

TEXT 1

The text below describes the experience of a man who is on an expedition to climb Mount Everest.

- 1 On April 10, 1996, after ten days of hiking through the steep, walled canyons and flowery forests of northern Nepal, I walked into Everest Base Camp. My altimeter read 17,600 feet. Our mess tent, a huge canvas structure, was wired with a stereo system and solar-powered electric lights. A communications tent housed a satellite phone and fax. Despite the many trappings of civilisation at Base Camp, there was no forgetting that we were more than three miles above sea level. It seemed like there was no air to gasp in from that bluest of mountain skies. Walking to the mess tent at mealtime left me wheezing to catch my breath. If I sat up too quickly, my head reeled and dizziness set in. I developed a dry, hacking cough that would steadily worsen over the next six weeks. My arms and legs gradually began to wither to toothpicks. 5
- 2 From the beginning, Rob Hall, our experienced guide had planned that May 10 would be our summit day. On May 8, our team started climbing the Lhotse Face. The night had a cold beauty that intensified as we ascended. More stars than I had ever seen filled the frozen sky. Far to the southeast, enormous thunder clouds drifted over Nepal, illuminating the heavens with bursts of orange and blue streaks. A huge moon rose over the shoulder of 27,000 foot peaks, washing the slope beneath my boots in ghostly light, eliminating the need for a headlamp. I led the way throughout the night with Ang Dorje, our head Sherpa, and at 5.30pm, just as the sun was edging over the horizon, I reached the crest of the Southeast Ridge. Three of the world's five highest peaks stood out in jagged relief against the pastel dawn. My altimeter read 27,500 feet. 10
- 3 Ascending above the South Summit with my regulator delivering two quarts of oxygen per minute, I had to stop and draw three or four heaving lungfuls of air after each painful step. Climbing along the edge of the summit ridge, sucking gas into my ragged lungs, I enjoyed a strange, unwarranted sense of calm. The world beyond the rubber mask was incredibly bright and clear, but it seemed not quite real. I had to remind myself over and over that there was 7,000 feet of cliff on either side, that everything was at stake here, and that I would pay for a single wrong step with my life. Plodding slowly up the last few steps to the summit, I had the sensation of being underwater, of moving at quarter-speed. And then I found myself atop a slender wedge of ice decorated with a discarded oxygen cylinder and a battered aluminium survey pole, with nowhere higher to climb. A string of flags snapped furiously in the wind. To the north, down a side of the mountain I had never seen, the brown, dry Tibetan plateau stretched to the horizon. This tiny platform, the size of a living room, was the summit of Mount Everest. 25
- 4 Reaching the top of Everest is supposed to trigger a surge of intense elation. Against long odds, after all, I had just attained a goal I had wanted since childhood. But the summit was really only the halfway point. Any impulse I might have felt toward self-congratulation was immediately extinguished by knowledge of the long, dangerous descent that lay ahead. As I turned to go down, I experienced a moment of alarm: a glance at my watch showed that it was after 1 pm; my regulator showed that my oxygen was almost gone. 30

- 5 It was after 2.30pm when I made it down to the South Summit. By now, mist was wrapping across the top of Mount Everest's sister peak, 27,000-foot Lhotse. No longer did the weather look so good. I grabbed a fresh oxygen cylinder and hurried down into the cloud. Moments after I dropped below the South Summit, it began to snow lightly and the visibility went to hell. Four hundred feet above, where the summit was still washed in bright sunlight under a blue sky, my companions were wasting time, celebrating their arrival at the top of the planet with photos and high-fives, all the while using up precious ticks of the clock. None of them imagined that a horrible ordeal was drawing near. None of them suspected that by the end of that long day, every minute would matter. 45 50

TEXT 2

The text below describes the experience of a girl who is caught in a civil war.

- 1 Most of the village sat along a single street, the homes unvarying in style and size. Exposed cinder block was the prevailing façade in those mountains and the grey brick appeared perpetually unfinished. Riddled with shell fragments, the pockmarked houses looked dismal. My eyes burned. The sun sat on the horizon and I walked towards the main road. A spiral of smoke twisted up from the valley, beckoning me with a wispy finger. I followed the smoke. It led me to the centre of a village, down a rocky street lined with houses. A woman wrapped in a purple shawl was feeding leftover crusts to emaciated chickens in her yard. I felt her looking but kept walking. As I got closer, her mouth slackened at the sight of me – a tiny blood-crusted zombie. She approached, called out to me. I stopped in the middle of the street. 5
- 2 She came to me and kneeled, asked my name, where I was from, what had happened. I tried to determine from her accent whether or not she was a Serb, if it was safe to speak to her. I couldn't tell, and decided it didn't really matter, that I had nowhere else to go and I might as well answer. But somewhere along the way my body had taken a vow of silence, while she talked and talked. She reached for my hand, and I vomited on the asphalt. In the end she grabbed my arms and led me to her house. She stood over me and rinsed blood from my wrists. It was only cold water but the cuts were dirty and it stung. My eyes welled up, but no tears escaped. 15
- 3 For the first week I sat on her kitchen floor with my back to the wall and my knees to my chest. I counted the squares in the linoleum, stared at the crack in the dining table leg, scratched at my gauze-wrapped wrists. I blinked rarely, and moved with a halting, mechanical edge. At night I slept in the same spot, curling into a knot on the floor. 20
- 4 The woman's son, a boy a few years older than I was, left the house early each morning and came home after dark. He stomped around in combat boots and talked incessantly of the "Safe House." It was a phrase I'd never heard before, and I assumed it was the village's bomb shelter. The boy never spoke to me, walked in wide arcs around my spot as if I had a contagious illness. I felt like I did. The woman gave me water in a tin cup and bread with butter, but it was hard to eat. Even breathing was a conscious effort. The first few times the air raid siren sounded the woman tried to coax me into going to the shelter with her, but I stayed in my corner. The explosions of that first week were inconsequential; I was anesthetised to fear. 30
- 5 The woman had visitors who entered under various pretences and examined me from the corners of their eyes but spoke as if I wasn't there at all. Eventually my novelty wore off and the gossip became less frequent. 35
- 6 I left the house for the first time when the chickens exploded. As the bombs fell, they released showers of tiny metal balls. They fell indiscriminately, like combustible hail. The blast shook the floor, and I jumped and ran out of the front door. Behind the house a cloud of feathers was settling, and I tried not to look. 40

TEXT 3

The text below relates the experience of a young boy with an abusive father.

- 1 Ravi was woken up by the sound of keys clanging against his front gate. He glanced at his alarm clock. It was two o'clock. The keys were now jangling against the front door and a loud thud followed just as his mother's bedroom door opened and he heard her rushing to the front door.
- 2 "What did you do to the lock?" a man's voice bellowed. "My keys don't work!" 5
- 3 Ravi could feel his anger rising just before he heard his mother's soothing voice, "Sssh... the children are sleeping. The lock and your keys are okay. Let's go into our room."
- 4 "Don't shush me, woman! This is my house and I can talk as loudly as I want. These children should wake up and greet their father! Ravi! Shanti! Come out!" 10
- 5 "Good grief!" muttered Ravi as he sighed under his breath. He had a Mathematics test that day and he needed all the sleep he could get. Ravi had to muster all his self-control in order not to storm outside and give his drunken father a piece of his mind. "Let's go, let's go," came his mother's harried voice followed by the clumsy closing of her bedroom door. Ravi waited to hear the usual sounds of beating and shouting but after a brief clatter and a loud thump on their bed, no other noises came from his parents' room. Ravi breathed a sigh of relief knowing that his mother was safe this time but then, he heard a soft sobbing from the bed above him – his younger sister, Shanti. 15 20
- 6 The next morning, Ravi and Shanti had their breakfast in silence as their mother moved quietly around them getting things ready for their father who was still snoring in bed. Everyone was on the edge from the night before but as usual, no one said a thing. This was not the first time his father had come home drunk. Ever since he had lost his job six months ago, he had turned to the bottle for solace. When he could not find another job after two months, he started venting his frustration on Ravi's mother. It started with verbal abuse and the fierce beatings followed. Ravi had tried to ask his mother to leave but to no avail – she was absolutely devoted to her husband despite the torture she endured at his drunken hands. Ravi could not fathom her loyalty but accepted it out of love and respect for her. As he and Shanti picked up their school bags to leave, he gave his mother a hug and whispered, "I love you, Ma." His mother smiled as tears filled her eyes and she hastily kissed him and Shanti goodbye. 25 30 35
- 7 As Ravi tried to focus on the test paper in front of him, his thoughts kept drifting back to his mother. It was only a matter of time before his father would cross the line. He had to find some way to protect her. "Ravi, hand in your work now. Ravi?" repeated Mrs Lee; the Mathematics teacher brought Ravi

- out of his reverie. 40
- 8 “Oh, but I’m not finished yet,” stuttered Ravi.
- 9 “Well, your time is up. I’m sorry,” replied Mrs Lee.
- 10 As Ravi reluctantly handed in his half-completed test paper, he silently raged against his father.
- 11 After class, Mrs Lee asked Ravi to remain behind. “Ravi, what’s going on? 45
Your grades have been slipping for the past few months and today, you didn’t even finish your test. Why have you been so distracted?”
- 12 “It’s nothing Mrs Lee. I’ve been spending too much time on soccer training. I’ll try harder. Really,” Ravi said with lowered eyes.
- 13 “Ravi, please tell me what’s really going on. I have spoken to Coach Adam. 50
He is really worried about you and so am I,” Mrs Lee said softly.
- 14 The gentleness in her voice reminded him of his mother, and he was tempted to tell Mrs Lee everything. The last few months of worry for his mother and anger for his father were just too much for a thirteen-year-old boy to bear but he steeled himself. “I’m sorry Mrs Lee. My grandmother has been ill, and we 55
have been looking after her, so I haven’t had the time for anything else. I didn’t want to tell anyone because my father told me not to say anything,” Ravi tried to look steadily into Mrs Lee’s eyes to convince her that he was telling the truth – he could not bear to have her judge his family or worse, to have her pity him. 60

Adapted from ‘A Broken Home’ - Beyond

TEXT 4

In the text below the writer describes one of her many experiences whilst travelling through Papua New Guinea.

