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*This selection of 10 short stories may be found in Stories of Ourselves: The University of Cambridge International Examinations Anthology of Short Stories in English (Cambridge University Press). All rights reserved.*
On January 19, 1809, Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Poe’s father and mother, both professional actors, died before the poet was three years old, and John and Frances Allan raised him as a foster child in Richmond, Virginia. John Allan, a prosperous tobacco exporter, sent Poe to the best boarding schools and later to the University of Virginia, where Poe excelled academically. After less than one year of school, however, he was forced to leave the university when Allan refused to pay Poe’s gambling debts.

Poe returned briefly to Richmond, but his relationship with Allan deteriorated. In 1827, he moved to Boston and enlisted in the United States Army. His first collection of poems, Tamerlane, and Other Poems, was published that year. In 1829, he published a second collection entitled Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems. Neither volume received significant critical or public attention. Following his Army service, Poe was admitted to the United States Military Academy, but he was again forced to leave for lack of financial support. He then moved into the home of his aunt Maria Clemm and her daughter Virginia in Baltimore, Maryland.

Poe began to sell short stories to magazines at around this time, and, in 1835, he became the editor of the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond, where he moved with his aunt and cousin Virginia. In 1836, he married Virginia, who was thirteen years old at the time. Over the next ten years, Poe would edit a number of literary journals including the Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine and Graham’s Magazine in Philadelphia and the Broadway Journal in New York City. It was during these years that he established himself as a poet, a short story writer, and an editor. He published some of his best-known stories and poems, including “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and “The Raven.”

After Virginia’s death from tuberculosis in 1847, Poe’s lifelong struggle with depression and alcoholism worsened. He returned briefly to Richmond in 1849 and then set out for an editing job in Philadelphia. For unknown reasons, he stopped in Baltimore. On October 3, 1849, he was found in a state of semi-consciousness. Poe died four days later of “acute congestion of the brain.” Evidence by medical practitioners who reopened the case has shown that Poe may have been suffering from rabies.

Poe’s work as an editor, a poet, and a critic had a profound impact on American and international literature. His stories mark him as one of the originators of both horror and detective fiction. Many anthologies credit him as the “architect” of the modern short story. He was also one of the first critics to focus primarily on the effect of style and structure in a literary work; as such, he has been seen as a forerunner to the “art for art’s sake” movement. French Symbolists such as Mallarmé and Rimbaud claimed him as a literary precursor. Baudelaire spent nearly fourteen years translating Poe into French. Today, Poe is remembered as one of the first American writers to become a major figure in world literature.
Gothic fiction began as a sophisticated joke. Horace Walpole first applied the word ‘Gothic’ to a novel in the subtitle – ‘A Gothic Story’ – of The Castle of Otranto, published in 1764. When he used the word it meant something like ‘barbarous’, as well as ‘deriving from the Middle Ages’. Walpole pretended that the story itself was an antique relic, providing a preface in which a translator claims to have discovered the tale, published in Italian in 1529, ‘in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England’. The story itself, ‘founded on truth’, was written three or four centuries earlier still (Preface). Some readers were duly deceived by this fiction and aggrieved when it was revealed to be a modern ‘fake’.

The novel itself tells a supernatural tale in which Manfred, the gloomy Prince of Otranto, develops an irresistible passion for the beautiful young woman who was to have married his son and heir. The novel opens memorably with this son being crushed to death by the huge helmet from a statue of a previous Prince of Otranto, and throughout the novel the very fabric of the castle comes to supernatural life until villainy is defeated. Walpole, who made his own house at Strawberry Hill into a mock-Gothic building, had discovered a fictional territory that has been exploited ever since. Gothic involves the supernatural (or the promise of the supernatural), it often involves the discovery of mysterious elements of antiquity, and it usually takes its protagonists into strange or frightening old buildings.

**Gothic Motifs**

Gothic is a literary genre, and a characteristically modern one. The word ‘genre’ comes from the Latin ‘genus’ which means ‘kind’. So to ask what genre a text belongs to is to ask what kind of text it is. A genre isn’t like a box in which a group of texts all neatly fit and can be safely classified; there is no essence or a single element that belongs to all Gothics. It is more like a family of texts or stories. All members of a family don’t look the same and they don’t necessarily have a single trait in common, but they do have overlapping characteristics, motifs and traits. The genre of Gothic is a particularly strange and perverse family of texts which themselves are full of strange families, irrigated with scenes of rape and incest, and surrounded by marginal, uncertain and illegitimate members. It is never quite clear what is or is not a legitimate member of the now huge Gothic family, made up not just of novels, poems and stories but of films, music, videogames, opera, comics and fashion, all belonging – and not quite belonging – together. But they do have some important traits in common.
Strange places
It is usual for characters in Gothic fiction to find themselves in a strange place; somewhere other, different, mysterious. It is often threatening or violent, sometimes sexually enticing, often a prison. In Bram Stoker’s 1897 *Dracula*, for example, Jonathan Harker, a young lawyer’s clerk, suddenly finds himself trapped within Castle Dracula. That scene occurs in Central Europe, but often in classic Gothic fiction – in the novels of Ann Radcliffe for example – it takes place in distant, marginal, mysterious southern Europe; and it could just as easily be somewhere like Satis House in Great Expectations, a decaying mansion just down the road.

Clashing time periods
Just as places are often mysterious, lost, dark or secret in Gothic fiction, so too are its characteristic times. Gothics often take place at moments of transition (between the medieval period and the Renaissance, for example) or bring together radically different times. There is a strong opposition (but also a mysterious affinity) in the Gothic between the very modern and the ancient or archaic, as everything that characters and readers think that they’ve safely left behind comes back with a vengeance.

Sigmund Freud wrote a celebrated essay on ‘The Uncanny’ (1919), which he defined as ‘that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’. Gothic novels are full of such uncanny effects – simultaneously frightening, unfamiliar and yet also strangely familiar. A past that should be over and done with suddenly erupts within the present and deranges it. This is one reason why Gothic loves modern technology almost as much as it does ghosts. A ghost is something from the past that is out of its proper time or place and which brings with it a demand, a curse or a plea. Ghosts, like gothics, disrupt our sense of what is present and what is past, what is ancient and what is modern, which is why a novel like Dracula is as full of the modern technology of its period – typewriters, shorthand, recording machines – as it is of vampires, destruction and death.

Power and constraint
The Gothic world is fascinated by violent differences in power, and its stories are full of constraint, entrapment and forced actions. Scenes of extreme threat and isolation – either physical or psychological – are always happening or about to happen. A young woman in danger, such as the orphan Emily St Aubert in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, is often at the centre of Gothic fiction. Against such vulnerable women are set the great criminals or transgressors, such as the villainous Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or Count Dracula. Cursed, obscene or satanic, they seem able to break norms, laws and taboos at will. Sexual difference is thus at the heart of the Gothic, and its plots are often driven by the exploration of questions of sexual desire, pleasure, power and pain. It has a freedom that much realistic fiction does not, to speak about the erotic, particularly

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illegitimate or transgressive sexuality, and is full of same-sex desire, perversion, obsession, voyeurism and sexual violence.

**Terror versus horror**

Why do readers take such pleasure in Gothic’s descriptions of frightening and horrible events, and might there be something wrong or immoral in doing so? The pioneering gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe was particularly troubled by these questions and in trying to answer them, made an important distinction between ‘terror’ and ‘horror’. Terror, which she thought characterised her own work, could be morally uplifting. It does not show horrific things explicitly but only suggests them. This, she thinks, ‘expands the soul’ of the readers of her works and helps them to be more alert to the possibility of things beyond their everyday life and understanding. Horror, by contrast, Radcliffe argues, ‘freezes and nearly annihilates’ the senses of its readers because it shows atrocious things too explicitly. This is morally dangerous and produces the wrong kind of excitement in the reader. Whereas there might be the fear or suggestion of the possibility of sexual assault or rape, for example, in a Radcliffe novel, there is explicit description of such scenes in *The Monk*. Terror, which can be morally good, characterises the former; horror, which is morally bad, the latter. Terror for Radcliffe is concerned with the psychological experience of being full of fear and dread and thus of recognising human limits; horror by contrast focuses on the horrific object or event itself, with essentially damaging or limiting consequences for the reader’s state of mind.

**A world of doubt**

Gothic is thus a world of doubt, particularly doubt about the supernatural and the spiritual. It seeks to create in our minds the possibility that there may be things beyond human power, reason and knowledge. But that possibility is constantly accompanied by uncertainty. In Radcliffe’s work, even the most terrifying things turn out to have rational, non-supernatural explanations; by contrast, in Lewis’s *The Monk*, Satan himself appears. The uncertainty that goes with Gothic is very characteristic of a world in which orthodox religious belief is waning; there is both an exaggerated interest in the supernatural and the constant possibility that even very astonishing things will turn out to be explicable. This intellectual doubt is constantly accompanied by the most powerful affects or emotions that the writer can invoke. The 18th-century philosopher and politician Edmund Burke in his 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* made a vital distinction between the beautiful and the sublime which has shaped much modern thinking about art. Beauty, for Burke, is characterised by order, harmony and proportion. Sublime experiences, by contrast – the kind we get for example from being on a high mountain in a great storm – are excessive ones, in which we encounter the mighty, the terrible and the awesome. Gothic, it is clear, is intended to give us the experience of the sublime, to shock us out of the limits of our everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanation, in the shape of awesome and terrifying characters, and inexplicable and profound events.

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During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

I know not how it was — but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me — upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain — upon the bleak walls — upon the vacant eye-like windows — upon a few rank sedges — and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees — with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium — the bitter lapse into everyday life — the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart — an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it — I paused to think — what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to

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1 Translation: "His/her heart is a poised lute; as soon as it is touched, it resounds". These lines are taken from Le Refus, a song by French songwriter Pierre-Jean de Béranger, a contemporary of Poe's. Béranger's lyrics actually read "Mon cœur" (my heart), but Poe changed them to read "Son cœur" (his/her heart).

2 tract: an extended area of land.

3 insufferable: extremely unpleasant or annoying.

4 pervade: be present and apparent throughout.

5 goad: provoke or annoy (someone) so as to stimulate an action or reaction.

6 sublime: producing an overwhelming sense of awe or other high emotion through being vast or grand.

7 insoluble: admitting of no solution or explanation.

8 grapple: work hard to come to terms with or deal with something.
modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous\textsuperscript{9} brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down — but with a shudder even more thrilling than before 35 — upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn\textsuperscript{10} of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant 40 part of the country — a letter from him — which, in its wildly importunate\textsuperscript{11} nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness — of a mental disorder which oppressed him — and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady\textsuperscript{12}. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said — it the apparent heart that went with his request —which allowed me no room for hesitation; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very an- 50 cient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent\textsuperscript{13} yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognisable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other — it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher" — an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the 65 family mansion.

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment —that of looking down within the tarn —had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt

\textsuperscript{9} precipitous: extremely high or steep; (of an action): done suddenly and without careful consideration.
\textsuperscript{10} sojourn: a temporary stay.
\textsuperscript{11} importunate: emaking persistent or urgent requests.
\textsuperscript{12} malady: illness.
\textsuperscript{13} munificent: very generous.
that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition — for why should I not so term it? — served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy — a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity — an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn — a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me — while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy — while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this — I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases, I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow,

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14 affinity: a similarity of characteristics suggesting a relationship, especially a resemblance or similarity.
15 specious: deceptively pleasing.
16 phantasmagoric: characterized by fantastic and incongruous imagery.
17 trepidation: a feeling of alarm, fear, or dread.
and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality — of the constrained effort of the ennuyé man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance, convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.

18 _pallid_: deficient in colour suggesting physical or emotional distress.
19 _inordinate_: beyond normal limits, highly unusual.
20 _gossamer_: a fine, filmy substance consisting of cobwebs spun by small spiders, seen especially in autumn.
In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence — an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy — an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter, than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision — that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation — that leaden, self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him. He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy — a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms, and the general manner of the narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. "I shall perish," said he, "I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect — in terror. In this unnerved — in this piteous condition — I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR."

I learned, moreover, at intervals, and through broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth — in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated — an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his

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21 abeyance: a state of temporary disuse or suspension.
22 enunciation: clear pronunciation.
23 insipid: lacking vigour or interest
24 anomalous: deviating from what is standard, normal, or expected.
25 abhorrence: a feeling of revulsion; disgusted loathing.
26 supposititious: substituted for the real thing; not genuine.
spirit — an effect which the physique of the gray walls and turrets\(^\text{27}\), and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale of his existence.

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable\(^\text{28}\) origin — to the severe and long-continued illness — indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution — of a tenderly beloved sister — his sole companion for long years — his last and only relative on earth. "Her decease," he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, "would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers." While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmixed with dread — and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps. When a door, at length, closed upon her, my glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother — but he had buried his face in his hands, and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated\(^\text{29}\) fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but, on the closing in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed (as her brother told me at night with inexpressible agitation) to the prostrating power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain — that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself: and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavours to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom.

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. His long improvised dirges\(^\text{30}\) will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind

\(^{27}\) turrets: a small tower on top of a larger tower or at the corner of a building or wall, typically of a castle.  

\(^{28}\) palpable: (of a feeling or atmosphere) so intense as to seem almost tangible. 

\(^{29}\) emaciated: abnormally thin or weak, especially because of illness or a lack of food. 

\(^{30}\) dirge: a lament for the dead, especially one forming part of a funeral rite.
a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of von Weber.

215 From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vaguenesses at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why; — from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavour to *educe* more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me at least — in the circumstances then surrounding me — there arose out of the pure abstractions which the *hypochondriac* contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli.

225 One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendour.

I have just spoken of that morbid condition of the auditory nerve which rendered all music intolerable to the sufferer, with the exception of certain effects of stringed instruments. It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar, which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his performances. But the *fervid* facility of his impromptus could not be so accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial excitement. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily remembered. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it, as he gave it, because, in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher, of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne.

245 The verses, which were entitled "The Haunted Palace," ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus:

I.

In the greenest of our valleys,
   By good angels tenanted,
   Once a fair and stately palace —
   Radiant palace — reared its head.

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31 *educe*: bring out or develop (something latent or potential).
32 *hypochondriac*: a person who is abnormally anxious about their health.
33 *fervid*: intensely enthusiastic or passionate, especially to an excessive degree.
In the monarch Thought's dominion —
    It stood there!
Never seraph 34 spread a pinion 35
    Over fabric half so fair.

II.
    Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
    On its roof did float and flow;
    (This — all this — was in the olden
    Time long ago)
    And every gentle air that dallied,
    In that sweet day,
    Along the ramparts 36 plumed and pallid,
    A winged odour went away.

III.
    Wanderers in that happy valley
    Through two luminous windows saw
    Spirits moving musically
    To a lute's well-tuned law,
    Round about a throne, where sitting
    (Porphyrogen!)
    In state his glory well befitting,
    The ruler of the realm was seen.

IV.
    And all with pearl and ruby glowing
    Was the fair palace door,
    Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
    And sparkling evermore,
    A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
    Was but to sing,
    In voices of surpassing beauty,
    The wit and wisdom of their king.

V.
    But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
    Assailed the monarch's high estate;
    (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow

34 seraph: an angelic being, regarded in traditional Christian angelology as belonging to the highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy, associated with light, ardour, and purity.
35 pinion: the outer part of a bird's wing including the flight feathers.
36 ramparts: a defensive wall of a castle or walled city, having a broad top with a walkway and typically a stone parapet.
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!
And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

VI.
And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows, see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant\textsuperscript{37} melody;
While, like a rapid ghastly river,
Through the pale door,
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh — but smile no more.

I well remember that suggestions arising from this ballad led us into a train of thought where-
in there became manifest an opinion of Usher’s which I mention not so much on account of
its novelty, (for other men have thought thus,) as on account of the pertinacity\textsuperscript{38} with which
he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable
things. But, in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and tres-
passed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization. I lack words to express
the full extent, or the earnest abandon of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected
(as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The condi-
tions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of
these stones — in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which
overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around — above all, in the long undist-
turbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn.
Its evidence — the evidence of the sentience — was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as
he spoke,) in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the
waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent, yet importunate
and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which
made him what I now saw him — what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will
make none.

Our books — the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental exist-
ence of the invalid — were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of
phantasm. We pored together over such works as the Ververt et Chartreuse of Gresset; the
Belphegor of Machiavelli; the Heaven and Hell of Swedenborg; the Subterranean Voyage of
Nicholas Kimm by Holberg; the Chiromancy of Robert Flud, of Jean D’Indaginé, and of De
la Chambre; the Journey into the Blue Distance of Tieck; and the City of the Sun of Campan-
ella. One favourite volume was a small octavo edition of the Directorium Inquisitorum, by

\textsuperscript{37} discordant: (of sounds) harsh and jarring because of a lack of harmony.
\textsuperscript{38} pertinacity: holding firmly to an opinion or a course of action.
the Dominican Eymeric de Gironne; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela, about the old African Satyrs and OEgipans, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic — the manual of a forgotten church — the Vigilae Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ec-

clesiae Maguntinae.

I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight, (previously to its final interment,\(^{39}\)) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building.

The worldly reason, however, assigned for this singular proceeding, was one which I did not feel at liberty to dispute. The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the burial-ground of the family. I will not deny that when I called to mind the sinister countenance of the person whom I met upon the staircase, on the day of my arrival at the house, I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless, and by no means an unnatural, precaution.

At the request of Usher, I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges.

Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead — for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house.

\(^{39}\) interment: the burial of a corpse in a grave or tomb, typically with funeral rites.
And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue—but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was labouring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified—that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.

It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch—while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavoured to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room—of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed. But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremour gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened—I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me—to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste (for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night), and endeavoured to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment.

I had taken but few turns in this manner, when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognised it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped, with a gentle touch, at my door, and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan—but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanour. His air appalled me—but anything was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured, and I even welcomed his presence as a relief.

"And you have not seen it?" he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence—"you have not then seen it?—but, stay! you shall." Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.
The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity; for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind; and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the life-like velocity with which they flew careering from all points against each other, without passing away into the distance. I say that even their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this — yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars — nor was there any flashing forth of the lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapour, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.

"You must not — you shall not behold this!" said I, shudderingly, to Usher, as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat. "These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon — or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. Let us close this casement; — the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favourite romances. I will read, and you shall listen; — and so we will pass away this terrible night together."

The antique volume which I had taken up was the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favourite of Usher's more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild over-strained air of vivacity with which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.

I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:

"And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise

40 miasma: an oppressive or unpleasant atmosphere which surrounds or emanates from something.
41 prolixity: (of speech or writing) using or containing too many words; tediously lengthy speech.
42 parley: a conference between opposing sides in a dispute, especially a discussion of terms for an armistice.
of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarummed and reverberated throughout the forest."

At the termination of this sentence I started, and for a moment, paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me) — it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly, to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story:

"But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the maliceful hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious\(^43\) demeanour, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten —

Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win;

And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shrieck so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard."

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement — for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound — the exact counterpart of what my fancy had conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.

Oppressed, as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of the second and most extraordinary coincidence, by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting, by any observation, the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question; although, assuredly, a strange alteration had, during the last few minutes, taken place in his demeanour. From a position fronting my own, he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber; and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast — yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea — for he rocked from side to side with

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\(^{43}\) prodigious: remarkably or impressively great in extent, size, or degree.
a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. Having rapidly taken notice of all this, I resumed the narrative of Sir Launcelot, which thus proceeded:

"And now, the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen* shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound."

435 No sooner had these syllables passed my lips, than — as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver — I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation.

440 Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

"Not hear it? — yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long — long — long — many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it — yet I dared not — oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! — I dared not — I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them — many, many days ago — yet I dared not — I dared not speak! And now — to-night — Ethelred — ha! ha! — the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangour of the shield! — say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid* me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and

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44 * brazen: (literary or archaic) made of brass.
45 * upbraid: find fault with (someone); scold.
horrible beating of her heart? Madman!" — here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul — "Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!"

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell — the huge antique pannels to which the speaker pointed, threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust — but then without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold — then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened — there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind — the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight — my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder — there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters — and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher."

46 ponderous: slow and clumsy because of great weight or difficulty.
D Comprehension, Close Reading & Analysis

Answer the following thoughtfully and completely, using examples from the story to support your arguments.

1) What is the mood at the beginning of the story, and how does Poe create this mood?

2) Describe the history of the Usher family. What kind of interests do they have? What type of people are they?

3) Describe Roderick Usher – his appearance, his weaknesses, his attitudes.

4) What happens in the poem, “The Haunted Palace”? What are the parallels between this poem and the story of the Ushers?

5) Which descriptive details of the interior of the house suggest that the narrator has entered a realm that is quite different from the ordinary world?

6) In what ways is the appearance of both the interior and exterior of the house related to Usher’s appearance and to the condition of his mind?

7) Poe chose to characterize Roderick and Madeline as twins, not simply as brother and sister. Why do you think he made this choice?

8) What evidence is there to support the claim of some critics who have argued that Madeline and Roderick are actually the physical and mental component of the same being? (Think about why Roderick buries Madeline alive.)

9) Explore the various meanings of the “House of Usher.”

10) How does Roderick Usher die?

E Food for Thought — Essay Topics

Write a detailed response to one of the following questions:

1) The narrator approaches the House of Usher with great trepidation when he sees the disrepair. He is telling the story of visiting a friend. It might occur to the reader that the main character is the narrator but the story gives very little information about him. Discuss how it affects the story not knowing much about the narrator. Use examples from the story to support your reasoning.

2) Poe does an exemplary job of portraying gloom, fear and horror. Discuss some of the techniques Poe uses to elicit the emotions he wants from the reader. Use examples from the story to support your points.

3) Poe includes a poem, "The Haunted Palace", in the story which he later publishes separately. Discuss the meaning the poem has to the story. Use examples from the story to support your reasoning.
IGCSE Short Stories
"The Open Boat" by Stephen Crane (1898)

A

About the Author — Stephen Crane (1871 - 1900)

American novelist, short story writer, and poet Stephen Crane was born November 1st, 1871; six years after the American Civil War had ended. Yet his fame and fortune were interwoven with that war. Though he never fought in battle himself, he created stories about the battlefield that were so realistic that veterans reading his work thirty years after the war had ended praised it for its realism and ability to capture the true feelings and images of combat.

His best known novel is *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895); an impressionistic novel about Henry Fleming, a soldier participating in the Civil War who experiences and struggles with cowardice and bravery on the field of battle. The title itself is born from his longing for a battle wound, a "red badge of courage", to help conceal his cowardice after he fled from a battle while overcome with fear. *The Red Badge of Courage* has become one of the mostly widely read and influential war stories of all time. It also brought Crane international fame and modest wealth.

Crane is less well known for his short stories, poems, and essays but the modern reader will discover that he produced excellent work beyond his widely known novel. *A Dark Brown Dog* is a superlative effort and well-known to short enthusiasts. Crane's first novel, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, was about an innocent slum girl and how she fell into the world of prostitution. Quite scandalous for the times, Crane published this work under the pseudonym "Johnson Smith" in 1893, at his own expense.

After his success with *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane focused on ideas of war. In 1897 he went to Cuba as a journalist to report on the rebellion against the Spanish, but on the way he was shipwrecked and reported as dead. Actually, he had rowed towards land with three other men in a dinghy but was forced to swim to shore losing all his money on the way. Recounting the incident resulted in his most famous short story, "The Open Boat", published in 1898. That same year, Crane published his third novel, *The Third Violet*.

Back to being a war reporter, Crane went to Greece to report on the Greco-Turkish War for several New York newspapers, but rumors of his life turning to drug addiction, rampant promiscuity, even satanism — all of which were untrue — prompted him to move to England.

Crane published his poetry in 1899, *War Is Kind*, and a book of short stories, *The Monster and Other Stories*. He wrote a war novel based on his experiences in Greece, called *Active Service*. Crane continued to write prolifically until his life was cut short, a victim of tuberculosis at the age of 28. He died in a sanitorium in Germany's Black Forest on June 5, 1900.
"The Open Boat" by Stephen Crane (1898)

A Tale intended to be after the fact. Being the experience of four men from the sunk steamer "Commodore".

I

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small-boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: "Gawd! That was a narrow clip." As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he commanded for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a top-mast with a white ball on it that slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was, deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.

"Keep 'er a little more south, Billie," said he.

"A little more south, sir," said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and by the same token, a

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1 dejection: a sad and depressed state; low spirits.
broncho is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats. In a ten-foot dingey one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience which is never at sea in a dingey. As each slatey wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests.

In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been grey. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds. The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the color of the sea changed from slate to emerald-green, streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the color of the waves that rolled toward them.

In disjointed sentences the cook and the correspondent argued as to the difference between a life-saving station and a house of refuge. The cook had said: "There's a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll come off in their boat and pick us up."

"As soon as who see us?" said the correspondent.

"The crew," said the cook.

"Houses of refuge don't have crews," said the correspondent. "As I understand them, they are only places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked people. They don't carry crews."

"Oh, yes, they do," said the cook.

"No, they don't," said the correspondent.

\(^2\) *surmount*: overcome (a difficulty or obstacle)
"Well, we're not there yet, anyhow," said the oiler, in the stern.

"Well," said the cook, "perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it's a life-saving station."

"We're not there yet," said the oiler, in the stern.

II

As the boat bounced from the top of each wave, the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men, and as the craft plopped her stern down again the spray splashed past them. The crest of each of these waves was a hill, from the top of which the men surveyed, for a moment, a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

"Bully good thing it's an on-shore wind," said the cook; "If not, where would we be? Wouldn't have a show."

"That's right," said the correspondent.

The busy oiler nodded his assent.

Then the captain, in the bow, chuckled in a way that expressed humor, contempt, tragedy, all in one. "Do you think We've got much of a show now, boys?" said he.

Whereupon the three were silent, save for a trifle of hemming and hawing. To express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid, but they all doubtless possessed this sense of the situation in their mind. A young man thinks doggedly at such times. On the other hand, the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness. So they were silent.

"Oh, well," said the captain, soothing his children, "We'll get ashore all right."

But there was that in his tone which made them think, so the oiler quoth: "Yes! If this wind holds!"

The cook was bailing: "Yes! If we don't catch hell in the surf."

Canton flannel gulls flew near and far. Sometimes they sat down on the sea, near patches of brown seaweed that rolled on the waves with a movement like carpets on a line in a gale. The birds sat comfortably in groups, and they were envied by some in the dingey, for the wrath.

1 tumultuous: making an uproar or loud, confused noise.
2 wrath: extreme anger.
of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand miles inland. Often they came very close and stared at the men with black bead-like eyes. At these times they were uncanny and sinister in their unblinking scrutiny, and the men hooted angrily at them, telling them to be gone. One came, and evidently decided to alight on the top of the captain's head. The bird flew parallel to the boat and did not circle, but made short sidelong jumps in the air in chicken-fashion. His black eyes were wistfully fixed upon the captain's head. "Ugly brute," said the oiler to the bird. "You look as if you were made with a jack-knife." The cook and the correspondent swore darkly at the creature. The captain naturally wished to knock it away with the end of the heavy painter; but he did not dare do it, because anything resembling an emphatic gesture would have capsized this freighted boat, and so with his open hand, the captain gently and carefully waved the gull away. After it had been discouraged from the pursuit the captain breathed easier on account of his hair, and others breathed easier because the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow gruesome and ominous.

In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed.

They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. The very ticklish part of the business was when the time came for the reclining one in the stern to take his turn at the oars. By the very last star of truth, it is easier to steal eggs from under a hen than it was to change seats in the dingey. First the man in the stern slid his hand along the thwart and moved with care, as if he were of Swes. Then the man in the rowing seat slid his hand along the other thwart. It was all done with most extraordinary care. As the two sidled past each other, the whole party kept watchful eyes on the coming wave, and the captain cried: "Look out now! Steady there!"

The brown mats of seaweed that appeared from time to time were like islands, bits of earth. They were traveling, apparently, neither one way nor the other. They were, to all intents, stationary. They informed the men in the boat that it was making progress slowly toward the land.

