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PEDAGOGY

ELT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
ELT is an acronym or combination of initial letters. It comes from the words English Language Teaching (ELT).

The abbreviation is used to refer to the discipline or science of teaching the English language to learners who do not speak English as their mother tongue. By extension, it also names the actual practice of such discipline.

The acronym can be used to qualify anything and anyone related with imparting English as a foreign language, for example, an ELT Division (a department of an organization, which deals with the teaching of English to non-native speakers), an ELT coach (a teacher specialized in the preparation of foreign learners of English), an ELT book (a book that is used for, or is about, teaching English), ELT multimedia (visual, aural and audiovisual material for learning English in a non-English-speakers' classroom), etc.

Finally, the acronym is associated with an international certificate for Argentine learners of English: the ELT Certificate (ELT). This diploma, which marks intermediate level, certifies the acquisition of knowledge and the development of language skills in English as a foreign language. Learners who reach this level master basic structures and vocabulary. They know enough to understand spoken and written English and to produce English texts or speech with relative facility. Therefore, they can communicate in English and 'teach' what they know to others, hence ELT.

By virtue of this, a learner who has done successfully at the ELT Certificate examination is called an Elementary Teacher of English or, simply, an ELT.

BECOMING AN ELT

In order to become an ELT, you must prove yourself competent in two different areas: (1) linguistic and (2) attitudinal.

1. Linguistic Competence.

Linguistically, a prospective ELT should develop the minimum language abilities and capacities to understand good English when it is spoken or written. Additionally, you should develop enough linguistic competence to speak and write correctly in English. In other words, you must understand English and be understood in English without serious impediments.

To do so, the mental capacities and physical abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing have to be attended to and strengthened. The importance of these four language skills resides in the fact that you can encode a message by means of speaking or writing; and through listening and reading you can decode what is said or written.

Since language is primarily speech, careful attention should be paid to oral communication (i.e. speaking and listening). Some learners may find this difficult because they do not have many chances of interacting orally in English, therefore, they should take advantage of every opportunity they are offered. English sounds, which are different from Spanish sounds, should be learnt and practised. What is more, the 'music' of English that is, in part, a consequence of peculiar intonation, stress, rhythm and speed of delivery must be imitated with precision.
For example, as a speaker, you should know how to use strong stress to emphasize the pieces of information that are most important for understanding a message, as well as a marked rhythm in an effort to be clear, rising intonation on requests to sound polite, quick speed of delivery when in urgency, etc. These suprasegmental features are used in a conventional way which needs to be attentively studied and exercised through repetition.

You should also take advantage of the non-linguistic features that accompany the message (e.g. gestures, surrounding objects, time and place of production of speech), which will give clues that help codify and decodify ideas.

Facility in composing language is also an essential requirement of oral communication because feedback (i.e. your response to a message) should be 'immediate'. This means that you have little time to answer and demonstrate how well a message has been understood; and, even if the message has not been understood, the learner is expected to respond promptly, asking for clarification or expansion of the original message. Thus, a certain degree of automatization in giving oral feedback is required.

On the other hand, written communication does not have any possibility of expressing suprasegmental features, except for a few punctuation marks, and does not provide non-linguistic features, either. All the reader gets is graphical signs which have to be decoded without the writer's presence. When reading, you should be able to make up for the missing features, yet the fact that feedback is not necessarily immediate gives you the chance of pausing to interpret the message, re-reading, and even looking up terms and phrases in reference books, such as dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses, lexicons, databases, etc.

Finally, when you act as writers, you must consider the impossibility of using suprasegmental and non-linguistic features, and think of the reader's reaction in advance so as to correct, clarify or expand the message they wish to convey and, in this way, avoid ambiguity, lack of coherence or lack of cohesion.

2. Attitudinal Competence.

Attitudinally, an ELT must match the linguistic education received with good principles and behaviour. Being an ELT presupposes certain human values, particularly when the Elementary Teachers are teaching others what they have learnt. The reason is that, in the role of the educator, the ELT will be imitated not only in the language but also in the morals. This explains our concern for the ethics of prospective ELTs, in general, and of those who will collaborate on the intellectual growth of children, in particular.

An Elementary Teacher who knows a lot of English but is, for example, aggressive when explaining what he/she knows, cannot be considered a good ELT, least of all a good model.

When teaching, the ELT must exercise modesty in the sense of caring not to do or say anything improper: modesty in speech to prevent and eliminate the use of swear words, abusive language, biased criticism and deprecatory remarks; modesty in dress avoiding ostentation and exhibitionism to favour cleanliness and simplicity; and modesty in behaviour to replace aggressiveness with gentleness.

ELTs must be patient and give those they are helping time to understand. If the ELT is not patient, the learning process will turn into a frustrating experience. Mind patience and beware not to demoralize those you teach, especially if they are children since a frustrated child will probably become a resentful adult in no time.

ELTs should also have charity to assist those who need assistance in English. For instance, if someone does not understand an explanation, you must be generous to re-explain it as many
times as it is necessary; if someone has had a problem in class and wants to speak to us, you must find time to listen. ELTs should always be charitable and give others the intellectual food, the guidance and the company they need to grow sane.

All ELTs should exercise discipline as well. This means that you must develop and exteriorize the habits of order and study. You should not be away from class without a sound reason or arrive late repeatedly, nor improvise or speak Spanish all the time because these things affect the learning process. ELTs should teach setting the example: if you want your students to behave, you must behave yourselves first; if you want them to speak English, you must speak English in class yourselves.

Above all, ELTs should have humility to accept and correct their own mistakes. Learning to recognize your mistakes will make you better educators. It is not how much you know, but how you learn and teach that counts.

THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING ENGLISH

Most of you, who are studying to become ELTs, already know what use you will make of English in the future. Some of you may want to use English when travelling abroad; others may wish to teach English; still others may hope to understand English songs and films, or to use English at work or as a translation tool in your higher education.

Yet, this diversity of applications is based upon one fundamental learning goal: effective communication. ELTs learn English for communication purposes. You learn so as to be able to communicate effectively in English, that is, to understand English or to make others understand English.

But, how is effective communication achieved? Will you be able to communicate effectively only when you complete your English course?

The answer to the second question is 'no'. Effective communication is not the end product of an English course. You are constantly trained in effective communication. Every time you answer a question correctly in English, you are communicating effectively. Every time you solve a written exercise in English, you are communicating effectively. On the teacher's part, the efforts are always directed towards enabling the learners to communicate effectively, this means making them succeed in understanding and being understood.

The training in effective communication that the ELT receives at every stage of the learning process prepares the learner for 'real life' situations (e.g. travelling, work, entertainment or furthering studies) where proficiency in English is demanded.

To develop effective communication in class, the teacher works to comply with the following *sine qua non*:

1. **The arousal of a psychological need for information and/or socialization.**

This psycho-need urges people into breaking the ice that surrounds every individual, prompting the establishment of interrelations between two partners or entrants. People communicate because they are interested in informing or knowing about something, or because they feel an impulse to intimate with someone. Such psychological urgency results from the perception of a particular stimulus. Therefore, if a learner has no psychic-impulse, that is, if the necessary stimulus is not provided, communication will hardly be effective.
2. The presence of two communicating entrants.

There should be two entrants to establish communication, a sender and a receiver. Communication starts when the sender feels the psycho-need to communicate and interacts by encoding ideas (message) into language (medium). The reception of the message by a receiver who decodes what was said or written completes the communication process. For communication to be effective, the message must reach the intended receiver. Proof of reception is the receiver's response. A receiver may respond affirmatively or negatively, verbally or non-verbally. Even silence or an ignoring attitude are, in some cases, valid responses. If there is interest in keeping up communication, the entrants swap roles, the receiver becomes the sender and the sender becomes the receiver of a new message. Roles are exchanged indefinitely until one of the entrants produces a verbal or non-verbal response seeking a standstill. Although it is true that two entrants are necessary, there is no need for both to be physically present at the same time. For example, the singer who records a song does not see his receiver, but the receiver is 'present' in the singer's mind when he sings. Likewise, readers do not read books while their authors are writing them, what is more, many books are read after the author's death, but when someone reads a book, its author is 'alive' again in the reading.

3. A facilitating world.

Communication cannot be effective unless it takes place in a facilitating atmosphere. Language is transmitted in sound waves or in writing. Therefore, oral communication depends on the presence of air, and written communication on paper, a board, or a screen, among other things. Apart from the most obvious elements, a facilitating world guarantees the absence of inhibiting factors that may disrupt communication. For example, there can be little effectiveness in communication if there are distracting objects, disturbing background noises or unwanted third parties that deviate the entrants' attention. A communication-friendly atmosphere must also consider the entrants' state of mind and health since experiencing a nervous breakdown or being under the effect of medication, for instance, will probably make communication less effective.

4. The same code.

Both entrants must have acquired a similar system of communication. That is, they should know the same language to understand the other entrant and to be understood.

5. Regular interaction.

The possession of a common system of communication must be strengthened through regular interaction to improve codification of ideas and decodification of messages, exercising the four language skills. The establishment of regular interaction ensures that the system of communication remains mutually intelligible for the sender and the receiver. The more people interact, the more effectively they will communicate.

Clearly, to develop effective communication in the learners, the teacher should aim at maximizing classroom dynamics in order to comply with the aforesaid *sine qua nons.*
THE ENGLISH LESSON

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Compliance with the sine qua nons of effective communication forms the basis for the English lesson. When you learn a new language, you acquire a series of new linguistic habits which you use to communicate effectively in the foreign language. These habits are classified into language items for the purpose of study: sounds, words, phrases, tenses, intonation curves and other forms characteristic of the language you want to learn. The learning of language items takes place in context and with the purpose of effective communication. In order to incorporate each of the new language items, the learners undergo a learning process that takes them from familiarization to consubstantiation with the item. The learning process consists of three distinguishable stages: presentation, practice and production.

1. **Presentation**: the stage of explanation.

Presentation is the stage in which learners approach a language item for the first time. They identify it as new and wish to understand it. At this stage, the teacher uses presentation techniques to explain the meaning of the new item. A teacher that is presenting a language item must be careful with the wording, that is, the words used in the explanation. The wording should always be clear and simple because a new item cannot be explained with unknown words or confusing definitions.

A thorough presentation covers the four language skills so that the learners familiarize themselves with both the oral and written aspects of the item. The following are the typical presentation steps:

(a) The learners read or listen to the new item in context (reading or listening);
(b) The teacher focuses on the item and explains it;
(c) The learners repeat the new item (speaking); and
(d) The learners write down the new item and its explanation (writing).

The order of the steps may change but, since the learners cannot speak or write what they have not heard or read, listening must always precede speaking and reading must always precede writing.

The familiarization with the item is complete when the four skills have been involved and the meaning of the item made clear.

2. **Practice**: the stage of consolidation.

After Presentation, the learners are ready to use the new language item by themselves but they may feel insecure to do it. It is time to start Practice. In Practice, the learners manipulate the item guided and controlled by the teacher.

The main objective of Practice is to consolidate the idea the learners have formed of the item in Presentation. Written and oral exercises (e.g. substitution drills, asking and answering, recasting sentences, etc.) are all good, if properly devised for the practice of language items.

One thing should always be attempted: to make Practice natural—remember how effective communication is achieved. Whenever possible, the teacher should make the learners feel that they are communicating not just doing an exercise. Give life to Practice creating true-to-life situations. The teacher should fill Practice with meaning resorting to current affairs, the learners' knowledge of the world, their interests and curiosity.
In Practice, all doubts should be cleared up. Mistakes should be systematically corrected and
the learners should aim at accuracy and correctness.

3. **Production**: the stage of activation.

At this stage, the learners know how to use the item properly. This enables them to activate
it free from the pressure of being corrected. Every time the learners use a practised item
spontaneously is an instance of Production. An exercise, a dialogue or any other language
activity may prove an opportunity for the learners to activate a known item.

The activation of an item need not be directly induced by the teacher. The learners can use a
practised item of their own accord in response to the circumstance. The teacher's duty in
Production is to open up opportunities for the learners to recycle practised items regularly
by creating situations in which the learners can use and reuse known items.

The aim of Production is to develop in the learners a fair degree of fluency and
automatization. Obviously, the more the learners activate an item, that is, the more
opportunities they take to use it, the less likely they are to forget it.

If the learning process has been successful, the result of Production should be effective
communication.

**PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES**

Presentation techniques are used at the Presentation Stage for explaining the meaning of
language items. An item can be explained ostensively or linguistically. An ostensive
explanation is the one that uses referents or symbols to associate the new language item with
what it means. A linguistic explanation clarifies the meaning of an item with words.
Accordingly, there are two big groups of Presentation Techniques: ostensive and linguistic.

**Ostensive Presentation Techniques**

The Ostensive Techniques comprise the Visual, Aural and Audio-Visual Techniques which
explain the new item through the direct association object-item. In other words, the teacher
'shows' what the item is.

1. **The Visual Technique.**

It is used when the language item represents something that the learners can see.

In this case, the teacher may show the actual object or a representative of its kind—for
example, a real pen to explain the item 'pen'. When the actual object cannot be displayed, a
photograph, a drawing or any other graphic substitute can be used. For instance, the teacher
may bring to class a toy car or may draw a car on the board to explain the item 'car' visually.

For the explanation of single actions (verbs) or predicates, the teacher can also use miming,
like thrusting a leg forward to explain the item 'kick'.

2. **The Aural Technique.**

It is used for explaining those items that represent sounds or noises. In aural presentations,
teachers use a recording or imitate a sound or make a noise themselves. Barking like a dog
and making the distinctive sneeze are aural presentations of the items 'bark' and 'have a cold',
respectively.
3. The Audio-Visual Technique.

It involves the learners' hearing and sight. Presenting an item audio-visually means using a video, multi-media or live dramatization in which the learners hear and see what the new item represents. For example, stretching both arms horizontally and making a purring noise to explain 'fly', or showing a video of an auction to explain 'sell in auction' are valid audio-visual presentations.

**Linguistic Presentation Techniques**

The Linguistic Techniques use language to explain an item. In other words, the teacher 'says' what the item means. If an English item is explained using other English words, the explanation is monolingual. If Spanish or any other language, except English, is used to explain an English item, the explanation is a translation.

1. **The Monolingual Technique.**

It consists in explaining an item with words in English, orally or in writing. The Monolingual Technique may use enumerations, definitions, synonyms, antonyms, examples, paraphrases and context-of-situation descriptions to explain an item, e.g.

- butcher = person who sells meat
- preposterous = absurd

The teacher should be careful not to use difficult dictionary definitions or unknown words because they may provoke a domino effect called ignotum per ignotius by which a new item is explained with more new items that need to be clarified themselves. To avoid this, the wording used in monolingual presentations should always be known to the learner or guessable.

2. **The Translation Technique.**

It consists in giving equivalents or explanations, examples, etc. in Spanish or any other language except English. The translation presentation should be a last resort because it may go against the development of the habit of communicating in English. The Translation Technique is recommended only when all other techniques fail. This is the case with many technical and scientific words that are only 'understood' by the common learner when translated into Spanish, e.g.

- maple = “arce”
- hatchability = “incubabilidad”

**AIDS FOR PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES**

**Highlighting**

There are presentations in which the new item is explained in context, for instance, when we apply the Monolingual Technique to explain an item through examples or when we present forms and structures that need to be incarnated in sentences. In these cases, it is necessary to highlight the distinctive elements of the new item from the surrounding background.

Highlighting is used to call the learners' attention to the item without isolating it from its context. There are different ways of highlighting: orally, strong stress can be used; in writing, the teacher may use framing, underlining, capitalizing, italicizing, etc., e.g.
Mary: ‘Why is he sad?’

Reported Question
Mary asked why he was sad.

This example shows how you can highlight the peculiarities of the item 'Reported Questions' underlining the reporting verb and the past form of the verb in its 'new' position in the sentence.

Another way of highlighting an item is using a different colour or a different type of letter, e.g.

Car crash
The Fiat was destroyed in a car crash.

Highlighting can also be used to call the learners' attention to the inconsistency between the spelling and the pronunciation of items. This can be done writing between brackets the phonetics of the whole or part of the item, e.g.

CAN: I can / can’t do it.

To highlight the pronunciation of an item, teachers can use the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet, which are found in most modern dictionaries, or create their own symbols. The important thing is that the learners rapidly associate the symbols with the pronunciation of the item.

**Formulating**

In the presentation of language items that have a syntactic configuration of their own: some phrases, tenses, passive voice, reported speech, etc., it is advisable to formulate their syntactic peculiarities after using Presentation Techniques. Formulating helps the learners summarize and remember the items through formulas, tables, diagrams, graphs and charts.

Formulating cannot explain a new item per se but it clarifies its syntactic distribution. For example, after making clear the meaning of the item 'Passive Voice' with Ostensive and Linguistic Techniques, the teacher can formulate the syntactic peculiarities of the passive form of the verb:

“be” + past participle

This will help the learners remember that every passive sentence has the conjugated verb 'be' followed by the action in the past participle form.

In the case of tenses, the teacher may find formulating useful to mark the differences among persons and the forms of the sentence. For example, the Present Perfect Tense can be formulated and its distinctive elements highlighted to call the learners' attention to the syntactic implications of the item. This can be seen in the following table, which presents the syntactic peculiarities of the tense, framing the auxiliary verb 'has' and underlining the ‘-ed’ of the regular verb.
PRESENT PERFECT FOR REGULAR VERBS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(+) Affirmative</th>
<th>(-) Negative</th>
<th>(??) Interrogative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have</td>
<td>I haven't</td>
<td>Have I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have</td>
<td>you haven't</td>
<td>you haven't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he has</td>
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<td>she has</td>
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<td>it have</td>
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<tr>
<td>we have</td>
<td>we haven't</td>
<td>we have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they have</td>
<td>they haven't</td>
<td>they have</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

Practice Techniques are ways of consolidating the understanding and proper use of a language item that has already been presented. Practice Techniques are all about exercises. Text books normally include a variety of them but teachers can prepare their own exercises to reinforce the practice both orally and in writing. Without exception, the exercises should be preceded by clear and concise instructions indicating the learner what to do and, preferably, giving an example of what is required.