- 1 Everyone in the village had something to say about why I should not try to swim the river. I went down to the banks several times more to check the water level, but each time it was, a too high, though it was difficult to tell with all the surging and splashing. I went back to the village feeling more impatient than ever. Meanwhile, I learnt that the normal method of swimming across was to use a float of logs, which was held with both hands while swimming with your legs. Without a log float, I was told, I would be swept away by the current into the gorges. To help pass the time, I made a miniature model of a float and mentally prepared myself to cross the river. The idea terrified me and I could see that I would be lucky to get safely across. But I did not believe in going back or in giving up before trying. 5 10
- 2 As the day progressed, the weather worsened and storm clouds built up overhead. I hoped that the rain would not fall upriver and put off my crossing for yet one more day. Early the next morning I went down to check the river, but it was no less violent than the day before and my spirits began to sink. While I was waiting to see if the water was rising or falling, four men from the neighbouring Hewa tribe appeared who, it transpired also wanted to swim the river. They agreed that it was too swollen to attempt for the time being, and they began to make their one-man floats. Chopping down a few smallish trees and cutting them into metre-length logs, they bound three of them together with vines to make each float. They made an extra one for me and said that I could cross with them. Much to my surprise, I was just turning to go back to my hut when the Hewas changed their minds and announced that they were not going to wait after all and that they would cross now. I replied excitedly that I was ready, collected my backpack, wrapped it in my plastic rain-sheet and roped it onto a big float. The only thought in my mind was that if the Hewas were willing to let me attempt the swim then it must be feasible. 15 20 25
- 3 The first to try crossing were three of the men with my backpack. I watched nervously as they dragged their floats down the sand into the waves, slipped their wrists through loops of vines tied to each float, took firm hold of the logs and launched themselves forward into the churning current. Swimming hard, they shrieked their traditional yelping battle-cry, which grew fainter as the roaring water carried them down the river. The water surged over rocks in huge angry waves and as they met the rapids one float broke apart. We watched horrified as the man was swept away, catching glimpses of him on distant wave crests as he struggled to gain hold of one log. We were all greatly relieved when we saw he had caught the log and was floating safely back to shore. 30
- 4 Then it was my turn. Two villagers positioned my float alongside that of the strongest man and they held it steady, pointing it at a slight angle upstream. I slipped my wrists through the loops of vine and called my last goodbye to my friends. Cold, clam terror gripped my stomach, far colder than the icy mountain water around my legs. We pushed the floats forward and set off. Yelpings of encouragement were ringing in my ears as I began to swim for my life. The far bank was a blur of green beyond a tossing muddy brown river. I kicked my way along with desperate determination. Water was roaring in my ears, and my knuckles were white with the effort of gripping the float. 35 40
- 5 Despite my kicking, I was being swept, mercilessly downstream and knew myself to the powerless against the river's force. My muscles screamed, but I could not slacken. The man with the float beside me was still yelping encouragement. When we were nearing the centre of the river, my terror began to turn into a different feeling: a wild 45

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sense of exhilaration. Waves were washing over us and we were hurled into heaving rapids; I saw the water meet the sky at every angle, yet it never closed over me. The opposite bank loomed slowly larger, but when I fixed my eyes on a point it vanished upriver and again I realized how fast I was being swept downriver. Briefly it flashed 50 through my mind that the gorges must be close, and I swam with every last ounce of strength. Closing in on the bank, the current was less turbulent and I dragged myself to the shore. I sat and trembled with fatigue, too tired to feel elated by success.

TEXT 5

The text below describes an injured man's experience in the hospital, as he looks out at the window and makes conversation with a blind man.

- 1 At the first gesture of morning, flies began stirring. Inman's eyes and the long wound at his neck 1
drew them, and the sound of their wings and the touch of their feet were soon more potent than
a yardful of roosters in rousing a man to wake. So he came to yet one more day in the hospital
ward, trying to recover from his latest souvenir from the battlefield. He flapped the flies away with
his hands and looked across the foot of his bed to an open triple-hung window. Ordinarily he could 5
see to the red road and the oak tree and the low brick wall, and beyond them to a sweep of fields
and flat piney woods that stretched to the western horizon. The view was a long one for the
flatlands, the hospital having been built on the only swell within eyeshot. But it was too early yet
to view the scenery outside. The window might as well have been painted grey.
- 2 The window was tall as a door, and he had imagined many times that it would open onto some 10
other place and let him walk through and be there. During his first weeks in the hospital, he had
been hardly able to move his head. All that kept his mind occupied had been watching out the
window and picturing the old green places he recollected from home. Childhood places. The damp
creek bank where Indian pipes grew. The corner of a meadow favored by brown-and-black 15
caterpillars in the fall. A hickory limb that overhung the lane, and from which he often watched his
father driving cows down to the barn at dusk. They would pass underneath him, and then he
would close his eyes and listen, as the cupping sound of their hooves in the dirt grew fainter and
fainter until it vanished into the calls of the peanut man. The window apparently wanted only to
take his thoughts back. Which was fine with him, for he had seen too much, that when he thought 20
into the future, all he could vision was a world from which everything he counted important had
been banished or had willingly fled.
- 3 Inman watched the window as he ate his breakfast of boiled oats and butter, and shortly he saw
the blind man come trudging up the road, his back humped against the weight of the cart he
pushed, little twin clouds of dust rising from beneath the turning cartwheels. When the blind man
had his fire going and his peanuts boiling, Inman put his empty plate on the windowsill and went 25
outside and with the shuffling step of an old man crossed the lawn to the road.
- 4 The blind man sat with his head tipped down and appeared to be musing on, but he raised his
head as Inman approached, like he was really looking. His eyelids, though, were dead as shoe
leather and were sunken into puckered cups where his eyeballs had been.
- 5 Without pausing even for salutation Inman said, "Who put out your pair of eyes?" 30
- 6 The blind man had a friendly smile and he replied, "Nobody. I never had any."
- 7 That took Inman aback, for his imagination had worked in the belief that they had been plucked
out in some desperate and bloody dispute. Every vile deed he had witnessed lately had been at
the hand of a human agent, so he had about forgot that there was a whole other order of 35
misfortune.
- 8 "There is plenty I wish I'd never seen," was all he could mutter.
- 9 The blind man twisted a square of newsprint up into a cone and then dipped a spoon into the pot
and filled the cone with wet peanuts. He handed it to Inman and said, Come on, cite me one
instance where you wished you were blind.
- 10 "Where to begin?" Inman wondered aloud. Malvern Hill. Sharpsburg. Petersburg. Any would do 40
admirably as examples of unwelcome visions. But Fredericksburg was a day particularly lodged
in his mind. So he sat with his back to the oak and halved the wet peanut shells and thumbed the
meats out into his mouth and told the blind man his tale, beginning with how the fog had lifted that
morning to reveal a vast army marching uphill toward a stone wall, a sunken road.

TEXT 6

The text below describes the events leading up to an execution in a town in France.

- 1 A tragic incident occurred at Digne, a quiet unassuming town with no scandals ever. A man was condemned to death for murder. Not really educated but not completely uneducated, this poor wretch had been a fairground entertainer and a public letter-writer. The trial was the talk of the town. On the eve of the day set for the condemned man's execution the prison chaplain fell ill. A priest was needed to attend to the criminal in his final moments. They sent for the parish priest but apparently he refused to come, saying, "It's nothing to do with me. I can't take on the responsibility of dealing with that ¹charlatan. I too am unwell. In any case it's not my job." 5
- 2 This response was reported to the bishop, who agreed with what the priest had said and in turn reported that the job should be his instead. He went straight to the prison and down into the 'charlatan's' cell, called him by name, took him by the hand, and spoke to him. He spent the whole day and the whole night with him, forgetting about food and sleep, praying to God for the condemned man's soul, and asking the man to pray for his. He told him the best truths, which are the simplest ones. He was father, brother, friend to him, bishop only in blessing him. He taught him everything, sustaining and comforting him. 10 15
- 3 This man was about to die in despair. Death was an abyss to him. As he stood trembling on that macabre threshold he recoiled in horror. He was not ignorant enough to be totally unaffected. Deeply traumatic, his condemnation had, as it were, created cracks in the screen dividing us from the mystery of things and what we call life. He kept looking beyond this world through these fateful chinks and saw only darkness. The bishop enabled him to see light. 20
- 4 When they came to fetch the poor man the following day, the bishop was there. He went with him. He appeared before the crowd alongside the trussed-up criminal. He climbed into the ²tumbril with him. He climbed onto the scaffold with him. 25
- 5 So crushed and despondent the previous day, the man facing death was radiant. He felt his soul had been reconciled and his trust was in his God. The bishop embraced him and as the blade was about to drop, prayed for the man who shed tears of joy at the promise of meeting his God. 30
- 6 When the bishop came down from the scaffold there was something in his expression that made the crowd draw aside. It could not be said which gave greater cause for wonder, his pallor or his serenity. Going home to the humble dwelling he would refer to with a smile as his palace, he said to his sister, "I have just been officiating as bishop." 35
- 7 As the most sublime things are often those least understood, there were people in town, who, commenting on the bishop's conduct, said, "It's affectation." Actually, it was only in the salons this was said. The ordinary people, who see no harm in saintly deeds, were touched and felt admiration.

