

Lesson 13

READ THIS STORY #1, Advanced

The Performance

We arrived early and sat impatiently in our reserved seats waiting for the performance to begin. Charles Laughton, a famous actor, would soon appear on stage at the Stanford Theater. He was a heavy-set Englishman who was popular with American audiences. In his pictures, he was not handsome. His blond hair seemed thin and stringy. His face and hands were pudgy. He looked about seventy years old.

The stage was bare except for a tall stool and a book stand. At eight o'clock sharp, he walked to the center of the stage. He gave a small shy smile and a slight bow in recognition of our applause. He was dressed in black and carried a large book. He proceeded to leaf through its pages. The hall darkened, and a spotlight focused only on his face.

He began to read a story from the King James version of the Bible. His voice was strong and vibrant. As we listened to the tale of Daniel in the lion's den, we were carried away to the ancient kingdom of Babylon.

The crowd was enraptured by his phrasing of the old English words as he read the plight of the captive Hebrew children. His voice rose and fell with the cadence of the poetry. When he finished reading, he closed the book. There was complete silence. You could almost hear a collective sigh before the audience rose and gave him a standing ovation.

That night we understood what it really meant to hold an audience in the palm of your hand.