

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat	Code Sujet	CLG 01
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Your commentary should be focused on *adjectives*.

Sally appeals, silently, to Walter. *Speak, you moron.* Walter simply nods, blinking, basking, alert to the possibility of danger and, at the same time, all but hypnotized by the heat that emanates from Oliver St. Ives, who is trim and rumpled, forty five-ish, keen-eyed behind his modest gold-rimmed glasses; whose image on celluloid has survived countless attempts by other men to murder him, swindle him, blacken his name, ruin his family; who has made love to goddesses, always with the same abashed ardor, as if he can't believe his luck.

"Yes," Oliver says, with an audible rise of impatience in his voice.

"It sounds really, well, interesting," Sally says, and can't help laughing.

"Walter could do it," Oliver says. "Walter could pull it off. Definitely."

At the sound of his name Walter rouses, blinks more rapidly, shifts forward in his chair, all but changes color. "I'd love to take a crack at it," he says.

Oliver smiles his famous smile. Sally is still surprised, sometimes, at how much Oliver resembles himself. Aren't movie stars supposed to be short, ordinary, and ill-tempered? Don't they owe us that? Oliver St. Ives must have been identifiable as a movie star since childhood. He is incandescent; he is Bunyanesque. He can't be much under six foot four, and his perfectly formed, blond-tufted hands could easily palm most other men's heads. He is large-featured, flat-faced, and if in person he is not quite so handsome as he is on screen he carries every bit as much of that mysterious and undeniable singularity, a singularity not just of spirit but of the flesh as well, as if all other brawny, exuberant, unflinching American men were somehow copies of him, either well or indifferently made.

"Do," Oliver says to Walter. "I have great faith in your powers. Hey, you wrecked my career with one little story.

Walter tries a knowing grin but it comes out hideously debased, and full of hatred. Sally imagines him, suddenly and with perfect clarity, at the age of ten. He would have been overweight, desperately friendly,

able to calibrate the social standing of other ten-year-olds to the millimeter. He would have been capable of treachery in almost any form.

"Don't give me that," Walter says, grinning. "Didn't I try to talk you out of it? How many times did I call?"

"Oh, don't worry, little friend, I'm pulling your leg," Oliver says. "I don't regret anything, not one thing. What do you think about the screenplay?"

"I've never tried a thriller before," Walter says.

"It's easy. It's the easiest thing in the world. Rent a half dozen of the ones that made money, you'll know all you need to know."

"This one would be a little different, though," Sally says.

"No," Oliver answers with smiling, peevish patience. "No different. This one would have a gay man for a hero. That's the only thing, and it's not that big a deal. He wouldn't be tortured about his sexuality. He wouldn't have HIV. He'd just be a gay guy who does his job. Who saves the world, one way or another."

"Mm-hm," Walter says. "I think I could do that. I'd like to try.

"Good. Excellent."

Sally sips her coffee, wanting to be gone, wanting to stay; wanting not to want to be admired by Oliver St. Ives. There is no more powerful force in the world, she thinks, than fame. To help maintain her equilibrium she looks around the apartment, which appeared on the cover of *Architectural Digest* a year before Oliver revealed himself and will probably not appear in a magazine ever again, given what Oliver's announced sexual nature now implies about his taste.

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Your commentary should be focused on *nominal clauses*.

Crake and Jimmy kept in touch by e-mail. Jimmy whined about Martha Graham in what he hoped was an entertaining way, applying unusual and disparaging adjectives to his professors and fellow students. He described the diet of recycled botulism and salmonella, sent lists of the different multi-legged creatures he'd found in his room, moaned about the inferior quality of the mood-altering substances for sale in the dismal student mall. Out of self-protection, he concealed the intricacies of his sex life except for what he considered the minimum of hints. *(These babes may not be able to count to ten, but hey, who needs numeracy in the sack? Just so long as they think it's ten, haha, joke, ☺)*

He couldn't help boasting a little, because this seemed to be – from any indications he'd had so far – the one field of endeavour in which he had the edge over Crake. At HelthWyzer, Crake hadn't been what you'd call sexually active. Girls had found him intimidating. True, he'd attracted a couple of obsessives who'd thought he could walk on water, and who'd followed him around and sent him slushy, fervent e-mails and threatened to slit their wrists on his behalf. Perhaps he'd even slept with them on occasion; but he'd never gone out of his way. Falling in love, although it resulted in altered body chemistry and was therefore real, was a hormonally induced delusional state, according to him. In addition it was humiliating, because it put you at a disadvantage, it gave the love object too much power. As for sex per se, it lacked both challenge and novelty, and was on the whole a deeply imperfect solution to the problem of intergenerational genetic transfer.

