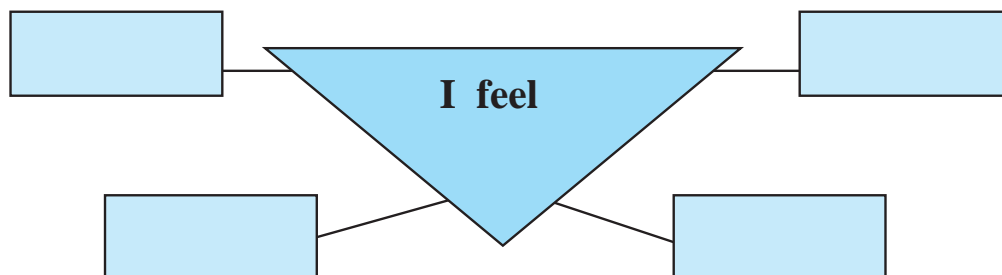


1.5 Mrs. Adis

ICE BREAKERS

- (i) Share your opinions/ feelings with your partner about a stranger who has a villainous look/appearance.



- (ii) Recall your favourite crime story on TV. Discuss with your friend how you could prevent the villain / thief from committing the crime / theft.
- (i) The feelings of a person when he commits a mistake are
 - (a) He tries to justify it.
 - (b)
 - (c)
 - (d)
 - (e)
- (ii) The person who makes a mistake or commits a crime should be punished because
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (c)
 - (d)

Sheila Kaye-Smith was an English novelist and poet. Many of her novels were set in the borderlands of Sussex and Kent in the English regional tradition. Her book *'The End of the House of Alard'* became a best-seller.

The story is about a peasant woman who finds a desperate young man at her doorstep, pleading of her to give him protection from the police. He had been poaching on the nearby estate, and in panic, had killed one of the gamekeepers.



Mrs. Adis

Sussex: a county in the south of England

tongue of land: a long stretch of land branching out from the mainroad

hammer-woods: wood (forest)- described as 'hammer' because in the past, iron used to be made using timber and water.

hammerponds: ponds

pricks of fire: stars

Delmonden: name of a village

close at hand: very near

stooping over: bending over

In north-east **Sussex** a great **tongue of land** runs into Kent. It is a land of woods – the old **hammer-woods** of the Sussex iron industry and among the woods gleam the **hammerponds**. Owing to the thickness of the woods, the road that passes Mrs. Adis's cottage is dark long before the fields beyond. That night there was no twilight and no moon, only a few **pricks of fire** in the black sky above the trees. But what the darkness hid the silence revealed. In the absolute stillness of the night, windless and clear, every sound was distinct, intensified. The distant bark of a dog at **Delmonden** sounded **close at hand**, and the man who walked on the road could hear the echo of his own footsteps following him like a knell.

Every now and then he made an effort to go more quietly, but the roadside was a mass of thorns, and their crackling and rustling were nearly as loud as the thud of his feet on the road. Besides, they made him go slowly, and he had no time for that.

When he came to Mrs. Adis's cottage he paused a moment. Only a small patch of grass lay between it and the road, and he looked in at the lighted, uncurtained window. He could see Mrs. Adis **stooping over** the fire, taking some pot or kettle off it. He hesitated and seemed to wonder. He was a big, heavy, working man, not successful, judging by the poverty of his appearance. For a moment he made as if he would open the window, then he changed his mind and went to the door instead.

He did not knock, but walked straight in.

The woman at the fire turned quickly round.

‘What, you, Peter Crouch !’ she said. ‘I didn’t hear you knock.’

‘I didn’t knock ma’am. I didn’t want anybody to hear.’

‘How’s that?’

‘I’m in trouble.’ His hands were shaking a little. ‘What have you done?’

I shot a man, Mrs. Adis.

‘You?’

‘Yes – I shot him.’

‘You killed him?’

‘I don’t know.’

For a moment there was silence in the small, stuffy kitchen. Then the kettle boiled over and Mrs Adis mechanically put it at the side of the fire.