The captain, rearing cautiously in the bow, after the dingey soared on a great swell, said that he had seen the light-house at Mosquito Inlet. Presently the cook remarked that he had seen it. The correspondent was at the oars then, and for some reason he too wished to look at the lighthouse, but his back was toward the far shore and the waves were important, and for some time he could not seize an opportunity to turn his head. But at last there came a wave more gentle than the others, and when at the crest of it he swiftly scoured the western horizon.

"See it?" said the captain.

"No," said the correspondent slowly, "I didn't see anything."

\footnote{capsize: (of a boat) be overturned in the water.}
"Look again," said the captain. He pointed. "It's exactly in that direction."

At the top of another wave, the correspondent did as he was bid, and this time his eyes chanced on a small still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon. It was precisely like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find a light house so tiny.

"Think we'll make it, captain?"

"If this wind holds and the boat don't swamp, we can't do much else," said the captain.

The little boat, lifted by each towering sea, and splashed viciously by the crests, made progress that in the absence of seaweed was not apparent to those in her. She seemed just a wee thing wallowing, miraculously top-up, at the mercy of five oceans. Occasionally, a great spread of water, like white flames, swarmed into her.

"Bail her, cook," said the captain serenely.

"All right, captain," said the cheerful cook.

III

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dingley. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it.

"I wish we had a sail," remarked the captain. "We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest." So the cook and the correspondent held the mast and spread wide the overcoat. The oiler steered, and the little boat made good way with her new rig. Sometimes the oiler had to scull sharply to keep a sea from breaking into the boat, but otherwise sailing was a success.

Meanwhile the lighthouse had been growing slowly larger. It had now almost assumed color, and appeared like a little grey shadow on the sky. The man at the oars could not be prevented from turning his head rather often to try for a glimpse of this little grey shadow.

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6 wallow: (of a boat or aircraft) roll from side to side.
7 cynical: believing that people are motivated purely by self-interest; distrustful of human sincerity or integrity.
At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. "We must be about opposite New Smyrna," said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners. "Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago."

"Did they?" said the captain.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dingey, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them. The oiler or the correspondent took the oars again.

Shipwrecks are _ propos_ of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink condition, there would be less drowning at sea. Of the four in the dingey none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dingey, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily.

For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time. The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back. He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary-faced oiler smiled in full sympathy. Previously to the foundering, by the way, the oiler had worked double-watch in the engine-room of the ship.

"Take her easy, now, boys," said the captain. "Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time."

Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white, trees and sand. Finally, the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore. "That's the house of refuge, sure," said the cook. "They'll see us before long, and come out after us."

The distant lighthouse reared high. "The keeper ought to be able to make us out now, if he's looking through a glass," said the captain. "He'll notify the life-saving people."

"None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck," said the oiler, in a low voice. "Else the lifeboat would be out hunting us."

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8 _impetuous_: acting or done quickly and without thought or care.
9 _ingenuous_: (of a person or action) innocent and unsuspecting.
10 _aberration_: a departure from what is normal, usual, or expected, typically an unwelcome one.
Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea. The wind came again. It had veered from the north-east to the south-east. Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the low thunder of the surf on the shore. "We'll never be able to make the lighthouse now," said the captain. "Swing her head a little more north, Billie," said he.

"A little more north,' sir," said the oiler.

Whereupon the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind, and all but the oarsman watched the shore grow. Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension was leaving the minds of the men. The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore.

Their backbones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat, and they now rode this wild colt of a dingey like circus men. The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with sea-water; four were perfectly scathless. After a search, somebody produced three dry matches, and thereupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat, and with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.

"Cook," remarked the captain, "there don't seem to be any signs of life about your house of refuge."

"No," replied the cook. "Funny they don't see us!"

A broad stretch of lowly coast lay before the eyes of the men. It was of dunes topped with dark vegetation. The roar of the surf was plain, and sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach. A tiny house was blocked out black upon the sky. Southward, the slim lighthouse lifted its little grey length.

Tide, wind, and waves were swinging the dingey northward. "Funny they don't see us," said the men.

The surf's roar was here dulled, but its tone was, nevertheless, thunderous and mighty. As the boat swam over the great rollers, the men sat listening to this roar. "We'll swamp sure," said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not know this fact, and in consequence they made dark and opprobrious remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life-savers. Four scowling men sat in the

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11 **opprobrious**: (of language) expressing scorn or criticism.
dingey and surpassed records in the invention of epithets.\textsuperscript{12}

225 "Funny they don't see us."

The lightheartedness of a former time had completely faded. To their sharpened minds it was easy to conjure pictures of all kinds of incompetency and blindness and, indeed, cowardice. There was the shore of the populous land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign.

230 "Well," said the captain, ultimately, "I suppose we'll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have strength left to swim after the boat swamps."

And so the oiler, who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscle. There was some thinking.

"If we don't all get ashore--" said the captain. "If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?"

They then briefly exchanged some addresses and admonitions.\textsuperscript{13} As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: "If I am going to be drowned-- if I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd.... But no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work."

Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds: "Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!"

The billows that came at this time were more formidable. They seemed always just about to break and roll over the little boat in a turmoil of foam. There was a preparatory and long growl in the speech of them. No mind unused to the sea would have concluded that the dingey could ascend these sheer heights in time. The shore was still afar. The oiler was a wily surfer. "Boys," he said swiftly, "she won't live three minutes more, and we're too far out to swim. Shall I take her to sea again, captain?"

"Yes! Go ahead!" said the captain.

255 This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in

\textsuperscript{12} epithet: an adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned.

\textsuperscript{13} admonition: a firm warning or reprimand.
the middle of the surf and took her safely to sea again.

There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water. Then somebody in gloom spoke. "Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now."

260 The gulls went in slanting flight up the wind toward the grey desolate east. A squall, marked by dingy clouds, and clouds brick-red, like smoke from a burning building, appeared from the south-east.

"What do you think of those life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?"

"Funny they haven't seen us."

265 "Maybe they think we're out here for sport! Maybe they think we're fishin'. Maybe they think we're damned fools."

It was a long afternoon. A changed tide tried to force them southward, but the wind and wave said northward. Far ahead, where coast-line, sea, and sky formed their mighty angle, there were little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore.

270 "St. Augustine?"

The captain shook his head. "Too near Mosquito Inlet."

And the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed. Then the oiler rowed. It was a weary business. The human back can become the seat of more aches and pains than are registered in books for the composite anatomy of a regiment. It is a limited area, but it can become the theatre of innumerable muscular conflicts, tangles, wrenches, knots, and other comforts.

"Did you ever like to row, Billie?" asked the correspondent.

"No," said the oiler. "Hang it!"

When one exchanged the rowing-seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a bodily depression that caused him to be careless of everything save an obligation to wiggle one finger. There was cold sea-water swashing to and fro in the boat, and he lay in it. His head, pillowed on a thwart, was within an inch of the swirl of a wave crest, and sometimes a particularly obstreperous sea came in-board and drenched him once more. But these matters did not annoy him. It is almost certain that if the boat had capsized he would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt sure that it was a great soft mattress.

285 "Look! There's a man on the shore!"

14 obstreperous: noisy and difficult to control.
"Where?"

"There! See 'im? See 'im?"

"Yes, sure! He's walking along."

"Now he's stopped. Look! He's facing us!"

290 "He's waving at us!"

"So he is! By thunder!"

"Ah, now we're all right! Now we're all right! There'll be a boat out here for us in half-an-hour."

"He's going on. He's running. He's going up to that house there."

The remote beach seemed lower than the sea, and it required a searching glance to discern the little black figure. The captain saw a floating stick and they rowed to it. A bath-towel was by some weird chance in the boat, and, tying this on the stick, the captain waved it. The oarsman did not dare turn his head, so he was obliged to ask questions.

"What's he doing now?"

"He's standing still again. He's looking, I think.... There he goes again. Toward the house.... 300 Now he's stopped again."

"Is he waving at us?"

"No, not now! he was, though."

"Look! There comes another man!"

"He's running."

305 "Look at him go, would you."

"Why, he's on a bicycle. Now he's met the other man. They're both waving at us. Look!"

"There comes something up the beach."

"What the devil is that thing?"

"Why it looks like a boat."
"Why, certainly it's a boat."

"No, it's on wheels."

"Yes, so it is. Well, that must be the life-boat. They drag them along shore on a wagon."

"That's the life-boat, sure."

"No, by ----, it's--it's an omnibus."

"I tell you it's a life-boat."

"It is not! It's an omnibus. I can see it plain. See? One of these big hotel omnibuses."

"By thunder, you're right. It's an omnibus, sure as fate. What do you suppose they are doing with an omnibus? Maybe they are going around collecting the life-crew, hey?"

"That's it, likely. Look! There's a fellow waving a little black flag. He's standing on the steps of the omnibus. There come those other two fellows. Now they're all talking together. Look at the fellow with the flag. Maybe he ain't waving it."

"That ain't a flag, is it? That's his coat. Why, certainly, that's his coat."

"So it is. It's his coat. He's taken it off and is waving it around his head. But would you look at him swing it."

"Oh, say, there isn't any life-saving station there. That's just a winter resort hotel omnibus that has brought over some of the boarders to see us drown."

"What's that idiot with the coat mean? What's he signaling, anyhow?"

"It looks as if he were trying to tell us to go north. There must be a life-saving station up there."

"No! He thinks we're fishing. Just giving us a merry hand. See? Ah, there, Willie!"

"Well, I wish I could make something out of those signals. What do you suppose he means?"

"He don't mean anything. He's just playing."

"Well, if he'd just signal us to try the surf again, or to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go to hell--there would be some reason in it. But look at him. He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving like a wheel. The ass!"

"There come more people."
"Now there's quite a mob. Look! Isn't that a boat?"

"Where? Oh, I see where you mean. No, that's no boat."

"That fellow is still waving his coat."

"He must think we like to see him do that. Why don't he quit it? It don't mean anything."

340 "I don't know. I think he is trying to make us go north. It must be that there's a life-saving station there somewhere."

"Say, he ain't tired yet. Look at 'im wave."

"Wonder how long he can keep that up. He's been revolving his coat ever since he caught sight of us. He's an idiot. Why aren't they getting men to bring a boat out? A fishing boat--one of those big yawls--could come out here all right. Why don't he do something?"

"Oh, it's all right, now."

"They'll have a boat out here for us in less than no time, now that they've seen us."

A faint yellow tone came into the sky over the low land. The shadows on the sea slowly deepened. The wind bore coldness with it, and the men began to shiver.

350 "Holy smoke!" said one, allowing his voice to express his impious mood, "if we keep on monkeying out here! If we've got to flounder out here all night!"

"Oh, we'll never have to stay here all night! Don't you worry. They've seen us now, and it won't be long before they'll come chasing out after us."

The shore grew dusky. The man waving a coat blended gradually into this gloom, and it swelled in the same manner the omnibus and the group of people. The spray, when it dashed uproariously over the side, made the voyagers shrink and swear like men who were being branded.

"I'd like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck."

"Why? What did he do?"

360 "Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful."

In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed, and then the oiler rowed. Grey-faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars. The form of the lighthouse had vanished from the southern horizon, but finally a pale star ap-
peared, just lifting from the sea. The streaked saffron in the west passed before the all-merging 365 darkness, and the sea to the east was black. The land had vanished, and was expressed only by the low and drear thunder of the surf.

"If I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and con-370 template sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life?"

The patient captain, drooped over the water-jar, was sometimes obliged to speak to the oars-380 man.

"Keep her head up! Keep her head up!"

375 "Keep her head up,' sir." The voices were weary and low.

This was surely a quiet evening. All save the oarsman lay heavily and listlessly in the boat's bottom. As for him, his eyes were just capable of noting the tall black waves that swept forward in a most sinister silence, save for an occasional subdued growl of a crest.

The cook's head was on a thwart, and he looked without interest at the water under his nose. 380 He was deep in other scenes. Finally he spoke. "Billie," he murmured, dreamfully, "what kind of pie do you like best?"

V

Pie," said the oiler and the correspondent, agitatedly. "Don't talk about those things, blast you!"

"Well," said the cook, "I was just thinking about ham sandwiches, and--"

385 A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. As darkness settled finally, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea in the south, changed to full gold. On the northern horizon a new light appeared, a small bluish gleam on the edge of the waters. These two lights were the furniture of the world. Otherwise there was nothing but waves.

Two men huddled in the stern, and distances were so magnificent in the dingey that the 390 rower was enabled to keep his feet partly warmed by thrusting them under his companions. Their legs indeed extended far under the rowing-seat until they touched the feet of the cap-395 tain forward. Sometimes, despite the efforts of the tired oarsman, a wave came piling into the boat, an icy wave of the night, and the chilling water soaked them anew. They would twist their bodies for a moment and groan, and sleep the dead sleep once more, while the water in the boat gurgled about them as the craft rocked.
The plan of the oiler and the correspondent was for one to row until he lost the ability, and then arouse the other from his sea-water couch in the bottom of the boat.

The oiler plied the oars until his head drooped forward, and the overpowering sleep blinded him. And he rowed yet afterward. Then he touched a man in the bottom of the boat, and called his name. "Will you spell me for a little while?" he said, meekly.

"Sure, Billie," said the correspondent, awakening and dragging himself to a sitting position. They exchanged places carefully, and the oiler, cuddling down in the sea-water at the cook's side, seemed to go to sleep instantly.

The particular violence of the sea had ceased. The waves came without snarling. The obligation of the man at the oars was to keep the boat headed so that the tilt of the rollers would not capsize her, and to preserve her from filling when the crests rushed past. The black waves were silent and hard to be seen in the darkness. Often one was almost upon the boat before the oarsman was aware.

In a low voice the correspondent addressed the captain. He was not sure that the captain was awake, although this iron man seemed to be always awake. "Captain, shall I keep her making for that light north, sir?"

The same steady voice answered him. "Yes. Keep it about two points off the port bow."

The cook had tied a life-belt around himself in order to get even the warmth which this clumsy cork contrivance could donate, and he seemed almost stove-like when a rower, whose teeth invariably chattered wildly as soon as he ceased his labor, dropped down to sleep.

The correspondent, as he rowed, looked down at the two men sleeping under-foot. The cook's arm was around the oiler's shoulders, and, with their fragmentary clothing and haggard faces, they were the babes of the sea, a grotesque rendering of the old babes in the wood.

Later he must have grown stupid at his work, for suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat, and it was a wonder that it did not set the cook afloat in his life-belt. The cook continued to sleep, but the oiler sat up, blinking his eyes and shaking with the new cold.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry, Billie," said the correspondent contritely.

"That's all right, old boy," said the oiler, and lay down again and was asleep.

Presently it seemed that even the captain dozed, and the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans. The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end.

15 *haggard*: looking exhausted and unwell, especially from fatigue, worry, or suffering.
There was a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters. It might have been made by a monstrous knife.

Then there came a stillness, while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea.

Suddenly there was another swish and another long flash of bluish light, and this time it was alongside the boat, and might almost have been reached with an oar. The correspondent saw an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail.

The correspondent looked over his shoulder at the captain. His face was hidden, and he seemed to be asleep. He looked at the babes of the sea. They certainly were asleep. So, being bereft of sympathy, he leaned a little way to one side and swore softly into the sea.

But the thing did not then leave the vicinity of the boat. Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals long or short, fled the long sparkling streak, and there was to be heard the whirroo of the dark fin. The speed and power of the thing was greatly to be admired. It cut the water like a gigantic and keen projectile.

The presence of this biding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would if he had been a picnicker. He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone.

Nevertheless, it is true that he did not wish to be alone. He wished one of his companions to awaken by chance and keep him company with it. But the captain hung motionless over the water-jar, and the oiler and the cook in the bottom of the boat were plunged in slumber.

VI

If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?"

During this dismal night, it may be remarked that a man would conclude that it was really the intention of the seven mad gods to drown him, despite the abominable injustice of it. For it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural. Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still--

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at

\[\text{abominable: very bad; terrible; causing moral revulsion.}\]
\[\text{maim: wound or injure (a person or animal) so that part of the body is permanently damaged.}\]
the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no brick and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands supplicant, saying: "Yes, but I love myself."

A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation.

The men in the dingey had not discussed these matters, but each had, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to his mind. There was seldom any expression upon their faces save the general one of complete weariness. Speech was devoted to the business of the boat.

To chime the notes of his emotion, a verse mysteriously entered the correspondent's head. He had even forgotten that he had forgotten this verse, but it suddenly was in his mind.

"A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, There was a lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears; But a comrade stood beside him, and he took that comrade's hand, And he said: 'I shall never see my own, my native land.'"

In his childhood, the correspondent had been made acquainted with the fact that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, but he had never regarded the fact as important. Myriads of his school-fellows had informed him of the soldier's plight, but the dinning had naturally ended by making him perfectly indifferent. He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, nor had it appeared to him as a matter for sorrow. It was less to him than the breaking of a pencil's point.

Now, however, it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet, meanwhile drinking tea and warming his feet at the grate; it was an actuality--stern, mournful, and fine.

The correspondent plainly saw the soldier. He lay on the sand with his feet out straight and still. While his pale left hand was upon his chest in an attempt to thwart the going of his life, the blood came between his fingers. In the far Algerian distance, a city of low square forms was set against a sky that was faint with the last sunset hues. The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers.

The thing which had followed the boat and waited, had evidently grown bored at the delay.

18 **supplicant**: someone who asks or begs for something earnestly or humbly.
19 **plight**: a dangerous, difficult, or otherwise unfortunate situation.
There was no longer to be heard the slash of the cut-water, and there was no longer the flame of the long trail. The light in the north still glimmered, but it was apparently no nearer to the boat. Sometimes the boom of the surf rang in the correspondent's ears, and he turned the craft seaward then and rowed harder. Southward, some one had evidently built a watch-fire on the beach. It was too low and too far to be seen, but it made a shimmering, roseate reflection upon the bluff back of it, and this could be discerned from the boat. The wind came stronger, and sometimes a wave suddenly raged out like a mountain-cat, and there was to be seen the sheen and sparkle of a broken crest.

The captain, in the bow, moved on his water-jar and sat erect. "Pretty long night," he observed to the correspondent. He looked at the shore. "Those life-saving people take their time."

"Did you see that shark playing around?"

"Yes, I saw him. He was a big fellow, all right."

"Wish I had known you were awake."

Later the correspondent spoke into the bottom of the boat.

"Billie!" There was a slow and gradual disentanglement. "Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the cold comfortable sea-water in the bottom of the boat, and had huddled close to the cook's life-belt he was deep in sleep, despite the fact that his teeth played all the popular airs. This sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name in a tone that demonstrated the last stages of exhaustion. "Will you spell me?"

"Sure, Billie."

"Wish I had known you were awake."

Later the correspondent took his course from the wide-awake captain.

Later in the night they took the boat farther out to sea, and the captain directed the cook to take one oar at the stern and keep the boat facing the seas. He was to call out if he should hear the thunder of the surf. This plan enabled the oiler and the correspondent to get respite together. "We'll give those boys a chance to get into shape again," said the captain. They curled down and, after a few preliminary chatterings and trembles, slept once more the dead sleep. Neither knew they had bequeathed the cook the company of another shark, or perhaps the same shark.

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20 respite: a short period of rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant.
21 bequeathed: pass (something) on or leave (something) to someone else.
As the boat caroused on the waves, spray occasionally bumped over the side and gave them a fresh soaking, but this had no power to break their repose. The ominous slash of the wind and the water affected them as it would have affected mummies.

"Boys," said the cook, with the notes of every reluctance in his voice, "she's drifted in pretty close. I guess one of you had better take her to sea again." The correspondent, aroused, heard the crash of the toppled crests.

As he was rowing, the captain gave him some whisky-and-water, and this steadied the chills out of him. "If I ever get ashore and anybody shows me even a photograph of an oar--"

At last there was a short conversation.

"Billie.... Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

VII

When the correspondent again opened his eyes, the sea and the sky were each of the grey hue of the dawning. Later, carmine and gold was painted upon the waters. The morning appeared finally, in its splendor, with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves.

On the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white windmill reared above them. No man, nor dog, nor bicycle appeared on the beach. The cottages might have formed a deserted village.

The voyagers scanned the shore. A conference was held in the boat. "Well," said the captain, "if no help is coming we might better try a run through the surf right away. If we stay out here much longer we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all." The others silently acquiesced in this reasoning. The boat was headed for the beach. The correspondent wondered if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if then they never looked seaward. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. It is, perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life, and have them taste wickedly in his mind and wish for another chance. A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction

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22 *acquiesce*: accept something reluctantly but without protest.
23 *beneficent*: (of a person) generous or doing good
"Now, boys," said the captain, "she is going to swamp, sure. All we can do is to work her in as far as possible, and then when she swamps, pile out and scramble for the beach. Keep cool now, and don't jump until she swamps sure."

The oiler took the oars. Over his shoulders he scanned the surf. "Captain," he said, "I think I'd better bring her about, and keep her head-on to the seas and back her in."

"All right, Billie," said the captain. "Back her in." The oiler swung the boat then and, seated in the stern, the cook and the correspondent were obliged to look over their shoulders to contemplate the lonely and indifferent shore.

The monstrous in-shore rollers heaved the boat high until the men were again enabled to see the white sheets of water scudding up the slanted beach. "We won't get in very close," said the captain. Each time a man could wrest his attention from the rollers, he turned his glance toward the shore, and in the expression of the eyes during this contemplation there was a singular quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was shrouded.

As for himself, he was too tired to grapple fundamentally with the fact. He tried to coerce his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was dominated at this time by the muscles, and the muscles said they did not care. It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame.

There were no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation. The men simply looked at the shore. "Now, remember to get well clear of the boat when you jump," said the captain.

Seaward the crest of a roller suddenly fell with a thunderous crash, and the long white comber came roaring down upon the boat.

"Steady now," said the captain. The men were silent. They turned their eyes from the shore to the comber and waited. The boat slid up the incline, leaped at the furious top, bounced over it, and swung down the long back of the wave. Some water had been shipped and the cook bailed it out.

But the next crest crashed also. The tumbling, boiling flood of white water caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular. Water swarmed in from all sides. The correspondent had his hands on the gunwale at this time, and when the water entered at that place he swiftly withdrew his fingers, as if he objected to wetting them.

The little boat, drunken with this weight of water, reeled and snuggled deeper into the sea.

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24 *pallor*: an unhealthy pale appearance.
"Bail her out, cook! Bail her out," said the captain.

"All right, captain," said the cook.

590 "Now, boys, the next one will do for us, sure," said the oiler. "Mind to jump clear of the boat."

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. It fairly swallowed the dingey, and almost simultaneously the men tumbled into the sea. A piece of lifebelt had lain in the bottom of the boat, and as the correspondent went overboard he held this to his chest with his left hand.

595 The January water was icy, and he reflected immediately that it was colder than he had expected to find it on the coast of Florida. This appeared to his dazed mind as a fact important enough to be noted at the time. The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic. This fact was somehow so mixed and confused with his opinion of his own situation that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold.

600 When he came to the surface he was conscious of little but the noisy water. Afterward he saw his companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the correspondent's left, the cook's great white and corked back bulged out of the water, and in the rear the captain was hanging with his one good hand to the keel of the overturned dingey.

605 There is a certain immovable quality to a shore, and the correspondent wondered at it amid the confusion of the sea.

It seemed also very attractive, but the correspondent knew that it was a long journey, and he paddled leisurely. The piece of life-preserver lay under him, and sometimes he whirled down the incline of a wave as if he were on a handsled.

610 But finally he arrived at a place in the sea where travel was beset with difficulty. He did not pause swimming to inquire what manner of current had caught him, but there his progress ceased. The shore was set before him like a bit of scenery on a stage, and he looked at it and understood with his eyes each detail of it.

As the cook passed, much farther to the left, the captain was calling to him, "Turn over on your back, cook! Turn over on your back and use the oar."

"All right, sir." The cook turned on his back, and, paddling with an oar, went ahead as if he were a canoe.

Presently the boat also passed to the left of the correspondent with the captain clinging with one hand to the keel. He would have appeared like a man raising himself to look over a board fence, if it were not for the extraordinary gymnastics of the boat. The correspondent mar-
velled that the captain could still hold to it.

They passed on, nearer to shore--the oiler, the cook, the captain--and following them went the water-jar, bouncing gaily over the seas.

The correspondent remained in the grip of this strange new enemy--a current. The shore, with its white slope of sand and its green bluff, topped with little silent cottages, was spread like a picture before him. It was very near to him then, but he was impressed as one who in a gallery looks at a scene from Brittany or Holland.

He thought: "I am going to drown? Can it be possible Can it be possible? Can it be possible?"

Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature.

But later a wave perhaps whirled him out of this small, deadly current, for he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore. Later still, he was aware that the captain, clinging with one hand to the keel of the dingey, had his face turned away from the shore and toward him, and was calling his name. "Come to the boat! Come to the boat!"

In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he reflected that when one gets properly wearied, drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief, and he was glad of it, for the main thing in his mind for some months had been horror of the temporary agony. He did not wish to be hurt.

Presently he saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off him.

"Come to the boat," called the captain.

"All right, captain." As the correspondent paddled, he saw the captain let himself down to bottom and leave the boat. Then the correspondent performed his one little marvel of the voyage. A large wave caught him and flung him with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck him even then as an event in gymnastics, and a true miracle of the sea. An over-turned boat in the surf is not a plaything to a swimming man.

The correspondent arrived in water that reached only to his waist, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave knocked him into a heap, and the under-tow pulled at him.

Then he saw the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water. He dragged ashore the cook, and then waded towards the captain, but the captain waved him away, and sent him to the correspondent. He was naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint. He gave a strong pull, and a long drag, and a bully heave at the correspondent's hand. The correspondent

25 cessation: the fact or process of ending or being brought to an end
ent, schooled in the minor formulae, said: "Thanks, old man." But suddenly the man cried: 655 "What's that?" He pointed a swift finger. The correspondent said: "Go."

In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea.

The correspondent did not know all that transpired afterward. When he achieved safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each particular part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from 660 a roof, but the thud was grateful to him.

It seems that instantly the beach was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffeepots and all the remedies sacred to their minds. The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it could only be the different and sinister 665 hospitality of the grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters.

C Comprehension Questions

1) What is the setting of the story? What is the significance of the setting considering that the story is told in the naturalist literary style? (Naturalism is a is a type of extreme realism. Thus, naturalistic writers write stories based on the idea that environment determines and governs human character.)

2) Who are the individuals in the story? What are their duties?

3) List some examples of the indifference of nature against the struggle of the men.

4) What is the meaning of the sea gulls taunting the men in the boat?

5) How do the men form a brotherhood? List some examples.

6) List some examples of the significance of the use of colour in the description of the environment.

7) List some examples of how the story fits the naturalist genre.

8) List some specific examples of the men's struggle against the forces of nature. Why can't they overcome these forces?

9) In your opinion, why do you think the oiler, the strongest of the four, is the one to die at the end?
D Close Reading & Analysis

1) Why do you think Billie is the only named character?

2) How does the description of what it’s like to move in the boat help convey the tense situation the men are in?

3) Why does the cook dream/talk about pie and sandwiches?

4) What is the relationship between the captain and the others on the boat?

5) What is the significance of the boat in comparison to human life and existence?

6) What is the symbolic significance of the cigars?

7) Why did Crane choose to include the random scene of a person on land who seems to be waving at them?

8) What is Crane’s perspective of Mother Nature?

9) If you were prompted to change the title of the story, what would your new title be? Why?

10) Is there any comparison to be made between nature, life and the waves in the sea during the men’s traumatic experience?
IGCSE Short Stories
"The Moving Finger" by Edith Wharton (1899)

A | About the Author — Edith Wharton (1862 - 1937)

One of the major figures in American literary history, Edith Wharton (1862-1937) presented intriguing insights into the American experience. Author of more than 40 volumes — novels, short stories, poetry, non-fiction — Wharton had a long and remarkable life. She was born during the Civil War, encouraged in her childhood literary endeavours by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and devoted to such varied friends as Henry James and Theodore Roosevelt; yet she had also read William Faulkner, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot, and had actually met Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Her upbringing provided her with insights on the upper class, while her sense of humour and polished prose produced fiction that appealed to a large audience. Recipient of the French Legion of Honor for her philanthropic work during World War I and of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Age of Innocence* (1920), in 1923 she became the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from Yale. Wharton was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

A naturally gifted storyteller, Wharton wrote novels and short fiction notable for their vividness, satire, irony, and wit. Her complex characters and subtly delivered point-of-view make the reading of Wharton’s fiction both challenging and rewarding, while her own life illustrates the difficulties that a woman of her era had to surmount to find self-realization.

