

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat	Code Sujet	CLG 04
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Your main commentary should be focused on *compounds*. Other topics may also be addressed.

Right, here goes.

Monday morning, 15th Feb., 1993. A mild February day has brought the squirrels out of hibernation. The leafless trees in the garden make a kind of adventure playground for them. I watched two playing tag in the chestnuts just outside my study window: spiralling up a trunk, dodging and feinting among the branches, then scampering along a bough and leaping to the next tree, then zooming down the side of its trunk headfirst, freezing halfway, claws sticking like Velcro to the corrugated bark, then streaking across the grass, one trying to shake off the other by jinking and swerving and turning on a sixpence till he reached the bole of a Canadian poplar and they both rocketed up its side into the thin elastic branches and balanced there, swaying gently and blinking contentedly at each other. Pure play – no question. They were just larking about, exercising their agility for the sheer fun of it. If there's such a thing as reincarnation, I wouldn't mind coming back as a squirrel. They must have knee-joints like tempered steel.

The first time I felt the pain was about a year ago. I was leaving the London flat, hurrying to catch the 18.10 from Euston, scuttling backwards and forwards between the four rooms, stuffing scripts and dirty socks into my briefcase, shutting windows, switching off lights, re-setting the central-heating timer, emptying milk cartons down the sink, sloshing Sanilav round the toilet bowl – in short, going through the Before You Leave The Flat hit-list that Sally had written out and stuck on the fridge door with magnetic yellow Smileys, when I felt it: a sharp, piercing pain, like a red-hot needle thrust into the inside of the right knee and then withdrawn, leaving a quickly fading afterburn. I uttered a sharp, surprised cry and keeled over on to the bed (I was in the bedroom at the time). "Christ!" I said, aloud, although it was gone. "What was that?"

Gingerly I got up to my feet. (Should that be "gingerlyly"? No, I've just looked it up, adjective and adverb both have the same form.) Gingerly I got to my feet and tested my weight on the knee, took a few paces forward (funny word actually, nothing to

do with ginger, I always thought it meant the way you taste ground ginger, very carefully, dipping a moistened finger into it, and then trying it on the tip of your tongue, but no, it's thought to come from Old French *genson*, dainty, or *gent*, of noble birth, neither of which applies to me). I took a few paces forward without any ill-effects, shrugged and put it down to some freakish twitch of a nerve, like the sudden excruciating crick you can get in your neck sometimes, twisting round to get something from the back seat of a car. I left the flat, caught my train, and thought no more about it.

About a week later, when I was working in my study, I crossed my legs underneath the desk, and I felt it again, the sudden stab of pain on the inside of the right knee, which made me gasp, sucking in a lungful of air and then expelling it with a resounding "Fuuuuckinell!". From then onwards, I began to get the pain with increasing frequency, though there was nothing predictable about it. It rarely happened when I might have expected it, like when I was playing golf or tennis, but it could happen just *after* a game, in the club-house bar, or while driving home, or when I was sitting perfectly still in my study, or lying in bed. It would make me cry out in the middle of the night, so that Sally thought I was having a nightmare. In fact nightmares are about the only thing I don't have, in that line. I have depression, anxiety, panic attacks, night sweats, insomnia, but not nightmares. I never did dream much. Which simply means, I understand, that I don't remember my dreams, because we dream all the time we're asleep, so they say.