

The Machine City



A beautiful woman and a group of ragged children entered the beauty of the Eternal Gardens. Freder and his friends were forced to see the less fortunate children of Metropolis.

Preview:

1. Read the name of the story.
2. Look at the picture.
3. Read the sentences under the picture.
4. Read the first two paragraphs of the story.
5. Then answer the following question.

You learned from your preview that

- a. Freder was being held prisoner.
- b. Freder's dream was going to come true.
- c. Freder's dream left him feeling sad and angry.
- d. Freder was planning to set out on a journey.

Turn to the Comprehension Check on page 10 for the right answer.

Now read the story.

Read to find out what will happen in the Eternal Gardens.

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Freder Fredersen was sick with fever when a dream came to him. In the dream, he heard a rumbling sound. Then the sky seemed to burst apart, and the earth, startled from her sleep, began to shake. Her rivers dried up and her mountains fell to ruin. The ground ripped open and fire sprang up. Then from the ashes rose a beautiful bird with colored wings. The bird fluttered aimlessly above the ruined earth and let out a sad cry, and Freder too, felt its sadness. Then, before his eyes, he saw a beautiful woman. He made an effort to reach out for her, but she vanished and there the dream came to an end.

Freder got up and opened the window of his workshop. He looked out upon the rumbling machine city of Metropolis. He felt a quiver run down his back and he knew that Slim, his servant, was watching him.

"I wish to be quite alone," Freder said softly. And silently, Slim left.

But Freder knew Slim would never be far away. Freder smiled an angry smile. He was a treasure to be guarded. The son of a great father must be watched carefully. His thoughts stopped again and his mind wandered back to that day in The Club of the Sons . . .

The Club of the Sons was one of the most beautiful buildings in Metropolis. And why not? For fathers, to whom every turn of the slave-run machines meant gold, could purchase anything. This building, which they had purchased for their sons, had game rooms, theaters and swimming pools. Best of all, it had the Eternal Gardens, where the servants' only job was to be always cheerful. The sons must never suspect the sadness beneath the machine city.

That day, after winning a game, Freder lazily stretched out to rest. He saw the sunlight stream through the glass ceiling above. Woman servants brought food and waited on him. From their smooth white hands, Freder ate the fruits he enjoyed.

While mixing a drink, one of the servants began to laugh, and Freder, for no reason except that he was young and happy, began to laugh. The laughter in the garden swelled to a storm as each member of the club joined in the cheerful sound. Then, suddenly, the laughter stopped. Freder turned his head. No one in the garden moved a hand or foot. They just stood and watched.

The door of the Eternal Gardens had opened, and through it came a group of ragged children. Their small faces seemed gray and old. They looked like skeletons covered with faded rags as they took clumsy steps forward on thin, bare feet.

Their leader was a beautiful woman. She stood perfectly still and gave each of the members a stern look. Then she let go of the children and stretched forward her hand.

Pointing toward the members, she said to the children, "Look, these are your brothers."

Then, pointing toward the children, she spoke to the members, "Look, these are your brothers."

She stood still, and her eyes fell on Freder. The guards came, but no one dared to touch her. Then she took the children by the hand, turned, and led them out.

Within the walls of marble and under the ceiling of glass there was much dismay. The guards did not know how the woman and the children had gotten inside.

Freder looked around at the Eternal Gardens and the elegant beings in it and he looked at himself. He wore the white silk and the soft, quiet shoes of all the sons. Freder looked at his friends, who never tired unless from sport, and he recalled the woman's soft words: "Look, these are your brothers." Freder felt sick. He jumped up and ran out the door in search of the mysterious woman, but no one knew who she was or from where she had come.

Freder walked home with the sounds of the machine city thumping in his head. He locked himself in his workshop, but that did not help. He kept seeing the firm but sweet face of the woman and he kept hearing her words.

Freder listened to the rumblings of the city and, for the first time, he understood the sound. The sound was beautiful and horrible. Soon, Metropolis raised her voice again. The machines of Metropolis roared because they wanted to be fed.

Freder looked across the city at the building called the New Tower of Babel. In the New Tower lived the man who was the Master of Metropolis. He was the boss who pressed his fingers to the blue metal control board so the machines of the city would roar for food. And living men were the food!

The living food would march along in lines. Men, all wearing the same dark blue pants, the same hard clumsy shoes and the same black caps, marched to the gate of The New Tower.

Past them, going the other way, another dark blue stream would drag itself along with great effort. The machine center of Metropolis would throw them up as it swallowed the others. Then the Master of Metropolis would stop pressing his fingers to the blue metal control board, and once more the endless beating of the machines could be heard.

Freder stared at the old church. It was the last building that stood as an enemy to the wicked Metropolis. The Gothics, a small but eager group, were the only people to stand against the boss of Metropolis. They would not let the church be torn down.

Suddenly, Freder was seized by the idea that he would lose his mind if he had once more to hear the machines roar to be fed. He turned from the bright lights of the city and went to speak with the Master of Metropolis, Joh Fredersen, who was his father.

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COMPREHENSION CHECK

Choose the best answer.

1. The servants in the Eternal Gardens were supposed to
 a. keep everything clean.
 b. buy things for the sons.
 c. work at the machines.
 d. be cheerful all the time.
2. While the fathers ran the city, the sons
 a. went to school.
 b. helped their fathers.
 c. played and enjoyed themselves.
 d. marched in lines to the machine center.
3. First, the woman brought the children into the Eternal Gardens. Then, the guards came. Next,
 a. Freder began to laugh.
 b. Freder jumped up and ran out.
 c. Freder stared at the old church.
 d. Freder went to sleep.
4. The faces of the children seemed
 a. angry.
 b. gray and old.
 c. amused.
 d. pink and pretty.
5. Freder wore
 a. dark blue pants.
 b. faded rags.
 c. high leather boots.
 d. white silk.
6. After he saw the woman, Freder
 a. began to think there was something wrong with his city.
 b. felt happier about everything.
 c. joined a group called the Gothics.
 d. argued with his father and left the city forever.
7. The machine workers of Metropolis
 a. led happy lives.
 b. were just food for the machines.
 c. had games rooms, theaters, and swimming pools.
 d. were all women.
8. Freder's father was
 a. a servant named Slim.
 b. the Master of Metropolis.
 c. killed by the machines.
 d. a machine worker.
9. Another name for this story could be
 a. "The Eternal Gardens".
 b. "Freder's Journey".
 c. "Freder's City".
 d. "Joh Fredersen".
10. This story is mainly about
 a. a dream Freder had.
 b. a beautiful woman.
 c. how the city is run.
 d. a city at war.

Preview Answer:

- c. Freder's dream left him feeling sad and angry.

Check your answers with the key on page 67.