

500
CREATIVE
DESCRIPTIONS
FOR
SECONDARY
SCHOOLS
BOOK 1

THE 2RS THE PROFESSIONAL WAY

500

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DESCRIPTIONS

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THE 3RS THE PROFESSIONAL WAY

Creative Descriptions

1.	From the sprawling verandah of his bedroom, Tyler had a clear and unimpeded view of the drive leading up to his grandfather's fabulous villa .
2.	It was six-thirty in the afternoon, and the ferocious heat of the day was beginning to give way to something a little more acceptable .
3.	Even so, it was still too hot for anything ^v other than a pair of light shorts and a short-sleeved shirt .
4.	In one hand he nursed a ginger beer on the rocks, which he had been periodically sipping for the past half-hour; content to just sit back on the cushioned wicker lounging chair and watching the scenery.
5.	And the scenery was indeed magnificent.
6.	To the right, just a short walk from his bedroom, was the famous flooded volcano.

7.	Meticulously manicured gardens swept around the swimming pool and curved towards the drive, which had been impressively designed to give the illusion of dropping off the side of the caldera.
8.	He had forgotten how tranquil and soporific the place was, but then again he rarely visited the villa.
9.	In fact, appreciating scenery was something he didn't do much of.
10.	He simply didn't have the time.
11.	He lived his life between London, Athens and New York, controlling the vast shipping empire which his great-grandfather had founded and which was now his legacy.
12.	Taking time out was almost unthinkable.
13.	But then, celebrating his grandfather's eightieth birthday was the equivalent of a royal summons .
14.	Tyler planned to stay for three days only,

	long enough to pay his respect and toast his grandfather's health before resuming his ferociously work fuelled life in London.
15.	One crisp, late autumn morning when the sky had lost the faded blue of the long hot summer and taken on the deeper colour of winter yet to come, I discovered a hessian sack floating down the bit of creek that ran around the back of the orphanage . I waded into the shallow stream, the water reaching to just below the hem of my khaki shorts, the current pulling at my skinny legs.
16.	The stream, already icy from the high mountains was extra cold from the frosty morning so that I inched and ouched my way towards the floating sack, grabbed hold of it and drew it back against the current to finally rest it on the bank of wet black pebbles.
17.	The desk, coffee table and chairs are lacquered , honey-coloured oak and have a sturdy shape and for me a certain charm because I almost always would rather see

	something made by hand, no matter how rustic .
18.	He was dressed in white flannels and an open-necked shirt. Beside him a middle-aged woman whose heavy-featured face was scored by lines of discontent.
19.	For a moment, he seemed lost for words.
20.	John peered about him.
21.	He had spent the next two hours wandering...
22.	She was dressed in a pair of khakis , a blue-and-white striped cotton shirt tucked in and basket-weave loafers with a matching belt.
23.	Mrs X has moved away from the window, her hands shaking badly.
24.	She sat down at the small wooden table, her face stunned and expressionless , a gleam of terror in her eyes.

25.	Jane pulled out a chair and sat across from her.
26.	She dug into her handbag, and lipstick and a compact clattered to the table.
27.	Her voice trembled and she blinked back tears.
28.	A frigid wind gusted in from the east snatching at the girl's coat as she walked quickly along.
29.	A grey steel garage door was open: a truck was backing up to unload.
30.	The man's name was Gilbert, mid-forties with curly black hair and ebony eyes.
31.	The room was arranged with burgundy and blue upholstered couches and chairs, coffee tables and racks of magazines.
32.	The loose raincoat made him look broader than he was and the lowered hat-brim,

	<p>hiding the high forehead, from which the greying hair had receded, cast a shadow over the rather anxious brown eyes.</p> <p>His annoyance creased sharp wrinkles in his fleshy cheeks and gave his face a cadaverousness that was not natural to it.</p>
33.	Hers were small, hard hands; they were cold.
34.	<p>She had not changed much, or so he thought at first. Her short, dark hair, swinging loosely as she tossed it back from her face in a rather conscious childish gesture, was hardly greyer than when he had seen her last six years ago.</p>
35.	<p>She moved with the same vigour as ever, in the same hurrying, uneven way.</p> <p>Her small, puppyish face smiled up at him.</p>
36.	The name did evoke a faint feeling of familiarity .
37.	She frowned a little, as if she had to puzzle it out.

38.	They had sat down on either side of a banged-up fire that Grace now jabbed at with the poker, so that flames burst through the black crust of cool dust and flickered up against the back of the chimney.
39.	He sat in the lounge, ostensibly reading, but in reality his thoughts were elsewhere.
40.	They walked towards the house. At the first few steps they took, a dog barked angrily , then as they continued, retreated slowly backwards, snarling .
41.	They had reached the circular porch that jutted out from the front of the house.
42.	Grace tossed her dark hair back from her face and rubbed the back of her hand across her damp forehead.
43.	Mounting the few steps to it, they found themselves again sheltered from the rain.

44.	She was far too slender, a wraith of a woman, with the look of there being scarcely room inside her for all the usual bones and organs.
45.	Her pallor and her soft, fair hair, looped loosely back from her face and worn in a knot on her neck. She wore a dress of an indeterminate grey-green colour, of some flimsy material.
46.	A big fire was blazing in the hearth and nearly all the light in the room came from the flames, for the only lamp that had been lit was one on a desk in a corner.
47.	Some papers were spread out in the pool of light on the desk, which was of cherry wood like the rest of the furniture in the room.
48.	Hester dropped exhaustedly into a deep, velvet covered chair.
49.	She made a slight motion with her head towards the window. "Yes, they are in the

	studio.”
50.	It was a raining – a driving spring rain that slashed at the windows.
51.	The CIA has despatched their most unusual spy. Brittany again dons one of the delightful flowered hats and charms her way through treacherous waters.
52.	Amid the gaily coloured banners and exotic little shops that line Hong Kong’s teeming streets, she unearths a plot of stunning proportions .
53.	I had been to Sydney as usual, shopping, but got back rather later than I usually do, because I went to a film.
54.	The faint tinkle of the shop-bell interrupted Kate’s thoughts in her attempt to organise the coming weekend.
55.	Muttering annoyance , she levered her heavy body out of a deep armchair.

59.	Martin the cat, dislodged without warning from her lap, slithered to the floor, mewing resentment .
60.	His yellow eyes followed her suspiciously as she went to the door, while Spike, the dog, lifting his head from the hearthrug, gave a drowsy yelp in formal recognition of the presence of strangers .
61.	Kate did not hurry, but paused before a mirror to fumble for a moment with her short, rough, greying hair.
62.	The mirror, framed in gilt, was old and precious .
63.	Her face was robbed of its florid colour; her short-sighted eyes had a blank, fierce stare.
64.	Her full, firm chin looked long and hollow.
65.	This view of herself did not disturb her.

