



National  
Qualifications  
2024

**X824/77/12**

**English  
Textual Analysis**

TUESDAY, 7 MAY  
2:30 PM – 4:00 PM

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**Total marks — 20**

Attempt **ONLY** Part A **OR** Part B **OR** Part C **OR** Part D.

**PART A — POETRY — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART B — PROSE FICTION — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART C — PROSE NON-FICTION — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART D — DRAMA — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

Write your answers clearly in the answer booklet provided. In the answer booklet, you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Before leaving the examination room you must give your answer booklet to the Invigilator; if you do not, you may lose all the marks for this paper.



\* X 8 2 4 7 7 1 2 \*

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS — 20 marks

Your answer should take the form of a **CRITICAL ANALYSIS** appropriately structured to meet the demands of your selected question.

Attempt **ONLY** Part A OR Part B OR Part C OR Part D.

### PART A — POETRY

Read carefully *Easement* (2022) by Jameson Fitzpatrick and then answer the question that follows it.

#### *Easement*

I didn't know what to call the sudden  
green glimpse from the road, lush  
but low, from which rose a line of

5 utility poles, all in pairs, so that together  
they gave the impression of a long  
succession of gates leading somewhere

greener still. This was a common feature  
of the landscape against which I grew up.  
But this one, loved, because it was

10 on the way to my boyfriend's,  
two towns over, where it brought me such  
pleasure to drive, singing along to the songs

we made ours. Hours into months.  
For an anniversary he gave me a Polaroid  
15 of this place I'd point out, though the curve

was steep there and the glimpse brief.  
How he'd taken it he'd never tell.  
Once dumped, I cut the photo up.

20 This was what is meant by 'a lifetime ago.'  
That time before you I call my childhood,  
when there were many boyfriends to lose

and the songs I played were not yet a portal  
to anything. Now, coming up on a view  
of a much sharper drop, I'm surprised

25 to think of him only fondly and in passing.  
To give you permission to cut through me,  
as needed, on your way down to sweetness.

#### Question

Write a detailed critical response to this poem.

OR

## PART B — PROSE FICTION

Read carefully the extract from *Lessons* (2022) by Ian McEwan and then answer the question that follows it.

*In this extract, Roland, aged 11, who has been living with his parents in Libya after the end of the Second World War, has arrived at his new boarding school in England.*

### *Lessons*

He walked between his parents as though through a dreamscape towards the grand building. They entered by a side door. Inside it was cool, almost chilly. Within a narrow space before the entrance hall there was a telephone booth and a fire extinguisher. The staircase was steep and modest. These details were reassuring. Then they were in a larger reception space with an  
5 echoing high ceiling and three polished dark doors, all closed. The family stood uncertainly in the centre. Captain Baines was reaching again for the letter of directions when the school secretary was suddenly before them. After the introductions — her name was Mrs Manning — the tour began. She asked some cheery questions of Roland which he answered politely and she announced that he would be the youngest in his year. After that he barely listened and she did not  
10 speak to him again — a relief. Her remarks were addressed to the Captain. He asked the questions while Roland and his mother walked behind, as if they were both prospective pupils. But they did not look at each other. What Roland did catch from their guide were the mentions she made of ‘the boys’. After lunch, when it wasn’t rugby, the boys put on their boilersuits. That did not sound good. She said several times how strange or peaceful or tidy it was without these  
15 boys. But she missed them really. His old anxiety returned. The boys would know things that he did not, they knew each other, they would be bigger, stronger, older. They would dislike him.

They left the building by a side door and passed under a monkey puzzle tree. Mrs Manning pointed out a statue of Diana, the huntress, with what looked like a gazelle at her side. They did not go near, as he would have liked. Instead they stood at the top of some steps looking down at a  
20 gate which, she explained at length, was monogrammed in cast iron. Roland gazed at the immense river and drifted away in his thoughts. If they were at home now they would be getting ready for the beach. Rubber flippers and mask with their distinctive smell in the heat, trunks, towels. Sand grains from yesterday would be in the flippers and mask. His friends would be waiting. At night his mother would dab pink calamine lotion on his burnt and peeling shoulders  
25 and nose.

Now they were approaching a low modern building. Inside, upstairs, they inspected the dormitories. Here was the strongest evidence so far of the boys. Metal bunkbeds in rows, grey blankets, the smell of disinfectant, scarred cupboards Mrs Manning called ‘tallboys’ and in the washrooms rows of squat handbasins under small mirrors. No resemblance to the Palace of  
30 Versailles.

Later, tea and a slice of cake in the school office. Roland’s piano lessons were paid for in advance. The Captain signed some papers and, after farewells, the walk back down the drive, a short wait under the immense tree for the bus into the centre of Ipswich, then to the stuffy school outfitter, where the oak-panelled walls soaked up most of the available air. It took a long time to work  
35 through the list. Captain Baines went to a pub. Roland put on a bristling Harris tweed jacket with leather patches at the elbows and leather trimming at the cuffs. His first jacket. His second was a blue blazer. The boilersuit came flat in a cardboard box. It was not necessary to try it on, the assistant said. The one item he liked was an elastic belt in blue and yellow, fastened with a hook shaped like a snake. On the Ipswich train to London, heading back to his sister’s place in  
40 Richmond, surrounded by bags of his stuff, his parents asked him in different ways if he liked the

school or this or that feature. He neither liked nor disliked Berners. It was simply, overwhelmingly there and it was already his future. He said he liked it and the look of relief on their faces made him feel happy.

