://banditfiction.com/2020/05/13/nerve-by-david-batteiger/>

SOUND EFFECT

So, how did you find the story? Enjoy it? Feel you understood what was going on with the main character, Simon? Well, now I'm going to go through the story and summarise it. So, if you want to listen to *Nerve* again or read through it, I suggest you pause the podcast now.

Okay, the story *Nerve* is about a man named Simon, who is waiting at a subway station. However, he isn't waiting for a train, but a person – a woman in black and pink Nike trainers who is listening to music. He waits for her there often, perhaps every day, as she was there at the station yesterday, which means Simon was as well.

This is when things start to get a bit creepy. Simon notes that the woman has arrived three and a half minutes later than usual, which tells us that he has been keeping very close track of her. He also knows she is on the way back from the gym; it's part of her 'unfailing routine'. The important thing here is not that the woman has a rigid routine, but that Simon *knows* she follows the same routine each day. We can conclude that he is stalking this woman, which means he is pursuing her obsessively. In fact, he plans to 'work up the nerve to ask her tomorrow,' which reveals that he wishes to ask her out on a date or something similar.

As Simon is watching this woman, however, he sees someone who reminds him of a lady called Sarah. After this comes a flashback, a piece of narration about a past event, as Simon starts to think about Sarah. He remembers that she 'smelled of vanilla and lavender' and that she sat on the bench next to him night after night.

Simon then recalls that he had ‘worked up the nerve for her finally.’ That means, he had finally mustered the courage to talk to her, had plucked up the courage to speak to her. He told her: ‘Your hair smells lovely.’

Well, it’s no wonder that everything went downhill for Simon from here, as telling someone whom you don’t know that they smell nice is a little strange, a little creepy. Unsurprisingly, this peculiar compliment, along with Simon’s ‘broad, toothy smile,’ repulsed Sarah: ‘The look on her face bordered somewhere between terror and disgust.’ She subsequently moved away from Simon, but he followed. We then learn that it ended badly, as Simon had to find a new subway station after this encounter.

At this point the flashback ends and the narrative returns to the present. This is clear from the line: ‘But it was fine, he was here now, and she wouldn’t be like Sarah.’ Simon then imagines exactly how things will go with the woman in the black and pink Nikes, just as he has many times before: ‘He’d walk up and tell her he liked to watch how she moved to her music.’

It all sounds very similar to the time he spoke to Sarah, though Simon is sure that this woman will be different. He believes that he won’t have to read her name in the newspaper later, unlike when he had to read about ‘Sarah Jenkins who fell onto the tracks at 9th and Broadway.’

This final line confirms what the reader has suspected since the flashback: when Simon said ‘things didn’t go well’ with Sarah, that means he pushed her onto the railway tracks. He was insulted by how Sarah walked away from him after he told her that her hair smelt nice. Perhaps the [her] reaction *struck a raw nerve*, perhaps Simon has an issue with rejection – there are plenty of people in the world who do – and that’s why he pushed her onto the railway tracks. We cannot know exactly, though it is clear that something isn’t quite right with Simon psychologically: perhaps he’s a psychopath; perhaps he simply has other problems. The author leaves this ambiguous.

So, what does all this mean for the woman in the black and pink Nikes who is listening to music? Well, it doesn’t bode well. Maybe she too will end up on the tracks. After all, Simon

plans on telling her that he likes to watch as she moves to her music, which is at least as creepy as telling a stranger that their hair smells nice. This suggests that history is about to repeat itself: the woman in Nikes will be repulsed by Simon's comment, she'll move away from him, and then Simon will push her onto the railway tracks. However, we don't know this for sure – the author doesn't reveal everything – which makes for a suspenseful ending.

Good, that's the end of the analysis. Hopefully that has helped you to understand the story *Nerve* a little better. I recommend having another read or one more listen through to check your progress and pick up on any subtleties you may have missed.

As mentioned at the beginning, please do get in contact to let me know a bit about yourself and to leave any feedback. Once again, the email address is englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com, and the Facebook page is called 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' If you have enjoyed the podcast or found it helpful, please do tell your friends about it, share the Facebook page on social media, subscribe, etc.

If you would like to read more from David Batteiger or from Bandit Fiction, you will find the links to their websites in the description as well as at the bottom of the transcript. There you will also find the link to the Facebook page of *Se Habla Español*, the podcast from Felipe Galán.

That's all from me for today. I hope you have enjoyed this episode of *English in Practice*. Look out for an interview episode next week. All the best. Over and out.

Read more from David Batteiger: <http://davidbatteiger.com/>

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