The girls Jimmy accumulated had found Crake more than a little creepy, and it had made Jimmy feel superior to come to his defence. "He's okay, he's just on another planet," was what he used to say.

But how to know about Crake's present circumstances? Crake divulged few factoids about himself. Did he have a roommate, a girlfriend? He never mentioned either, but that meant nothing. His e-mail descriptions were of the campus facilities, which were awesome – an Aladdin's treasure-trove of bio-research gizmos – and of, well, what

else? What *did* Crake have to say in his terse initial communications from the Watson-Crick Institute? Snowman can't remember.

They'd played long drawn-out games of chess though, two moves a day. Jimmy was better at chess by now; it was easier without Crake's distracting presence, and the way he had of drumming his fingers and humming to himself, as if he already saw thirty moves ahead and was patiently waiting for Jimmy's tortoiselike mind to trundle up to the next rook sacrifice. Also, Jimmy could look up grandmasters and famous games of the past on various Net programs, in between moves. Not that Crake wasn't doing the same thing.

After five or six months Crake loosened up a bit. He was having to work harder than at HelthWyzer High, he wrote, because there was a lot more competition. Watson-Crick was known to the students there as Asperger's U. because of the high percentage of brilliant weirdos that strolled and hopped and lurched through its corridors. Demi-autistic, genetically speaking; single-track tunnel-vision minds, a marked degree of social ineptitude – these were not your sharp dressers – and luckily for everyone there, a high tolerance for mildly deviant public behaviour.

More than at HelthWyzer? asked Jimmy.

Compared to this place, *HelthWyzer was a pleebland*, Crake replied. *It was wall-to-wall NTs.*

NTs?

Neurotypicals.

Meaning?

Minus the genius gene.

So, are you a neurotypical? Jimmy asked the next week, having had some time to think this over. Also to worry about whether he himself was a neurotypical, and if so, was that now bad, in the gestalt of Crake? He suspected he was, and that it was.

But Crake never answered that one. This was his way: when there was a question he didn't want to address, he acted as if it hadn't been asked.

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Your commentary should be focused on *modal auxiliaries*.

She was always Em to us. There may have been a time when we called her something ordinary like Mummy, or Ma, but I don't remember. She was Em, and our father, sometimes, was The Big Hoom. Neither Susan nor I, the only persons who might ever care to investigate the matter, can decide how those names came about though we've tried ('Em must mean M for Mother' and 'Maybe it's because he made "hoom" sounds when we asked him something'). On certain days we called her Doogles, or The Horse, or other such names that sprang from some subterranean source and vanished equally quickly. Otherwise, she was Em, and most of the time she was Em with an exclamation mark.

Once, by mistake, I called her Mater. I got it out of a Richie Rich comic. The very rich, very snobby Mayda Munny used the word to address her mother. I should have known that I would not get away with something so precious, but I was nine or ten years old and did not know what precious means. Em peered at me for a moment, pulling deeply on her beedi. (She smoked beedis because they were cheap, she said, and because once you'd started down the beedi road, you could never find your way back to the mild taste of cigarettes. The Big Hoom rarely came home from work in the evenings with sweets for us when we were children, but he never forgot the two bundles of Ganesh Chhaap Beedi.)

'Mater,' she said, and her eyes shone behind the curls of smoke. 'Yes, I suppose I am. I did do it, didn't I? And here you stand, living proof.'

I think I blushed. She roared, a happy manic laugh.

'I thought you boys knew everything about the cock and cunt business!'

'We do,' I said, lamely, terrified of where the conversation was going.

'So what did you think, both of you were products of the Immaculate Conception? Gosh, you couldn't keep us out of bed in those first years.'

'Em!'

'What? Are you feeling all Oedipal-Shmeedipal then?'

35 'What's Oedipal?'

Em loved a good story. She was off.