Written Practice Techniques

Written Practice Techniques are activities that give the learners the chance of manipulating a new item in writing. There are three types of Written Practice: word exercises, sentence exercises and text exercises.

1. **Word Exercises.**

   They are exercises in which the teacher asks the learners to make a word choice. For example, if the teacher wants the learners to practise the affirmative forms of the Present Perfect auxiliary, the teacher might give an exercise like this:

   Complete the sentences with 'have' or 'has'.
   1. She _has_ cooked a really good meal.
   3. No one _finished_ this exercise.
   4. The police _arrested_ the criminal.
   5. A lot of people _climbed_ Everest.

   Here the learners opt between the forms 'have' or 'has' in view of the context. This word option is a relatively simple case of filling-in-the-blanks and, like most word exercises, it is particularly advisable at the initial stage of Practice.

   Other instances of word exercises are those where the learners have to match pictures with words, decide between true and false, or make word selections from multiple choices.

2. **Sentence Exercises.**

   They consist in either joining words to form sentences, or making, matching or positioning a sentence in response to clues. For instance, to practise the collocation of the verb of preference 'like', the teacher might use the following exercise where the learners have to write full sentences using the clues provided on the chart.
Another example of a sentence exercise is:

**Use the words in the boxes to form sentences.**

I The dentist The children My aunt

didn't pull

bought out play
go

my tooth on Monday. in the park last week. me a new bike for my birthday. to the cinema yesterday.

Example: I didn't go to the cinema yesterday.

In this exercise, the learners practise the Past Simple.

The sentence exercises purport a greater challenge to learners since it is required that they master English semantics and syntax to create well-formed sentences.

Answering questions in writing is also a type of sentence exercise. So are the recasting activities where the learners have to re-write the information given following a particular pattern.

More communicative and life-like forms of sentence exercises include giving titles to newspaper articles, adding the moral to a tale, summarizing paragraphs in one sentence, writing questions, etc.

3. **Text Exercises.**

When the learners have to arrange sentences to form a text or when they are asked to write a text of their own, they do a text exercise.

Text exercises are the most demanding of all Written Practice Techniques. They bring into play coherence and cohesion to acceptably express a message through an arrangement of sentences.

Examples of text exercises are: putting sentences in order to form a paragraph, putting paragraphs in order to form an article, writing composition tasks, writing a report, writing a letter, e-mail or text message.

**Oral Practice Techniques**

As language is not only writing, but primarily speech, oral practice becomes an ineluctable step in any English lesson. The purpose of Oral Practice is, apart from consolidating vocabulary and grammar, to develop listening comprehension, pronunciation and speaking skills.

Textbooks seldom offer enough exercises to reinforce oral language and, therefore, the teacher should supplement the activities with Oral Practice Techniques. Let us consider the types.
1. Drills.

Drills are repetition exercises in which the learners imitate a given model. Some drills concentrate on grammar so the learners will have to repeat a phrase or sentence, sometimes as it is given, and sometimes changing it slightly to follow the clues provided.

Other drills concentrate on pronunciation, thus, the phonetics of sounds and strings of sounds is emphasized.

The models which the learners hear and which indicate what to say are called prompts or clues. All drills require prompts, e.g.

Teacher: Listen to this sentence, 'They bought the house'. I'm going to say it again but changing 'bought' for 'painted'. 'They painted the house.' Now you do it.

Teacher: 'They bought the house". Learners: They bought the house.
Teacher: PAINTED. Learners: They painted the house.
Teacher: SOLD. Learners: They sold the house.
Teacher: DEMOLISHED. Learners: They demolished the house.
Teacher: LET. Learners: They let the house.

This drill is used to practise the grammar of the Past Simple, affirmative form. It is called a substitution drill because the learners replace a part of a model sentence with the prompts given by the teacher.

An example of a pronunciation drill is the following activity in which the learners repeat a minimal contrasting list of words to exercise the pronunciation of some English vowels:

Teacher: Please repeat after me. SEE. Learners: See.
Teacher: SAW. Learners: Saw.
Teacher: SIR. Learners: Sir.
Teacher: SUE. Learners: Sue.

2. Listening Exercises.

Listening exercises comprise a wide range of activities in which the learners have to understand the general idea (listening for gist) or particular information (listening for detail) and write or speak about it. They also include exercises where blanks have to be filled or matches made with the information heard.

Examples of listening exercises are: listening to a recording and answering comprehension questions, watching a film and telling its plot, listening to the teacher's or a classmate's account and reporting it, e.g.

Teacher: Listen to this recording about London and follow the instructions.

Recording: London is the capital of England. It is a modern city but it is not new. It was founded by the Romans almost 2000 years ago. Some buildings in London are very old. The Tower of London, for example, is more than 900 years old and was formerly a castle and a prison. On the other hand, there are some very recent constructions like the enormous London Eye which was inaugurated in 2000.
Match the sentence halves.

1. London is  
2. London was founded  
3. The Tower of London is  
4. The Tower of London was  
5. The London Eye was inaugurated  

   a. almost 2000 years ago.  
   b. in 2000.  
   c. the capital of England.  
   d. more than 900 years old.  
   e. a castle and a prison.


The purpose of this exercise is listening for detail within the framework of the Present Simple and Simple Past (active and passive forms).


Speaking exercises are activities that offer learners the possibility of answering or telling something orally. Their purpose is to enable the learners to manipulate the spoken form of items and to consolidate pronunciation.

The difference between speaking exercises and drills is that the speaking exercises are non-repetitive, i.e. the structures used in them vary.

Some examples of speaking exercises are: speaking about events or experiences, telling a story, answering questions, role-playing, interviewing and singing.

PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

After the Practice stage, the learners need to recycle known items to prevent forgetting them. It is vital that the teacher offers plenty of possibilities to activate what has been learnt, first, by using English him/herself in class, and second, by asking the learners to communicate in English both with the teacher and with other classmates.

Every time English is used, something is being recycled. That is, production takes place at all moments during a lesson in English. When the teacher speaks in English, the learners are activating their comprehension of vocabulary and structures studied previously. When the teacher writes in English, the learners are refreshing the spelling of words and syntax. When the learners speak or write in English, they are recycling items which they have practised before.

Induced Production

Production or recycling may be induced by the teacher. In these cases, Production overlaps with Presentation and Practice in the sense that an item is presented or practised by means of and surrounded by other items which the learners already know, e.g.

Recast the pairs to form one sentence using relative clauses.

1. The man went to the cinema. They were showing ‘Batman’.  
   => The man went to the cinema where they were showing ‘Batman’.  
2. Albert thinks I am cute. Albert is my best friend.  
3. The park remained closed. The park keeper was killed yesterday.  
4. Music is my favourite pastime. I play music on my keyboard.  
5. Uncle Tom works hard. My dad speaks well of him.
This exercise aims at practising relative clauses, but it also induces production of the Present Simple, the Past Simple, the inflected possessive and collocations of some personal and objective pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, nouns, prepositions and articles.

**Spontaneous Production**

Spontaneous production takes place the moment the learners use English freely—that is, they do not use items indicated by the teacher but items they themselves feel necessary for expressing a perception of their own.

In spontaneous production there are no pre-established answers. On the contrary, every expression is 'right' on condition that it is in grammatical and acceptable English.

For example, if the learners feel the call of nature, they could say 'Can I go to the toilet, please?', 'May I go to the toilet?', 'Please, excuse me. I have to go to the toilet,' or any other suitable expression. In doing so, the learner is recycling polite requests and an assortment of vocabulary items which were not demanded by the teacher but which were born out of necessity.

Likewise, when learners write a composition, speak about their experiences or tell a story, they are constructing texts and discourses which recycle numerous items free from the teacher's inducement. In other words, the learners express their thoughts choosing suitable items from their own language background, e.g.

Instructions: Tell me. Where did you go and what did you do on holidays?
Learner 1: I went to the beach. I visited friends, played water sports and read a novel.
Learner 2: I spent my holidays in the mountains. I went hiking and climbing.

In spite of the fact that this exercise is mainly devised to practise the Past Simple, the teacher does not indicate the use of any verb in particular, nor are the learners limited in their choice of vocabulary. Each learner chooses from the collection of verbs and general vocabulary known those which accurately express where and how the holidays were spent. At the same time they consolidate the Past Simple, the learners are spontaneously recycling other learnt items to express their experiences.

**EVALUATION**

The learning process must be carefully monitored to ensure that the learners understand, and to check that they can achieve effective communication. This monitoring is called evaluation. There are two types of evaluation according to its purpose and the moment it takes place: Classroom Evaluation and Formal Evaluation.

**Classroom Evaluation**

Classroom Evaluation takes place during the learning process in Presentation, Practice and Production. At every stage, evaluation is used to assess the learners' progress in the assimilation and utilization of language items.

In Presentation, the teacher evaluates understanding through the feedback the learners provide. Questions like: 'Am I clear?', 'Is it OK?', etc. are necessary to know whether the learners have understood an item. Their responses manifest the degree of clarity on the
teacher's part and become the most accurate thermometer to decide whether to advance or do remedial work.

In Practice, the teacher evaluates accuracy and correctness through the learners' performance in the resolution of exercises. The number and the type of mistakes made will tell the teacher when consolidation should be extended and when the learners are ready to end Practice.

In Production, the teacher evaluates fluency and automatization through the proficiency evinced by the learners in the use of language items.

Classroom Evaluation should be constant but not necessarily overt (i.e. the learners need not know they are being evaluated).

**Formal Evaluation**

Formal Evaluation takes place after the learners have learnt a full course syllabus. Its purpose is to mark off the level acquired and to certify the learners' command of the language at the end of an English course. Formal Evaluation consists in a written and oral examination that tests the learners' capacity to communicate effectively in English at different levels. There are four categories of Formal Evaluation: Children, Juniors, Adults and ELT Certificate. Within the first three categories levels range from beginner to intermediate. The preparation of a particular level consists in learning the items listed in the Universal Syllabus. During the preparation, the learners should use a course-book that introduces all or most of the language items required for the level. The items that are listed in the Universal Syllabus but are not contained in the book should be presented separately. For Children and Juniors, a workbook or activity book is also necessary to guarantee a thorough practice of the items.

Formal Evaluation takes place at the Linguistics Department Evaluation and Certification Centre of New Oxford Institute (48 N° 562 - 1900 La Plata - Buenos Aires - Argentina) in March, July or December. The examination date is chosen in accordance with the completion of the preparation. In Formal Evaluation the learners are examined in the four language skills. The main criterion is to determine whether the students are able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing. This means that if the learners fail in either part of the examination, they will be failing Formal Evaluation. If this is the case, they will have to reinforce the preparation of all the items and be re-evaluated. The learners who succeed can get a certificate of attainment. The certificate serves as a private document which attests the level acquired and enables the learners to prosecute studies.

To prepare learners for Formal Evaluation, the teacher must be registered as a coach with New Oxford Institute.
LITERATURE

ERM

EXTENSIVE READING MATERIAL
“Sit down, young man,” said the Official.

“Thanks.” The young man sat.

“I’ve been hearing rumors about you,” the Official said pleasantly. “Oh, nothing much. Your nervousness. You are not getting on so well. Several months now I’ve heard about you, and I thought I’d call you in. Thought maybe you’d like your job changed. Like to go overseas, work in some other War Area? Desk job killing you off, like to get right in on the old fight?”

“I don’t think so,” said the young sergeant.

“What do you want?”

The sergeant shrugged and looked at his hands. “To live in peace. To learn that during the night, somehow, the guns of the world had rusted, the bacteria had turned sterile in their bomb casings, the tanks had sunk like prehistoric monsters into roads suddenly made tar pits.

That’s what I’d like.”

“That’s what we’d all like, of course,” said the Official. “Now stop all that idealistic chatter and tell me where you’d like to be sent. You have your choice – the Western or the Northern War Zone.” The Official tapped a pink map on his desk.

But the sergeant was talking at his hands, turning them over, looking at the fingers: “What would you officers do, what would we men do, what would the world do if we all woke tomorrow with the guns in flaking ruin?”

The Official saw that he would have to deal carefully with the sergeant. He smiled quietly. “That’s an interesting question. I like to talk about such theories, and my answer is that there’d be mass panic. Each nation would think itself the only unarmed nation in the world, and would blame its enemies for the disaster. There’d be waves of suicide, stocks collapsing, a million tragedies.”

“But after that,” the sergeant said. “After they realized it was true, that every nation was disarmed and there was nothing more to fear, if we were all clean to start over fresh and new, what then?”

“They’d rearm as swiftly as possible.”

“What if they could be stopped?”

“Then they’d beat each other with their fists. If it got down to that. Huge armies of men with boxing gloves of steel spikes would gather at the national borders. And if you took the gloves away they’d use their fingernails and feet. And if you cut their legs off they’d spit on each other. And if you cut off their tongues and stopped their mouths with corks they’d fill the atmosphere so full of hate that mosquitoes would drop to the ground and birds would fall dead from telephone wires.”

“Then you don’t think it would do any good?” the sergeant said.

“Certainly not. It’d be like ripping the carapace off a turtle. Civilization would gasp and die from the shock.”
The young man shook his head. “Or are you lying to yourself and me because you’ve a nice comfortable job?”

“Let’s call it ninety per cent cynicism, ten per cent rationalizing the situation. Go put your Rust away and forget about it.”

5 The sergeant jerked his head up. “How’d you know I had it?” he said.

“Had what”.

“The Rust, of course.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“I can do it, you know. I could start the Rust tonight if I wanted to.”

The Sergeant laughed. “You can’t be serious.”

“I am. I’ve been meaning to come talk to you. I’m glad you called me in. I’ve worked on this invention for a long time. It’s been a dream of mine. It has to do with the structure of certain atoms. If you study them you find that the arrangement of atoms in steel armor is such-and-such an arrangement. I was looking for an imbalance factor. I majored in physics and metallurgy, you know. It came to me, there’s a Rust factor in the air all the time. Water vapor.

I had to find a way to give steel a ‘nervous breakdown’. Then the water vapor everywhere in the world would take over. Not on all metal, of course. Our civilization is built on steel, I wouldn’t want to destroy most buildings. I’d just eliminate guns and shells, tanks, planes, battleships. I can set the machine to work on copper and brass and aluminium, too, if necessary. I’d just walk by all of those weapons and just being near them I’d make them fall away.”

The Official was bending over his desk, staring at the Sergeant.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Yes.”

“Have you ever thought you were Christ?”

“I can’t say that I have. But I have considered that God was good to me to let me find what I was looking for, if that’s what you mean.” The Official reached into his breast pocket and drew out an expensive ball-point pen capped with a rifle shell. He flourished the pen and started filling in a form. “I want you to take this to Dr. Mathews this afternoon, for a complete check-up. Not that I expect anything really bad, understand. But don’t you feel you should see a doctor?”

“You think I’m lying about my machine,” said the Sergeant. “I’m not. It’s so small it can be hidden in this cigarette package. The effect of it extends for nine hundred miles. I could tour this country in a few days, with the machine set to a certain type of steel. The other nations couldn’t take advantage of us because I’d rust their weapons as they approach us. Then I’d fly to Europe. By this time next month the world would be free of war forever. I don’t know how I found this invention. It’s impossible. Just as impossible as the atom bomb. I’ve waited a month now trying to think it over. I worried about what would happen if I did rip off the carapace, as you say. But now I’ve just about decided. My talk with you has helped clarify
things. Nobody thought an airplane would ever fly, nobody thought an atom would ever explode, and nobody thinks that there can ever be Peace, but there will be.”

“Take that paper over to Dr. Mathews, will you?” said the Official hastily.

The sergeant got up. “You’re not going to assign me to any new Zone then?”

“Not right away, no. I’ve changed my mind. We’ll let Mathews decide.”

“I’ve decided then,” said the young man. “I’m leaving the Post within the next few minutes. I’ve a pass. Thank you very much for giving me your valuable time, sir.”

“Now look here, Sergeant, don’t take things so seriously. You don’t have to leave. Nobody’s going to hurt you.”

“That’s right. Because nobody would believe me. Goodbye, sir.” The sergeant opened the office door and stepped out. The door shut and the Official was alone. He stood for a moment looking at the door. He sighed. He rubbed his hands over his face. The phone rang. He answered it abstractedly.

“Oh, hello, Doctor. I was just going to call you.” A pause. “Yes, I was going to send him over to you. Look, is it all right for that young man to be wandering about? It is all right? If you say so, Doctor. Probably needs a rest, a good long one. Poor boy has a delusion of rather an interesting sort. Yes, yes. It’s a shame. But that’s what a Sixteen-Year War can do to you, I suppose.” The phone voice buzzed in reply.

The Official listened and nodded. “I’ll make a note on that. Just a second.” He reached for his ball-point pen. “Hold on a moment. Always mislaying things.” He patted his pocket. “Had my pen here a moment ago. Wait.” He put down the phone and searched his desk, pulling out drawers. He checked his blouse pocket again. He stopped moving. Then his hands twitched slowly into his pocket and probed down. He poked his thumb and forefinger deep and brought out a pinch of something.

He sprinkled it on his desk blotter: a small filtering powder of yellow-red rust.

He sat staring at it for a moment. Then he picked up the phone. “Mathews,” he said, “get off the line, quick.” There was a click of someone hanging up and then he dialed another call. “Hello, Guard Station, listen, there’s a man coming past you any minute now, you know him, name of Sergeant Hollis, stop him, shoot him down, kill him if necessary, don’t ask any questions, kill the son of a bitch, you heard me, this is the Official talking! Yes, kill him, you hear!”

“But, sir,” said a bewildered voice on the other end of the line. “I can’t, I just can’t ...”

“What do you mean you can’t, God damn it!”

“Because ...” The voice faded away. You could hear the guard breathing into the phone a mile away.

The Official shook the phone. “Listen to me, listen, get your gun ready!”

“I can’t shoot anyone,” said the guard. The Official sank back in his chair. He sat blinking for half a minute, gasping.

Out there even now – he didn’t have to look, no one had to tell him – the hangars were dusting down in soft red rust, and the airplanes were blowing away on a brown rust wind into nothingness, and the tanks were sinking, sinking slowly into the hot asphalt roads, like
dinosaurs (isn’t that what the man had said?) sinking into primordial tar pits. Trucks were blowing away into ochre puffs of smoke, their drivers dumped by the road, with only the tires left running on the highways.

