

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 27
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Your main commentary should be focused on *present, preterite and present perfect*. Other topics may also be addressed.

I called on Armande again this morning. She was sitting in her rocking-chair in her low-ceilinged living room, one of her cats lying sprawled across her knees. Since the fire at Les Marauds she has looked frail and determined, her round apple-face sinking slowly in upon itself, eyes and mouth swallowed by wrinkles. She was wearing a grey housedress over lumpy black stockings, and her hair was lank and unplaited.

5 'They've gone, you noticed.' Her voice was flat, almost indifferent. 'Not a single boat left on the river.'

10 'I know.'

Walking down the hill into Les Marauds I find their absence is still a shock, like the ugly patch of yellowed grass where a circus tent once stood. Only the hulk of Roux's boat remains, a waterlogged carcass a few feet below the surface, blackly visible against the river mud.

15 'Blanche and Zézette have moved a little way downriver. They said they'd be back sometime today, to see how things were doing.'

She began to work her long grey hair into her customary plait. Her fingers were stiff and awkward, like sticks.

20 'What about Roux? How is he?'

'Angry.'

As well he might be. He knows the fire was no accident, knows he has no proof, knows that even if he had, it wouldn't help him. Blanche and Zézette offered him a place on their cramped houseboat, but he refused. The work on Armande's house is still unfinished, he says flatly. He needs to see to that first. I myself have not spoken to him since the night of the fire. I saw him once, briefly on the river bank, burning litter left by the travellers. He looked dour and unresponsive, eyes reddened by the smoke, refusing to answer when I addressed him. Some of his hair was burnt away in the fire and he has chopped the rest spikily short, so that now he looks like a newly struck match.

30 'What is he going to do now?'

Armande shrugged. 'I'm not sure. I think he's been sleeping in one of the derelict houses down the road. Last night I left him some

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food on the doorstep, and this morning it had gone. I already offered him money, but he won't take it.' She pulled irritably at her finished plait. 'Stubborn young fool. What good's all that money to me, at my age? Might as well give some of it to him as to the Clairmont clan. Knowing them, it'll probably end up in Reynaud's collection-box anyway.'

40 She made a sound of derision. 'Pigheaded, that's what it is. Redhaired men, God save us. You can't tell them anything.' She shook her head peevishly. 'He stalked off in a temper yesterday, and I haven't seen him since.'

45 I smiled in spite of myself. 'You're a pair,' I told her. 'Each as stubborn as the other.'

Armande shot me a look of indignation. 'Me?' she exclaimed. 'You're comparing me with that carrot-topped, obstreperous-'

50 Laughing, I recanted. 'I'll see if I can find him,' I told her. I did not find him, though I spent an hour on the banks of the Tannes looking. Even my mother's methods failed to reveal him. I did find where he was sleeping, however. A house not far from Armande's, one of the least run-down of the derelicts. The walls are slick with damp, but the top floor seems sound enough and there is glass in several of the windows. Passing by I noticed that the door had been forced open, and that a fire had been lit recently in the living-room grate. Other signs of occupancy; a roll of charred tarpaulin salvaged from the fire, a stack of driftwood, a few pieces of furniture, presumably left in the house as being of no value. I called Roux's name, but there was no answer.

60 By eight-thirty I had to open La Praline, so I abandoned the search. Roux would emerge when he wanted to. Guillaume was waiting outside the shop when I arrived, although the door was unlocked.

65 'You should have gone inside to wait for me,' I told him. 'Oh no.' His face was gravely mocking. 'That would have been taking a liberty.'