In 1885, when she was twenty-three, she married Edward (“Teddy”) Wharton. Although from a similar social background, he lacked her artistic and intellectual interests and after nearly 30 years of marriage, she divorced him. Wharton eventually settled permanently in France, thereafter visiting the United States only rarely. In Paris in 1908 she began a briefly fulfilling but ultimately disappointing affair with Morton Fullerton, a journalist on the *London Times* and a friend of Henry James. In Paris she found intellectual companionship in circles where artists and writers mingled with the rich and well-born, and where women played a major role. Considered one of the major American novelists and short story writers of the 20th century, Edith Wharton died in France in 1937.
B Key Concepts — Literary Modernism

Modernism, in its broadest definition, is modern thought, character, or practice. More specifically, the term describes the modernist movement, its set of cultural tendencies and array of associated cultural movements, originally arising from wide-scale and far-reaching changes to Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Modernism was a revolt against the conservative values of realism. Arguably the most paradigmatic motive of modernism is the rejection of tradition and its reprise, incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision and parody in new forms. Modernism rejected the lingering certainty of Enlightenment thinking and also rejected the existence of a compassionate, all-powerful Creator God.

In general, the term modernism encompasses the activities and output of those who felt the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic, social, and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. The poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "Make it new!" was paradigmatic of the movement's approach towards the obsolete. Another paradigmatic exhortation was articulated by philosopher and composer Theodor Adorno, who, in the 1940s, challenged conventional surface coherence and appearance of harmony typical of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking. A salient characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness. This self-consciousness often led to experiments with form and work that draws attention to the processes and materials used (and to the further tendency of abstraction).

The modernist movement, at the beginning of the 20th century, marked the first time that the term "avant-garde", with which the movement was labeled until the word "modernism" prevailed, was used for the arts (rather than in its original military and political context). Surrealism gained fame among the public as being the most extreme form of modernism, or "the avant-garde of modernism".

Hans Hofmann, "The Gate", 1959–1960, collection: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Hofmann was renowned not only as an artist but also as a teacher of art, and a modernist theorist both in his native Germany and later in the U.S. During the 1930s in New York and California he introduced modernism and modernist theories to a new generation of American artists. Through his teaching and his lectures at his art schools in Greenwich Village and Provincetown, Massachusetts, he widened the scope of modernism in America.
C Key Concepts — The Uncanny in Gothic Literature

The uncanny is the sole principle underlying ghost and supernatural stories, where we are frightened because something isn’t going the way it should. Gothic novels tend to feature strong supernatural elements juxtaposed with familiar backdrops: dark and stormy nights, ruined castles riddled with secret passages, and forces of unlikely good pitted against those of unimaginable evil. These elements highlight the feeling of the unknown that is associated with the Uncanny. Gothic writers often attempt to probe Oedipal themes, the power of the symbolic order and the experiences of the abject. The Uncanny provides a feeling of intellectual uncertainty - which is a feature that dominates Gothic literature.

Why do we find this experience so appealing? The answer lies in the idea of the "alien" or "otherness"; we define ourselves through defining the other; we are what we are not. The Gothic genre provides numerous examples of 'otherness' and how this reveals the true nature of the dominant culture, including its values, attitudes and fears.

One very popular example of the Uncanny in Gothic Literature is vampirism in Bram Stoker's archetypal Dracula. Vampirism can be seen as the Uncanny because of the suspicion that someone else is a vampire, or some kind of monster. We appreciate the distinction between human and nonhuman, and anything that threatens to breech that clear line between living and not makes us feel very uneasy. This is interesting to think about when thinking about vampires. They are so human-like, they appear to be human, and they even go through some daily human routines. Then again, they are not human at all. They thrill us with characteristic that does not appear to be fully human, but yet they still carry some human traits.

Looking at Bram Stoker's Dracula, the relationship between Dracula and Mina Harker is uncanny. It imitates the relationship between husband and wife, but is described as sinister, more as if they were predator and prey. The relationship between husband and wife is familiar, and the relationship between predator and prey is familiar, but only when they are separate from each other. Combining the characteristics of these two separate pairings and applying them to a single relationship between Dracula and Mina, creates an uncanny effect.
The news of Mrs. Grancy's death came to me with the shock of an immense blunder—one of fate's most irretrievable acts of vandalism. It was as though all sorts of renovating forces had been checked by the clogging of that one wheel. Not that Mrs. Grancy contributed any perceptible momentum to the social machine: her unique distinction was that of filling to perfection her special place in the world. So many people are like badly-composed statues, over-lapping their niches\(^1\) at one point and leaving them vacant at another. Mrs. Grancy's niche was her husband's life; and if it be argued that the space was not large enough for its vacancy to leave a very big gap, I can only say that, at the last resort, such dimensions must be determined by finer instruments than any ready-made standard of utility. Ralph Grancy's was in short a kind of disembodied usefulness: one of those constructive influences that, instead of crystallizing into definite forms, remain as it were a medium for the development of clear thinking and fine feeling. He faithfully irrigated his own dusty patch of life, and the fruitful moisture stole far beyond his boundaries. If, to carry on the metaphor, Grancy's life was a sedulously\(^2\)-cultivated enclosure, his wife was the flower he had planted in its midst—the embowering tree, rather, which gave him rest and shade at its foot and the wind of dreams in its upper branches.

We had all—his small but devoted band of followers—known a moment when it seemed likely that Grancy would fail us. We had watched him pitted against one stupid obstacle after another—ill-health, poverty, misunderstanding and, worst of all for a man of his texture, his first wife's soft insidious\(^3\) egotism. We had seen him sinking under the leaden embrace of her affection like a swimmer in a drowning clutch; but just as we despaired he had always come to the surface again, blinded, panting, but striking out fiercely for the shore. When at last her death released him it became a question as to how much of the man she had carried with her. Left alone, he revealed numb withered patches, like a tree from which a parasite has been stripped. But gradually he began to put out new leaves; and when he met the lady who was to become his second wife—his one real wife, as his friends reckoned—the whole man burst into flower.

The second Mrs. Grancy was past thirty when he married her, and it was clear that she had harvested that crop of middle joy which is rooted in young despair. But if she had lost the surface of eighteen she had kept its inner light; if her cheek lacked the gloss of immaturity her eyes were young with the stored youth of half a life-time. Grancy had first known her somewhere in the East—I believe she was the sister of one of our consuls out there—and when he brought her home to New York she came among us as a stranger. The idea of Grancy's remarriage had been a shock to us all. After one such calcining most men would have kept out of the fire; but we agreed that he was predestined to sentimental blunders, and we awaited with resignation the embodiment of his latest mistake. Then Mrs. Grancy came—

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1. **niche**: (one's niche) a comfortable or suitable position in life or employment.
2. **sedulous**: (of a person or action) showing dedication and diligence.
3. **insidious**: proceeding in a gradual, subtle way, but with very harmful effects.
and we understood. She was the most beautiful and the most complete of explanations. We shuffled our defeated omniscience out of sight and gave it hasty burial under a prodigality of welcome. For the first time in years we had Grancy off our minds. “He’ll do something great now!” the least sanguine of us prophesied; and our sentimentalist emended: “He has done it—in marrying her!”

It was Claydon, the portrait-painter, who risked this hyperbole; and who soon afterward, at the happy husband’s request, prepared to defend it in a portrait of Mrs. Grancy. We were all—even Claydon—ready to concede that Mrs. Grancy’s unwontedness was in some degree a matter of environment. Her graces were complementary and it needed the mate’s call to reveal the flush of color beneath her neutral-tinted wings. But if she needed Grancy to interpret her, how much greater was the service she rendered him! Claydon professionally described her as the right frame for him; but if she defined she also enlarged, if she threw the whole into perspective she also cleared new ground, opened fresh vistas, reclaimed whole areas of activity that had run to waste under the harsh husbandry of privation. This interaction of sympathies was not without its visible expression. Claydon was not alone in maintaining that Grancy’s presence—or indeed the mere mention of his name—had a perceptible effect on his wife’s appearance. It was as though a light were shifted, a curtain drawn back, as though, to borrow another of Claydon’s metaphors, Love the indefatigable artist were perpetually seeking a happier “pose” for his model. In this interpretative light Mrs. Grancy acquired the charm which makes some women’s faces like a book of which the last page is never turned. There was always something new to read in her eyes. What Claydon read there—or at least such scattered hints of the ritual as reached him through the sanctuary doors—his portrait in due course declared to us. When the picture was exhibited it was at once acclaimed as his masterpiece; but the people who knew Mrs. Grancy smiled and said it was flattered. Claydon, however, had not set out to paint their Mrs. Grancy—or ours even—but Ralph’s; and Ralph knew his own at a glance. At the first confrontation he saw that Claydon had understood. As for Mrs. Grancy, when the finished picture was shown to her she turned to the painter and said simply: “Ah, you’ve done me facing the east!”

The picture, then, for all its value, seemed a mere incident in the unfolding of their double destiny, a foot-note to the illuminated text of their lives. It was not till afterward that it acquired the significance of last words spoken on a threshold never to be recrossed. Grancy, a year after his marriage, had given up his town house and carried his bliss an hour’s journey away, to a little place among the hills. His various duties and interests brought him frequently to New York but we necessarily saw him less often than when his house had served as the rallying-point of kindred enthusiasms. It seemed a pity that such an influence should be

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4 omniscience: the state of knowing everything.
5 prodigality: the state of spending money or using resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.
6 sanguine: optimistic or positive, especially in an apparently bad or difficult situation.
7 concede: admit or agree that something is true after first denying or resisting it; surrender, yield, give up.
8 husbandry: management and conservation of resources.
9 privation: a state in which food and other essentials for well-being are lacking.
10 indefatigable: (of a person or their efforts) persisting tirelessly.
withdrawn, but we all felt that his long arrears of happiness should be paid in whatever coin he chose. The distance from which the fortunate couple radiated warmth on us was not too great for friendship to traverse; and our conception of a glorified leisure took the form of 75 Sundays spent in the Grancy’s library, with its sedative rural outlook, and the portrait of Mrs. Grancy illuminating its studious walls. The picture was at its best in that setting; and we used to accuse Claydon of visiting Mrs. Grancy in order to see her portrait. He met this by declaring that the portrait was Mrs. Grancy; and there were moments when the statement seemed unanswerable. One of us, indeed—I think it must have been the novelist—said that Clayton had been saved from falling in love with Mrs. Grancy only by falling in love with his picture of her; and it was noticeable that he, to whom his finished work was no more than the shed husk of future effort, showed a perennial tenderness for this one achievement. We smiled afterward to think how often, when Mrs. Grancy was in the room, her presence reflecting itself in our talk like a gleam of sky in a hurrying current, Claydon, averted from the real woman, would sit as it were listening to the picture. His attitude, at the time, seemed only a part of the usualness of those picturesque afternoons, when the most familiar combinations of life underwent a magical change. Some human happiness is a landlocked lake; but the Grancy’s was an open sea, stretching a buoyant and illimitable surface to the voyaging interests of life. There was room and to spare on those waters for all our separate ventures; and always beyond the sunset, a mirage of the fortunate isles toward which our prows bent.

II

I t was in Rome that, three years later, I heard of her death. The notice said “suddenly”; I was glad of that. I was glad too—basely perhaps—to be away from Grancy at a time when silence must have seemed obtuse and speech derisive. I was still in Rome when, a few months afterward, he suddenly arrived there. He had been appointed secretary of legation at Constantinople and was on the way to his post. He had taken the place, he said frankly, “to get away.” Our relations with the Porte held out a prospect of hard work, and that, he explained, was what he needed. He could never be satisfied to sit down among the ruins. I saw that, like most of us in moments of extreme moral tension, he was playing a part, behaving as he thought it became a man to behave in the eye of disaster.

The instinctive posture of grief is a shuffling compromise between defiance and prostration; and pride feels the need of striking a worthier attitude in face of such a foe. Grancy, by nature musing and retrospective, had chosen the role of the man of action, who answers blow for blow and opposes a mailed front to the thrusts of destiny; and the completeness of the equipment testified to his inner weakness. We talked only of what we were not thinking of, and parted, after a few days, with a sense of relief that proved the inadequacy of friendship to perform, in such cases, the office assigned to it by tradition.

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11 **arrears**: money that is owed and should have been paid earlier.
12 **illimitable**: without limits or an end.
13 **obtuse**: difficult to understand, especially deliberately so; annoyingly insensitive or slow to understand.
14 **derisive**: expressing contempt or ridicule.
15 **retrospective**: looking back on or dealing with past events or situations.
Soon afterward my own work called me home, but Grancy remained several years in Europe. International diplomacy kept its promise of giving him work to do, and during the year in which he acted as charge d'affaires he acquitted himself, under trying conditions, with conspicuous zeal and discretion. A political redistribution of matter removed him from office just as he had proved his usefulness to the government; and the following summer I heard that he had come home and was down at his place in the country.

On my return to town I wrote him and his reply came by the next post. He answered as it were in his natural voice, urging me to spend the following Sunday with him, and suggesting that I should bring down any of the old set who could be persuaded to join me. I thought this a good sign, and yet—shall I own it?—I was vaguely disappointed. Perhaps we are apt to feel that our friends' sorrows should be kept like those historic monuments from which the encroaching ivy is periodically removed.

That very evening at the club I ran across Claydon. I told him of Grancy's invitation and proposed that we should go down together; but he pleaded an engagement. I was sorry, for I had always felt that he and I stood nearer Ralph than the others, and if the old Sundays were to be renewed I should have preferred that we two should spend the first alone with him. I said as much to Claydon and offered to fit my time to his; but he met this by a general refusal.

"I don't want to go to Grancy's," he said bluntly. I waited a moment, but he appended no qualifying clause.

"You've seen him since he came back?" I finally ventured.

Claydon nodded.

"And is he so awfully bad?"

"Bad? No: he's all right."

"All right? How can he be, unless he's changed beyond all recognition?"

"Oh, you'll recognize him," said Claydon, with a puzzling deflection of emphasis.

His ambiguity was beginning to exasperate me, and I felt myself shut out from some knowledge to which I had as good a right as he.

"You've been down there already, I suppose?"

16 *acquit*: [with object] free (someone) from a criminal charge by a verdict of not guilty.

17 *discretion*: the quality of behaving or speaking in such a way as to avoid causing offence or revealing confidential information.

18 *encroach*: intrude on (a person's territory, rights, personal life, etc.).
“Yes; I’ve been down there.”

“And you’ve done with each other—the partnership is dissolved?”

“Done with each other? I wish to God we had!” He rose nervously and tossed aside the review from which my approach had diverted him. “Look here,” he said, standing before me, “Ralph’s the best fellow going and there’s nothing under heaven I wouldn’t do for him—short of going down there again.” And with that he walked out of the room.

Claydon was incalculable enough for me to read a dozen different meanings into his words; but none of my interpretations satisfied me. I determined, at any rate, to seek no farther for a companion; and the next Sunday I travelled down to Grancy’s alone. He met me at the station and I saw at once that he had changed since our last meeting. Then he had been in fighting array, but now if he and grief still housed together it was no longer as enemies. Physically the transformation was as marked but less reassuring. If the spirit triumphed the body showed its scars. At five-and-forty he was gray and stooping, with the tired gait of an old man. His serenity, however, was not the resignation of age. I saw that he did not mean to drop out of the game. Almost immediately he began to speak of our old interests; not with an effort, as at our former meeting, but simply and naturally, in the tone of a man whose life has flowed back into its normal channels. I remembered, with a touch of self-reproach, how I had distrusted his reconstructive powers; but my admiration for his reserved force was now tinged by the sense that, after all, such happiness as his ought to have been paid with his last coin. The feeling grew as we neared the house and I found how inextricably his wife was interwoven with my remembrance of the place: how the whole scene was but an extension of that vivid presence.

Within doors nothing was changed, and my hand would have dropped without surprise into her welcoming clasp. It was luncheon-time, and Grancy led me at once to the dining-room, where the walls, the furniture, the very plate and porcelain, seemed a mirror in which a moment since her face had been reflected. I wondered whether Grancy, under the recovered tranquillity of his smile, concealed the same sense of her nearness, saw perpetually between himself and the actual her bright unappeasable ghost. He spoke of her once or twice, in an easy incidental way, and her name seemed to hang in the air after he had uttered it, like a chord that continues to vibrate. If he felt her presence it was evidently as an enveloping medium, the moral atmosphere in which he breathed. I had never before known how completely the dead may survive.

After luncheon we went for a long walk through the autumnal fields and woods, and dusk was falling when we re-entered the house. Grancy led the way to the library, where, at this hour, his wife had always welcomed us back to a bright fire and a cup of tea. The room faced the west, and held a clear light of its own after the rest of the house had grown dark. I remembered how young she had looked in this pale gold light, which irradiated her eyes and hair, or silhouetted her girlish outline as she passed before the windows. Of all the rooms the library

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19 *inextricable*:: impossible to disentangle or separate; impossible to escape from (a situation).
was most peculiarly hers; and here I felt that her nearness might take visible shape. Then, all in a moment, as Grancy opened the door, the feeling vanished and a kind of resistance met me on the threshold. I looked about me. Was the room changed? Had some desecrating hand effaced the traces of her presence? No; here too the setting was undisturbed. My feet sank into the same deep-piled Daghestan; the bookshelves took the firelight on the same rows of rich subdued bindings; her armchair stood in its old place near the tea-table; and from the opposite wall her face confronted me.

180 Her face—but was it hers? I moved nearer and stood looking up at the portrait. Grancy’s glance had followed mine and I heard him move to my side.

“You see a change in it?” he said.

“What does it mean?” I asked.

“It means—that five years have passed.”

185 “Over her?”

“Why not?—Look at me!” He pointed to his gray hair and furrowed temples. “What do you think kept her so young? It was happiness! But now—” he looked up at her with infinite tenderness. “I like her better so,” he said. “It’s what she would have wished.”

“Have wished?”

190 “That we should grow old together. Do you think she would have wanted to be left behind?”

I stood speechless, my gaze travelling from his worn grief-beaten features to the painted face above. It was not furrowed like his; but a veil of years seemed to have descended on it. The bright hair had lost its elasticity, the cheek its clearness, the brow its light: the whole woman had waned.

195 Grancy laid his hand on my arm. “You don’t like it?” he said sadly.

“Like it? I—I’ve lost her!” I burst out.

“And I’ve found her,” he answered.

“In that?” I cried with a reproachful gesture.

“Yes; in that.” He swung round on me almost defiantly. “The other had become a sham, a lie!

200 This is the way she would have looked—does look, I mean. Claydon ought to know, oughtn’t he?”

20 desecrate: treat (a sacred place or thing) with violent disrespect.
I turned suddenly. “Did Claydon do this for you?”

Grancy nodded.

“Since your return?”

205 “Yes. I sent for him after I’d been back a week–.” He turned away and gave a thrust to the smouldering fire. I followed, glad to leave the picture behind me. Grancy threw himself into a chair near the hearth, so that the light fell on his sensitive variable face. He leaned his head back, shading his eyes with his hand, and began to speak.

III

“You fellows knew enough of my early history to A guess what my second marriage meant to me. I say guess, because no one could understand–really. I’ve always had a feminine streak in me, I suppose: the need of a pair of eyes that should see with me, of a pulse that should keep time with mine. Life is a big thing, of course; a magnificent spectacle; but I got so tired of looking at it alone! Still, it’s always good to live, and I had plenty of happiness–of the evolved kind. What I’d never had a taste of was the simple inconscient sort that one breathes in like the air....

210 “Well–I met her. It was like finding the climate in which I was meant to live. You know what she was–how indefinitely she multiplied one’s points of contact with life, how she lit up the caverns and bridged the abysses! Well, I swear to you (though I suppose the sense of all that was latent in me) that what I used to think of on my way home at the end of the day, was simply that when I opened this door she’d be sitting over there, with the lamp-light falling in a particular way on one little curl in her neck.... When Claydon painted her he caught just the look she used to lift to mine when I came in–I’ve wondered, sometimes, at his knowing how she looked when she and I were alone.–How I rejoiced in that picture! I used to say to her, ‘You’re my prisoner now–I shall never lose you. If you grew tired of me and left me you’d leave your real self there on the wall!’ It was always one of our jokes that she was going to grow tired of me–

215 “Three years of it–and then she died. It was so sudden that there was no change, no diminution. It was as if she had suddenly become fixed, immovable, like her own portrait: as if Time had ceased at its happiest hour, just as Claydon had thrown down his brush one day and said, ‘I can’t do better than that.’

220 “I went away, as you know, and stayed over there five years. I worked as hard as I knew how, and after the first black months a little light stole in on me. From thinking that she would have been interested in what I was doing I came to feel that she was interested–that she was there and that she knew. I’m not talking any psychical jargon — I’m simply trying to express

21 latent: (of a quality or state) existing but not yet developed or manifest; hidden or concealed.
22 jargon: special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand.
the sense I had that an influence so full, so abounding\(^{23}\) as hers couldn’t pass like a spring shower. We had so lived into each other’s hearts and minds that the consciousness of what she would have thought and felt illuminated all I did. At first she used to come back shyly, tentatively\(^{24}\), as though not sure of finding me; then she stayed longer and longer, till at last she became again the very air I breathed.... There were bad moments, of course, when her nearness mocked me with the loss of the real woman; but gradually the distinction between the two was effaced\(^{25}\) and the mere thought of her grew warm as flesh and blood.

“Then I came home. I landed in the morning and came straight down here. The thought of seeing her portrait possessed me and my heart beat like a lover’s as I opened the library door. It was in the afternoon and the room was full of light. It fell on her picture—the picture of a young and radiant woman. She smiled at me coldly across the distance that divided us. I had the feeling that she didn’t even recognize me. And then I caught sight of myself in the mirror over there—a gray-haired broken man whom she had never known!

“For a week we two lived together—the strange woman and the strange man. I used to sit night after night and question her smiling face; but no answer ever came. What did she know of me, after all? We were irrevocably\(^{26}\) separated by the five years of life that lay between us. At times, as I sat here, I almost grew to hate her; for her presence had driven away my gentle ghost, the real wife who had wept, aged, struggled with me during those awful years.... It was the worst loneliness I’ve ever known. Then, gradually, I began to notice a look of sadness in the picture’s eyes; a look that seemed to say: ‘Don’t you see that I am lonely too?’ And all at once it came over me how she would have hated to be left behind! I remembered her comparing life to a heavy book that could not be read with ease unless two people held it together; and I thought how impatiently her hand would have turned the pages that divided us!–So the idea came to me: ‘It’s the picture that stands between us; the picture that is dead, and not my wife. To sit in this room is to keep watch beside a corpse.’ As this feeling grew on me the portrait became like a beautiful mausoleum\(^{27}\) in which she had been buried alive: I could hear her beating against the painted walls and crying to me faintly for help....

“One day I found I couldn’t stand it any longer and I sent for Claydon. He came down and I told him what I’d been through and what I wanted him to do. At first he refused point-blank to touch the picture. The next morning I went off for a long tramp, and when I came home I found him sitting here alone. He looked at me sharply for a moment and then he said: ‘I’ve changed my mind; I’ll do it.’ I arranged one of the north rooms as a studio and he shut himself up there for a day; then he sent for me. The picture stood there as you see it now—it was as though she’d met me on the threshold and taken me in her arms! I tried to thank him, to tell him what it meant to me, but he cut me short.

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\(^{23}\) **abound**: exist in large numbers or amounts.

\(^{24}\) **tentative**: not certain or fixed; provisional.

\(^{25}\) **efface**: cause (a memory or emotion) to disappear completely.

\(^{26}\) **irrevocable**: not able to be changed, reversed, or recovered; final.

\(^{27}\) **mausoleum**: a stately or impressive building housing a tomb or group of tombs.
“There’s an up train at five, isn’t there?” he asked. ‘I’m booked for a dinner to-night. I shall just have time to make a bolt for the station and you can send my traps after me.’ I haven’t seen him since.

“I can guess what it cost him to lay hands on his masterpiece; but, after all, to him it was only a picture lost, to me it was my wife regained!”

IV

After that, for ten years or more, I watched the strange spectacle of a life of hopeful and productive effort based on the structure of a dream. There could be no doubt to those who saw Grancy during this period that he drew his strength and courage from the sense of his wife’s mystic participation in his task. When I went back to see him a few months later I found the portrait had been removed from the library and placed in a small study upstairs, to which he had transferred his desk and a few books. He told me he always sat there when he was alone, keeping the library for his Sunday visitors. Those who missed the portrait of course made no comment on its absence, and the few who were in his secret respected it. Gradually all his old friends had gathered about him and our Sunday afternoons regained something of their former character; but Claydon never reappeared among us.

As I look back now I see that Grancy must have been failing from the time of his return home. His invincible spirit belied and disguised the signs of weakness that afterward asserted themselves in my remembrance of him. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of life to draw on, and more than one of us was a pensioner on his superfluity.

Nevertheless, when I came back one summer from my European holiday and heard that he had been at the point of death, I understood at once that we had believed him well only because he wished us to.

I hastened down to the country and found him midway in a slow convalescence. I felt then that he was lost to us and he read my thought at a glance.

“Ah,” he said, “I’m an old man now and no mistake. I suppose we shall have to go half-speed after this; but we shan’t need towing just yet!”

The plural pronoun struck me, and involuntarily I looked up at Mrs. Grancy’s portrait. Line by line I saw my fear reflected in it. It was the face of a woman who knows that her husband is dying. My heart stood still at the thought of what Claydon had done.

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28 belied: (of an appearance) fail to give a true impression of (something).
29 superfluity: an unnecessarily or excessively large amount or number of something.
30 convalescence: time spent recovering from an illness or medical treatment; recuperation.
for me.” After a pause he added: “Claydon has been very kind; he’s so busy nowadays that I seldom see him, but when I sent for him the other day he came down at once.”

I was silent and we spoke no more of Grancy’s illness; but when I took leave it seemed like shutting him in alone with his death-warrant.

The next time I went down to see him he looked much better. It was a Sunday and he received me in the library, so that I did not see the portrait again. He continued to improve and toward spring we began to feel that, as he had said, he might yet travel a long way without being towed.

One evening, on returning to town after a visit which had confirmed my sense of reassurance, I found Claydon dining alone at the club. He asked me to join him and over the coffee our talk turned to his work.

“If you’re not too busy,” I said at length, “you ought to make time to go down to Grancy’s again.”

He looked up quickly. “Why?” he asked.

“Because he’s quite well again,” I returned with a touch of cruelty. “His wife’s prognostications were mistaken.”

Claydon stared at me a moment. “Oh, she knows,” he affirmed with a smile that chilled me. “You mean to leave the portrait as it is then?” I persisted.

He shrugged his shoulders. “He hasn’t sent for me yet!”

A waiter came up with the cigars and Claydon rose and joined another group.

It was just a fortnight later that Grancy’s housekeeper telegraphed for me. She met me at the station with the news that he had been “taken bad” and that the doctors were with him. I had to wait for some time in the deserted library before the medical men appeared. They had the baffled manner of empirics who have been superseded by the great Healer; and I lingered only long enough to hear that Grancy was not suffering and that my presence could do him no harm.

I found him seated in his arm-chair in the little study. He held out his hand with a smile.

“You see she was right after all,” he said.

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305 Prognostication: the action of prophesying future events.
310 Supersede: take the place of (a person or thing previously in authority or use); supplant.
“She?” I repeated, perplexed for the moment.

“My wife.” He indicated the picture. “Of course I knew she had no hope from the first. I saw that”—he lowered his voice—“after Claydon had been here. But I wouldn’t believe it at first!”

I caught his hands in mine. “For God’s sake don’t believe it now!” I adjured\(^\text{33}\) him.

He shook his head gently. “It’s too late,” he said. “I might have known that she knew.”

“But, Grancy, listen to me,” I began; and then I stopped. What could I say that would convince him? There was no common ground of argument on which we could meet; and after all it would be easier for him to die feeling that she had known. Strangely enough, I saw that Claydon had missed his mark….

