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# GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Reading resource

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Paper 1

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Perhaps this was only the first of  
a whole battalion of crows, that  
would rise up and swoop at him.

*I'm the King of the Castle*  
Susan Hill



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## Contents

### **Story openings:**

*I'm the King of the Castle* by Susan Hill (1970)

*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle (1993)

*Bring up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel (2012)

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (2007)

### **Transition points and endings:**

*Spies* by Michael Frayn (2002)

*The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga (2008)

*The Thirty-nine Steps* by John Buchan (1915)

### **Presenting people, places and action:**

*I'm the King of the Castle* by Susan Hill (1970)

*Remarkable Creatures* by Tracy Chevalier (2009)

*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle (1993)

*The Thirty-nine Steps* by John Buchan

*Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks (1993)

### **Complete short story:**

*Lullaby* by Elizabeth Berridge (1947)

**Texts extracts can be found at the back of resource.**

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# Reading resources for GCSE English Language:

## Explorations in creative reading for Paper 1

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### Introduction

Students will be required to respond to unseen texts drawn from “high quality, challenging literature and non fiction” on both papers in the final examination, so the two-year course should provide opportunities for them to read widely and become confident in interpreting information and ideas and in understanding the means by which they are presented.

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### Assessment objectives for Paper 1

AO1: Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise from different texts.

AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.

AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.

Texts on this paper will be drawn from literary prose fiction from the 20th or 21st Centuries.

In addition to developing the relevant skills for the study of literary fiction, teachers may use the following materials to encourage students’ wider reading. They have been grouped for ease of use, but you will find overlaps between the groups.

These suggested reading activities are suitable for both pair and groupwork.

It is important for students to start by reading and enjoying the whole passage and then for them to give an independent response.

This can be followed by close reading and analysis of the writer’s craft.

Students can then be asked for a more considered, evaluative response which they need to support with detailed reference and analysis of the text.

Emboldened words and phrases indicate relevant subject terminology.

## Using the material in class

### Story openings

- Aims:
- to understand the ways in which authors use the openings of stories to engage the reader
  - to understand how the conventions of literary genres may be evident in the story opening
  - to understand the structural features of the passage and its place in the structure of the whole novel
  - to make a personal response to the passage with evaluation using inference and analysis.

***I'm the King of the Castle***  
by Susan Hill (1970) – chapter 1 from beginning to “But he knew where to find the key.”

#### Read the whole passage

##### First responses

What is the passage about? Which characters does it introduce, and what do we learn about them? What questions does it raise for the reader? What hints does it give about what will follow? What impression is created of the mood and atmosphere at the start of this novel?

##### Close reading

Look at the opening sentence and discuss **narrative perspective**: who is “he”? What is “this house”? What does this use of **pronouns** tell us about the narrative viewpoint of the passage?

Highlight the words that are spoken aloud, shown by the author’s use of **direct speech**. Reading only these sections, what impression do you have of the characters and their relationships?

Now read the sections that present the characters’ unspoken thoughts. How do these add to the reader’s understanding?

Much of the direct speech in this passage is reported without any **authorial mediation**, so the reader must form his/her own response to the characters. What is yours?

Identify the **terms of address** used in the passage. What are the names of the characters? Which **nouns** and **noun phrases** are used to refer to them? This is a passage about members of a family: which terms of address are absent that you might expect to have seen? Compare the terms of address/**terms of endearment** used in your own families. Summarise your understanding of the characters of Edmund and Joseph Hooper, their personalities, emotions and relationship.

Which details create an impression of the formality, social status and wealth of the Hooper family?

How is the Red Room given a sense of importance and mystery? What does it contain? Why do you think Edmund Hooper wants to go there? What does the final sentence of the passage suggest about Edmund’s character and about what will follow?

In two columns, list the factual information about the characters and their situation that we are given in the passage, and the inferences that we make based on closer reading.

From reading this passage, which of the following words and phrases do you think could be used to describe the **genre** of this novel: comic, psychological, fantasy, mystery, realistic fiction, gothic horror, graphic novel, historical fiction, satire, memoir, science fiction, ghost story? Use details from the passage to support your point of view.

***Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha***  
by Roddy Doyle (1993) from beginning to “He never called him Mister O’Connell; he called him the Tinker.”

#### Read the whole passage

##### First responses

What is the passage about? Which characters does it introduce, and what do we learn about them? Who is telling the story? What information does it give about the world of the novel? What is the mood and atmosphere of this passage? Did you enjoy it? Did you recognise in it any features of childhood from when you were about ten years old?

**Close reading**

Look again at the opening paragraph, and discuss what it shows about the **narrative perspective** of a young boy. Which language details in the whole passage convey the impression of a child's **voice**?

Pay particular attention to the **structure** of sentences. Are they generally long or short? What is the proportion of **single clause sentences** to those that are more **multi-clause**? What does the style of sentences contribute to our understanding and response?

Read the whole passage again, highlighting every point at which there is change of subject or reference to time. Identify examples of **non sequiturs**. Can you follow the story? How successfully has the author structured it to sound authentically like the account of a child? The narrator of this novel has been described as 'breathless'. Do you agree with this description? Why? Why not?

Roddy Doyle is an Irish writer. Identify the details of language that convey an impression of its Irish setting. The narrator is describing very familiar events. Which details show his familiarity with the world that he lives in? How extensive is his world?

Our real speech reflects our regional and social identity through **accent** and **dialect**. Identify the dialect features of the language used in this passage and explain how successfully you think they create an **authentic voice**.

The novel was written for adults, not children, and yet it recounts the life and activities of a ten year old boy. What do you think makes it appealing for an adult audience? In this opening passage there is a mixture of children's play and hints of more serious matters. Identify the more serious issues that Paddy Clarke mentions but doesn't explore. What effect has the author achieved by presenting them in this way? A critic described the novel as "Truthful, hilarious, painfully sad". From what you have read so far can you predict how the novel will unfold?

**Bring up the Bodies**  
by Hilary Mantel (2012) from the beginning to "Teasing him, they amble towards supper."

**Read the whole passage**

**First responses**

What is happening in this passage? Is it set in the present day or at another time? Look at the clues given by the names of the characters. What sporting or leisure activity are the men engaged in? Would you describe the mood and atmosphere of the scene as relaxed or tense? Troubled or happy? Stormy or calm? What do we learn from this opening passage about the life, work and personality of the main character, Thomas Cromwell?

**Close reading**

What is the effect of the opening sentence? What does it mean? How does the rest of the first paragraph help you to understand what is happening? Why do you think that Cromwell has named his hawks after members of his family? What do the first two paragraphs suggest about what has happened to his wife and daughters and sisters, and about his thoughts and feelings?

Consider the following two quotations: "a riot of dismemberment, fur and feather flying..." and "the green copses and rushing streams, the alders by the water's edge..." How has the author combined violence, death, tranquillity and beauty in the whole of this passage? Identify descriptive words and phrases and consider how they appeal to the reader's senses. Considering what you know about the history of the period, what effect is achieved by this description? Read the final sentence of the passage and comment on the mood created by the author's use of the **verbs** "teasing" and "amble".

Three men are hawking together. What do you understand about them and their relationships with each other? How can you tell that people have to tread carefully around the King? What impression does the author give in this passage of the character of Henry VIII?

Consider the **structure** of the passage. It starts in the midst of the hunting action, and although King Henry VIII is present, he is not given a prominent place at first. We learn that Thomas Cromwell's working night will begin "when the king has gone to bed" showing that he is an important figure. Re-read the fourth paragraph and explain what the passage as a whole suggests about Cromwell's attitude and his personal thoughts and values.

Looking at the passage as a whole, explain your response to the opening section of this acclaimed **historical novel** set in Tudor England. Explain why you think historical fiction about real characters appeals to readers.

***The Reluctant Fundamentalist***  
by Mohsin Hamid (Penguin 2007) from beginning to page 5 “I certainly was, at least at first.”

### Read the whole passage

#### First responses

Where is this passage set? Who is speaking and to whom? Only one character speaks, but what clues are we given about the response of the man he is speaking to? What do we learn from this passage about the different cultures of the two men? How does the speaker know so much about America and Americans? What are his opinions about them?

#### Close reading

Identify the questions used as **topic sentences** at the start of paragraphs and as **discourse markers**. How do they create an impression of a conversation and of movement through the scene? Can you suggest at appropriate points the **utterances** that the author suggests have been made by the American?

Explain how the author creates an impression of the speaker’s **tone** being helpful and polite. How does the passage create a sense of tension between the two men?

What was the speaker’s experience at his American university, Princeton? What does the final sentence of the passage suggest about it?

How can you tell that the speaker is clever? What do you think his intentions are?

Looking at the title of the novel and this opening section, discuss how you think the story will unfold.

The following quotation is a critic’s response to this novel “Sharp, relevant ... makes you think.” Based on what you have read, what do you think would be its appeal to readers?

## Transition points and endings

- Aims:
- to understand the structures that writers use to engage the reader
  - to be able to use the details of texts as the foundation for plausible predictions and insights about the rest of the work
  - to recognise some of the conventions of literary fiction and the ways in which **textual cohesion** is achieved.

### *Spies*

by Michael Frayn (Faber and Faber Ltd. 2002)  
pages 31-33 from “Where the story began, though ...”, to the end of chapter 2, “My mother ... is a German spy.”