'Ick', I said when Oedipus wandered off, his eyes bleeding and his future uncertain, escorted by his daughter who was also his sister.

40 'Well you may say "Ick",' said Em. 'But that's what Freud says every boy wants to do to his mother. Ick, I say to Mr Freud. He must have been odd, even for an Austrian. Not that I'm racist, but why would they have a navy when they're landlocked?'

'Mr Freud was in the navy?' I asked, confused.

45 'No, silly, I'm talking about *The Sound Of Music*.'

The Big Hoom came into the bedroom.

'You're telling the boy about?'

'The psychoanalytic movement,' said Em, her voice slightly defiant.

'Have you got past the id, the ego and the superego?' he asked pleasantly.

50 'I should have started at that end, shouldn't I?'

'At what end did you start?'

'Oh, I was telling him about the Oedipus Complex.'

The Big Hoom said nothing. He did nothing. He looked at her. She went into a tizzy.

55 'It's knowledge, knowledge is good, it will help, knowledge *always* helps,' she said. She was attempting logic. But she was miserable. It was only later that I came to understand why she never used her condition as a refuge: it would have violated her sense of fair play. The Big Hoom let her stew for a bit and then he nodded. He opened *The Hamlyn Children's Encyclopaedia*, a book that I refused to read because it had been given to Susan as a birthday present, and slowly led me through the facts of life.

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Your commentary should be focused on *coordinators*.

She has the afternoon shift, when it's pretty quiet. The evening would be better for tips, but Stan says he doesn't want her working then because there are too many drunken lechers, though he may have to give in on that if she's offered the slot, because their cash
5 stash is getting really small. In the afternoons it's only her and Deirdre, who's left over from the cushier days of PixelDust – she was once a coder, she has a tattoo of a Moebius strip on her arm and still wears her hair in two little-girl brunette pigtails, that Harriet-the-Spy girl-geek look. And there's also Brad, who does the
10 scowling at the rowdy customers when necessary.

She can watch TV on the flatscreens, old Elvis Presley movies from the sixties, so consoling; or daytime sitcoms, though they aren't that funny and anyway comedy is so cold and heartless, it makes fun of people's sadness. She prefers the more dramatic
15 shows where everyone's getting kidnapped or raped or shut up in a dark hole, and you aren't supposed to laugh at it. You're supposed to be upset, the way you'd be if it was happening to you. Being upset is a warmer, close-up feeling, not a chilly distant feeling like laughing at people.

She used to watch a show that wasn't a sitcom. It was a reality show called *The Home Front, with Lucinda Quant*. Lucinda used to be a bigtime anchor but then she got older, so *The Home Front* was only on local cable. Lucinda went around and interviewed people who were being evicted from their homes, and you got to see all
25 their stuff being piled on the lawn, such as their sofa and their bed and their TV, which was really sad but also interesting, all the things they'd bought, and Lucinda asked them what happened to their life, and they told about how hard-working they'd been, but then the plant closed, or the head office relocated, or whatever.
30 Then viewers were supposed to send in money to help those folks out, and sometimes they did, and that showed the good in people.

Charmaine found *The Home Front* encouraging, because what happened to her and Stan could happen to anyone. But then Lucinda Quant got cancer and went bald and started streaming
35 video of herself being sick, right from her hospital room, and Charmaine found that depressing, so she didn't watch Lucinda any more. Though she wished her well, and hoped she would get better.

Sometimes she chats with Deirdre. They tell their life stories, and Deirdre's is worse than Charmaine's, with fewer kindly adults like Grandma Win, and more molesting, and it has an abortion in it; which isn't a thing Charmaine could ever bring herself to do. She's on the pill for now, she gets them cheap from Deirdre, but she's
40 always wanted a baby, though how she'll cope if she gets pregnant by mistake, with Stan and her living in their car, she has no idea.
45 Other women – women in the past, tougher women – have dealt with babies in confined spaces, such as ocean ships and covered wagons. But maybe not cars. It's hard to get smells out of car upholstery, so you'd have to be extra careful about the spitting up
50 and so forth.

Around eleven she and Stan have another doughnut. Then they make a hopeful stop at a dumpster out behind a soup joint, but no luck, the stuff has already been picked over. Before noon Stan takes her to the Laundromat in one of the malls – they've used that
55 one before, two of the machines are still working – and he watches the car while she does a load and then pays for it on their phone.