66.	Water splashing. A grey mosaic tile tub sunk deep into a terra cotta floor. Water pours slowly from an old brass spout and darkness pours through the windows.
67.	As she went slowly down the passage to the shop, her loose felt slippers slapped on the stone floor.
68.	She was wearing slacks that had fitted her two years before, but which no longer buttoned comfortably at the waist.
69.	Above them she wore a shapeless sweater, knitted by herself for her husband, who had not protested when she had decided to borrow it back from him.
70.	Round the high collar of the sweater she wore a fine necklace of seed-pearls.
71.	She was a shortish woman, fifty years old. Lethargic in her movements.
72.	“Good morning,” she said automatically as

	she entered the shop.
73.	It was full of sunshine. It streamed in through the one narrow window that overlooked the village street and showed up the film of dust on the polished surfaces of table and tallboy, bureau and carved chest.
74.	The air was full of moving specks of dust.
75.	The customer, a woman in a fur coat and small hat, had taken a pewter tankard from a shelf and was turning it round in her gloved hands.
76.	I'll keep an eye peeled for any mention of the name X.
77.	Despite this melange of races and cultures, the flavour of El Paso itself was distinctly Mexican.
78.	The Rio Grande was the U.S. – Mexican border and over the years, as a result of its meanderings had proved a source of heated

	border disputes.
79.	It was sienna coloured and sluggish with mud. Still, as she caught glimpses of it through the trees and structures, Araminta thought the river looked inviting and she envied the brown skinned children who splashed and waded at its edge.
80.	On the mantel piece, in pride of place, were two photographs: one taken at Alexandra's wedding; the other at Mr William's seventieth birthday party.
81.	Next Mrs Anderson examined the group of three photographs on the bookshelves to the right of the fireplace and noticed something of which she had been utterly oblivious until that moment.
82.	For many years now, she had regarded her position in every group as an unspoken acknowledgement of her importance to the family. Now she noticed that every one of the family was turned away from her.

83.	She hurried across the hall to the kitchen and dropped the photographs into the rubbish bin.
84.	Cal watched the van go, glanced at the lean-to and decided to look inside; the door opened halfway before sticking. He pushed with his shoulder and it gave some more, revealing a mound of paper, letters and packages of different shapes and sizes.
85.	There were so many that he assumed this was where Duncan routinely dumped his post.
86.	Violet wandered from room to room, imagining the daily routine of Megan Bates' life. Did her mother rise early? Did she make coffee, while running a bath? Did she listen to the radio? Did she read?
87.	Mrs Anderson wrote quickly, two sentences in printed capitals, so her handwriting wouldn't later be recognised. She folded the

	sheet and tucked it into an envelope, the flap of which she had to lick a few times with her dry tongue before it was wet enough to seal.
88.	Immediately a grin spread across his face, making his weather-beaten skin a relief of crevasses.
89.	He rubbed his hand across the grizzle of his unshaven chin and took the rocky path from the headland to the beach below.
90.	Half-way down, where the trail descended steeply between perpendicular slabs of rock, he stopped. Almost as soon as he stepped onto the sand, his optimism seemed vindicated . A blue mooring buoy was stranded there, a type he hadn't seen before. He turned it over, looking for a manufacturer's name, but couldn't find one.
91.	Before lifting it across the beach, he checked whether anyone was approaching.

92.	For a moment, he wondered whether his find should go with the other blue buoys in his collection - his loose practice was to grade buoys by size and colour – or should it be separate since he had no others the same?
93.	As soon as the question formulated in his head, he became impatient and gave the buoy a shove, rolling it to the rear of the empty trailer.
94.	On the bus north-west of Ullapool, Violet studied an ordnance survey map of Poltown and the surrounding district.
95.	She read the newspaper cuttings Mr Anwar had given her, though she knew them so well she could recite paragraphs from memory.
96.	How Megan Bates had left her cottage. How she walked the coastal path to the headland by South Bay, where she descended to the beach.

97.	Intermittent squalls of rain rattled against the bathroom window of the cottage.
98.	Violet got dressed and while running her fingers through her wet hair, a knock sounded at the front door. It made her jump.
99.	She was on edge anyway, being back within those walls, on edge as well as in a hurry to meet the taxi which would soon be arriving on the other side of the causeway.
100.	She crossed the landing to the front room – its window overlooked the porch and the garden – and on the gravel path below was a woman wearing a waterproof hat which concealed her face.
101.	She had on a rain-jacket, a skirt which flapped in the wind, and wellington boots.
102.	Violet backed away into the room, hoping her visitor, whoever she was, would leave, but instead she knocked again, once, then

	twice more.
103.	The porch door banged shut, but Violet barely heard it.
104.	A chocolate sponge cake was on the table and the teapot warming beside the kettle.
105.	Duncan pointed towards his father's old tractor. "This land is not for sale". He smirked at his cleverness.
106.	A frown formed across his forehead. Mrs Anderson found it surprising there was no room, given the competition from all the other lines and wrinkles.
107.	Instead of answering the question, he fidgeted. One moment picking at his fingers, the next becoming side-tracked by the cats, which had appeared to welcome him.
108.	They rubbed against his legs, tails raised and meowed.

109.	You're not very forthcoming, are you? She scolded. Duncan picked at his teeth, rubbed at his lips and blinked. She could tell he wanted to run away – so like a child.
110.	No, I'm self-employed, I work with environmental organisations tracking down ocean polluters or for people looking to recover a body lost at sea.
111.	At South Bay, Cal opened his laptop and called up the Admiralty's tide prediction website, Easy Tide. A map appeared on the screen: green for land, blue for sea and a scattering of yellow dots around the UK coast. The dot's represented ports.
112.	North Bay was dissimilar to its southern neighbour. It was sheltered, exposed only to the westerlies, with a small beach which sloped into the sea and was protected on the landward side by a collar of boulders.
113.	South Bay, by contrast, was open to the elements, vulnerable to any wind between

	south-west and north-west, with a beach which was wide, flat and long.
114.	Cal woke before seven, his shoulders and neck stiff after sleeping uncomfortably in the pick-up cab.
115.	At the high-tide mark, he undressed and walked to the sea.
116.	Then, after ducking his head, he splashed back to the shallows
117.	Back at the pick-up, he put on a blue shirt, cotton trousers, thick socks and walking boots. Breakfast was half a cheese sandwich left over from the day before and a swig from a carton of milk.
118.	A movement in the dunes at the back of the beach caught Violet's eye. She thought it might be the breeze ruffling the grass, or a rabbit until she saw a man's head bob up.
119.	Walking in his direction, she noticed the man

	seemed to have turned his back and was raking his fingers through his unruly and brittle hair and brushing down his clothes.
120.	Violet's head pressed against the sitting-room window. Her slow breathing made a plume of condensation on the cold glass, she was as still as the branches of the trees behind her.
121.	She was talking quickly, as though worried about what he might say if she gave him the opportunity.
122.	Mrs Anderson's morning walk usually took her over the moor path to the churchyard, but today she skirted the walled garden to the main driveway.
123.	While she waited for him to put in an appearance, she occupied herself with memories.
124.	She reached out to touch the stone pillar at her side, its cold surface stirring vivid

	memories.
125.	The north-west tip of Orasaigh Island overlooked the narrow entrance to the sea loch.
126.	Cal leaned against a boulder standing sentry at the shore.
127.	The clap and clatter of pigeon wings resonated around the courtyard. The birds burst from a broken skylight and were flying in frantic loops and circles above.
128.	She backed across the yard towards the farmhouse door. It was ajar. "Duncan"? she inquired into the gap between the door and the jamb and stepped away, as if expecting him to jump out. Her knuckles rapped on the wood of the door.
129.	A blue van idled at the bottom of the track to the cottage. Jim was debating whether to call in on Mrs Anderson.