¹ charlatan: a person who pretends to have skills or knowledge that they do not have

² tumbril: open cart tilted backwards to empty its load

- 8 As for the bishop, it was a shock to him to have seen the ³guillotine, and it took him a long time to get over it. 40
- 9 There is something nightmarish about the scaffold when it is standing there ready. It is possible to feel a certain indifference about the death penalty, not to declare yourself, to say yes and no, so long as you have not seen a guillotine with your own eyes. But if you do come across one, it has a violent impact. You are forced to make a decision, to take sides, for or against. The guillotine is the law made concrete. Its name is retribution. It is not neutral and does not allow you to remain neutral. Whoever sees it shudders with the most mysterious of shudders. All social problems raise question marks around this blade. 45
- 10 The scaffold is not a structure. The scaffold is not a machine. The scaffold is not an inert contraption made of wood, iron and rope. It is as though it were some kind of being with its own sinister initiative. To all appearances this wooden construction can see, this machine can hear, this contraption can understand, this wood, this iron and this rope have a will of their own. Its presence casts the soul into a ghastly trance in which the scaffold appears terrifying and involved in what it is doing. The scaffold is the executioner's accomplice. It devours. It eats flesh. It drinks blood. The scaffold is a kind of monster put together by the judge and the carpenter, a spectre that seems to live by some dreadful life force created out of all the death it has inflicted. 55
- 11 So it left a deep and horrible impression. 60

³ guillotine: a device, invented in France, consisting of a sharp blade in a tall frame, used in the past for killing criminals by cutting off their heads

TEXT 7

The text describes a group of passengers on a bus.

- 1 There had never been a summer day like this; this fiery furnace. The roar of London's traffic reverberated under a sky of coppery blue; the pavements threw out unceasing waves of heat, thickened with the reek of perfumery shops. Even the wearing of one's own flesh felt weary. Streams of sweat ran from the bellies of the horses when they halted. Men walked up and down the streets with unbuttoned jackets, looking for escape in a pub or restaurant. But as soon as they were inside they longed to be out again. Others hung around the fountains, listening to the splash of running water. 5

- 2 Eleven of us already sat inside the bus when it pulled up at Charing Cross Station, so there was room for just one more. I had travelled often enough along this bus route to know my fellow passengers by heart – a teacher with some worksheets in her satchel; an actress going to a rehearsal; a housewife running her usual errands; three middle-aged office workers; a pair of bleary-eyed reporters; a wizened old woman; a portly business man who carried himself with an air of importance. Not a word passed. We were used to each other, and the curiosity had long gone. So we sat listless, and staring blankly. Occasionally, one of us would glance at the vacant seat, praying that there would not be a new addition to our numbers. This hope we shared in common was too obvious to be discussed. 10
15

- 3 But at Charing Cross Station the twelfth passenger got in – a boy with a blue bag. He looked about thirteen; headed for the docks to sail on probably his first voyage. We could tell almost immediately; the way his eyes darted about, a cloud of wonderment surrounding him. When the bus first pulled up at the stop, he was standing on the opposite pavement with dazed eyes like a hare's, staring at the strange new world around him —the cars whizzing by, the yelling newsboys, the crowd, the bustle and din of it all. The hugeness and noise of the city could really be frightening or alluring to a young child. After hailing our bus, he dashed across the busy road, almost dropping his bag. Thankfully, he was snatched out of the path of an oncoming car by the bus conductor just in time, and was hauled onboard. His eyelids were pink and swollen; but he was not crying, though he wanted to. Instead, he took a great gulp and squeezed past us to his seat, and tried to look brave as a lion. 20
25
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- 4 At this sight, the passengers turned a half-resentful stare on him, and then repented immediately. It was not so much the boy's look, but rather what he was carrying. Tied the strap of his bag was a bunch of wildflowers wilting slightly in the heat; a loving touch that only a mother would be capable of. The sight and smell of the flowers in that dingy bus were like tears on thirsty eyelids. It made us shudder to look at his young face, set towards the same road which we had toiled on for so far. I was not at all surprised to see the actress shed a tear; she was, after all, habituated to expressing emotion. 35

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- 5 The housewife touched me on the knee. "Speak to him," she whispered. "It's the
young who make me sad. Sometimes, when I lie awake at night, the whole of 40
London seems filled with the sound of children's feet running. To be alone in this city
by themselves" But her whisper did not reach me, for I was hundreds of miles
away, swept up in past memories of travelling to school for the first time.
- 6 The businessman grunted and rose from his seat as we came to a halt at the next
stop. After paying his bus fare, I saw him surreptitiously slip an extra few dollars to 45
the conductor and whispered something, jerking his head in the direction of the boy.
- 7 The boy was brushing his eyes, under pretence of pulling his cap forward. When the
bus started off again, he glanced up suspiciously, frowning in defiance at no one,
and everyone. I pretended to stare out of the window, but saw a wet smear on his
hand as he laid it on his lap. 50
- 8 In less than a minute it was my turn to alight. Unlike the businessman, I did not have
much to spare. I forced up courage to nod and say: "Good luck, my boy." He nodded
politely at me. A moment later, I hit the pavement and joined the hot crowd, whose
roar echoed for miles.

TEXT 8

The text below describes how an elephant and her calf survived drowning.

- 1 One of the most intelligent acts I ever witnessed an elephant perform took place on an evening at the Upper Taungdwin River. Directly below my camp, the banks of the river were steep and rocky and twelve to fifteen feet high. About fifty yards away on the other side, the bank was drowning.

- 2 I was suddenly alarmed by hearing an elephant roar. I ran down to the edge of the near bank and saw an elephant with her calf, trapped in the fast-rising torrent. She was holding her whole body against the surging river and keeping the calf pressed against her massive body. Every now and then the swirling water would whip the calf away; then, with terrific strength, she would encircle it with her trunk and pull it upstream to rest against her body again. Her grip on the calf was tested every time she was slapped about by fallen trees borne downstream by the raging river. 5 10

- 3 The water rose suddenly and the calf was washed clean over the mother's hindquarters and was gone. She turned to chase it, like an otter after a fish. Plunging and sometimes afloat, she had crossed to my side of the river, before she had caught up with it and got it back. For what seemed like eternity, she pinned the calf with her head and trunk against the rocky bank. Then, with a really gigantic effort, she picked it up in her trunk and reared up until she was half standing on her hind legs, so as to be able to place it five feet above the flood level. 15

- 4 Having accomplished this, she fell back into the raging torrent, and she herself went away like a cork. She well knew that she would now have to fight to save her own life. Less than three hundred yards away was a gorge. If she were carried down, it would be certain death. By that time, my chief interest was in the calf. It stood, tucked up, shivering and terrified on a ledge just wide enough to hold its feet. Its little, fat, protruding belly was tightly pressed against the bank. 20

- 5 While I was peering over at it from about eight feet above, I heard the mother. She had crossed the river and got up the bank, and was making her way back as fast as she could, calling the whole time – a defiant roar, which to her calf, was music. The two little ears were cocked forward, listening to the only sound that mattered. 25

- 6 Any wild schemes which had raced through my head of recovering the calf by ropes disappeared as fast as I had formed them, when I saw the mother elephant emerge from the jungle and appear on the opposite bank. When she saw her calf, she stopped roaring and began rumbling. It is the sound of pleasure, like a cat's purring. She must have been delighted to see her calf still in the same spot, where she had put her half an hour before. 30

- 7 A torrential rain was falling, and the river still separated the mother and her calf. I decided I could do nothing but wait and see what happened. Twice before turning in for 35

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the night I went down to the bank and picked out the calf with my torch, but this seemed to disturb it, so I went away.

- 8** It was just as well I did, because at dawn, the mother and her calf were together – both on the far bank. The spate had subsided to a mere foot of dirty-coloured water. No one in the camp had seen the mother recover her calf, but she must have lifted it down from the ledge in the same way as she had put it there. 40

TEXT 9

The text below is about the writer's train journey in India.

