

In this extract the narrator discusses the relationships within his family after his Father's death.

The pond in our park was circular, exposed, perhaps fifty yards across. When the wind blew, little waves travelled across it and slapped the paved edges, like a miniature sea. We would go there, Mother, Grandfather and I, to sail the motor-launch Grandfather and I made out of plywood, balsawood and varnished paper. We would go even in the winter - especially in the winter, because then we would have the pond to ourselves - when the leaves on the two willows turned yellow and dropped and the water froze your hands. Mother would sit on a wooden bench set back from the perimeter; I would prepare the boat for launching. Grandfather, in his black coat and grey scarf, would walk to the far side to receive it. For some reason it was always Grandfather, never I, who went to the far to side. When he reached his station I would hear his 'Ready!' across the water. A puff of vapour would rise from his lips like the smoke from a muffled pistol. And I would release the launch. It worked by a battery. Its progress was laboured but its course steady. I would watch it head out to the middle while Mother watched behind me. As it moved it seemed that it followed an actual existing line between Grandfather, myself and Mother, as if Grandfather were pulling us toward him on some invisible cord, and that he had to do this to prove we were not beyond his reach. When the boat drew near him he would crouch on his haunches. His hands- which I knew were knotted, veiny and mottled from an accident in one of his chemical experiments - would reach out, grasp it and set it on its return.

The voyages were trouble-free. Grandfather improvised a wire grapnel on the end of a length of fishing line in case of shipwrecks or engine failure, but it was never used. Then one day- it must have been soon after Mother met Ralph - we watched the boat, on its first trip across the pond to Grandfather, suddenly become deeper, and deeper in the water. The motor cut. The launch wallowed, sank. Grandfather made several throws with his grapnel and pulled out clumps of green slime. I remember what he said to me, on this, the first loss in my life that I had witnessed. He said, very gravely: 'You must accept it – you can't get it back - it's the only way,' as if he were repeating something to himself. And I remember Mother's face as she got up from the bench to leave. It was very still and very white, as if she had seen something appalling.

•••••

It was some months after that Ralph, who was now a regular guest at weekends, shouted over the table to Grandfather: 'Why don't you leave her alone?!'

I remember it because that same Saturday Grandfather recalled the wreck of my boat, and Ralph said to me, as if pouncing on something: 'How about me buying you a new one? How would you like that?' And I said, just to see his face go crestfallen and blank, 'No!', several times, fiercely. Then as we ate supper Ralph suddenly barked, as Grandfather was talking to Mother: 'Why don't you leave her alone?!'

Grandfather looked at him. 'Leave her alone? What do you know about being left alone?' Then he glanced from Ralph to Mother. And Ralph didn't answer, but his face went tight and his hands clenched on his knife and fork.

And all this was because Grandfather had said to Mother: 'You don't make curry any more, the way you did for Alec, the way Vera taught you.'

•••••

It was Grandfather's house we lived in - with Ralph as an ever more permanent lodger. Grandfather and Grandmother had lived in it almost since the day of their marriage. My grandfather had worked for a firm which manufactured gold and silver-plated articles. My grandmother died suddenly when I was only four; and all I know is that I must have had her looks. My mother said so and so did my father; and Grandfather, without saying anything, would often gaze curiously into my face. 4

SECTION A: 40 MARKS

In this extract the narrator discusses the relationships within his family after his Father's death.

At that time Mother, Father and I lived in a new house some distance from Grandfather's. Grandfather took his wife's death very badly. He needed the company of his daughter and so my father; but he refused to leave the house in which my grandmother had lived, and my parents refused to leave theirs. There was bitterness all round, which I scarcely appreciated. Grandfather remained alone in his house, which he ceased to maintain, spending more and more time in his garden shed which he had fitted out for his hobbies of model making and amateur chemistry.

The situation was resolved in a dreadful way: by my own father's death.

He was required now and then to fly to Dublin or Cork in the light aeroplane belonging to the company he worked for, which imported Irish goods. One day, in unexceptional weather conditions, the aircraft disappeared without trace into the Irish Sea. In a state which resembled a kind of trance - as if some outside force were all the time directing her - my Mother sold up our house, put away the money for our joint future, and moved in with Grandfather.

My father's death was a far less remote event than my grandmother's, but no more explicable. I was only seven. Mother said, amidst her adult grief: 'He has gone to where Grandma's gone.' I wondered how Grandmother could be at the bottom of the Irish Sea, and at the same time what Father was doing there. I wanted to know when he would return. Perhaps I knew, even as I asked this, that he never would, that my childish assumptions were only a way of allaying my own grief. But if I really believed Father was gone for ever - I was wrong.

Perhaps too I was endowed with my father's looks no less than my grandmother's. Because when my mother looked at me she would often break into uncontrollable tears and she would clasp me for long periods without letting go, as if afraid I might turn to air.

I don't know if Grandfather took a secret, vengeful delight in my father's death, or if he was capable of it. But fate had made him and his daughter quits and reconciled them in mutual grief. Their situations were equivalent: she a widow and he a widower. And just as my mother could see in me a vestige of my father, so Grandfather could see in the two of us a vestige of my grandmother.

For about a year we lived quietly, calmly, even contentedly within the scope of this sad symmetry. We scarcely made any contact with the outside world. Grandfather still worked, though his retirement age had passed, and would not let Mother work. He kept Mother and me as he might have kept his own wife and son. Even when he did retire we lived quite comfortably on his pension, some savings and a widow's pension my mother got. Grandfather's health showed signs of weakening - he became rheumatic and sometimes short of breath - but he would still go out to the shed in the garden to conduct his chemical experiments, over which he hummed and chuckled gratefully to himself.

We forgot we were three generations. Grandfather bought Mother bracelets and ear-rings. Mother called me her 'little man'. We lived for each other - and for those two unfaded memories - and for a whole year, a whole harmonious year, we were really quite happy. Until that day in the park when my boat, setting out across the pond towards Grandfather, sank.

85

SECTION A: 40 marks

Read lines 1-7

A1: List five things about the park.

[5]

90 **Read lines 10-22**

A2: How does the writer show the voyage of the toy boat?

[5]

You must refer to the text to support your answer.

In this extract the narrator discusses the relationships within his family after his Father's death.

95 **Read lines 28-39**

A3 How does the writer try to make these tense and awkward? [10]

You should write about:

- What is tense and awkward in these lines
- The writer's use of language to show tension and awkwardness.
- Effects on the reader

100

Read lines 41-58

A4: What impressions do you get of the family in this extract and how does the writer present them?

You must refer to the text to support your answer. [10]

105

Read lines 55 to the end of the extract.

A5: 'In the passage and extract as a whole, we feel sympathy for the family' How far do you agree with this view?

You should write about:

- Your own thoughts and feelings about the family.
- How the writer has created these thoughts and feelings in the extract and passage as a whole [10]

You must refer to the text to support your answer