

- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison.

The narrator, a young African-American from the southern USA, has recently left college, and is looking for work in New York. The college Principal, Dr. Bledsoe, has given him a letter to show to Mr. Bates, a wealthy and powerful business man.

Behind me the elevator was letting off passengers, and I heard the cheery voices of women going chattering down the hall. Soon I would have to go in. My uncertainty grew. My appearance worried me. Mr. Bates might not like my suit, or the cut of my hair, and my chance of a job would be lost. I looked at his name typed neatly across the envelope and wondered how he earned his money. He was a millionaire, I knew. Maybe he had always been; maybe he was born a millionaire. Never before had I been so curious about money as now that I believed I was surrounded by it. Perhaps I would get a job here and after a few years would be sent up and down the streets with millions strapped to my arms, a trusted messenger. Then I'd be sent South again to head the college—just as the mayor's cook had been made principal of the school after she'd become too lame to stand before her stove. Only I wouldn't stay North that long; they'd need me before that ... But now for the interview. 5 10

Entering the office I found myself face to face with a young woman who looked up from her desk as I glanced swiftly over the large light room, over the comfortable chairs, the ceiling-high bookcases with gold and leather bindings, past a series of portraits and back again, to meet her questioning eyes. She was alone and I thought, Well, at least I'm not too early ... 15

"Good morning," she said, betraying none of the antagonism I had expected.

"Good morning," I said, advancing. How should I begin? 20

"Yes?"

"Is this Mr. Bates' office?" I said.

"Why, yes, it is," she said. "Have you an appointment?"

"No, ma'am," I said, and quickly hated myself for saying "ma'am" to so young a white woman, and in the North too. I removed the letter from my brief case, but before I could explain, she said, 25

"May I see it, please?"

I hesitated. I did not wish to surrender the letter except to Mr. Bates, but there was a command in the extended hand, and I obeyed. I surrendered it, expecting her to open it, but instead, after looking at the envelope she rose and disappeared behind a paneled door without a word. 30

Back across the expanse of carpet to the door which I had entered I noticed several chairs but was undecided to go there. I stood, my hat in my hand, looking around me. One wall caught my eyes. It was hung with three portraits of dignified old gentlemen in winged collars who looked down from their frames with an assurance and arrogance that I had never seen in any except white men and a few bad, razor-scarred Negroes. Not even Dr. Bledsoe, who had but to look around him without speaking to set the teachers to trembling, had such assurance. So these were the kind of men who stood behind him. How did they fit in with the southern white folks, with the men who gave me my scholarship? I was still staring, caught in the spell of power and mystery, when the secretary returned. 35 40

She looked at me oddly and smiled. "I'm very sorry," she said, "but Mr. Bates is just too busy to see you this morning and asks that you leave your name and address. You'll hear from him by mail."

I stood silent with disappointment. "Write it here," she said, giving me a card. 45

"I'm sorry," she said again as I scribbled my address and prepared to leave.

"I can be reached here at any time," I said.

“Very good,” she said. “You should hear very soon.”
She seemed very kind and interested, and I left in good spirits. My fears were 50
groundless, there was nothing to it. This was New York.

- 2 Write a critical comparison of the following two poems. In each, the poet thinks of those who have died in war.

Spring in War-time

Now the sprinkled blackthorn snow¹
Lies along the lovers' lane
Where last year we used to go –
Where we shall not go again.

In the hedge the buds are new, 5
By our wood the violets peer –
Just like last year's violets, too,
But they have no scent this year.

Every bird has heart to sing 10
Of its nest, warmed by its breast;
We had heart to sing last spring,
But we never built our nest.

Presently red roses blown 15
Will make all the gardens gay....
Not yet have the daisies grown
On your clay.

Edith Nesbit (1858–1924)

¹ *blackthorn snow*: the white blossom of the blackthorn bushes

Spring in War-time

I feel the spring far off, far off,
 The faint, far scent of bud and leaf—
 Oh, how can spring take heart to come
 To a world in grief,
 Deep grief? 5

The sun turns north, the days grow long,
 Later the evening star grows bright—
 How can the daylight linger on
 For men to fight,
 Still fight? 10

The grass is waking in the ground.
 Soon it will rise and blow in waves—
 How can it have the heart to sway
 Over the graves,
 New graves? 15

Under the boughs where lovers walked
 The apple-blooms will shed their breath—
 But what of all the lovers now
 Parted by Death,
 Grey Death? 20

Sara Teasdale (1884–1933)

3 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the play *The Waxen Man* (1934) by Mary Reynolds.

Joe is Alison's twin brother. They live by the coast, and as the extract opens, Joe has just left their cottage to fetch some wood for the fire, while Alison is preparing their supper.

[ALISON starts to set the table for supper. A face appears at the window for an instant or two, then is withdrawn and a knock is heard. She has not seen the face, but at the knock she stops abruptly in her work, then goes to the door with reluctance. On opening it, the COASTGUARD is visible, his reefer buttoned tightly, a sou'wester¹ on his head.] 5

Coastguard: Good evenin'.

[She nods, looks past him into the dusk.]