45 Five days after his eleventh birthday his parents took him to a street near Waterloo station where the coaches were waiting. One was set aside for new boys. It was an awkward goodbye. His father clapped him on the back, his mother hesitated over an embrace then gave a restrained version of one which he received clumsily, sensitive to what the other boys might think. Minutes after, he witnessed many tearful noisy hugs, but it was too late to go back. Inside the coach there were a difficult fifteen minutes, with his parents on the pavement smiling and half waving and mouthing  
50 inaudible encouragement up at him through the window while next to him was a boy who wanted to talk. When the coach began to move at last, his parents walked away. His father's arm was round his mother's shoulders which were shaking.

Roland's neighbour put out his hand and said, 'I'm Keith Pitman and I'm going to be a cosmetic dentist.'

55 Roland had politely shaken hands before with many grown-ups, mostly his father's army colleagues, but he had never performed this ritual with someone of his own age. He took Keith's hand and said, 'Roland Baines.'

He had already noticed that this friendly boy was no bigger than he was.

60 In the first instance, the shock was not separation from his parents 2,000 miles away. The immediate assault was on the nature of time. It would have happened anyway. It had to happen, the transition into adult time and obligation. Before, he had flourished in a barely visible mist of events, careless of their sequence, drifting, at worst stumbling, through the hours, days and weeks. Birthdays and Christmas were the only true markers. Time was what you received. His parents supervised its flow at home, at school everything happened in one classroom and  
65 occasional shifts in routine were orchestrated by teachers who escorted you and even held your hand.

Here, the transition was brutal. The new little boys had to learn quickly to live by the clock, be its servants, anticipate its demands and pay the toll for failure: a telling-off from an irritable teacher, or a detention or, in the final resort, the threat of 'the slipper'. When to be up and making your  
70 bed, when to be at breakfast, then assembly, then first lesson; to gather up everything needed five lessons ahead; how to consult your timetable, or certain noticeboards for lists that might contain your name; to walk punctually from one classroom to another every forty-five minutes and not be late for lunch straight after fifth lesson; which days were games, where to hang and retrieve your kit and when to hand it in for washing; and on the afternoons when there were no  
75 games, when to be at class in the late afternoon, and when to be at class on Saturday mornings; when prep started and how long you had to complete your set tasks of memorising or writing; when to shower, when to be in bed fifteen minutes before the lights went out; which were the laundry days and at what time you must line up to present your dirty clothes to Matron — socks and underwear on certain days, shirts, trousers and towels on others; when the top sheet on your  
80 bed became the bottom and the new sheet went on top; when to queue for nit or nail inspection or haircuts or pocket-money distribution and when the tuck shop opened.

Possessions consorted tyrannically with time. They could disappear at the ends of your fingers. There were many things you were likely to lose or forget to bring at the start of the day — the timetable itself, a textbook, last night's prep, other exercise books, printed questionnaires and  
85 maps, a pen that didn't leak, a bottle of ink, pencil, ruler, protractor, compass, slide rule. If you kept all these small things in a case, you could lose that too and be in bigger trouble.

Time, which had been an unbounded sphere in which he moved freely in all directions, became overnight a narrow one-way track down which he travelled with his new friends from lesson to

90 lesson, week to week until it became an unquestioned reality. The boys, whose presence he had dreaded, were as bewildered as he was, and friendly. He liked the warmth of the cockney accents. They huddled together, some wept at night, some wet their beds, most were relentlessly cheerful. No one was ridiculed. After lights out, they told ghost stories, or elaborated their theories about the world or boasted about their fathers, some of whom, he learned later, were non-existent. Roland heard his own voice in the dark trying and failing to evoke the Suez evacuation. But the  
95 story of the accident was a success. A man sailing through the air to his certain death, a woman blinded and bleeding, sirens, police, his father's bloodied arm. Another night, Roland repeated it by general request. He gained status, an element that had never been part of his life. He thought he was becoming a different person, one that his parents might not recognise.

100 After lunch, three afternoons a week, Roland's year group put on their boilersuits — simply done — and were sent out to play unsupervised in the woods and along the river's foreshore. Much that he had read about in the Jennings novels and dreamed of from dry Libya was at last fulfilled. It was as if they had received instructions from *Boy's Own* magazine. They built camps, climbed trees, made bows and arrows, and dug a dangerous unsupported tunnel and went through it on their stomachs for a dare. At four o'clock they were back in class. The hands that held fountain  
105 pens might be still streaked with black estuary mud or grass stains. If it was double maths or history, it was a fight to stay awake for ninety minutes. But if it was Friday, when the last lesson was English, the teacher thrilled them by reading aloud in a high nasal voice another episode of a cowboy story, 'Shane'. It occupied most of the term.