#### Introduction

In this extract from chapter 2 of the novel, the narrator recalls a turning point in his childhood in England during the Second World War, when his friend Keith tells him something that sets off a complex chain of events.

#### First responses

Do you think that the narrator trusts the accuracy of his memory? How accurately do we remember things from childhood? Discuss examples from your own early memories in which the details are jumbled or unclear. Why did women at that time live “in dread of policemen and telegraph boys”? What was the momentous thing that Keith told the narrator? Why would it have been so significant at the time? How does the narrator create an impression of the importance of Keith’s words in relation to what happened afterwards? Reading his account, do you believe that Keith’s mother was a German spy?

#### Close reading

Consider how the author has structured this passage to show the difficulty of recalling distant memories. The novel is written in **first person** from the perspective of adulthood. Highlight the words and phrases that show the narrator contradicting or correcting himself. How does he use questions? What impression of memory and of the events described is created by the writer’s use of **ellipsis** in the passage? Explain the meanings of the words ‘memory’ and ‘hindsight’. What does the narrator’s use of these words say about the act of remembering?

The narrator describes his memory as “a collection of vivid particulars”. Which precise sights, sounds and feelings have stayed in his memory from that time? How accurately do these details reflect the things that children notice? Which other details in the passage has the writer used to show the point of view of a young boy?

The narrator refers to “our projects and adventures”. How might the suggestion that Keith’s mother is a German spy lead them into a project or adventure? From reading the passage, do you think that the project or adventure that followed was a happy one?

### ***The White Tiger***

by Aravind Adiga (Atlantic Books 2008)  
pages 34-38 from, “The inspector wrote four sentences...” to “That had been a big affair too.”

#### **Introduction**

A successful Indian entrepreneur called Balram has heard that the Prime Minister of China is about to visit India. Balram decides to write to the Prime Minister, giving an account of his rise from poverty. In this extract he recalls a surprise visit by a school inspector during his schooldays in a poor part of India known as the Darkness.

#### **First responses**

How does Balram distinguish himself during the inspector’s visit? How does the inspector reward him? Why does the inspector consider ‘White Tiger’ to be an appropriate name for Balram? What is the bad news for Balram that follows all the good news? What is the link between his sisters’ marriages and Balram’s eventual employment as a coal breaker in the tea shop?

#### **Close reading**

What do we learn in this passage about the conditions in Balram’s school? What is your impression of the way in which the inspection is conducted? The inspector uses the **metaphor** of a jungle to describe the school. Is this an effective comparison?

Identify the ways in which Balram’s life is shown to be harsh. How do the boys from school mock him in the tea shop? How does their mockery link together the scenes in the school and in the tea shop?

Now look at the **voice** that the author has created for Balram. Which of these words would you use to describe it: confident, respectful, pragmatic, realistic, critical, humorous, formal or informal? What impression does his voice create of Balram’s character?

Consider how the author has structured this passage. Identify the parts that hint at what will follow in the novel. What is their effect on the reader? Explain how the author has used **contrast** in this passage. What do the two contrasting scenes show about Balram’s experience of life in India?

### ***The Thirty-nine Steps***

by John Buchan (Penguin Classics 1915)  
chapter 10 pages 110-113 from, “Meantime I vote we have a game of bridge...” to the end of the novel.

#### **Introduction**

In this adventure story, Richard Hannay has pursued a gang called The Black Stone to prevent them from leaving England with some secrets that could precipitate a war. In this final passage of the novel, he has entered a house where he believes that members of the gang are staying undercover, passing themselves off as ordinary English gentlemen until they can escape by sea to Germany. They have denied any knowledge of a plot, and their disguises are so effective that Hannay has started to doubt himself. In this passage Hannay has accepted their invitation to sit and play a game of cards with them, wondering all the time what he should do next. Peter Pienaar is the person who informed Hannay about the gang and its plan.

#### **First responses**

How is the situation in which Hannay finds himself dangerous and exciting? What clue does Hannay first notice that confirms the identity of one of the men? Which details does the author provide to summarise the ruthless activities that the gang have been involved in earlier in the novel? How does it all work out well for Hannay and his men at the end? Which details of characters and action do you recognise as being features of the adventure **genre** from other stories you have read and films you have seen?

### Close reading

The novel is a **first person** narrative. Identify parts of the passage in which the author has allowed Hannay to give an account of his own thoughts and feelings. What is the effect of this first person account on our understanding of the action and characters, and our sense of Hannay's character and courage in the face of danger? What different effects might have been achieved if the novel had been written in **third person**?

Identify the features of the members of the gang that show them to be sinister. Explain how the author uses **similes** and **metaphors** to present them.

Read the passage again and assess the pace of the narrative. At which points is it leisurely, and when does it speed up? How has the author used different sentence types to mark changes in the pace of the action? What do the short sentences contribute?

The author has included some German words and phrases, even though many readers will not understand them. Do they, nevertheless, contribute to our understanding and engagement? How and why?

Read the final three short paragraphs. How satisfactorily do they conclude this episode and the whole of the adventure story?

## Presenting people, places and action

- Aims:
- to be able to read for inference and comprehension
  - to understand how writers use language to achieve effects and influence readers
  - to be able to support their responses with appropriate textual references

***I'm the King of the Castle***  
**by Susan Hill (Penguin 1970) chapter 3 pages 30-32**

### Introduction

Charles Kingshaw is running away from the house called Warings where he and his mother have recently come to stay when she was given the position of housekeeper. He is unhappy because

he is being bullied by Edmund Hooper whose father owns the house and who is Mrs Kingshaw's employer. Both boys are referred to by their surnames in the novel.

### Read the whole passage

#### First responses

Explain what happens to Kingshaw in this passage. How does the writer create an impression of his isolation and helplessness? Would you describe Kingshaw as a fearful boy? In what ways does the passage resemble horror stories or films that you know?

#### Close reading

This is a day in summer with good weather, and yet the author does not make it seem pleasant. Identify the **descriptive details** that make the natural world appear hostile and sinister to Kingshaw.

How does the author's description of sound in the passage emphasise Kingshaw's isolation and the horror of his encounter with the crow?

Examine how the author has **structured** the crow's attack by highlighting its approach closer and closer to Kingshaw. How does the attack reach a peak of horror? And how does the encounter with the crow close?

There is no speech in this passage, but the author provides some account of Kingshaw's thoughts. Identify examples where the author reveals Kingshaw's thoughts in his own words and explain what they show of his character.

Highlight the details that show the physical effects of fear and panic on Kingshaw. How effective are these in conveying an impression of his state of mind? Do you find the presentation of this eleven year old boy convincing? Why?

To what extent do you sympathise with Kingshaw?

**Remarkable Creatures**

by Tracy Chevalier

(Harper Collins 2009) chapter 1 “*Different from all the other rocks on the beach*”**Introduction**

This is the opening section of an **historical novel** about a young woman who became acclaimed during the nineteenth century for her success in finding fossils on the Dorset coast.

**Read the passage****First responses**

What is your impression of the character of Mary Anning? How does she regard herself? Note that this chapter is entitled ‘Different from all the other rocks on the beach’. Does the title refer to more than just the rock samples? What would have been the social status of a young, unmarried woman in 19th century England?

**Close reading**

Explain the meaning of the first two sentences in this extract. How effective are they in engaging your interest?

Identify the details that Mary Anning remembers from when she was struck by lightning, and comment on the **similes** she uses in the second paragraph to express this unusual experience.

In her **first person** account, Mary Anning refers to other characters and events that will follow as the novel progresses. What impression does this create of her **perspective** on the events she describes?

**Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha**by Roddy Doyle (Vintage 1993) pages 149-151 from “*We charged through on our bikes*” to “*We could see in all directions.*”**Introduction**

The novel is written in the voice of Paddy Clarke, a ten year old boy living in Dublin during the 1960s.

**Read the passage****First responses**

How do Paddy Clarke and his friends play, and what do they enjoy? Do you recognise their behaviour as realistic for children of their age?

How do they regard the people around them? How dangerous are the things they do? What was Paddy’s response on receiving a bike for Christmas? Why? What does the passage show to be the secret of success when learning to ride a bike? How much can you identify with that experience?

**Close reading**

The story is written in **first person** in the uncomplicated **voice** of a ten year old boy. Read this passage again and comment on the author’s use of **short and single clause sentences** to describe the action. How do they contribute to the authenticity of the account?”

Examine the writer’s handling of time in this extract. From describing the game of Indians, Paddy goes on to explain how he got his bike and couldn’t ride it. Why is the narrative **structured** in this way?

Explain what this passage shows about childhood imagination. Identify examples from the passage that show Paddy’s ability to live in an imaginary world. Explain what is in Paddy’s mind when he “circled the garages to make sure the others had time to escape.” How does this sentence link with the game they are playing?

Find examples of **hyperbole**. What is the effect of the author’s use of this technique in recreating an exciting story?

What do we learn from this passage about Paddy’s relationship with his father? Do they understand each other? Does Paddy respect him? Which details may imply that Paddy is growing up?

To what extent do Paddy and his friends seem to be free from care and responsibility?

Although Paddy and his friends are only ten years old, the passage uses some language that expresses control and power. Highlight the examples that you can find, and explain what these words and phrases show about Paddy’s point of view. Where does the real power lie in Paddy’s world? Explain your answer.