- 1 I nervously twirled the silver band on my ring finger as I surveyed my companions. All men in their thirties and forties. All speaking a language I could not comprehend. The smell of sweat and rust and spice mixing in the metal box that would carry me for 18 hours, through the night, to my next adventure. Would my fake wedding ring be enough to fend off unwanted advances? Or would these men see through my ruse, sniff and smell my youth and inexperience, and pounce to take liberties with this solo female foreigner in a sea of men? 5
- 2 Everyone had warned me not to go. I was determined to prove them wrong. But my 22-year-old gumption was giving way to the voices of reason from back home. Voices which were quickly drowned out by the screeching-lurching-churning of the aging train straining to leave the station. No turning back now. 10
- 3 Feigning calm, I smoothed the airy layers of my *salwar-kameez*, the breezy tunic and billowy pants a relief in the sticky heat, trying not to look too uncomfortable in this strange attire I had only put on for the first time. I tugged down the scarf I had carefully draped across my shoulders to a perfect position – something I had learnt from a number of YouTube videos. I desperately wanted to fit in, to be less noticeable. To be less stared-at by all these men. 15
- 4 They spoke my language but I could not speak theirs.
- 5 'Hello, miss. I am Ravi. If you please, what is your name?' Seven pairs of eyes all turned to me expectantly. It seems my berth-mates had nominated their spokesman, a quiet young man with kind eyes sitting across from me.
- 6 'I'm Leah. Nice to meet you... all of you.' Laughter rippled out, dispersing the tension. One by one, they introduced themselves to me. Strangers becoming less strange. I learned about their hometowns, their studies, their jobs. I shared my own simplified biography. 20
- 7 Then out came the food. Container after container of aromatic surprises, still hot from the kitchen. They all wanted me to try the various dishes prepared by their mothers, grandmothers, and wives. They eagerly explained the history behind each one, the ingredients and methods of preparation, watching my face to guess my verdict. It was as if we were in a reality television game of sorts. An unwitting cook-off with absent chefs. 25
- 8 I bit delicately into a coriander-scented ball of fried dough, an explosion of flavours I could not name filling my mouth. Next came a salty, spiced cracker – delightfully crunchy, followed by a steaming hot soup so peppery hot I felt tears streaming down my cheeks. I never rejected any of the food that came my way and tried to enjoy each new taste, but my face has never been good at hiding my truth. They could tell which foods I liked and which I did not, teasing one another and offering me milky chai to wash down the bites that burned. 30
- 9 By the time the train groaned into the next station, I had seven new friends. My nervousness was replaced with ease. I could handle India. Alone yet not. My belly was full and my heart was light as we rumbled across the subcontinent towards Varanasi. 35

TEXT 10

The text below describes a family whose matriarch greatly enjoys cooking.

- 1 Sometime back in the early thirties my Uncle Hubert finished his internship at one of the smaller hospitals in Poughkeepsie, New York, took a pretty young wife, Sophia, and set up practice in his mother-in-law's rambling house on Garvin Street. His mother-in-law, whom everybody called Auntie Bella, was a formidable woman. She was, in the first place, large – not merely plump, not fat only, but tall, large-boned, and heavy-fleshed. She had a booming bass voice with which she sounded all her opinions to anyone who would listen. If no one would, she told her marvellous tales of the evil eye and of the time her cousin Giuseppe was robbed by bandits to the four cats who were constantly stalking in and out of the kitchen. The cats were swollen with pride and with tasty titbits that Auntie Bella was always feeding them - a little dab of chicken cooked in a red sauce, for instance. 5 10
- 2 The cats were not the only fortunate ones to taste Auntie Bella's savoury sauces and delicate pasties. All day long she urged cups of steaming minestrone on the mailman, tortoni on the milkman, a golden slice of sweet bread on the grocery delivery boy, little cookies on any child within hailing range. And when mealtime finally arrived, the table, far from being diminished by her generous taste-givings, was laden with so many steaming, fragrant dishes that we could heap our oversized plates full and still not have sampled everything that was on the table. 15
- 3 Uncle Hubert was a spare eater, and the sight of those groaning tables thrice daily made him uneasy. In the days when he was courting Sophia, Auntie Bella urged the steaming dishes on him; he would take only a tiny portion, and she would snatch the ladle from his reluctant hand and heap his plate ever higher, until the lake of spaghetti sauce threatened to overflow onto the snowy tablecloth. But Uncle Hubert ate only as much as he wanted and then sat quietly thinking of the day when he would be married to Sophia and be master in the house; the huge meals would certainly stop. Auntie Bella's thoughts ran along rather different lines. Daily she told the cats how she would fatten Hubert up when he and Sophia were married, and that once he fell under the spell of her rich cooking there would be an end to this quibbling over meals. 20 25
- 4 The day of the wedding came, and late that evening, as Hubert and his bride were leaving for Niagara Falls, he looked at his mother-in-law in a masterful manner and said, "When Sophia and I come back, we will eat simple, small meals, and there will be no rich sauces. And one thing more: there is never, never to be any garlic in my food. I have my patients to think of, I can't go about reeking of garlic. So, no garlic!" And he glared sternly at Auntie Bella, who was standing slack-jawed at this traitorous speech. 30 35
- 5 The moment the door closed behind Hubert and Sophia, Auntie Bella melted into a river of laughter that sent the cats flying behind the velvet drapes. No garlic! Garlic was more often used in Auntie Bella's kitchen than salt – than water, even. To do without garlic? Impossible! Impossible and mad. 40
- 6 The great purple strings of fragrant garlic that festooned Auntie Bella's kitchen were more than seasoning and piquant touches to otherwise dull sauces. Garlic was the mainstay, the rock upon which her cooking was founded. And then, too, any fool knew the other properties of garlic. Garlic was a sovereign remedy for all sorts of

ailments: garlic warded off the evil eye, garlic at the foot of the bed of a newly wedded couple ensured a son for the firstborn. With this thought Auntie Bella was off to tie garlic cloves to the springs of her new son-in-law's marriage bed. Underneath so he wouldn't see them. 45

7 Two weeks later Hubert and Sophia were back and dinner was ready. As they started up the stairway toward the living quarters, the fragrant aroma of garlic assaulted Hubert's nostrils, and his eyes flashed wildly for a moment, but he drew a deep breath and went into the dining room. The table was loaded more than usual, for was this not a homecoming feast? Platters of fried zucchini, spinach pie and beef stew crowded each other. Huge bowls of eggplant with Parmesan cheese, red spaghetti sauce, white clam sauce and shrimp sent up a heavy mist of steam. And over the table like a palpable cloud hung the heavy, pervasive aroma of garlic. Auntie Bella had outdone herself. 50 55

TEXT 11

The text below tells of the story of a man's solo kayaking expedition.

- 1 The noonday sun was beating down on the grey, turbulent sea. The jagged coastline was a haze in the distance. Over the roar of the angry waves around me, I could hear my thumping heart. I was caught in an eddy, roughly three kilometres off the Arabian Sea coast, between Diu and Rajpara. Panic-stricken, I rowed furiously, but the mighty whirlpool below was determined to consume me. My 18-foot kayak bobbed precariously, as the rising waves lashed against it. It was only a matter of time before it would keel over and I'd be sucked deep into the waters. 5
- 2 No, I wasn't marooned--I was on a solo kayaking expedition along the western coast of India, from Kutch to Kanyakumari. That morning the sea had welcomed me with a golden sunrise, but soon it turned into a hostile adversary. I had no idea how I had drifted into the eddy. 10
- 3 Suddenly, I spotted a fishing boat. They were too far away to notice me. I'd have to accelerate to the point where I was out of the eddy. Eventually, I gained enough speed to stabilize the kayak, turning it towards land. By then the blue fishing trawler was moving in my direction. It was a miracle that they had spotted me. Watching the vessel battle the waves put my predicament in perspective. I paddled away to a safe spot until they arrived. The crew offered to tug me to land but I declined politely. I asked them the best way to get to Rajpara and then we went our separate ways. 15 20
- 4 I had set off from Gomti Ghat, Dwarka on a sunny day--17 November 2016 crossing the waters of six states and two union territories. I paddled for six to nine hours every day, at speeds of 5-6.5 km/hr. On average I would cover between 35-45 kilometres every day. I started out at sunrise and called it a day at dusk. Every four to five days, I'd take a day off. 25
- 5 While I felt a rush of joy riding the waves, at times it was physically exhausting. The sun left me parched, my body hurting from the hectic paddling. But all of it was worth it. I would gaze at the serene beauty of the sea often.
- 6 Near Ratnagiri, I noticed a large orange plastic packet floating by. As I reached for it to clean up the sea, my eye caught another white one and then another. Within minutes, I was surrounded by plastic. Then I realized these were jellyfish! One sting could be lethal. In the nick of time, I pulled my hand out and quickly steered away. 30
- 7 Out at sea, there is never a dull moment--like the time when my paddle hit a venomous snake. I freaked out, convinced it had leapt on to the kayak to retaliate. Another time, I spotted a tail fin in the water. For a moment I stopped breathing: The chilling scenes from the shark thriller Jaws flashed in my mind. 35

I was relieved to find it was actually a harmless dugong.