“Sir...” said the guard, who was seeing all this, far away. “Oh, God...”

“Listen, listen!” screamed the Official. “Go after him, get him, with your hands, choke him, with your fists, beat him, use your feet, kick his ribs in, kick him to death, do anything, but get that man. I’ll be right out!” He hung up the phone.

By instinct he jerked open the bottom desk drawer to get his service pistol. A pile of brown rust filled the new leather holster. He swore and leaped up. On the way out of the office he grabbed a chair. It’s wood, he thought. Good old-fashioned wood, good old-fashioned maple. He hurled it against the wall twice, and it broke. Then he seized one of the legs, clenched it hard in his fist, his face bursting red, the breath snorting in his nostrils, his mouth wide. He struck the palm of his hand with the leg of the chair, testing it. “All right, God damn it, come on!” he cried.

He rushed out, yelling, and slammed the door.
While he was waiting in the kitchen, the police sergeant got out a Marlboro cigarette and hunted a match. His name was Dunne, and he was assisting the Burglary Investigation Unit of the San Jose Police Department. He was mustached and gray and thirty-six years old, dressed in a stiff navy-blue uniform whose pleats seemed sharp as pairing knives. Dunne opened a dessert service drawer and then a drawer with torn coupons and hand tools and batteries in it. Dunne stared at the hand tools for a good while before closing the drawer again. At last he went to the stovetop and held his cigarette inside the puttering ring of green and blue flame. He turned off the gas flame and took a hard drag on the cigarette as he looked at the fresh pumpkin-orange paint on the kitchen walls. Chatter was loud on the radio handpack attached to his belt so he turned it down. He exhaled gray tobacco smoke. She’d put wineglasses in the kitchen sink, the four rims all stained with pink lipsticks.

She finished her shower and hurried in, holding shut a white terry-cloth robe as she considered the policeman. Her blond hair was wetly brown and the tracks of the comb were still in it. She seemed surprised to see him there, though she’d heard his voice and invited him inside when he called to her from the kitchen porch. “Took a while,” she said.

“Wasn’t an emergency, just a burglary. You weren’t in danger, were you?”

“Skip it,” she said. She tilted away from his too-interested attention and sat down on a kitchen chair.

“Just tell me how it happened,” the police sergeant said.

Linda sighed. “Like I told the flake on the theft detail, I was just coming back from the grocery store. I parked the car in the alley and carried the stuff up the back porch steps and inside and he must have followed me.”

“Was the door unlocked?”

“Sure. I mean, I unlocked it. With my house keys.”

“You have them?”

She tried to remember what she’d done with them and then turned to check the ajar kitchen door. She stood up and frantically peered at the kitchen table, the white pantry countertop, and the child’s kneehole desk that she usually put her mail on.

“Are the house keys gone, too?”

She looked at him with panic.

“You opened the door with your house keys,” the police sergeant said. “Your hands were full. You may have left the house keys in the door and carried the groceries inside.”

“Yes; I suppose so.” She gazed at the door. “That’s really terrifying.”

“You could change the locks again,” Dunne said. He tapped the jagged ash from his cigarette into his palm, then carried the ash to a wrinkled grocery sack on the floor.

She asked him, “Aren’t you supposed to be writing this down?”

“Sergeants get rookies to do their paperwork, that’s one of the good parts of the job.”
“Congratulations,” she said.

“About time,” Dunne said, and looked at the furniture in the front room and hallway, then leaned against the kitchen doorway and crossed his forearms and ankles. “What else?”

A flock of sparrows flashed up in the yard and she followed their flight until they completely disappeared in the east. She said, “You’d think you’d have a feeling that an unfamiliar person was in the house with you, but I didn’t. Everything seemed so normal until I heard the spring on the back door.”

Dunne walked over and pushed open the screen door to hear the noise. The iron spring was orange with rust and rang slightly as it dragged against the wood.

“Like that, but not so much,” Linda said.

“You could hardly hear it.”

“Right.”

“You looked behind you, though.”

“And nobody was there,” Linda said.

“And?”

“And I put away the groceries. Wind, I thought.”

“You heard the door. Was that him sneaking in or him sneaking out?”

“I have no way of knowing.”

“When did you notice your purse had been stolen?”

“Exactly?”

“You reported a theft at a quarter past three.”

“Well, I suppose I hunted around for fifteen minutes or so before I was positive that I hadn’t simply mislaid it.”

“Any idea of the contents?”

“My checkbook. Wallet and credit cards. Lipstick. Kleenex. Hand cream. Junk mostly, except for the wallet. And there was just a few dollars in that.”

The policeman took his cigarette to the kitchen faucet and killed it with a jolt of water. “Was it expensive, that purse?”

She perused him and said, “Extremely.”

“Was my picture still in it?”

She shook her head.

Dunne peered out through the four-paned window just above the kitchen sink. A fat, aproned woman was kneeling in her garden next door and putting flower bulbs with a trowel. She sat back on her haunches and shaded her face from the sunshine. “I’m trying to imagine how you must have felt,” Dunne said. “You must have felt like there was a ghost in the house. Haunting you. Watching every move you made. Stealing your purse and your keys. And you didn’t even know it.”
“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” Linda asked, but from the hard intensity of his frown she could tell he was not.

A half minute of silence passed between them, and he said, “You’ve painted.”

“Yes.”

“Looks nice.”

“And then the rent went up.”

“Much?”

“Fifty bucks.”

“Still a good deal,” he said.

Linda stood up and got a diet cola from the Hotpoint refrigerator. She snapped it open and sipped from it. She asked, “Was it a coincidence that you came?”

“I heard the address on the radio.”

“And you decided to give it your personal attention.”

He turned up his handpack and heard a rookie patrolman reading information from motor vehicle registration papers, and then he lowered the volume again. “Shall I figure it for you?”

She sipped her cola, “You’re the cop.”

“You got a guy thinks you’re a hot stuff,” he said. “You knew him once maybe, but he isn’t getting anywhere with you now. Wants to, though. Would like to let you know he’s still around. Looking out for you. And then he sees you getting your groceries. Wonders about talking to you, but doesn’t. Hangs out, just waiting for you to get into your car. Still doesn’t make his move. And so he follows you here. You surprise him. You stun him, probably. Here he’s been on your tail for an hour and you haven’t seen a hint of him. And you’ve been the only thing beside himself that he’s looked at or thought about. So he steals your purse like a kid writes his name on the sidewalk, just to say he exists.”

“And he takes my house keys to tell me he’ll be back.”

She could have counted to one hundred in the silence, and then Dunne asked, “So how are things?”

“Getting better.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“You happy?”

“Up and down. You know.”

“Having fun?”

“Off and on.”

“Seeing anybody?”

She shrugged.
“Any chance?”

“Who knows,” Linda said.

“Okay,” he said. “Your purse is in the milkbox outside.” He put his hand in his pocket and took out her house keys and handed them to her. “You watch it,” he said.

And she said, “You.”
Ed pulled the RV off the road and parked it in a small paved lot, the front bumper kissing the concrete barrier, the large pale gray vehicle facing the sea, and Alice said, “Why are we stopping?”

The rain came in curtains off the Atlantic, one after the other, like the waves breaking against the sand, only slower, neither building nor diminishing. The couple watched the rain and the waves through the wide, flat windshield. There were no other vehicles in the lot and none in sight on the coastline road behind them. It was late fall, and the summer houses and rental cottages and motels were closed for the season.

“I don’t know why. I mean, I do know. Because of the dog.” He cracked open his window and relighted the cold stub of his cigar, and for a long while the couple sat in silence.

Finally she said, “So these are the famous Outer Banks of North Carolina.”

“Yeah. Sorry about the weather,” he said. “‘Graveyard of the Atlantic’, Alice.”

“Yes. I know.”

“Joke, Alice? Joke?”

She didn’t answer him. A moment passed, and he said, “We’ve got to do something about the dog. You know that.”

“What’ve you got in mind? Bury her in the sand? That’s a real cute idea, Ed. Bury her in the sand and drive on our merry way. Just like that.” She looked at her hands for a moment. “I don’t like thinking about it either, you know.”

He eased himself from the driver’s chair, stood uncertainly, and walked back through the living area and the tidy galley to the closet-sized bathroom, where he got down carefully on his knees and drew back the shower curtain and looked at the body of their dog. She was a black and white mixed breed, Lab and springer, lying on her side where Ed had found her this morning, when, naked, he’d gone to take a shower. He studied the dog’s stiffened muzzle.

“Poor bastard,” he said.

“Maybe we should try to find a vet!” she called from the front.

“She’s dead, Alice!” he hollered.

“They’ll know how to take care of her, I meant.”

Ed stood up. He was seventy-two; the simple things had gotten very difficult very quickly – standing up, sitting down, getting out of bed, driving for longer than four or five hours. When they left home barely a year ago, none of those things had been difficult for him. That was why he had done it, left home, why they both had done it, because, while nothing simple was especially difficult for them, they were old enough to know that whatever they did not do or see now they would never see or do at all.

It was Alice’s idea, too, not his alone – the romance of the open road, see America and die, master of your destiny, all that – although the actual plan had been his, to sell the house in Troy and all their furniture, buy and outfit the RV, map and follow the Interstate from upstate New York to Disney World to the Grand Canyon to Yosemite to the Black Hills, man, he’d
always wanted to see the Black Hills of South Dakota, and Mount Rushmore was even grander and more inspirational than he’d hoped, then on to Graceland, and now the Outer Banks. He hadn’t once missed the hardware store, and she hadn’t missed the bank. They’d looked forward to retirement, and once there, had liked it, as if it were a vacation spot and they’d decided to stay year-round. There were no children or grandchildren or other close family – they were free as birds. “Snowbirds,” they’d been called in Florida and out in Arizona. When they left home, their dog, Rosie, was already old, ten or eleven, he wasn’t sure, they’d got her from the pound, but, Jesus, he hadn’t figured on her dying like this. It was as if she had run out of air, out of life, like a watch that had stopped because someone forgot to wind it.

He dropped his cigar butt into the toilet, looked at it for a second and resisted flushing – she’d scowl when she saw it, he knew, because it was ugly, even he thought so, but he shouldn’t waste the water – and walked heavily back to the front and sat in the driver’s chair.

“Vets are for sick animals. Not dead animals,” he said to her.

“I suppose you want to leave her in a Dumpster or just drop her at the side of the road somewhere.”

“We should’ve found a home for Rosie. When we left Troy, I mean. Should’ve given her to some people or something, you know?” He looked at his wife, as if for a solution. She was crying, though. Silently, with tears streaming down her pale cheeks, she cried steadily, as if she had been crying for a long time and had no idea how to stop.

He put a hand on her shoulder. “Alice. Hey, c’mon, don’t cry. Jesus, it’s not the end of the world, Alice.”

She stopped and fumbled in the glove compartment for a tissue, found one and wiped her face. “I know. But what are we going to do?”

“About what?”

“Oh, Ed. About Rosie. This,” she said and waved a hand at the rain and the sea. “Everything.”

“It’s my fault,” he said. He stared at her profile, hoping she would turn to him and say no, it wasn’t his fault, it wasn’t anybody’s. But she didn’t turn to him; she said nothing.

Slowly, he rose from his seat again. He walked to the bathroom and pulled back the shower curtain. He kneeled down and gently lifted the dog in his arms, surprised that she was not heavier. Lying there she had seemed solid and heavy, as if carved of wood and painted, like an old, unused merry-go-round horse. He carried the dog to the side door of the RV and worked it open with his knee and stepped down to the pavement. The rain fell on him, and he was quickly drenched. He wore only a short-sleeved shirt and Bermuda shorts and sneakers, and all of a sudden he was cold. He carried the dog to the far corner of the parking lot, stepped over the barrier between the pavement and the beach, and walked with slow, careful steps through the wet sand toward the water. The rain blocked his vision and plastered white swatches of his hair to his skull and his thin clothes to his body.

Halfway between the parking lot and the water, he stopped and set the dog down. He was breathing rapidly from the effort. He wiped the rain from his eyes, got down on his hands and knees and started scooping sand. He pulled double handfuls of it away, worked down through the wet, gray sand to the dry sand beneath and kept digging, until finally he had carved a large hole. Still on his knees, he reached across the hole and drew the body of the dog into it. Her hair was wet and smelled the way it had when she was still alive. Then, slowly, carefully, he covered her.
When he was finished and there was a low mound where before there had been a hole, he turned around and looked back at the RV in the parking lot. He could see his wife staring out the windshield from the passenger's seat. He couldn’t tell if she was looking at him or at the sea or what. He turned his gaze toward the sea. The rain was still coming steadily in curtains, one after the other.

He stood and brushed the crumbs of wet sand from his clothes, bare legs and hands and made his way back to the parking lot. When he had settled himself into the driver's chair, he said to his wife, “That’s the end of it, I don’t want to hear any more about it. Okay?” He turned the ignition key and started the motor. The windshield wipers swept back and forth like wands.

“Okay,” she said.

He backed the RV around and headed toward the road. “You hungry?” he asked her.

She spoke slowly, as if to herself. “There’s supposed to be a good seafood place a few miles south of here. It’s toward Kitty Hawk. So that’s good.”

He put the RV into gear and pulled out of the lot onto the road south. “Fine,” he said. “Too bad we have to see Kitty Hawk in the rain, though. I was looking forward to seeing it. I mean, the Wright brothers and all.”

“I know you were,” she said.

The cumbersome vehicle splashed along the straight, two-lane highway, and no cars passed. Everyone else seemed to be inside today, staying home.

Ed said, “We could keep going, y’know. Head for Cape Canaveral, check out the Space Center and all.”

She said, “They shut the space program down, I thought.”

“I guess maybe they did.”
CAPTIVE
by Rose Tremain

Owen Gibb grew up on a hundred-acre farm in south Norfolk, with apple orchards and a pond for geese and ducks, and fields of lush grazing for a fine herd of Herefords. Wooden chicken houses, set out across a muddy rise, were shaded by ancient oaks. In the cool dairy, butter was churned.

When Owen’s parents died, he had to sell the farm. What remained to him, when all the tax and all the debts had been paid, was a small bungalow, once occupied by his grandmother, and a piece of land, half an acre long, leading down to a quiet road. The new owners of the farm rooted out the apple trees and turned the dairy into a holiday cottage.

Owen knew that it was important, with a legacy as meagre as this, to make an immediate plan for it. Delay would get him nowhere. He was fifty and alone. His only companions were his black Labrador dogs, Murphy and Tyrant, and it was they who inspired his plan.

He designed a set of Boarding Kennels. He’d heard you could make a good living out of people’s longing to be rid of their pets, in order to holiday in Spain or Florida – or just to be rid of them, full stop. For that was part of human nature: a longing to be rid of the things you’d thought you might be able to love, and found you couldn’t.

All Owen had to do was build the kennels with care, make them solid and comfortable, so that he could designate them “superior”. Long before the building work was complete, he’d chosen the wording for his sign: “Gibb’s Superior Dog-Homing Facility”.

He set the kennels in two rows, running down towards the road, with a green exercise space to the west of them. In each pen, he installed a shelter, made of wood planking and bedded with straw, which reminded him of the old hen houses. The open areas in front, where the dogs could walk round and round – as prisoners do in a yard – were fenced with sturdy chain-link. The flooring was concrete (the only practical solution) but underneath the concrete, Owen laid in a network of heating pipes that would run off the bungalow’s oil-fired boiler. “Your pet,” Owen heard himself announce to his future clients, “will never suffer from cold in this facility.”

He decided, too, that his kennels would be available to all-comers.

After failing to halt his plans at the local council office, the owners of the farm had tried to get him to promise that he wouldn’t take in dangerous dogs, but he’d refused. He knew that housing Staffordshire pit-bulls, Dobermans or Rottweilers would put up his Public Liability Insurance premiums. But Owen Gibb was a man who felt some affection for all animals. It didn’t trouble him that some of them possessed a harsh kind of nature. He thought he could have grown accustomed to wolves, or even jackals – provided only that there wasn’t a whole pack of them: too many to love.

Word circulated quickly around the local area: “Gibb’s Superior” was the best and most economical place to board your dog. The food and shelter were good, with the heated floors providing reassurance in winter. The animals got proper exercise twice a week – in rotation according to their breed, size and sex. And, most important of all, if you stayed away longer than you’d agreed, Owen would always “sort something out”.

Soon, Owen’s booking ledger was so crammed that he began to consider nibbling some land from the exercise space, in order to extend the kennels beyond the thirty places provided at
present. It troubled him to turn an animal away, as though this act of his would condemn it
to unacceptable suffering, or even death. Because people were hard-hearted: this he knew. If
a pet stood between them and their restless desires, they weren’t ashamed to have it put down,
or turn it out into some wasteland, far from home, to “fend for itself” – whatever they thought
that might mean.

Owen drew up plans for ten more units. He hired a plumber to find a way of running a spur
off the underfloor heating grid and ordered a second oil tank.

Work was almost ready to begin when, on the first day of a new year – the kennels full to
capacity with assorted boarders – a front of arctic weather drove south from Scandinavia and
settled over East Anglia.

Snow fell and rested on the frozen earth and piled up on the wooden roofs of the shelters.
Owen stood at his front window, watching.

The dogs came out of the shelters and smelled the frosty air and raised their heads into the
whirl of snowflakes, trying to bite them as they fell. Though the blizzard was obliterating the
path to the road, Owen was exhilarated to see that where it fell on to the concrete pens, it
quickly melted. The heating pipes were doing their job.

Owen knew the dogs would still be cold in these conditions – especially the two pit-bulls he’d
boarded since Christmas, whose smooth skin appeared almost as vulnerable to Owen as the
skin of a man’s body – but they’d survive. He’d increase their food ration, shred newspapers
to add to the straw, put coats on the pit-bulls and on the overweight little Dachshund bitch
called Cherry.

It snowed all day, pausing at night to uncover stars and a deep frost, and began snowing
again the following morning. It felt, to Owen, as he worked on the paper-shredding, as
though the fat snow would never stop, but keep falling and falling into the heart of the year’s
beginning, blocking any artery that led to spring. But he and the dogs would endure it
together, as the Herefords had endured it through his childhood, as the old apple trees had
endured it, motionless in the wind, under their white burden.