***The Thirty-nine Steps***  
**by John Buchan (Penguin Classics 1915)**  
**chapter 6 pages 70-72**

**Introduction**

In this extract the narrator, Richard Hannay, is on the run from a gang of spies after escaping from a locked room in their farmhouse by using some explosive devices that he found there. Unable to travel away from the farm in daylight, he has now found a hiding place on top of a dovecote which he needs to climb in spite of having been injured in the explosion.

**Read the passage**

**First responses**

This is a typical scene from stories in the adventure **genre**: the injured hero hides as the villains search for him. Give examples of similar episodes from books and films that you know. What conditions make the narrator's experience more uncomfortable? What discovery does he make from the vantage point of the dovecote roof? How does this discovery put him in more danger?

**Close reading**

The adventure story genre has many recognisable features. Make a list of the details that the author provides of the villains and their behaviour in this passage. Which other details and events are familiar to you?

Identify three narrow escapes that the narrator has before the end of this passage. How does the account suggest that he is smarter than his enemies?

Hiding in the full glare of the sun, Hannay is tantalised by the near presence of cool water that he cannot reach. Explore the language that the writer has used to make the water seem all the more desirable. How does the description appeal to our senses?

How does the final sentence of this passage close the episode and end the chapter satisfactorily for the reader?

***Birdsong***  
**by Sebastian Faulks (Vintage 1993)**  
**pages 349-352**

**Introduction**

Set in the trenches of the First World War, this passage describes how a group of British soldiers and miners take advantage of a break in the action to venture into no man's land and bring back the bodies of their colleagues who have been killed.

**Read the passage**

**First responses**

From the routine conversation that opens this passage, the writing moves on to present the horror of dealing with the bodies of dead soldiers. How do the men react? How did you respond when reading it? Weir says that his father would say that the soldiers were all "doing their bit." How does this make him feel? Why was Stephen more frightened by the thought that one of those men was going to be alive? Explain why Brennan says at the end of the chapter that he feels better, even though one of the dead soldiers was his brother.

**Close reading**

Comment on the writer's presentation of the weather and the natural world alongside a scene of such horror. Where does he identify beauty? What is the effect of the description of the rat and crow in the scene?

Consider the contribution made to our understanding and response by the following sentences:

'Goddard, releasing his mask, breathed in worse than he had expelled.'

'It was his brother.'

'He was nineteen.'

'Michael Weir had a rigid smile.'

What comment can you make about the structure of these sentences?

How does the passage show normal human interaction and compassion in the presence of horror and suffering? Explain your response to the closing sentence of the chapter.

## Complete short story

- Aims:
- to enjoy a complete short story
  - to understand how aspects of structure and language contribute to meaning and effects.

### *Lullaby*

by Elizabeth Berridge (Published in *Tell it to a Stranger* by Persephone Books Ltd. 2000; first published in *Selected Stories* by Maurice Fridberg 1947)

### Read the story

#### First responses

Explain the events in the story. Do the parents realise what has happened at the end? Why do they think they hear the sound of the lullaby when they are nowhere near the house? Do you sympathise with the parents? How would you describe their relationship? Is this a story about the dangers of 'modern' technology? Explain your answer.

#### Close reading

How does the author present the relationship between the couple in the first two paragraphs of the story? What is 'she' not sure about? What effect is achieved by the author's delay in explaining what the couple have disagreed about? Explain the **metaphor** used in "She could keep them both spinning equably, dexterously, for a time ..."

The author does not name any of the characters. What is the effect of the use of the **third person** narrative perspective and the **pronouns** 'she', 'he' and 'they' instead of **proper nouns**?

Voice recording technology was innovative at the time. How do the couple plan to use it? Even though the recording succeeds in getting the baby to sleep, his mother feels uncomfortable with it. "She felt as if her whole being was caught beneath the sharp needle, dragged round like a piece of fluff in the shining groove." How might we interpret this sentence as a comment on the woman's life and relationship with her husband?

Identify the words and phrases in which the husband's character is presented. What do you understand from the comment "It's being in the air so much, doing so much flying ... it must do something to you."? Why does the woman use the **imperative** form of the verb in the sentence, "Her fear was always there, but it must not spoil his evening ..."?

How do the shifts between what the couple say and the events in the nursery build tension at the end of the story? Explain how the author's description of the baby conveys a sense of his innocence and rising fear.

The writer gives no details at the end of the story beyond the man's call for a taxi. What is your response to the **conclusion** of the story? Explain the effects of the two one-word **exclamations**.

To what extent do you consider this story to be a criticism of the man, the woman or both characters? Or is its message something different? Does it show anything about events and the action of the natural world beyond our control?

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## Story openings

# *I'm the King of the Castle*

by Susan Hill

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Three months ago, his grandmother died, and then they had moved to this house.

'I will not live there again, until it belongs to me,' his father had said. Though the old man lay upstairs, after a second stroke, and lingered, giving no trouble.

The boy was taken up to see him.

'You must not be afraid,' his father said nervously, 'he is a very old man, now, very ill.'

'I am never afraid,' And that was no more than the truth, though his father would not have believed it.

It will be very moving, Joseph Hooper had decided, with the three generations together and one upon his deathbed, the eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son. For, in middle age, he was acquiring a dynastic sense.

But it had not been moving. The old man had breathed noisily, and dribbled a little, and never woken. The sick room smelled sour.

'Ah well, 'Mr Hooper had said, and coughed, 'he is very ill. You know. But I am glad you have seen him.'

Why?'

'Well – because you are his only grandson. His heir, I suppose. Yes. It is only as it should be.'

The boy looked towards the bed. His skin is already dead, he thought, it is old and dry. But he saw that the bones of the eye-sockets, and the nose and jaw, showed through it, and gleamed. Everything about him, from the stubble of hair down to the folded line of sheet, was bleached and grey-ish white.

'All he looks like,' 'Edmund Hooper said, 'is one of his dead old moths.'

'That is not the way to speak! You must show respect.'

His father had led him out. Though I am only able to show respect now, he thought, to behave towards my father as I should, because he is dying, he is almost gone away from me.

Edmund Hooper, walking down the great staircase into the wood-panelled hall, thought nothing of his grandfather. But later, he remembered the moth-like whiteness of the very old skin.

Now they had moved, Joseph Hooper was master in his own house.

He said, 'I shall be away in London a good deal. I cannot live here the whole time, even in your holidays.'

'That won't be anything new, will it?'

He looked away from his son's gaze, irritated. I do my best, he thought, it is not the easiest of tasks without a woman beside me.

'Ah, but we shall be looking into things, 'he said, 'I shall see about getting you a friend, as well as someone to look after us in this house. Something is soon to be done.'

Edmund Hooper thought, I don't want anything to be done about it, nobody must come here, as he walked between the yew trees at the bottom of the garden.

'You had better not go into the Red Room without asking me. I shall keep the key in here.'

'I wouldn't do any harm there, why can't I go?'  
'Well - there are a good many valuable things. That is all. Really.' Joseph Hooper sighed, sitting at his desk, in the room facing the long lawn. 'And I cannot think that it will be a room to interest you much.'

For the time being, the house was to be kept as it was, until he could decide which of the furniture to be rid of, which of their own to bring.

He moved his hands uneasily about over the papers on his desk, oppressed by them, uncertain where he should begin.

Though he was accustomed to paperwork. But his father's affairs had been left in disarray, he was ashamed of the paraphernalia of death.

'Can I have the key now, then?'

'May...'

'O.K.'

'The key for the Red Room?'

'Yes.'

'Well...'

Mr. Joseph Hooper moved his hand towards the small, left-side drawer in the desk, underneath the drawer where sealing wax had always been kept. But then, said 'No, No, you had really much better be playing cricket in the sun, Edmund, something of that sort. You have been shown everything there is in the Red Room.'

'There's nobody to play cricket with.'

'Ah, well now, I shall soon be doing something about that, you shall have your friend.'

'Anyway, I don't like cricket.'

'Edmund, you will not be difficult, please, I have a good deal to do, I cannot waste time in foolish arguments.'

Hooper went out, wishing he had said nothing. He wanted nothing to be done, nobody should come here.

But he knew where to find the key.

# *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

by Roddy Doyle

We were coming down our road. Kevin stopped at a gate and bashed it with his stick. It was Missis Quigley's gate; she was always looking out the window but she never did anything.

–Quigley!

–Quigley!

–Quigley Quigley Quigley!

Liam and Aidan turned down their culdesac. We said nothing; they said nothing. Liam and Aidan had a dead mother. Missis O'Connell was her name.

–It'd be brilliant, wouldn't it? I said.

–Yeah, said Kevin.—Cool.

We were talking about having a dead ma. Sinbad, my little brother, started crying. Liam was in my class in school. He dirtied his trousers one day—the smell of it rushed at us like the blast of heat when an oven door was opened—and the master did nothing. He didn't shout or slam his desk with his leather or anything. He told us to fold our arms and go asleep and when we did he carried Liam out of the class. He didn't come back for ages and Liam didn't come back at all.

James O'Keefe whispered,—If I did a gick in me pants he'd kill me!

–Yeah.

–It's not fair, said James O'Keefe.—So it's not.