Alison: Did you see Joe?

Coastguard [slowly, his eyes on her face]: No. ... I can't say as I did. 10

[She stands there, looking out, almost as though she would escape past him. His eyes never leave her face.]

He'll be in soon, never fear. Mind if I come in for a minute?

[She draws back, and he comes over the threshold, against her will. He pushes the door to behind him.] 15

Alison: I've no supper to offer you.

Coastguard: I want none.

[He comes further in, takes off his sou'wester, and is revealed as a weather-tanned, florid man, bearded, and with untrustworthy eyes, watching ALISON with furtive desire.] 20

Did you never hear that love destroys a man's appetite? It's true. What's food, when a man ...? Your face is food enough for me.

[He is forced to a pause by her stoniness; then attempts a heavy imitation of banter.]

You know, you didn't ought to be so pretty. 25

Alison [shortly]: Is that what you came to say?

Coastguard: Not exactly ... no, not exactly, but, by the way ... I can't help myself. ... [He comes further down, glancing round.] This is a lonely place you've got. It'd be all the better for a bit o' neighbouring, eh? Why don't you— 30

Alison: We manage well enough.

Coastguard: Ah, you're proud, and I like to see it. I like a bit o' pride. Some likes women as soft as a bit o' new cheese, but give me the proud kind ... the sort as can hold her pretty head in the air and hold her own ... like you. ... 35

Alison [briefly]: Thanks for your good opinion.

[His last move has taken him between her and the hearth, and she has put the width of the room between them and now stands by the dresser, facing him. Only half at ease, but wishing to appear fully so, the COASTGUARD takes out his pipe and scrapes the bowl with his clasp-knife, cuts tobacco, and fills the pipe, throwing furtive glances at ALISON as he does so. His remarks punctuate his operations.] 40

Coastguard: Good opinion, eh? You may say that. ... It's true. ... [He takes the chair by the table.] You're like them sirens of old, callin' a man till he's

- mazed. ... [*He pauses to lean towards her.*] The times I've watched 45
 you durin' my little spell o' duty here ... goin' your ways wi' your head
 in the air and not much said ... not much said. ... [*He returns to his
 pipe.*] You're not like one o' them women for ever clack-clackin' like
 so many hens. ... [*His pipe engrosses him, but he drops his next
 remark with meaning.*] But I haven't seen you lately. ... not since the 50
 day of Luke Simonds's wedding.
- Alison* [*in instant denial*]: I wasn't there.
- Coastguard*: No. You wasn't by way of bein' there, exactly. ... Not to say invited.
 ... But you was there. In the belfry.² [*He glances at her again.*] That's 55
 no mean climb for a female in petticoats, rickety and all as the beams
 are. I've bin up there myself since, and I know. One of them old
 bells will come down some day. [*He returns to his pipe.*] Let's pray
 nobody's underneath. 'Twould ha' bin a fine hullabaloo if one had
 a-come down that day. On the bridegroom, say ... or the bride.
- Alison*: You're talking very strange. And you must be seein' double. I wasn't 60
 at—Luke Simonds's wedding.
- Coastguard* [*coaxingly*]: Now, why d'you take that tone with me? Not but what
 I like a woman to stick to her guns, but why all this slydom ... with
 a friend? [*He leans on the table, towards her.*] Because, as I were 65
 a-standin' outside the church, I chanced to glance up at the tower,
 and if I didn't see your face at one of the outlooks—well, somebody
 must be *actin'* double. Or else you've *got* a double. Which don't seem
 likely, though there's pretty girls about.
- [*ALISON walks to the hearth, avoiding his eyes. Her own, as she
 puts him behind her, are wide with fear, but she is still mistress of her
 voice, though her words are unwise.*] 70
- Alison*: When d'you go on duty?
- Coastguard*: Want to get rid o' me?
- Alison*: No. I wondered. The tide's coming in pretty fast.
- Coastguard*: Ay. Pretty fast and pretty full. There won't ha' bin one like it this ten 75
 year, if I know the signs. You should see it. What about me and you
 goin' up the cliff to the lighthouse to watch it?
- Alison*: I'm going with my brother, thanks.
- Coastguard*: Goin' with your brother, eh? A nice lad, that. Younger than you, no 80
 doubt.
- Alison*: My twin.
- Coastguard*: Your twin, eh? So I heard tell, but couldn't believe it. There's a special
 tie between twins, they say, even when one is handsome and clever,
 and the other—ain't as bright as he might be. And what does that
 matter? You're clever enough for two. [*He eyes her averted face;
 goes on, a note of warning under the heavy banter.*] Some folks think 85
 you're too clever. ... It causes talk. ... [*He rises, goes towards her.*]
 But there, I'm your friend, in spite of the gossip.
- Alison*: Gossip? [*He gives her a furtive glance, and nods.*] What gossip? [*He
 says nothing. To avoid him, she goes to the window and glances out.
 He still says nothing, and she comes back, behind the table, facing
 him.*] What gossip? 90

¹ *reefer, sou'wester*: waterproof clothing

² *belfry*: church tower

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