Two days later, Owen was woken at seven, in darkness, by the sound of the dogs howling.

His bedroom was icy. He drew back the curtains and saw snow piled a foot high on the outer
sill. He fumbled for the warmth of the radiator under the window, but it was cold.

Owen tugged on a fisherman’s sweater, cords and worn slippers and padded to the kitchen,
where he knew what he would find: the boiler was out.

The boiler was old, difficult to light. Owen knelt down and took the housing off the ignition
box, smelling oil, surprised at how quickly the appliance, which had been burning strongly
at midnight, had cooled.

His hands were shaking. The sound of the dogs’ howling choked him. Murphy and Tyrant,
their tails optimistically wagging, crowded round Owen’s crouching figure, and he didn’t
push them away, but kept them near to him for comfort.

He tried to think clearly. He spoke aloud to the Labradors: “Useless to try to re-light the boiler
if snow’s piled up on the chimney stack, eh, lads?” he said. Murphy licked Owen’s face.
Tyrant’s tail beat against the boiler-housing. “Boiler’ll cut out straight off if there’s anything
blocking the outflow. So, what’s to do, next, Murph? Tyrant? Get a ladder, I guess, and clear
the stack. Right? Then come back in and try the old re-lighting procedure. Pray it works.”
Owen tugged on heavy socks and boots and his warmest farm coat and opened the back door and Murphy and Tyrant went out to do their business, jumping through the snow to reach a favourite spot.

But Owen stood motionless on the threshold of the door. Hoisting a ladder, clearing snow from the stack: these tasks didn’t trouble him. What he dreaded was the sight that awaited him at the kennels. He sniffed the outside air and could guess at a temperature of minus 5 or 6 degrees. Animals without fur succumbed quickly to hypothermia in cold of this intensity. They were howling now, but unless he got the boiler going, they would soon enough fall silent.

He’s out in it now. He keeps looking back at his footprints in the snow, leading away from the oil tank, finding it hard to believe what he’s just seen.

He carries a bucket of high-protein food. He stands by the pens. Some of the dogs come out from the shelters and try to push through the deep snow towards him. He throws bits of food through the wire. There is no sign of the pit-bulls.

He longs for someone to help him. He thinks wistfully of the days when his parents were alive, companionable voices to console and advise. Because he’s trapped. In the night – the coldest night of this winter – somebody came and committed a crime against him. He keeps vainly hoping that he’s imagined it, but he knows he hasn’t. Silently in the snow, these criminal people unlocked his oil tank and siphoned out every last drop of oil. Every drop.

He believes these criminals are his neighbours, the family who walk the loved land where he grew up, but who detest him and his dogs and want to bring all his endeavours to nothing. He can’t be sure it was them, of course, and he believes that he will probably never get to the bottom of a thing so steeped in hate, but suspicion will linger. The very people who own what should have been his are intent upon his ruin.

He must defy them.

He’s called all the oil-delivery merchants he can find in the phone book. Most – because it’s the week of the New Year – aren’t answering; those that answer say demand for heating oil is so heavy they won’t be able to get to him for another nine or ten days.

Owen walks on slowly down the line of kennels. One of the pit-bulls lies dead with his jaw clamped round the chain-link gate, as though trying to bite his way out. The Dachshund, Cherry, is a lifeless, snow-covered mound. Owen shivers as he stares at the fat little corpse. From the bungalow comes the sound of his landline ringing: dog-owners calling from ice-bound stations or airports, asking him to keep the dogs until the thaw comes.

There will be no thaw. This is how it feels to Owen. He and the animals are imprisoned for all time in a frozen world.

He tries to master his shivering and to think clearly. He knows that he has no choice. He will have to bring the dogs inside the bungalow. Twenty-eight dogs.

He’ll try to separate them, as he does for their exercise routine, so that they don’t constantly mate and fight with each other. But still, their animal natures, confined, confused, will create turmoil around him. Their barking and howling and rampaging will fill his every waking hour and make sleep impossible. Murphy and Tyrant will cower in corners, hide in cupboards, their familiar territory usurped by strangers. And everything that Owen possesses will be torn and stained and brought to desolation.
But there’s no other way to save the dogs. No other way. He feels paralysed, as though he’s suddenly become ill or old.

He turns away from the kennels and walks towards the house. The howling and whimpering of the dogs resume as they watch him leave.

But he needs a moment of respite. He remembers that he still has electricity. He’s going to make himself a cup of tea, something to warm him, at least, before he faces all that he has to face in the coming day.

He fills the electric kettle. He stands waiting for the homely sound of its boiling to mask the noises outside, which now come to him as though from a far-away country, a barbaric place, where there is no order or kindness, the sort of place he’d hoped never to inhabit.
I heard a romantic story. It was while I was waiting to kill a guy. And not just a guy, by the way. They were calling this guy a prince, and I guess he was. A lot of those guys over there are princes. Not just one or two a country. Families have princes. All kinds of families. They have princes of their own. There are hundreds of them. They have so many that some are twenty-five-year-old assholes. That kind of prince. And he was the target. This young asshole. He was going to show up in a large Mercedes sedan. He was going to get out of the backseat and walk about ten steps to the porch of the house. The porch was supposed to be like they have at a Marriott hotel, but smaller. Where you get out of the shuttle bus. Only they made it too small for cars. I guess it was supposed to keep the sun off people. Maybe animals. Because, by the way, this was India. It was the middle of the day and everything was scorching hot and too bright to look at. But this guy was going to walk to this porch. And the porch was kind of walled in partly. And as soon as I was sure he was moving at a consistent pace, I had to time it right so that I actually pushed the button first, and then he walked to the walled part of the porch second, and of course the wall was where the bomb was. So it was just a button job. Easy enough for one guy to do. Except of course, they sent two guys. But then, they always do. No guy is ever alone. You go to the movies and you see the guy all on his own? Obviously he is not all on his own, because there’s a cameraman right in his face. Otherwise you wouldn’t be seeing him. There would be no movie. That’s a minimum of two guys right there. And that’s how it was for us. Two guys. If I was a sniper, you’d have to call this other guy the spotter. Except I wasn’t a sniper. This was a button job. I didn’t need a spotter. But he was there. Probably a CIA guy. He was talking to me. It was like he had to validate the hit and give his permission. Maybe they didn’t want any radio snafus. So they put the guy right next to me. Right in my ear. And presumably he knows this Mercedes sedan is some distance away, and therefore some time away, and therefore his validation was not going to be required until some future period. And we could see the road, anyway. Certainly we could see the last hundred yards of it. After the turn. And we’d have seen dust clouds miles away. And we weren’t seeing any, which gave this guy time to talk. And he talked about how we’d gotten as far as we had, with this prince. He laid the whole thing out. He told me how it was done, basically. Which was not complicated, by the way. It was just a number of fairly simple things. They all had to work together, and we’d get a positive result. And obviously one of the strands was the old thing with the girl, and that part was working fine. Which is what this other guy was telling me. Because he seemed to be in charge of the whole girl part of the program. He was the chief. He sent the girl. Which was obviously a matter of selection. It’s about judging the task and sending the right girl. Which this guy did. I don’t think there was a lack of self-confidence in his choice. The problem was the best girl for the job in his professional judgment was also the same girl he was in love with, which obviously placed him in a predicament. He had to send the girl he loved into battle. And not battle with guns and bombs. The weapons his girlfriend was going to use were considerably more personal. It was that sort of game. And the guy knew it, obviously. He was the chief. I’m not saying he invented it, by the way. I’m saying he was currently the world’s leading exponent. He was the big dog. It’s not a question of second-guessing the guy. He did the right thing. He was a professional. He put his country first. The girl went. And did a fine job obviously. Within two weeks the guy was heading to this house in his Mercedes. That’s diligence, right there. Two weeks is a pretty short time. To get a positive result in two weeks is extraordinary. Positive in the sense that I still had to push the button. I was a strand, too. I was the final strand. All I had to do was pull the button. If the guy showed up. Which he did, because of
this other guy’s girlfriend. She must have done all sorts of things. The guy knew that. This what these girls do. But he’s kind of denying it. That’s what he’s saying to me. He’s making it different for her. Maybe she didn’t do all these things. Or maybe she did. The guy didn’t make it entirely clear to me. But if she did, it was because she was doing it for the mission, of which he was the chief. She knew he knew it was mission critical. So she did it. She delivered the guy, and I’m waiting to push my button, which is on a cell phone, by the way. Cell phones are what we use now. They built a whole network just for us to blow things up. Private capital. Providers who take complaints. With radios you couldn’t complain. If something went wrong you shrugged your shoulders and you tried again the next day. But if some guy gets his call dropped, he complains. He complains real loud. Maybe it was some big deal he was doing. So the cell companies keep things working. The only drawback being the time lag. You dial a call, it’s a long time before it rings. There are all kinds of towers and computers in the way. All kind of technical management. The delay can be eight whole seconds, which was why it was all about timing. I had to judge his pace so I could push the button eight whole seconds before he got where he was going. After he arrived in the car. Which wasn’t happening yet, which gave the guy time to talk, which he did, mostly about this girl. She was living with him. Obviously not for the two weeks she was with the prince, which was the point of the whole conversation, which was actually a monologue on his part in that he was attempting to convince me he was okay with it. And that she was okay with him being okay with it. It was a minefield. But allegedly both of them were okay with it. This is what the guy was trying to persuade me about. While we waited. Which turned out to be for an hour, by the way. For one hour. We were in position one hour early. Which proves the guy planned to use the time talking, because he was the one who drew up the schedule and he was the one who was doing the talking. About this girl. This girl was an angel. Which I was prepared to believe. This was a hard guy to tolerate. But he told me all the stuff they did together and I couldn’t help but believe they had several happy years behind them. They weren’t doing new-relationship stuff anymore, but they weren’t doing old-relationship stuff yet, either. They were doing normal things, happy, maybe a little experimental, same as some people do for a long time. I was convinced. It was a convincing description. At the time I was sure it was true. Which it was, obviously. Eventually a lot of people saw it for themselves. But it was possible to see it way back. I believed the guy. He sent the girl to the prince. They’ve both had a great time the weekend before. They’re cool with it. He’s okay with it, and she’s okay with everything. So they do it. Monday morning, off she goes. And that should be it. He’s the chief, she’s a girl in the field, there should be no contact between them. None at all. Organizationally she’s lost to him now. She’s gone. She might not be coming back. Because some of them don’t. There have been fatalities. Hence the protocols. No personal involvement. Which they’ve been faking so far, but now they’re going to have to do it for real. Except they don’t. They sneak visits. Which is a huge off-the-charts no-no professionally. It’s going to screw everything up forever. It’s a double whammy. She’s no longer deniable, and his cover is blown. But they did it. And not just once. They met five times. In two weeks. Five out of fourteen. That’s a pretty decent fraction. Not far from one half. Which is a long time to be away. Her performance was miraculous. She got the got the job done in two weeks, half of which was spent back with her original boyfriend. Who was telling me all about these visits. Which was another breach of discipline right there. I mean, what was I? He should have asked for ID. But he didn’t, which means he thought I was just some dumb guy who didn’t matter. Which was ironic, because I was just the same as him. In fact I was exactly the same as him. I was a government operator, too. His equal in every way. Except I didn’t have a girl. He was the one with the girl. And he was visiting her. The first time she was fine. She’d only just met the prince. They were still in the formal stages. The second time, not so much. They’d moved beyond the formal stages. Twenty-four lousy hours, and the prince was already doing stuff. That was totally clear. But we are talking national security here. The best kind. You
blow someone up in India, you save a lot of problems later. Maybe you save the world. Obviously people like this guy and his girl have to believe the stuff. Or maybe they already believe this stuff before they join. Maybe that’s why they seek out those jobs. Because they believe certain things. They believe there is something bigger than themselves. That’s why the girl goes back to the prince, even after that second visit. We can guess what she’s doing, because she’s in a bad state when the third visit rolls around. The prince is not hitting her. This is not a physical problem. The prince might not be doing anything at all. He could be totally naïve and inexperienced. He could be undemanding. There was a range of possibilities, as were. She had to smile and curtsey like she was the happiest girl in the world.

Which is a strain, psychologically. She was not having a good time. But she went back. She was determined to complete the mission. That’s the kind of person she was. Which put the chief in a permanent circular argument, of course. He couldn’t stop the girl he loved because if he could he wouldn’t have loved her. She would have insisted she go. He would have insisted she go. National security is a very important thing. These people believe that. They have to. So she went. And she kept on going back. She seemed stronger at the fourth visit. Better still at the fifth. She was in control now. She was doing it. She was like a boxer who just won the belt. Sure he hurts, but not much. She was like that. She was going to deliver him. She was the undisputed champion of the world. She was nearly done. She was coming home. Except maybe that boxer’s hurting worse than he lets on. Maybe she was. Maybe she’s tired, but she’s close. So she fakes it with you. She’s okay to go back. So she goes back. But part of faking was exaggerating. She’s going to deliver him, but it’s not going to be easy. Not like she’s making out. She’s going to have to offer incentives. Which she hasn’t mentioned to you. Because she’s exaggerating. She’s telling you it’s better than it is. She’s in control but not all the way. And she conceals it, so you don’t know. And then you see the dust cloud miles away, and you wait, and then the Mercedes comes around the turn, the last hundred yards; it’s an expensive car, but dusty, and it parks right where it should and the guy gets out of the backseat. And like a prick he leaves the door wide open behind him and just walks away, like he’s the king of the world, and I’m already timing him. He’s doing that kind of fit-guy hustle, which is actually slower than it looks, but I’m on it and I know exactly when I’m going to push the button. Then the girl bounds out of the car behind him, like she had dropped her pocketbook or something and was delayed for a moment, which is exactly what I think she did, because she’s doing a kind of apologetic thing with the body language, a kind of I’m-an-idiot look, and then she catches up to the prince and she takes his arm in a kind of affectionate way. Almost an excited way, to be truthful, and you realize she got him there by promising him something special. In one of the rooms, perhaps. Maybe something he’s never done before. They’re giggling like schoolkids. They are bounding ahead. They’re right there at the point where you have to hit the button. And by now the validation process is seriously screwed up. We’re just babbling to each other. But we know one thing. National security is very important. It’s bigger than either of us. We believe that stuff. I have to. So I hit the button.

My timing was good. No reason why it wouldn’t be. I had no lack of self-confidence in my estimate of speed and direction. Eight seconds. They were perfectly level with the wall when it went up. Both of them. And that was the end of the romantic story.
THE NEW YORK TIMES AT SPECIAL BARGAIN RATES

by Stephen King

She’s fresh out of the shower when the phone begins to ring, but although the house is still full of relatives—she can hear them downstairs, it seems they will never go away, it seems she never had so many—no one picks up. Nor does the answering machine, as James programmed it to do after the fifth ring.

Anne goes to the extension on the bed-table, wrapping a towel around her, her wet hair thwacking unpleasantly on the back of her neck and bare shoulders. She picks it up, she says hello, and then he says her name. It’s James. They had thirty years together, and one word is all she needs. He says Annie like no one else, always did.

For a moment she can’t speak or even breathe. He has caught her on the exhale and her lungs feel as flat as sheets of paper. Then, as he says her name again (sounding uncharacteristically hesitant and unsure of himself), the strength slips from her legs.

They turn to sand and she sits on the bed, the towel falling off her, her wet bottom dampening the sheet beneath her. If the bed hadn’t been there, she would have gone to the floor.

Her teeth click together and that starts her breathing again.

“James? Where are you? What happened?” In her normal voice, this might have come out sounding shrewish—a mother scolding her wayward eleven-year-old who’s come late to the supper-table yet again—but now it emerges in a kind of horrified growl. The murmuring relatives below her are, after all, planning his funeral.

James chuckles. It is a bewildered sound. “Well, I tell you what,” he says. “I don’t exactly know where I am.”

Her first confused thought is that he must have missed the plane in London, even though he called her from Heathrow not long before it took off. Then a clearer idea comes: although both the Times and the TV news say there were no survivors, there was at least one. Her husband crawled from the wreckage of the burning plane (and the burning apartment building the plane hit, don’t forget that, twenty-four more dead on the ground and the number apt to rise before the world moved on to the next tragedy) and has been wandering around Brooklyn ever since, in a state of shock.

“Jimmy, are you all right? Are you…are you burned?” The truth of what that would mean occurs after the question, thumping down with the heavy weight of a dropped book on a bare foot, and she begins to cry. “Are you in the hospital?”

“Hush,” he says, and at his old kindness—and at that old word, just one small piece of their marriage’s furniture—she begins to cry harder. “Honey, hush.”

“But I don’t understand!”

“I’m all right,” he says. “Most of us are.”

“Most—? There are others?”

“Not the pilot,” he says. “He’s not so good. Or maybe it’s the co-pilot. He keeps screaming. ‘We’re going down, there’s no power, oh my God.’ Also ‘This isn’t my fault, don’t let them blame it on me.’ He says that, too.”
She’s cold all over. “Who is this really? Why are you being so horrible? I just lost my husband, you asshole!”

“Honey—”

“Don’t call me that!” There’s a clear strand of mucus hanging from one of her nostrils.

She wipes it away with the back of her hand and then flings it into the wherever, a thing she hasn’t done since she was a child. “Listen, mister—I’m going to star-sixtynine this call and the police will come and slam your ass…your ignorant, unfeeling ass…”

But she can go no farther. It’s his voice. There’s no denying it. The way the call rang right through—no pickup downstairs, no answering machine—suggests this call was just for her.

And…honey, hush. Like in the old Carl Perkins song.

He has remained quiet, as if letting her work these things through for herself. But before she can speak again, there’s a beep on the line.

“James? Jimmy? Are you still there?”

“Yeah, but I can’t talk long. I was trying to call you when we went down, and I guess that’s the only reason I was able to get through at all. Lots of others have been trying, we’re lousy with cell phones, but no luck.” That beep again. “Only now my phone’s almost out of juice.”