The master, Mister Hennessey, hated James O'Keefe. He'd be writing something on the board with his back to us and he'd say,—O'Keefe, I know you're up to something down there. Don't let me catch you. He said it one morning and James O'Keefe wasn't even in. He was at home with the mumps.

Henno brought Liam to the teachers' toilet and cleaned him up and then he brought him to the

headmaster's office and the headmaster brought him to his auntie's in his car because there was no one at home in his own house. Liam's auntie's house was in Raheny.

–He used up two rolls of toilet paper, Liam told us.—And he gave me a shilling.

–He did not; show us it.

–There.

–That's only threepence.

–I spent the rest, said Liam.

He got the remains of a packet of Toffo out of his pocket and showed it to us.

–There, he said.

–Give us one.

–There's only four left, said Liam; he was putting the packet back in his pocket.

–Ah, said Kevin.

He pushed Liam.

Liam went home.

Today, we were coming home from the building site. We'd got a load of six-inch nails and a few bits of plank for making boats, and we'd been pushing bricks into a trench full of wet cement when Aidan started running away. We could hear his asthma, and we all ran as well. We were being chased. I had to wait for Sinbad. I looked back and there was no one after us but I didn't say anything. I grabbed Sinbad's hand and ran and caught up with the rest of them. We stopped when we got out of the fields onto the end of the road. We laughed. We roared through the gap in the hedge. We got into the gap and looked to see if there was anyone coming to get us. Sinbad's sleeve was caught in the thorns.

–The man’s coming! said Kevin, and he slid through the gap.

We left Sinbad stuck in the hedge and pretended we’d run away. We heard him snivelling. We crouched behind the gate pillars of the last house before the road stopped at the hedge, O’Driscoll’s.

–Patrick, Sinbad whinged.

–Sinbahhhd, said Kevin.

Aidan had his knuckles in his mouth. Liam threw a stone at the hedge.

–I’m telling Mammy, said Sinbad.

I gave up. I got Sinbad out of the hedge and made him wipe his nose on my sleeve. We were going home for our dinner: shepherd’s pie on a Tuesday.

Liam and Aidan’s da howled at the moon. Late at night, in his back garden; not every night, only sometimes. I’d never heard him but Kevin said he had. My ma said that he did it because he missed his wife.

–Missis O’Connell?

–That’s right.

My da agreed with her.

–He’s grieving, said my mother. –The poor man. Kevin’s father said that Mister O’Connell howled because he was drunk. He never called him Mister O’Connell; he called him the Tinker.

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# Bring up the Bodies

by Hilary Mantel

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## Falcons

### Wiltshire, September 1535

His children are falling from the sky. He watches from horseback, acres of England stretching behind him; they drop, gilt-winged, each with a blood-filled gaze. Grace Cromwell hovers in thin air. She is silent when she takes her prey, silent as she glides to his fist. But the sounds she makes then, the rustle of feathers and the creak, the sigh and rattle of pinion, the small cluck-cluck from her throat, these are sounds of recognition, intimate, daughterly, almost disapproving. Her breast is gore-streaked and flesh clings to her claws.

Later, Henry will say, 'Your girls flew well today.' The hawk Anne Cromwell bounces on the glove of Rafe Sadler, who rides by the king in easy conversation. They are tired; the sun is declining, and they ride back to Wolf Hall with the reins slack on the necks of their mounts. Tomorrow his wife and two sisters will go out. These dead women, their bones long sunk in London clay, are now transmigrated. Weightless, they glide on the upper currents of the air. They pity no one. They answer to no one. Their lives are simple. When they look down they see nothing but their prey, and the borrowed plumes of the hunters: they see a fluttering, flinching universe, a universe filled with their dinner.

All summer has been like this, a riot of dismemberment, fur and feather flying; the beating off and the whipping in of hounds, the coddling of tired horses, the nursing, by the gentlemen, of contusions, sprains and blisters. And for a few days at least, the sun has shone on Henry. Sometime before noon, clouds scudded in from the west and rain fell in big scented drops; but the sun re-emerged with a scorching heat, and now the sky is so clear you can see into Heaven and spy on what the saints are doing.

As they dismount, handing their horses to the grooms and waiting on the king, his mind is already moving to paperwork: to dispatches from

Whitehall, galloped down by the post routes that are laid wherever the court shifts. At supper with the Seymours, he will defer any stories his hosts wish to tell: to anything the king may venture, tousled and happy and amiable as he seems tonight. When the king has gone to bed, his working night will begin.

Though the day is over, Henry seems disinclined to go indoors. He stands looking about him, inhaling horse sweat, a broad, brick-red streak of sunburn across his forehead. Early in the day he lost his hat, so by custom all the hunting party were obliged to take off theirs. The king refused all offers of substitutes. As dusk steals over the woods and fields, servants will be out looking for the stir of the black plume against darkening grass, or the glint of his hunter's badge, a gold St Hubert with sapphire eyes.

Already you can feel the autumn. You know there will not be many more days like these; so let us stand, the horseboys of Wolf Hall swarming around us, Wiltshire and the western counties stretching into a haze of blue; let us stand, the king's hand on his shoulder, Henry's face earnest as he talks his way back through the landscape of the day, the green copses and rushing streams, the alders by the water's edge, the early haze that lifted by nine; the brief shower, the small wind that died and settled; the stillness, the afternoon heat.

'Sir, how are you not burned?' Rafe Sadler demands. A redhead like the king, he has turned a mottled, freckled pink, and even his eyes look sore. He, Thomas Cromwell, shrugs; he hangs an arm around Rafe's shoulders as they drift indoors. He went through the whole of Italy – the battlefield as well as the shaded arena of the counting house – without losing his London pallor. His ruffian childhood, the days on the river, the days in the fields: they left him as white as God made him. 'Cromwell has the skin of a lily,' the king pronounces. 'The only particular in which he resembles that or any other blossom.' Teasing him, they amble towards supper.

# The Reluctant Fundamentalist

by Mohsin Hamid

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a mission, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services.

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit, with its single vent, and your button-down shirt. True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-five—are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike. Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation.

Come, tell me, what were you looking for? Surely, at this time of day, only one thing could have brought you to the district of Old Anarkali—named, as you may be aware, after a courtesan immured for loving a prince—and that is the quest for the perfect cup of tea. Have I guessed correctly? Then allow me, sir, to suggest my favorite among these many establishments. Yes, this is the one. Its metal chairs are no better upholstered, its wooden tables are equally rough, and it is, like the others, open to the sky. But the quality of its tea, I assure you, is unparalleled.

You prefer that seat, with your back so close to the wall? Very well, although you will benefit less from the intermittent breeze, which, when it does blow, makes these warm afternoons more pleasant. And will you not remove your jacket? So formal! Now that is not typical of Americans, at least not in my experience. And my experience is substantial: I spent four and a half years in your country. Where? I worked in New York, and before that attended college in New Jersey. Yes, you are right:

it was Princeton! Quite a guess, I must say.

What did I think of Princeton? Well, the answer to that question requires a story. When I first arrived, I looked around me at the Gothic buildings— younger, I later learned, than many of the mosques of this city, but made through acid treatment and ingenious stonemasonry to look older— and thought, *This is a dream come true*. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. *I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making.*

I was, I must admit, overly generous in my initial assumptions about the standard of the student body. They were almost all intelligent, and many were brilliant, but whereas I was one of only two Pakistanis in my entering class—two from a population of over a hundred million souls, mind you— the Americans faced much less daunting odds in the selection process. A thousand of your compatriots were enrolled, five hundred times as many, even though your country's population was only twice that of mine. As a result, the non-Americans among us tended on average to do better than the Americans, and in my case I reached my senior year without having received a single B.

Looking back now, I see the power of that system, pragmatic and effective, like so much else in America. We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations—interviews, essays, recommendations—until the best and the brightest of us had been identified. I myself had among the top exam results in Pakistan and was besides a soccer player good enough to compete on the varsity team, which I did until I damaged my knee in my sophomore year. Students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first.

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## Transition points and endings

# Spies

by Michael Frayn

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Where the story began, though. was where most of our projects and adventures began – at Keith’s house. At the tea table, in fact – I can hear the soft clinking made by the four blue beads that weighted the lace cloth covering the tall jug of lemon barley...

No, wait. I’ve got that wrong. The glass beads are clinking against the glass of the jug because the cover’s stirring in the breeze. We’re outside, in the middle of the morning, near the chicken run at the bottom of the garden, building the transcontinental railway.

Yes, because I can hear something else, as well - the trains on the real railway, as they emerge from the cutting on to the embankment above our heads just beyond the wire fence. I can see the showers of sparks they throw up from the live rail. The jug of lemon barley isn’t our tea- it’s our elevenses, waiting with two biscuits each on a tray his mother has brought us out from the house, and set down on the red brick path beside us. It’s as she walks away, up the red brick path, that Keith so calmly and quietly drops his bombshell.

When is this? The sun’s shining as the beads clink against the jug, but I have a feeling that there’s still a trace of fallen apple blossom on the earthworks for the transcontinental railway, and that his mother’s worried about whether we’re warm enough out there. ‘You’ll come inside, chaps, won’t you, if you get chilly?’ May still, perhaps. Why aren’t we at school? Perhaps it’s a Saturday or a Sunday. No, there’s the feel of a weekday morning in the air; it’s unmistakable, even if the season isn’t. Something that doesn’t quite fit here, as so often when one tries to assemble different bits to make a whole.