130.	Jim put his hands to the sides of his face, to shield the window from sunlight so he might see inside more clearly.
131.	He noticed the wing chair by the fireplace, the newspaper folded over the arm and the tapestry stool in front: more evidence of Mrs Anderson's presence.
132.	Mrs Anderson stood at the corner of her kitchen table, her skin suddenly translucent in the evening light, her breathing quickening.
133.	The sound of an engine and the bang of a car door made her jump, at first with surprise – she hadn't noticed the vehicle's approach – then fright.
134.	A black Audi with tinted windows was parked at the stone pillars to Boyd's farm. The car was clean, shiny, in Cal's opinion, out of place.
135.	After a late picnic lunch of tomato

	sandwiches, crisps and cans of Fanta, Violet warned the girl, they had work to do.
136.	Alexandra wore a silk pink dress belted at the waist, and a style of shoe Anna – Violet’s four year old – liked to call “properly”.
137.	Michael Dibbin was born in Wolver Hampton in 1947. His mother was a nurse and his father a Cambridge educated physicist with a passionate enthusiasm for folk music.
138.	Amplified both by the loud speaker system and the sonorous acoustics of the great basilica; the celebrant’s voice reverberated with supra human authority, seemingly unrelated to the dominant figure beating his breast like a hammy tenor in some provincial opera house.
139.	One man, standing slightly apart on one side of the crowd, was ostentatiously paying no attention at all to the service.
140.	He was wearing a suede jacket and a flowery

	print shirt opened at the neck to display the thick gold chain which nestled in the lush hair on his chest.
141.	His big arms were crossed, the sleeve of the jacket riding up to reveal the gold Rolex Oyster watch on his left wrist, and his large round, slightly concave face was tilted upwards like a satellite dish tracking some celestial objects invisible to the naked eye, highly above, in the vast dark recess of the unlighted cupola.
142.	Not far away, at the base of one of the massive whorled columns supporting the fantastic canopy of the bronze baldachin over the papal altar, a woman was also absorbed by the spectacle above.
143.	With her grey tweed coat, black tailored wool jacket, calf-length velvet skirt and the white silk scarf over her head, she looked like a designer version on the aged cronies who constituted the majority of the congregation.

144.	But her lipstick, a blare of brilliant red only partially qualified by her cold blue eyes, sent a very different message.
145.	As the mail-cart drew up at the little inn of Bathurst, the clock struck the midnight hour, and the new year of 1840 was ushered into me to the tune of a discordant fiddle, danced to by assigned convicts, who shuffled and scraped vile steps on the kitchen floor to an audience whose well-marked countenances of the true convict stamp were new to me.
146.	On Monday to Fridays, it was fifty-fifty whether the postman called before Julia Stevens left for school.
147.	So, at 8.15 a.m. on 25 May, she lingered a while at the dark blue front door of her two-bedroomed terraced house in East Oxford.
148.	No sign of her postman yet; but he'd be bringing something a bit later.

149.	Aged forty-six today, the Titian-haired Julia Stevens would have been happier with life-though only a little if she had been able to tell herself that, after nearly twenty-three years, she was still enjoying her chosen profession, but she wasn't.
150.	It wasn't so much the pupils-her thirteen-to eighteen-year olds-though some of them would surely have ruffled the calm of a Mother Teresa.
151.	No, it wasn't that. It was the way the system was going: curriculum development, aims and objectives-whatever the difference between those was supposed to be!- assessment criteria, pastoral care, parent consultation profiling, testing... God! When was there any time for teaching these days?
152.	The headmaster, a young, shining ideas-man who-during his brief spell of teaching – as rumour had it – would have experienced considerable difficulty in maintaining

	discipline even amongst the glorious company of the angels.
153.	So there he sat, his long legs sticking way out beneath his undersized desk; his feet shod in a scuffed, cracked, decrepit pair of winklepickers which had been bequeathed by some erstwhile lover to his mother.
154.	Kevin was a lankily built, gangly-boned youth with long, dark unwashed hair and a less than virile sprouting on upper lip and chin, dressed that day in a gaudily floral T-shirt and tattered jeans.
155.	After working for two weeks on a hard cross-word puzzle, Lumberjack Haley, a teacher in the UK, became a raving maniac when unable to fill in the last word. When found, he was in the alcove of the old homestead, sitting on the floor, pulling his hair and shrieking unintelligible things.
156.	Much earlier that day, Detective Sergeant Lewis had found his chief sitting well

	forward in the black-leather chair shaking his head sadly over the Times crossword puzzle. "Not finished it yet, Sir?"
157.	Morse looked up briefly with ill-disguised disdain.
158.	Daventry Court comprising eight "luxurious" apartments built in Daventry Avenue in 1989, had been difficult to sell.
159.	House prices had tumbled during the ever deepening recession of the early nineties.
160.	Morning arrived, cold and frosty and defiant , as unwanted as it was inevitable.
161.	Celia Bannerman looked up at two thin rows of glass, seven tiny panes in each, and wondered again why anyone had bothered to go through the motions of letting daylight into such a godforsaken place called Holloway Goal.
162.	Even if the dirt from the world outside had

	not made it all but impenetrable, the window would have been too high to see from.
163.	Soot from the Camden Road was left to accumulate peacefully on the glass, shielding those inside from a life which continued without them.
164.	The cell was airless and oppressive.
165.	In the absence of adequate natural light, a lamp burned throughout the day and on into the night, denying the prisoner even the comforting anonymity of blackness.
166.	Like many other things about prison life, the brightness of the room was a compromise-never truly light and never truly dark, as if a denial of such extremes could somehow keep their equivalent emotions at bay.
167.	From her chair in the corner, Celia watched the shadows dance over the cell's familiar contents: a wooden wash stand, with its

	pathetic ration of yellow soap, a single filthy rag, meant to clean both mug and chamber pot but not fit to touch a Bible, an enamel plate and knife made from folded tin and sharp as a piece of cardboard.
168.	As impressive as its sequence of huge stores was, Oxford Street was one of Josephine's least favourite parts of London, something to be endured for the sake of a weakness for clothes but never longer than necessary.
169.	Gladly, she left its crowds and its clatter(1903!) behind and cut through into the more select Wigmore Street.
170.	There was something about the anonymity of walking through London in the early evening that never failed to delight her, a sense of freedom in the knowledge that-for as long as she chose-no one in the world knew where she was or how to contact her.
171.	She had travelled down from Inverness ten days ago.