110 It took Roland several weeks to understand that most of the teachers were not fierce or hostile. They only appeared so in their black gowns. Largely, they were genial and some even knew his name, though only his surname. Many were shaped by their service in the war. Even though it had ended fourteen years ago — his entire lifetime plus almost a quarter — the world war remained a presence, a shadow, but also a light, the source of virtue and meaning. The war lived in the unfading stencilled lettering on the brick wall outside the sickbay — Decontam Centre. It was  
115 alive in most classrooms, where discipline was not imposed but assumed by ex-servicemen who themselves had once received orders in a grand cause. Obedience was a given. Everyone could relax.

Roland's terrible secret was revealed within two weeks. The new boys were sent in batches to the sickbay and stood stripped to their underpants, crammed together in the waiting room until their  
120 names were called. He presented himself before the fearsome Sister Hammond. It was said of her that she 'took no nonsense'. Without a greeting she told him to get on the scales. Then he was measured, his joints, his bones, his ears were inspected for abnormalities. Finally, the Sister put an eyepatch on him and, turning him by his shoulders, made him stand behind a line and look at a board of diminishing letters on the wall. In near nakedness he was about to be uncovered. His  
125 heart was thudding. Squinting couldn't help him, his right eye was no better than his left and all his guesses were wrong. He could not read past the second row. Unsurprised, Sister Hammond made a note and called the next boy.

Ten days after his visit to the Ipswich optician he was sent from his classroom to collect a stiff brown envelope. It was a warm autumnal morning, the sky was cloudless. He stopped before a tall  
130 oak tree to experiment before returning to class. He looked first to make sure there was no one nearby. He removed the case from the envelope, prised open the heavily sprung lid and took out the unfamiliar device. It felt alive in his hands, repellent. He opened its arms wide, raised it to his face and looked up. A revelation. He called out in joy. The great shape of the oak leaped as though through an Alice in Wonderland mirror. Suddenly every separate leaf of the many  
135 thousands that covered the tree resolved into a brilliant singularity of colour and form and glittering movement in the slight breeze, each leaf a subtle variation of red, orange, gold, pale yellow and lingering green against a deep blue sky. The tree, like the scores around it, had made a portion of the rainbow its own. The oak was an intricate giant being that *knew* itself. It was performing for him, showing off, delighting in its own existence.

140 When he shyly put his glasses on in class to test out possibilities of ridicule and shame, no one noticed. At home in the Christmas holidays, with the Mediterranean horizon restored to a sharpened blade, his parents made only neutral comments in passing. He noticed that dozens of people around him wore glasses. For two years he had worried about nothing and got everything wrong. It was not only the material world that had come into focus. He had caught sight of himself  
145 for the first time. He was a particular person — more than that, a peculiar one.

He was not alone in thinking so. Back at school a month later he was dispatched from the classroom on an errand to deliver a letter to the secretary's office. Mrs Manning wasn't there. As he approached her desk he saw his name, upside down in an open file. He edged round the desk to read it. In a box marked 'IQ' he read a number, 137, that meant nothing to him. Below it he  
150 read, 'Roland is an intimate boy . . .' There were footsteps in the corridor outside and he came away quickly and returned to his class. Intimate? He thought he knew what it meant, but surely you had to be intimate *with* someone. When he was free in the afternoon he went to the library for a dictionary. He felt sick as he opened it. He was about to read an adult verdict on who or what he was. *Close in acquaintance or association. Very familiar.* He stared at the definition, his  
155 bafflement confirmed. Who was he supposed to be familiar with? Someone he had forgotten or had yet to meet? He never discovered but he kept a special feeling for the word that held the secret of his selfhood.

### Question

Discuss the effectiveness of the ways in which Ian McEwan presents the impact of boarding school on Roland's life.



OR

## PART C — PROSE NON-FICTION

Read carefully the introduction to *What Just Happened?! (2022)* by Marina Hyde and then answer the question that follows it.

*This is an extract from the introduction to What Just Happened?! by Marina Hyde, a book of her newspaper columns previously published in The Guardian.*