Or have I got everything back to front? Had the policeman already happened before this?

It’s so difficult to remember what order things occurred in – but if you can’t remember that, then it’s impossible to work out which led to which, and what the connection was. What I remember, when I examine my memory carefully, isn’t a narrative at all. It’s a collection of vivid particulars. Certain words spoken, certain objects glimpsed. Certain gestures and expressions. Certain moods, certain weathers, certain times of day and states of light. Certain individual moments, which seem to mean so much, but which mean in fact so little until the hidden links between them have been found.

Where did the policeman come in the story? We watch him as he pedals slowly up the Close. His appearance has simultaneously justified all our suspicions and overtaken all our efforts, because he’s coming to arrest Keith’s mother... No, no- that was earlier. We’re running happily and innocently up the street beside him, and he represents nothing but the hope of a little excitement out of nowhere. He cycles right past all the houses, looking at each of them in turn, goes round the turning circle at the end, cycles back down the street ... and dismounts in front of No. 12. What I remember for sure is the look on Keith’s mother’s face, as we run in to tell her that there’s a policeman going to Auntie Dee’s. For a moment all her composure’s gone. She looks ill and frightened. She’s throwing the front door open and not walking but running down the street...

I understand now, of course, that she and Auntie Dee and Mrs Berrill and the McAfees all lived in dread of policemen and telegraph boys, as everyone did then who had someone in the family away fighting. I’ve forgotten now what it had turned out to be- nothing to do with Uncle Peter, anyway. A complaint about Auntie Dee’s blackout, I think. She was always rather slapdash about it.

Once again I see that look cross Keith's mother's face, and this time I think I see something else beside the fear. Something that reminds me of the look on Keith's face, when his father's discovered some dereliction in his duties towards his bicycle or his cricket gear: a suggestion of guilt. Or is memory being overwritten by hindsight once more?

If the policeman and the look had already happened, could they by any chance have planted the first seed of an idea in Keith's mind?

I think now that most probably Keith's words came out of nowhere, that they were spontaneously created in the moment they were uttered. That they were a blind leap of pure fantasy. Or of pure intuition. Or, like so many things, of both.

From those six random words, anyway, came everything that followed, brought forth simply by Keith's uttering them and by my hearing them. The rest of our lives was determined in that one brief moment as the beads clinked against the jug and Keith's mother walked away from us, through the brightness of the morning, over the last of the fallen white blossom on the red brick path, erect, composed, and invulnerable, and Keith watched her go, with the dreamy look in his eye that I remembered from the start of so many of our projects.

'My mother', he said reflectively, almost regretfully, 'is a German spy.'

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# The White Tiger

by Aravind Adiga

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The inspector wrote four sentences on the board and pointed his cane at a boy:

‘Read.’

One boy after the other stood up and blinked at the wall.

Try Balram, sir,’ the teacher said. ‘He’s the smartest of the lot. He reads well.’

So I stood up, and read, *‘We live in a glorious land. The Lord Buddha received his enlightenment in this land. The River Ganga gives life to our plants and our animals and our people. We are grateful to God that we were born in this land.’*

Good,’ the inspector said. ‘And who was the Lord Buddha?’

‘An enlightened man.’

‘An enlightened god.’

(Oops! Thirty-six million and five—!)

The inspector made me write my name on the blackboard; then he showed me his wristwatch and asked me to read the time. He took out his wallet, removed a small photo, and asked me, ‘Who is this man, who is the most important man in all our lives?’

The photo was of a plump man with spiky white hair and chubby cheeks, wearing thick earrings of gold; the face glowed with intelligence and kindness.

‘He’s the Great Socialist.’

‘Good. And what is the Great Socialist’s message for little children?’

I had seen the answer on the wall outside the temple: a policeman had written it one day in red paint.

‘Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India. That is his message to little children all over this land.’

The inspector pointed his cane straight at me. ‘You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?’

I thought about it and said:

‘The white tiger.’

‘That’s what you are, in this jungle.’

Before he left, the inspector said, ‘I’ll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school – somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education.’

He had a parting gift for me – a book. I remember the title very well: *Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi*.

So that’s how I became the White Tiger. There will be a fourth and a fifth name too, but that’s late in the story.

Now, being praised by the school inspector in front of my teacher and fellow students, being called a ‘White Tiger’, being given a book, and being promised a scholarship: all this constituted good news, and the one infallible law of life in the Darkness is that good news becomes bad news – and soon.

My cousin-sister Reena got hitched off to a boy in the next village. Because we were the girl’s family, we were screwed. We had to give the boy a new bicycle, and cash, and a silver bracelet, and arrange for a big wedding – which we did. Mr Premier, you probably know how we Indians enjoy our weddings – I gather that these days people come from other countries to get married Indian-

style. Oh, we could have taught those foreigners a thing or two, I tell you! Film songs blasting out from a black tape recorder, and drinking and dancing all night! I got smashed, and so did Kishan, and so did everyone in the family, and for all I know, they probably poured hooch into the water buffalo's trough.

Two or three days passed. I was in my classroom, sitting at the back, with the black slate and chalk that my father had brought me from one of his trips to Dhanbad, working on the alphabet on my own. The boys were chatting or fighting. The teacher had passed out.

Kishan was standing in the doorway of the classroom. He gestured with his fingers.

'What is it, Kishan? Are we going somewhere?'

Still he said nothing.

'Should I bring my book along? And my chalk?'

'Why not?' he said. And then, with his hand on my head, he led me out.

The family had taken a big loan from the Stork so they could have a lavish wedding and a lavish dowry for my cousin-sister. Now the Stork had called in his loan. He wanted all the members of the family working for him and he had seen me in school, or his collector had. So they had to hand me over too.

I was taken to the tea shop. Kishan folded his hands and bowed to the shopkeeper. I bowed to the shopkeeper too.

'Who's this?' The shopkeeper squinted at me.

He was sitting under a huge portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, and I knew already that I was going to be in big trouble.

My brother,' Kishan said. 'He's come to join me.'

Then Kishan dragged the oven out from the tea shop and told me to sit down. I sat down next to him. He brought a gunnysack; inside was a huge pile of coals. He took out a coal, smashed it on a brick, and then poured the black chunks into the oven.

'Harder,' he said, when I hit the coal against the brick. 'Harder, harder.'

Finally I got it right – I broke the coal against the brick. He got up and said, 'Now break every last coal in this bag like that.'

A little later, two boys came around from school to watch me. Then two more boys came; then two more. I heard giggling.

'What is the creature that comes along only once in a generation?' one boy asked loudly.

'The coal breaker,' another replied.

And then all of them began to laugh.

'Ignore them,' Kishan said. 'They'll go away on their own.'

He looked at me.

'You're angry with me for taking you out of school, aren't you?'

I said nothing.

'You hate the idea of having to break coals, don't you?'

I said nothing.

He took the largest piece of coal in his hand and squeezed it.

'Imagine that each coal is my skull: they will get much easier to break.'

He'd been taken out of school too. That happened after my cousin-sister Meera's wedding. That had been a big affair too.

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# The Thirty-Nine Steps

by John Buchan

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'Meantime I vote we have a game of bridge,' said the plump one. 'It will give Mr Hannay time to think over things, and you know we have been wanting a fourth player. Do you play sir?'

I accepted as if it had been an ordinary invitation at the club. The whole business had mesmerised me. We went into the smoking-room where a card-table was set out, and I was offered things to smoke and drink. I took my place at the table in a kind of dream. The window was open and the moon was flooding the cliffs and sea with a great tide of yellow light. There was moonshine, too, in my head. The three had recovered their composure, and were talking easily – just the kind of slangy talk you will hear in any golf club-house. I must have cut a rum figure, sitting there knitting my brows with my eyes wandering.

My partner was the young dark one. I play a fair hand at bridge, but I must have been rank bad that night. They saw that they had got me puzzled, and that put them more than ever at their ease. I kept looking at their faces, but they conveyed nothing to me. It was not that they looked different; they *were* different. I clung desperately to the words of Peter Pienaar.

Then something awoke me.

The old man laid down his hand to light a cigar. He didn't pick it up at once, but sat back for a moment in his chair, with his fingers tapping on his knees.

It was the movement I remembered when I had stood before him in the moorland farm, with the pistols of his servants behind me.

A little thing, lasting only a second, and the odds were a thousand to one that I might have had my eyes on my cards at the time and missed it. But I didn't, and, in a flash, the air seemed to clear. Some shadow lifted from my brain, and I was looking at the three men with full and absolute recognition.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten o'clock.

The three faces seemed to change before my eyes and reveal their secrets. The young one was the murderer. Now I saw cruelty and ruthlessness, where before I had only seen good humour. His knife, I made certain, had skewered Scudder to the floor. His kind had put the bullet in Karolides.

The plump man's features seemed to dislimn, and form again, as I looked at them. He hadn't a face, only a hundred masks that he could assume when he pleased. That chap must have been a superb actor. Perhaps he had been Lord Alloa of the night before; perhaps not; it didn't matter. I wondered if he was the fellow who had first tracked Scudder, and left his card on him. Scudder had said he lisped, and I could imagine how the adoption of a lisp might add terror.