V

Grancy’s will named me as one of his executors\(^\text{34}\); and my associate, having other duties on his hands, begged me to assume the task of carrying out our friend’s wishes. This placed me under the necessity of informing Claydon that the portrait of Mrs. Grancy had been bequeathed\(^\text{35}\) to him; and he replied by the next post that he would send for the picture at once. I was staying in the deserted house when the portrait was taken away; and as the door closed on it I felt that Grancy’s presence had vanished too. Was it his turn to follow her now, and could one ghost haunt another?

After that, for a year or two, I heard nothing more of the picture, and though I met Claydon from time to time we had little to say to each other. I had no definable grievance against the man and I tried to remember that he had done a fine thing in sacrificing his best picture to a friend; but my resentment had all the tenacity\(^\text{36}\) of unreason.

One day, however, a lady whose portrait he had just finished begged me to go with her to see it. To refuse was impossible, and I went with the less reluctance that I knew I was not the only friend she had invited. The others were all grouped around the easel when I entered, and after contributing my share to the chorus of approval I turned away and began to stroll about the studio. Claydon was something of a collector and his things were generally worth looking at. The studio was a long tapestried room with a curtained archway at one end. The curtains were looped back, showing a smaller apartment, with books and flowers and a few fine bits of bronze and porcelain. The tea-table standing in this inner room proclaimed that it was open to inspection, and I wandered in. A bleu poudre vase first attracted me; then I turned to examine a slender bronze Ganymede, and in so doing found myself face to face with Mrs. Grancy’s portrait. I stared up at her blankly and she smiled back at me in all the

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\(^\text{33}\) adjure: urge or request (someone) solemnly or earnestly to do something.

\(^\text{34}\) executor: a person or institution appointed by a testator to carry out the terms of their will.

\(^\text{35}\) bequeath: leave (property) to a person or other beneficiary by a will.

\(^\text{36}\) tenacity: the quality or fact of being very determined; determination.
recovered radiance of youth. The artist had effaced every trace of his later touches and the original picture had reappeared. It throned alone on the panelled wall, asserting a brilliant supremacy over its carefully-chosen surroundings. I felt in an instant that the whole room was tributary37 to it: that Claydon had heaped his treasures at the feet of the woman he loved. Yes—it was the woman he had loved and not the picture; and my instinctive resentment was explained.

Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“Ah, how could you?” I cried, turning on him.

“How could I?” he retorted. “How could I not? Doesn’t she belong to me now?”

I moved away impatiently.

“Wait a moment,” he said with a detaining gesture. “The others have gone and I want to say a word to you.–Oh, I know what you’ve thought of me—I can guess! You think I killed Grancy, I suppose?”

I was startled by his sudden vehemence. “I think you tried to do a cruel thing,” I said.

“Ah—what a little way you others see into life!” he murmured. “Sit down a moment—here, where we can look at her—and I’ll tell you.”

He threw himself on the ottoman38 beside me and sat gazing up at the picture, with his hands clasped about his knee.

“Pygmalion,” he began slowly, “turned his statue into a real woman; I turned my real woman into a picture. Small compensation, you think—but you don’t know how much of a woman belongs to you after you’ve painted her!—Well, I made the best of it, at any rate—I gave her the best I had in me; and she gave me in return what such a woman gives by merely being. And after all she rewarded me enough by making me paint as I shall never paint again! There was one side of her, though, that was mine alone, and that was her beauty; for no one else understood it. To Grancy even it was the mere expression of herself—what language is to thought. Even when he saw the picture he didn’t guess my secret—he was so sure she was all his! As though a man should think he owned the moon because it was reflected in the pool at his door—

“Well—when he came home and sent for me to change the picture it was like asking me to commit murder. He wanted me to make an old woman of her—of her who had been so divinely, unchangeably young! As if any man who really loved a woman would ask her to

37 tributary: (historical) a person or state that pays tribute to another state or ruler
38 ottoman: a low upholstered seat without a back or arms that typically serves also as a box, with the seat hinged to form a lid.
sacrifice her youth and beauty for his sake! At first I told him I couldn’t do it—but afterward, when he left me alone with the picture, something queer happened. I suppose it was because I was always so confoundedly fond of Grancy that it went against me to refuse what he asked. Anyhow, as I sat looking up at her, she seemed to say, ‘I’m not yours but his, and I want you to make me what he wishes.’ And so I did it. I could have cut my hand off when the work was done—I daresay he told you I never would go back and look at it. He thought I was too busy—he never understood….

“Well—and then last year he sent for me again—you remember. It was after his illness, and he told me he’d grown twenty years older and that he wanted her to grow older too—he didn’t want her to be left behind. The doctors all thought he was going to get well at that time, and he thought so too; and so did I when I first looked at him. But when I turned to the picture—ah, now I don’t ask you to believe me; but I swear it was her face that told me he was dying, and that she wanted him to know it! She had a message for him and she made me deliver it.”

He rose abruptly and walked toward the portrait; then he sat down beside me again.

“Cruel? Yes, it seemed so to me at first; and this time, if I resisted, it was for his sake and not for mine. But all the while I felt her eyes drawing me, and gradually she made me understand. If she’d been there in the flesh (she seemed to say) wouldn’t she have seen before any of us that he was dying? Wouldn’t he have read the news first in her face? And wouldn’t it be horrible if now he should discover it instead in strange eyes?—Well—that was what she wanted of me and I did it—I kept them together to the last!” He looked up at the picture again. “But now she belongs to me,” he repeated....

E Comprehension Questions

1) Why did the writer feel the second Mrs. Grancy’s death was a huge mistake?

2) What metaphor is used to describe the first Mrs. Grancy as part of her husband’s garden of life?

3) How is the second Mrs. Grancy described?

4) What does Claydon mean when he states that the portrait was Mrs. Grancy?

5) Where did Grancy go to work after his second wife’s death?

6) What did Grancy ask Claydon to do to the portrait?

7) What does Grancy feel his wife would have wished?

8) What did Claydon feel after he had painted Mrs. Grancy?
9) What happens to Grancy and Claydon in the end?

10) Can we say that Grancy had three wives? Why?

Food for Thought and Essay Questions

Write a detailed response to one of the following questions:

1) How does the short story "The Moving Finger" highlight the themes of control, or rather, the lack of control?

2) What does the short story "The Moving Finger" say about the themes of loneliness, grief and obsession? Comment on how each theme plays a role in the story, and in conveying its overall message, in particular?

3) This story is a Gothic short story and explores "the uncanny". Re-read section C of the handout "The Uncanny in Gothic Literature" and find uncanny aspects in the short story "The Moving Finger". How does Wharton use the uncanny to reinforce themes, ideas and the overall message of the story, and to what effect?
IGCSE Short Stories
"There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury (1950)

About the Author — Ray Bradbury (1920 - 2012)

Ray Bradbury was an American fantasy and horror author who rejected being categorized as a science fiction author, claiming that his work was based on the fantastical and unreal. His best known novel is Fahrenheit 451, a dystopian study of future American society in which critical thought is outlawed. He is also remembered for several other popular works, including The Martian Chronicles and Something Wicked This Way Comes. Bradbury won the Pulitzer in 2004, and is one of the most celebrated authors of the 21st century. He died in Los Angeles on June 5, 2012, at the age of 91.

Early Life
Author Ray Douglas Bradbury was born on August 22, 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois, to Leonard Spaulding Bradbury, a lineman for power and telephone utilities, and Ester Moberg Bradbury, a Swedish immigrant. Bradbury enjoyed a relatively idyllic childhood in Waukegan, which he later incorporated into several semi-autobiographical novels and short stories. As a child, he was a huge fan of magicians, and a voracious reader of adventure and fantasy fiction — especially L. Frank Baum, Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Bradbury decided to become a writer at about age 12 or 13. He later said that he made the decision in hopes of emulating his heroes, and to "live forever" through his fiction.

Bradbury's family moved to Los Angeles, California in 1934. As a teenager, he participated in his school's drama club and occasionally befriended Hollywood celebrities. His first official pay as a writer came for contributing a joke to George Burns' Burns & Allen Show. After graduation from high school in 1938, Bradbury couldn't afford to go to college, so he went to the local library instead. "Libraries raised me," he later said. "I believe in libraries because most students don't have any money. When I graduated from high school, it was during the Depression, and we had no money. I couldn't go to college, so I went to the library three days a week for 10 years."

Literary Works and Honours
To support himself while he wrote, Bradbury sold newspapers. He published his first short story in a fan magazine in 1938, the same year he graduated from high school. The next year, he published four issues of his own fan magazine, Futuria Fantasia. Nearly every piece in the magazine was written by Bradbury himself; he used a variety of pseudonyms to try to hide the fact that the magazine was a virtual one-man show. "I was still years away from writing my first good short story," he later said, "but I could see my future. I knew where I wanted to go."

Bradbury sold his first professional piece, the story "Pendulum," in November 1941, just a month before the United States entered World War II, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Ruled ineligible for military service by his local draft board because of his vision
problems, Bradbury became a full-time writer by early 1943. His first collection of short stories, Dark Carnival, was published in 1947.

That same year, he married Marguerite "Maggie" McClure, whom he met while she was working as a clerk at a bookstore. McClure was the breadwinner in the early days of their marriage, supporting Bradbury as he worked on his writing for little to no pay. The couple had four daughters, Susan (1949), Ramona (1951), Bettina (1955) and Alexandra (1958).

In 1950, Bradbury published his first major work, The Martian Chronicles, which detailed the conflict between humans colonizing the red planet and the native Martians they encountered there. While taken by many to be a work of science fiction, Bradbury himself considered it to be fantasy. "I don't write science fiction," he said. "Science fiction is a depiction of the real. Fantasy is a depiction of the unreal. So Martian Chronicles is not science fiction, it's fantasy. It couldn't happen, you see?" Television and comic book adaptations of Bradbury's short stories began to appear in 1951, introducing him to a wider audience.

Bradbury's best-known work, Fahrenheit 451, published in 1953, became an instant classic in the era of McCarthyism for its exploration of themes of censorship and conformity. In 2007 Bradbury himself disputed that censorship was the main theme of Fahrenheit 451, instead explaining the book as a story about how television drives away interest in reading: "Television gives you the dates of Napoleon, but not who he was."

Despite his apparent distaste for television, Bradbury advocated for film adaptations of his work. He wrote numerous screenplays and treatments, including a 1956 take on Moby Dick. In 1986, Bradbury developed his own HBO television series, allowing him to produce adaptations of his short stories. The series ran until 1992.

Famously prolific, Bradbury wrote for several hours every day throughout his entire life, allowing him to publish more than 30 books, close to 600 short stories, and numerous poems, essays, screenplays and plays.

Though Bradbury won many honours and awards throughout his life, his favorite was perhaps being named "ideas consultant" for the United States Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair. "Can you imagine how excited I was?" he later said about the honor. "'Cause I'm changing lives, and that's the thing. If you can build a good museum, if you can make a good film, if you can build a good world's fair, if you can build a good mall, you're changing the future. You're influencing people, so that they'll get up in the morning and say, 'Hey, it's worthwhile going to work.' That's my function, and it should be the function of every science fiction writer around. To offer hope. To name the problem and then offer the solution. And I do, all the time."

Bradbury wrote well into his 80s, dictating for three hours at a time to one of his daughters, who would transcribe his words to the page. Though curtailing much of his traveling and public appearances, he granted several interviews in his latter years and helped raise funds for his local library.
"There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury (1950)

In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock*! as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in the city of Allendale, California." It repeated the date three times for memory's sake. "Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; umbrellas, raincoats for today..." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shrivelled and the toast was like stone. An aluminium wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

*Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, time to clean.*

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were a crawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their moustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their *burrows*. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

*Ten o'clock.* The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

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1 *burrow*: a hole or tunnel dug by a small animal, especially a rabbit, as a dwelling.
Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted window panes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned, evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint - the man, the woman, the children, the ball - remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house! The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon.

A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch. The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.

The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odour and the scent of maple syrup. The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran
wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

_Two o’clock_, sang a voice.

70 Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

_Two-fifteen._

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney. _Two thirty-five._

75 Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.
At four o’clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls .

Four-thirty.

80 The nursery walls glowed.

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers _cavorting_2 in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors! There was the sound like a great matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of _parched_3 grass, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes. It was the children’s hour.

Five o’clock. The bath filled with clear hot water.

Six, seven, eight o’clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a click. In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

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2 _cavort_: jump or dance around excitedly.
3 _parched_: dried out with heat.
Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling: "Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?" The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random." Quiet music rose to back the voice. "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favourite...

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims4 on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone."

The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other between the silent walls, and the music played.

105

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough5 crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent,6 bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

4 whim: a sudden desire or change of mind, especially one that is unusual or unexplained.
5 bough: a main branch of a tree.
6 solvent: a liquid, typically one other than water, used for dissolving other substances.
The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying water rats squeaked from the walls, pistolled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements. From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake.

Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Heat snapped mirrors like the first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed. Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river.... Ten more voices died.

7 *cease*: come or bring to an end.
8 *capillary*: any of the fine branching blood vessels that form a network between the arterioles and venules..
9 *wail*: producing a prolonged high-pitched cry of pain, grief, or anger.
In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in, the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlour. The parlour into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

"Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is..."

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10 oblivious: not aware of or concerned about what is happening around one.
11 sublime: producing an overwhelming sense of awe or other high emotion through being vast or grand.
12 withered: cause to decline or deteriorate; weaken.
13 psychopathic: suffering from or constituting a chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour.
C | Comprehension Questions

1) When and where does this story take place?

2) What details tell you the city has been destroyed?

3) What happens to the dog?

4) At the end of the story, what happens to the house?

D | Close Reading & Analysis

1) Circle the details in lines 1–16 that identify the setting — the time and place of the story.

2) What happens—or doesn’t happen—between 8:01 A.M. and 9:15 A.M. that suggests that all is not well with the humans who own this house?

3) Underline details in lines that tell you how this house is different from the other houses in the neighborhood. What seems to have happened to the city (lines 29-31)?

4) Write a number, from 1 to 5, over the details describing each of the five silhouettes on the wall of the house. What has caused the five silhouettes to be “burned on wood” (lines 32-39)?

5) Personification is a figure of speech in which an object or animal is spoken of as if it has human qualities. Circle the words and phrases in lines 43-48 that portray the house’s human qualities

6) Who are the gods who have gone away?

7) Re-read lines 53-68. This section is filled with images, details that appeal to your senses. Circle three images that appeal to three different senses.

8) Retell in two or three sentences what is happening in the poem (lines 101 - 112).

9) How is nature in the poem like nature in this story? Summarise the similarities and parallels.

10) A conflict has arisen in the story. On one side of the conflict is the house and all the scientific progress and advanced machinery it stands for. Whom or what is the house battling?

11) Underline at least three details in lines 130-141 that personify the fire—that make the fire seem human.

12) Re-read lines 149-159. Why are so many things happening at once in the house?

13) What idea about scientific advances is Bradbury warning us about? Tell whether or not you agree with his message. Give reasons for your opinion.
IGCSE Short Stories
"The Lemon Orchard " by Alex La Guma (1962)

A
About the Author — Alex La Guma (1925 - 1985)

La Guma Alex(ander) (1925-85), South African short-story writer and novelist, was born to a "colored "(mixed-race) family in Cape town. His parents were active in left wing politics and the labor movement, and La Guma grew up conscious of the political and socioeconomic implications of South Africa's separatist policies. He did not begin writing fiction until after he turned thirty. He wrote five novels, over a dozen short stories and many political essays. He was repeatedly harassed by the South African government as a result of his political activities, and emigrated to England in 1966. Most of his work, fiction and non-fiction deals with South African subjects, focusing on the conflict between the races. Throughout his work, he stresses the importance of collective action and the need to care for others.

La Guma's strength lies in the short story form. His curiosity about the poverty, despair, oppression, and hopes of humanity combines with a deep concern about their suffering and affliction that inhabits the minutest detail of the fictional environment: the physical state of buildings, the smells that emanate from them, and the lives caught up in this environment. His first short story, 'Nocturne' (1957), reveals his ability to capture atmosphere, speech, and surface meaning. The straightforward narrative of a young man planning a robbery who is disturbed by classical music streaming in from outside blends event, scene, effective inner dialogue, and moral aim, making a point about social environment, status, transcendence, and South Africa's racist ugliness. La Guma saw his task, in a way, as similar to an African storyteller's, namely to record events as told to him and fashion a narrative both moral and entertaining.

In his first novel, A Walk in the Night (1962), La Guma describes the political and social existence of the "colored" people of the District Six slum in Cape Town. He examines the life of the district though the actions of four characters during the course of one night. He focuses on the decay and despair of the slum, whose residents are frequently too absorbed by their own miserable state to react to it, and thus suffer alone. In doing so, he explores the connection between rights and responsibilities through the unfolding of his characters' decisions and actions.

In Fog of the Season's End (1972), his most autobiographical novel, La Guma describes the South African struggles through characters who are involved in political resistance, unlike the lonely victims of his earlier works. Although the main character, Beukes, has reached the conclusion that collective action is essential to solving the problems of South Africa's system, the author uses flashbacks to reveal the squalor and despair which are the source of the political movement. The characters overcome the isolation and disconnectedness which plague the subjects in his earlier works in order to work together towards their goal.
Throughout his fictional writings about South Africa, La Guma explores the tension between human rights and social responsibility against the backdrop of the nation’s separatist policies. The moral development of his characters is closely tied their potential to improve their country's future.

**B** "The Lemon Orchard" by Alex La Guma (1962)

The men came down between two long, regular rows of trees. The winter had not passed completely and there was a chill in the air; and the moon was hidden behind long, high parallels of cloud which hung like suspended streamers of dirty cotton wool in the sky. All of the men but one wore thick clothes against the coolness of the night. The night and earth was cold and damp, and the shoes of the men sank into the soil and left exact, ridged foot prints, but they could not be seen in the dark.

One of the men walked ahead holding a small cycle lantern that worked from a battery, leading the way down the avenue of trees while the others came behind in the dark. The night close around was quiet now that the crickets had stopped their small noises, but far out others that did not feel the presence of the men continued the monotonous creek-creek.

Somewhere, even further, a dog started barking in short high yaps, and then stopped abruptly. The men were walking through an orchard of lemons and the sharp, bitter-sweet citrus smell hung gently on the night air.

'Do not go so fast,' the man who brought up the rear of the party called to the man with the lantern. 'It's as dark as a kaffir's soul here at the back.' He called softly, as if the darkness demanded silence. He was a big man and wore khaki trousers and laced-up riding boots, and an old shooting jacket with leather patches on the right breast and the elbows.

The shotgun was loaded. In the dark this man's face was invisible except for a blur of shadowed hollows and lighter crags. Although he walked in the rear he was the leader of the party. The lantern-bearer slowed down for the rest to catch up with him.

'It's cold, too, Oom,' another man said.
'Cold?' the man with the shotgun asked, speaking with sarcasm. 'Are you colder than this verdomte hotnot, here?' And he gestured in the dark with the muzzle of the gun at the man who stumbled along in their midst and who was the only one not warmly dressed. 

This man wore trousers and a raincoat which they had allowed him to pull on over his pyjamas when they had taken him from his lodgings, and he shivered now with chill, clenching his teeth to prevent them from chattering. He had not been given time to tie his shoes and the metal-covered ends of the laces clicked as he moved.

'Are you cold, hotnot?' the man with the light jeered. 

The coloured man did not reply. He was afraid, but his fear was mixed with a stubbornness which forbade him to answer them.

'He is not cold,' the fifth man in the party said. 'He is shivering with fear. Is it not so, hotnot?'

The coloured man said nothing, but stared ahead of himself into the half-light made by the small lantern. He could see the silhouette of the man who carried the light, but he did not want to look at the two who flanked him, the one who had complained of the cold, and the one who had spoken of his fear. They each carried a sjambok and every now and then one of them slapped a corduroyed leg with his.

'He is dumb also,' the one who had spoken last chuckled.

'No, Andries. Wait a minute,' the leader who carried the shotgun said, and they all stopped between the row of trees. The man with the lantern turned and put the light on the rest of the party.

'What is it?' he asked.

'Wag'n oomblikkie. Wait a moment,' the leader said, speaking with forced casualness. 'He is not dumb. He is a slim hotnot; one of those educated bushmen. Listen, hotnot,' he addressed the coloured man, speaking angrily now. 'When a baas speaks to you, you answer him. Do you hear?' The coloured man's wrists were tied behind him with a riem and the leader brought the muzzle of the shotgun down, pressing it hard into the small of the man's
back above where the wrists met. 'Do you hear, hotnot? Answer me or I will shoot a hole through your spine.'

The bound man felt the hard round metal of the gun muzzle through the loose raincoat and clenched his teeth. He was cold and tried to prevent himself from shivering in case it should be mistaken for cowardice. He heard the small metallic noise as the man with the gun thumbed back the hammer of the shotgun. In spite of the cold little drops of sweat began to form on his upper lip under the overnight stubble.

'For God's sake, don't shoot him,' the man with the light said, laughing a little nervously.

'We don't want to be involved in any murder.'

'What are you saying, man?' the leader asked. Now with the beam of the battery-lamp on his face the shadows in it were washed away to reveal the mass of tiny wrinkled and deep creases which covered the red-clay complexion of his face like the myriad lines which indicate rivers, streams, roads and railways on a map. They wound around the ridges of his chin and climbed the sharp range of his nose and the peaks of his chin and cheekbones, and his eyes were hard and blue like two frozen lakes.

'This is mos a slim hotnot,' he said again. 'A teacher in a school for which we pay. He lives off our sweat, and he had the audacity to be cheeky and uncivilized towards a minister of our church and no hotnot will be cheeky to a white man while I live.'

'Ja, man,' the lantern-bearer agreed. 'But we are going to deal with him. There is no necessity to shoot him. We don't want that kind of trouble.'

'I will shoot whatever hotnot or kaffir I desire, and see me get into trouble over it. I demand respect from these donders. Let them answer when they're spoken to.'

He jabbed the muzzle suddenly into the coloured man's back so that he stumbled struggling to keep his balance. 'Do you hear, jong? Did I not speak to you?' The man who had jeered about the prisoner's fear stepped up then, and hit him in the face, striking him on a cheekbone with the clenched fist which still held the sjambok. He was angry over the delay and wanted the man to submit so that they could proceed. 'Listen you hotnot bastard,' he said loudly. 'Why don't you answer?'

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3 *myriad*: a countless or extremely great number of people or things.
4 *audacity*: a willingness to take bold risks; rude or disrespectful behaviour; impudence.
The man stumbled, caught himself and stood in the rambling shadow of one of the lemon trees. The lantern-light swung on him and he looked away from the centre of the beam. He was afraid the leader would shoot him in anger and he had no wish to die. He straightened up and looked away from them. 'Well?' demanded the man who had struck him.

'Yes, baas,' the bound man said, speaking with a mixture of dignity and contempt which was missed by those who surrounded him.

'Yes there,' the man with the light said. 'You could save yourself trouble. Next time you will remember. Now let us get on.' The lantern swung forward again and he walked ahead.

The leader shoved their prisoner on with the muzzle of the shotgun, and he stumbled after the bobbing lantern with the other men on each side of him.

'The amazing thing about it is that this bliksem should have taken the principal, and the meester of the church before the magistrate and demand payment for the hiding they gave him for being cheeky to them,' the leader said to all in general. 'This verdomte hotnot. I have never heard of such a thing in all my born days.'

'Well, we will give him a better hiding,' the man, Andries said. 'This time we will teach him a lesson, Gom. He won't demand damages from anybody when we're done with him.' 'And afterwards he won't be seen around here again. He will pack his things and go and live in the city where they're not so particular about the dignity of the volk. Do you hear, hotnot?'

This time they were not concerned about receiving a reply but the leader went on, saying, 'We don't want any educated hottentots in our town.'

'Neither black Englishmen,' added one of the others.

The dog started barking again at the farm house which was invisible on the dark hillside at the other end of the little valley. 'It's that Jagter,' the man with the lantern said. 'I wonder what bothers him. He is a good watchdog. I offered Meneer Marais five pounds for that dog, but he won't sell. I would like to have a dog like that. I would take great care of such a dog.'

The blackness of the night crouched over the orchard and the leaves rustled with a harsh

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2 magistrate: a civil officer who administers the law, especially one who conducts a court that deals with minor offences and holds preliminary hearings for more serious ones.
whispering that was inconsistent with the pleasant scent of the lemons. The chill in the air had increased, and far-off the creek-creek-creek of the crickets blended into solid strips of highpitched sound. Then the moon came from behind the banks of cloud and its white light touched the leaves with wet silver, and the perfume of lemons seemed to grow stronger, as if the juice was being crushed from them.

They walked a little way further in the moonlight and the man with the lantern said, 'This is as good a place as any, Gom.' They had come into a wide gap in the orchard, a small amphitheatre surrounded by fragrant growth, and they all stopped within it. The moonlight clung for a while to the leaves and the angled branches, so that along their tips and edges the moisture gleamed with the quivering shine of scattered *quicksilver*.

### B Historical Context & Further Notes

**The Story in a Nutshell:**
"The Lemon Orchard" follows an assumed five characters, one educated foreign ‘coloured’ man and four, rough ‘locals’, one of which is armed. The foreign man has been taken captive and is being escorted through the Orchard late at night by the others, presumably for being “cheeky to a white man” or being rude to a member of the local church. The ‘coloured’ man is then led to clear space in the Orchard and it is implied but not stated that the coloured man is shot, explaining the “scattered quicksilver.”

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** When writing about the ‘coloured’ man, as he is refered to in the story, unless you are quoting directly, please refer to him either as: the victim, the lynched man, the black man or the ‘coloured’ man (use quotation marks). Please remember that the term coloured is not an acceptable word to use these days, having its origins in selected breeding for slavery and/or different levels of acceptable societal prejudice according to lightness of skin.

**Sjambok:**
A Sjambok is a long, stiff whip made of rhino hide or rubber - the tail has a long reach (very symbolic). It is typically used on herd animals but has also been historically used against black people. It is a strongly symbolic aspect of the story, given that all of the white men carry one. The obvious implication is that they are going to use it on the man (they make it clear they do not want to murder him). The metaphorical aspect of what the Sjambok symbolises needs to be explored in any essay or analysis of the story.

**The "black Englishman"**
This refers to their captive not in terms of him being an Afro-Caribbean Englishman, but as a derogatory comment about how he has tried to ‘civilise’ himself like a white man, which they find amusing. In addition to this, the Afrikaans men would see the British/English as invaders.

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*quicksilver:* the liquid metal mercury.
and oppressors in their land, making their captive seem even more alien: to them, the image of an educated, well spoken black man is ridiculously out of place. Interestingly though, there are elements of the recognition of their own repression here (as the indigenous people have been repressed by the Afrikaans, so the Afrikaans have been oppressed by the British: what might La Guma be saying here about power?).

**C Comprehension & Close Reading**

1) What is the significance of the division in the two rows of trees and the ‘parallel clouds’—think about South African society at the time.

2) How does the way in which the “coloured” man is described or labelled change throughout the narrative, what is the significance of this?

3) How does the setting of the story reflect the state of society during the time period?

4) What is the author trying to convey to his readers by purposefully making the characters in the narrative anonymous?

5) Find uses of derogatory lexis towards the ‘coloured’ man. Find the meanings behind some of these words. Does the use of these words have any significance, or are they just common for the time?

6) What information can you gather about the ‘tormentors’ from their speech and description?

7) What is the significance of the title “The Lemon Orchard”. Explain in detail.

8) Discuss the effectiveness of the ending and what implications you draw from it.

9) What was the author’s purpose in writing this story? Consider the time period, the race of the writer and his affiliations.

10) Discuss sections of the story in which the ‘coloured man’ is described as “uncivilised” and when the “baas” highlights the importance of respect. What is ironic about this statement from the leader?

11) Find semantic fields of obfuscation (ie language of things being hidden or obscured). For instance “the moon was hidden”, cloud like “dirty cotton wool” but also lots of others. Why does La Guma do this? What atmosphere is created and what can this hidden world symbolise about the society he is writing in?
2) At the end of the story there is some beautiful imagery with "the moonlight clung for a while...quivering shine of scattered quicksilver" — however, there is a lot of language of transience in this fleeting moment of beauty before the brutality begins. Explore the language and techniques and then consider the symbolism of this brief moment juxtaposed before the inevitable violence.