### ***What Just Happened?!***

- At this point, I should say something about the whole idea of a book of columns. Can I confide in you? It worries me. In the olden times, anything written in a newspaper mercifully and quite rightly disappeared within a day of it being published, ideally ending up wrapped round your fish and chips. (And, yes, newspapers *have* turned out to be even less sustainable than cod.) These
- 5 days, of course, newspaper content lives on seemingly for ever, acquiring rather more permanence than many of us journalists deserve. Particularly someone like me. In fact, I often feel that if I wrote my column in the afternoon, it would say something completely different to whatever I'd ended up writing that morning. 'Do you still think this, six years on?' 'Oh my God — I probably didn't even think it by tea THAT DAY.'
- 10 I know some people like to think of column-writing as an art, but for me, it's definitely not. It's a trade. You get up, you write something to fill a space, and you hope it's not one of your worst shots and that readers enjoy it. Maybe some people are out there imagining they're writing the first draft of history, but I feel like I'm just sticking a pin in a moment. All of which is a long way of saying that I cringe at quite a few bits in the earlier columns in this book. (You, however, may wish
- 15 to reserve your shudders for the later efforts.) When I was putting together this selection, I read a couple of them and just thought, 'Oh, do get OVER yourself, luv. Do you have any idea how histrionic you sound?'
- Clearly I didn't. But time's a great teacher, and on reflection I thought it was best not to airbrush all of those little embarrassments out. Like I say, they're just a record of a moment in time —
- 20 perhaps some howl of entitled despair that liberals like me had to work through. After all, as was made abundantly clear from 2016 onwards, we were no longer flavour of the century. Yup, we'd got home to our ivory tower to find the locks had been changed. We had, in the immortal words of Chris Morris to Peter O'Hanraha-hanrahan in *The Day Today*, LOST THE NEWS.
- Other potential potholes? If there are any predictions in here, please forgive them, because in
- 25 recent years I have tried to steer clear of all that. I can't remember exactly when it hit me, but at a certain point I noticed how often political journalism was about predicting what was coming. We were suddenly awash with discussions about how the various stories were going to play out. Don't get me wrong, I read and very much enjoyed most of it. But with the best will in the world, I'm not totally sure it's the job of a journalist to tell you what's going to happen next, as opposed to
- 30 what's just happened. Let's be clear: the stuff that actually was occurring was wild enough. Even so, increasing amounts of content seemed to be a kind of futurology, with speculation about potential scenarios occasionally crowding out analysis of existing developments. I think it comes back to that thing of having lost the news. There was almost a cargo cult element to it. If we just lay out the flowchart, if we just set out our logical case for how things SHOULD develop, then
- 35 somehow — somehow! — the old familiar certainties will be airdropped back to us.

They haven't been yet — but soon, no doubt. Any day now . . .

\*

To talk briefly about the format: I thought about doing all the politics in themes, before realising I

don't have anything so highfalutin as those. What I do have — and what we've all had — is characters. So this book doesn't just have politicians; it has a queen, various princes and duchesses, celebrities, wicked advisers, reality TV monsters, billionaires, philanthropists, fauxlanthropists, Hollywood sex offenders, judges, media barons, populists, police officers and all kinds of other heroes and villains. The full fairy tale, in fact. Sometimes pretty Grimm. In the end I've grouped the political columns together, with each year given its own chapter. And I've broken those years up with columns about things like sport or celebrities, because we all need an interlude/respite.

Ideally it'll all be a deeply unpleasant and staggeringly unwelcome reminder of how the news felt to some of us as we were put through it, seemingly on a permanent wringer cycle. The Americans got Trump; UK citizens got the seemingly interminable Brexit wars. Everyone got plunged into a pandemic. How would you rate your satisfaction at your news journey, on a scale of one to the survivors of the USS *Indianapolis*? Those sailors survived one of the worst naval disasters in US history, when their ship was torpedoed by the Japanese in 1945, and were then left bobbing in the Pacific Ocean. Subsequently, and over several days, they were subjected to the worst shark attack in history.

So it seems that when it comes to interludes/respite, there weren't a whole lot of them in real life. And in the month I'm typing this, horrifyingly, war has broken out in Europe. Unimaginable scenes that seem plucked from the darker parts of the 20th century are playing out live on our TV screens. Elsewhere, Donald Trump is once again the favourite to win the Republican nomination.

Things will calm down. Won't they? Any day now . . . ?

\*

A non-scientific 'most' people in the UK had absolutely had enough of politics by about six months after the Brexit vote in 2016. On the other hand, had we? Had we *really*? We supposedly hated it, but couldn't stop rubbernecking at it. The BBC Parliament channel had never rated so highly. Westminster seemed to reach far beyond its bubble. A friend of mine was doing a comedy tour in September 2019, and I remember going to Worcester to see his show there. Having put my bag down in my hotel room, I went downstairs to the bar and beheld a selection of people at separate tables completely and utterly glued to the Sky News feed from the Supreme Court, where arguments on the lawful or otherwise early suspension of Parliament were being heard. It was 3pm on a Tuesday afternoon. Without wishing to go out on a limb, it was difficult not to conclude that something quite odd had happened to the UK.

Having said that, I do have one small theory about what has happened both here and beyond. I think that reality television — the overwhelmingly dominant and highest-rating entertainment genre of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century — became reality politics. Instead of sitting back and having entertainment done to them, audiences in the reality TV heyday were given buttons to press and voting lines to call, and were invited to change the narrative themselves. They loved it. *The X Factor* had 'kind of given democracy back to the world', its supremo, Simon Cowell, noted mildly. At the height of his light-entertainment powers in 2009, Cowell was convinced that his next big will-of-the-people format would be 'a political *X Factor*', a 'referendum-type TV show' in which viewers would vote on hot topics. The Government would then be challenged to phone in to the studio and explain its position. Well, now . . . Be careful what Simon Cowell wishes for.

And as shows like *X Factor* and *Strictly* matured, a new phenomenon could be observed: people were taking increasing delight in voting for talentless or disruptive candidates, convinced they were sticking it to the experts. 'We don't care if some respected prat in London thinks we shouldn't like these candidates,' they seemed to be saying. 'Indeed, the fact the respected prat doesn't like them makes us like them all the more.' Muscles were being flexed. Control was being taken back.