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Your commentary should be focused on TO.

He bows to the woman. From beneath the silly hat a rather timid, girlish, freckled face peers out. He feels a quick flicker of sexual interest, but it dies down. He should wear a black tie, or a black band around his arm in the Italian manner, then his standing would be clearer – to himself too. Not a full man any longer: half a man. Or on his lapel a medal with Pavel's image. The better half taken, the half that was to come.

'I must go,' he says.

Nechaev gives him a scornful look. 'Go,' he says. 'No one is stopping you.' And then, to the woman: 'He thinks I don't know where he is going.'

The remark strikes him as gratuitous. 'Where do you think I am going?'

'Do you want me to spell it out? Isn't this your chance for revenge?'

Revenge: after what has just passed, the word is like a pig's bladder thumped into his face. Nechaev's word, Nechaev's world – a world of vengeance. What has it to do with him? Yet the ugly word has not been thrust at him without reason. Something comes back to him: Nechaev's behavior when they first met – the flurry of skirts against the back of his chair, the pressure of his foot under the table, the way he used his body, shameless yet gauche. Does the boy have any clear idea of what he wants, or does he simply try to see where it will lead? *He is like me, I was like him*, he thinks – *only I did not have the courage*. And then: *Is that is, why Pavel followed him: because he was trying to learn courage? Is that why he climbed the tower in the night?*

More and more it is becoming clear: Nechaev will not be satisfied till he is in the hands of the police, till he has tasted that too. So that his courage and resolution can be put to the test. And he will come through – no doubt of that. He will not break. No matter how he is beaten or starved, he will never give in, not even fall sick. He will lose all his teeth and smile. He will drag his broken limbs around, roaring, strong as a lion.

'Do you *want* me to take revenge? Do you *want* me to go out and betray you? Is that what it is meant to achieve, all this charade of mazes and blindfolds?'

Nechaev laughs excitedly, and he knows that they understand each other. 'Why should I want that?' he replies in a soft, mischievous voice, giving the girl a sidelong glance as if drawing her into the joke. 'I'm not a youth who has lost his way, like your stepson. If you are going to the police, be frank about it. Don't sentimentalize me, don't pretend you are not my enemy. I know about your sentimentalizing. You do it to women too, I'm sure. Women and little girls.' He turns to the girl. 'You know all about it, don't you? How men of that type drop tears when they hurt you, to lubricate their consciences and give themselves thrills.'

For someone of his age, extraordinary how much he has picked up! More even than a woman of the streets, because he has his own shrewdness. He knows about the world. Pavel could have done with more of that. There was more real life in the filthy, waddling old bear in his story – what was his name? Karamzin? – than in the priggish hero he so painfully constructed. Slaughtered too soon – a bad mistake.

'I have no intention of betraying you,' he says wearily. 'Go home to your father. You have a father somewhere in Ivanovo, if I remember. Go to him, kneel, ask him to hide you. He will do it. There are no limits to what a father will do.'

There is a wild snort of laughter from Nechaev. He can no longer remain still: he stalks across the cellar, pushing the children out of his way. 'My father! What do you know about my father? I'm not a ninny like your stepson! I don't cling to people who oppress me! I left my father's house when I was sixteen and I've never been back. Do you know why? Because he beat me. I said, "Beat me once more and you will never see me again." So he beat me and he never saw me again. From that day he ceased to be my father. I am my own father now, I have made myself over. I don't need any father to hide me. If I need to hide, the people will hide me.'

Your commentary should be focused on V-EN.

Felix opened the chafing dishes on the sideboard and helped himself to a large plate of kidneys, scrambled eggs, fried bread, bacon and sausage. He found that keeping his head down while he shovelled in food was the best way of avoiding the pathetic sight of Nigel Bathe across the table.

He sat down. 'Well,' he said vacuously, 'looks like it's going to be a pleasant day.' He turned round in his seat and craned his head to see out of the window. His guess seemed accurate enough. The lawn was bright with sun, the fishponds were blue, only a few small indolent clouds occupied the sky above.