3) The dog barks as the men are introduced, then stops abruptly. The likely reason behind an abrupt cease to the barking is the intervention of the owner. What could this symbolise? The dog begins to bark again as the men come to the place that they are going to beat the man — what could this imply and signify?

3) How is the black man ironically presented as more educated, more noble and arguably stronger than his captors?

E Food for Thought — Essay Questions

Write a detailed response to one of the following questions:

1) In Alex la Guma's story "The Lemon Orchard," what is the value to the reader in retaining the original vocabulary, for example, the words "hotnot" and "sjambok" in the story?

2) How does La Guma make the opening of the story so dramatic?

3) How has La Guma use language, word choice and style to effectively convey his anti-racism message throughout "The Lemon Orchard"?

4) How does La Guma make us feel sympathy for the "coloured" man from: “The coloured man said nothing, but stared ahead of himself”… to “He straightened up and looked away from them.”?
Bernard MacLaverty was born in Belfast in 1942, and moved to Scotland in 1975, where he lived in Edinburgh, on the Isle of Islay, and now in Glasgow. After leaving school he became a Medical Laboratory Technician, later studying at Queen's University, Belfast and becoming an English teacher.

He has been writer in residence at the University of Aberdeen, and Guest Writer at the University of Augsburg and at Iowa State University. For three years, he was visiting writer at John Moores University, Liverpool, and is currently visiting Professor at the University of Strathclyde. He is a member of Aosdana.

He is the author of the novels *Lamb* (1980); *Cal* (1983); *Grace Notes* (1997); and *The Anatomy School* (2001), set in Belfast in the late 1960s. Both *Lamb* and *Cal* have been made into major films for which he wrote the screenplays, and he has written various versions of his fiction for radio, television and screen. *Grace Notes* was awarded the 1997 Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award and shortlisted for many other major prizes, including the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Whitbread Novel Award.


In 2003, he wrote and directed a short film, *Bye-Child*, after a poem by Seamus Heaney, which was nominated for a BAFTA (Best Short Film Award) and won a BAFTA Scotland (Best First Director Award).

He has also written 2 books for young children: *A Man in Search of a Pet* (1978), which he also illustrated; and *Andrew McAndrew* (1988).
"Secrets" by Bernard MacLaverty (1977)

He had been called to be there at the end. His Great Aunt Mary had been dying for some days now and the house was full of relatives. He had just left his girlfriend home – they had been studying for ‘A’ levels together – and had come back to the house to find all the lights spilling onto the lawn and a sense of purpose which had been absent from the last few days.

He knelt at the bedroom door to join in the prayers. His knees were on the wooden threshold and he edged them forward onto the carpet. They had tried to wrap her fingers around a crucifix but they kept loosening. She lay low on the pillow and her face seemed to have shrunk by half since he had gone out earlier in the night. Her white hair was damped and pushed back from her forehead. She twisted her head, from side to side, her eyes closed. The prayers chorused on, trying to cover the sound she was making deep in her throat. Someone said about her teeth and his mother leaned over her and said, ‘That’s the pet’, and took her dentures from her mouth. Her lower face seemed to collapse. She half opened her eyes but could not raise her eyelids enough and showed only crescents of white.

‘Hail Mary full of grace . . .’ the prayers went on. He closed his hands over his face so that he would not have to look but smelt the trace of his girlfriend’s handcream from his hands. The noise, deep and guttural, that his aunt was making became intolerable to him. It was as if she were drowning. She had lost all the dignity he knew her to have. He got up from the floor and stepped between the others who were kneeling and went into her sitting-room off the same landing.

He was trembling with anger or sorrow, he didn’t know which. He sat in the brightness of her big sitting-room at the oval table and waited for something to happen. On the table was a cut-glass vase of irises, dying because she had been in bed for over a week. He sat staring at them. They were withering from the tips inward, scrolling themselves delicately, brown and neat. Clearing up after themselves. He stared at them for a long time until he heard the sounds of women weeping from the next room. His aunt had been small – her head on a level with his when she sat at her table – and she seemed to get smaller each year. Her skin fresh, her hair white and waved and always well washed. She wore no jewelry except a cameo ring on the third finger of her right hand.

1 threshold: a point of entry or beginning; the level at which one starts to feel or react to something; a level, rate, or amount at which something comes into effect.
2 guttural: (of a speech sound) produced in the throat; harsh-sounding.
3 cameo: a piece of jewellery, typically oval in shape, consisting of a portrait in profile carved in relief on a background of a different colour.
and, around her neck, a gold locket on a chain. The white classical profile on the ring was almost worn through and had become translucent and indistinct. The boy had noticed the ring when she had read to him as a child. In the beginning fairy tales, then as he got older extracts from famous novels, Lorna Doone, Persuasion, Wuthering Heights and her favourite extract, because she read it so often, Pip's meeting with Miss Havisham from Great Expectations. She would sit with him on her knee, her arms around him, holding the page flat with her hand. When he was bored he would interrupt her and ask about the ring. He loved hearing her tell of how her grandmother had given it to her as a brooch and she had had a ring made from it. He would try to count back to see how old it was.

35 Had her grand-mother got it from her grandmother? And if so what had she turned it into? She would nod her head from side to side and say, ‘How would I know a thing like that?’ keeping her place in the closed book with her finger.

‘Don’t be so inquisitive,’ she’d say. ‘Let’s see what happens next in the story.’

One day she was sitting copying figures into a long narrow book with a dip pen when he came into her room. She didn’t look up but when he asked her a question she just said, ‘Mm?’ and went on writing. The vase of irises on the oval table vibrated slightly as she wrote.

‘What is it?’ She wiped the nib on blotting paper and looked up at him over her reading glasses.

50 ‘I’ve started collecting stamps and Mamma says you might have some.’

‘Does she now –?’

She got up from the table and went to the tall walnut bureau-bookcase standing in the alcove. From a shelf of the bookcase she took a small wallet of keys and selected one for the lock. There was a harsh metal shearing sound as she pulled the desk flap down. The writing area was covered with green leather which had dog-eared at the corners. The inner part was divided into pigeon holes, all bulging with papers. Some of them, envelopes, were gathered in batches nipped at the waist with elastic bands. There were postcards and bills and cash-books. She pointed to the postcards.

‘You may have the stamps on those,’ she said. ‘But don’t tear them. Steam them off.’

55 She went back to the oval table and continued writing. He sat on the arm of the chair looking through the picture postcards – torchlight processions at Lourdes, brown photographs of town centres, dull black and whites of beaches backed by faded hotels. Then he turned them over and began to sort the stamps. Spanish, with a bald man, French with a rooster, German with funny jerky print, some Italian with what looked like a chimney-sweep’s bundle and a hatchet.

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4 brooch: an ornament fastened to clothing with a hinged pin and catch.
5 inquisitive: having or showing an interest in learning things; curious.
6 nib: the pointed end part of a pen, which distributes the ink on the writing surface.
7 alcove: a recess in the wall of a room or garden.
8 procession: a number of people or vehicles moving forward in an orderly fashion, especially as part of a ceremony.
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‘These are great,’ he said. ‘I haven’t got any of them.’
‘Just be careful how you take them off.’
‘Can I take them downstairs?’
‘Is your mother there?’

‘Yes.’
‘Then perhaps it’s best if you bring the kettle up here.’
He went down to the kitchen. His mother was in the morning room polishing silver. He took the kettle and the flex upstairs. Except for the dipping and scratching of his aunt’s pen the room was silent. It was at the back of the house overlooking the orchard and the sound of traffic from the main road was distant and muted. A tiny rattle began as the kettle warmed up, then it bubbled and steam gushed quietly from its spout. The cards began to curl slightly in the jet of steam but she didn’t seem to be watching. The stamps peeled moistly off and he put them in a saucer of water to flatten them.

‘Who is Brother Benignus?’ he asked. She seemed not to hear. He asked again and she looked over her glasses.
‘He was a friend.’
His flourishing signature appeared again and again. Sometimes Bro Benignus, sometimes Benignus and once Iggy.
‘Is he alive?’

‘No, he’s dead now. Watch the kettle doesn’t run dry.’
When he had all the stamps off he put the postcards together and replaced them in the pigeon-hole. He reached over towards the letters but before his hand touched them his aunt’s voice, harsh for once, warned.

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flourish: develop rapidly and successfully.
'A-A-A,' she moved her pen from side to side. Do-not-touch,’ she said and smiled. Anything else, yes! That section, no!’ She resumed her writing.

The boy went through some other papers and found some photographs. One was of a beautiful girl. It was very old-fashioned but he could see that she was beautiful. The picture was a pale brown oval set on a white square of card. The edges of the oval were misty. The girl in the photograph was young and had dark, dark hair scraped severely back and tied like a knotted rope on the top of her head – high arched eyebrows, her nose straight and thin, her mouth slightly smiling, yet not smiling – the way a mouth is after smiling. Her eyes looked out at him dark and knowing and beautiful.

‘Who is that?’ he asked.

‘Why? What do you think of her?’

She's all right.’

‘Do you think she is beautiful?’ The boy nodded.

‘That's me,’ she said. The boy was glad he had pleased her in return for the stamps.

Other photographs were there, not posed ones like Aunt Mary's but Brownie snaps of laughing groups of girls in bucket hats like German helmets and coats to their ankles. They seemed tiny faces covered in clothes. There was a photograph of a young man smoking a cigarette, his hair combed one way by the wind against a background of sea.

‘Who is that in the uniform?’ the boy asked.

‘He’s a soldier,’ she answered without looking up.

‘Oh,’ said the boy. ‘But who is he?’

He was a friend of mine before you were born,’ she said. Then added, ‘Do I smell something cooking? Take your stamps and off you go. That’s the boy.’

The boy looked at the back of the picture of the man and saw in black spidery ink, ‘John, Aug ’15 Ballintoy’.

‘I thought maybe it was Brother Benignus,’ he said. She looked at him not answering.

Was your friend killed in the war?’

At first she said no, but then she changed her mind.

‘Perhaps he was,’ she said, then smiled. ‘You are far too inquisitive. Put it to use and go and see what is for tea. Your mother will need the kettle.’ She came over to the bureau and helped tidy the photographs away. Then she locked it and put the keys on the shelf.

‘Will you bring me up my tray?’

The boy nodded and left.

It was a Sunday evening, bright and summery. He was doing his homework and his mother was sitting on the carpet in one of her periodic fits of tidying out the drawers of the mahogany sideboard. On one side of her was a heap of paper scraps torn in quarters.
and bits of rubbish, on the other the useful items that had to be kept. The boy heard the bottom stair creak under Aunt Mary's light footstep. She knocked and put her head round the door and said that she was walking to Devotions. She was dressed in her good coat and hat and was just easing her fingers into her second glove. The boy saw her stop and pat her hair into place before the mirror in the hallway. His mother stretched over and slammed the door shut. It vibrated, then he heard the deeper sound of the outside door closing and her first few steps on the gravelled driveway. He sat for a long time wondering if he would have time or not. Devotions could take anything from twenty minutes to three quarters of an hour, depending on who was saying it.

Ten minutes must have passed, then the boy left his homework and went upstairs and into his aunt's sitting room. He stood in front of the bureau wondering, then he reached for the keys. He tried several before he got the right one. The desk flap screeched as he pulled it down. He pretended to look at the postcards again in case there were any stamps he had missed. Then he put them away and reached for the bundle of letters. The elastic band was thick and old, brittle almost and when he took it off its track remained on the wad of letters. He carefully opened one and took out the letter and unfolded it, frail, khaki-coloured.

My dearest Mary, it began. I am so tired I can hardly write to you. I have spent what seems like all day censoring letters (there is a howitzer about 100 yds away firing every 2 minutes). The letters are heart-rending in their attempt to express what they cannot. Some of the men are illiterate, others almost so. I know that they feel as much as we do, yet they do not have the words to express it. That is your job in the schoolroom to give us generations who can read and write well. They have . . .

The boy's eye skipped down the page and over the next. He read the last paragraph.

Mary I love you as much as ever – more so that we cannot be together. I do not know which is worse, the hurt of this war or being separated from you. Give all my love to Brendan and all at home.

It was signed, scribbled with what he took to be John. He folded the paper carefully into its original creases and put it in the envelope. He opened another.

My love, it is thinking of you that keeps me sane. When I get a moment I open my memories of you as if I were reading. Your long dark hair – I always imagine you wearing the blouse with the

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10 brittle: hard but liable to break easily.
11 censor: examine (a book, film, etc.) and suppress unacceptable parts of it.
12 heart-rending: causing great sadness or distress.
tiny roses, the white one that opened down the back – your eyes that said so much without words, the way you lowered your head when I said anything that embarrassed you, and the clean nape\(^\text{13}\) of your neck.

185 The day I think about most was the day we climbed the head at Ballycastle. In a hollow, out of the wind, the air full of pollen and the sound of insects, the grass warm and dry and you lying beside me your hair undone, between me and the sun. You remember that that was where I first kissed you and the look of disbelief in your eyes that made me laugh afterwards.

It makes me laugh now to see myself savouring these memories standing alone up to my thighs in muck. It is everywhere, two, three feet deep. To walk ten yards leaves you quite breathless. I haven’t time to write more today so I leave you with my feet in the clay and my head in the clouds. I love you, John. He did not bother to put the letter back into the envelope but opened another. My dearest, I am so cold that I find it difficult to keep my hand steady enough to write. You remember when we swam the last two fingers of your hand went the colour and texture of candles with the cold. Well that is how I am all over. It is almost four days since I had any real sensation in my feet or legs. Everything is frozen. The ground is like steel.

Forgive me telling you this but I feel I have to say it to someone. The worst thing is the dead. They sit or lie frozen in the position they died. You can distinguish them from the living because their faces are the colour of slate\(^\text{14}\). God help us when the thaw comes . . . This war is beginning to have an effect on me. I have lost all sense of feeling. The only emotion I have experienced lately is one of anger. Sheer white trembling anger. I have no pity or sorrow for the dead and injured. I thank God it is not me but I am enraged that it had to be them. If I live through this experience I will be a different person.

I am full of anger which has no direction.

205 He sorted through the pile and read half of some, all of others. The sun had fallen low in the sky and shone directly into the room onto the pages he was reading making the paper glare. He selected a letter from the back of the pile and shaded it with his hand as he read.

The only thing that remains constant is my love for you. Today a man died beside me. A piece of shrapnel\(^\text{15}\) had pierced his neck as we were moving under fire. I pulled him into a crater and stayed with him until he died. I watched him choke and then drown in his blood.

\(^{13}\) nape: the back of a person’s neck.

\(^{14}\) slate: [mass noun] a fine-grained grey, green, or bluish-purple metamorphic rock easily split into smooth, flat plates.

\(^{15}\) shrapnel: fragments of a bomb, shell, or other object thrown out by an explosion.
Dearest Mary, I am writing this to you from my hospital bed. I hope that you were not too worried about not hearing from me. I have been here, so they tell me, for two weeks and it took another two weeks before I could bring myself to write this letter.

I have been thinking a lot as I lie here about the war and about myself and about you. I do not know how to say this but I feel deeply that I must do something, must sacrifice something to make up for the horror of the past year. In some strange way Christ has spoken to me through the carnage... 

Suddenly the boy heard the creak of the stair and he frantically tried to slip the letter back into its envelope but it crumpled and would not fit. He bundled them all together.

He could hear his aunt’s familiar puffing on the short stairs to her room. He spread the elastic band wide with his fingers. It snapped and the letters scattered. He pushed them into their pigeon hole and quickly closed the desk flap. The brass screeched loudly and clicked shut. At that moment his aunt came into the room.

‘What are you doing, boy?’

‘Nothing.’ He stood with the keys in his hand. She walked to the bureau and opened it. The letters sprung out in an untidy heap.

‘You have been reading my letters,’ she said quietly. Her mouth was tight with the words and her eyes blazed. The boy could say nothing. She struck him across the side of the face.

‘Get out,’ she said. ‘Get out of my room.’

The boy, the side of his face stinging and red, put the keys on the table on his way out. When he reached the door she called to him. He stopped, his hand on the handle.

‘You are dirt,’ she hissed, ‘and always will be dirt. I shall remember this till the day I die.’

Even though it was a warm evening there was a fire in the large fire-place. His mother had asked him to light it so that she could clear out Aunt Mary's stuff. The room could then be his study, she said. She came in and seeing him at the table said, ‘I hope I’m not disturbing you.’

‘No.’

She took the keys from her pocket, opened the bureau and began burning papers and cards. She glanced quickly at each one before she flicked it onto the fire.

‘Who was Brother Benignus?’ he asked. His mother stopped sorting and said, ‘I don’t know. Your aunt kept herself very much to herself. She got books from him through the post occasionally. That much I do know.’

She went on burning the cards. They built into strata, glowing red and black. Now and again she broke up the pile with the poker, sending showers of sparks up the chimney.

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16 **carnage**: the killing of a large number of people.

17 **stratum**: (pl. strata) a layer or a series of layers of rock in the ground; a thin layer within any structure.
He saw her come to the letters. She took off the elastic band and put it to one side with the useful things and began dealing the envelopes into the fire. She opened one and read quickly through it, then threw it on top of the burning pile. ‘Mama,’ he said. ‘Yes?’

‘Did Aunt Mary say anything about me?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Before she died – did she say anything?’

‘Not that I know of – the poor thing was too far gone to speak, God rest her.’ She went on burning, lifting the corners of the letters with the poker to let the flames underneath them.

When he felt a hardness in his throat he put his head down on his books. Tears came into his eyes for the first time since she had died and he cried silently into the crook of his arm for the woman who had been his maiden aunt, his teller of tales, that she might forgive him.

C Comprehension & Close Reading

1) Where was the narrator and what was he doing when he was called to Great Aunt Mary’s bedside?

2) What made the lower half of Great Aunt Mary’s face seem “to collapse” (line 13)?

3) Describe, using your own words, the sound that Great Aunt Mary made as she lay dying and the effect this had on the narrator.

4) How long had Great Aunt Mary been in bed?

5) Describe, in your own words, how Great Aunt Mary looked.

6) What was Great Aunt Mary’s favourite story?

7) Where did Great Aunt Mary’s ring come from?

8) What sort of flowers did Great Aunt Mary like?

9) Which phrase tells us that the narrator is confused about his feelings towards Great Aunt Mary’s death?

10) How does the author make it clear (lines 25-30) that Great Aunt Mary has died?
11) Do you think the narrator had a close relationship with Great Aunt Mary? Give reasons for your answer.

D Food for Thought — Writing Tasks

Write as much as you can in response to one of the following:

1) Describe an elderly person you know. Use vivid details, descriptive language and imagery.

2) Write a story entitled: “Secrets”.

3) In the short story "Secrets" by Bernard MacLaverty, how does the last paragraph help us to relate to the themes and plot of the story? What characteristics of the protagonist can be seen in the themes and the plot?

4) How does MacLaverty make the first paragraphs (lines 1 - 30) a powerful introduction to the story?
IGCSE Short Stories
"The Stoat" by John McGahern (1978)

A  About the Author — John McGahern (1934 - 2006)

Born November 12, 1934, in Dublin, Ireland, author and novelist John McGahern's lyrical portraits of his native Ireland and its denizens earned him a reputation as one of the country's most eminent writers of his generation. Often termed the successor to James Joyce, McGahern wrote stories that "moved deliberately through their agonies of love and misgiving," asserted the New York Times ' James F. Clarity, "always with reference to the dominating Catholic culture and the rigors of wrestling existence from the fields and the peat bogs."

Born in Dublin in 1934, McGahern grew up in the northwest part of Ireland in the counties of Leitrim and Roscommon. He was the first of seven children in his family, and was devoted to his mother, a former teacher, and devastated by her death from cancer when he was nine. The remainder of his youth was marked by hardship: For a time, he and his siblings lived with their brutish father, a police sergeant and veteran of Ireland's 1919–21 War of Independence, in police barracks, and McGahern resisted his father's determination to pull him out of school so that he might learn a trade. As a teenager, he bicycled seven miles daily to attend high school, and discovered a love of literature thanks to the kindness of a neighbor with a well-stocked library.

As a young man, McGahern taught school and took classes at the University College of Dublin. He graduated in 1957, and began writing short stories while still keeping his teaching job. His first novel, The Barracks, was published in 1963 to critical acclaim. The novelist Anthony Burgess asserted that McGahern that had no peer in capturing "so well the peculiar hopelessness of contemporary Ireland," according to the Washington Post's Matt Schudel. Taking a year off from his teaching duties, McGahern spent time in London, and returned to Ireland with a Finnish-born wife, a theater director named Anikki Laaki.

McGahern was forced out of his job after his second novel, The Dark, caused a sensation when it appeared in 1965. The story of a teenage boy and the anxiety he experiences about his suitability for the priesthood, the novel mentioned masturbation and hinted of a possible sexual advance by a member of the clergy. The Roman Catholic authorities in Ireland condemned McGahern's novel, and it was even banned for a time by the Irish Censorship Board. He refused to comment publicly on the fracas, saying only years later that "by protesting I would give them too much honor," the Los Angeles Times quoted him as saying. "Besides, a book has a life of its own. Once it is written, it belongs to its readers."

McGahern spent the next few years living abroad. Divorced from Laaki, he married an American photographer, Madeline Green, and the two settled down on a piece of land in County Leitrim.
in the early 1970s. For the remainder of his life, McGahern farmed, wrote, and took the occasional visiting professorship. His 1975 novel, *The Leavetaking*, centered on the story of a teacher who is fired when he marries a foreign divorcee, echoing what McGahern's superiors had told him years before—that it was not so much the scandalous content of *The Dark* that forced their hand, but the fact that he had wed a foreigner, too.

In between novels McGahern produced short stories and plays for radio, television, and the stage. His literary style, noted a *Los Angeles Times* tribute, "included a loving attention to the detail of Ireland's rural life: its plants and animals, its textures and smells—and the witty idiom and darker insular dynamics of its people." He worked slowly, and there was a ten-year span between his fourth novel, *The Pornographer*, in 1980 and the fifth, *Amongst Women*. Hailed as his masterpiece, *Amongst Women* was shortlisted for Britain's prestigious Man Booker Prize, and adapted for television in an acclaimed 1998 miniseries that aired on the British Broadcasting Service. The story's protagonist is Michael Moran, a former soldier who tyrannizes his family. *The Times* of London described the character as "an unpredictable, severe man obsessed with appearances and lacking any self-awareness ... based largely on [McGahern's] recently deceased father." The paper went on to note, however, that Moran "is drawn memorably with feeling and some understanding. But almost equally compelling is the picture it gives of the cohesiveness of the family in rural Ireland."

Diagnosed with cancer, McGahern died in Dublin on March 30, 2006, at the age of 71. Survivors include his wife and four sisters. His final novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, was published in the United States as *By the Lake* in 2002, but his last work was a loving homage to his mother, *Memoir*. Published in 2006 in the United States as *All Will Be Well*, the work recalled happy moments in McGahern's childhood spent with her, especially on walks through the countryside. "My mother spoke to me of heaven as concretely and with as much love as she named the wild flowers," he wrote, according to the Washington Post obituary. "Above us the sun of heaven shone. Beyond the sun was the gate of heaven."
A long-legged student in a turtleneck was following a two-iron he had struck just short of the green when he heard the crying high in the rough grass above the fairway. The clubs rattled as he climbed towards the crying, but it did not cease, its pitch rising. Light of water from the inlet that ran to Ballisadare and was called the Calm Sea blinded him as he climbed out of the coarse tussocks, and he did not see the rabbit at once, where it sat rigidly still on a bare patch of loose sand, screaming; and at the same time he glimpsed the long grey body of the stoat slithering away like a snake into the long grass.

He took a slow step forward but the rabbit still did not move. Its crying ceased, and he noticed the wet slick of blood behind its ear, and then the blood pumping out on the sand. It did not stir when he stooped to pick it up, but never before did he hold such pure terror in his hands, the body trembling in a rigidity of terror as the heart hammered away its blood through the cut in the jugular vein. Holding it up by the hind legs he killed it with one stroke, but when he turned it over he could find no mark other than where the vein had been cut. He took the rabbit down with him, picking his way more cautiously through the long grass than when he had climbed. He left the rabbit beside the clubs while he chipped and holed out, but as he crossed from the green to the tee he saw the stoat cross the fairway behind him. After watching two simple shots fade away into the rough, he knew he had lost his concentration, and decided to finish for the morning. As he made his way back to the cottage his father rented every August in Strandhill, he twice glimpsed the stoat behind him, following the rabbit still, though it was dead.

All night the rabbit must have raced from warren to warren, he thought, the stoat on its trail. Plumper rabbits had crossed the stoat’s path but it would not be deflected; it had marked down this one rabbit to kill. No matter how fast the rabbit raced, the stoat was still on its trail, and at last the rabbit sat down in terror and waited for the stoat to slither up and cut the vein behind the ear. He had heard it crying as the stoat was drinking its blood.

His father was reading The Independent on the front lawn of the cottage when he got back, facing Knocknarea, his back to the wind that blew from the ocean. A quick look told the son that he was going through the ads for teachers; he always went through the ads for teachers again after he had exhausted the news and death notices, why he would never know, other than from habit or boredom, since he would never leave now the small

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1 *fairway*: a navigable channel in a river or harbour.
2 *deflect*: cause (something) to change direction; turn aside from a straight course.
school where he was principal and the residence that went with it.

"Another colleague who was in Drumcondra the same year as myself has gone to his reward," he said when he looked up. "A great full-back poor Weeshie was, God rest him."

The son made no answer but held up the rabbit. "Where did you get that?"

"On the links. I heard it crying. And when I went to look there was this weasel. It had cut the jugular vein, and the rabbit was just sitting there. It never moved when I went to pick it up."

"It must be a stoat. The weasel is extinct in Ireland."

"A stoat then. I read something about it, but I never came across it before."

"It's common. You often hear the squealing in scrubs or bushes. No doubt it'll be another specimen for yourself and your uncle to mull over."

"Well, it's as good as what you find in The Independent."

"What do you intend to do with it?" Other than to rattle the newspaper loudly the father made no response to the counter thrust.

"I thought I'd skin it and cook it."

"Do you think will it be all right?"

"It couldn’t be more perfect," he laughed as he held it up. "Maybe it I cooked it Miss McCabe might like to have it with us tonight."

"You better not tell her how you came by it," he looked up in alarm.

"Of course not. Old Luke had rabbits for sale a few days back as well as suspiciously got sea trout and salmon. He said he bought them off fellows with a ferret."

"Rabbit—the poor man’s chicken. What if she doesn’t like rabbit?"

"She can say so, and it needn’t change anything. There'll still be plenty of time for both of you to have dinner as usual at the Kincora. By the way, what are you going to do for lunch? Are you going to go down to the Bay View?"

"I'd feel like a pint if I went down. If you take a drink too early in this weather it makes the day very cumbersome to get through."

"There's cheese and bread and a bit of salad. I could make up sandwiches and have coffee."

"That’d be far better. Good man. Can I give you a hand?"

"No. Stay where you are. I’ll bring them out. And what about this rabbit and Miss McCabe? Is it all right with you?"

"I suppose there’s no hard in asking her, is there?"

The young student took the rabbit inside. He had no anxieties regarding Miss McCabe and the dinner; she would come even if a cow’s head were in question, since by coming to the cottage to dinner she was drawing closer to the dream of her future of, of what he hoped to become.

3 *mull*: think about (something) deeply and at length.

4 *cumbersome*: large or heavy and therefore difficult to carry or use; unwieldy; slow or complicated and therefore inefficient.
Miss McCabe’s dream was still in the womb of time, he reflected with mock ruefulness⁵, when his father had asked him up to the study the Christmas before. It was not a study in any strict sense, but a small room where he corrected exam papers and kept textbooks and books of his college days, and where he liked to impart⁶ decisions in an aura of some solemnity⁷ that "not only affects me, but affects my family as well". Those occasions that used to arouse fear and foreboding in the growing boy had by this time dwindled to embarrassing and faintly comic charades.

"Would you take it very much to heart if I decided to marry again?" At least that opening had the virtue of surprise.

"Of course not. Why do you ask me?" the young man’s face showed his amazement. "I was afraid you might be affronted by the idea of another woman holding the position your dear mother held," the voice floated brittlely along on emotion that it could not control. The son hoped the father would break down and cry, for if he did he was afraid he might idiotically join him. The father started to rotate his thumbs about one another as he waited.