85 Meanwhile, just as *Big Brother* or *Survivor* bookers once had, day-time TV shows started picking guests from the extremes because it made for better ‘conflict’. And in fairly short order the news programmes decided they wanted in on the drama too. Adversarial punditry was in. Katie Hopkins started off as an *Apprentice* candidate, then moved on to the *This Morning* sofa to insult children with ‘common’ names, eventually graduating to alt-right politics like it was the most seamless  
90 journey in the world. I don’t believe it’s a coincidence that the biggest reality TV star of the era eventually ended up in the White House — and, of course, social media sent the ratings of reality politics into the stratosphere.

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Any other business? Well, I almost feel bad admitting it, but I should say that in general I have found writing about these turbulent years rather cathartic. Instead of having what we might call  
95 ‘unresolved news issues’, I have simply had to sit down, open a blank document and — on a good day — try to work out a way of making people laugh about some current events. The routine is pretty therapeutic.

It’s also helped that I’ve never thought of myself as a proper journalist or political writer or anything grand and professional like that. I started out in journalism entirely by accident, when  
100 the secretarial temping agency I worked for sent me to answer the phones on the *Sun*’s showbiz desk for a few days. I loved it — it was so much more hilarious than answering the phone in a bank, which is what I’d been doing before — but maybe because of that odd entry path I’ve never felt entirely ‘formal’ on the old journalistic front. After a long while in the trade, I finally realised this could be an asset. Or at least I gained the confidence to treat it as such. I stopped trying to  
105 emulate other people’s voices and found my own.

The first column I think I managed that with was a celebrity one I started in the *Guardian*, called Lost in Showbiz. The mid-2000s were an amazing time to be writing about celebrity culture. I also had a sports column, which I’m afraid to say was vanishingly rare for a woman back then, and would go and cover live things like the World Cup and the Olympics and so on, where that male-  
110 female imbalance became even clearer. (It’s much better now!) So I always felt rather outsidersy on the sports pages too, and gradually realised that this actually gave me lot of leeway. I didn’t have to cover things in some ‘expected’ way, so I learned, on the job, to do my own thing.

In fact, I can now see it was covering the showbiz and sport beats in that particular way that helped me to find a way of writing about politics that I hoped would be more accessible. I tend to  
115 think very associatively, so for me the reflexive way of making sense of a lot of things is by using references to other things. I’m forever internally analogising. When it came to applying that to politics, I found drawing comparisons with political history and philosophy less amusing than drawing them with stuff like pop music or movies or football. I just thought there might be a fun way of writing about politics that filtered it through the prisms of things people actually *liked*,  
120 given how many of them seemed to dislike politics itself.

Even now I always feel like more of an old-style blogger (albeit one lucky enough to be paid). I don’t really have any special access — once a year I might do something mad and masochistic like go to the party conferences — but in general I watch it all from the sofa at home, just like everyone else. Or, to put it another way, as far as political writing goes, I’m a cook, not a chef. So  
125 over the past few years I’ve tried above all to be a companion to any reader — to be a sympathetic friend, as opposed to an expert or educator. The latter is *definitely* a job for finer minds than mine. I can, however, do you fellow-feeling and a few jokes. Just watched Michael Howard casually threaten war with Spain (April 2017)? Come and sit down next to me, and we’ll have a slightly deranged laugh about it together.

130 But — and with apologies to all the serious-minded big hitters out there — the companionable laughter space is a pretty great one to be in. As the past few years have gone by, more and more people have been kind enough to read my columns. And when a new one gets published, I’ve

135 noticed an increasing number of readers saying that they're saving it to read with a cup of tea or a glass of wine. And that, honestly, is THE nicest thing I can possibly imagine. Talk about a personal pinnacle. If anything I write can be a brief but pleasurable part of someone's downtime or relaxation, then that is my absolute honour. Saving me for a drink? Yes please! Yes please to being an accompaniment! More than anything else in this entire crazy world, I want to be the journalistic equivalent of a chocolate digestive or a packet of salt and vinegar crisps.

Quite heavy on the vinegar. Obviously.

### Question

Write a detailed critical response to this extract.

In your response you should pay particular attention to how the author:

- sets up expectations for what follows in the book
- explains her approach to journalistic writing.

OR

## PART D — DRAMA

Read carefully the extract from Act 1 of *Painting Churches* (1982) by Tina Howe and then answer the question that follows it.

*The play is set on a bright spring morning in the Church's townhouse in Beacon Hill, Boston. Fanny and Gardner Church are in the process of preparing to move house to Cape Cod on the Atlantic coast and are boxing objects up.*

Characters in this extract:

**FANNY SEDGWICK CHURCH:** a Bostonian from a fine old family, in her sixties

**GARDNER CHURCH:** her husband, an eminent New England poet from a finer family, in his seventies

**MARGARET CHURCH (MAGS):** their daughter, a painter, in her early thirties

### Act One

*The doorbell rings.*

FANNY: IT'S MAGS, IT'S MAGS! (A pause. Dashing out of the room, colliding into Gardner) GOOD GOD, LOOK AT ME! I'M STILL IN MY BATHROBE!

GARDNER (Offstage): COMING, COMING . . . I'VE GOT IT . . . COMING! (Dashing into the room, colliding into Fanny) I'VE GOT IT . . . HOLD ON . . . COMING . . . COMING . . .