“Jimmy, did you know?” This idea has been the hardest and most terrible part for her—that he might have known, if only for an endless minute or two. Others might picture burned bodies or dismembered heads with grinning teeth; even light-fingered first responders filching wedding rings and diamond ear-clips, but what has robbed Annie Driscoll’s sleep is the image of Jimmy looking out his window as the streets and cars and the brown apartment buildings of Brooklyn swell closer. The useless masks flopping down like the corpses of small yellow animals. The overhead bins popping open, carry-ons starting to fly, someone’s Norelco razor rolling up the tilted aisle.

“Did you know you were going down?”

“Not really,” he says. “Everything seemed all right until the very end—maybe the last thirty seconds. Although it’s hard to keep track of time in situations like that, I always think.”

Situations like that. And even more telling: I always think. As if he has been aboard half a dozen crashing 767s instead of just the one.

“In any case,” he goes on, “I was just calling to say we’d be early, so be sure to get the FedEx man out of bed before I got there.”

Her absurd attraction for the FedEx man has been a joke between them for years. She begins to cry again. His cell utters another of those beeps, as if scolding her for it.

“I think I died just a second or two before it rang the first time. I think that’s why I was able to get through to you. But this thing’s gonna give up the ghost pretty soon.”

He chuckles as if this is funny. She supposes that in a way it is. She may see the humor in it herself, eventually. Give me ten years or so, she thinks.

Then, in that just-talking-to-myself voice she knows so well: “Why didn’t I put the tiresome motherfucker on charge last night? Just forgot, that’s all. Just forgot.”

“James…honey…the plane crashed two days ago.”
A pause. Mercifully with no beep to fill it. Then: “Really? Mrs. Corey said time was funny here. Some of us agreed, some of us disagreed. I was a disagreer, but looks like she was right.”

“Hearts?” Annie asks. She feels now as if she is floating outside and slightly above her plump damp middle-aged body, but she hasn’t forgotten Jimmy’s old habits. On a long flight he was always looking for a game. Cribbage or canasta would do, but hearts was his true love.

“Hearts,” he agrees. The phone beeps again, as if seconding that.

“Jimmy…” She hesitates long enough to ask herself if this is information she really wants, then plunges with that question still unanswered. “Where are you, exactly?”

“Looks like Grand Central Station,” he says. “Only bigger. And emptier. As if it wasn’t really Grand Central at all but only…mmm…a movie-set of Grand Central.

Do you know what I’m trying to say?”

“I…I think so…”

“There certainly aren’t any trains…and we can’t hear any in the distance…but there are doors going everywhere. Oh, and there’s an escalator, but it’s broken. All dusty, and some of the treads are broken.” He pauses, and when he speaks again he does so in a lower voice, as if afraid of being overheard. “People are leaving. Some climbed the escalator—I saw them—but most are using the doors. I guess I’ll have to leave, too. For one thing, there’s nothing to eat. There’s a candy machine, but that’s broken, too.”

“Are you…honey, are you hungry?”

“A little. Mostly what I’d like is some water. I’d kill for a cold bottle of Dasani.”

“I’m all right, though,” he adds hastily. “For now, anyway. But there’s no sense staying here. Only…”

“What? What, Jimmy?”

“I don’t know which door to use.”

Another beep.

“I wish I knew which one Mrs. Corey took. She’s got my damn cards.”

“Are you…” She wipes her face with the towel she wore out of the shower; then she was fresh, now she’s all tears and snot. “Are you scared?”

“Scared?” he asks thoughtfully. “No. A little worried, that’s all. Mostly about which door to use.”

Find your way home, she almost says. Find the right door and find your way home.

But if he did, would she want to see him? A ghost might be all right, but what if she opened the door on a smoking cinder with red eyes and the remains of jeans (he always traveled in jeans) melted into his legs? And what if Mrs. Corey was with him, his baked deck of cards in one twisted hand?

Beep.

“I don’t need to tell you to be careful about the FedEx man anymore,” he says. “If you really want him, he’s all yours.”
She shocks herself by laughing.

“But I did want to say I love you—”

“Oh honey I love you t—”

“—and not to let the McCormack kid do the gutters this fall, he works hard but he’s a risk-taker, last year he almost broke his fucking neck. And don’t go to the bakery anymore on Sundays. Something’s going to happen there, and I know it’s going to be on a Sunday, but I don’t know which Sunday. Time really is funny here.”

The McCormack kid he’s talking about must be the son of the guy who used to be their caretaker in Vermont…only they sold that place ten years ago, and the kid must be in his mid-twenties by now. And the bakery? She supposes he’s talking about Zoltan’s, but what on earth—

Beep.

“Some of the people here were on the ground, I guess. That’s very tough, because they don’t have a clue how they got here. And the pilot keeps screaming. Or maybe it’s the co-pilot. I think he’s going to be here for quite awhile. He just wanders around. He’s very confused.”

The beeps are coming closer together now.

“I have to go, Annie. I can’t stay here, and the phone’s going to shit the bed any second now, anyway.” Once more in that I’m-scolding-myself voice (impossible to believe she will never hear it again after today; impossible not to believe) he mutters,

“It would have been so simple just to…well, never mind. I love you, sweetheart.”

“Wait! Don’t go!”

“I c—”

“I love you, too! Don’t go!”

But he already has. In her ear there is only black silence.

She sits there with the dead phone to her ear for a minute or more, then breaks the connection. The non-connection. When she opens the line again and gets a perfectly normal dial tone, she touches star-sixty-nine after all. According to the robot who answers her page, the last incoming call was at nine o’clock that morning. She knows who that one was: her sister Nell, calling from New Mexico. Nell called to tell Annie that her plane had been delayed and she wouldn’t be in until tonight. Nell told her to be strong.

All the relatives who live at a distance—James’s, Annie’s—flew in. Apparently they feel that James used up all the family’s Destruction Points, at least for the time being.

There is no record of an incoming call at—she glances at the bedside clock and sees it’s now 3:17 P.M.—at about ten past three, on the third afternoon of her widowhood.

Someone raps briefly on the door and her brother calls, “Anne? Annie?”

“Dressing!” she calls back. Her voice sounds like she’s been crying, but unfortunately, no one in this house would find that strange. “Privacy, please!”

“You okay?” he calls through the door. “We thought we heard you talking. And Ellie thought she heard you call out.”
“Fine!” she calls, then wipes her face again with the towel. “Down in a few!”

“Okay. Take your time.” Pause. “We’re here for you.” Then he clumps away.

“Beep,” she whispers, then covers her mouth to hold in laughter that is some emotion even more complicated than grief finding the only way out it has. “Beep, beep. Beep, beep, beep.”

She lies back on the bed, laughing, and above her cupped hands her eyes are large and awash with tears that overspill down her cheeks and run all the way to her ears. “Beep-fucking-beepity-beep.”

She laughs for quite awhile, then dresses and goes downstairs to be with her relatives, who have come to share their grief with hers. Only they feel apart from her, because he didn’t call any of them. He called her. For better or worse, he called her.

During the autumn of that year, with the blackened remains of the apartment building the jet crashed into still closed off from the rest of the world by yellow police tape (although the taggers have been inside, one leaving a spray-painted message reading CRISPY CRITTERS STOP HERE), Annie receives the sort of e-blast computeraddicts like to send to a wide circle of acquaintances. This one comes from Gert Fisher, the town librarian in Tilton, Vermont.

When Annie and James summered there, Annie used to volunteer at the library, and although the two women never got on especially well, Gert has included Annie in her quarterly updates ever since. They are usually not very interesting, but halfway through the weddings, funerals, and 4-H winners in this one, Annie comes across a bit of news that makes her catch her breath.

Jason McCormack, the son of old Hughie McCormack, was killed in an accident on Labor Day. He fell from the roof of a summer cottage while cleaning the gutters and broke his neck.

“He was only doing a favor for his dad, who as you may remember had a stroke the year before last,” Gert wrote before going on to how it rained on the library’s end-of summer lawn sale, and how disappointed they all were.

Gert doesn’t say in her three-page compendium of breaking news, but Annie is quite sure Jason fell from the roof of what used to be their cottage. In fact, she is positive.

Five years after the death of her husband (and the death of Jason McCormack not long after), Annie remarries. And although they relocate to Boca Raton, she gets back to the old neighborhood often. Craig, the new husband, is only semi-retired, and his business takes him to New York every three or four months. Annie almost always goes with him, because she still has family in Brooklyn and on Long Island. More than she knows what to do with, it sometimes seems. But she loves them with that exasperated affection that seems to belong, she thinks, only to people in their fifties and sixties. She never forgets how they drew together for her after James’s plane went down, and made the best cushion for her that they could. So she wouldn’t crash, too.

When she and Craig go back to New York, they fly. About this she never has a qualm, but she stops going to Zoltan’s Family Bakery on Sundays when she’s home, even though their raisin bagels are, she is sure, served in heaven’s waiting room. She goes to Froger’s instead.

She is actually there, buying doughnuts (the doughnuts are at least passable), when she hears the blast. She hears it clearly even though Zoltan’s is eleven blocks away. LP gas explosion. Four killed, including the woman who always passed Annie her bagels with the top of the bag rolled down, saying, “Keep it that way until you get home or you lose the freshness.”

People stand on the sidewalks, looking east toward the sound of the explosion and the rising smoke, shading their eyes with their hands. Annie hurries past them, not looking. She doesn’t
want to see a plume of rising smoke after a big bang; she thinks of James enough as it is, especially on the nights when she can’t sleep. When she gets home she can hear the phone ringing inside. Either everyone has gone down the block to where the local school is having a sidewalk art sale, or no one can hear that ringing phone. Except for her, that is. And by the time she gets her key turned in the lock, the ringing has stopped.

Sarah, the only one of her sisters who never married, is there, it turns out, but there is no need to ask her why she didn’t answer the phone; Sarah Bernicke, the one-time disco queen, is in the kitchen with the Village People turned up, dancing around with the O-Cedar in one hand, looking like a chick in a TV ad. She missed the bakery explosion, too, although their building is even closer to Zoltan’s than Froger’s.

Annie checks the answering machine, but there’s a big red zero in the MESSAGES WAITING window. That means nothing in itself, lots of people call without leaving a message, but—

Star-sixty-nine reports the last call at eight-forty last night. Annie dials it anyway, hoping against hope that somewhere outside the big room that looks like a Grand Central Station movie-set he found a place to re-charge his phone. To him it might seem he last spoke to her yesterday. Or only minutes ago. Time is funny here, he said.

She has dreamed of that call so many times it now almost seems like a dream itself, but she has never told anyone about it. Not Craig, not even her own mother, now almost ninety but alert and with a firmly held belief in the afterlife.

In the kitchen, the Village People advise that there is no need to feel down. There isn’t, and she doesn’t. She nevertheless holds the phone very tightly as the number she has star-sixty-nined rings once, then twice. Annie stands in the living room with the phone to her ear and her free hand touching the brooch above her left breast, as if touching the brooch could still the pounding heart beneath it. Then the ringing stops and a recorded voice offers to sell her the New York Times at special bargain rates that will not be repeated.
He likes the dark and the solitude.

The glow of the screen and a few LEDs are enough to mark his passing, and besides, he could do the work blindfold. He has been working here fifteen years, ever since he could patch a cable, and now he knows every inch of the place, every file in the archives. This man has nursed the studio from analogue to digital. He is far more than an engineer, far more than a sound technician. To all intents and purposes, the man is Phantom Radio. He knows every secret, hears every word spoken on or off the airwaves.

Every piece of equipment here has passed between his fingers.

But to most of the day people, he is just the man who keeps the machine alive. Some know his voice from the sound box; few have ever seen his face. At night, there’s even less chance of that; the station runs on a skeleton staff, and the late shows are merely recordings, broadcast to give the illusion of life while the day people sleep at home in their beds and he can have the place to himself.

This is when he is happiest. When he can be completely alone. In the lobby, there’s just one security guard; but he never pays attention to him, and from midnight to five in the morning, Phantom Radio whispers and hums with the seashell voices of ghosts, speaking from headphones in the dark, sending their message of fake goodwill to the sleepless and the desperate.

One such sleepless listener is sitting at her computer right now. She calls herself Lady of Shalott; her real name is much more prosaic.

She too is nocturnal – perhaps by choice – and she likes to hear the radio – the cheery, familiar voices, the music, the songs – as they clatter and chatter and chime against the giant screen of night.

It’s true that things sound different at night. Even silence has a different tone; a resonance unheard by day.

Her fingers on the pad beside her move with amazing precision, summoning sounds and images. Her face – almost close enough for her forehead to touch the screen – is bathed in a subaquatic glow.

She is beautiful – though she does not know it; with the pallor of one who barely goes out by day; eyes blinking with electric stars. This is her favourite radio show; pre-recorded and broadcast between midnight and three every morning. It is nothing particularly special – just three hours of oldies strung together with late-night monologue – but sometimes, for her, there is something else. Something no one else knows about. At least, she presumes that no one knows. Who else listens, anyway? It’s only a local station.

She sends in a request for a track.

She does this quite often, sending her choice to requests@phantomradio.com. Even though the show isn’t live, she finds they always play her song. There must be someone, she tells herself, waiting for her e-mails. Tonight, she is feeling wistful, maybe even a little sad. What will she choose to match her mood?
Something by the Carpenters, perhaps; sweet and sincere and maybe just a little hokey, like still believing in true love. Dear Phantom, Are you there? She types.

Her computer has been adapted with a vocalizer and a refreshable Braille display. Through this tactile medium she can talk with people online. See them, darkly, through the glass. Hear their voices, like echoes of life that resonate through the world of the dead.

None of it is real, of course. But the feel of the words at her fingertips, the texture of the Braille display, as familiar to her as the lines and scars on her own palm, brings with it a comfort that cannot be denied. The touchpad lets her read web pages through a series of raised pins that translate the text into a form that she can understand. She prefers it to the vocalizer; the synthetic voice is unpleasant, while the Braille display is pretty – pretty as beads, or rice in a jar, or the sound of rain on the rooftops.

Dear Phantom, Are you still there?

She types her message; mails it; waits – at her fingertips the web shifts and moves like a tapestry of pixels.

What am I waiting for? She thinks.

What do I think will happen?

Sometimes she gets so tired, waiting here in front of the screen; feeling the world at her fingertips instead of confronting it face to face.

She wonders what would happen if she simply turned the computer off and walked out into the world alone and then she thinks better of it, and sighs, and returns her hand to the touchpad – that pad of raised pins that rise and fall according to the shapes on the screen, and which, with exquisite sensitivity, she interprets with her fingertips.

Are you there?

He thinks: Yes, I’m here.

It’s something like divination; something like enchantment; and as she weaves she sings to herself, like a mermaid in a story, as if in her net she might one day catch a shimmering shoal of fallen stars.

Of course, the screen only reflects.

It isn’t quite reality. She knows this, and yet it is the closest she gets to the world of other people. The Lady of Shalott, she thinks; watching the world through a darkened glass; waiting for someone to pull her through; waiting for someone to see her face –

He smiles to himself as he sorts through the mail. Few people ever write in to this, the midnight-to-three o’clock show. The graveyard shift, they call it; and he is happy to work it, ghost that he is, here in the familiar dark, away from their stares and their whispers.

Most people find him difficult to look at in the daylight. It is not so much the shape of his face, which is eccentric, nothing more, but the birthmark that disfigures him, a slap in the face from an angry God.

Some people are better than others at hiding their reactions.

Some simply smile at him fixedly, as if attempting to compensate.
Others never look at him directly, perpetually fixing their gaze on a point just beyond his head. Some are exaggeratedly cheery; others will do whatever they can to avoid being anywhere near him at all.

Women and children are the worst: the children because of the fear in their eyes, the women because of their pity. Some women, he notices, seem to be curiously drawn to him – he has come to hate these especially.

Middle-aged, overweight, nurturing types, who dream of taming a monster. These are the worst of the lot, he thinks, and does what he can to drive them away, although they are tenacious as weeds, seeing in his rudeness the germ of something ripe for redemption.

The internet is his escape. No one needs to see him here. He can exist as an avatar; words on a screen; a voice in the dark. Here the world is his to explore; a world in which not only he, but no one has a face.

He checks the mail again. There she is. LadyofShalott@gmail.com.

She often sends in song requests; sometimes with a little note describing what she did today; or why she chose that particular track; or simply one of her whimsical thoughts –

Dear Phantom (she always begins this way), Have you ever wondered what happens to music when it stops? The soundwaves keep on going, of course, so I guess it never stops at all. It just keeps spooling off into space, for anyone to catch who can. Wish upon a star, they say – but can’t I wish upon a song?

He never writes back. The Phantom does not indulge in personal chat. But this has never deterred her. She never seems to need a reply. In fact, her notes are longer now than they were when she started to write to him. Perhaps it is the allure of the dark; the screen of the confessional. She tells him all kinds of personal things – everything except one thing, in fact; the reason she’s here in the first place, feeling her way into his world – I like the songs you play (she writes). I like the way you make them fit together, not just randomly, but in a way that tells stories. Do I ever hear your voice? Or is it just DJs recording links, while someone else makes the connections?

It’s a question no one has asked him before. The voices on the airwaves – those cheery late-night chatterers – always get plenty of mail from their fans. But she seems much more interested in what’s going on behind the scenes. She’s smart, he thinks. She knows it’s a fake, cleverly rigged to make it sound like a live broadcast. Because the appeal of the graveyard show is all about the shared experience; the feeling that there’s someone there, talking away into the night, sharing time, sharing thoughts – Who’d stay up till 3am to listen to a recording? She would. Of course she would.

Nowadays he has been taking more care in constructing those late-night play lists. He knows she listens attentively, and he tries to make it a challenging game, interspersing sly references to current events, to films, to plays, even sometimes to his dreams – Dear Phantom, Last night I thought you were lonely. So many sad, sad songs. So many tunes in D minor. Perhaps your name begins with a D? I try to imagine what it might be. David. Dominic. That’s not right.

And Phantoms shouldn’t have dreams, he thinks. Especially not dangerous dreams like this. He makes himself a cup of tea, then goes into the bathroom. Switches on the overhead light and slowly, deliberately, studies his face.
He doesn’t do this often. But sometimes he must, just as sometimes in life a man has to suffer in order to grow. If she saw him now, he thinks, she would react like everyone else. She wouldn’t be able to help herself; and he would see that look in her eyes, that look of half pity, half disgust, and that would be the end of it. It has happened before. It always will. And yet – and yet – Dear Phantom, I wish – What does she wish? She wishes he would answer her.