There were three letters by his place. A catalogue from a bookseller, confirmation of an appointment with his optician and one, unstamped, in a plain white envelope. He recognized Charis's writing at once, and with a frown of curiosity tore it open. Nobody paid any attention.

He read the letter.

'Oh God. Jesus Christ,' he said in a shocked voice, getting up from his place.

'Felix!' Cressida and Eustacia said in unison.

He ran out of the room, stuffing the letter in his pocket. He rushed outside, sprinting across the sunlit lawn, the heels of his shoes biting deeply into the dew-damp turf. He vaulted over the eve-gate, skidding on a patch of mud beyond and falling over. He picked himself up and pounded through the wood towards the cottage. The back door was locked. He ran round to the front and let himself in. He knew at once the cottage was empty. He stood in the little parlour, looking at the grate of the fire, the ashes of the night before still there. His eyes passed uneasily over the sofa and he saw that the lid of the writing desk was folded down.

He went upstairs. The bed was unslept in. He opened the wardrobe. It was filled with hanging clothes. On the chest of

drawers he saw Gabriel's photograph. The strong square face, the simple smile. He felt an awful turmoil in his body, a sudden sickening awareness of just what he and Charis had done. He recalled the words of the letter: 'I have written to Gabriel and told him everything.'

He sat down on the bed and rubbed his eyes. His brain was refusing to work. He realized one trouser leg was thick with mud, also the sleeve of his jacket and his left hand. He stood up. The bedspread was smeared and dirty.

He walked shakily down the stairs. Think, he told himself, *think*.

She seemed to have walked out of the house without taking anything. No clothes, no suitcase... He tried to ignore one explanation which was shouting persistently in his head.

Not Charis, he said to himself. She wouldn't. The sense of his own responsibility, so successfully evaded for so many months, hit him with full force. He sat down again, on the bottom stair, trembling all over. He patted his pockets for a cigarette, then realized he'd left them in his bedroom.

He got to his feet. The police would have to be informed. Perhaps she'd gone to Aunt Bedelia's, just fled in a panic for whatever reason? It sounded plausible. But what was wrong? he asked himself. Why should she do it? Why now? She said she hadn't been feeling well lately, perhaps that could have been a contributing factor. He turned a few more thoughts over in his head. But her note? He took it out of his pocket and spread it on his knee. It was so terse and final. Almost hostile. But why should she write to Gabriel too? This new factor made his head reel. He felt the blood thumping at his temples, he found it difficult to swallow. His stomach heaved and he gagged. He put the back of his hand to his mouth and leant against the wall for support. His mouth was full of fresh saliva, like thick water.

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Your commentary should be focused on *DO*.

Rickards had almost forgotten Meg Dennison, but now he looked across to where she sat like a distressed child, hands in her lap, her untasted coffee still standing in the hearth.

5 "Mrs Dennison, did you know last night that the Whistler was dead?"

"Oh yes. Mr Jago telephoned me too, about a quarter to ten."

Alice Mair said: "He probably tried to get you earlier but you were on the way to Norwich station with the Copleys."

10 Meg Dennison spoke directly to Rickards: "I should have been, but the car broke down. I had to get Spark and his taxi in a hurry. Luckily he could just do it but he had to go straight on to a job in Ipswich, so he couldn't bring me back. He saw the Copleys safely on the train for me."

"Did you leave the Old Rectory at any time during the evening?"

15 Mrs Dennison looked up and met his eyes. "No," she said, "no, after I'd seen them off I didn't leave the house."

20 Then she paused and said, "I'm sorry, I did go out into the garden very briefly. It would be more accurate to say that I didn't leave the grounds. And now, if you'll all excuse me, please, I'd like to go home."

She got up, then turned again to Rickards: "If you want to question me, Chief Inspector, I'll be at the Old Rectory."

25 She was gone before the two men could get to their feet, almost stumbling from the room. Miss Mair made no move to follow her and, seconds later, they heard the front door close.

There was a moment's silence, broken by Oliphant. Nodding towards the hearth he said: "Funny. She hasn't even touched her coffee."

30 But Rickards had a final question for Alice Mair. He said: "It must have been getting on for midnight when Dr Mair got home

yesterday night. Did you ring the power station to find out if he'd left or why he was delayed?"