FANNY (Offstage): MAGS IS HERE! IT'S MAGS . . . SHE'S FINALLY HERE!

*Gardner exits to open the front door. Mags comes staggering in carrying a suitcase and an enormous duffel bag. She wears wonderfully distinctive clothes and has very much her own look. She's extremely out of breath and too wrought up to drop her heavy bags.*

10 MAGS: I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry I'm so late . . . Everything went wrong! A passenger had a heart attack outside of New London and we had to stop . . . It was terrifying! All these medics and policemen came swarming onto the train and the conductor kept running up and down the aisles telling everyone not to leave their seats under any circumstances . . . Then the New London fire department came screeching down to the tracks, sirens blaring, lights whirling, and all these men  
15 in black rubber suits started pouring through the doors . . . *That took two hours . . .*

FANNY (Offstage): DARLING . . . DARLING . . . WHERE ARE YOU?

MAGS: *Then*, I couldn't get a cab at the station. There just weren't any! I must have circled the block fifteen times. Finally I just stepped out into the traffic with my thumb out, but no one would pick me up . . . so I walked . . .

20 FANNY (Offstage): Damned zipper's stuck . . .

GARDNER: You walked all the way from the South Station?

MAGS: Well actually, I ran . . .

GARDNER: You had poor Mum scared to death.

25 MAGS (Finally puts the bags down with a deep sigh): I'm sorry . . . I'm really sorry. It was a nightmare.

*Fanny re-enters the room, her dress over her head. The zipper's stuck; she staggers around blindly.*

FANNY: Damned zipper! Gar, will you please help me with this?

MAGS: I sprinted all the way up Beacon Hill.

- GARDNER (*Opening his arms wide*): Well come here and let's get a look at you. (*He hugs her*) Mags!
- 30 MAGS (*Squeezing him tight*): Oh, Daddy . . . Daddy!
- GARDNER: My Mags!
- MAGS: I never thought I'd get here! . . . Oh, you look wonderful!
- GARDNER: Well, you don't look so bad yourself!
- MAGS: I love your hair. It's gotten so . . . white!
- 35 FANNY (*Still lost in her dress, struggling with the zipper*): This is so typical . . . just as Mags arrives, my zipper has to break! (*She grunts and struggles*)
- MAGS (*Waves at her*): Hi, Mum . . .
- FANNY: Just a minute, dear, my zipper's . . .
- GARDNER (*Picks up Mags' bags*): Well, sit down and take a load off your feet . . .
- 40 MAGS: I was so afraid I'd never make it . . .
- GARDNER (*Staggering under the weight of the bags*): What have you got in here? Lead weights?
- MAGS: I can't believe you're finally letting me do you.
- Fanny flings her arms around Mags, practically knocking her over.*
- FANNY: OH, DARLING . . . MY PRECIOUS MAGS,                      GARDNER (*Lurching around in circles*): Now  
45 YOU'RE HERE AT LAST.    let's see . . . where should I put these . . . ?
- FANNY: I was sure your train had derailed and you were lying dead in some ditch!
- MAGS (*Pulls away from Fanny to come to Gardner's rescue*): Daddy, please, let me . . . these are much too heavy.
- FANNY (*Finally noticing Mags*): GOOD LORD, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOUR HAIR?!
- 50 MAGS (*Struggling to take the bags from Gardner*): Come on, give them to me . . . please? (*She sets them down by the sofa*)
- FANNY (*As her dress starts to slide off one shoulder*): Oh, not again! . . . Gar, would you give me a hand and see what's wrong with this zipper. One minute it's stuck, the next it's falling to pieces.
- Gardner goes to her and starts fussing with it.*
- 55 MAGS (*Pacing*): I don't know, it's been crazy all week. Monday, I forgot to keep an appointment I'd made with a new model . . . Tuesday, I overslept and stood up my advanced painting students . . . Wednesday, the day of my meeting with Max Zoll, I forgot to put on my underpants . . .
- FANNY: GODDAMMIT, GAR, CAN'T YOU DO ANYTHING ABOUT THIS ZIPPER?!
- MAGS: I mean, there I was, racing down Broome Street in this gauzy Tibetan skirt when I tripped and fell right at his feet . . . SPLATTT! My skirt goes flying over my head and there I am . . .  
60 everything staring him in the face . . .
- FANNY: COME ON, GAR, USE A LITTLE MUSCLE!
- MAGS (*Laughing*): Oh, well, all that matters is that I finally got here . . . I mean . . . there you are . . .
- 65 GARDNER (*Struggling with the zipper*): I can't see it, it's too small!
- FANNY (*Whirls away from Gardner, pulling her dress off altogether*): OH, FORGET IT! JUST FORGET IT! The trolley's probably missing half its teeth, just like someone else I know. (*To Mags*) I grind my teeth in my sleep now, I've worn them all down to stubs. Look at that! (*She flings open her mouth and points*) Nothing left but the gums!
- 70 GARDNER: I never hear you grind your teeth . . .
- FANNY: That's because I'm snoring so loud. How could you hear anything through all that racket? It