Better still, she wishes to hear his voice. The Braille display is always so bland, robbing words of inflection. She wishes she could know the sound of him; his dialect, the stress he puts on syllables, the texture of his words.

Dear Phantom (she says), Do you know what I wish? I wish I could hear your voice. I’m very alert to voices. Accents, too – I can spot a fake in a crowd at two hundred paces.

A fake, he thinks. Is that what I am? A monster who believes he’s a man? He wishes he could grant her wish. But that would be a mistake, he thinks. He’d never get away with it. To mess about with the broadcasts could end in his dismissal, and where would he go if he lost this job? What would he do in the human world?

I wish – At least I can play her request, he thinks. That much is within my power. And yet – I wish, he thinks. I wish – The studio is empty and dark.

The chair in which the DJ would sit is like a cradle of darkness. Behind it, there’s a baby grand, under a canvas cover. He pulls the cover from the piano. Fingers the smooth, cool rows of keys. Through the headphones, the seashell voice drones and hums and murmurs. It’s almost two; there’s nobody here; no one to report him. Who even listens in at this hour? A handful of insomniacs; a drunk; a depressive; a lonely young girl – Dear Phantom, Are you really there? I like to think you are, of course, but sometimes I find myself wondering.

Like the music spooling off into space in the hope that someone will hear it, am I just sending out random signals without a chance of ever being heard? I know you can’t answer, and maybe it’s wrong of me to try to put you on the spot like this, but maybe you could just give me a sign? Anything. A dot. A dash. Or are you just like me, perhaps – a ghost in the machine?

He smiles. A ghost in the machine? Once more, she has seen through his disguise. This is what he has always been; nameless, faceless, voiceless – It takes a few seconds to check the mike and to secure a channel. He waits until the end of a track. Slips on the headphones. Sits at the desk.

And then he ends the broadcast and switches from Recorded to Live.

A red light blinks. He adjusts the mike. Picks up where the recording left off in the same soft and intimate voice –

This is Phantom Radio. You’re listening to the graveyard show, bringing you home from midnight to three.

No one would know the difference unless they were paying attention. These voices are generic, he thinks, their tone as bland as bird song. And yet, she will know. She is listening. Tuned in to his frequency; she will know that he is there.

And now he finds himself talking to her. Surly by nature, to his surprise he finds that he does have a voice, after all.
Tonight, here in the studio, he is going to play a special request; for the first time, live and unplugged –

She hears it in the silence. Live silence and studio silence have a completely different quality, and her ears, attuned to every nuance, are quick to register the change.

Then comes his voice, and the hairs on her arms rise like the pins on the pad at her side. She readjusts the sound controls; tweaks the mid-range and the bass to give the optimum result.

Digital sound is so clean, she thinks; she can hear every sound that he makes; from the creaking of his swivel chair to the way his breath catches in his throat when he pronounces certain words.

Fingers on the touchpad, she can almost see him now; seeking out the shape of his mouth, the way his face turns away from the mike whenever he glances towards the door.

The piano is slightly out of tune – others might not notice this, but she, with her eerie sense of pitch, can hear every variation. And when he sings – softly at first, but slowly gaining in confidence – she takes in every shade of sound, every modulation. Delivery; accent; mannerisms; everything suddenly clear – and the voice itself; untrained, but rich; a woody, smoky baritone that fits perfectly with the impression she has of what his face must be like – I wish. I wish. This is what I wish for. That this moment should never end, that it should carry beyond the stars on a single, perfect algorithm – It lasts for less than five minutes in all. Then the recording takes over again, with its flat studio silences. He wonders what she made of it all.

He wonders if she was listening. Maybe she has fallen asleep. Maybe she was never there – He checks the mail. Dear Phantom (she says), Thank you. Nothing more.

He wonders why. Is it nervousness, he thinks, or has he somehow crossed a line? After all, it’s easy, he thinks, to talk to someone who may not be there.

But to give that person a voice – or a face – is to destroy the illusion. Perhaps she is shy of him now – or worse, perhaps she is disappointed –

He waits. She writes no more that night. The next night, his impatience is such that he can barely function. Throughout the day – and for the first time anyone can remember – Phantom Radio is plagued by technical problems. Finally, the producer comes in, and finds him asleep in the sound booth. He gives him a sympathetic talk that also serves as a warning – get your act together, you – but never looks him in the face.

Midnight comes. The graveyard shift. Still she has not written back. He grins bitterly at himself for expecting anything different. The fact that after all these years he is still capable of making a fool of himself gives him a perverse kind of pleasure.

As if a girl like that could ever care for someone like you, he thinks. Without ever having seen your face, she already knew you were a freak.

And yet – Throughout the show, he waits for her mail. Nothing comes, not even a song request. He is vaguely angry at himself for half expecting otherwise. She has probably moved on by now to another all-night station. Or maybe she’s asleep in bed, or out with someone special.

She makes no attempt to read tonight. Her fingers are numb on the Braille pad. The screen has frozen on Phantom’s home page, but she does not try to refresh it.
Instead she simply listens to the songs that he has chosen – she knows his play lists almost by heart; has even given them names in her mind. The current one is called Blue, and it is one of his most melancholy. One of her favourites, too, as it happens, so that she does not even suggest a song for him to play for her tonight.

All tonight’s songs are for her, and the thought is ice water and terrible heat as she listens to the lovely sounds, though none is as beguiling as his voice, the voice that has stolen into her dreams –

Could it be I have fallen in love? She asks herself the question. Can you really fall in love with just the sound of a person’s voice? She moves her hand on the pad at her side and tries to conjure the shape of his face; imagines the feel of her fingertips moving over his eyelids – Dear Phantom (she writes), I love you. I think I must have loved you before, but last night, when you spoke to me – She sends it before she can change her mind. Halfway through a sentence, as if she expects him to finish the phrase.

He has to read it several times before it really registers. The simplest words in the language, and he cannot decipher their meaning.

Dear Lady of Shalott, he begins, and then decides against it. He is not a writer, he thinks. The words will not co-operate.

Instead, he changes channels again, switches the broadcast once more to Live. For a moment he has no idea what he is about to say; and then he turns to the piano, spans a chord of D minor and begins to speak, or maybe to sing – I wish, he thinks aloud. I wish.

It must be something in the air. Never before in all his life has he been so articulate.

Perhaps it’s the night, he tells himself; or perhaps it’s the thought of those soundwaves shooting off into deepest space – Wish I may, wish I might – On the call desk, a red light begins to blink persistently.

There must be more people out there listening than he thought.

Another light begins to blink. A star. A constellation. The switchboard is soon jammed with callers, red lights all across the desk. It’s his job to answer the calls, but tonight the Phantom is occupied. All that can wait till tomorrow, he thinks. Tomorrow he won’t have a job.

The thought makes his voice dry up in his throat. Phantom Radio is his life. What has he done? Has he gone mad? What demon has possessed him?

He pulls off the headphones, steps away from the mike.

Switches back to the regular broadcast. Of course it’s too late, he tells himself. He cannot hide what he has done. After a lifetime of hiding away, he has exposed, not his face, but his heart to anyone who was listening – He checks the mail.

Dear Phantom (she writes), I think it’s time. Please meet me here in half an hour. She gives a place, a street, an address. He types: All right. He presses Send. And then he stands, frozen with what he has done.

He puts his hands over his face – the face that makes little children cry – and stands like this for a long time; a big, awkward man with an ugly mark that looks like a splash of purple ink across his face. Behind him, on the sound desk, lights are blinking like crazy. Something – a circuit, perhaps – has failed.
Phantom Radio is off the air. Not that it matters any more. He feels his heart begin to pound. She feels her head begin to spin.

What if she isn’t there? He thinks. What if he doesn’t come? She thinks. And he types: There’s something you need to know. And she types: There’s something I didn’t say – But now the computers are down as well; the screen is blank; there’s nothing to see but the cursor blinking against the blue; nothing to feel but the Braille pad frozen in its final wave.

And nobody sees her pull on her coat and pick up her white cane and open the door; and nobody sees him run outside but the doorman, half asleep at his post, while the ghosts of Phantom Radio whisper and hum from darkened rooms and the lights all over the switchboard blink out their messages in code.
BRAVADO

by William Trevor

The leaves had begun to fall. All along Sunderland Avenue on the pavement beneath the beech trees there was a sprinkling, not yet the mushy inconvenience they would become when more fell and rain came, which inevitably would be soon. Not many people were about; it was after midnight, almost one o’clock, the widely spaced lampposts casting pools of misty, yellow illumination. A man walked his dog in Blenning Road in the same blotchy lamplight, the first of autumn’s leaves gathering there also. An upstairs window opened in Verdun Crescent, hands clapped to dismiss a cat rooting in a flower bed. A car turned into Sunderland Avenue, its headlights dimmed and then extinguished, its alarm set for the night with a flurry of flashing orange and red. The traffic of the city was a hum that only faintly reached these leisurely streets, the occasional distant shriek of a police siren or an ambulance more urgently disturbing their peace.

Less than half a mile away, the night was different. Young people prowled about outside the Star night club, its band—Big City—taking a break. A late shop was still open, a watchful Indian at the door noting who came and went. A few cars drew away, but more remained. Then, with a thump of such suddenness that for a moment it might have been taken for a warning of emergency or disaster, music again burst from the Star night club.

By half past one this neighborhood, too, had quietened. The bouncers at the Star drove off, couples made their way to the dark seclusion of the nearby canal bank. Others stood about, groups forming and dispersing. Locking up his shop, the Indian was argued with, and abused, when demands for alcohol and potato crisps were refused. The last of the parked cars were driven off.

Two youths who were friends went together, undaunted by the prospect of an hour’s walk to where they lived. One was in shirtsleeves although it was chilly, the arms of a red anorak tied around his shoulders; the other wore a black woolen jersey above ragged jeans. They talked about the girls they had come across on the dance floor, one in particular, well known to them both, the others strangers. They talked about their intentions for the future: in the Merchant Navy and in car sales, an uncle’s business. These were the changes that were soon to come about, when education ended, when so much they had known for so long was to be left behind forever: the Brothers and the lay teachers, the cramped desks scratched with entwined initials and hearts and arrows, all they had learned of self-preservation and of survival’s cunning. There was, in their conversation, an absence of regret.

They paused in their walk while the anorak was unknotted and put on and zipped. Their evening out had been a good one, they agreed while this was being done. “Kicking,” one said. “Big City can do it.” They walked on, talking about that band’s touch of genius.

With his mobile telephone close to his mouth, the Indian loudly demanded the police: his usual ploy at this hour, speaking to no one. His tormentors swore at him, then tired of their invective and went away. Five there were, two of them girls, neither of whom had taken part in the abuse, which had surprised him, for girls were often the worst. He kept an eye on the five when they moved off in a bunch, causing an oncoming car to slow to a crawl as they crossed the street. Then he locked his shop, thankful that there hadn’t been an incident.
“How ya doin’?” Manning shouted at the driver of the car. He drummed on the bonnet with his fists and, joining in, his companions—but not the girls—did the same. The car kept moving, then stopped and reversed. It went another way.

“Could you beat that?” Manning laughed, watching the car from the middle of the road. He was tallest of the bunch, his reddish hair falling over his forehead in a floppy shock that he was said to be proud of. An air of insouciance distinguished his manner, was there again in the lazy saunter of his walk, in his smile. Manning led when he was with Donovan and Kilroy, which he was most of the time, and was tonight. Aisling was his girl, fair-haired and pretty, with expressive blue eyes, younger than Manning by more than a year. The second girl wasn’t known to the others; earlier she had asked which way they were going and then if she could go with them, because she lived in that direction. Francie she was called.

Aisling clung to Manning as they walked. With his arm round Francie, Kilroy tried to slow her down, in the hope of setting up an opportunity for something when they had fallen far enough behind. But Francie kept up a steady pace. She was small, often called a little thing, but deliberate and determined in her manner. She, too, was pretty, but less dramatically so than Aisling, whom Manning liked to describe as drop-dead gorgeous. She denied that she was, but Manning’s regular repetition of the compliment did not displease her.

She listened to him now, saying he didn’t intend to set foot in the Star again, objecting to the way the shaven-headed bouncers had frisked him for miniatures. They had taken one from him and afterward said they hadn’t: they thought they owned you, louts like that. “Did you ever do a line, cowboy?” he called across Aisling to Donovan.

“Ammn’t I doing a line with Josie Flynn?”

“You eejit!”

Laughing again, Manning sounded drunk, Aisling thought. Not very, but a little. She’d been drunk once or twice herself but hadn’t liked it, everything slipping about, and the way you felt in the morning.

“Did you ever, though?” Manning pressed, offering Donovan a cigarette.

Donovan said he had of course, many a time, and Aisling knew all this was for her and for the girl who’d tagged along, whose name she had forgotten. “Awesome,” Donovan said, he and Manning lighting their cigarettes, sharing the match. No one else was a smoker.

They were going by the dye works now, where Manning had once climbed over the high spiked railings. That had been for Aisling, too, and a girl called Maura Bannerman. The security lights had been triggered and through the railings they had watched Manning roaming about, from time to time peering in at the downstairs windows of the lumpy red brick building that was said to have been a lunatic asylum once.

Behind her Aisling heard Kilroy telling the girl he had monopolized about that night. At the top of the railings, razor wire was woven through the spikes, he said, adding to the hazards: none of them knew how Manning had done it, especially since he was a bit drunk then, too.

Kilroy had slit eyes that aptly suggested an untrustworthy nature. Donovan was considered to be dense. Almost as tall as Manning, he was bulkier, clumsy in his movements, slow of speech. Kilroy had a stunted appearance, accentuated by oiled black hair sleekly brushed straight back, making the top of his head seem flat. Aisling didn’t much like either of them.

The first time she’d been in the Star—the first time she’d seen Manning, no more than a face in the crowd—she had admired him. He’d noticed her interest, he told her afterward, he said
“I’d give a thousand bucks for a snort,” he was saying now, his voice slightly raised, a laugh in it again. “Where’d we get ourselves a snort, cowboy?”

Donovan said maybe Dirty Doyle’s, Kilroy suggested Capel Street. It was a kind of play, Aisling knew; Martin Manning doing the big fellow, her father would have said. She had become used to it ages ago.

They reached the quiet streets, St. Stephen’s Church at the corner of Goodchild Street, the shadowy sprawl of trees on either side of Sunderland Avenue ahead of them.

“Who’re those geeks?” Donovan suddenly exclaimed, and they all stopped, not knowing at first where to look. When he pointed they saw the red anorak.

“It’s bloody Dalgety,” Manning said.

The two parted in Sunderland Avenue, Dalgety turning into Blenning Road. On his own, he went a little faster, but paused when he noticed that one of the garden gates he was passing was invitingly open. He went through it and crossed a lawn to a corner near the house where he couldn’t be seen from the windows. He urinated in the shadow of an eleagnus bush.

Making their way from the night club, they had once or twice been aware of voices behind them but, engrossed in conversation themselves, hadn’t looked round to see whose they were. Dalgety couldn’t hear the voices now and imagined that whoever they belonged to had gone in some other direction. A light hadn’t come on in the house, which sometimes happened when you found a garden that was convenient for the purpose he had used it for. He unzipped his anorak because he’d noticed that the teeth of the zip hadn’t been properly aligned. While he was zipping it up again he was struck, a blow on the right side of his head. He thought that someone had come out of the house, and was thinking he hadn’t heard the front door opening when the next blow came. He stumbled and fell, and a foot smashed into his jaw when he was lying on the grass. He tried to stand up but couldn’t.

Aisling watched from the road. Francie looked away. In the garden, standing back at first, not taking part, Donovan moved forward when the boy was lying on the grass. Kilroy stayed with the girl. Nobody spoke while the assault was taking place, not in the garden, not on the road.

Aisling wondered what the boy had done, what insults had been exchanged in the Star or before that, how he had offended. Something of the headiness of the night club seemed to be there again, something of the music’s energy, of the wildness that was often in a face as it went by on the dance floor before it was sucked into the suffocating closeness of the crowd. Still nobody spoke when they all moved on, in a bunch again.

“Oh, leave me be!” Francie suddenly cried out. “Just leave me, would you!”

She pulled herself away from Kilroy’s grasp, fiercely taking exception to the attentions she had allowed before. “Lay off of me, will you.”

“Behave yourself, cowboy.” Manning’s rebuke came lightly, and for a moment as he spoke Aisling saw the white gleam of his teeth. He knew how best to intercede. He was good at that. She’d often noticed how in an instant he became serious when seriousness was called for.
And she’d noticed how he didn’t hesitate to do what he felt should be done. There would be a reason for what had happened.

Kilroy muttered. He desisted for a few minutes before he tried again, and again was crossly rejected. In Charleston Road Francie scuttled off, not saying good night.

“Hoity!” Kilroy remarked.

Aisling didn’t think so. The girl who’d asked if she might walk with them had been upset, taken by surprise when so suddenly the incident occurred. Knowing too little about the strangers she’d fallen in with, she hadn’t been able to make allowances, or sense that there would be a reason. Being pawed about by Kilroy might even have seemed too like the violence in the garden—you couldn’t blame her if she’d felt frightened. Aisling would have herself.

“Dalgety’s a pain,” Manning said when she asked why Dalgety had been duffed up.

“Forget it,” he said.

“I never heard that name before,” Aisling said. “Dalgety.”

“Yeah, a nerd’s.”

Conversation lapsed then, but as they passed the entrance to the Greenbanks Hotel Donovan began on a story about his sister, how she was going to a shrink and hated it so much she often didn’t turn up for her weekly sessions.

“A guy comes on heavy,” Donovan said. “You end up with a shrink.”

Nobody commented; Donovan did not go on. The interrupted silence held for a little longer and the talk, when it began again, was different. So that was it, Aisling reflected, not saying anything herself. She felt relieved, aware of a relaxation in her body, as if her nerves had been strung up and no longer were. This Dalgety had upset Donovan’s sister, going too far when she didn’t want him to, his persistence putting her in need of psychiatric care. And the anger Aisling had witnessed in the garden touched her, what had happened seeming different, less than it had been while she watched.