35 She said coolly: "It didn't occur to me, Chief Inspector. Since Alex is neither my child nor my husband I am spared the compulsion of checking on his movements. I am not my brother's keeper."

40 Oliphant had been staring at her with his sombre, suspicious eyes. Now he said: "But he lives with you, doesn't he? You do talk, don't you? You must have known about his relationship with Hilary Robarts, for example. Did you approve?"

Alice Mair's colour didn't change, but her voice was like steel.

45 "Either to approve or disapprove would have been as presumptuously impertinent as was that question. If you wish to discuss my brother's private life, I suggest that you do so with him."

50 Rickards said quietly: "Miss Mair, a woman has been brutally done to death and her body mutilated. She was a woman you knew. In the light of that outrage, I hope you won't feel the need to be oversensitive to questions which are bound to seem at times both presumptuous and impertinent."

55 Anger had made him articulate. Their eyes met and held. He knew that his were hard with fury, both with Oliphant's tactlessness and her response. But the grey eyes which met his were less easy to read. He thought he could detect surprise, followed by wariness, reluctant respect, an almost speculative interest.

60 And when, fifteen minutes later, she escorted her visitors to the door he was a little surprised when she held out her hand. As he shook it, she said: "Please forgive me, Chief Inspector, if I was ungracious. Yours is a disagreeable but necessary job and you are entitled to co-operation. As far as I'm concerned, you will get it."

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Your commentary should be focused on *tense and aspect*.

There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York — every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The

last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing upstairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of the gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the Follies. The party has begun.

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Your commentary should be focused on *the expression of quantity*.

They put the behemoths in the hold along with the rhinos, the hippos and the elephants. It was a sensible decision to use them as ballast; but you can imagine the stench. And there was no-one to muck out. The men were overburdened with the feeding rota, and their women, who beneath those leaping fire-tongues of scent no doubt reeked as badly as we did, were far too delicate. So if any mucking-out was to happen, we had to do it ourselves. Every few months they would winch back the thick hatch on the aft deck and let the cleaner-birds in. Well, first they had to let the smell out (and there weren't too many volunteers for winch-work); then six or eight of the less fastidious birds would flutter cautiously around the hatch for a minute or so before diving in. I can't remember what they were all called – indeed, one of those pairs no longer exists – but you know the sort I mean. You've seen hippos with their mouths open and bright little birds pecking away between their teeth like distraught dental hygienists? Picture that on a larger, messier scale. I am hardly squeamish, but even I used to shudder at the scene below decks: a row of squinting monsters being manicured in a sewer.

There was strict discipline on the Ark: that's the first point to make. It wasn't like those nursery versions in painted wood which you might have played with as a child – all happy couples peering merrily over the rail from the comfort of their well-scrubbed stalls. Don't imagine some Mediterranean cruise on which we played languorous roulette and everyone dressed for dinner; on the Ark only the penguins wore tailcoats. Remember: this was a long and dangerous voyage – dangerous even though some of the rules had been fixed in advance. Remember too that we had the whole of the animal kingdom on board: would you have put the cheetahs within

30 springing distance of the antelope? A certain level of security was inevitable, and we accepted double-peg locks, stall inspections, a nightly curfew. But regrettably there were also punishments and isolation cells. Someone at the very top became obsessed with information gathering; and certain of the travellers agreed to act as stool pigeons. I'm sorry to report that ratting to the authorities was at times widespread. It wasn't a nature reserve, that Ark of ours; at times it was more like a prison ship.

Now, I realize that accounts differ. Your species has its much repeated version, which still charms even sceptics; while the animals have a compendium of sentimental myths. But they're not going to rock the boat, are they? Not when they've been treated as heroes, not when it's become a matter of pride that each and every one of them can proudly trace its family tree straight back to the Ark. They were chosen, they endured, they survived: it's normal for them to gloss over the awkward episodes, to have convenient lapses of memory. But I am not constrained in that way. I was never chosen. In fact, like several other species, I was specifically not chosen. I was a stowaway; I too survived; I escaped (getting off was no easier than getting on); and I have flourished. I am a little set apart from the rest of animal society, which still has its nostalgic reunions: there is even a Sealegs Club for species which never once felt queasy. When I recall the voyage, I feel no sense of obligation; gratitude puts no smear of Vaseline on the lens. My account you can trust.