- even wakes me up. It's no wonder poor Daddy has to sleep downstairs.
- MAGS (*Looking around*): Jeez, look at the place! So, you're finally doing it . . . selling the house and moving to Cotuit year round. I don't believe it. I just don't believe it!
- 75 GARDNER: Well, how about a drink to celebrate Mags' arrival?
- MAGS: You've been here so long. Why move now?
- FANNY: Gardner, what are you wearing that bathrobe for?
- MAGS: You can't move. I won't let you!
- FANNY (*Softly to Gardner*): Really, darling, you ought to pay more attention to your appearance.
- 80 MAGS: You love this house. *I* love this house . . . the room . . . the light.
- GARDNER: So, Mags, how about a little . . . (*He drinks from an imaginary glass*) to wet your whistle?
- FANNY: We can't start drinking now, it isn't even noon yet!
- MAGS: I'm starving. I've got to get something to eat before I collapse! (*She exits towards the*
- 85 *kitchen*)
- FANNY: What *have* you done to your hair, dear? The color's so queer and all your nice curl is gone.
- GARDNER: It looks to me as if she dyed it.
- FANNY: Yes, that's it. You're absolutely right! It's a completely different color. She dyed it bright red!
- 90 *Mags can be heard thumping and thudding through the icebox.*
- FANNY: NOW, MAGS, I DON'T WANT YOU FILLING UP ON SNACKS . . . I'VE MADE A PERFECTLY BEAUTIFUL LEG OF LAMB FOR LUNCH! . . . HELLO? . . . DO YOU HEAR ME? . . . (*To Gardner*) No one in our family has *ever* had red hair, it's so common looking.
- GARDNER: I like it. It brings out her eyes.
- 95 FANNY: WHY ON EARTH DID YOU DYE YOUR HAIR RED, OF ALL COLORS?!
- MAGS (*Returns, eating Saltines<sup>1</sup> out of the box*): I didn't dye my hair, I just added some highlight.
- FANNY: I suppose that's what your arty friends in New York do . . . dye their hair all the colors of the rainbow!
- GARDNER: Well, it's damned attractive if you ask me . . . damned attractive!
- 100 *Mags unzips her duffel bag and rummages around in it while eating the Saltines.*
- FANNY: Darling, I told you not to bring a lot of stuff with you. We're trying to get rid of things.
- MAGS (*Pulls out a folding easel and starts setting it up*): AAAAAHHHHHH, here it is. Isn't it a beauty? I bought it just for you!
- FANNY: Please don't get crumbs all over the floor. Crystal was just here yesterday. It was her last
- 105 time before we move.
- MAGS (*At her easel*): God, I can hardly wait! I can't believe you're finally letting me do you.
- FANNY: *Do* us? . . . What *are* you talking about?
- GARDNER (*Reaching for the Saltines*): Hey, Mags, could I have a couple of those?
- MAGS (*Tosses him the box*): Sure! (*To Fanny*) Your portrait.
- 110 GARDNER: Thanks. (*He starts munching on a handful*)
- FANNY: You're planning to paint our portrait now? While we're trying to move . . . ?

<sup>1</sup> Saltines: an inexpensive cracker

- GARDNER (*Sputtering Saltines*): Mmmmm, I'd forgotten just how delicious Saltines are!
- MAGS: It's a perfect opportunity. There'll be no distractions; you'll be completely at my mercy. Also, you promised.
- 115 FANNY: I did?
- MAGS: Yes, you did.
- FANNY: Well, I must have been off my rocker.
- MAGS: No, you said, 'You can paint us, you can dip us in concrete, you can do anything you want with us just so long as you help us get out of here!'
- 120 GARDNER (*Offering the box of Saltines to Fanny*): You really ought to try some of these, Fan, they're absolutely delicious!
- FANNY (*Taking a few*): Why, thank you.
- MAGS: I figure we'll pack in the morning and you'll pose in the afternoons. It'll be a nice diversion.
- FANNY: These *are* good!
- 125 GARDNER: Here, dig in . . . take some more.
- MAGS: I have some wonderful news . . . amazing news! I wanted to wait till I got here to tell you.
- Gardner and Fanny eat their Saltines, passing the box back and forth as Mags speaks.*
- MAGS: You'll die! Just fall over into the packing cartons and die! Are you ready? . . . BRACE YOURSELVES . . . OKAY, HERE GOES . . . I'm being given a one-woman show at one of the most important galleries in New York this fall. Me, Margaret Church, exhibited at Castelli's, 420 West Broadway . . . Can you believe it?! . . . MY PORTRAITS HANGING IN THE SAME ROOMS THAT HAVE SHOWN RAUSCHENBERG, JOHNS, WARHOL, KELLY, LICHTENSTEIN, STELLA, SERRA, ALL THE HEAVIES . . . It's incredible, beyond belief . . . I mean, at my age . . . Do you know how good you have to be to get in there? It's a miracle . . . an honest-to-God, star-spangled miracle!
- 130
- 135 *Pause.*
- FANNY (*Mouth full*): Oh, darling, that's wonderful. We're so happy for you!
- GARDNER (*Mouth full*): No one deserves it more, no one deserves it more!
- MAGS: Through some fluke, some of Castelli's people showed up at our last faculty show at Pratt and were knocked out . . .
- 140 FANNY (*Reaching for the box of Saltines*): More, more . . .
- MAGS: They said they hadn't seen anyone handle light like me since the French Impressionists. They said I was this weird blend of Pierre Bonnard, Mary Cassatt and David Hockney . . .
- GARDNER (*Swallowing his mouthful*): I told you they were good.
- MAGS: Also, no one's doing portraits these days. They're considered passé. I'm so out of it, I'm in.
- 145 GARDNER: Well, you're loaded with talent and always have been.
- FANNY: She gets it all from Mama, you know. Her miniature of Henry James is still one of the main attractions at the Atheneum. Of course no woman of breeding could be a professional artist in her day. It simply wasn't done. But talk about talent . . . that woman had talent to burn!
- MAGS: I want to do one of you for the show.
- 150 FANNY: Oh, do Daddy, he's the famous one.
- MAGS: No, I want to do you both. I've always wanted to do you and now I've finally got a good excuse.
- FANNY: It's high time somebody painted Daddy again! I'm sick to death of that dreadful portrait of him in the National Gallery they keep reproducing. He looks like an undertaker!