- 8 In Devgad, I learnt that dolphins are real exhibitionists. They chased fishing vessels, diving, spinning and flaunting their acrobatic skills. One of my fondest memories was a curious pod of seven dolphins racing in front of my kayak for two kilometres--the best performance I have witnessed at sea. 40
- 9 At last, on 7 February 2017, I paddled into Kanyakumari, past the southernmost tip of India to the east coast. This made me the first Indian to have covered the entire west coast of India by kayaking. On my journey I met many kind souls--people who warned me about storms, took me into their homes, fed me when I was cold, wet and defeated. That, with the unparalleled beauty of the Indian coast was the greatest gift I got from my expedition. 45

TEXT 12

In the text below, Laurie Lee recalls a summer from his childhood days in Slad, a village in Gloucestershire, England.

- 1 In the long hot summer of 1921, a serious drought hit the country. Springs dried up, the wells filled with frogs, and the usually sweet water from our scullery pump turned brown and tasted of nails. Although this drought was a relief to my family, it was a punishment to the rest of the village. For weeks, trees shrivelled and crops burned in the fields. The old folk said the sun had slipped in its course and that we had to overcome this curse. There were prayers for rain; but my family did not go because it was rain we feared most of all. As the scourge continued, prayer was abandoned. Finally, soldiers, feeling a sense of hopelessness and as a last resort, marched to the top of the hills with their rifles and began shooting at passing clouds. When I heard the sound of breaking sticks in the stillness, I knew our long armistice was over. Sure enough – whether from prayers or the shooting, or by a simple return of nature – the drought broke soon after and it was something we had not seen before. 5
- 2 I remember waking up in fright to a cacophony. The screams of our mother. The howling darkness. The wailing storm-battered trees outside. The old terror had returned but much worse this time, and as always in the middle of the night.
- 3 I heard Mother beating the wall hysterically and uttering in accents of final doom. When Mother gave her alarms, one didn't lie back and think, one didn't use reason at all; one just leapt out of bed and scrambled downstairs with the others. 15
- 4 Our predicament was such that we lived at nature's mercy; for the cottage stood directly in the path of the floods. All the spouts of the heavens seemed to lead to our door, and there was only one small drain to swallow them. When this drain blocked up, as it did in an instant, the floods poured into our kitchen – and as there was no back door to let them out, again I felt it natural at that time we should drown. 20
- 5 We griped and we darted about for brooms, then ran out and tackled the storm. We found the drain blocked already and the yard full of water. The noise of the rain drowned our cries and whines and there was nothing to do but sweep. 25
- 6 What panic those middle-night stirrings were: the trumpet-calls murdering sleep, darkness, whirlwind, cloud bursting, thunder crashing, lightning cracking, floods rising, and our mother demented. The girls in their nightdresses held candles while we boys swept away at the drain. Bullet rain struck through our shirts as we shivered in the cold.
- 7 'More brooms!' shouted Mother, jumping up and down. 'Sweep harder, boy! It's up to the doorstep already!' 30
- 8 The flood water gurgled and moved thickly around us, skipping and frothing where the rain hit it, and inching slowly towards the door. The wet candles hissed and went out one by one. The drain was now hidden perilously beneath the water, and in the blackout, we swept as if for our lives. Mother lit torches of newspapers, while we fought knee-deep in cries and thunder, splashing about, wet-through, half-weeping, overwhelmed by gigantic fears. 35
- 9 The water did get in; two or three inches of it. It slid down the steps like a thick cream custard and spread all over the floor. There would be a horrible mess in the kitchen the next morning, mud and slime all over the mats. When that happened, Mother's lamentations reached funeral-like proportions. All the world was subpoenaed to witness the drudgery of Mother scraping the mess up and carrying it away. 40
- 10 It was not till much later that I reasoned things out: that our position on the hillside made it unlikely we should drown, that Mother's frenzies and scares were exaggerated. It was impossible after all to sleep through rain in peace. Even so, to this day, when the skies suddenly darken, I smell rain on the wind, and hear the first growl of thunder, I grow uneasy and start looking for brooms. 45

TEXT 13

In the text below, a traveller describes his experience in a rural part of Asia.

- 1 The toilet, a small bamboo hut on the edge of the clearing, was a good example of how well the camp had been organised. Inside the hut was a low bench with a football-sized hole, through which I could see running water – a tributary from the diverted waterfall stream. There was a second hole cut into the roof, to let in what little light filtered past the canopy ceiling. 5
- 2 All in all, it was a lot more agreeable than many of the bathrooms one finds outside the westernised world. There wasn't, however, any toilet paper. Not a surprise in itself, but I'd thought there might be some leaves or something. Instead, by the water channel, there was a plastic pitcher.
- 3 You find plastic pitchers all around provincial Asia and their purpose has confounded me for years. I refuse to believe that Asians wipe themselves with their hands – it's a ridiculous idea – but, aside from washing digits, I can't see what other use the pitcher has. I'm sure they don't splash themselves down. Apart from being ineffective, it would make an incredible mess, and they emerge from their ablutions as dry as a bone. 10 15
- 4 Of the various mysteries of the Orient, this should be the easiest to unravel, but the subject matter appears to be veiled in a conspiracy of silence. A Manilan friend once came with me on a trip to a small island off the coast of Luzon. One day, I found him standing on a mud-dike, peering into the mangrove swamps with obvious concern. When I asked him what the matter was, he blushed furiously, which made his brown skin go almost purple, and pointed to some bits of toilet paper that were floating in the water. The tide was leading the toilet paper towards some houses, and this prospect had thrown him into a panic. Not for reasons of hygiene but because it would betray his western toilet habits – habits that the locals would find unacceptably disgusting. In his shame, he was considering wading into the swamps to hoick the pieces out and hide them elsewhere. 20 25
- 5 We managed to solve the problem by bombarding the water with stones until the paper shredded or sank. As we slunk away from the scene of the crime, I asked him to describe the locals' acceptable alternative, but he refused to tell me. He just hinted darkly that I'd find it as disgusting as they found our way. This was as close as I ever got to finding out the truth. 30
- 6 Luckily, I only needed to piss so I was spared having to experiment. When the time came for solids, I decided I'd slip into the jungle.
- 7 I left the toilet and began walking back across the clearing. I was still feeling slightly feverish but I didn't want to spend yet more hours breathing stuffy air and watching flickering candle flames. Instead, I continued past the longhouse, thinking I might explore. I also hoped that I might find Etienne and Francoise, who'd been missing since I woke up. I imagined they were exploring too. 35
- 8 I counted nine tents in the clearing and five huts, not including the longhouse. The

tents were only used for sleeping – inside the flaps I could see backpacks and clothes, and in one, I even saw a Nintendo Gameboy – but the huts all seemed to have functional uses. Apart from the toilet, there was a kitchen and a washing area, also fed by tributaries. The other huts were for storage. One contained carpentry tools and another some boxes of tinned food. It made me wonder how long the camp had existed. 40 45

- 9 Tents, tools, tinned food, Nintendo. The more I saw, the more I marvelled. It wasn't just how much the camp had been organised, it was how it had been organised. None of the huts looked newer than the others. The tents' guy-lines were held with rocks, and the rocks were moulded into the ground. Nothing seemed random, everything seemed calculated: designed as opposed to evolved. 50

TEXT 14

The text below describes how Argin, a newly-appointed District Officer, tried to organise local people who were forced to move out of the area they had always lived in. The area was due to be flooded as a result of a huge new hydroelectric dam being built upstream.

- 1 Argin never actually asked for the task of overseeing the abandonment and resettlement programme. The offer came, quite simply, out of the blue. He received a telephone call one morning.
- 2 'A tricky job... not easy... not easy, at all,' cooed the Governor hypnotically from the comfortable surroundings of his air-conditioned office in the capital. 'We have reports from over twenty archaeological expeditions ... you must liaise with these people.' The Governor had an infuriating habit of speaking in such a slow manner that thin wisps of words seemed to drop out of his sentences and float away. 'It's a job that will require a great deal of tact,' he continued, meandering mesmerizingly. 'We need someone quick ... discreet ... kind of opportunity that can help establish a man's name. What do you say?' 5 10
- 3 Through the open door of his office, Argin could see a delegation of goats making its way up the path from the gate. There was nothing unusual about so many visitors at this early hour of the morning; the veranda was already so packed with so many creatures it resembled a vet's waiting room. There were also mothers with babies on their hips, mournful children staring blankly at him, old men banging staffs on the newly-washed tiles. It was endless. Each and every one of them had some kind of question they expected him to answer. 15
- 4 Argin dealt patiently with all demands. He showed people the plans, the little model of the valley as it would be with the villages submerged. He tried to reassure them about the new settlement. They wouldn't be living among strangers but would have the same neighbours as they had now – unless they insisted otherwise, which they occasionally did. He took notes, made calculations, assured them their herds would be tallied again, their furniture transported. He promised them all compensation would be paid. Though he was sincere in trying to allay their fears, Argin was aware his task was impossible. He had neither the time nor money to fulfil all the promises he'd given. 20 25
- 5 For the moment, they believed him when he said that he'd do his best.
- 6 There was no end to the inventiveness people used to appeal for his help. A number of strategies became familiar. Elderly women pressed parcels of biscuits and bundles of sticky pastry onto him. Wealthy merchants dropped thick wallets on the table, shrewdly scrutinising the size of his office and state of his uniform. The less wealthy dispensed with tact, demanding bluntly how much he wanted in order to spare their land. When he explained this was impossible, they would repeat the demand more loudly, convinced he had hearing problems. It was when you got down to the peasants and farmers that livestock began to arrive, often herded straight into his office, where they invariably set about chewing up the seat covers and scattering pungent little pellets everywhere. Argin could have accumulated a large herd by now if he had cared to. It was turning into a marathon test of his moral strength. 30 35 40

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- 7 Hordes of archaeologists descended from all corners of the globe, adding to his responsibilities. Land was divided up between teams on a first-come-first-served basis. Relics of the ancient world were dismantled and pored over in a plethora of languages. Rulers were held up to granite thighs, bones gathered into hasty heaps, skulls, femora and hands still bearing rings sprouted from the earth. It was like watching time being unpacked from the ground and then flying away. 45
- 8 Over there was the river where it had always been. The idea that the water would rise up to cover everything seemed silly when you stood and gazed at its placid surface. Argin heaved a heavy sigh. All of this was to vanish beneath a blanket of watery forgetfulness. 50

TEXT 15

The text below is about some students at a school camp.