172.	A world in which there were no timetables(to be followed) or deadlines(to be met), and where messages(left) were never for her, suited Josephine perfectly.
173.	Here, the streetlamps were more forgiving, their pools of light interspersed with longer stretches of darkness, and there was a restful elegance about the area.
174.	Outside the main entrance, she balanced her parcels precariously on one arm, but the door flew open before she could reach it, and a young woman-one of the club's servants-rushed out, nearly knocking her to the ground.
175.	"Am I missing the fire!" Josephine asked, a little more sarcastically than she meant it.
176.	"Crikey, Miss. I'm so sorry," the girl said bending down to pick up the books that had skidded across the pavement and into the street.

178.	"I wasn't looking where I was going."
179.	The club's entrance hall was spacious and uncluttered, the focal point being a long reception desk made of diligently polished mahogany.
180.	She turned to greet Celia Bannerman and was struck-as always-by how little she had changed in twenty years.
181.	Her long dark hair, which Josephine had never seen worn any other way than scraped back from her face into a bun, was streaked with grey at the temples, and her glasses were needed too frequently now to be worn on a chain around her neck, but no one would have guessed that she was nearly sixty.
182.	They had first met at a Physical Training College in Birmingham where Josephine was a student and Miss Bannerman one of the senior teachers.

183.	She had certainly come a long way since her earlier job as a warder at Holloway Gaol, but it was those years that interested Josephine now.
184.	“I was just going to leave a message for you at reception,” Celia said.
185.	Your note said that you’ve got something for me to read?”
186.	“Yes, the first draft of what we discussed the other day. I wondered if you’d have a look at it, just to make sure it’s reasonably accurate. I have a few more questions if you’ve got time.”
187.	She headed for the stairs again like a straggler late for lessons, but was stopped once more in her tracks, this time by the receptionist.
188.	There was no sign of Celia in the drawing room so Josephine chose one of the blue

	horsehair chairs by the windows overlooking Henrietta Street and settled down to wait.
189.	It was the largest room in the house, extending the full width of the building on the first floor, and one of the most beautiful, with nicely proportioned panelled walls, painted in ivory-white enamel to maximise the reflection of light during the day.
190.	Fine rococo mirrors hung over original fireplaces-one on either end, suggesting that the space had once been two rooms-and there were other splashes of opulence in a gilt Louis xv couch with sapphire- coloured cushions and three enormous chandeliers, but most of the furnishings were quietly tasteful: simple mahogany bookcases- housing an eclectic selection of fiction and non-fiction-plain velvet curtains, comfortable armchairs, alternately upholstered in blue and fawn and free of tassels and loose covers that would have made the room look untidy.

191.	A number of women sat around in small groups or on their own, playing cards and reading newspapers, and the soft murmur of conversation filled the room, punctuated every now and then by laughter or the chink of cup against saucer.
192.	It spoke of privilege but most of the women had worked hard to get there, and Josephine could still remember how proud she had felt when she was first elected.
193.	For her, as for many women of her generation, the membership of a private club represented a new and cherished independence.
194.	Ten years later, although her life had taken a different path from the one she had expected, her achievements as a novelist and a playwright more than justified her place here, but success had not dulled that early excitement.
195.	Celia glanced at the papers on the card

	table. "Is that what you'd like me to look at?"
196.	Josephine nodded and pushed the typescript over to Celia, marvelling how easy it was to slip back into the old teacher-pupil relationship.
197.	Amelia Sach held the baby close to her chest and stared impatiently at the long case clock, whose steady purposeful ticking dominated the front parlour of the house in Hertford Road.
198.	These days, it seemed that her life was governed by waiting-waiting for babies to arrive, waiting for them to depart, waiting for the next timid knock at the door which would start the whole process again.
199.	Outside, she heard the iron gate close but the footsteps coming up the path-although familiar-were not the ones she was waiting for.

200.	The front door slammed and her husband called her name.
201.	“In here, Jacob,” she answered brightly, rocking the child gently as she began to cry, but her smile of welcome faded as she saw his expression change.
202.	He looked hard and long at the baby, and began to put his coat back on.
203.	Amelia went back into the sitting room and drew aside the curtain in the large bay window, talking absent-mindedly to the child all the time.
204.	Peering out into the darkness, she saw Walters at the bottom of the street, sauntering along as though she didn’t have a care in the world. And perhaps she didn’t.
205.	Walters was dressed respectably enough in the brown cape which she always wore, tied tightly with a black ribbon at the throat, but her smile seemed grotesquely out of place

	in a face which had been destroyed by hard living.
206.	She looked much older than its fifty-odd years.
207.	It reminded Amelia of the terrible old woman who haunted the fairy tales that she read to her daughter.
208.	She went hurriedly over to a small bureau in the corner, unlocked the top left-hand drawer and removed a cash-box, feeling Walter's eyes on her all the time.
209.	As she counted out thirty shillings onto the table, the other woman laid the child carefully down on the settee and scraped the money into her purse without waiting to be asked.
210.	There was a tentative knock at the door and a young man looked in on them.
211.	Walters opened her mouth to speak but

	changed her mind, and turned to go with nothing more than a defiant glance.
212.	Traffic in the park was light in the still dark morning. In an hour, the roads would be backed up as people awoke to the heavy rain and decided to avoid unpredictable public transport and drive to work.
213.	The smell of damp greenery assaulted his nostrils.
214.	All the heat he'd absorbed in the car seemed to instantly leave his body.
215.	Michael Geoghegan was waiting for them. He was wearing a heavy black rain hood, hands shoved in the pockets.
216.	She looked up at their approach and hailed herself to a standing position.
217.	Tom was frozen to the spot , a slight tremor in his hand as he kept his light focused on the nightmarish sight in front of him.

218.	Even exhausted from her heavy workload, with bags under her eyes, she was still breathtaking.
219.	An aged man is but a paltry thing, a tattered coat on a stick.
220.	He sat, anonymous and freezing, waiting patiently for the elusive late evening bus, the Pearl Fishers duet blaring from his earphones.
221.	The well-known piece of music was brutally interrupted by his ringtone.
222.	“Why do I feel like a can of worms that has just been opened?”
223.	The inspector walked briskly alongside the granite wall that circled Phoenix Park. He had lived facing that wall for over twenty years.
224.	The park provided an amenity for the people

	who lived beside it.
225.	He slipped off his shoes in the hall, unknotted his tie and wondered why the house was so silent. Through the sitting-room door he caught a glimpse of an undecorated Christmas tree. He'd smelled it before he'd seen it.
226.	Louise and Maria were huddled in conference at the kitchen table in the centre of the large kitchen/dinning room. Their body language unnerved him. Maria was visibly upset.
227.	Louise shot up in her seat when she saw him. His daughter just groaned and hid her head in her hands .
228.	He nodded inquiringly at Maria.
229.	Louise sank back in her chair, her beautiful face creased with worry.
230.	Maria's mop of auburn hair hung over her