She was a small, thin woman with a brown, hard face, on which the skin had dried in innumerable small, hair like wrinkles. She was probably not more than forty-two, but life treats some women hard in the agricultural districts of Sussex, and Mrs. Adis’ life had been harder than most.

‘What do you want me to do for you, Peter Crouch?’ she said a little sourly.

‘Let me stay here a bit. Is there nowhere you can put me till they’ve gone?’

‘Who’s they?’

‘The keepers.’

‘Oh you’ve had a quarrel with the keepers, have you?’

‘Yes. I was down by **Cinder Wood** seeing if I could pick up anything, and the keepers found me. There were four to one, so I used my gun.’

‘Then I ran for it. They’re after me; they can’t be far off now.’

Mrs Adis did not speak for a moment. Crouch looked at her **beseechingly**.

The writer describes Mrs. Adis as -

• a small woman

• -----

• -----

• -----

Mrs. Adis asks Peter Crouch whether he has had a quarrel with the keepers. This shows that

1. -----

2. -----

3. -----

Cinder Wood: name of wood

beseechingly: appealingly

huddled down: shrank oneself

‘You might do it for Tom's sake,’ he said.

‘You haven't been an over-good friend to Tom’, snapped Mrs. Adis.

‘But Tom’s been a very good friend to me; he would want you to stand by me tonight.’

‘Well, I won’t say he wouldn’t, for Tom always thought better of you than you deserved. Maybe you can stay till he comes home to-night, then we can hear what he says about it.’

‘He’ll be up at work for an hour yet, and the coast will be clear by then – I can get away out of the country.’

‘Where’ll you go?’

‘I don’t know. There is time to think of that.’

‘Well! You can think of it in here, she said dryly, opening a door which led from the kitchen into the small shed at the back of the cottage. They’ll never guess you’re there, specially if I tell them I haven’t seen you tonight.’

‘You’re a good woman, Mrs. Adis. I know I’m not worth your standing by me, but may be I’d have been different if I’d a mother like Tom’s.’

She did not speak, but shut the door, and he was in darkness save for a small ray of light that came through one of the cracks. By this light he could see her moving to and fro, preparing Tom’s supper. In another hour Tom would be home from Ironlatch Farm, where he worked every day. Peter Crouch trusted Tom to help him, for they had been friends when they went together to the National School at Lamberhurst, and since then the friendship had not been broken by their very different characters and careers.

Peter Crouch **huddled down** upon the sacks that filled one corner of the shed. A delicious smell of cooking began to come through from the kitchen, and he hoped Mrs. Adis would not deny him a share of the supper when Tom came home, for he was very hungry and he had a long way to go.

He had fallen into a kind of helpless doze, when he was roused by the sound of footsteps on the road.

For a moment his poor heart nearly choked him with its beating. They were the keepers. They had guessed where he was – with Mrs. Adis, his old friend's mother. He had been a fool to come to the cottage. Nearly losing his self-control, he shrank into the corner, shivering, half sobbing. But the footsteps went by. The next minute Mrs. Adis stuck her head into the shed.

'That was the keepers', She said shortly. 'I saw them go by. They had lanterns. Maybe it would be better if you slipped out now and went towards **Cansiron**. You'd miss them that way and get over to Kent. There's a London train that comes from Tunbridge Wells at ten tonight.'

'That'd be a fine thing for me, ma'am, but I haven't the price of a ticket on me.'

She went to one of the kitchen drawers.

'Here's seven shillings. It'll be your fare to London and a bit over.'

For a moment he did not speak, then he said: 'I don't know how to thank you ma'am.'

'Oh, you needn't thank me. I am doing it for Tom.'

'I hope you won't get into trouble because of this.'

'There isn't much fear. No one's ever likely to know you've been in this cottage. That's why I'd sooner you went before Tom came back, for maybe he'd bring a friend with him, and that'd make trouble.'

She opened the door for him but on the threshold they both stood still, for again footsteps could be heard approaching, this time from the far south.

'May be it's Tom,' said Mrs. Adis.