But the old man was the pick of the lot. He was sheer brain, icy, cool, calculating, as ruthless as a steam hammer. Now that my eyes were opened I wondered where I had seen the benevolence. His jaw was like chilled steel, and his eyes had the inhuman luminosity of a bird's. I went on playing, and every second a greater hate welled up in my heart. It almost choked me, and I couldn't answer when my partner spoke. Only a little longer could I endure their company.

'Whew! Bob! Look at the time,' said the old man. 'You'd better think about catching your train. Bob's got to go to town to-night,' he added, turning to me. The voice rang now as false as hell.

I looked at the clock, and it was nearly half-past ten.

'I am afraid he must put off his journey,' I said.

'Oh damn,' said the young man, 'I thought you had dropped that rot. I've simply got to go. You can have my address, and I'll give any security you like.'

'No,' I said, 'you must stay.'

At that I think they must have realised that the game was desperate. Their only chance had been

to convince me that I was playing the fool, and that had failed. But the old man spoke again.

I'll go bail for my nephew. That ought to content you, Mr Hannay.' Was it fancy, or did I detect some halt in the smoothness of that voice?

There must have been, for as I glanced at him, his eyelids fell in that hawk-like hood which fear had stamped on my memory.

I blew my whistle.

In an instant the lights were out. A pair of strong arms gripped me round the waist, covering the pockets in which a man might be expected to carry a pistol.

'Schnell, Franz,' cried a voice, 'das Boot, das Boot!' As it spoke I saw two of my fellows emerge on the moonlit lawn.

The young dark man leapt for the window, was through it, and over the low fence before a hand could touch him. I grappled the old chap, and the room seemed to fill with figures. I saw the plump one collared, but my eyes were all for the out-of-doors, where Franz sped on over the road towards the railed entrance to the beach stairs. One man followed him, but he had no chance. The gate of the stairs locked behind the fugitive, and I stood staring, with my hands on the old boy's throat, for such a time as a man might take to descend those steps to the sea.

Suddenly my prisoner broke from me and flung himself on the wall. There was a click as if a lever had been pulled. Then came a low rumbling far, far below the ground, and through the window I saw a cloud of chalky dust pouring out of the shaft of the stairway.

Some one switched on the light.

The old man was looking at me with blazing eyes.

'He is safe,' he cried. 'You cannot follow in time... He is gone... He has triumphed... *Der Schwarze Stein ist in der Siegeskrone.*'

There was more in those eyes than any common triumph. They had been hooded like a bird of prey, and now they flamed with a hawk's pride. A white fanatic heat burned them, and I realised for the first time the terrible thing I had been up against. This man was more than a spy; in his foul way he had been a patriot.

As the handcuffs clinked on his wrists I said my last word to him.

'I hope Franz will bear triumph well. I ought to tell you that the *Ariadne* for the last hour has been in our hands.'

Three weeks later, as the world knows, we went to war. I joined the New Army the first week, and owing to my Matabele experience got a captain's commission straight off. But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki.

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## Presenting people, places and actions

# *I'm the King of the Castle*

by Susan Hill

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The cornfield was high up. He stood in the very middle of it, now, and the sun came glaring down. He could feel the sweat running over his back, and in the creases of his thighs. His face was burning. He sat down, although the stubble pricked at him, through his jeans, and looked over at the dark line of trees on the edge of Hang Wood. They seemed very close – all the individual branches were clearly outlined. The fields around him were absolutely still.

When he first saw the crow, he took no notice. There had been several crows. This one glided down into the corn on its enormous, ragged black wings. He began to be aware of it when it rose up suddenly, circled overhead, and then dived, to land not very far away from him. Kingshaw could see the feathers on his head, shining blank in between the butter-coloured corn-stalks. Then it rose, and circled, and came down again, this time not quite landing, but flapping about his head, beating its wings and making a sound like flat leather pieces being slapped together. It was the largest crow he had ever seen. As it came down for the third time, he looked up and noticed its beak, opening in a screech. The inside of its mouth was scarlet, it had small glinting eyes.

Kingshaw got up and flapped his arms. For a moment, the bird retreated a little way off, and higher up in the sky. He began to walk rather quickly back, through the path in the corn, looking ahead of him. Stupid to be scared of a rotten bird. What could a bird do? But he felt his own extreme isolation, high up in the cornfield.

For a moment, he could only hear the soft thudding of his own footsteps, and the silky sound of the corn, brushing against him. Then, there was a rush of air, as the great crow came beating down, and wheeled about his head. The beak opened and the hoarse caaw came out again and again, from inside the scarlet mouth.

Kingshaw began to run, not caring, now, if he trampled the corn, wanting to get away, down into the next field. He thought that the corn might be some kind of crow's food store, in which he was seen as an invader. Perhaps this was only the first of a whole battalion of crows, that would rise up and swoop at him. Get on to the grass then, he thought, get on to the grass, that'll be safe, it'll go away. He wondered if it had mistaken him for some hostile animal, lurking down in the corn.

His progress was very slow through the cornfield, the thick stalks bunched together and got in his way, and he had to shove them back with his arms. But he reached the gate and climbed it, and dropped on to the grass of the field on the other side. Sweat was running down his forehead and into his eyes. He looked up. The crow kept on coming. He ran.

But it wasn't easy to run down this field, either, because of the tractor ruts. He began to leap wildly from side to side of them, his legs stretched as wide as they could go, and for a short time, it seemed that he did go faster. The crow dived again, and, as it rose, Kingshaw felt the tip of its black wing, beating against his face. He gave a sudden, dry sob. Then, his left foot caught in one of the ruts and he keeled over, going down straight forwards.

He lay with his face in the coarse grass, panting and sobbing by turns, with the sound of his own blood pumping through his ears. He felt the sun on the back of his neck, and his ankle was wrenched. But he would be able to get up. He raised his head, and wiped two fingers across his face. A streak of blood came off, from where a thistle had scratched him. He got unsteadily to his feet, taking in deep, desperate breaths of the close air. He could not see the crow.

But when he began to walk forwards again, it rose up from the grass a little way off, and began to circle and swoop. Kingshaw broke into a run, sobbing and wiping the damp mess of tears and sweat off his face with one hand. There was a blister on his ankle, rubbed raw by the sandal strap. The crow was still quite high, soaring easily, to keep pace with him. Now, he had scrambled over the third gate, and he was in the field next to the one that belonged to Warings. He could see the back of the house. He began to run much faster.

This time, he fell and lay completely winded. Through the runnels of sweat and the sticky tufts of his own hair, he could see a figure, looking down at him from one of the top windows of the house.

Then, there was a single screech, and the terrible beating of wings, and the crow swooped down and landed in the middle of his back.

Kingshaw thought that, in the end, it must have been his screaming that frightened it off, for he dared not move. He lay and closed his eyes and felt the claws of the bird, digging into his skin, through the thin shirt, and began to scream in a queer, gasping sort of way. After a moment or two, the bird rose. He had expected it to begin pecking at him with his beak, remembering terrible stories about vultures that went for living people's eyes. He could not believe in his own escape.

He scrambled up, and ran on, and this time, the crow only hovered above, though not very high up, and still following him, but silently, and no longer attempting to swoop down. Kingshaw felt his legs go weak beneath him, as he climbed the last fence, and stood in the place from which he had started out on his walk, by the edge of the copse. He looked back fearfully. The crow circled a few times, and then dived into the thick foliage of the beech trees.

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# Remarkable Creatures

by Tracy Chevalier

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## Chapter 1

### Different from all the rocks on the beach

Lightning has struck me all my life. Just once was it real. I shouldn't remember it, for I was little more than a baby. But I do remember. I was in a field, where there were horses and riders performing tricks. Then a storm blew in, and a woman – not Mam – picked me up and brought me under a tree. As she held me tight I looked up and saw the pattern of black leaves against a white sky.

Then there was a noise, like all the trees falling down round me, and a bright, bright light, which was like looking at the sun. A buzz ran right through me. It was as if I'd touched a hot coal, and I could smell singed flesh and sense there was pain, yet it weren't painful. I felt like a stocking turned inside out.

Others begun pulling at me and calling, but I couldn't make a sound. I was carried somewhere, then there was warmth all round, not a blanket, but wet. It was water and I knew water – our

house was close to the sea, I could see it from our windows. Then I opened my eyes, and it feels like they haven't been shut since.

The lightning killed the woman holding me, and two girls standing next to her, but I survived. They say I was a quiet, sickly child before the storm, but after it I grew up lively and alert. I cannot say if they're right, but the memory of that lightning still runs through me like a shiver. It marks powerful moments of my life: seeing the first crocodile skull Joe found, and finding its body myself; discovering my other monsters on the beach; meeting Colonel Birch. Other times I'll feel the lightning strike and wonder why it's come. Sometimes I don't understand, but accept what the lightning tells me, for the lightning is me. It entered me when I was a baby and never left.

I feel an echo of the lightning each time I find a fossil, a little jolt that says, "Yes, Mary Anning, you are different from all the rocks on the beach." That is why I am a hunter: to feel that bolt of lightning, and that difference, every day.

# Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

by Roddy Doyle

We charged through on our bikes. Bikes became important, our horses. We galloped through the garage yards and made it to the other side. I tied a rope to the handlebars and hitched my bike to a pole whenever I got off it. We parked our bikes on verges so they could graze. The rope got caught between the spokes of the front wheel; I went over the handlebars, straight over. It was over before I knew. The bike was on top of me. I was alone. I was okay. I wasn't even cut. We charged into the garages—

—Woo wooo wooo wooo wooo wooo wooo!

and the garages captured our noise and made it bigger and grownup. We escaped out the other end, out onto the street and back for a second attack.