- 1 The scream came as we were about to launch into another round of *Cannibal King*, sitting around the campfire. We saw each other's alarm, the fingers of shadows streaking across our faces. We pressed our shoulders together, and glided our stares towards our form teacher, Miss Geraldine Tan, who had turned her body towards the source of the sound, her pencil-thin brows drawn together in mild irritation. *Must be someone saw a rat or something*, someone said, before dropping in a softer utter of "scaredy cat". Some of us laughed and made ghastly faces, trying to mimic the cry. Someone threw a stick into the fire, which agitated the flames into a flurry of bright leaps. *Don't do that*, Miss Tan said, visibly annoyed. We lapsed into a tight silence, uncertain whether we should start singing again. 5

- 2 Then, some girls from another class began to whisper among themselves, their voices loud enough to be heard by everyone else. *Maybe it's a ghost, from the Arts block?* one of the girls said. *Maybe it's a vampire*, another ventured weakly. *Maybe it's your new boyfriend lah, the one always waiting for you at the bus stop*, another butted in. There was a volley of insults all round, as we jostled one another for a better comeback, a punchline, the final word. 15

- 3 *Stop it, girls, stop all the nonsense*, Miss Tan finally said, getting up from the mat and straightening her khaki shorts. *You girls wait here, and don't go anywhere*, she said, and walked out of the perimeter of light towards the main Admin block. We watched as she disappeared into the night. 20

- 4 *Someone is so going to get into trouble now*, a girl from our class said. Our voices started to rise in excitement as we spun wild, implausible stories. Very soon it became inevitable to include a ghost story or two into our fabrications, given that our school, a brand-name convent girls' school, had a long history that went all the way back to our colonial past. We tried to better each other's story with horrific tales, each riddled with suicides, murders and venomous lovers' spats. Our imaginations were rife with all kinds of possibilities, and we were more than willing to be amused and scared by our stories. Right then, we heard a second scream coming from the science laboratories, and, almost instantaneously, we stopped talking, our ears pricked up. Some of us held hands and stared at each other, our eyes as wide as discs. A few jumped to their feet, unsure which direction to take flight—across the school field or into the Admin block. 35

- 5 *We should stay here together, as we were told.*

- 6 *No, we should go somewhere safer.*

- 7 Then, all of us were on our feet, like a flock of agitated chickens in a coop.
- 8 *Don't panic, it's nothing. Miss Tan will come back soon. Somebody is pulling a prank on us, don't fall for it. Maybe someone is in trouble. Maybe someone needs our help. We should stick together. Strength in numbers, right?* Our words swirled in the thickened air around us as we tried to decide what to do. A night breeze stirred the fire and chilled our skin. Then, one of us started to run toward the Admin block – Bernice, our class monitor – and the rest followed automatically, fighting to keep up. We discarded our song sheets, hoodies and hairbands as we ran, leaving behind a messy trail. 40 45
- 9 We paused briefly at the darkened staff room, and one of us shone the light of her torch into it. Someone rattled the door handle, but it was locked. We peered through the dusty window panes into the room, trying to differentiate between the shifty shadows cast onto the floor and walls by us, and those made by the furniture in the room. One of us yelped and pointed to something on the floor farther in, slightly hidden by a partition; we strained to see it. Our breaths made ghostly stains on the window panes, appearing and disappearing quickly with each exhalation. We rubbed our eyes; already a few of us were weeping from fear and panic. When we heard a burst of footsteps farther down the corridor, we paused only for a split second and shot off in the opposite direction. One of us tripped and fell to her knees. We didn't wait for her; shortly after we heard her squeal, which sounded weak and wobbly, as if she didn't have the chance to warm up her vocal cords before she was cut off. We stampeded up the stairs, summoning all the strength we could muster in our legs. 50 55 60

TEXT 16

The text below describes the life of a German boy and his sister in Germany during World War II.

- 1 Werner's earliest years are the leanest. Men brawl over jobs outside the Zollverein¹ gates, and chicken eggs sell for two million reichsmarks² apiece, and rheumatic fever stalks Children's House³ like a wolf. There is no butter or meat. Fruit is a memory. Some evenings, during the worst months, all the house directress has to feed her dozen wards are cakes made from mustard powder and water. However, seven-year-old Werner seems to float. He is undersized, his ears stick out and he speaks with a high, sweet voice; the whiteness of his hair stops people in their tracks. Snowy, milky, chalky. A colour that is the absence of colour. Every couple of days he will startle the directress with some unanswerable query: "Why do we get hiccups? Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle, Frau Elena?"

5
- 2 Frau Elena is a Protestant nun from Alsace⁴ who is fonder of children than of supervision. She sings French folk songs in a screechy falsetto, harbours a weakness for sherry, and regularly falls asleep standing up. Some nights she lets the children stay up late while she tells them stories in French about her girlhood cosied up against mountains, snow six feet deep on rooftops, town criers and creeks smoking in the cold and frost-dusted vineyards: a Christmas-carol world.

15
- 3 Sometimes Werner and Jutta draw. His sister sneaks up to his cot, and together they lie on their stomachs and pass a single pencil back and forth. Jutta, though she is two years younger, is the gifted one. She loves most of all to draw Paris, a city she has seen in exactly one photograph. Other days, in the hours after lessons, Werner tows his little sister through the mine complex in a wagon he has assembled from cast-off parts. They rattle down the long gravel lanes, past pit cottages and trash barrel fires, past laid-off miners squatting all day on upturned crates, motionless as statues. One wheel regularly clunks off and Werner crouches patiently beside it, threading back the bolts. All around them, the figures of second-shift workers shuffle into warehouses while first-shift workers shuffle home, hunched, hungry, blue-nosed, their faces like black skulls beneath their helmets. "Hello," Werner will chirp, "good afternoon," but the miners usually hobble past without replying, perhaps without even seeing him, their eyes on the muck, the economic collapse of Germany looming over them like the severe geometry of the mills.

20

25

30
- 4 Werner and Jutta sift through glistening piles of black dust; they clamber up mountains of rusting machines. They tear berries out of brambles and dandelions out of fields. Sometimes they manage to find potato peels or carrot greens in trash bins; other afternoons they collect paper to draw on or old toothpaste tubes from which the last dregs can be squeezed out and dried into chalk.

35

¹ Zollverein – a four-thousand-acre coal mining complex outside Essen, Germany

² reichsmarks – currency in Germany

³ Children's House – an orphanage

⁴ Alsace – a region in Eastern France, next to Germany and Switzerland

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- 5 Once in a while Werner tows Jutta as far as the entrance to Pit Nine, the largest of the mines, wrapped in noise, lit like the pilot at the centre of a gas furnace, a five-storey coal elevator crouched over it, cables swinging, hammers banging, men shouting, an entire mapful of pleated and corrugated industry stretching into the distance on all sides, and they watch the coal cars trundling up from the earth and the miners spilling out of warehouses with their lunch pails toward the mouth of the elevator like insects toward a lighted trap. 40
- “Down there,” Werner whispers to his sister. “That’s where Father died.” 45
- As night falls, Werner pulls little Jutta wordlessly back through the close-set neighbourhoods of Zollverein, two snowy-haired children in a bottomland of soot, bearing their paltry treasures to Children’s House, where Frau Elena stares into the coal stove, singing a French lullaby in a tired voice, one toddler yanking her apron strings while another howls in her arms. 50

TEXT 17

The text below is about a boy's adventures with his friends in nature.