"That’s ridiculous. I think you should do exactly what you want to do. It’s your life."

The father looked hurt, as if his life had been brutally severed from the other life by the son’s words.

"For years I’ve been faithful to your mother’s memory," he began painfully. "Now you’re a man. Soon you’ll be a fully qualified doctor, while I’ll have to eke out my days between this empty house and the school. At my age you don’t expect much from marriage, but at least I’d have companionship."

"There was no need to ask me. In fact, I think it’s a good idea." "You have no objections then?"

"None. As I said, I think it’s a good idea."

"I’m glad you approve. I wouldn’t have gone ahead if you’d any objections."

The son was curious if there was already some woman in mind, but did not ask. When later that day his father showed him the ad he had written he was grateful for the dismay which cancelled laughter.


"What do you think of it?"

"I think it’s fine. It couldn’t be better." "I’ll send it off then so."

Neither had any idea that so much unfulfilled longing for the woe⁸ that is marriage
wandered around in the world till the replies began to pour in. Nurses, housekeepers, secretaries, childless widows and widows with small children, house owners, car owners, pensioners, teachers, civil servants, a policewoman, and a woman who had left at twenty years to work at Fords of Dagenham who wanted to come home to marry. The postman inquired slyly if the school was seeking a new assistant, and the woman who ran the post office said in a faraway voice that if we were looking for a housekeeper she had a relative who might be interested.

"I hope they don't steam the damn letters. This country is on fire with curiosity," the father complained.

The son saw much of him that spring term, as he met many of the women in Dublin, tough he had to go to Cork and Limerick and Tullmore as well. In hotel lounges he met them, hiding behind a copy of the Roscommon Herald, which was how they were able to identify him.

"You've never in your life seen such a collection of wrecks and battleaxes as I've had to see in the last few months," he said, a cold night in late March after he had met the lady from Dagenham in the Ormond. "You'd need to get a government grant to do them up before you could think of taking some of them on."

"Do you mean in appearance or as people?" "All ways," he said despairingly.

Because of these interviews the son was able to spend all that Easter with his uncle, a surgeon in a county town, who had encouraged him against his father in his choice of medicine, the father wishing to see him in a bank. After dinner, on the first night, the uncle suggested a long walk. "It's one of those clear frosty night. We can circle and come back through the town. It's about four miles."

"That's fine with me."

A car passed on the road as they set out. The headlamps lit the white railing and fleshly boles of the beech avenue down to the ragged thorns of the road below. They did not start to stride out properly till they had reached the road. The three-quarter moon and the stars gave light enough for them to see their breaths in the frosty night.

"My father's going to get married, it seems," he confided, in the ring of the footsteps. "You're joking," his uncle paused. "I'm not. He's had an ad this long while in the papers." "An ad. You're surely joking." "I'm not. I'm in deadly earnest."

"An ad," suddenly the uncle became convulsed with laughter, and was hardly able to get the next words out, "And did he get... replies?"

"Bundles. He's been interviewing them."

"And have you seen any of the... applicants," he had to pause again on the road. "No,

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9 *earnest*: resulting from or showing sincere and intense conviction.
10 *convulse*: (of an emotion, laughter, or physical stimulus) cause (someone) to make sudden, violent, uncontrollable movements.
but he said you’d need a government grant to do some of them that he’s seen up before you could think of marrying them.”

"A government grant... stop it. This is high farce. The man must finally have gone off his rocker."

"Apparently he’s just found someone. A schoolteacher in her forties. She’s no beauty, but a shining light compared with the wrecks and battleaxes he’s been interviewing."

"Have you seen this person?"

"Not yet. I’m supposed to see her next week."

"My god, if you hang round long enough you see everything," he combed his fingers through his long greying hair as he walked. "At least, if he does get married, it’ll get him off your back."

"You don’t like my father much?"

"He’s a decent enough fellow but I find him dull. Probably not nearly as dull as he finds me."

They had circled the town. Lighted poles appeared in the thorn hedges, and then a paved sidewalk.

"We might as well have the drink in the Grand Central,” the uncle said as they came into the town. "The trouble with being a bigwig\textsuperscript{11} in a small down is that there’s either the Grand Central or nowhere,” and though he nodded to some people sitting in armchairs as they passed through the lounge, he headed straight for a corner of the bar. "We’ll stand. That way we can’t be so easily cornered. You know, if your father does succeed in getting himself hitched, you’ll be able to spend much more time here. I’d like that."

He’d like that too. With his uncle everything seemed open: "Life seems to have no purpose other than to reproduce itself. Life comes out of matter and goes back into matter. We inherit it and pass it on. We might as well take as decent a care of it as we can. You cannot go against love and not be in error.” Nothing was closed. This freedom was gaiety,\textsuperscript{12} even though it seemed that it caused him to seem mostly lonely.

"I feel guilty about it but the truth is that my father bores me. I fear and hate the unconscious."

A few Saturdays later he was to meet Miss McCabe in Dublin. Both his father and she were desperately nervous. It made him feel that he was the parent and they the children anxious for his approval. Miss McCabe wore pale tweeds and serviceable\textsuperscript{13} brown shoes.

She was somewhere in her forties, rather frail, and excitable. He liked her, but he would have encouraged his father to marry her whether he did or not, as he was anxious for the

\textsuperscript{11} bigwig: an important person, especially in a particular sphere.

\textsuperscript{12} gaiety: the state or quality of being light-hearted or cheerful.

\textsuperscript{13} serviceable: fulfilling its function adequately; functional and durable rather than attractive; in working order.
whole play to be over.

"Well, what was your impression?" his father asked him afterwards. That she was so
desperately nervous that she spilled both coffee and a small bowl of cream at the luncheon,
that she was anxious for approval to such a point that no person should or ought to be
from another... these he did not say. Who was he to give or withhold approval from one
who had been wandering round in the world long before he.

"I think Miss McCabe is a fine person," he said. "You have... no objections then?"
"Of course not."

"I'm glad," he said and started to explain their plans.

She would come with them to Strandhill this summer, and stay in one of the hotels close
to the usual cottage they took for August. If all went well they would become engaged
before they went back to the schools at the end of the holidays.

They had been at Strandhill a week now, the boy golfing or studying, the father spending
much of his time with Miss McCabe. Sometimes the son would see them arm in arm
on the promenade from the tees close to the shore. The sight disturbed him, as if their
defense was too brittle against the only end of life, and made it too disturbingly obvious,
and he would try to shut it out with the golf ball.

"Will you be seeing Miss McCabe?" the boy asked as the put the coffee and sandwiches
on the table.

"I might drop into the hotel. She's going to the salt baths."

There was a hot salt bath close to where the old cannon pointed out on the ocean, asbestos
covered, the yellow funnel of a ship for chimney from which plumes of steam puffed. She
went every afternoon for the hot baths and a massage. She had rheumatism.

"And you? What do you intend? Are you studying?"

"No, I'll get in a round, and come back early to cook that rabbit. But ask Miss McCabe.
It's just a folly on my part to want to cook it, and I don't mind at all if you'd both prefer
to eat as usual at the Kincora."

They left the cottage together after lunch, the father with a walking stick, the son with
the golf clubs, and parted at the lane that led to the clubhouse.

As he went round the course he climbed in that instinct that draws people to places
that have witnessed murder or violence to where he had heard the crying that morning,
but the blood had dried from the sand, and the place was *uncannily*¹⁴ still, the coarse
*tussocks*¹⁵ rusting in the sea wind, the strand covered with the full tide, and a white
sailing boat tacking up the inlet from Ballisadare to the mouth of the ocean.

He skinned and dressed the rabbit that evening, clinically teasing out the dried blood

¹⁴ *uncanny*: strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way.
¹⁵ *tussock*: a small area of grass that is thicker or longer than the grass growing around it.
where the vein had been cut, and Miss McCabe came at eight. The father was plainly
uneasy until she exclaimed that the rabbit was delicious.

"I never knew rabbit could be so good," he added. "I suppose it's just prejudice again. It
was always known as the poor man's chicken."

"We must praise the cook too. As well as a future doctor we have also a good cook on our
hands." Miss McCabe was so much in her element that she was careless. "It's much nicer
to eat here than at the Kincora. Luke seems to have very good trout as well. Some of them
look as fat as butter. You must allow me to cook them for dinner some evening soon. It's
crazy not to have fish when at the ocean."

"Miss McCabe likes you enormously," the father sang after he had returned from leaving
her back to the hotel. "She has savings, and she says you'll be welcome to them if you
ever need money for post-graduate work or anything like that."

"That won't be necessary. My uncle said I can have as much as I need on loan for those
purposes," the son said cuttingly, and the reference to the uncle annoyed the father as
much as Miss McCabe's offer had the son. Irrationally, he felt soiled by meal and rabbit
and whole evening, as if he had taken part in some buffoonery against the day, against
any sense of dignity, and he was determining how to avoid the trout dinner and anything
more got to do with them.

As it turned out there was no need for avoidance. A uniformed bellhop came from the
hotel the next evening to tell that Miss McCabe had suffered a heart attack in the salt
baths that afternoon. The doctor had seen her and she was resting in her hotel room. She
wished to see the father.

"Will you come?" the father asked. "It's you she wants to see."

When he got back from the hotel he was incredibly agitated. He could not sit still. "She's
all right," he said. "She just had a mild heart attack in the hot baths, but she still
thinks we'll get engaged at the end of the month." "But I thought that was the general
idea."

"It was. If everything went well. Who wants to marry a woman who can pop off at any
minute?"

It sometimes happened, even in the act, the son had heard, but he said nothing. "Isn't it
enough to have buried one woman?" the father shouted.

"Did you tell her?"

"I tried. I wasn't able. All she thinks of is our future. Her head is full of plans." "What
are you going to do?"

"Clear out," he said, to the son's dismay. "You can't do that."

"It's the only way to do it. I'll write to her." "What... if she doesn't take it?"

"There's nothing I can do about that."

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16 buffoonery: behaviour that is ridiculous but amusing.
As if all the irons were being suddenly all truly struck and were flowing from all directions to the heart of the green, he saw with terrifying clarity that it was the stoat the father had glimpsed in the Miss McCabe's hotel room, and he was running.

"What'll you do about the cottage? It's rented till the end of the month." "It doesn't matter about the cottage. The rent is paid."

"Where'll you go to?"

"Home, of course. Aren't you coming?" he asked as if he assumed it was foregone. "No," he saw his chance. "I'll stay."

"What if Miss McCabe sees you?" the father asked in alarm. "There's nothing I can do for her or she for me."

He was not staying by the sea either. Tomorrow he would leave for his uncle's. They were all running.

"What if she asks about me?"

"Naturally, I'll try to avoid her, but if I meet her I'll say I don't know. That it's not my affair. How soon are you going?

"As soon as I get the stuff into the boot of the car." "I'll give you a hand so."

"Are you sure you won't change your mind?" "No. I'll stay."

"Write then." "I'll write."

Already he could hear his uncle's mordant voice. "You have to take a test to drive a blood old car around. But any pair of imbeciles of age can go and take a marriage license out and set about bringing up a child in the world, which is a much more complicated activity than driving an old car around!" There would be good talk for several days, and there was the story of the stoat and the rabbit.

All night the rabbit must have raced from warren to warren, the stoat on its trail. Plumper rabbits had crossed the stoat's path, but it would not be deflected; it had marked down this one rabbit to kill. No matter how fast the rabbit raced, the stoat was still on its trail, and at last the rabbit sat down in terror and waited for the stoat to slither up and cut the vein behind the ear. He had heard it crying as the stoat was drinking its blood.

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17 mordant: the back of a person's neck.
18 warren: the back of a person's neck.
C Comprehension, Close Reading & Analysis

1) What game is the student playing at the beginning of the story?

2) Find a quote that demonstrates that the stoat’s killing of the rabbit is violent.

3) Describe the protagonist’s relationship with his father. This story is autobiographical (based on real events in the author’s life). What does this tell us about the author?

4) Do you think the father misses his wife? Why / why not?

5) How does the father go about finding a new wife? What do you think of this approach to finding a partner?

6) What purpose does the uncle serve in the story? The uncle is not autobiographical, so why would McGahern invent him? Explain.

7) Write a description of Miss McCabe, using the words from the text.

8) What is an allegory? Explain the allegorical elements of the story.

D Food for Thought — Essay Questions

Write as much as you can in response to one of the following:

1) Discuss the theme of death as portrayed in the short story "The Stoat" by John McGahern.

2) Discuss the theme of violence as portrayed in the short story "The Stoat" by John McGahern.

3) Compare and contrast ways in which the writers of the short stories you have read so far discuss the themes of growing up and adulthood.
About the Author — Patricia Grace (1937)

Patricia Grace was born in Wellington in 1937. She graduated with a Diploma in Teaching at Victoria University. Patricia began writing by entering her work in competitions with local newspapers before joining a Penwoman’s Club in Auckland. Her first collection of short stories, Waiariki, was published in 1975 and won the PEN/Hubert Church Award for Best First Book of Fiction. Her first novel Mutuwhenua (1978) was the first novel ever published by a Maori woman writer and was short listed for the fiction section of the New Zealand Book Awards. Grace's novels are well known throughout New Zealand and have also been published in the United States, United Kingdom, Holland, Spain, Italy and Germany.

In 1985, Patricia was awarded the Victoria University of Wellington writing fellowship. She used this time to complete her second novel, Potiki (1986). This book won the fiction section of the New Zealand Book Awards in 1987 and has been much applauded since. She was awarded the Literaturpreis from Frankfurt, Germany for Potiki in 1994.

Patricia has written numerous short stories throughout her career. Collections such as The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories (1980), Electric City and Other Stories, (1987), Selected Stories (1991) and The Sky People (1994) allowed her to investigate often challenging Maori experiences through a diverse range of protagonists. Patricia was awarded the Queen’s Service Order in 1988 and an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Victoria University in 1989. Her third novel, Cousins (1992), again placed her on the shortlist for the fiction section of the 1992 New Zealand Book Awards. Her fourth novel, Baby No—eyes (1998), was short listed for the Tasmania/Pacific Prize for Literature.

Dogsise Story was published in 2001. With this novel Patricia won the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Fiction Book Prize in 2001; was long listed for the Booker Prize in 2002; was short listed for the fiction prize of the Montana Book Awards 2002 and the Tasmania/Pacific Prize for Literature. Her next novel, Tu (2004), won the Deutz Medal for Fiction or Poetry at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards 2005. Prime Minister Helen Clark bestowed Patricia with the NZ$60,000 Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in 2006. This Award recognises writers who have made a significant contribution to New Zealand Literature. Patricia was acknowledged in 2007 in the Queen's birthday honours list, becoming a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for her services to literature. In the same year she was selected as the 2008 Laureate of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, announced at a ceremony at the University of Oklahoma. An international jury representing 10 countries selected her as the winner of the US$50,000 prize administered by the University of Oklahoma and its international magazine, World Literature Today.
Patricia Grace continues to be active within the New Zealand literary community, presenting her work at events and taking part in the NZ Book Council's Writers in Schools programme. Patricia lives in Plimmerton on her ancestral land of Ngati Toa, near her home Marae at Hongoeka Bay.

**Historical Context — The Maori (Tangata Whenua: the local people)**

The Maori arrived in New Zealand in the 10th century AD. They called the new land Aotearoa, which means Land of the Long White Cloud. The Maori brought dogs and rats. They also brought yams and kumara or sweet potatoes and gourds. The Maori also ate fern roots. There was also an abundance of seafood in New Zealand. The Maori hunted dolphins, whales and seals and they ate fish and shellfish. They also hunted large, flightless birds called moa – until they became extinct.

Maori society was tribal. Each person belonged to a family or whanau, a sub tribe or hapu and the full tribe or iwi. Warfare was common in New Zealand. The Maori built fortified settlements called pa. They fought with long wooden clubs called taiaha and short wooden clubs called patu. They also fought with short jade clubs called mere. People captured in war became slaves.

The Maori are famous for their wood carvings. They also make pendants or tikiis from whalebone. The Maori are also famous for their tattoos or moko, which were made with a bone chisel, a mallet and blue pigment.

The first European to see New Zealand was a Dutchman called Abel Tasman who arrived in 1642. Ominously Europeans fought with the Maori and the Europeans were not keen to return. However the new land was named New Zealand after a Dutch province.

Europeans left New Zealand alone until 1769 when Captain James Cook arrived in his ship The Endeavour. The first encounters with the Maori were violent so Cook called the place Poverty Bay and sailed away. However later, at Mercury Bay, Cook managed to befriend the local Maori. He went on to circumnavigate New Zealand and to accurately map it. Cook made two more voyages to New Zealand in 1773 and 1777. Furthermore other European explorers came, French and Spanish.

Towards the end of the 18th century sealers began to sail to New Zealand. The first group arrived on South Island in 1792. Then, at the beginning of the 19th century whalers came to New Zealand. Sailors began to cut wood from New Zealand for masts and spas and a small group of Europeans settled there. In the early 19th century some Europeans began buying land from the Maori.
Moreover, there were isolated conflicts between the Maori and Europeans but generally relations were peaceful. The Maoris traded food and flax for European goods - including muskets. Imported muskets made Maori warfare much more bloody. The so-called musket wars were fought between 1819 and 1825. Furthermore Europeans brought diseases to New Zealand to which the Maoris had no resistance. On the other hand they did bring potatoes and pigs.

Meanwhile, missionaries went to New Zealand. The first was Samuel Marsden who arrived in 1814. At first the missionaries had little success. The first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in 1838. Then in 1817 the laws of New South Wales were extended to New Zealand. However, in reality there was little law and order among the European settlers and some of them appealed to the British government for help. So in 1833 the government sent a man named James Busby as 'official British Resident'. The British government were concerned about the way people were buying land from the Maori and they wanted it to be properly regulated. Busby's job was to unite the Maori tribes into a federation that the British could deal with. In 1838 Busby was replaced with a man named William Hobson.

At first the British government was reluctant to make New Zealand a colony. They changed their minds when they feared the French were about to do so. In 1840 William Hobson persuaded the Maori to accept annexation by the treaty of Waitangi. The Maori accepted the sovereignty of the British crown. In return the Maoris became British subjects and they were guaranteed possession of their land. However despite the treaty the British and the Maori soon quarrelled. Also in 1840 Hobson made Auckland the capital of New Zealand. Meanwhile the Maori grew disenchanted with the treaty of Waitangi and in 1844 a chief named Hone Heke cut down the British flag (symbol of British authority in New Zealand) several times. He sacked the town of Kororareka and he fought a 2-year war with the British. However he was eventually defeated.

The white population of New Zealand grew at a tremendous rate. By 1861 it was almost 100,000. By 1881 it was nearly 500,000. However the Maori were increasingly discontented. Some Maoris in North Island appointed a king in 1858. In 1860 simmering Maori resentment broke out into war. The fighting dragged on until 1872. As a result of the war large amounts of land was confiscated from rebel tribes.

The Maori also suffered from diseases introduced to New Zealand by Europeans and their numbers declined drastically. In 1769, when Cook arrived, there were about 100,000 Maori. By 1896 their numbers had fallen to 42,000. By 1956 the white population of New Zealand reached about 2 million. The Maori population was about 135,000. In 1975 the Treaty of Waitangi Act was passed. It formed a tribunal to examine Maori land claims. However many Maori continue to suffer deprivation.
He was an old man going on a journey. But not really so old, only they made him old buttoning up his coat for him and giving him money. Seventy—one that's all. Not a journey, not what you would really call a journey — he had to go in and see those people about his land. Again. But he like the word Journey even though you didn't quite say it. It wasn't a word for saying only for saving up in your head, and that way you could enjoy it. Even an old man like him, but not what you would call properly old. The coat was good and warm. It was second—hand from the jumble and it was goon and warm. Could have ghosts in it but who cares, when that's the main thing. If some old pakeha died in it that's too bad because he wasn't scared of the pakeha kehuas anyway. The pakeha kehuas they couldn't do anything, it was only like having a sheet over your head and going woo— woo at someone in the lavatory . .

He better go to the lavatory because he didn't trust town lavatories, people spewed there and wrote rude words. Last time he got something stuck on his shoe. Funny people those town people.

— Taxi.
— It's coming Uncle.
—Taxi Uncle. They think he's deaf. And old. Putting more money in his pocket and wishing his coat needed buttoning, telling him it's windy and cold. Never mind, he was off. Off on his journey, he could get round town good on his own, good as gold.

— Out early today old man.. Business young fulla.
— Early bird catches the early worm.
— It'll be a sorry worm young fulla, a sorry worm. Like that is it?
— Like that.

You could sit back and enjoy the old taxi smells of split upholstery and cigarette, and of something else that could have been the young fulla's hair oil or his bow. It was good. Good. Same old taxi same old stinks. Same old shop over there, but he wouldn't be calling in today, no. And tomorrow they'd want to know why. No, today he was going on a journey, which was a good word. Today he was going further afield, and there was a word no one knew he had. A good wind today but he had a warm coat and didn't need anyone fussing.

Same old butcher and same old fruit shop, doing all right these days not like before. Same old Post Office where you went to get your pension money, but he always sent Minnie down to get his because he couldn't stand these old—age people. These old—age people got on his nerves.

— Yes, same old place, same old shops and roads, and everything cracking up a bit. Same old taxi. Same old young fulla.
— How's the wife?
— Still growling old man.
— What about the kids?

1 pakeha: Caucasians (in New Zealand's native language).
2 kehuas: ghost (in New Zealand's native language).
— Costing me money.

40 — Send them out to work that's the story.
— I think you're right you might have something there old man. Well here we are, early.
— Still another half hour to wait for the train.
— Best to be early. Business. Guess you're right.
— What's the sting?

45 — Ninety—five it is.
— Pull out a fistful and give the young fulla full eyes. Get himself out on to the footpath and shove the door, give it a good hard slam. Pick me up later young fulla, ten past five. Might as well make a day of it, look round town and buy a few things.
— Don't forget ten past five. Right you are old man five ten.

50 People had been peeing in the subway the dirty dogs. In the old days all you needed to do to get on to the station was to step over the train tracks, there weren't any piss holes like this to go through, it wasn't safe. Coming up the steps on to the platform he could feel the quick huffs of his breathing and that annoyed him, he wanted to swipe at the huffs with his hand.

Steam engines went out years ago.

55 Good sight though seeing the big engines come bellowing through the cutting and pull in squealing, everything was covered in soot for miles those days.

New man in the ticket office, looked as though he still had his pyjamas on under his outfit. Miserable looking fulla and not all impressed by the ten—dollar note handed through to him. A man feels like a screwball yelling through that little hole in the glass and then trying to pick up the change that sourpuss has scattered all over the place. Feels like giving sourpuss the fingers, yes. Yes he knows all about those things, he's not deaf and blind yet, not by a long shot.

Ah warmth. A cold wait on the platform but the carriages had the heaters on, they were warm even though they stank. And he had the front half of the first carriage all to himself. Good idea getting away early. And right up front where you could see everything. Good idea coming on his own, he didn't want anyone fussing round looking after his ticket, seeing if he's warm and saying things twice. Doing his talking for him, made him sick. Made him sick them trying to walk slow so they could keep up with him. Yes he could see everything. Not many fishing boats gone out this morning and the sea's turning over rough and heavy — Tamatea that's why. That's something they don't know all these young people, not even those fishermen walking about on their decks over there. Tamatea a Ngana, Tamatea Aio, Tamatea Whakapau — when you get the winds — but who'd believe you these days. They'd rather stare at their weather on television and talk about a this and a that coming over because there's nothing else to believe in.

70 Now this slip here, it's not really land at all, it's where we used to get our pipis, any time or tide. But they pushed a hill down over it and shot the railway line across to make more room.
for cars. The train driver knows it's not really land and he is speeding up over this strip. So fast you wait for the nose dive over the edge into the sea, especially when you're up front like this looking. Well too bad. Not to worry, he's nearly old anyway and just about done his dash, so why to worry if they nose dive over the edge into the sea. Funny people putting their trains across the sea. Funny people making land and putting pictures and stories about it in the papers as though it's something spectacular, it's a word you can use if you get it just right and he could surprise quite a few people if he wanted to. Yet other times they go on as though land is just a nothing. Trouble is he let them do his talking for him. If he'd gone in on his own last time and left those fusspots at home he'd have got somewhere. Wouldn't need to be going in there today to tell them all what's what.

Lost the sea now and coming into a cold crowd. This is where you get swamped, but he didn't mind, it was good to see them all get in out of the wind glad to be warm. Some of his whanaungas\(^1\) lived here but he couldn't see any of them today. Good job too, he didn't want them hanging round wondering where he was off to on his own. Nosing into his business. Some of the old railway houses still there but apart from that everything new, houses, buildings, roads. You'd never know now where the old roads had been, and they'd filled a piece of the harbour up too to make more ground. A short row of sooty houses that got new paint once in a while, a railway shelter, and a lunatic asylum and that was all. Only you didn't call it that these days, he'd think of the right words in a minute.

There now the train was full and he had a couple of kids sitting by him wearing plastic clothes, they were gog—eyed stretching their necks to see. One of them had a snotty nose and a wheeze.

On further it's the same — houses, houses — but people have to have houses. Two or three farms once, on the cold hills, and a rough road going through. By car along the old road you'd always see a pair of them at the end of the drive waving with their hats jammed over their ears. Fat one and a skinny one. Psychiatric hospital, those were the words to use these days, yes don't sound so bad. People had to have houses and the two or three farmers were dead now probably. Maybe didn't live to see it all. Maybe died rich.

The two kids stood swaying as they entered the first tunnel, their eyes stood out watching for the tunnel's mouth, waiting to pass out through the great mouth of the tunnel. And probably the whole of life was like that, sitting in the dark watching and waiting. Sometimes it happened and you came out into the light, but mostly it only happened in tunnels. Like now.

And between the tunnels they were slicing the hills away with big machines. Great looking hills too and not an easy job cutting them away, it took pakeha determination to do that. Funny people these pakehas, had to chop up everything. Couldn't talk to a hill or a tree these people, couldn't give the tree or the hills a name and make them special and leave them. Couldn't go round, only through. Couldn't give life, only death. But people had to have

\(^1\)whanaungas: peers (in New Zealand's native language).
houses, and ways of getting from one place to another. And anyway who was right up there helping the pakeha to get rid of things — the Maori of course, riding those big machines. Swooping round and back, up and down all over the place. Great tools the Maori man had for his carving these day, tools for his new **whakairo**\(^4\), but there you are, a man had to eat. People had to have houses, had to eat, had to get from here to there — anyone knew that.

He wished the two kids would stop crackling, their mothers dressed them in rubbish clothes that's why they had colds.

Then the rain'll come and the cuts will bleed for miles and the valleys will drown in blood, but the pakeha will find a way of mopping it all up no trouble. Could find a few bones amongst that lot too. That's what you get when you dig up the ground, bones.

Now the next tunnel, dark again. Had to make sure the windows were all lit up in the old days or you got a face full of **soot**\(^5\).

And then coming out of the second tunnel that's when you really had to hold your breath, that's when you really had to hand it to the pakeha, because there was a sight. Buildings miles high, streets and steel and concrete and asphalt settled all round the great—looking curve that was the harbour. Water with hip on it, and roadways threading up and round the hills to layer on layer of houses, even in the highest and steepest places. He was filled with admiration. Filled with admiration, which was another word he enjoyed even though it wasn't really a word for saying, but yes he was filled right to the top — it made him tired taking it all in. The kids too, they'd stopped crackling and were quite still, their eyes full to exploding.

The snotty one reminded him of George, he had pop eyes and he sat quiet not talking. The door would open slowly and the eyes would come round and he would say I ran away again Uncle. That's all. That' all for a whole week or more until hi mother came to get him and take him back. Never spoke, never wanted anything. Today if he had time he would look out for George.

Railway station much the same as ever, same old platforms and not much cleaner than the soot days. Same old stalls and looked like the same people in them. Under  ground part is new. Same cafeteria, same food most likely, and the spot where they found the murdered man looked no different from any other spot. Always crowded in the old days especially during the hard times. People came there in the hard times to do their starving. They didn't want to drop dead while they were on their own most probably. Rather all starve together.

Same old statue of **Kupe**\(^6\) with his woman and his priest, and they've got the name of the

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\(^4\) **whakairo**: A Maori traditional art of carving in wood, stone or bone. Wood was formed into houses, fencepoles, containers, and tool handles.