We got material from our houses and made headbands. Mine was a tartan one, with a seagull's feather. We took off our jumpers and shirts and vests. James O'Keefe took off his trousers and rode through Bayside in his underpants. His skin was stuck to the saddle when he was getting off, from the sweat; you could hear the skin clinging to the plastic. We threw his trousers onto the roof of a garage, and his shirt and his vest. We put his jumper down a shore.

The garage roofs were easy to get up onto. We climbed up on our saddles and onto the roofs when we'd conquered the forts.

—Woo wooo wooo wooo wooo wooo wooo!

A woman looked out of a bedroom window and made a face and moved her hands, telling us to get down. We did the first time. We got on our bikes and hightailed it out of Bayside. She'd called the police; her husband was a Guard; she was a witch. I got straight from the roof onto the bike without touching the ground. I pushed off from the wall. There was a wobble but then I was gone. I circled the garages to make sure that the others had time to escape.

I'd got the bike for Christmas, two Christmases before. I woke up. I thought I did. The bedroom door was closing. The bike was leaning against the end of my bed. I was confused. And afraid. The door clicked shut. I stayed in the bed. I heard no steps outside in the hall. I didn't try to ride the bike for months after. We didn't need them. We were better on foot through the fields and sites. I didn't like it. I didn't know who'd given it to me. It should never have been in my bedroom. It was a Raleigh, a gold one. It was the right size for me and I didn't like that either. I wanted a grownup one, with straight handlebars and brakes that fit properly into my hands with the bars, like Kevin had. My brakes stuck down under the bars. I had to gather them into my hands. When I held the bar and the brake together the bike stopped; I couldn't do it. The only thing I did like was a Manchester United sticker that was in my stocking when I woke up again in the morning. I stuck it on the bar under the saddle.

We didn't need bikes then. We walked; we ran. We ran away. That was the best, running away. We shouted at watchmen, we threw stones at windows, we played knickknack—and ran away. We owned Barrytown, the whole lot of it. It went on forever. It was a country.

Bayside was for bikes.

I couldn't cycle it. I could get my leg over the saddle and onto the pedal and push but that was all. I couldn't go; I couldn't stay up. I didn't know how. I was doing everything right. I ran the bike, got onto it and fell over. I was frightened. I knew I was going to fall before I started. I gave up. I put the bike in the shed. My da got angry. I didn't care.

—Santy got you that bike, he said.—The least you can do is learn how to cycle the bloody thing. I said nothing.

—It comes natural, he said.—It's as natural as walking.

I could walk.

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I asked him to show me.

–About time, he said.

I got up on the bike; he held the back of the saddle and I pedalled. Up the garden. Down the garden. He thought I was enjoying it; I hated it. I knew: he let go: I fell over.

–Keep pedalling keep pedalling keep pedalling—

I fell over. I got off the bike. I wasn't really falling. I was putting my left foot down. That made him more annoyed.

–You're not trying.

He pulled the bike away from me.

–Come on; get up.

I couldn't. He had the bike. He realised this. He gave it back. I got up. He held the back. He said nothing. I pedalled. We went down the garden. I went faster. I stayed up; he was still holding. I looked back. He wasn't there. I fell over. But I'd done it; I'd gone a bit without him. I could do it. I didn't need him now. I didn't want him.

He was gone anyway. Back into the house.

–You'll be grand now, he said.

He was just lazy.

I stayed on. I turned at the top of the garden instead of getting off and turning the bike and getting back on. I stayed on. Around the garden three times. Nearly into the hedge. I stayed on.

We ruled Bayside. We camped up on the garage roofs. We lit a fire. We could see in all directions.

# The Thirty-Nine Steps

by John Buchan

That was one of the hardest jobs I ever took on. My shoulder and arm ached like hell, and I was so sick and giddy that I was always on the verge of falling. But I managed it somehow. By the use of out-jutting stones and gaps in the masonry and a tough ivy root I got to the top in the end. There was a little parapet behind which I found space to lie down. Then I proceeded to go off into an old-fashioned swoon.

I woke with a burning head and the sun glaring in my face. For a long time I lay motionless, for those horrible fumes seemed to have loosened my joints and dulled my brain. Sounds came to me from the house – men speaking throatily and the throbbing of a stationary car. There was a little gap in the parapet to which I wriggled, and from which I had some sort of prospect of the yard. I saw figures come out – a servant with his head bound up, and then a younger man in knickerbockers. They were looking for something, and moved towards the mill. Then one of them caught sight of the wisp of cloth on the nail, and cried out to the other. They both went back to the house, and brought two more to look at it. I saw the rotund figure of my late captor, and I thought I made out the man with the lisp. I noticed that all had pistols.

For half an hour they ransacked the mill. I could hear them kicking over the barrels and pulling up the rotten planking. Then they came outside, and stood just below the dovecot, arguing fiercely. The servant with the bandage was being soundly rated. I heard them fiddling with the door of the dovecot, and for one horrid moment I fancied they were coming up. Then they thought better of it, and went back to the house.

All that long blistering afternoon I lay baking on the roof-top. Thirst was my chief torment. My tongue was like a stick, and to make it worse I could hear the cool drip of water from the mill-lade. I watched the course of the little stream as it came in from the moor, and my fancy followed it to the top of the glen, where it must issue from an icy fountain fringed with cool ferns and mosses. I would have given a thousand pounds to plunge my face into that.

I had a fine prospect of the whole ring of moorland. I saw the car speed away with two occupants, and a man on a hill pony riding east. I judged they were looking for me, and I wished them joy of their quest.

But I saw something else more interesting. The house stood almost on the summit of a swell of moorland which crowned a sort of plateau, and there was no higher point nearer than the big hills six miles off. The actual summit, as I have mentioned, was a biggish clump of trees – firs mostly, with a few ashes and beeches. On the dovecot I was almost on a level with the tree-tops, and could see what lay beyond. The wood was not solid, but only a ring, and inside was an oval of green turf, for all the world like a big cricket-field.

I didn't take long to guess what it was. It was an aerodrome, and a secret one. The place had been most cunningly chosen. For suppose anyone were watching an aeroplane descending here, he would think it had gone over the hill beyond the trees. As the place was on the top of a rise in the midst of a big amphitheatre, any observer from any direction would conclude it had passed out of view behind the hill. Only a man very close at hand would realise that the aeroplane had not gone over but descended in the midst of the wood. An observer with a telescope on one of the higher hills might have discovered the truth, but only herds went there, and herds do not carry spy-glasses. When I looked from the dovecot I could see far away a blue line which I knew was the sea, and I grew furious to think that our enemies had this secret conning-tower to rake our waterways.

Then I reflected that if that aeroplane came back the chances were ten to one that I would be discovered. So through the afternoon I lay and prayed for the coming of darkness, and glad I was when the sun went down over the big western hills and the twilight haze crept over the moor. The aeroplane was late. The gloaming was far advanced when I heard the beat of wings and saw it vol-planning downward to its home in the

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wood. Lights twinkled for a bit and there was much coming and going from the house. Then the dark fell, and silence.

Thank God it was a black night. The moon was well on its last quarter and would not rise till late. My thirst was too great to allow me to tarry, so about nine o'clock, so far as I could judge, I started to descend. It wasn't easy, and half-way down I heard the back-door of the house open, and saw the gleam of a lantern against the mill wall. For some agonising minutes I hung by the ivy and prayed that whoever it was would not come round by the dovecot. Then the light disappeared, and I dropped as softly as I could on to the hard soil of the yard.

I crawled on my belly in the lee of a stone dyke till I reached the fringe of trees which surrounded the house. If I had known how to do it I would have tried to put that aeroplane out of action, but I

realised that any attempt would probably be futile. I was pretty certain that there would be some kind of defence round the house, so I went through the wood on hands and knees, feeling carefully every inch before me. It was as well, for presently I came on a wire about two feet from the ground. If I had tripped over that, it would doubtless have rung some bell in the house and I would have been captured.

A hundred yards farther on I found another wire cunningly placed on the edge of a small stream. Beyond that lay the moor, and in five minutes I was deep in bracken and heather. Soon I was round the shoulder of the rise, in the little glen from which the mill-lade flowed. Ten minutes later my face was in the spring, and I was soaking down pints of the blessed water.

But I did not stop till I had put half a dozen miles between me and that accursed dwelling.

# Birdsong

by Sebastian Faulks

'Quiet, isn't it?' said Stephen.

'Tolerable,' said Ellis. 'I've got a problem. I'm trying to get a working party to go out and bring back some bodies. It's pretty quiet, as you say, and we may not have a better chance.'

'So what's the problem?'

'My men wouldn't do it unless I went too. So I said I would. Then they insisted on having at least one miner with them, but the miners' CO says it's nothing to do with them and in any case they're fed up with doing our fatigues.'

Ellis's white, freckled face was agitated. He pushed the cap back from his forehead to show a puckered hairline from which the gingerish hair had started to recede.

Stephen smiled vaguely and shook his head. 'We should all go. It doesn't matter. It's only death.'

