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### Character Profile

In modern times, we know more about mental disorders than we ever have before. In the past, people came up with different explanations for abnormal psychology, whether it be ‘possession’, ‘witchcraft’, or what was known as ‘hysteria’. It is only recently that we have come up with scientific explanations for the illnesses of the mind. The short story “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” by J.D Salinger takes us back to a time where mental health was not well-understood. The story is told in the third person, giving us insight on Seymour who is a war veteran, through his wife and his interactions with a child. Seymour’s behavior and interactions point to the explanation that he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after serving in the military and returning home.

PTSD is caused by severe trauma and mental issues left unaddressed. Seymour had just returned from war. He witnessed violence and traumatic events for a prolonged period of time. He had to do things that normal people could not do like killing and destroying. At the beginning of the story, Seymour’s wife Muriel gets a phone call from her mother. She wants to check in on her daughter as she arrives at her vacation destination. Muriel’s mother seems concerned about her daughter and her trip there. She asks her if Seymour had been acting up again. She felt uneasy about Seymour driving. She states, “Well, we’ll see. How did he behave--in the car and all?” This demonstrates how Seymour is in a fragile state and something is going on with him mentally. In addition, Seymour had been acting recklessly. The mother stated, “The trees. That business with

the window. Those horrible things he said to Granny about her plans for passing away. What he did with all those lovely pictures from Bermuda--everything." It is apparent that this recklessness is a recent problem. His wife had been ignoring the severity of the issue, which worsened it because those with severe PTSD require attention and support. She was being dismissive of her mother's concerns on the phone and did not pay too much attention to her husband's sudden behavioral changes. She did not properly address the issues with the psychiatrist she had met at the hotel and she also ignored advice from a medical professional. The text stated, "He very definitely told your father there's a chance--a very great chance, he said--that Seymour may completely lose control of himself." It is clear that Seymour is suffering from PTSD and he needs urgent help. The doctor strongly believes that he is a danger to himself or others around him. This is a strong indication that his behavior is due to the trauma he had endured at war. Muriel disregarded her husband's need for help in his fragile state, which is a terrible idea because that can cause matters to escalate.

Later in the story when Seymour interacts with Sybil the young girl, his condition is more apparent. He demonstrates a child-like demeanor and it is apparent that he gets along with children better than he does with his wife. Their relationship is probably strained from all of the time they spent apart along with his behavior change. "'No, Mother. I didn't go into details very much,' said the girl. 'I'll probably get a chance to talk to him again. He's in the bar all day long.'" This shows that Seymour's issues are causing a strain in the relationship and he does not feel comfortable opening up to his wife yet. He might also be abusing alcohol to try and suppress what he had gone through. Those with PTSD sometimes turn to substance abuse to forget their pain. While they spent time apart, Seymour was busy getting friendly with Sybil. They both connect because Seymour gets reminded of what innocence is like and he wants to have that part of him back. Sybil truly gets him and sees what he sees. The text states, "'Saw what, my love?' 'A bananafish.' 'My

God, no!’ said the young man. ‘Did he have any bananas in his mouth?’ ‘Yes,’ said Sybil. ‘Six.’ The young man suddenly picked up one of Sybil's wet feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and kissed the arch.” Here, Sybil ‘sees’ the imaginary bananafish that Seymour was talking about. He feels understood and kisses her foot. He seems to be attracted to her and is having trouble restraining himself. He is subtly flirtatious with her but she is too young to understand what is going on. After his predatory encounter with Sybil, he returns to his hotel room and shoots himself. This might be what the doctor was talking about when he said Seymour could “lose control” at any moment. His erratic behavior, strained relationship with his wife, encounter with Sybil, and his suicide at the end all indicate he was suffering from the effects of trauma and felt out of control. His wife and family failed to get him the help he needed and that caused his issues to accelerate. What makes it even more difficult is that veterans could not get the help they needed after experiencing severe trauma because people were not aware of what PTSD is. Seymour’s demons caught up with him and it resulted in him ending his life.

Works Cited

Salinger, J. D. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." *The New Yorker*, January 31, 1948, pages 21-25.

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