\(^5\) **soot**: Soot is mostly made of carbon, and it forms when matter burns incompletely. Engines, burning coal, and house fires are all sources of soot, and soot is a major contributor to air pollution around the world. It's dangerous for people to breathe too much soot into their lungs.

\(^6\) **Kupe**: According to tribal narratives, Kupe was the first Polynesian to discover the islands of New Zealand. His journey there was triggered by difficulties with fishing in Hawaiki, his homeland.
canoe spelt wrong his old eyes aren't as blind as all that. Same old floor made of little coloured pieces and blocked into patterns with metal strips, he used to like it but now he can just walk on it. Big pillars round the doorway holding everything in place, no doubt about it you had 155 to hand it to the pakeha.

Their family hadn't starved, their old man had seen to that. Their old man had put all the land down in garden, all of it, and in the weekends they took what they didn't use round by horse and cart. Sometimes got paid, sometimes swapped for something, mostly got nothing but why to worry. Yes great looking veggies they had those days, turnip as big as pumpkins, 160 cabbages you could hardly carry, big tomatoes, lettuces, potatoes, everything. Even now the ground gave you good things. They had to stay home from school for the planting and picking, usually for the weeding and hoeing as well. Never went to school much those days but why to worry.

Early, but he could take his time, knows his way round this place as good as gold. Yes he's 165 walked all over these places that used to be under the sea and he's ridden all up and down them in trams too. This bit of sea has been land for a long time now. And he's been in all the pubs and been drunk in all of them, he might go to the pub later and spend some of his money. Or he could go to the continuous pictures but he didn't think they had them any more. Still, he might celebrate a little on his own later, he knew his way round this place 170 without anyone interfering. Didn't need anyone doing his talking, and messing things up with all their letters and what not. Pigeons, he didn't like pigeons, they'd learned to behave like people, eat your feet off if you give them half a chance.

And up there past the cenotaph, that's where they'd bulldozed all the bones and put in the new motorway. Resited, he still remembered the newspaper word, all in together. Your leg 175 bone, my arm bone, someone else's bunch of teeth and fingers, someone else's head, funny people. Glad he didn't have any of his whanaungas underground in that place. And they had put all the headstones in a heap somewhere promising to set them all up again tastefully — he remembered — didn't matter who was underneath. Bet there weren't any Maoris driving those bulldozers, well why to worry it's not his concern, none of his whanaungas up there anyway.

180 Good those old trams but he didn't trust these crazy buses, he'd rather walk. Besides he's nice and early and there's nothing wrong with his legs. Yes, he knows this place like his own big toe, and by Jove he's got a few things to say to those people and he wasn't forgetting. He'd tell them, yes.

The railway station was a place for waiting. People waited there in the old days when times 185 were hard, had a free wash and did their starving there. He waited because it was too early to go home,— his right foot was sore. And he could watch out for George, the others had often seen George here waiting about. He and George might go and have a cup of tea and some kai7.

7 kai: traditional Maori food. Kai Maori is made up of kaiwhenua – food from the land, and kaimoana – food from the sea.
He agreed. Of course he agreed. People had to have houses. Not only that, people had to have other things — work, and ways of getting from place to place, and comforts. People needed more now than they did in his young days, he understood completely. Sir. Kept calling him Sir, and the way he said it didn't sound so well, but it was difficult to be sure at first. After a while you knew, you couldn't help knowing. He didn't want any kai, he felt sick. His foot hurt.

Station getting crowded and a voice announcing platforms. After all these years he still didn't know where the voice came from but it was the same voice, and anyway the trains could go without him it was too soon. People. Queueing for tickets and hurrying towards the platforms, or coming this way and disappearing out through the double door, or into the subway or the lavatory or the cafeteria. He was too tired to go to the lavatory and anyway he didn't like ... Some in no hurry at all. Waiting. You'd think it was starvation times. Couldn't see anyone he knew.

— I know I know. People have to have houses, I understand and it's what I want. Well it's not so simple Sir.
— It's simple. I can explain. There's only the old place on the land and it needs bringing down now. My brother and sister and I talked about it years back. We wrote letters ... 
— Yes yes but it's not as simple as you think.
— But now they're both dead and it's all shared — there are my brother's children, my sister's children, and me. It doesn't matter about me because I'm on the way out, but before I go I want it all done.
— As I say it's no easy matter, all considered. Subdivision. It's what we want.
— There'll be no more subdivision Sir, in the area.
— Subdivision. My brother has four sons and two daughters, my sister has five sons. Eleven sections so they can build their houses. I want it all seen to before...
— You must understand Sir that it's no easy matter, the area has become what we call a development area, and I've explained all this before, there'll be no more subdivision.
— Development means houses, and it means other things too, I understand that. But houses, it's what we have in mind.
— And even supposing Sir that subdivision were possible, which it isn't, I wonder if you fully comprehend what would be involved in such an undertaking.
— I fully comprehend ...
— Surveying, kerbing and channelling and formation of adequate access, adequate right of ways. The initial outlay ...
— I've got money, my brother and sister left it for the purpose. And my own, my niece won't use any of my money, it's all there. We've got the money.
— However that's another matter, I was merely pointing out that it's not always all plain sailing.
— All we want is to get it divided up so they can have a small piece each to build on ...
— As I say, the area, the whole area, has been set aside for development. All in the future of course but we must look ahead, it is necessary to be far—sighted in these concerns.
— Houses, each on a small section of land, it's what my niece was trying to explain ...
— You see there's more to development than housing. We have to plan for roading and
commerce, we have to set aside areas for educational and recreational facilities. We've got to think of industry, transportation ... — But still people need houses. My nieces and nephews have waited for years. They'd be given equivalent land or monetary compensation of course.

But where was the sense in that, there was no equal land. If it's your it' stamping ground and you have your ties there, then there's no land equal, surely that wasn't hard to understand. More and more people coming in to wait and plastic kids had arrived. They pulled away from their mother and went for a small run crackling. He wished he knew their names and hoped they would come and sit down by him, but 110, their mother was striding, turning them toward a platform because they were getting a train home. Nothing to ay for a week or more and never wanted anything except sitting squeezed beside him in the armchair after tea until he fell asleep. Carry him to bed, get in beside him later then one day his mother would come. It was too early for him to go home even though he needed a pee.

— There's no sense in it don't you see? That's their stamping ground and when you've got your ties there's no equal land. It's what my niece and nephew were trying to explain the last time, and in the letters ...
— Well Sir I shouldn't really do this, but if it will help clarify the position I could show you what has been drawn up. Of course it's all in the future and not really your worry ...
— Yes yes I'll be dead but that's not ... I'll get the plans.

And it's true he'll be dead, it's true he's getting old, but not true if anyone thinks his eyes have had it because he can see good enough. His eyes are still good enough to look all over the paper and see his land there, and to see that his land has been shaded in _and had 'Off Street Parking' printed on it.

He can see good close up and he can see good far off, and that's George over the other side standing with some mates. He can tell George anywhere no matter what sort of get—up he's wearing. George would turn and see him soon.

But you can't, that's only a piece of paper and it can be changed, you can change it. People have to live and to have things. People need houses and shops but that's only paper, it can be changed.

— It's all been very carefully mapped out. By experts. Areas have been selected according to suitability and convenience. And the aesthetic aspects have been carefully considered ...
— Everything grows, turnips the size of pumpkins, cabbages you can hardly carry, potatoes, tomatoes ... Back here where you've got your houses, it's all rock, land going to waste there. You would all receive equivalent sites. Resited ...
— As I say on equivalent land ... There's no land equal ...
— Listen Sir, it's difficult but we've got to have some understanding of things. Don't we? — Yes yes I want you to understand, that's why I came. This here, it's only paper and you can change it. There's room for all the things you've got on your paper, and room for what we
want too, we want only what we've got already, it's what we've been trying to say.
— Sir we can't always have exactly what we want ...

270 — All round here where you've marked residential it's all rock, what's wrong with that for
shops and cars. And there'll be people and houses. Some of the people can be us, and some of
the houses can be ours.
— Sure, sure. But not exactly where you want them. And anyway Sir there's no advantage do
you think in you people all living in the same area?

275 — It's what we want, we want nothing more than what is ours already. It does things to your
land value.
He was an old man but he wanted very much to lean over the desk and swing a heavy punch.
— No sense being scattered everywhere when what we want ...
— It immediately brings down the value of your land ...

280 — ...is to stay put on what is left of what has been ours since before we were born. Have a
small piece each, a small garden, my brother and sister and I discussed it years ago.
— Straight away the value of your land goes right down.

Wanted to swing a heavy punch but he's too old for it. He kicked the desk instead, Hard. And
the veneer cracked and splintered. Funny how quiet it had become.

285 — You ought to be run in old man, do you hear.
— Cripes! Look what the old blighter's gone and done. Look at Paul's desk. He must be whacky.
He can't do that Paul, get the boss along to sort him out. Get him run in.
— Get out old man, do you hear.
— Yes he could hear, he wasn't deaf, not by a long shot. A bit of trouble getting his foot back
out of the hole, but there, he was going, and not limping either, he'd see about this lot later.
Going, not limping, and not going to die either. It looked as though their six eyes might all
fall out and roll on the floor.

There's no sense, no sense in anything, but what use telling that to George when George
already knew sitting beside him wordless. What use telling George you go empty handed
and leave nothing behind, when George had always been empty handed, had never wanted
anything except to have nothing.
— How are you son?
— All right Uncle. Nothing else to say. Only sitting until it was late enough to go. Going, not
limping, and not going to die either.

300 — There you are old man, get your feet in under that heater. Got her all warmed up for you.
— Yes young fulla that's the story. The weather's not so good.
— Not the best.
— How was your day all told? All right.
— It's all those hard footpaths, and all the walking that gives people sore feet, that's what
makes your legs tired.
— There's a lot of walking about in that place. You didn't use the buses?
— Never use the buses.
— But you got your business done? All done. Nothing left to do.
— That's good then isn't it?
— How's your day been young fulla? A proper circus.
— Must be this weather.
— It's the weather, always the same in this weather. This is your last trip for the day is it?
— A couple of trains to meet after tea and then I finish. Home to have a look at the telly. For a while, but there's an early job in the morning ...

— Drop me off at the bottom young fulla. I'm in no hurry. Get off home to your wife and kids.
— No, no, there's a bad wind out there, we'll get you to your door. Right to your door, you've done your walking for the day. Besides I always enjoy the sight of your garden, you must have green fingers old man.
— It keeps me bent over but it gives us plenty. When you come for Minnie on Tuesday I'll have a couple of cabbages and a few swedes for you.
— Great, really great, I'm no gardener myself. Almost too dark to see.
— Never mind I had a good look this morning, you've got it all laid out neat as a pin.
— Neat as a pin old man.
— And here we are.

— One step away from your front door. You can get off home for tea.
— You're all right old man?
— Right as rain young fulla, couldn't be better. I'll get along then.

Tuesday. Now he could get in and close the door behind him and walk without limping to the lavatory because he badly needs a pee. And when he came out of the bathroom they were watching him, they were stoking up the fire and putting things on the table. They were looking at his face.

Seated at the table they were trying not to look at his face, they were trying to talk about unimportant things, there was a bad wind today and it's going to be a rough night.

*Tamatea* Whakapau.

— It must have been cold in town. Heaters were on in the train.
— And the train, was it on time?
— Right on the minute.
— What about the one coming home?
— Had to wait a while for the one coming home.

— At the railway station, you waited at the railway station? And I saw George.
— George, how's George?
— George is all right, he's just the same.
— Maisie said he's joined up with a gang and he doesn't wash. She said he's got a big war sign on his jacket and won't go to work.

— They get themselves into trouble she said and they all go round dirty. George is no different, he's just the same. They were quiet then wondering if he would say anything else, then after a while they knew he wouldn't.

But later that evening as though to put an end to some silent discussion that they may have been having he told them it wasn't safe and they weren't to put him in the ground. When I go

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*Tamatea:* Tornado (in New Zealand's native language).
you're not to put me in the ground, do you hear. He was an old man and his foot was giving him hell, and he was shouting at them while they sat hurting.
— Bum me up I tell you, it's not safe in the ground, you'll know all about it if you put me in the ground. Do you hear?
— Some other time, we'll talk about it.

— Some other time is now and it's all said. When I go, bum me up, no one's going to mess about with me when I'm gone.
He turned into his bedroom and shut the door. He sat on the edge of his bed for a long time looking at the palms of his hands.

D Comprehension, Close Reading & Analysis

1) What is the purpose of the old man's journey?

2) To what extent did the officials listen to the old man? Find examples and quotes to support your point of view. What tone are the officials' remarks made in?

3) "And anyway Sir there's no advantage do you think in you people all living together in the same area." Why do you think the authorities think there is no benefit in the family living close together?

4) Why does the old man want to be created instead of buried?

5) How do the opening two paragraphs and the closing passage starting with "They were quiet wondering if he would say anything else" reflect the Uncle's changing mood?

6) Why do you think the story concludes with the Uncle "looking at the palm of his hands"?

7) Grace uses motifs and symbols of blindness and sight throughout the story, as evidenced by the following quotations from the story:
   • "Yes he knos all about those things, he's not deaf and blind yet, not only by a long shot."
   • "... they've got the name of the canoes spelt wrong, his old eyes aren't as blind as that."
   • "His eyes are still good enough to look all over the paper and see his land there, and to see his land has been shaded in and 'Off Street Parking' printed on it."

To what purpose and to what effect are these employed?

8) Why do you think Grace capitalises the 'a' in admiration in the following phrase: "... and roadways threading up and round the hills to layer on layer of houses, even in the highest and steepest palces. He was filled with admiration. Filled with Admiration ... but yes he was filled right to the top - it made him tired taking it all in."

9) How does the old man view the land and the way the pakeha have 'developed' it? Embed a short quote into each of your observations.
10) Leg and feet-related imagery forms a recurring motif in the short story; why do you think Grace has included them, and to what effect?

11) The narrative point of view shifts perspective in "Journey". At times the old man seems to watch himself in action, to observe himself objectively before returning to a subjective expression of his feelings and knowledge. First, identify the subjective and the objective parts in the passage below:

"He better go to the lavatory because he didn’t trust town lavatories, people spewed there and wrote rude words. Last time he got something stuck on his shoe. Funny people those town people."

How does the shifting narrative affect your view of the old man?

12) Comment on the way Grace has structured the 'journey' of the story. Consider the physical journey, the opening and ending taxi rides, as well as the reader's own journey through the story.

E Food for Thought and Essay Questions

Write a detailed response to one of the following questions:

1) You are the elderly man and write your thoughts as you sit on the edge of your "bed for a long time looking at the palms" of your hands. Be sure to write in an authentic style and to refer to directly and to allude to the short story "Journey".

2) Comment on Patricia Grace's characterisation of the narrator of the story; to what extent does the reader sympathise with the old man's attitudes towards the land?

3) How does the lack of a clear outcome in Patricia Grace's short story "Journey" make it an impactful and successful short story nonetheless? How does the lack of a clear outcome add to the story's overall message and significance?
IGCSE Short Stories
"The Bath" by Janet Frame (1983)

About the Author — Janet Frame (1924 — 2004)

Janet Paterson Frame Clutha, (born August 28, 1924, Dunedin, New Zealand—died January 29, 2004, Dunedin), was a leading New Zealand writer of novels, short fiction, and poetry. Her works are noted for their explorations of alienation and isolation. Frame was born to a railroad worker and a sometime—poet who had been a maid for the family of writer Katherine Mansfield. Her early years were marked by poverty, the drowning death of her sister, and the disruptions created by her brother’s epilepsy. In 1945, while studying to be a teacher, she suffered a breakdown. Misdiagnosed as having schizophrenia, she spent nearly a decade in psychiatric hospitals. From 1947, following the drowning death of another sister, she endured repeated courses of electroconvulsive therapy. During that time she read the classics voraciously and cultivated her writing talent.

In 1951, while still a patient, Frame’s first book, The Lagoon, was published. A collection of short stories, it expresses the sense of isolation and insecurity of those who feel they do not fit into a normal world. She was scheduled to have a lobotomy until hospital officials learned that she had won a literary award for The Lagoon. The procedure was canceled, and Frame was released in 1955.

Writer and literary arbiter Frank Sargeson offered her the use of a shack on his property in Takapuna, and there, under his mentorship, she composed her first novel, Owls Do Cry (1957). The experimental book incorporates both poetry and prose and lacks a conventional plot. It investigates the worth of the individual and the ambiguous border between sanity and madness. Faces in the Water (1961) is a fictionalized account of her time in New Zealand mental institutions. It was written as a therapy exercise while she received psychiatric care in London, where she lived and wrote from 1956 to 1963. In all her novels, Frame depicted a society deprived of wholeness by its refusal to come to terms with disorder, irrationality, and madness. Her sophisticated and original use of frame stories to convey the subjectivity of experience and the existence of individually distinct realities was much remarked upon.

The Edge of the Alphabet (1962) centres on the struggles of several dislocated people and their largely futile efforts to connect with society. In Scented Gardens for the Blind (1963), a girl becomes mute after her parents’ marriage dissolves. The Adaptable Man (1965) is a subversive comedy set in a small town that has just been connected to the electrical grid. Frame further investigated sanity and social isolation in A State of Siege (1966; film 1978), about an elderly unmarried woman who attempts to start a new life, and The Rainbirds (1968; also published as Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room), about a man resurrected from the dead. Intensive Care (1970) combines a story of thwarted love with a dystopian tale of a society that eliminates its weakest members. Her later novels include Daughter Buffalo (1972), an intricately structured
work fixated on death; *Living in the Maniototo* (1979), a surreal exploration of the mind of a woman who appears to have several identities; and *The Carpathians* (1988), an allegory—laden investigation of language and memory. The latter work earned her the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (later called the Commonwealth Book Prize) in 1989.

*Towards Another Summer*, an autobiographical novel Frame wrote in 1963 but deemed too personal for publication until after her death, was released in 2007. The highly private Frame legally changed her last name to Clutha in 1973 to make herself more difficult to locate. In *The Memorial Room* (2013)—written in 1974 and also, because of its autobiographical elements, purposely withheld from publication until after Frame’s death—was a *roman à clef* (a novel in which real people or events appear with invented names,) about her time in France.

Frame wrote three volumes of memoirs: *To the Is—Land* (1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985). Those autobiographical works were adapted for a critically acclaimed film, *An Angel at My Table* (1990), directed by Jane Campion. Frame received numerous honours. In 1983 she was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), and in 1990 she received the Order of New Zealand. In 2003 she received one of the inaugural Prime Minister’s Awards for Literary Achievement, along with poet Hone Tuwhare and historian Michael King.

### B “The Bath” by Janet Frame (1983)

On Friday afternoon she bought cut flowers—daffodils, *anemones*¹ a few twigs of a red—leaved shrub, wrapped in *mauve*² waxed paper: for Saturday was the seventeenth anniversary of her husband’s death, and she planned to visit his grave, as she did each year, to weed it and put fresh flowers in the two jam jars standing one on each side of the tombstone. Her visit this year occupied her thoughts more than usual. She had bought the flowers to force herself to make the journey that each year became more hazardous from the walk to the bus stop, the change of buses at the Octagon, to the bitterness of the winds blowing from the open sea across almost unsheltered rows of tombstones, and the tiredness that overtook came her when it was time to return home when she longed to find a place beside the graves, in the soft grass, and fall asleep.

That evening she filled the coal bucket, *stoked*³ the fire. Her movements were slow and *arduous*⁴, her back and shoulder gave her so much pain. She cooked her tea — liver and bacon — set her knife and fork on the tea towel she used as a tablecloth, turned up the volume of the polished red radio to listen to the Weather Report and the News, ate her

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¹ *anemones*: a plant of the buttercup family which typically has brightly coloured flowers and deeply divided leaves.
² *mauve*: a pale purple colour.
³ *to stoke*: add coal or other solid fuel to (a fire, furnace, boiler, etc.).
⁴ *arduous*: involving or requiring strenuous effort; difficult and tiring.
tea, washed her dishes, then sat drowsing in the rocking chair by the fire, waiting for the 15 water to get hot enough for a bath. Visits to the cemetery, the doctor, and to relatives, to stay, always demanded a bath. When she was sure that the water was hot enough (and her tea had been digested) she ventured from the kitchen through the cold passageway to the colder bathroom. She paused in the doorway to get used to the chill of the air then she walked slowly, feeling with each step the pain in her back, across to the bath, 20 and though she knew that she was gradually losing the power in her hands she managed to wrench on the stiff cold and hot taps and half—fill the bath with warm water. How wasteful, she thought, that with the kitchen fire always burning during the past month of frost, and the water almost always hot, getting in and out of a bath had become such an effort that it was not possible to bath every night nor even every week!

She found a big towel, laid it ready over a chair, arranged the chair so that should difficulty arise as it had last time she bathed she would have some way of rescuing herself; then with her nightclothes warming on a page of newspaper inside the coal oven and her dressing—gown across the chair to be put on the instant she stepped from the bath, she undressed and pausing first to get her breath and clinging tightly to the slippery yellow—stained rim that now seemed more like the edge of a cliff with a deep drop below into the sea, slowly and painfully she climbed into the bath.

—I'll put on my nightie the instant I get out, she thought. The instant she got out indeed! She knew it would be more than a matter of instants yet she tried to think of it calmly, without dread, telling herself that when the time came she would be very careful, taking the process step by step, surprising her bad back and shoulder and her powerless wrists into performing feats they might usually rebel against, but the key to controlling them would be the surprise, the slow stealing up on them. With care, with thought. . . .

Sitting upright, not daring to lean back or lie down, she soaped herself, washing away the dirt of the past fortnight, seeing with satisfaction how it drifted about on the water a sign that she was clean again. Then when her washing was completed she found herself looking for excuses not to try yet to climb out. Those old woman's finger nails, cracked and dry, where germs could lodge, would need to be scrubbed again; the skin of her heel, too, growing so hard that her feet might have been turning to stone; behind her ear where a thread of dirt lay in the rim; after all, she did not often have the luxury of a bath, did she? How warm it was! She drowsed a moment. If only she could fall asleep then wake to find herself in her nightdress in bed for the night! Slowly she rewashed her body,
and when she knew she could no longer deceive herself into thinking she was not clean she reluctantly replaced the soap, brush and flannel in the groove at the side of the bath, feeling as she loosened her grip on them that all strength and support were ebbing from her. Quickly she seized the nail—brush again, but its magic had been used and was gone; it would not adopt the role she tried to urge upon it. The flannel too, and the soap, were frail flotsam to cling to in the hope of being borne to safety.

She was alone now. For a few minutes she sat swirling the water against her skin, perhaps as a means of buoying up her courage. Then resolutely she pulled out the plug, sat feeling the tide swirl and scrape at her skin and flesh, trying to draw her down, down into the earth; then the bath water was gone in a soapy gurgle and she was naked and shivering and had not yet made the attempt to get out of the bath.

How slippery the surface had become! In future she would not clean it with kerosene, she would use the paste cleaner that, left on overnight, gave the enamel rough patches that could be gripped with the skin.

She leaned forward, feeling the pain in her back and shoulder. She gasped the rim of the bath but her fingers slithered from it almost at once. She would not panic, she told herself: she would try gradually, carefully, to get out. Again she leaned forward, again her grip loosened as if iron hands but deliberately uncurled her stiffened blue fingers from their trembling hold. Her heart began to beat faster, her breath came more quickly, her mouth was dry. She moistened her lips. If I shout for help, she thought, no—one will hear me. No—one in the world will hear me. No—one will know I'm in the bath and can't get out.

She listened. She could hear only the drip-drip of the cold water tap of the wash basin, and the corresponding whisper and gurgle of her heart, as if it were beating under water. All else was silent. Where were the people, the traffic? Then she had a strange feeling of being under the earth, of a throbbing in her head like wheels going over the earth above her.

Then she told herself sternly that she must have no nonsense, that she had really not tried to get out of the bath. She had forgotten the strong solid chair and the grip she could get on it. If she made the effort quickly she could first take hold of both sides of the bath, pull herself up, then transfer her hold to the chair and thus pull herself out.

8 ebb: (of an emotion or quality) gradually decrease.
9 flotsam: people or things that have been rejected or discarded as worthless.
10 stern: (of a person or their manner) serious and unrelenting, especially in the assertion of authority and exercise of discipline.
She tried to do this; she just failed to make the final effort. Pale now, gasping for breath, she sank back into the bath. She began to call out but as she had predicted there was no answer. No—one had heard her, no—one in the houses or the street or Dunedin or the world knew that she was imprisoned. Loneliness welled in her. If John were here, she thought, if we were sharing our old age, helping each other, this would never have happened. She made another effort to get out. Again she failed. Faintness overcoming her she closed her eyes, trying to rest, then recovering and trying again and failing, she panicked and began to cry and strike the sides of the bath; it made a hollow sound like a wild drum—beat.

Then she stopped striking with her fists; she struggled again to get out; and for over half an hour she stayed alternately struggling and resting until at last she did succeed in climbing out and making her escape into the kitchen. She thought, I'll never take another bath in this house or anywhere. I never want to see that bath again. This is the end or the beginning of it. In future a district nurse will have to come to attend me. Submitting to that will be the first humiliation. There will be others, and others.

In bed at last she lay exhausted and lonely thinking that perhaps it might be better for her to die at once. The slow progression of difficulties was a kind of torture. There were her shoes that had to be made specially in a special shape or she could not walk. There were the times she had to call in a neighbour to fetch a pot of jam from the top shelf of her cupboard when it had been only a year ago that she hers it had made the jam and put it on the shelf. Sometimes a niece came to fill the coal—bucket or mow the lawn. Every week there was the washing to be hung on the line this required a special technique for she could not raise her arms without at the same time finding some support in the dizziness that overcame her. She remembered with a sense of the world narrowing and growing darker, like a tunnel, the incredulous11 almost despising look on the face of her niece when in answer to the comment —How beautiful the clouds are in Dunedin! These big billowing12 white and grey clouds — don't you think, Auntie?

She had said, her disappointment at the misery of things putting a sharpness in her voice, —I never look at the clouds!

She wondered how long ago it was since she had been able to look up at the sky without

11 _incredulous_: unwilling or unable to believe something..
12 _billowing_: (of smoke, cloud, or steam) move or flow outward with an undulating motion.
reeling\textsuperscript{13} with dizziness. Now she did not dare look up. There was enough to attend to down and around — the cracks and hollows in the footpath, the patches of frost and ice and the potholes in the roads; the approaching cars and motorcycles: and now, after all the outside menaces, the inner menace of her own body. She had to be guardian now over her arms and legs, force them to do as she wanted when how easily and dutifully they had walked, moved and grasped, in the old days! They were the enemy now. It had been her body that showed treachery when she tried to get it out of the bath. If she ever wanted to bath again — how strange it seemed! — she would have to ask another human being to help her to guard and control her own body. Was this so fearful? she wondered. Even if it were not, it seemed so.

She thought of the frost slowly hardening outside on the fences, roofs, windows and streets. She thought again of the terror of not being able to escape from the bath. She remembered her dead husband and the flowers she had bought to put on his grave. Then thinking again of the frost, its whiteness, white like a new bath, of the anemones and daffodils and the twigs of red—leaved shrub, of John dead seventeen years, she fell asleep while outside, within two hours, the frost began to melt with the warmth of a sudden wind blowing from the north, and the night grew warm, like a spring night, and in the morning the light came early, the sky was pale blue, the same warm wind as gentle as a mere breath, was blowing, and a narcissus had burst its bud in the front garden.

In all her years of visiting the cemetery she had never known the wind so mild. On an arm of the peninsula exposed to the winds from two stretches of sea, the cemetery had always been a place to crouch shivering in overcoat and scarf while the flowers were set on the grave and the narrow garden cleared of weeds. Today, everything was different. After all the frosts of the past month there was no trace of chill in the air. The mildness and warmth were scarcely to be believed. The sea lay, violet—coloured, hush—hushing, turning and \textit{heaving}\textsuperscript{14}, not breaking into foamy waves, it was one \textit{sinuous}\textsuperscript{15} ripple from shore to horizon and its sound was the muted sound of distant forests of peace.