155 GARDNER: Well, I think you should just do Mum. She's never looked handsomer.  
 FANNY: Oh, come on, I'm a perfect fright and you know it.  
 MAGS: I want to do you both. Side by side. In this room. Something really classy. You look so great. Mum with her crazy hats and everything and you with that face. If I could just get you to hold still long enough and actually pose.

160 GARDNER (*Walking around, distracted*): Where are those papers I just had? Goddammit, Fanny . . .  
 MAGS: I have the feeling it's either now or never.  
 GARDNER: I can't hold on to anything around here. (*He exits to his study*)  
 MAGS: I've always wanted to do you. It would be such a challenge.  
 FANNY (*Pulling Mags onto the sofa next to her*): I'm so glad you're finally here, Mags. I'm very  
 165 worried about Daddy.  
 MAGS: Mummy, please. I just got here.  
 FANNY: He's getting quite gaga.  
 MAGS: Mummy . . . !  
 FANNY: You haven't seen him in almost a year. Two weeks ago he walked through the front door of  
 170 the Codman's house, kissed Emily on the cheek and settled down in the maid's room, thinking he was home!  
 MAGS: Oh, come on, you're exaggerating.  
 FANNY: He's as mad as a hatter and getting worse every day! It's this damned new book of his. He works on it around the clock. I've read some of it, and it doesn't make one word of sense, it's all  
 175 at sixes and sevens . . .  
 GARDNER (*Pokes his head back in the room, spies some of his papers on a table and grabs them*): Ahhh, here they are. (*He exits*)  
 FANNY (*Voice lowered*): Ever since this dry spell with his poetry, he's been frantic, absolutely . . . frantic!

180 MAGS: I hate it when you do this.  
 FANNY: I'm just trying to get you to face the facts around here.  
 MAGS: There's nothing wrong with him! He's just as sane as the next man. Even saner, if you ask me.  
 FANNY: You know what he's doing now? You couldn't guess in a million years! . . . He's writing  
 185 criticism! Daddy! (*She laughs*) Can you believe it? The man doesn't have one analytic bone in his body. His mind is a complete jumble and always has been!  
*There's a loud crash from Gardner's study.*  
 GARDNER (*Offstage*): SHIT!  
 MAGS: He's abstracted . . . That's the way he is.

190 FANNY: He doesn't spend any time with me anymore. He just holes up in that filthy study with Toots. God, I hate that bird! Though actually they're quite cunning together. Daddy's teaching him Gray's *Elegy*. You ought to see them in there, Toots perched on top of Daddy's head, spouting out verse after verse . . . Daddy, tap-tap-tapping away on his typewriter. They're quite a pair.  
 GARDNER (*Pokes his head back in*): Have you seen that Stevens' poem I was reading before?

195 FANNY (*Long-suffering*): NO, I HAVEN'T SEEN THAT STEVENS' POEM YOU WERE READING BEFORE! . . . Things are getting very tight around here, in case you haven't noticed. Daddy's last Pulitzer didn't even cover our real estate tax, and now that he's too dodderly to give readings anymore, that income is gone . . . (*Suddenly handing Mags the sugar bowl she'd been wrapping*) Mags, do

200 take this sugar bowl. You can use it to serve tea to your students at that wretched art school of yours . . .

MAGS: It's called Pratt! The Pratt Institute.

FANNY: Pratt, Splatt, whatever . . .

MAGS: And I don't serve tea to my students, I teach them how to paint.

FANNY: Well, I'm sure none of them has ever seen a sugar bowl as handsome as this before.

205 GARDNER (*Reappearing again*): You're sure you haven't seen it?

FANNY (*Loud and angry*): YES, I'M SURE I HAVEN'T SEEN IT! I JUST TOLD YOU I HAVEN'T SEEN IT!

GARDNER (*Retreating*): Right you are, right you are. (*He exits*)

FANNY: God!

*Silence.*

210 MAGS: What do you have to yell at him like that for?

FANNY: Because the poor thing's as deaf as an adder!

*Mags sighs deeply; silence.*

### Question

Make a detailed analysis of the ways in which Tina Howe explores the relationships within the Church family.

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