'There's more than one man there, and I can hear voices.'

'You'd better go back,' she said shortly. 'Wait till they've passed, anyway.'

With an **unwilling shrug** he went back into the little dusty shed, which he had come to hate, and she locked the door upon him.

Cansiron: name of a town where there is a railway station

List some characteristics of Mrs. Adis based on this incident.

unwilling shrug : the action of raising the shoulders reluctantly

momentary: for a brief period of time

dulling : not interesting or exciting

Scotney Castle: (a fort) name of a castle

refuge: shelter

Vilder guessed that Crouch has taken refuge at Mrs. Adis' house because

tongue tied: speechless

The footsteps drew nearer. They came slowly and heavily this time. For a moment he thought they would pass also, but their **momentary dulling** was only the crossing of the strip of grass outside the door. The next minute there was a knock. It was not Tom, then.

Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, Peter Crouch put his eye to one of the numerous cracks in the door and looked through into the kitchen. He saw Mrs. Adis go to the cottage door, but before she could open it a man came in quickly and shut it behind him.

Crouch recognized Vidler, one of the keepers of **Scotney Castle**, and he felt his hands and feet grow leaden cold. They knew where he was then. They had followed him. They had guessed that he had taken **refuge** with Mrs. Adis. It was all up. He was not really hidden; there was no place for him to hide. Directly they opened the inner door they would see him. Why couldn't he think of things better? Why wasn't he cleverer at looking after himself – like other men? His legs suddenly refused to support him, and he sat down on the pile of sacks.

The man in the kitchen seemed to have some difficulty in saying what he wanted to Mrs. Adis. He stood before her silently twisting his cap.

'Well, what is it?' she asked. 'I want to speak to you, ma'am'.

Peter Crouch listened, straining his ears, for his thudding heart nearly drowned the voices in the next room. Oh no! he was sure she would not give him away. If only for Tom's sake. She was a good sort, Mrs. Adis.

'Well?' she said sharply, as the man remained **tongue tied.** 'I have brought you bad news, ma'am,' Her expression changed.

'What ? It isn't Tom, is it?'

'He's outside,' said the keeper.

'What do you mean?' said Mrs. Adis, and she moved the door.

'Don't ma'am. Not till I've told you.'

'Told me what? Oh, be quick, man, for mercy's sake,' and she tried to push past him to the door.

‘There’s been a row,’ he said, down by Cinder Wood. There was a chap there snaring rabbits, and Tom was walking with the Boormans and me and old Crotch. We heard a noise and there...It was too dark to see who it was, and directly he saw us he **made off** but we’d scared him, and he let fly with his gun...

‘Tom’— said Mrs. Adis.

The keeper had forgotten his guard, and before he could prevent her she had flung open the door.

The men outside had evidently been waiting for the signal, and they came in carrying something, which they put down in the middle of the kitchen floor.

‘Is he dead?’ asked Mrs. Adis without tears.

The men nodded. They could not find a dry voice like hers.

In the shed Peter Crouch had ceased to sweat and tremble. Strength had come with despair, for he knew he must despair now. Besides, he no longer wanted to escape from this thing that he had done. Oh, Tom;-and I was thinking it was one of the keepers. Oh, Tom.

And it was you that got it—got it from me; I don’t want to live!

And yet life was sweet, for there was a woman at Ticehurst, a woman as faithful to him as Tom, who would go with him to the world’s end even now. But he must not think of her . He had no right: he must pay with his life for what he had done.

Mrs. Adis was sitting in the old basket armchair by the fire. One of the men had helped her into it.

‘We’ll go round to Ironlatch Cottage and ask Mrs. Gain to come down to you.’

‘This is a terrible thing to have come to you, and as for the man who did it—we’ve a middling good guess who he is, and he shall hang.’

‘We didn’t see his face, but we’ve got his gun. He threw it into a bush when he bolted and I swear that gun belongs to Peter Crouch who’s been up to no good since the day he was **sacked** for stealing corn.’

made off: ran away

The row took place because.....

sacked: dismissed

‘But he couldn’t have known it was Tom when he did it, he and Tom always being better friends than he deserved.’

