

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 33
-------------------	-------------------	-----------------------	--	-------------------	---------------

Your main commentary should be focused on *nominal clauses*. Other topics may also be addressed.

At first, I didn't know what to do with myself. I had spent thirty-one years commuting back and forth between the suburbs and the Manhattan offices of Mid-Atlantic Accident and Life, but now that I didn't have a job anymore, there were too many hours in the day. About a week after I moved into the apartment, my married daughter, Rachel, drove in from New Jersey to pay me a visit. She said that I needed to get involved in something, to invent a project for myself. Rachel is not a stupid person. She has a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Chicago and works as a researcher for a large drug company outside Princeton, but much like her mother before her, it's a rare day when she speaks in anything but platitudes—all those exhausted phrases and hand-me-down ideas that cram the dump sites of contemporary wisdom.

I explained that I was probably going to be dead before the year was out, and I didn't give a flying fuck about projects. For a moment, it looked as if Rachel was about to cry, but she blinked back the tears and called me a cruel and selfish person instead. No wonder "Mom" had finally divorced me, she added, no wonder she hadn't been able to take it anymore. Being married to a man like me must have been an unending torture, a living hell. A living hell. Alas, poor Rachel—she simply can't help herself. My only child has inhabited this earth for twenty-nine years, and not once has she come up with an original remark, with something absolutely and irreducibly her own.

Yes, I suppose there is something nasty about me at times. But not all the time—and not as a matter of principle. On my good days, I'm as sweet and friendly as any person I know. You can't sell life insurance as successfully as I did by alienating your customers, at least not for three long decades you can't. You have to be sympathetic. You have to be able to listen. You have to know how to charm people. I possess all those qualities and more. I won't deny that I've had my bad moments as well, but everyone knows what dangers lurk behind the closed doors of family life. It can be poison for all concerned, especially if you discover that you

probably weren't cut out for marriage in the first place. I loved having sex with Edith, but after four or five years the passion seemed to run its course, and from then on I became less than a perfect husband. To hear Rachel tell it, I wasn't much in the parent department either. I wouldn't want to contradict her memories, but the truth is that I cared for them both in my own way, and if I sometimes found myself in the arms of other women, I never took any of those affairs seriously. The divorce wasn't my idea. In spite of everything, I was planning to stay with Edith until the end. She was the one who wanted out, and given the extent of my sins and transgressions over the years, I couldn't really blame her. Thirty-three years of living under the same roof, and by the time we walked off in opposite directions, what we added up to was approximately nothing.

I had told Rachel my days were numbered, but that was no more than a hotheaded retort to her meddling advice, a blast of pure hyperbole. My lung cancer was in remission, and based on what the oncologist had told me after my most recent exam, there was cause for guarded optimism. That didn't mean I trusted him, however. The shock of the cancer had been so great, I still didn't believe in the possibility of surviving it. I had given myself up for dead, and once the tumor had been cut out of me and I'd gone through the debilitating ordeals of radiation treatment and chemo, once I'd suffered the long bouts of nausea and dizziness, the loss of hair, the loss of will, the loss of job, the loss of wife, it was difficult for me to imagine how to go on. Hence Brooklyn. Hence my unconscious return to the place where my story began. I was almost sixty years old, and I didn't know how much time I had left. Maybe another twenty years; maybe just a few more months. Whatever the medical prognosis of my condition, the crucial thing was to take nothing for granted.