“See you, Mano,” Donovan said. “Cheers, Aisling.”

She said good night. Donovan turned into Cambridge Road, and soon afterward Kilroy turned off, too.

“Was he all right?” Aisling asked then.

“Who’s this?”

“Dalgety.”

“Christ, of course he was.”

They went to Spire View Lane, where they always went when it was as late as this. “You’re a dazzler tonight,” Manning whispered, slipping his hands beneath her clothes.

She closed her eyes, kissing him back, his early-morning stubble harsh on her chin. The first time she had experienced that roughness it had excited her, and every time since it had.

“I’d best be getting back,” she said, not that she wanted to get back anywhere.

A dog came sniffing at them, some kind of small breed, black or gray, you couldn’t tell in the dark. Someone whistled for it and it ran off.
“I’ll walk you over,” Manning said, which he always did when she had to go. He lit a cigarette, as he always did, too. The smoke would get into her clothes and she’d be asked about it if there was anyone up, although usually nobody was.

“I looked back,” Manning said. “He was up on his feet.”

“Bernadette rang,” a note for her in the kitchen said, “and Sister Teresa about knowing your part for Thursday.”

No one was still up or there wouldn’t be the note. Aisling made cocoa and had biscuits with it, sitting at the table with the Evening Herald, then pushing it away. She wished it hadn’t happened, but thought about Hazel Donovan and before she finished her cocoa wondered if she really wished it.

She might have slipped him but she hadn’t, and she remembered now not wanting to. “The hard man,” his friends said when they greeted him, knowing him well, as she did, too, his daring, the way he took chances. “Aw, come on,” he had urged, the time he gave her a lift on the bar of his bicycle, when they were caught by her father coming toward them on a bicycle, too, his veterinary bag hanging on the handlebars. “Don’t ever let me see the like of that again,” her father stormed at her when she returned to the house. Being his favorite made being caught all the worse, her mother explained. Neither of them approved of Martin Manning. They didn’t understand.

She washed the mug she’d drunk her cocoa from at the sink and put the lid on the biscuit tin. She picked up Sister Teresa’s typed sheets and went upstairs. “Scenes from Hamlet” was Sister Teresa’s title for the monologues she had put together, the first time she had attempted something that wasn’t a conventional play. “ ‘There’s fennel for you,’ ” Aisling murmured, half asleep already, “ ‘and columbines …’ ”

At No. 6 Blenning Road, the elderly woman who had lived alone there since she was widowed seven months earlier was roused from a dream in which she was a child again. She went to the top of her stairs, leaned over the bannister, and shouted in the direction of the hall door, asking who was there. But all that happened was the ringing of the doorbell again. It would take more than that, she told herself, to get her to open her door at this hour.

When the bell ceased there was a banging and a rapping, and a voice coming from far away because she hadn’t had time to put her hearing aid in. Even when the letter box rattled and the voice was louder she still couldn’t hear a word of what was said. She went back to her bedroom for her hearing aid and then trudged down to the hall.

“What d’you want?” she shouted at the letter box.

Fingers appeared, pressing the flap open.

“Excuse me, missus. Excuse me, but there’s someone lying down in your garden.”

“It’s half past six in the morning.”

“Could you phone up the guards, missus?”

In the hall she shook her head, not answering that. She asked whereabouts in her garden the person was.

“Just lying there on the grass. I’d call them up myself only my mobile’s run out.”

She telephoned. No point in not, she thought. She was glad to be leaving this house, which for so long had been too big for two and was now ridiculously big for one. She had been glad
before this, but now was more certain than ever that she had made the right decision. She thought so again while she watched from her dining-room window a garda car arriving, and an ambulance soon after that. She opened her hall door then, and saw a body taken away. A man came to speak to her, saying it was he who had talked to her through the letter box. A guard told her the person they had found lying near her eleagnus was dead.

On the news the address was not revealed. A front garden, it was reported, and gave the district. A milkman going by on his way to the depot had noticed. No more than that.

When Aisling came down at five past eight they were talking about it in the kitchen. She knew at once.

“You all right?” her mother asked, and she said she was. She went back to her bedroom, saying she had forgotten something.

It was all there on the front page of the Evening Herald’s early-afternoon edition. No charges had been laid, but it was expected that they would be later in the day. The deceased had not been known to the householder in whose garden the body had been discovered, who was reported as saying she had not been roused by anything unusual in the night. The identity of the deceased had not yet been established, but a few details were given, little more than that a boy of about sixteen had met his death following an assault. Witnesses were asked to come forward.

Aisling didn’t; the girl who had tagged along did. The victim’s companion on the walk from the Star night club gave the time they left it and the approximate time of their parting from one another. The night-club bouncers were helpful but could add little to what was already known. The girl who had come forward was detained for several hours at the Garda station from which inquiries were being made. She was complimented on the clarity of her evidence and pressed to recall the names of the four people she had been with. But she had never known those names, only that the red-haired boy was called Mano and had himself addressed his two companions as “cowboy.” Arrests were made just before midnight.

Aisling read all that the next morning in the Irish Independent, which was the newspaper that came to the house. Later in the day she read an almost identical account in the Irish Times, which she bought in a newsagent’s where she wasn’t known. Both reports referred to her, describing her as “the second girl,” whom the Gardaí were keen to locate. There was a photograph, a coat thrown over the head and shoulders of a figure being led away, a wrist handcuffed to that of a uniformed garda. The second arrest, at a house in Ranelagh, told no more. No names were released at first.

When they were, Aisling made a statement to the police, confessing that she was the second girl, and in doing so she became part of what had happened. People didn’t attempt to talk to her about it, and at the convent it was forbidden that they should do so; but it was sometimes difficult, even for strangers, to constrain the curiosity that too often was evident in their features.

When more time passed, there was the trial, and then the verdict. Acquitted of murder, the two who had been apprehended were sent to jail for eleven years, their previous good conduct taken into account, together with the consideration, undenied by the court, that there was an accidental element in what had befallen them: neither had known of their victim’s frail, imperfect heart.

Aisling’s father did not repeat his castigation of her for making a friendship he had never liked: what had happened was too terrible for petty blame. Beneath an intolerant surface, he
could draw on gentleness. “We have to live with this,” he said, as if accepting that the violence of the incident reached out for him, too, that guilt was indiscriminately scattered.

For Aisling, time passing was stranger than she had ever known days and nights to be before. Nothing was unaffected. In conveying the poetry of Shakespeare on the hastily assembled convent stage she perfectly knew her lines, and the audience was kind. But there was pity in that applause, because she had unfairly suffered in the aftermath of the tragedy she had witnessed. She knew there was, and in the depths of her consciousness it felt like mockery and she did not know why.

A letter came, long afterward, flamboyant handwriting bringing back the excitement of surreptitious notes in the past. No claim was made on her, nor were there protestations of devotion, as once, so often, there had been. He would go away. He would bother no one. He was a different person now. A priest was being helpful.

The letter was long enough for contrition, but still was short. Missing from its single page was what had been missing, also, during the trial: that the victim had been a nuisance to Donovan’s sister. In the newspaper photograph—the same one many times—Dalgety was dark-haired, smiling only slightly, his features regular, almost nondescript except for a mole on his chin. And, seeing it so often, Aisling had each time imagined his unwanted advances pressed on Hazel Donovan, and had read the innocence in those features as a lie. It was extraordinary that this, as the reason for the assault, had not been brought forward in the court; and more extraordinary that it wasn't touched upon in a letter where, with remorse and regret, it surely belonged. “A guy comes on heavy,” Donovan, that night, had said.

There had been a lingering silence and he broke it to mention this trouble in his family, as if he thought that someone should say something. The conversational tone of his voice seemed to indicate he would go on, but he didn’t. Hungry for mercy, she too eagerly wove into his clumsy effort at distraction an identity he had not supplied, allowing it to be the truth, until time wore the deception out.

After the convent, Aisling acquired a qualification that led to a post in the general office of educational publishers. She had come to like being alone and often in the evenings went on her own to the cinema, and at weekends walked at Howth or by the sea at Dalkey. One afternoon she visited the grave, then went back often. A stone had been put there, its freshly incised words brief: the name, the dates. People came and went among the graves but did not come to this one, although flowers were left from time to time.

In a bleak cemetery Aisling begged forgiveness of the dead for the falsity she had embraced when what there was had been too ugly to accept. Silent, she had watched an act committed to impress her, to deserve her love, as other acts had been. And watching, there was pleasure. If only for a moment, but still there had been.

She might go away herself and often thought she would: in the calm of another time and place to flee the shadows of bravado. Instead, she stayed, a different person, too, belonging where the thing had happened.
LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

by Roald Dahl

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight—hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whisky. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket. Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work. Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of the head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin—for this was her sixth month with child—had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger, darker than before.

When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

‘Hullo, darling,’ she said.

‘Hullo,’ he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both his hands, rocking it, so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel—almost as a sunbather feels the sun—that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whisky had taken some of it away.

‘Tired, darling?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I'm tired.’ And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left. She wasn't really watching him but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

‘I'll get it!’ she cried, jumping up.

‘Sit down,’ he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whisky in it.

‘Darling, shall I get your slippers?’
‘No.’
She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

‘I think it's a shame,’ she said, ‘that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long.’ He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

‘Darling,’ she said. ‘Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday.’

‘No,’ he said.

‘If you're too tired to eat out,’ she went on, ‘it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.’ Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

‘Anyway’ she went on, ‘I'll get you some cheese and crackers first.’

‘I don't want it,’ he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. ‘But you must have supper. I can easily do it here. I'd like to do it. We can have lamb chops. Or pork. Anything you want. Everything's in the freezer.’

‘Forget it,’ he said.

‘But, darling, you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.’ She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

‘Sit down,’ he said. ‘Just for a minute, sit down.’ It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

‘Go on,’ he said. ‘Sit down.’ She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I've got something to tell you.’

‘What is it, darling? What's the matter?’

He had become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

‘This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid,’ he said. ‘But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much.’ And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

‘So there it is,’ he added. ‘And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job.’
Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

5  ‘I'll get the supper,’ she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all—except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now—down the stairs to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again. A leg of lamb.

10  All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

‘For God’s sake,’ he said, hearing her, but not turning round. ‘Don't make supper for me. I'm going out.’

15  At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

20  She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

25  ‘All right,’ she told herself. ‘So I've killed him.’

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both—mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

30  Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her face, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

35  ‘Hullo Sam,’ she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

‘I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.’ That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran
downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street. It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

‘Hullo Sam,’ she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

‘Why, good evening, Mrs Maloney. How're you?’

‘I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.’

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

‘Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight,’ she told him. ‘We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house.’

‘Then how about meat, Mrs Maloney?’

‘No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb, from the freezer.’

‘Oh.’

‘I don't much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?’

‘Personally,’ the grocer said, ‘I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?’

‘Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those.’

‘Anything else?’ The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. ‘How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards?’

‘Well, what would you suggest, Sam?’ The man glanced around his shop. ‘How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that.’

‘Perfect,’ she said. ‘He loves it.’ And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, ‘Thank you, Sam. Good night.’

‘Good night, Mrs Maloney. And thank you.’ And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror.

Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all. Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

‘Patrick!’ she called. ‘How are you, darling?’ She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living-room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.
A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police
station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, ‘Quick! Come quick!
Patrick's dead!’

‘Who's speaking?’

‘Mrs Maloney. Mrs Patrick Maloney.’

‘You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?’

‘I think so,’ she sobbed. ‘He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead.’

‘Be right over,’ the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policemen walked in.
She knew them both—she knew nearly all the men at that precinct—and she fell right into
Jack Noonan's arms, weeping hysterically. He put her gently into a chair, then went over to
join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

‘Is he dead?’ she cried.

‘I'm afraid he is. What happened?’

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the
floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of
congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and
hurried to the phone. Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two
detectives, one of whom she knew by name.

Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about
fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the
detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her
story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was
sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd
put the meat in the oven—‘it's there now, cooking’—and how she'd slipped out to the grocer
for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

‘Which grocer?’ one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately
went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and
through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases—‘...acted quite normal... 
very cheerful... wanted to give him a good supper... peas... cheesecake... impossible that
she...'  

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and
took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives
remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack
Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to
his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night. No, she said. She didn't
feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just
where she was until she felt better? She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.
No, she said, she'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke to her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may've thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

‘It's the old story,’ he said, ‘Get the weapon, and you've got the man.’

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing—a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase?

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

‘Or a big spanner?’ She didn't think they had a big spanner, but there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw the flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantel. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

‘Jack,’ she said, the next time Sergeant Noonan went by ‘Would you mind giving me a drink?’

‘Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whisky?’

‘Yes, please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.’

He handed her the glass.

‘Why don't you have one yourself,’ she said. ‘You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me.’

‘Well,’ he answered. ‘It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.’

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little sip of whisky. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, came out quickly and said, ‘Look, Mrs Maloney, you know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.’

‘Oh dear me!’ she cried. ‘So it is!’

‘I'd better turn it off for you, hadn't I?’

‘Will you do that, Jack? Thank you so much.’ When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark, tearful eyes. ‘Jack Noonan,’ she said.

‘Yes?’

‘Would you do me a small favour—you and these others?’

‘We can try, Mrs Maloney.’
‘Well,’ she said. ‘Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it's long past your supper time, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven? It'll be cooked just right by now.’

‘Wouldn't dream of it,’ Sergeant Noonan said.

‘Please,’ she begged. ‘Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favour to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.’

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them through the open door, and she could hear them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

‘Have some more, Charlie?’

‘No. Better not finish it.’

‘She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.’

‘Okay then. Give me some more.’

‘That's the hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick,’ one of them was saying. ‘The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge-hammer.’

‘That's why it ought to be easy to find.’

‘Exactly what I say.’

‘Whoever's done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.’

One of them belched.

‘Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.’

‘Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?’

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.
"What a number of bond robberies there have been lately!
"I observed one morning, laying aside the newspaper. "Poirot, let us forsake the science of detection, and take to crime instead!"

"You are on the---how do you say it?---get-rich-quick tack, eh, mon ami?"

"Well, look at this last coup, the million dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds which the London and Scottish Bank were sending to New York, and which disappeared in such a remarkable manner on board the Olympia."

"If it were not for the mal de mer, and the difficulty of practicing the so excellent method of Laverguier for a longer time than the few hours of crossing the channel, I should delight to voyage myself on one of these big liners," murmured Poirot dreamily.

"Yes, indeed," I said enthusiastically. "Some of them must be perfect palaces; the swimming baths, the lounges, the restaurant, the palm courts---really, it must be hard to believe that one is on the sea."

"Me, I always know when I am on the sea," said Poirot sadly. "And all those bagatelles that you enumerate, they saw nothing to me; but, my friend, consider for a moment the geniuses that travel as it were incognito! On board these floating palaces, as you so justly call them, one would meet the elite, the haute noblesse of the criminal world!"

I laughed.

"So that's the way your enthusiasm runs! You would have liked to cross swords with the man who sneaked the Liberty Bonds?"

The landlady interrupted us. "A young lady wants to see you, Mr. Poirot. Here's her card."

The card bore the inscription: Miss Esmee Farquhar, and Poirot, after diving under the table to retrieve a stray crumb, and putting it carefully in the wastepaper basket, nodded to the landlady to admit her.

In another minute one of the most charming girls I have ever seen was ushered into the room. She was perhaps about five-and-twenty, with big brown eyes and a perfect figure. She was well-dressed and perfectly composed in manner.

"Sit down, I beg of you, mademoiselle. This is my friend, Captain Hastings, who aids me in my little problems."

"I am afraid it is a big problem I have brought you today, Monsieur Poirot," said the girl, giving me a pleasant bow as she seated herself. "I dare say you have read about it in the papers. I am referring to the theft of Liberty Bonds on the Olympia."

Some astonishing must have shown itself in Poirot's face, for she continued quickly: "You are doubtless asking yourself what I have to do with a grave institution like the London and Scottish Bank. In one sense nothing, in another sense everything. You see, Monsieur Poirot, I am engaged to Mr. Philip Ridgeway."

"Aha! and Mr. Philip Ridgeway—"
"Was in charge of the bonds when they were stolen. Of course, no actual blame can attach to him, it was not his fault in any way. Nevertheless, he is half distraught over the matter, and his uncle, I know, insists that he must carelessly have mentioned having them in his possession. It is a terrible set-back in his career."

"Who is his uncle?"

"Mr. Vavasour, joint general manager of the London and Scottish Bank."

"Suppose, Miss Farquhar, that you recount to me the whole story?"

"Very well. As you know, the Bank wished to extend their credits in America, and for this purpose decided to send over a million dollars in Liberty Bonds. Mr. Vavasour selected his nephew, who had occupied a position of trust in the Bank for many years and who was conversant with all the details of the Bank's dealings in New York, to make the trip. The Olympia sailed from Liverpool on the 23rd, and the bonds were handed over to Philip on the morning of that day by Mr. Vavasour and Mr. Shaw, the two joint general managers of the London and Scottish Bank. They were counted, enclosed in a package, and sealed in his presence, and he then locked the package at once in his portmanteau."

"A portmanteau with an ordinary lock?"

"No, Mr. Shaw insisted on a special lock being fitted to it by Hubbs's. Philip, as I say, placed the package at the bottom of the trunk. It was stolen just a few hours before reaching New York. A rigorous search of the whole ship was made, but without result. The bonds seemed literally to have vanished into thin air."

Poirot made a grimace. "But they did not vanish absolutely, since I gather that they were sold in small parcels within half an hour of the docking of the Olympia! Well, undoubtedly the next thing is for me to see Mr. Ridgeway."

"I was about to suggest that you should lunch with me at the 'Cheshire Cheese.' Philip will be there. He is meeting me, but does not yet know that I have been consulting you on his behalf."

We agreed to this suggestion readily enough, and drove there in a taxi. Mr. Philip Ridgeway was there before us, and looked somewhat surprised to see his fiancee arriving with two complete strangers. He was a nice-looking young fellow, tall and spruce, with a touch of graying hair at the temples, though he could not have been much over thirty.

Miss Farquhar went up to him and laid her hand on his arm. "You must forgive my acting without consulting you, Philip," she said. "Let me introduce you to Monsieur Hercule Poirot, of whom you must often have heard, and his friend, Captain Hastings."