Picking up the rusted garden fork that she knew lay always in the grass of the next grave, long neglected, she set to work to clear away the twitch and other weeds, exposing the first bunch of dark blue primroses with yellow centres, a clump of autumn lilies, and the shoots, six inches high, of daffodils. Then removing the green—slimed jam jars from their grooves on each side of the tombstone she walked slowly, stiff from her crouching, to the ever dripping tap at the end of the lawn path where, filling the jars with pebbles

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{to reel}: lose one’s balance and stagger or lurch violently; walk in a staggering or lurching manner.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{heave}: to lift or haul (something heavy) with great effort.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{sinuous}: having many curves and turns; lithe and supple.
and water she rattled them up and down to try to clean them of slime. Then she ran the sparkling ice—cold water into the jars and balancing them carefully one in each hand she walked back to the grave where she shook the daffodils, anemones, red leaves from their waxed paper and dividing them put half in one jar, half in the other. The dark blue of the anemones swelled with a sea—colour as their heads rested against the red leaves The daffodils were short—stemmed with big ragged rather than delicate trumpets—the type for blowing; and their scent was strong.

Finally, remembering the winds that raged from the sea she stuffed small pieces of the screwed—up waxed paper into the top of each jar so the flowers would not be carried away by the wind. Then with a feeling of satisfaction — I look after my husband's grave after seventeen years. The tombstone is not cracked or blown over, the garden has not sunk into a pool of clay. I look after my husband's grave—she began to walk away, between the rows of graves, noting which were and were not cared for. Her father and mother had been buried here. She stood now before their grave. It was a roomy grave made in the days when there was space for the dead and for the dead with money, like her parents, extra space should they need it. Their tombstone was elaborate though the writing was now faded; in death they kept the elaborate station of their life. There were no flowers on the grave, only the feathery sea—grass soft to the touch, lit with gold in the sun. There was no sound but the sound of the sea and the one row of fir trees on the brow of the hill. She felt the peace inside her; the nightmare of the evening before seemed far away, seemed not to have happened; the senseless terrifying struggle to get out of a bath!

She sat on the concrete edge of her parents' grave. She did not want to go home. She felt content to sit here quietly with the warm soft wind flowing around her and the sigh of the sea rising to mingle with the sighing of the firs and the whisper of the thin gold grass. She was grateful for the money, the time and the forethought that had made her parents' grave so much bigger than the others near by her husband, cremated, had been allowed only a narrow eighteen inches by two feet, room only for the flecked grey tomb stone In Memory of My Husband John Edward Harraway died August 6th 1948, and the narrow garden of spring flowers, whereas her parents' grave was so wide, and its concrete wall was a foot high; it was, in death, the equivalent of a quarter—acre section before there were too many people in the world. Why when the world was wider and wider was there no space left?

Or was the world narrower?

She did not know; she could not think; she knew only that she did not want to go home, she wanted to sit here on the edge of the grave, never catching any more buses, crossing
streets, walking on icy footpaths, turning mattresses, trying to reach jam from the top shelf of the cupboard, filling coal buckets, getting in and out of the bath. Only to get in somewhere and stay in; to get out and stay out; to stay now, always, in one place.

Ten minutes later she was waiting at the bus stop; anxiously studying the destination of each bus as it passed, clutching her money since concession tickets were not allowed in the weekend, thinking of the cup of tea she would make when she got home, of her evening meal—the remainder of the liver and bacon, of her nephew in Christchurch who was coming with his wife and children for the school holidays, of her niece in the home expecting her third baby. Cars and buses surged by, horns tooted, a plane droned, near and far, near and far, children cried out, dogs barked; the sea, in competition, made a harsher sound as if its waves were now breaking in foam.

For a moment, confused after the peace of the cemetery, she shut her eyes, trying to recapture the image of her husband's grave, now bright with spring flowers, and her parents' grave, "wide, spacious, with room should the dead desire it to turn and sigh and move in dreams as if the two slept together in a big soft grass double—bed.

She waited, trying to capture the image of peace. She saw only her husband's grave, made narrower, the spring garden whittled\textsuperscript{16} to a thin strip; then it vanished and she was left with the image of the bathroom, of the narrow confining bath grass—yellow as old baths are, not frost—white, waiting, waiting, for one moment of inattention, weakness, pain, to claim her for ever.

\section*{Comprehension Questions}

1) What narrative point of view and perspective is used to tell the story? What is the purpose and the effect of this choice?

2) What is the setting of the first paragraph? Comment on the symbolic significance of the setting.

3) How long has the woman been a widow? Provide a citation to support your answer.

4) What sort of difficulties does the woman face when taking a bath? Provide quotes to support your answer.

5) Why is the simile that compares the bathtub to "the edge of a cliff with a deep drop below into the sea" so effective?

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{whittle}: carve (an object) from wood.
6) What is the effect of the personification of her body parts "performing feats they might usually rebel against"?

7) Why is the metaphor that compares the flannel and the soap to "frail flotsam to cling to in the hope of being borne to safety" so effective?

### Food for Thought and Essay Questions

1) Analyse how Janet Frame's short story "The Bath" influenced you to think differently about an important idea or issue.

2) Comment on how the setting of Janet Frame's short story "The Bath" develops the themes of alienation, loneliness and loss.

3) How does Janet Frame use symbolism, imagery and other figurative language devices to develop important ideas in the story "The Bath"?

4) Analyse and comment on techniques used in the short story "The Bath" that made you feel sympathetic to a protagonist. How was this sympathy evoked in the reader?
IGCSE Short Stories
"On Her Knees" by Tim Winton (2004)

About the Author — Tim Winton (1960)

Tim Winton began his first novel, *An Open Swimmer* (1982), at the age of 19, while on a Creative Writing course at Curtin University, Perth. It won the Australian/Vogel National Literary Award, and he has since made his living as a full-time writer. Tim Winton writes adult and children’s novels that evoke both the experience of life in and the landscape of his native country.

Born in Perth, Western Australia, in 1960, Winton had decided by age 10 to be a writer. He studied creative writing at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, but his down-to-earth hobbies—sports and recreational surfing, fishing, camping, and “hanging out” in the old whaling port of Albany—gave him an inexhaustible supply of anecdotes that appealed initially to teenage readers. He became the author of several novels for adults, including *Shallows* (1986), a novel set in a whaling town, and *Cloudstreet* (1991), the tale of two working-class families rebuilding their lives, both won prestigious Miles Franklin Awards in Australia. A theatrical adaptation of *Cloudstreet* toured Australia, Europe and the USA to universal acclaim. His novel *That Eye, the Sky* (1986) was adapted for theatre by Justin Monjo and Richard Roxburgh, and was also made into a film. Many of his books are set in his familiar landscapes of Western Australia.


Winton is also the author of two collections of short stories, *Scission and Other Stories* (1987) and *Minimum of Two* (1987), and co-author of several travel books about Australia, including *Land's Edge* (1993).

His books include *Dirt Music* (2001), winner of several awards and shortlisted for the 2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction, and *The Turning* (2005), which tells 17 overlapping stories. *Breath* (2008) won the Miles Franklin Award in 2009. His latest novel, *Eyrie*, was published in 2013. An outspoken critic of ecological degradation, Winton was awarded the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) medal in 2003 for his environmental advocacy.

Tim Winton is patron of the Tim Winton Award for Young Writers sponsored by the City of Subiaco, Western Australia. Active in the environmental movement in Australia he has been named a Living Treasure by the National Trust, and awarded the Centenary Medal for service to literature and the community. He has lived in Greece, France and Ireland, but has now settled in Western Australia with his family.
"On Her Knees" by Tim Winton (2004)

I was sixteen when the old man shot through. A year later we moved back to the city where my mother cleaned houses to pay off his debts and keep us afloat and get me through university. She wouldn't let me get a part-time job to pay my way. The study, she said, was too important. Cleaning was a come-down from her previous job, eighteen years before, as a receptionist in a doctor's surgery, but it was all she could get. She told me there was more honour in scrubbing other people's floors than in having strangers scrub your own. But I wasn't convinced. The only thing worse than knowing she knelt every day in someone else's grotty shower recess was having to help her do it. Some days, between lectures, I did go with her. I hated it. There were many other times when I could have gone and didn't. I stayed home and stewed with guilt. She never said a word. My mother had a kind of stiff-necked working class pride. After the old man bolted she became a stickler for order. She believed in hygiene, insisted upon rigour. She was discreet and deadly honest, and those lofty standards, that very rigidity, set her apart. Carol Lang went through a house like a dose of salts. She earned a reputation in the riverside suburbs where, in time, she became the domestic benchmark. She probably cleaned the houses of some of my wealthy classmates without any of us being the wiser.

She was proud of her good name and the way people bragged about her and passed her around like a hot tip, but I resented how quickly they took her for granted. I'd seen their patronising notes on floral paper, their attempts to chip her rate down. The householders who thought most highly of themselves were invariably the worst payers and the biggest slobs. It was as though having someone pick up after them had either encouraged them to be careless or made them increasingly determined to extort more work for their money. Through it all, my mother maintained her dignity and her hourly rate. She left jobs, she did not lose them.

In twenty years she was only ever sacked the once, and that was over a pair of missing

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1 stickler: someone who insists that things are done in a certain way. Say you're getting married and want to write your own vows, but your partner's mother demands that you have a traditional ceremony. The mother is a stickler for tradition.

2 lofty: a good word for describing something that's high above the ground, or someone who acts like she's high above everyone else. A towering mountain can be called "lofty." So can someone who walks around with her nose in the air and speaks in a fake English accent. Even if she's only five-foot-two.

3 benchmark: a standard that other similar items can be compared to — that way everything is measured against a common standard.

4 extort: to use information or the threat of violence to acquire cash or something else. Usually it's money someone is after if they're going to extort you for it. Threats of violence and blackmail are probably the two most popular ways to extort a person. It's illegal but surprisingly common. Watch siblings play — older brothers serve no time for extortion.
earrings. She came home with a week's notice and wept under the lemon tree where she thought I wouldn't hear. I tried to convince her never to return but she wouldn't hear a word of it. We argued. It was awful, and it didn't let up all week. Since the old man's disappearance we'd never raised our voices at each other. It was as though we kept the peace at all costs for fear of driving each other away. And now we couldn't stop bickering. The morning she was to return we were still at it. Then, even while I took a shower, she stood in the bathroom doorway to lecture me on the subject of personal pride. It was as though I was not a twenty-year-old law student but a little boy who needed his neck scrubbed.

I don't care what you say, I yelled. It's outrageous and I'm not coming. I never asked you, she said. When did I ever ask you to come?

I groaned. There was nothing I could say to that. And I knew it was a four-hour job, two if I helped out. Given what the householder had accused her of, it would be the toughest four hours she'd ever put in. But I was convinced that it was a mistake for her to go back.

It was unfair, ludicrous, impossible, and while she packed the Corolla in the driveway I told her so. She came back for the mop and bucket. I stood on the verandah with my arms folded. But she must have known I'd go. She knew before I did, and not even the chassis-bending slam I gave the door could wipe the look of vindication from her face as she reversed us out into the street.

The car reeked of bleach and rubber gloves. I sighed and cranked down the window. She drove with both ravaged hands on the wheel, her chin up at a silly, dignified angle. Her mask of composure belied a fear of driving, and the caution with which she navigated made me crazy, but I resolved to show a bit of grace.

What? she said, seeing something in my face. Nothing, I said, trying not to sound sullen.

You're good to come with me. Well. Figure you need the help.

Oh, it's not help, love. It's company.

I could have opened the door and got out there and then. What? she asked.

I shook my head. I couldn't launch into it all again. She was

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5 chassis: the frame of a car; Pronounce chassis CHASS-ee (singular) and CHASS-eez (plural).

6 vindication: when you get vindication, you've been proven right or justified in doing something. Everyone accused of a crime craves vindication.

7 belie: to contradict. If you are 93 but look like you are 53, then your young looks belie your age.

8 sullen: if someone is dark, dour, glum, moody, morose, or sour, they're also sullen. Teenagers are often described as sullen, especially when they're being grumpy and silent. You often hear about "a sullen silence," which is when someone is quiet, but obviously in a lousy mood. If a sullen person is talking, they're probably not saying much, and they might not be doing much beyond grunting. A sullen person isn't much fun to be around.
worth twice what those silvertails paid her. She was more *scrupulous*, more honest, than any of them. She wouldn't even open a drawer unless it was to put a clean knife or fork into it. For her to be called a thief was beyond imagining.

I know it's not easy, she said.

It's *demeaning*, Mum! I blurted despite myself. Going back like this. The whole performance. It's demeaning.

To who?

Whom.

Well, excuse me, constable! she said with a tart laugh. To whom is it demeaning, then, Victor? You?

I looked out of the window, flushing for shame. You men, she said brightly.

Actually, this is about a woman, Mum. What kind of person accuses you of thieving, gives you the sack and then asks you back for one week while she looks for somebody to replace you?

Well, it's her loss, said my mother, changing lanes with excruciating precision. She knows she won't find anybody better than me.

Not even as good as you. Not a chance. Thank you.

Five-hundred-dollar earrings, Mum. She hasn't even gone to the police. As far as we know.

In that postcode? Believe me, we'd know. She must know I didn't steal them.

She just wants something, some advantage over you. There'll be a note there, you wait. She'll let it slide - this time - and later on, while you're all guilty and grateful, she'll chip you down on the rate. Back to a fiver an hour.

The Law, she said. It must make you suspicious. She's just made a stupid mistake. She's probably found them by now.

And not called?

These people, they never call. Silence, that's their idea of an apology. It's how they're brought up.

But she looked troubled for a few moments. Then her face cleared.

Oh well, she murmured. There's the waiting list. I can still fill a dance card in this business.

Sure, I said without any enthusiasm. Anyway, we'll show her.

How's that?

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9 *scrupulous*: very careful to do things properly and correctly, such as paying friends back for money borrowed right away, or not returning a pair of shoes after they've been worn outdoors.

10 *demeaning*: The adjective *demeaning* comes from the verb *demean*, which itself is based on the construction of the word "debase." The word *demean* has two almost opposite meanings, to degrade and to conduct oneself in a particular manner, usually a proper one. The adjective, however, always describes something that is degrading.
We'll clean that flat within an inch of its life.
Oh yeah, I muttered. That'll put her back in her box. Go, Mum.

90 We pulled up in the leafy street beneath a block of Art Deco flats. You could smell the river. Even after three years at the university, whose lawns all but ran to the river's grassy banks, that constant, brothy presence stank of old money, of posh schools and yacht clubs. Sometimes it reeked of Law itself, of port and cigars, chesterfields, musty paper and the men who owned this city because of it. That smell kept me alert. It made me wary and determined.

Drive on up, Mum, I said. Use her car space. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction. I did not roll my eyes. I got out and hoisted the vacuum cleaner off the back seat. She grabbed a bucket full of rags and squeeze bottles along with the mop. Don't you use her gear? Not today.

100 Don't tell me. The principle, right? She winked and I felt sick for her.

I followed her up the long garden steps. Veins stood out in her calves. Beneath her loose shorts her thighs were white and dimpled. She seemed so old. I balanced the Electrolux hose on my shoulder and stared at the tennis shoes that she scrubbed and bleached every week to keep them looking new. As if anyone but her gave a damn.

105 Up on the porch, she fished the key from her blouse. All the keys hung from a piece of string around her neck. The sound of them jangling onto her dressing table at night signalled the end of her day.

The apartment had a closed-up smell intensified by the pong of housebound cats. While Mum went through to the kitchen I stared a moment at the Klee reproductions. The dreadful cat photos in gold frames, and the Kokoschka poster which appeared to be new. I heard an envelope torn open and I came in as she held up the mauve paper. Hand on her heart.

What does it say?
Nothing, she said too quickly. She stuffed the note into her pocket and patted her hair.

110 The envelope lay on the bench. There was money in it.

I opened the fridge, a huge American thing with two doors and an icemaker. No snooping, she said. Not even today.

There were two kinds of white wine, tomato juice and jars of condiments.

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11 mauve: Mauve is a paler tone of the colour purple, and for some strange reason a beloved colour for mothers of the bride.
On one shelf was a stack of foil boxes, some kind of packaged food without labels. I closed the fridge and looked at the wine rack, a shoulder-high stack of bottles that, after her second week, my mother was requested to leave undisturbed. Unrolled. Unwiped and undusted.

Don’t be a stickybeak, she murmured, pulling on gloves.

Today I just couldn’t help myself. It wasn’t only resentment. I was curious. What kind of person would do this? After years of faultless service there was no discussion, just the accusation and the brusque termination in three scrawled lines.

Cat tray, she said.

I went into the airless laundry where the litter tray lay beneath the steel trough. The stink was awful. I got down with a garbage bag and tried to breathe through my mouth but the dust from the grit rose onto my lips and tongue and I started to gag. I grunted a bit, swung the hair out of my eyes and got it done, twisting the bag shut. I was supposed to disinfect the tray and I’d never dared cut corners before, but I just tipped some litter in and left it at that.

From the bathroom came the sound of my mother's off-key singing. I paused at the doorway a moment where a stinging fog of ammonia spilled out into the hall. She stopped warbling as if conscious of my presence. She was bent over the tub, Ajax in hand, veins livid in her legs. As I walked on, the sound of her brush panted against the enamel.

I binned the cat bag and began damp-dusting. With every surface so crowded with objects, it was slow work. Every trinket, souvenir, ornament and figurine had to be wiped, lifted, dusted beneath and replaced precisely. Standing orders. Mum would inspect it like a sergeant-major at barracks inspection. We both agreed that nobody who cleaned their own place would bother keeping such junk. A week of doing for herself and this woman’d ditch the lot out with the cat litter.

It was a lonely apartment. We’d had a grim few years, Mum and I, but you wouldn’t

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12 **brusque**: A brusque manner of speaking is unfriendly, rude, and very brief. Near synonyms for brusque are curt, short, and gruff. Brusque (pronounced "brusk") was borrowed from the French word meaning "lively, fierce," from Italian *brusco* "coarse, rough."

13 **trough**: If you live on a farm, you already know that a trough is what animals eat out of. The word actually refers to the shape of the container, and can mean anything that is low and hollowed out—like a curve on a graph or a depression in the ground.

14 **warble**: to sing in an uneven, quavering voice. You won’t win any singing contests if you warble the songs. Think of the class of song birds known as warblers. They have great songs, but they don’t sound quite human. They trill, whistle, vibrate and constantly change pitch. That’s a warble.

15 **livid**: If you’re livid, you’re furious, in a black cloud of anger. The Latin root this word comes from means “bluish-gray” or “slate-colored,” and you can also use livid to describe the colour, such as a livid bruise or a livid sea.
walk into our place and feel the same melancholy you picked up here. Another person might have found it tranquil, but to me it felt as stale as it smelled. I dusted the Andrew Wyeth reproduction and the steel and leather chairs. I brushed and wiped and waxed the long shelves of books and tried to imagine having strangers in our place looking in our fridge, touching our stuff, ripping hanks of our hair from the plughole. You'd have to imagine they were some kind of sleepwalker, that they were blind, incurious, too stupid to notice intimate things about your life. You'd have to not think about them, to will these intruders away. Or just be confident. Yes, I thought. That's what it takes to be blasé about strangers in your house - a kind of annihilating self assurance.

The bookshelves in the living room were stocked with novels and popular psychology. There were big celebrity hardbacks as well as the usual stuff by Germaine Greer, Erica Jong, Betty Friedan. But I found both volumes of the Kinsey Report and boxed sets of erotica I took some minutes to thumb through, wondering how Mum had missed them. In the study I flicked the duster across slabs of specialist material, academic stuff, lever-arch files and archive boxes. I found biographies of Paul Robeson, Leadbelly, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, each of them bristling with tabs of paper and pencilled notes. On the desk beside the typewriter was a pile of what I instantly recognised as student papers. The title of the topmost was Throwing Off the Shackles: consciousness-raising and the delivery of change. I turned the cover page and read a few paragraphs. It was all the safe, right-thinking stuff of the time but clumsily written. The comments in red biro were good-natured and forbearing.

I smoothed the paper back into place and dusted the pin-up board of snapshots above the desk. The photos were of people in heavy coats and hats with ear flaps, of fir trees, snow, people with big, pink smiling faces and spectacles. Americana. The lantern jawed woman who appeared in so many - it was her. She looked decent, happy, loved by friends and family. Even as I clawed through her desk drawers, finding nothing more remarkable than a tiny twist of hash in a bit of tinfoil, I knew I wouldn't find anything that would satisfy me. Now I just wanted to get the job over with.

In the bedroom I worked in a frenzy. Every sill and architrave, each lamp and mirror got  

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16 tranquil: Like a pond with no ripples, tranquil means calm and placid. A pleasant state of mind, with nothing to agitate or cause anxiety, can also be considered tranquil. As you struggle through your yoga poses, the teacher might annoyingly exclaim how tranquil you should be feeling, and when you and your siblings bicker over every little thing, your parents are wishing the house were more tranquil.

17 blasé: If the thrill is gone, you are blasé. If you yawn on a roller coaster, then maybe you've had one too many rides.

18 bristle: A bristle is a stiff hair — the kind men shave off their face or the kind badgers have all over. Bristle also means to get angry. Tell an animal rights activist you use a badger's bristle shaving brush and you'll get the idea.

19 forbearing: You are forbearing if you're very forgiving and patient. A strict teacher might punish a noisy class, but a forbearing teacher will give everyone a few minutes to quiet down.
a grinding wipe. I Windexed the glass, waxed the girly dressing table. When it was done
175 I went out for the vacuum, cranked it up and ploughed my way through the whole place.
At one point, when the old girl glanced up from the kitchen floor, I averted\textsuperscript{20} my eyes.

The thought kept returning to me. Why would someone not report the theft of a pair of five-hundred-dollar earrings? Even to claim the insurance you'd have to report it. Perhaps it was my own uneasiness at having overstepped the boundaries, at having gone through somebody's stuff, which made me consider the chance that this woman might know about me, be aware that I'd helped here before. Could she have suspected me rather than Mum? Worse still, did she know who I was, that I was an undergraduate at her own campus? And then could it be possible that her failure to report a theft to the cops was an act of kindness towards my mother, an act of mercy towards me?

185 I vacuumed and raked feverishly. When I got to the bedroom, the cats who'd thus far evaded us leapt out from behind the curtains. They were sulking great Persians. I threw down the nozzle and chased them out of the room. My mother was still in the kitchen.
Mum. I said. What did the note say?
190 Did you leave that machine going?
Was it about me? Does she suspect me?
You? Don't be stupid.
I haven't been here for months.
Turn that thing off.
195 No, I said feeling ridiculous. It doesn't matter. I'm going back.
Don't forget those curtains!
I gave the bedroom curtains a good going over. I could never understand how so much cat hair could accumulate in a week.
Mum came in while I was on my knees still vacuuming the flounces\textsuperscript{21} and folds of the
200 patchwork quilt.
Windex? she said.
I pointed to the dressing table. She lingered. I turned the machine off.
What were you on about before?
Honestly, Mum. Why didn't we just give the place a light go through? Or better, just take
205 the dough and split.
Because it would look like an admission of guilt.
Shit.

\textsuperscript{20} avert: to turn away or to prevent. You might avert your gaze or avert a disaster — either way, you are avoiding something.

\textsuperscript{21} flounce: to move in an exaggerated, emphatic way, especially if your movement expresses anger or impatience. A young child who doesn't like what's for dinner might stand up and flounce away from the table.
Language.
But this won't convince her, Mum.

210 No, probably not.
You should report them missing yourself. Ask them to search our place. Force the issue.
There's nothing that can come of it.
Except talk. Imagine the talk. I'd lose the rest of my jobs.
She was shining with sweat. Her hair had tightened into damp poodle curls. She had been so pretty once. So you're stuffed either way.

215 Love. We grin and bear it.
I shook my head. I hit the button on the vac and blitzed the carpet beneath the bed.

I could sense her still behind me, waiting to say something but I pretended to be absorbed in the work. Up at the head of the bed there was a nest of Red Tulip chocolate wrappers. They made a slurping noise as they were sucked into the machine. I only had half of them up when the ping of something hard racketing along the pipe made me turn my head.

Mum stepped on the button. The machine wound down to silence.
Money, probably, I murmured.
Let's open it up.

220 I cracked the hatch and felt around in the horrible gullet of the dust bag. From wads of lint and hair and dirt came an earring.
Five hundred dollars? she muttered. That's rich.
I didn't know anything about jewellery. I shrugged. Gave it to her. Look under there. The other one's bound to be close by.

225 I found it hard up against the skirting board.
She's left them on the pillow, she said. Forgotten about them. She's come in and swept them off as she got into bed. She hasn't even looked. That's all it was, just carelessness. All this fake outrage. She couldn't be bothered going to the cops because they're cheap?
Is that it?

230 I don't know.
It wasn't important.
It was important to me.
Well, you've cleared your name. That's something.
She shook her head with a furious smile.

235 Why not? I asked. Show her what we found, what she was too lazy to look for. Show her where they were.

All she has to say is that she made me guilty enough to give them back. That I just wanted to keep the job. To save my good name. Vic, that's all I've got - my good name. These
people, they can say anything they like. You can’t fight back.

245 I looked away at the floor. I heard her blow her nose. I was powerless to defend her. It was the lowest feeling.
   I’ll finish the kitchen, she said. Ten minutes.
   I vacuumed the rest of the bedroom. The earrings lay on the bed. I looked at them. They were pretty enough but I was no judge. Perhaps their real value was sentimental. I snatched them up from the quilt and took them into the laundry. I chucked them into the cat tray. Let her find them there if she cared to look.

In the kitchen Mum was ready to go. The rags and bottles were in the bucket. She walked a towel across the floor and that was it.
   What about the money? I said, looking at the scrubbed bench.

255 I’m worth more, she said.
   You’re not taking it?
   No.
   I smiled and shook my head.
   You forgot the vacuum, she said.

260 Oh, yeah. Right.

I went back to the laundry, knelt at the cat box and picked out the earrings. I dusted them off on my sweaty shirt. In my palm they weighed nothing. I grabbed the Electrolux from the bedroom and made my way out again. In the kitchen I put the earrings beside the unstrung key and the thin envelope of money.

265 My mother stood silhouetted in the open doorway. It seemed that the very light of day was pouring out through her limbs. I had my breath back. I followed her into the hot afternoon.

C Comprehension, Close Reading & Analysis

Characterisation:

1) Describe the mother’s personality. What is she like? What are her attitudes? Is she principled in her opinions? How?

2) Describe the narrator / son. How do his opinions differ, and to what effect?

3) Describe the owner of the house. What do we learn about her attitudes? How is she different from the other characters?
Setting:

4) How significant is the setting in the story? What are the narrator’s opinions of the setting? How and why are these opinions significant to the story?

5) Describe the setting; how does the author make this a significant place to set the action? How is the setting used to emphasise the differences between the characters?

Story Structure:

6) How is the story structured, and how does the author use this to create an effect? Which moments in the story correspond to the structure of Freytag’s pyramid? Can you identify the inciting incident and the climax of the story?

7) Have the characters changed or developed by the end of the story? How has the resolution affected them?

Mood and Tone:

8) How would you describe the mood and the tone of the story? Keep in mind that mood refers to the atmosphere of a piece of writing; mood refers to the emotions that a text evokes in the reader. Tone refers to the author’s attitude towards a subject or topic of a story.

Themes and Symbolism:

9) How is each of the following themes explored in the story?
   - class / social mobility
   - poverty / wealth
   - self-respect / pride
   - son-mother relationships
   - power (economic, class or intelligence)

10) What items hold symbolic significance in the story? Explain how each of the following items is symbolic, and how do these items explore or reinforce themes in the story?
   - Earrings
   - vacuum cleaner / cleaning products
   - books
   - pictures
D  Food for Thought and Essay Questions

Write a detailed response to one of the following questions:

1) Re-read the ending of the short story "On Her Knees" by Tim Winton. How does Winton’s writing make this conversation such a satisfying ending to the story?

2) How does the short story "On Her Knees" by Tim Winton highlight the importance of dignity? Specifically, how is this a story about maintaining and understanding the true meaning of dignity?

3) This story was published in 2004, and is thus a rather contemporary story, especially compared to other stories that you have read so far. In what ways does "On Her Knees" feel and read like a modern story, and in what ways does it not?

4) How does the son’s perception of his mother change throughout "On Her Knees"? What is Winton saying about son - mother relationships in this story? Compare and contrast this portrayal of parent-child relationships to those depicted in other short stories you have read.