GCSE

C700U10-1A

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MONDAY, 5 JUNE 2023 – MORNING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 1

20th Century Literature Reading and Creative Prose Writing

Resource Material for use with Section A

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SECTION A: 40 marks

Read carefully the passage below.

In this story, the narrator describes her relationship with her mother, and her sister, Lisa.

A World of Her Own

My sister Lisa is an artist. She is not like other people. Lisa is two years younger than I am, and we knew quite early on that she was artistic, partly because she could always draw so nicely, but also because of the way she behaved. "She lives in a world of her own," my mother used to say. She was always the difficult one, always having tantrums and getting upset about one thing and another, but once mother realised about her being artistic she made allowances. We all did.

The art teacher at school said she had real talent and mother was thrilled to bits. She'd always admired creative people. She'd have loved to be able to write or paint herself but having Lisa turn out that way was the next best thing, or better, even, perhaps. When Lisa was fifteen, mother went to work in Luigi's Delicatessen, behind the counter, to save up so there would be a bit extra for Lisa when she went to art school. It worried me rather, mother going out to work like that. She's had asthma for years now, and besides she felt awkward, serving in a shop. But the trouble is, she's not qualified at anything and in any case, as she said, a delicatessen isn't like an ordinary shop or a supermarket.

I was at college by then, doing my teaching qualification. Lisa went to one of the London art schools, and came back at the end of her first term looking as weird as anything. You'd hardly have known her, her hair dyed red and wearing black clothes with pop art stuck on and I don't know what. It was just as well mother *had* saved up, because it all turned out much more expensive than we'd thought. There was so much she had to do, like going to plays and things, and of course she needed smarter clothes, and more of them, and then the next year she had to travel all summer to see great paintings and architecture. She was away for months and when she came back she had changed completely all over again – her hair was blonde and frizzed out, and she was wearing a lot of leather things, very expensive boots up to her thighs and long suede coats. She did come home for Christmas and sometimes she was chatty and made everybody laugh and other times she was bad-tempered and moody but, as mother said, she'd always been like that from a little girl and of course you had to expect it, with her artistic temperament.

Lisa finished at her art college, and got whatever qualification they get, and then couldn't find a job. At least she didn't want any of the jobs she could have got, like jobs on magazines or for publishers or that kind of thing.

"And can you blame her," said mother. "I mean, what a waste of her talents, it's ridiculous, all that time she's spent developing herself and then they expect her to be tied down to some nine-to-five job like everyone else!"

I got my teaching qualification and started teaching and not long after that I married Jim, whom I'd met at college, and we had the children quite soon because I thought I'd go back to work when they were at school. I thought my life seemed to be following a clear path.

Lisa had come to live at home and she was fed up. Mother gave up her big bedroom and had the builders put a skylight in and made it into a studio for Lisa with a bare, polished floor and a big new easel that mother got by selling that silver tea set that was a wedding present and she said she never liked anyway. But then it turned out Lisa didn't do that kind of painting, but funny things to do with bits of material all glued together. And when she did paint she would be squatting on the floor, or lying on her stomach on the sofa.

I couldn't make head or tail of the art Lisa did. I mean, I just didn't know if it was any good or not. But then, I wouldn't, would I? I'm not experienced in things like that.

Lisa mooched about at home for months and, sadly, actually did less and less painting.

Then Bella Sims arrived and opened this new gallery in town. Bella's place was real art, you could see that at once – lots of pictures hung far apart, pottery vases so expensive they didn't have a price on them. Lisa took along some of her things one day and believe it or not Bella liked them and put three of them in her next exhibition. Mother and I were so thrilled we cried when Lisa first told us.

Bella Sims was about fifty, one of those people with a loud, posh voice and hair that's just been done at the hairdresser and expensive jewellery. She scared the wits out of me, though mother kept saying what a marvellous person she was. I didn't enjoy the party for the opening of the exhibition and nobody talked to us much. But Lisa had a good time and she met Melvyn at that party.

Melvyn was Bella's son. He taught design. That meant he was creative, though not a real artist like Lisa. He fell for her heavily and quite soon they said they were getting married. We were all pleased, because Melvyn was nice – you'd never have guessed he was Bella's son – and we didn't realise till later that it was because Francesca was on the way. Mother was a bit upset about that but actually she worried more about Lisa not being able to paint once the baby was born.

Actually, it didn't work out that way. Lisa soon got into the habit of leaving Francesca with mother or me. She had to go to London a lot to keep in touch with her friends and try to find openings for her work. I had my two, of course, so, as she said, an extra one didn't make much difference. It did get more of a strain the next year though after she had Jason. Four children is quite a lot to keep an eye on.

And so it went on. In the years that followed, Lisa had a series of relationships and more children. She moved to London and then there was Wales with a Polish sculptor and France with the tapestry people, London again and the cottage in Sussex that someone lent her…

The last time she was here I suddenly realised she is nearly forty. It doesn't seem right; she is a person that things have always been in front of, somehow, not behind.

Mother and I cleaned out Lisa's old studio the other day. I found some really nice drawings of things Lisa did at school. Mother put them aside and said she might have them framed and hang them in the hall.

Holding them, she said, "With her temperament, I suppose you could not expect her to settle but at least she has always been free to express herself, which is the important thing".

When I did not answer, she said, "Isn't it, dear?"

I said, "Yes. Yes, I think so mother".

Penelope Lively

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