	arms as she remained prone , head buried.
231.	Laura wearily unwrapped her scarf and draped it on top of the many coats slung over the end of the banister.
232.	Her brother Daithi, sixteen and one of the twin babies of the family, thundered down the stairs, carrying a bowl of grapes.
233.	He stopped on the last step, rocking on his heels.
234.	She welcomed her mother's home cooking: moist roast chicken breast, buttery mashed potatoes and glazed carrots.
235.	She poured gravy liberally over her dinner as her father inspected her over his newspaper, glasses propped on the end of his nose.
236.	"Having some dinner with your gravy, are you?"
237.	Her mother, seamlessly moving from one

	chore to the next, now stood washing dishes at the sink, which sat conspicuously beside the new dishwasher Laura had bought her when they moved.
238.	The snow had eased and the roads were still clear but a dusting of white had settled on the surrounding fields.
239.	The dark clouds looked ominously heavy, and a greyish white light gave the early evening an oppressive feel.
240.	Tom's brow creased with worry . Irish people were not used to dealing with inclement weather.
241.	Her life is crumbling; she's holding it together like a child protecting a sand castle from the waves.
242.	Keegan catches up to her. Short and overweight with the makings of an extra chin.

243.	The bottom lip is quiverous and his voice sounds almost posh.
244.	He has a mouth that creases permanently downward. He is the sort of man who suspects that everybody else is happier than he is, with more money, better friends and more fruitful lives.
245.	Where the road fell down the hill on its way to Poltown, Violet stopped.
246.	If anything, it was more dramatic now.
247.	The wind was strong and picked up speed.
248.	Clouds jostled against each other over the sea, a disorderly and looming procession.
249.	Here and there, the landscape was lit by diagonal shafts of sunlight creating intense pools of colour.
250.	He was sitting against a dune, his hair blowing in the wind like the stalks of dry

	grass.
251.	Mrs Anderson sat at the square kitchen table. In the middle was an earthenware jar with pens, pencils and scissors.
252.	She forked left and after 150 metres or so stopped beside a slatted bench with a decorated iron frame.
253.	She put down her bag and glanced at her watch.
254.	But still, Araminta could not rid herself of the niggling doubt that plagued her.
255.	She remembered her grandfather as a towering figure, with a bald pate surrounded by a fringe of short cropped white hair and with bushy white brows and moustache, a hooked nose and dark grey eyes like gunmetal, so fierce and piercing that their stare was uncannily eagle like.
256.	He had never been fond of children,

	although a grandson would undoubtedly have won his attention and perhaps even his affection.
257.	Shuddering and screeching, the train on which she travelled drew slowly to a halt at the depot in El Paso.
258.	For a moment, however, she did not rise, but continued to gaze out the window. At last, gathering her belongings, she disembarked from the carriage onto the platform, glancing around expectantly for her grandfather.
259.	Gideon was a quiet, dapper, but otherwise undistinguished man, in his early forties, she judged. However, despite his unprepossessing mien, his blue eyes twinkled not only with kindness, but also with intelligence.
260.	El Paso sprawled at the foot of Mount Franklin in the distance, below the narrow pass from which the Rio Grande emerged

	from the stark, southernmost spurs of the Rockies and which had given the town its name.
261.	As the porter loaded her bags in the boot, her uncle assisted her into the front seat where he tucked the lap robe securely about her to guard against dust.
262.	With a population of over ten thousand and since 1881 four railways, the town was crowded and rowdy.
263.	The wide dusty streets were thronged with auto mobiles, horses and carriages; the sidewalks were alive with a multitude of whites, Mexicans, and Indians mostly, although Araminta also spied an occasional negro.
264.	Raising her parasol against the glare of the bright yellow sun, she continued her interested perusal of the town as the driver deftly guided the motorcar along the teeming street, occasionally honking the

	horn at a slow-moving donkey or wagon as he pointed out the sights to her.
265.	They reached the hotel at last, a small but elegant two-storey edifice of white washed adobe with a wide, shady portico, ornate black wrought-iron balconies and a red-tiled roof.
266.	Inside was a spacious lobby with white walls and a dark, hardwood floor polished with beeswax to a burnished glow and scattered with colourful Mexican rugs. White globed chandeliers of brass hung from the ceiling.
267.	A grand, sweeping staircase that ascended to the second floor dominated the centre of the lobby, around which were intimate groups of sofas and chairs upholstered in tapestry fabric, and tables filled with plants in brass pots and willow baskets.
268.	While Mr Gideon approached the front desk to request the key to the suite, Araminta closed her parasol, stripped off her gloves,

	and wandered idly about the lobby, surveying her surroundings.
269.	The hotel was evidently a popular one, with guests coming and going, many through the archway that led to the restaurant, from which wafted appetising smells of steaming food.
270.	Laying her gloves down upon an elaborately carved table that stood before a large, gift-framed mirror, she studied her reflection critically for a moment.
271.	She had not realised until now how thin she had actually grown, how pinched and wan her face was beneath the veil of her hat, her sloe green eyes standing out startling against her pale skin, her high cheekbones sharply defined.
272.	Up to now, she had given scant attention to her appearance.
273.	After adjusting her hat and patting a few

	strands of her hair back into place, an effort that did little to improve her weary image, she turned away from the mirror, biting her lower lip hard to still its sudden trembling.
274.	Involuntary, her breath caught in her throat; for Gideon was undoubtedly the handsomest man she had ever seen, tall-standing a couple of inches over six feet-and lithe but powerfully built, like a panther, his body ripping with the same savage, supple grace when he moved and exuding the same animal magnetism and menace.
275.	His broad shoulders taped to a firm, flat belly and thighs corded with muscle, all emphasised rather than concealed it.
276.	His hair was as black and gleaming as obsidian marble, swept back in shaggy waves from his dark-bronze, hawkish face that was hard and impassive as though it had been chiselled from stone.
277.	Not only the colour of his skin, but also his

	aquiline nose with its fine, flaring nostrils, and his high cheekbones revealed his Spanish blood, obviously a little diluted by that of the Indians so many of the Spanish settlers had married over the years.
278.	But most of all, it was his eyes that riveted her where he stood. Deep-set beneath swooping black brows and spiked with thick black lashes, his eyes shone as dark brown as smoky quartz and were just as fathomless.
279.	She would have turned her heel and stalked indignantly away had she not at last realised that the man was holding her gloves in his outstretched hand. Of course, she had laid them down on the table before the mirror and, in her distress had forgotten to retrieve them.
280.	Angry, flustered, she practically snatched the gloves from his grasp.
281.	As her hand brushed his, a sudden, inexplicable tremor shot through her, as

	though she had been struck by a bolt of lightning.
282.	His skin was startlingly warm, electric. His finger, though long and slender, flexed with the strength of a tempered-steel sword.
283.	The woman sat motionless with her back to the window, her arms hung straight down. Her pale grey face seemed frozen.
284.	She was dressed in green trousers and blouse, with a jacket the same colour loose over her shoulders.
285.	Her cheekbones were high and prominent and her eyes still greenly blue, but now the iris was narrowing inside a milky white rim.
286.	Outside, the wind lifted a bare birch branch behind her head.
287.	Suddenly, she glided her tongue over her teeth before opening her mouth and fixing her gaze on her visitor.