- 1 When Tom awoke in the morning, he wondered where he was. He sat up and rubbed his eyes and looked around. It was the cool grey dawn, and there was a delicious sense of peace in the pervading calm and silence of the woods. Not a leaf stirred and not a sound meddled with great Nature's meditation. Beaded dewdrops stood upon the leaves and grass. Joe and Huck still slept. 1
5
- 2 Now, far away in the woods, a bird called and another answered. The hammering of a woodpecker was heard. Gradually, the cool dim grey of the morning whitened, and as gradually, sounds multiplied. The marvel of Nature shaking off sleep and going to work unfolded itself to the musing boy.
- 3 A little green worm came crawling over a dewy leaf, lifting two-thirds of his body into the air from time to time, sniffing around, then proceeding again. When the worm approached Tom of its own accord, Tom sat as still as a stone, with his hopes rising and falling by turns as the creature still came towards him or seemed inclined to go elsewhere. When at last it came decisively down upon Tom's leg and began a journey over him, Tom's whole heart was glad. 10
15
- 4 Now a procession of ants appeared and went about their duties. One struggled by determinedly with a dead spider five times as big as itself in its arms, and lugged it straight up a tree-trunk.
- 5 The birds were rioting by this time. A cat-bird hopped in a branch over Tom's head and trilled out her imitations of her neighbours in a rapture of enjoyment. Then a shrill jay swept down, a flash of blue flame, and stopped on a twig almost within the boy's reach. It cocked his head to one side, and eyed the strangers with a consuming curiosity. A grey squirrel and a big fellow of the 'fox' kind came scurrying along, sitting up to inspect the boys, for the wild things had probably never seen a human being before, and barely knew whether to be afraid or not. 20
25
- 6 All Nature was wide awake and stirring now. Long lances of sunlight pierced down through the dense foliage and a few butterflies came fluttering upon the scene. Tom stirred up the other pirates and they all clattered away with a shout. In a minute or two, they were stripped, chasing after and tumbling over each other in the shallow crystalline water of the white sand-bar. They felt no longing for their little village sleeping in the distance beyond the majestic expanse of water. A wild current or a slight rise in the river had carried off their raft, but this only thrilled them, since its departure was something like burning the bridge between them and civilisation. 30
- 7 They came back to camp wonderfully refreshed, gladhearted, and ravenous; and they soon had the camp-fire blazing up again. While Joe was slicing bacon for breakfast, Tom and Huck asked him to hold on a minute. They stepped into a promising nook in the river bank and threw in their lines. Almost immediately, they were rewarded. Joe had not had time to get impatient before they were back again with some handsome bass, a couple of sun-perch and a small catfish. They tried the fish with the bacon and were astonished; for no fish had ever seemed so delicious before. They did not know that the quicker a freshwater fish is on the fire after it is caught, the better it is. They did not consider what a gravy open-air sleeping, open-air exercise and bathing made, drizzled over the large ingredient of hunger. 35
40

TEXT 18

The text below describes a young Russian male arriving in London for his university education.

- 1 Overhead luggage compartments thumped as they were relieved of their overstuffed contents. Phones chimed and came back to life. Nick rubbed his hand over his face and felt along his jaw, wondering if he was the only one getting off the plane reeking of exhaustion. The flight from his adopted hometown, Ann Arbor, a city in the United States of America, had been a fairly long one. Flight attendants said goodbye in a British accent to everyone who walked past them while Nick kept a firm hold on his backpack straps. Then, he was off the plane and on British soil. 5
- 2 Gray walls surrounded him like a vault, reaching the glass ceiling. The atmosphere at the airport was tense and the silence was deafening. Every sign seemed complicated to him despite them being in English. As he shuffled behind all the other passengers, Nick moved along as if sleepwalking. The pouch his mom had given him for his passport and boarding passes was damp in his hand. He had checked its contents three times on the plane, then zipped it up in his backpack, then took it out again because he thought he had forgotten where he had stuffed it. 10
- 3 Nick knew that being afraid of travelling alone was ridiculous. He took out his phone. He could not afford a mobile plan, so it was strictly for Wi-Fi and emergencies. When his phone woke up, it was on Ann Arbor time. It was still the middle of the night back home. Heathrow airport kindly offered him forty-five minutes of complimentary Wi-Fi if he watched an ad, which he did while yawning. The Wi-Fi chugged slowly, but he persisted in order to dutifully send his mother and sister an email, to inform them that he had landed. 15
- 4 Forty-five minutes later, he was handing his passport and boarding pass to a tired-looking customs lady who asked him, in a British accent, if he was here on business or pleasure. She eyed him pretty closely, watching him like a hawk. It took him a moment to figure out why before he remembered the *born in* field in his passport. "School." Belatedly, he handed her the customs slip he had filled out on the plane. 20
- 5 "And where are you staying?" The officer's sharp eyes softened as she continued with a more relaxed tone. Nick swallowed, wondering what would happen if she decided for whatever reason that he wasn't trustworthy. "In a dorm." He cleared his throat and gave her the actual address. 25
- 6 "Do you have your return flight information, Mr Melnikov?" After some fumbling in his backpack, Nick managed to tug out his flight reservation printout. The officer took it from him wordlessly.
- 7 "Welcome to London, Mr Melnikov," she told him eventually, after stamping his passport. Suddenly released, he gathered up all the documents she thrust at him and legged it out of there before she could take it back. For the rest of the journey, he was at once aware of everything he had to do and completely separate from them. It felt like that time when he had awakened from an all-nighter, surrounded by papers, his laptop screen displaying a document with words that he could not recall typing. 30
- 8 When he emerged from the underground station, his arms were ready to fall off. He had packed for a nine-month stay, but even so, the weight of his belongings felt excessive. Pulling himself out of the way of the jostling locals, he stared at the map intently, trying to find his way to his apartment. It took him an embarrassingly long time to figure out his way after several detours. He was extremely exhausted and he desperately needed to relieve himself, and to sleep. His eyes lit up when he saw his dormitory appearing around the corner - it was such a relief, he nearly burst into tears. Putting his bags down on the floor once he had wrestled them through the heavy glass doors, he groaned in satisfaction. 40

TEXT 19

In the text below, the writer is entering the Hareenna Forest in Ethiopia's Bale Mountains to witness how honey is harvested there.

- 1 The sun was beginning its evening dip as I set off into the Hareenna Forest, which hugged the mountain slopes like the green armour of some forgotten god jealously guarding its secrets. The forest's thorny trees bristled like spears, occasionally breaking through dense canopy to ward off daring intruders, and the uneven ground sought to trip the unwary foot of anyone brave enough to enter the forest. Here, hand-carved beehives are lodged high in the tree canopies and reaching them to retrieve the sweet, sticky nectar is arduous – and often dangerous. 5
- 2 I dithered along the trail across a flower-strewn meadow, following my local guide Ziyad and the beekeeper Syed towards a break in the tangle of trees. I peered through the deepening dark beneath the forest's green roof before allowing it to swallow me whole. Sometimes, I wondered at my own curiosity and zest that prompted me to follow strangers into unknown situations. I would have sunk into apathy if I had continued working at my desk-bound job. 10
- 3 Whatever fears I harboured instantly dissipated once my eyes adjusted to the light gloom, and the forest revealed its true breath-taking beauty. While Syed began preparations, I paused to admire the giant trees, elegantly clothed in emerald moss, branches extended as though frozen in mid-dance. When I returned my attention to him, he had gathered handfuls of moss and lichen, wrapping the bundle with twine and lighting it to create a glowing bouquet for smoking out the bees and fending them off. Pulling a thin scarf around his face, Syed then secured a rope about a tree whose sturdy branches and vast, umbrella-shaped crown provided a sheltered home for the hives. 15 20
- 4 The hive was around 20m above the ground. I held my breath as he scaled the tree barefoot, shimmying up a few metres at a time and pausing every few minutes to loop the rope higher up the broad trunk. Finally, straddling a branch, he inched towards it and blew smoke from his mossy torch into a tiny hole in the hive, releasing glowing embers like a flurry of fiery fairies floating in mid-air. Minutes after reaching the hive, Syed released a sharp yelp. Within seconds, he'd slithered down the trunk and was back on the ground. It was too early. A relatively cool summer had delayed hatching, and baby bees – or *ichs* – were still curled in the honeycombs. The *nibi*, or adult bees, were angry. They continued attacking as Syed stumbled away from the tree, shielding his face with the scarf. 25 30
- 5 "Beekeepers often can't collect the honey, and then they have to wait for the right moment to go back up," Ziyad explained patiently, painstakingly plucking bees from Syed's hair and clothes. I quickly lent a hand as well, grimacing a little while touching the small hard bodies, some of which still moved.
- 6 Moving suddenly, Syed knocked my hand away. I gasped in surprise as he turned accusatory eyes on me. Gesturing at me and then the hive, he jabbered at Ziyad in their native tongue. Ziyad glanced at me apologetically and translated, "Stings might be common, but this time Syed was assailed by more than 100 bees. This has only happened twice in his 10 years as a beekeeper. He thinks that you jinxed him somehow." 35
- 7 Stalking ahead of us, Syed exited the forest. He had a wife and five children to feed, so I could understand why he was angry having to return home empty-handed. Perhaps my presence really did cause the harvest to go badly somehow. "I'm sure everything will go better tomorrow," I called after him. "It was only a minor setback," I trotted faster in an 40

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attempt to catch up with Syed. "We will come back in the morning," I said as I attempted to catch Syed's sleeve, but Ziyad held me back. "Let him cool off a bit," he said. "It wouldn't hurt if you offered him a little extra something for his trouble," he added with a wink, rubbing his fingers together in the universal gesture for payment. 45

TEXT 20

The text below describes an expedition to climb up Annapurna in the Himalayas.