Ridgeway looked very astonished. "Of course I have heard of you, Monsieur Poirot," he said, as he shook hands. "But I had no idea that Esmee was thinking of consulting you about our trouble."

"I was afraid you would not let me do it, Philip," said Miss Farquhar meekly.

"So you took care to be on the safe side," he observed, with a smile. "I hope Monsieur Poirot will be able to throw some light on this extraordinary puzzle, for I confess frankly that I am nearly out of my mind with worry and anxiety about it."

Indeed, his face looked drawn and haggard and showed only too clearly the strain under which he was laboring.
"Well, well," said Poirot. "Let us lunch, and over lunch we will put our heads together and see what can be done. I want to hear Mr. Ridgeway's story from his own lips."

While we discussed the excellent steak and kidney pudding of the establishment, Philip Ridgeway narrated the circumstances leading to the disappearance of the bonds. His story agreed with that of Miss Farquhar in every particular. When he had finished, Poirot took up the thread with a question.

"What exactly led you to discover that the bonds had been stolen, Mr. Ridgeway?"

He laughed rather bitterly. "The thing stared me in the face, Monsieur Poirot. I couldn't have missed it. My cabin trunk was half out from under the bunk and all scratched and cut about where they'd tried to force the lock."

"But I understood that it had been opened with a key?"

"That's so. They tried to force it, but couldn't. And, in the end, they must have got it unlocked somehow or other."

"Curious," said Poirot, his eyes beginning to flicker with the green light I knew so well. "Very curious! They waste much, much time trying to prise it open, and then ---sapristi!—they find that they have the key all the time, for each of Hubbs's locks is unique."

"That's just why they couldn't have had the key. It never left me day or night."

"You are sure of that?"

"I can swear to it, and besides, if they had had the key or a duplicate, why should they waste time trying to force an obviously unforceable lock?"

"Ahh! there is exactly the question we are asking ourselves! I venture to prophesy that the solution, if we ever find it, will hinge on that curious fact. I beg of you not to assault me if I ask you one more question: Are you perfectly certain you did not leave the trunk unlocked?"

Philip Ridgeway merely looked at him, and Poirot gesticulated apologetically.

"Ah! but these things can happen, I assure you! Very well, the bonds were stolen from the trunk. What did the thief do with them? How did he manage to get ashore with them?"

"Ahh!" cried Ridgeway. "That's just it. How? Word was passed to the Customs authorities, and every soul that left the ship was gone over with a toothcomb!"

"And the bonds, I gather, made a bulky pac

"Certainly they did. They could hardly have been hidden on board---and anyway we know they weren't because they were offered for sale within half an hour of the Olympia's arrival, long before I got the cables going and the numbers sent out. One broker swears he bought some of them even before the Olympia got in. But you can't send bonds by wireless."

"Not by wireless, but did any tug come alongside?"

"Only the official ones, and that was after the alarm was given when every one was on the lookout. I was watching out myself for their being passed over to some one that way. My God, Monsieur Poirot, this thing will drive me mad! People are beginning to say I stole them myself."

"But you also were searched on landing, weren't you?" asked Poirot gently.

"Yes."
The young man stared at him in a puzzled manner.

"You do not catch my meaning, I see," said Poirot, smiling enigmatically. "Now I should like to make a few inquiries at the Bank."

Ridgeway produced a card and scribbled a few words on it. "Send this in and my uncle will see you at once."

Poirot thanked him, bade farewell to Miss Farquhar, and together we started out for Threadneedle Street and the head office of the London and Scottish Bank. On production of Ridgeway's card, we were led through the labyrinth of counters and desks, skirting paying-in clerks and paying-out clerks and up to a small office on the first floor where the joint general managers received us. They were two grave gentlemen, who had grown gray in the service of the Bank. Mr. Vavasour had a short white beard, Mr. Shaw was clean shaven.

"I understand you are strictly a private inquiry agent?" said Mr. Vavasour. "Quite so, quite so. We have, of course, placed ourselves in the hands of Scotland Yard. Inspector McNeil has charge of the case. A very able officer, I believe."

"I am sure of it," said Poirot politely. "You will permit a few questions, on your nephew's behalf? About this lock, who ordered it from Hubbs's?"

"I ordered it myself," said Mr. Shaw. "I would not trust to any clerk in the matter. As to the keys, Mr. Ridgeway had one, and the other two are held by my colleague and myself."

"And no clerk has had access to them?"

Mr. Shaw turned inquiringly to Mr. Vavasour.

"I think I am correct in saying that they have remained in the safe where we placed them on the 23rd," said Mr. Vavasour. "My colleague was unfortunately taken ill a fortnight ago---in fact on the very day that Philip left us. He has only just recovered."

"Severe bronchitis is no joke to a man of my age," said Mr. Shaw ruefully. "But I am afraid Mr. Vavasour has suffered from the hard work entailed by my absence, especially with this unexpected worry coming on top of everything."

Poirot asked a few more questions. I judged that he was endeavoring to gauge the exact amount of intimacy between uncle and nephew. Mr. Vavasour's answers were brief and punctilious. His nephew was a trusted official of the Bank, and had no debts or money difficulties that he knew of. He had been entrusted with similar missions in the past. Finally we were politely bowed out.

"I am disappointed," said Poirot, as we emerged into the street.

"You hoped to discover more? They are such stodgy old men."

"It is not their stodginess which disappoints me, mon ami. I do not expect to find in a Bank manager a 'keen financier with an eagle glance' as your favorite works of fiction put it. No, I am disappointed in the case---it is too easy!"

"Easy?"

"Yes, do you not find it almost childishly simple?"

"You know who stole the bonds?" "I do."

"But then---we must---why---?"
"Do not confuse and fluster yourself, Hastings. We are not going to do anything at present."

"But why? What are you waiting for?"

"For the Olympia. She is due on her return trip from New York on Tuesday.

"But if you know who stole the bonds, why wait? He may escape."

"To a South Sea island where there is no extradition? No, mon ami, he would find life very uncongenial there. As to why I wait—eh bien, to the intelligence of Hercule Poirot the case is perfectly clear, but for the benefit of others, not so greatly gifted by the good God—the Inspector McNeil, for instance—it would be as well to make a few inquiries to establish the facts. One must have consideration for those less gifted than oneself."

"Good Lord, Poirot! Do you know, I'd give a considerable sum of money to see you make a thorough ass of yourself—just for once. You're so confoundedly conceited!"

"Do not enrage yourself, Hastings. In verity, I observe that there are times when you almost detest me! Alas, I suffer the penalties of greatness!"

The little man puffed out his chest, and sighed so comically that I was forced to laugh.

Tuesday saw us speeding to Liverpool in a first-class carriage of the L. & N. W. R. Poirot had obstinately refused to enlighten me as to his suspicions—or certainties. He contented himself with expressing surprise that I, too, was not equally au fait with the situation. I disdained to argue, and intrenched my curiosity behind a rampart of pretended indifference.

Once arrived at the quay alongside which lay the big transatlantic liner, Poirot became brisk and alert. Our proceedings consisted in interviewing four successive stewards and inquiring after a friend of Poirot's who had crossed to New York on the 23rd.

"An elderly gentleman, wearing glasses. A great invalid, hardly moved out of his cabin." The description appeared to tally with one Mr. Ventnor who had occupied the cabin C 24 which was next to that of Philip Ridgeway. Although unable to see how Poirot had deduced Mr. Ventnor's existence and personal appearance, I was keenly excited.

"Tell me," I cried, "was this gentleman one of the first to land when you got to New York?"

The steward shook his head.

"No, indeed, sir, he was one of the last off the boat."

I retired crestfallen, and observed Poirot grinning at me. He thanked the steward, a note changed hands, and we took our departure.

"It's all very well," I remarked heatedly, "but that last answer must have damped your precious theory, grin as you please!"

"As usual, you see nothing, Hastings. That last answer is, on the contrary, the coping-stone of my theory."

I flung up my hands in despair. "I give it up."

When we were in the train, speeding towards London, Poirot wrote busily for a few minutes, sealing up the result in an envelope.

"This is for the good Inspector McNeil. We will leave it at Scotland Yard in passing, and then to the Rendez-vous Restaurant, where I have asked Miss Esmee Farquhar to do us the honor of dining with us."
"What about Ridgeway?"

"What about him?" asked Poirot with a twinkle.

"Why, you surely don't think---you can't---"

"The habit of incoherence is growing upon you, Hastings. As a matter of fact I did think. If Ridgeway had been the thief---which was perfectly possible---the case would have been charming; a piece of neat methodical work."

"But not so charming for Miss Farquhar."

"Possibly you are right. Therefore all is for the best. Now, Hastings, let us review the case. I can see that you are dying to do so. The sealed package is removed from the trunk and vanishes, as Miss Farquhar puts it, into thin air. We will dismiss the thin air theory, which is not practicable at the present stage of science, and consider what is likely to have become of it. Every one asserts the incredibility of its being smuggled ashore---"

"Yes, but we know---"

"You may know, Hastings. I do not. I take the view that, since it seemed incredible, it was incredible. Two possibilities remain: it was hidden on board---also rather difficult---or it was thrown overboard."

"With a cork on it, do you mean?"

"Without a cork."

I stared. "But if the bonds were thrown overboard, they couldn't have been sold in New York."

"I admire your logical mind, Hastings. The bonds were sold in New York, therefore they were not thrown overboard. You see where that leads us?"

"Where we were when we started."

"Jamais de la vie! If the package was thrown overboard, and the bonds were sold in New York, the package could not have contained the bonds. Is there any evidence that the package did contain the bonds? Remember, Mr. Ridgeway never opened it from the time it was placed in his hands in London. "Yes, but then---" Poirot waved an impatient hand.

"Permit me to continue. The last moment that the bonds are seen as bonds is in the office of the London and Scottish Bank on the morning of the 23rd. They reappear in New York half an hour after the Olympia gets in, and according to one man, whom nobody listens to, actually before she gets in. Supposing then, that they have never been on the Olympia at all? Is there any other way they could get to New York? Yes. The Gigantic leaves Southampton on the same day as the Olympia, and she holds the record for the Atlantic. Mailed by the Gigantic, the bonds would be in New York the day before the Olympia arrived. All is clear, the case begins to explain itself. The sealed packet is only a dummy, and the moment of its substitution must be in the office in the Bank. It would be an easy matter for any of the three men present to have prepared a duplicate package which could be substituted for the genuine one. Tres bien, the bonds are mailed to a confederate in New York, with instructions to sell as soon as the Olympia is in, but some one must travel on the Olympia to engineer the supposed moment of the robbery."

"But why?"
"Because if Ridgeway merely opens the packet and finds it a dummy, suspicion flies at once to London. No, the man on board in the cabin next door does his work, pretends to force the lock in an obvious manner so as to draw immediate attention to the theft, really unlocks the trunk with a duplicate key, throws the package overboard and waits until the last to leave the boat. Naturally he wears glasses to conceal his eyes, and is an invalid since he does not want to run the risk of meeting Ridgeway. He steps ashore in New York and returns by the first boat available."

"But who---which was he?"

"The man who had a duplicate key, the man who ordered the lock, the man who has not been severely ill with bronchitis at his home in the country---enfin, that `stodgy' old man, Mr. Shaw! There are criminals in high places sometimes, my friend. Ah, here we are. Mademoiselle, I have succeeded! You permit?"

And, beaming, Poirot kissed the astonished girl lightly on either cheek!
PEDAGOGY EXERCISES

PART I: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
1. Where does the acronym ELT come from?
2. What is the ELT Certificate?
3. Why are successful candidates at the ELT Certificate examination called ELTs?
4. What requirements should ELT candidates comply with?
5. What are the four language skills and why are they important?
6. Why should the learners take advantage of every opportunity they have to communicate in English?
7. What are suprasegmental features and where are they present?
8. How important are the non-linguistic features that accompany the message?
9. What are the differences between speech and writing?
10. What are the essential human values that an ELT should have?
11. What do we mean by 'It is not how much we know but how we learn and teach that counts'?
12. What is the ultimate purpose of learning English?
13. What are the sine qua nons of effective communication?
14. Why should the teacher try to maximize classroom dynamics to comply with the sine qua nons?
15. Make a mind map of the four language skills.
16. Make a mind map of effective communication.

PART II: THE ENGLISH LESSON
17. How many stages are there in the learning process?
18. Why is Presentation called the stage of explanation?
19. What is the procedure to be followed in Presentation?
20. How long should Presentation last?
21. If the learners do not understand a new language item, what should the teacher do?
22. At what stage of the learning process are Presentation Techniques used?
23. What are Presentation Techniques used for?
24. What are the Ostensive Techniques?
25. When can the teacher use visual presentation?
26. How can the teacher present an item audio-visually?
27. What is the sine qua non of the language used in the Monolingual Technique?
28. Why should the Translation Technique be preferably avoided and when is it rightfully employed?
29. What is the purpose of Highlighting?
30. When is it advisable to highlight the pronunciation of an item?
31. What does Formulating consist in?

PART III: PRACTICE TECHNIQUES
32. What are Practice Techniques?
33. What are Written Practice Techniques?
34. What is a word exercise?
35. When are word exercises more suitably employed? Why?
36. What is the difference between a sentence exercise and a text exercise?
37. Can sentence exercises be communicative? How?
38. Why should activities be as communicative as possible?
39. Why are text exercises the most demanding of all Written Practice Techniques?
40. What are Oral Practice Techniques?
41. What is a drill?
42. What is a prompt?
43. How many types of listening exercises are there? What are they?
44. What is the difference between a speaking exercise and a drill?
PART IV: PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES
45. What is the purpose of Production Techniques?
46. When do the learners recycle language?
47. What can be recycled?
48. Are Production Techniques only about writing or do they also include oral language?
49. What is Induced Production?
50. Who decides what to recycle in Induced Production?
51. When does Induced Production take place?
52. What is Spontaneous Production?
53. Who decides what to recycle in Spontaneous Production?
54. What can the learners recycle in Spontaneous Production?
55. Do all learners recycle the same language item(s) in Spontaneous Production? Why/Why not?
56. Can the production of an item overlap with the practice of another item? Why/Why not? Why/Why not?

PART V: EVALUATION
57. When does Classroom Evaluation take place?
58. What is the aim of Classroom Evaluation?
59. Why is Formal Evaluation necessary?
60. How are candidates examined in Formal Evaluation?

PART VI: DEBATES
Here follow some hypothetical situations. Give your opinion taking advantage of what you have learnt from ELT.

(a) An English teacher knows a lot of English but gets hysterical in her classes. How will this affect the learning process?
(b) In an English classroom there is often much background noise and the lessons are frequently interrupted by phone calls which the teacher has to answer. In what way does this affect the learners?
(c) The learners do not feel comfortable in the room. What would the ideal classroom be like? Describe it.
(d) Mario Estévez wants to learn English to translate technical texts and Julián Pereira wants to learn English to use it when he travels abroad. They are both at an elementary level. Is it right that they learn together? Why/Why not?
(e) The teacher explains new items and then starts Practice without checking the learner’s understanding. What will probably happen?
(f) You cannot decide whether to read a dialogue or play the tape. What are the advantages and disadvantages of either decision?
(g) The teacher wants to make the English lessons more communicative. What should the teacher do to help the learners communicate effectively in English?
(h) The learners have problems in learning English in spite of the fact that they have a 'good' English teacher. List at least 10 (ten) hindrances.
(i) The learners have learnt several new items and they have practised them in written and oral exercises, but they have not had a chance to recycle the items they have learnt. What will probably happen? What could the teacher do to improve the situation?
(j) The teacher finds that the learners do not understand the visual presentations. What could be wrong? What qualities do you think visual material should have to be successfully used in Presentation?
(k) The learners only do word exercises in Written Practice. Could this be a problem? What is missing in Written Practice? How important are the missing types of written exercises?
(l) The learners are evaluated in class but they do not have formal evaluation. Will this be a problem? Why/Why not?
LITERATURE EXERCISES

1. A PIECE OF WOOD
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) The Official changes his moods from polite to alarmed, and then to aggressive. Say how he views the sergeant in each stage. (Illustrate with quotations.)
(c) State your position for or against war, and give reasons to support it.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

2. THE THEFT
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) State the difference between ‘theft’ and ‘robbery’. Provide examples of these nouns and the corresponding verbs.
(c) Justify the title of Ron Hansen’s story and explain why it is personal.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

3. THE OUTER BANKS
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) Why did Ed and Alice decide to change their way of life and what did they do?
(c) Write one or two paragraphs about your favourite pet.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

4. CAPTIVE
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) What do you think happened when the dog-owners came after the thaw?
(c) How is oil an indispensable element in modern life and how does it negatively affect the environment?
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

5. I HEARD A ROMANTIC STORY
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) Write your own ending changing the events described in the last 15 lines.
(c) Write a short summary of a thriller you have read or seen.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

6. NEW YORK TIMES AT SPECIAL BARGAIN RATES
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) What title would you give this story if it had none? Give reasons for your choice.
(c) State your opinion about whether the telephone conversation in Stephen King’s story is imaginary or real and explain why.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.
7. **GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE**
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) Do you believe in love through the internet? Why or why not?
(c) Investigate and write about audio and tactile devices for internet accessibility of blind people.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

8. **BRAVADO**
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) What would you have done if you had been Aisling?
(c) Write a true story about bravado which you might have witnessed, read about in the newspaper or watched on TV.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

9. **LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER**
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) What was Mary’s first reaction when Patrick told her his resolution?
(c) Why did Mary ask her husband’s friends to eat up the lamb that was in the oven? State her alibi and her real purpose.
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.

10. **THE MILLION DOLLAR BOND ROBBERY**
(a) Before reading the story, write a biography of its author. Include: pen name, nationality, name at birth, year of birth (and of death), education, genre(s), notable works and awards, film adaptations.
(b) Who was in charge of the bonds which disappeared and what was his relationship with the other characters?
(c) How did Mr Shaw justify his being away from the bank on the day Mr Ridgeway left and where was he?
(d) In no longer than a page, write a summary of the story.
CURSO DE INGRESO
a Carrera Oficial de 3 años

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