'Well, will you tell Captain Weir to get one of his sappers out with us?'

'I can ask him. Perhaps he'd like to come too, now that his arm's better.'

'Are you serious?' said Ellis crossly.

'I don't know, Ellis. There's something about you that makes me quite unsure. Get your working party ready for twelve o'clock. I'll see you in the next firebay.'

Weir laughed drily when Stephen made the suggestion.

'There'll be rum,' said Stephen.

Weir's eyes opened in interest.

Then when the moment came it brought a sudden fear and unreality. They could never be prepared to look at death in the crude form that awaited them. Stephen felt, as he had done before at

moments of extreme tension, a dislocation in his sense of time. It seemed to stutter, then freeze.

At noon on the firestep in gas masks. Taste of death, smell of it, thought Stephen. Coker slashed sandbags into gloves. 'Wear these.' Firebrace and Fielding of the miners, Ellis, white like milk, Barlow, Bates, Goddard, Allen of the infantry; Weir taking rum on top of whisky, unsteady on the step of the ladder.

'What are you doing, Brennan?'

'I'm coming too.'

They tracked out towards a shellhole, the sun bright, a lark above them. Blue sky, unseen by eyes trained on turned mud. They moved low towards a mine crater where bodies had lain for weeks uncollected. 'Try to lift him.' No sound of machine guns or snipers, though their ears were braced for noise. 'Take his arms.' The incomprehensible order through the gas mouthpiece. The arms came away softly. 'Not like that, not take his arms away'. On Weir's collar a large rat, trailing something red down his back. A crow disturbed, lifting its black body up suddenly, battering the air with its big wings. Coker, Barlow shaking their heads under the assault of risen flies coming up, transforming black skin of corpses into green by their absence. The roaring of Goddard's vomit made them laugh, snoring private mirth inside their masks. Goddard, releasing his mask, breathed in worse air than he had expelled. Weir's hands in double sandbags stretched out tentatively to a sapper's uniform, undressing the chest in search of a disc which he removed, bringing skin with it into his tunic pocket. Jack's recoil; even through coarse material, to the sponge of flesh. Bright and sleek on liver, a rat emerged from the abdomen; it levered and flopped fatly over the ribs, glutted with pleasure. Bit by bit on to stretchers, what flesh fell left in mud. Not men, but flies and flesh, thought Stephen. Brennan anxiously stripping a torso with no head. He clasped it with both hands, dragged legless up from the crater, his

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fingers vanishing into buttered green flesh. It was his brother.

When they got back to the safety of the trench Jack was angry that he and Fielding had been made to go, but Weir pointed out that there were three men from their company unburied. Goddard could not stop vomiting, though his stomach was long since empty. When he was not retching, he sat on the firestep, weeping uncontrollably. He was nineteen.

Michael Weir had a rigid smile. He told Fielding and Jack they were excused fatigues for a week, then went to Stephen's dugout in the hope of whisky.

'I wonder what my father would say, he said reflectively. 'Of course they're all "doing their bit", as he put it.' Weir swallowed and licked his lips. 'It's just that his "bit" and mine seem so different.'

Stephen watched him and shook his head fondly. 'You know what I really dreaded?' he said. 'What frightened me was the thought that one of those men was going to be alive.'

Weir laughed. 'After all that time?'

Stephen said, 'It's been known.' He had a thought. 'Where's Brennan? Did you see him when we got back?'

'No.'

Stephen went along the trench looking for him. He found him sitting quietly on the firestep near the dugout where he and half a dozen others slept.

'I'm sorry, Brennan,' he said. 'That was a terrible thing for you. You needn't have come.'

'I know. I wanted to come. I feel better now.'

'You feel *better*?'

Brennan nodded. He had a narrow head, with thick, black greasy hair on which Stephen was looking down. When he turned his face up, its features were calm.

Stephen said, 'At least wash your hands, Brennan. Get some chloride of lime on them. Take some time off if you want to. I'll tell your sergeant you're excused fatigues.'

It's all right. I feel lucky in a way. You know last July when I fell off the firestep when the mine went up and I broke my leg? Then watching you lot go over the top. I was lucky.'

'Yes, but I'm sorry about your brother.'

'It's all right, I found him, that's the thing. I didn't let him lie there. I got him back and now he'll have a proper burial. There'll be a grave that people can see: I can come and put flowers on it when the war's over.'

Stephen was surprised by how confident Brennan was that he himself would survive. As he turned to go, Brennan began to sing softly to himself, an Irish song that he had sung on the morning when they waited to attack. His voice was a grating, persistent tenor and he knew many songs.

All night he sang for his brother, whom he had brought, home in his hands.

## Complete short story

# Lullaby

by Elizabeth Berridge

She had never been quite sure about it, but he was convinced.

‘It’s a great idea, a marvellous idea,’ he said, ‘but of course if you don’t want to come out with me when I’m on leave, just say so.’

So she had given in. She always did. Life with him was precarious; always had been. She had sudden terrible fears of him leaving her. Suddenly walking from the room, out of the house, knowing he had gone on to some other life and needed no one. ‘It’s being in the air so much, doing so much flying.’ she thought. ‘It must do something to you.’ Hanging on to a cloud and never coming down – only of course you fell through a cloud.

When they had the child it was better, for a time. Then the juggling began. She could keep them both spinning equably, dexterously, for a time; father and son, son and father, but then her hand would become tired, the trick fail. This was such a time, so she said yes, and they went to friend of his who had cashed in on the pre-war vanity of people who wanted their voices recorded.

‘Only a few left,’ he said. Wistfully he looked over the wax discs. ‘Still, it was fun while it lasted.– Did I tell you the story of the man who was too nervous to propose on the spot?’

‘Yes,’ he was told.

‘Oh.’ He was obviously disappointed, ‘Well, what are you going to do?’

It was explained.

‘Why, that’s wonderful’ he exclaimed. ‘That’s – come on, let’s hear you.’

They tried it out that evening and sat listening in the next room. The child was in his cot, but was talking to himself in a queer half-language

of his own. He sang a little, chuckled and made astonished noises. Then the record was started.

‘Go to sleep, darling,’ came his mother’s voice from the black box. There was a pause, then ‘Hush now, bye-byes.’ The baby stopped murmuring and settled down. Then the voice said: ‘Everything’s all right, Mama’s here.’ The child seemed to be asleep, but they let the record run to the end. ‘It won’t disturb him,’ she whispered, and gazed as the voice sang, a little self-consciously spinning from under the needle. ‘What’s to be done with the baby son –’

A little breathlessly the record stopped, clicked. The next room was silent.

‘There!’ he said triumphant. ‘That’s all right, isn’t it? He only needs to hear your voice and off he goes.’ She smiled. It did seem a good idea.

‘Come on,’ he said, ‘let’s go.’

They did it once or twice after that, until he had to return to his station. But he couldn’t forget it. ‘You must make one for me,’ he wrote. But somehow she never did. She hated her voice spinning off the black disc; she felt as if her whole being was caught beneath the sharp needle, dragged round like a piece of fluff in the shining grooves.

When he next came on leave he said: ‘Sanders tells me we positively must see that film at the Empire. It’s tremendous.’

‘The Empire?’ she said. ‘It’s a long way.’

He looked at her with the peculiarly blank expression he assumed when he was determined to do something in the face of any obstacle.

‘We’ve got the record,’ he said. ‘We’ll be home by ten if we go early.’

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So that evening she put the baby to bed earlier, and they set the record off as they went out of the door. In the hall, he stopped suddenly and caught her in his arms. 'You're sure you feel all right about leaving him, darling?' he asked. 'I'm a selfish brute.'

She laughed. Her fear was always there, but it must not spoil his evening, and the idea of him being worried somehow strengthened her.

'He'll be all right,' she said firmly. 'Don't worry.'

Together they walked down the road.

'What a wind!' she said.

Back in the nursery the wind in a sudden gust shifted aside the blackout curtain they had always meant to fix. The house stood on a corner and took the full force of any storm.

'More of a gale,' he said.

The nightlight, usually unwavering in its saucer, flickered unsteadily; a tiny edge of the curtain was blown across and remained a little above it. From his cot the baby watched the flame grow bright. He chuckled and sang to himself. Then his mother's voice came gently. 'Go to sleep, darling.' He turned over and put his thumb in his mouth. But the brightness still fascinated him; he wanted

to tell his mother about it. 'Hush now, bye-byes.' Obediently he closed his eyes. A sudden intensity of light swept across his eyelids; the curtains were blazing. He opened his mouth to scream with sudden inexplicable fear, but across the lighted room came the trusted voice that was with him all day, 'You're quite all right. Mama's here.' He looked about, where was she?

He didn't like it. The wind rushed round the corner and swept the fire across to the chest of drawers – cottonwool, picture-books. The baby was standing in his cot now, gripping the rail and shaking, his eyes wide and black with fear, almost islanded by flame and across the room came the lullaby... 'we'll put him away for a rainy day...'

As they got off the bus, she gripped his arm. The journey had passed in silence, but now it was as if she lay beneath the sharp needle, caught in the spinning grooves.

'Did you hum that song we made up for the baby just then?' Her voice was edged, and he looked at her, startled.

'No,' he said, 'I could have sworn you were singing it.'

For a moment they looked at one another. Then:

'Taxi!' he shouted. 'Taxi!'