288.	"I've been waiting all day," she said. About time someone from the police could be bothered to turn up.
289.	She stood up, tottered across the floor on her high-heeled sandals and checked that the door was closed behind him, came tripping back and sat down in the other chair, the one next to the writing desk.
290.	In flashes she still had that energetic way of moving and she brushed a lock of her perm from her forehead with a gesture he knew well.
291.	The customer, a woman in a fur coat and small hat, had taken a pewter tankard from a shelf and was turning it round in her gloved hands.
292.	"How much?" "Twenty-five dollars!"
293.	The woman gave a startled laugh, asked the price of one or two other knickknacks,

	remarked what a beautiful day it was for the time of year, and left.
294.	The room was big with a low ceiling and with most of one wall taken up by a great fireplace.
295.	Logs were stacked there ready for lighting.
296.	Most of the stone floor was covered by a deep grey carpet.
297.	There were several easy-chairs, a long book case, some old paints of birds and flowers and the gilt-framed mirror.
298.	Turning now from the window with an uneasy sigh, she jolted the cat out of the chair, sat down and reached for the telephone.
299.	While she waited, the cat, purring noisily, sprang onto her knees and started to turn round and round there, seeking for perfect comfort.

300.	In a mood of irritation, Brittany pushed him off.
301.	She picked up a pencil, an old envelope and started drawing squares and circles. Presently a voice spoke remotely in her ear.
302.	High up in the dark foliage of the river gums the cockatoos and galahs are carrying on a treat while the cicadas, ready for nightfall singed the air with their humming. It's all noise and mayhem at sunset, the bush doves kookarooing, crows cawing, grey herons calling out across the river and the kookaburras adding a good bit of laughing to the night anthem.
303.	Meanwhile, below the gum trees, in the dust on the river bank, the snakes are lost in silence.
304.	He was a cabin boy on a tramp steamer and jumped ship in Sydney.

305.	The sun streamed through the windows set in the vaulted whitewashed ceiling high above brother James's head.
306.	Laura was the type of woman who, at a first encounter, always roused in her upsetting emotions of contempt and envy.
307.	Clare flushed when Laura addressed her.
308.	Brittany introduced them to each other as they stood in the narrow, stone-flagged passage.
309.	A faint crunching sound from Clare's corner of the room told Betty that she was eating salted almonds.
310.	Laura looked at her thoughtfully.
311.	She isn't at all a selfish or domineering person-and honestly, that's what I was a bit afraid of.
312.	Gilbert saw a distant figure sitting at the cliff

	edge. The dog, ever gregarious, dashed towards it.
313.	The odd thing, as far as Gilbert was concerned, was that a seagull was perched on each shoulder. The scene reminded him of an old woman he had once seen on a park bench, absolutely covered with the pigeons she was feeding.
314.	When the dog got close enough and barked, the seagulls launched themselves languidly and floated out over the sea, making it clear from their close circling and backward glances that this was only a temporary setback.
315.	Gilbert fancied they squawked in mockery that mere earth-bound animals, like him and the dog, couldn't follow where they went.
316.	The dog lost interest and edged towards some bushes away from the path, probably scenting a rabbit.

317.	When he arrived at the figure Gilbert was struck almost simultaneously by two odd things.
318.	On one corner stood a pub called the Fountain, and on the other a leather-goods shop. Between them, the narrow, cobbled street led into the Maze, that labyrinth of tiny squares, courtyards, nooks and crannies and small warehouses that had remained unchanged since the eighteenth century.
319.	Betty glanced out of the window. The wind was blowing harder and the people coming out of church were having time keeping their hats on.
320.	Three grizzled old men leaning on their walking sticks and chatting on the old stone bridge, despite the weather, fell silent and followed the young woman with their eyes as she walked by.
321.	The wind seemed to be blowing from all directions, and with it came sleet, stinging

	her eyes, seeping through her black denim jeans.
322.	The sound of Kate's car door closing shattered the silence and sent three fat crows soaring into the sky from a gnarled tree.
323.	They wheeled against the grey clouds like black umbrellas blowing inside-out.
324.	She ought to have worn something more practical. But she'd been in a hurry, and it was the first thing she'd touched in the hall cupboard.
325.	Donna got up and rummaged through a drawer, then came back with a snapshot of her daughter.
326.	The kitchen looked out on the sloping hillside at the back of the house. There was a large garden with a small wooden tool-shed leaning against the green fence.

327.	Hail pellets pattered against the windowpanes behind the net curtains.
328.	Wesley picked up the handset and dialled the number Donna had given him.
329.	His wispy grey hair was uncombed, flattened to the skull in some places and sticking up in others. Along with the shabby brown cardigan he wore over his round shoulders, it made him appear older than his fifty-five years.
330.	A gilt-edged mirror hung at an angle over the fireplace and he could see himself reflected in it.
331.	Behind the high gates in the wall, the gravel drive snaked through a wooded area to the front of the building where there was parking for about ten cars. Most spots were already taken by staff or visitors.
332.	Annie approached the imposing heavy wooden doors. Tony ambled beside her,

	nonchalant as ever, taking in the view.
333.	Annie's headache was still troubling her.
334.	She shivered as a gust of wind in from the sea, and a gull glided over her. She walked to the edge of the cliff and stood as close as she dared on the treacherous, slippery grass, looking down.
335.	The tide was well up now, the crashing waves dizzying and magnetic.
336.	Robert slammed the door behind him.
337.	There was no one behind the counter when they entered, but in response to the tinkling bell attached to the door, a little old woman, her short white hair standing on end, emerged through a curtain.
338.	The absence of anyone else in the shop and the eerie quiet outside, despite the proximity to the motorway, put them all on edge. It felt like the right atmosphere for a

	chilling tale.
339.	Kilcross garda station was end route to the convent shimmering with Christmas lights under freshly snow-topped roofs.
340.	Tom was flabbergasted.
341.	A glassy sheen made the narrow country road treacherous.
342.	Between concentrating on driving and the moonless dark night, they almost missed the left turn Ciaran had instructed them to take.
343.	The convent was an austere and oppressive building, standing three storeys high.
344.	A few windows on one side of the lower floor were lit, but the upper two floors remained cloaked in darkness. The front was coated in grim grey pebbledash.
345.	The large door opened before they had the chance to use the old-fashioned

