

# The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

## Part 1

In 1860, Roger Button and his wife were living in Baltimore, USA. Mrs Button was in hospital, waiting to have her first baby. Mr Button hoped they would have a son, because he wanted to send him to Yale, one of the two most important **colleges** in the United States (Harvard is the other). He himself had studied at Yale.

On the morning the baby was **expected** to arrive, Mr Button got up early and hurried to the hospital. As he arrived, he saw Dr Keene, their family doctor, leaving.

‘Dr Keene!’ Mr Button called. ‘Oh, Dr Keene!’

The doctor turned and looked strangely at him.

‘What happened?’ asked Mr Button excitedly. ‘Is it a boy? How is my wife? Tell me! Is the child born?’

Dr Keene said darkly, ‘Well, you could say the child is born – in a way.’ He gave Mr Button another strange look.

‘Is it a boy or a girl?’

‘Now look here!’ cried Dr Keene, suddenly very angry. ‘Go and see for yourself. It’s most **curious**. I’ve never seen a **case** like it. And it’s too bad! What about my good name as a doctor? You didn’t think of that, did you?’

**college** a place where students go to study when they finish high school

**expect** to think that something will happen

**curious** strange

**case** example



‘What’s the matter?’ asked Mr Button, by now very worried.

‘Go and see! And find yourself another doctor. I’m finished with you!’ He turned and walked away very fast.

Mr Button could not think what had happened. He slowly went into the hospital, and spoke to the first nurse he met.

‘Good morning,’ he said. ‘I – I am Mr Button.’

The girl gave a frightened scream. ‘Upstairs!’ she cried, showing him the stairs. ‘Go – go up!’

Mr Button went upstairs, where he met another nurse.

‘I’m Mr Button,’ he said. ‘I – I want to see my child.’

The nurse looked at him in **disgust**. ‘Come with me, Mr Button,’ she said, and took him to a large room with a number of new-born babies, each in its small **cot**.

‘Well, which is mine?’ asked Mr Button.

‘There!’ said the nurse, showing him one of the cots.

An old man, who looked about seventy years old, was sitting in a cot which was much too small for him. He had a large, white blanket round him. His thin hair was almost white and he had a long, grey beard.

‘Am I crazy?’ shouted Mr Button angrily. ‘Or are you playing some kind of game with me?’

‘It doesn’t seem like a game to us,’ said the nurse crossly, ‘But I can promise you, that’s your child.’

Mr Button hid his face in his hands. ‘What will people say?’ he whispered. ‘What must I do?’

‘You must take him home,’ said the nurse, ‘Immediately!’

Suddenly the old man said, in a thin, high voice, ‘Look here, if you think I’m going to walk home in this blanket, you’re making a big mistake. And the clothes they’ve got for me here, well, they’re much too small!’

‘What shall I do?’ Mr Button asked the nurse.

**disgust** a strong feeling of dislike

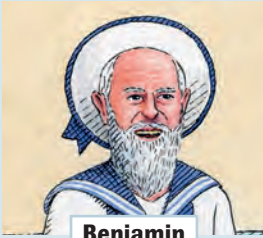
**cot** a small bed for a baby, with high sides

## READING CHECK

### 1 Put these sentences in the correct order. Number them 1–9.

- a  Roger learns that the old man is his baby son.
- b  Hildegarde agrees to marry Benjamin.
- c  The nurse shows Roger an old man sitting in a cot.
- d  The Button family's doctor speaks angrily to Roger.
- e  At eighteen, Benjamin tries to enter Yale College.
- f  Benjamin falls wildly in love with Hildegarde Moncrief.
- g  Roger Button hurries to the hospital to see his baby.
- h  At twenty, Benjamin starts working for his father.
- i  Benjamin finds being a child is hard because he looks and feels so old.

### 2 Match the sentences with the people.



**Benjamin**



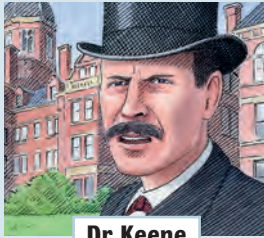
**Hildegarde**



**Roger Button**



**Mr Moncrief**



**Dr Keene**



**Mr Hart**

- a **Dr. Keene** doesn't want to help the Button family any more.
- b ..... has to buy special clothes for his son.
- c People in Baltimore talk about ..... for months.
- d ..... the registrar, doesn't want a fifty-year-old student at Yale.
- e Surprisingly, ..... likes older men better than young ones.
- f ..... is worried about his daughter's future.