- 1 On May 23, 1950, four of us slept in a tiny camp, completely lost among the snow and ice, and deafened by the roar of avalanches, 6,000 metres up – on Annapurna in India. We were in Camp II – the second of a series supply camps we setting up to launch our final attack on the great mountain. 5
- 2 When we woke up at nine o'clock the next morning, it was already very hot in spite of the great height and the tents were suffused with golden light. Still, it was hard work to get our frozen boots on – they were like blocks of wood. I poked my head out of the tent. The sky was blue and the view magnificent: a wonderful chain of peaks and ridges stood out round us at a height of 7,000 metres, while above us, an enormous ice face, bristling with ice towers or seracs and seamed with crevasses, sparkled in the sun. Far above, so high that one had to tilt one's head back to see it, was the summit of Annapurna, resplendent, dominating everything as a goddess should. It was a dazzling and menacing world: the eye was lost in its immensities. 10 15
- 3 I inspected the face we had to attack with some concern. It was all so disproportionate, on such a different scale from our puny resources. I had to take into account the rather limited equipment at our disposal up here and allow for the time factor: the dreaded monsoon from India was due to arrive on June 5. We had only ten days to establish the rest of our supply camps, reach the summit and return. 20
- 4 As fast as possible, we roped up. When we put our feet in the snow, they were numbed by the cold, yet the air was so warm that we soon took off our eiderdown jackets. The gigantic wall of snow and ice above us seemed to tower higher and higher as we pushed forward, while on the left a ridge of bare ice surprised me by its transparent blueness. 25
- 5 After we had been going for an hour, we reached the foot of the great central gorge running towards the summit. It was a dangerous spot, for every block of ice, snow or rock that fell from the upper slopes would inevitably hurtle down this funnel. However, what worried me most was what lay beyond, where thousands of tonnes of a titanic flood seemed to be frozen in indescribable confusion. The nearer we got to this wall, the steeper appeared the average angle. Seracs crashed down it with hideous din, and the rumbling of avalanches nearby put us all on edge. For the moment there was no snow or ice coming down the gorge above us but for some minutes, while we crossed it, we would be exposed to danger. 30 35

- 6 All went well, the danger zone was passed and we arrived out of breath on the opposite side. The slope was so steep now that the snow no longer held firm and we did not dare to stop. The first party rapidly cut some tiny steps barely sufficient for two spikes of our crampons, or foot irons. The ice was smooth and compact like glass and split off with a sharp noise beneath the axe. The chips broke off cleanly, went flying down into space and disappeared, starting up little avalanches. We continued to move over to the right under the seracs and a rickety snow-bridge brought us to a platform where we were at last able to stop. 40 45
- 7 At our feet lay the plateau with Camp II. We only managed to pick out the microscopic tent by following the tracks of our ascent. Higher up, the next part of the route was not very encouraging – about fifty metres or so above our heads, the way was barred by a huge vertical wall of ice. We could not see a way around it either to the left or to the right. 50

TEXT 21

In the text below, a diver encounters a shark.

- 1 Hooper waited until the bubbly froth of his descent had dissipated. There was water in his mask, so he tilted his head backward and blew through his nose until the mask was clear. It was the pervasive sense of freedom and ease that he always felt when he dived. He basked in the blue silence speckled with shafts of sunlight that danced through the water. The only sounds were those he made breathing. He held his breath and the silence was complete. He looked up at the hull of the boat, a grey body that sat above him, bouncing slowly. At first, the cage annoyed him. It confined him, restricted him, prevented him from enjoying the grace of underwater movement. But then he remembered why it was there, and he was grateful. 5
- 2 Even with the bright sunlight, visibility was poor in the murky water. Hooper turned slowly around, trying to pierce the edge of the gloom and grasp any sliver of colour or movement. He calculated that if he controlled his breathing, he could stay down for at least half an hour more. He glanced downwards, started to look away, then snapped his eyes down again. Rising at him from the darkling blue, slowly and smoothly was the shark. It rose with no apparent effort, an angel of death gliding towards an appointment predestined. 10
- 3 Hooper stared, enthralled, impelled to flee but unable to move. As the fish drew nearer, he marvelled at its colours – the brown-greys seen on the surface had vanished. The top of the immense body was a hard ferrous grey, bluish where dappled with streaks of sunlight. Beneath its underbelly, all was dreamy, ghostly white. Hooper wanted to raise his camera but his arm would not obey. In a minute, he said to himself, in a minute. 15
- 4 The fish came closer, silent as a shadow, and Hooper drew back. The head was only a few feet from the cage when the fish turned and began to pass before Hooper's eyes – casually, as if in proud display of its incalculable mass and power. The snout passed first, then the jaw, slack and smiling, armed with row upon row of serrate triangles. Its black, fathomless eyes were riveted upon him, its gills rippled and its steely skin showed off bloodless wounds. 20
- 5 Tentatively, Hooper stuck a hand through the bars and touched its side. It felt cold and hard, not clammy but smooth as vinyl. He let his fingers caress the flesh until finally they were slapped away by the sweeping tail. 25
- 6 The fish moved off to the limit of Hooper's vision – a ghostly silver-grey blur tracing a slow circle. Hooper raised his camera and pressed the trigger. He knew the shot would be worthless unless the fish moved in once more, but he wanted to catch the beast as it emerged from the darkness. 30

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- 7 Through the viewfinder he saw the fish turn towards him. It moved fast, tail thrusting vigorously, mouth opening and closing as if gasping for breath. Hooper raised his right hand to change the focus. But the fish did not turn. A shiver travelled through the whole length of its body as it closed in on the cage. It struck the cage head on, the snout ramming between two bars and spreading them apart. The snout hit Hooper in the chest and knocked him backward. The camera flew from his hands and the mouthpiece shot out from his mouth. The fish turned on its side and its pounding tail forced its great body further into the cage. Hooper groped for his mouthpiece but could not find it. His chest convulsed with the need for air. 35 40
- 8 The fish rammed through the space between the bars, spreading them further apart with each thrust of its tail. Hooper, flattened against the back of the cage, saw the mouth reaching, straining for him. The fish lunged at him again. Hooper saw with the terror of doom that the mouth was going to reach him.

TEXT 22

The text below describes the writer's thoughts and feelings while in prison.

- 1 I pace the floor. Not for the first time. One, two, three, four and a half. The metal green door is cold to my touch. My head swivels around and captures the photo on the wall. Holding its gaze, I walk methodically back. One, two, three, four and a half. The edges of the photo are frayed and its colours dulled; the past ten years have not only taken their toll on me. The photo was taken with my camera, one that used actual film. I hear those do not exist anymore. Everything is digital they say. 5

- 2 Joe's tiny face smiles back at me. He was only six months at the time, and how he loved bouncing in that blue baby rocker. We had laughed so. Those days all my photos were of Joe. We were inseparable. Until his death.

- 3 'Turner! Turner!' The female prison officer fills the door. 10
 Standing still, I gaze ahead. Carol, that is my name. They took that from me in here; my self. Sometimes I repeat it to myself, just to make sure I do not forget. 'Carol. Carol.' Daughter, wife, mother. Then child-murderer. Or so they claimed.
 'The warden wants to see you. Now!' I nod curtly and glance at the space above my table. 15

- 4 A calendar hangs on a wall. A big red circle pulsates around tomorrow, marking my appeal hearing. My final hope. The daily clamour of prison life continues around me unabated. After the silence all those years ago the constant barrage of noise is soothing to me. The silence of Joe and the day he stopped breathing. The relentless rain had whipped around the car on the journey home from the nursery that day. Joe had cried non-stop. This in itself was unusual as was the pitch of his scream; twenty minutes of fractured tortured crying. Not that of hunger or exhaustion. Slowly it dwindled to a whimper, and I hate myself even now for being relieved at the peace. 20

- 5 On entering the house Joe's stillness struck me. Then I spotted his lips, tinged light blue. I tried to get him to breathe. Those minutes turned into a lifetime. I must have called an ambulance. I watched the paramedics fighting to save my son's life. In vain. The hail had hammered upon my face as the police arrested me soon after Joe's death. I was not permitted to attend his funeral. 25

- 6 Salt, such a small innocuous condiment. The police and doctors said I had been feeding Joe teaspoons of this over time to kill him. My incredulity at the accusation turned to total disbelief, then resignation as experts testified to the high sodium levels in Joe. The only possible reason given for its presence was poisoning. I could never have harmed him, but nobody listened. He had been tired, lethargic even. Joe's low weight had always concerned me. I had asked for help but was told not to worry. 30

- 7 My raw anger and desperation at the initial trial had not helped. I realise that now. Neither had my appearance with unruly frizzy hair which had long since been tamed into a short smart bob. Exercise, which was detestable to me previously, became my new religion and I trained at the prison gymnasium like a fanatic. Once my body was in shape, I turned to my mind. Unused since school where I passed a couple of examinations, I studied like one possessed and only last year achieved a degree in law. I had almost laughed as I held the certificate. A degree! Me? No known parents and convicted for petty theft. Would I succeed at the final trial? 35 40