	doorknocker.
346.	English woods have few trees in them which turn red in November. That display is confined to North America where forests have a preponderance of maples.
347.	Eventually they found a car park near the back of City Station and with only some vague idea of where they were, left the Golf and walked the rest of the way. It was easy enough when they got to City Square, with its old post office turned into a restaurant, the statue of the Black Prince with torch-bearing nymphs and a pedestrian area where people sat at tables eating and drinking when the weather was good. Even today one or two brave souls had ventured into the open.
348.	“Time for another of these, I think.” She produced a bottle of pills, which had been tucked beneath her on the sofa. “Fetch me some water, will you?” Alice returned with a half-filled glass. The childproof cap on the

	pill bottle was defeating her friend, so she took it from her and opened it.
349.	They walked along Wellington Street for a short distance, then turned up King Street and made their way to Park Square.
350.	A receptionist sat clacking away at her computer in the high-ceilinged entrance hall and asked them what they wanted.
351.	“Please take a seat,” she said and gestured towards an L-shaped sofa with a table of magazines before it.
352.	Ginger laughed, a deep guffaw.
353.	Mrs Wells appeared lost behind the huge desk. She was a petite woman with wispy, dark curls, probably somewhere in her mid-thirties, Annie guessed.
354.	Annie was standing by the window, gazing down on Park Square, people-watching. She turned when she heard the door open.

355.	Julia was elegance personified. Annie had no idea where her simple dark blue business suit and plain white blouse had come from. She bet there was a designer's name on it somewhere. Her straight chestnut-brown hair fell to her shoulders and was imbued with the kind of lustre Annie had seen only on television advertisements.
356.	Julia bade them to sit. She regarded her visitors with watchful brown eyes, then turned to her assistant, who lingered in the doorway.
357.	Julia continued to regard Annie and Ginger with those serious hazel eyes and steepled her fingers. No rings, Annie noticed.
358.	"It's like squeezing the proverbial blood out of the proverbial stone," Annie said.
359.	Annie could hear other noises from the building-phone conversations, the clacking of a computer keyboard-mixed with the

	sounds of cars and birds outside.
360.	She tried to digest what she'd just heard.
361.	The whole affair still left a bitter taste in her mouth.
362.	Julia made a sympathetic grimace.
363.	I simply wanted to lay my cards on the table and let you know who you're really dealing with.
364.	Finally, he stood up slowly, gave Daniel a long, lingering look and said, "we'll be talking to you again soon, mate."
365.	Donna was contemplating her husband as a matador contemplates a bull.
366.	Next weekend, they would be putting the clocks forward and it would be light until late in the evening.
367.	It was a cosy room with a high ornate ceiling

	and broad sash windows. The bookcase contained a lot of travel guides to various countries, some very old indeed, and a poster of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul hung on the wall.
368.	Against another stood a battered old sofa with scuffed black-leather upholstery.
369.	The only window looked over a flagstone courtyard where students sat at wooden tables between the trees, eating sandwiches, talking and drinking coffee in the spring sunshine.
370.	Austin was about fifty, his grey hair worn fashionably long and tied in a ponytail at the back. He also had a deep tan.
371.	He wore a loose blue cable-knit jumper and faded jeans torn at the knees. He kept himself in shape and was attractive in a lanky rangy way, with a strong jaw, straight nose and large Adam's apple.

372.	Annie stood at the window and watched the fluffy clouds drifting across the blue sky on the horizon. Another beautiful spring day.
373.	She fancied she could even see as far as the bulky shapes of the Pennines far in the distance.
374.	Around the same time Mrs Toth returned with a tray, the front door opened and a young woman walked in wearing a supermarket overall which she immediately took off and threw over a chair.
375.	“Claire!” said her mother. “If I’ve told you once. I’ve told you a thousand times. Hang up your coat.”
376.	Claire gave Annie a long-suffering look and did as she was told.
377.	Annie had never seen her before so she hadn’t known what to expect.
378.	Claire took a packet of Dunhill out of her

	handbag and lit one with a Bic lighter.
379.	Her dirty-blonde hair was tied back and she was wearing jeans and a man's-style white shirt.
380.	Annie went in. The front room had high ceiling and a bay window looking west over the tops of the houses opposite. A television set stood in the corner.
381.	It wasn't hard to see that Claire was overweight, the jeans tight on her, flesh bulging at the hips and waist, and her make-up-free complexion was bad-pasty and spotty chipmunk cheeks, teeth stained yellow with nicotine.
382.	As darkness fell, Annie closed the curtains and turned on a couple of small shaded table lamps, which gave the room a nice warm glow.
383.	The traffic on the A1 slowed to a crawl just past the Angel of the North, standing on its

	hilltop like a rusty Spitfire on its tail.
384.	The day had started out with sunshine and distant cloud, but just north of Scotch Corner, the sky had quickly turned murky grey, brooding over Weardale to the left. It had been raining on and off ever since. They say if you don't like the weather up north wait ten minutes.
385.	Sarah was chic, from her ash-blonde hair, so perfectly coiffed, layered and tinted that it looked natural, to the white silk shirt and black designer skirt.
386.	She made Annie feel quite dowdy in her Levi's and black polo-neck jumper.
387.	She also had the kind of lithe body you only get from an hour at the gym each day.
388.	An expensive handbag lay on a chair, as if tossed there casually.
389.	"I don't know what I can do for you," said

	Sarah as she sat in a sculpted armchair,” but you’ve certainly got me intrigued.” Her accent was posh, but not forced. Like everything else about her, it seemed natural.
390.	As she walked down the stairs, a skinny, long, haired male student she vaguely recalled was on his way up. As they passed one another, he glanced at her oddly.
391.	Albert was running late. He dressed hurriedly after his shower, went downstairs, grabbed his travel mug of coffee and jumped into his car.
392.	He still felt stunned and bewildered by her behaviour.
393.	He had half expected a phone call of apology.
394.	Age gets to us all, eventually, Albert mused, and sooner than we expect.
395.	His jaw was set tight, and a tiny muscle

	twitched now and then under his left eye.
396.	Winson ordered a latte and sat on a stool by the window, where a long, orange moulded-plastic shelf ran at just the right height to rest her cup on.
397.	Winsome was older than most of the patrons, but found it interesting that she didn't draw many curious glances.
398.	She was wearing black denims and a short zip-up jacket, which weren't completely out of place there, though perhaps a little upmarket for the student scene.
399.	Most likely, she thought, nobody paid her much attention because there were two Chinese students in deep discussion at one table, a couple of Muslim girls wearing hijabs at another, and a young black woman with dreadlocks talking to a similarly coiffed white boy in a yellow T-shirt.
400.	Students ambled up and down the street

	carrying backpacks or shoulder-bags, wearing T-shirts and jeans; nobody seemed in a hurry.
401.	The young man walked out of the door, glanced around as he went down the steps and turned up the street.
402.	Winsome picked up her briefcase and set off in pursuit, leaving the rest of her latte.
403.	He stopped, a puzzled expression on his face.
404.	There was already a group of students at one table discussing the concert and the lunchtime office crowd was trickling in, men with their ties loosened and jackets slung over their shoulders, women in long print skirts and short-sleeved tops, open-toed shoes or sandals.
405.	The weather really had warmed up since Sunday, and it was looking good for the weekend.