Peter Crouch was standing upright now, looking through the crack of the door. He saw Mrs. Adis struggle to her feet and stand by the table, looking down on the dead man’s face. He saw her put her hand into her apron pocket, where she had thrust the key of the shed.

‘The Boormans have gone after Crouch,’ said Vidler, nervously breaking the silence.

‘They’d thought he’d broken through the wood Ironlatch way. There’s no chance of his having been by here? You haven’t seen him to-night ma’am?’

There was a pause.

‘No,’ said Mrs. Adis, ‘I haven’t seen him. Not since Tuesday.’ She took her hand out of her apron’s pocket.

‘Well, we’ll be getting around and fetch Mrs. Gain. Reckon you’d be glad to have her.’

Mrs. Adis nodded.

‘Will you carry him in there first?’ and she pointed to the bedroom door.

The men picked up the stretcher and carried it into the next room. Then silently each **wrung** the mother by the hand and went away.

She waited until they had shut the door, then she came towards the shed. Crouch once more fell a **shivering**. He couldn’t bear it. No he’d rather be hanged than face Mrs. Adis. He heard the key turn in the lock and he nearly screamed.

But she did not come in. She merely unlocked the door, then crossed the kitchen with a heavy, dragging footstep and shut herself in the room where Tom was.

Peter Crouch knew what he must do—the only thing she wanted him to do, the only thing he could possibly do. He opened the door and silently went out.

—Sheila Kaye-Smith

Guess the meaning:

‘**wrung**’ here means

Find the difference

between: shivering and
trembling

*Mrs. Adis unlocked the door
because*

BRAINSTORMING

(A1) (i) Discuss with your partner and describe the atmosphere in the woods when Peter Crouch was heading towards Mrs. Adis' House. It was—

(a) a dark moonless night.

(b)

(c)

(ii) Peter Crouch didn't knock before entering Mrs. Adis's house.

The reason was-

(a)

(b)

(c)

(iii) Go through the text again and find the reasons that forced Peter to shoot down a person.

(a) The keepers spotted him.

(b)

(c)

(iv) Mrs. Adis didn't hand over Peter Crouch to the keepers because—

(a)

(b)

(c)

(A2) The writer has used a phrase 'Thudding Heart' which means pounding, or beating of heart. Do you know that 'thud' is an onomatopoeic word which means a heavy sound made by an object falling to the ground? Discuss with your partner and make a list of Onomatopoeic words that you find in the text.

(a)

(b)

(c)

(A3) 'She went to one of the kitchen drawers'.

Look at the sentence carefully. The underlined word tells us that she went (some time ago) to a particular place (at one of the kitchen drawers). Now discuss with your partner and tell the class what you did 'yesterday' and what your friend did 'yesterday'. Complete the table. One is done for you.

You	About Friend
• I saw a movie.	• He/she wrote an essay.
• I	• He/she
• I	• He/she
• I	• He/she
• I	• He/she
• I	• He/she
• I	• He/she

(A4) Imagine your friend/younger brother or sister has committed a grave mistake that has resulted in a great loss to the college property or to your family. He/she seeks your advice to come out of the situation/problem. Write a dialogue between you and your friend/brother/sister who describes the entire situation and seeks help from you. Take help of the following points.

- Introduction
- Seeking help
- Concluding part
- Confessing the mistake
- Your advice/suggestion

(A5) The best punishment is ‘forgiveness’. Discuss the sentence in the light of the text you have read. You can make use of following points.

- (a) Forgiveness provides opportunity to change the behaviour.
- (b) Forgiveness leads to repentance.
- (c) A person may commit a mistake / crime impulsively or under the force of strong emotions.
- (d)
- (e)

(A6) Project:

Search in your college library or on the internet for at least five stories where a king or any great person has forgiven a losing king, culprit or offender. There are many such stories that you might have read in your history books. One such story is of Alexander and Porus. Find at least five stories and write their summarised versions in your notebook.