406.	It was a beautiful day, and the sea lay spread out below her, all greens and blues, so much brighter and more vibrant than she had seen them before.
407.	The red pan tiled roofs of the houses straggled up the hillside, and the harbour walls stretched out into the water like pincers.
408.	The whole scene, flanked on either side by high cliffs, appeared more like an abstract landscape than a real place.
409.	The fine weather had brought people out in the city centre, and the pedestrian walkway was packed, the shops doing brisk business.
410.	From the heights, she could easily see Whitloy's two distinct halves, split by the estuary: East Cliff, with its ruined abbey; and Westcliff, with its rows of Victorian guest-houses and hotels, the statue of captain Cook and the massive jawbone of a whale.

411.	Though Annie took in the sight, and her painter's eye translated it into an abstract canvas, her mind was preoccupied with something else.
412.	She worked as an illustrator on children's books so the odds are that she's still in the same line of work.
413.	Snow slowly kissed the windows and the wind moaned around the eaves.
414.	She perused rows of glass slides as she talked.
415.	She sipped her wine and stared vacantly into the fire. Like the expensive objects surrounding her, she was beautifully crafted, one of the most elegant women I thought I had ever seen. Silver white hair softly framed her patrician face. Her cheekbones were high, her features refined, her figure lithe but shapely in a beige cowl-necked sweater and corduroy skirt.

416.	Couples walked hand in hand on the boulevard and families with young children or pushing prams lingered at the edge of the sea, kids throwing pebbles at the waves.
417.	One brave man even rolled up his trouser legs and tested the water, but he didn't last more than a few seconds.
418.	Annie could smell salt and sea weed and hear the gulls screeching overhead.
419.	Ahead, where the high promontory of Scarborough Castle bulged out and brooded over the bay, Annie could see the waves smashing against the sea wall, the salt spray flying high.
420.	The cosy pub looked over the harbour. The tide was out and a few white, red or green fishing boats rested on the wet sand. One man in a blue jersey was painting a hull.
421.	He picked up his rumpled tweed jacket from

	the back of his chair.
422.	A silver moon hung low to the north.
423.	The front door needed a coat of paint; a dog or cat had clearly been scratching at the wood. The small lawn was patchy with weeds.
424.	After a few moments, a woman in a blue cardigan and grey slacks, opened the door.
425.	Annie expressed her admiration for the paintings, especially the one made up of different-coloured dots and Sarah seemed pleased at her appreciation. Maybe most of her guests didn't like abstract art.
426.	A large flat-screen TV hung on one wall and an expensive stereo system took up the other side. There were small speakers on stand in all corners and orchestral music issued very softly from them.
427.	Sarah gave a nervous laugh. She looked

	down at her fingernails, beautifully manicured and painted a tasteful shade of pink.
428.	She walked into the cool night air, stopped at the corner of the street and took a few deep breaths. She'd done it, she told herself.
429.	Dessert came, apple and rhubarb crumble with custard, then it was back to the living room for coffee and after-dinner drinks.
430.	The evening was winding down. The silence was punctuated by an occasional snore. Those left talked quietly as the steam rose from their coffee cups, every one feeling full and sleepy after the food and wine. Even the lamplight in the living room seemed dimmer and warmer. Banks felt warm and comfortable enough to fall asleep in his chair, but that wouldn't do.
431.	People started to get up and head for the hall. It was time to go, time for the long drive back, perhaps with something loud on the

	I-pad to keep awake.
432.	Why it always seemed to take forever for people to say goodbye at the end of a dinner party was beyond Banks.
433.	Urgent new conversations began, it seemed, at the eleventh hour and people finally got round to saying what they had been waiting to say all evening.
434.	Eventually, maybe twenty minutes or so after they had made their first moves towards the front door. They drifted away in the directions they had come from.
435.	He wandered down the path in the mild night air, looking up at the clear sky. The lightest of breezes blew, hardly even ruffling the new leaves. It felt cool on his skin after the warmth of the dining room.
436.	Sophia was wearing skin-hugging jeans, which suited her legs and she was taller than he had first imagined. Finally, they both

	spoke at once. I was one of those embarrassing moments you can laugh at, and it broke the ice.
437.	The valley side rose steeply to his left, fields giving way to outcrops of limestone and moors of gorse and heather, dark, looming shapes in the night, and the river gleamed in the moon light as it meandered over the wide, lush valley bottom.
438.	Unable to sleep, she got out of bed and put on the kettle. She peered through the curtains across the pan tiled rooftops down to the harbour, where the moon frosted the water's surface.
439.	She wondered if she should have gone home for the night, but she liked being close to the sea. It reminded her of her childhood, the long walks along the cliffs with her father, who kept stopping to sketch a rusty farm implement or a particular arresting rock formation while she was left to amuse herself.

440.	It was then that she had learnt to create her own world, a place she could go to and exist in when the real one was too tough to handle.
441.	She remembered only one walk with her mother when she was six, and all the way along the rough clifftop path her mother had held her hand as they struggled against the wind and rain and told her stories about the places they would visit one day.
442.	The kettle boiled and Annie poured water on the jasmine teabag in her mug. When the tea was ready, she lifted the bag out with a spoon, added sugar and sat cradling her fragrant drink, inhaling the perfume as she stared out to sea, noting the way the moonlight shimmered on the water's ripples and brought out the texture and silvery-grey colour of the clouds against the blue-black sky.
443.	Annie finished her tea and noticed it had

	started to rain lightly. Perhaps the sound of the drops tapping against her window would help her get back to sleep.
444.	The General Infirmary was designed in every aspect to make its patients feel at ease. The lighting was muted; no overhead fluorescent tubes or bare bulbs. The colours were calming: shades of green and blue with a dash of orange for warmth. A large vase of tulips stood on the low glass table; sea-and landscapes hung on the walls.
445.	While Annie was on the phone, she started sketching the view from her window on her writing-pad, the mist like feathers over the corrugate red roof tiles, the sea a vague haze under its shroud, grey on grey, and the sun so pale and weak you could stare at it forever and do not go blind.
446.	A bird was circling lazily overhead as I drove the van; palm trees flowed by.
447.	Long-necked herons were sticking up like

	porcelain periscopes in the Everglades. The white heads turned as I passed.
448.	My father sat up in bed and watched me as I told him about my day at school. His face was ashen. His eyes didn't blink and he couldn't hear what I was saying to him. He didn't respond but continued to stare.
449.	My heart went crazy, flailing against my ribs like a bird against the bars of its cage. Blood was roaring in my ears.
450.	I couldn't breathe or move.
451.	Tension ran through his arm, through his hand, like power through a high-voltage line.
452.	I was imprisoned by silence.
453.	He was wearing a dark blue jumpsuit. Sweat stained the collar, and there were wide crescent moons under his arms.
454.	The hand tightened savagely. My jaw was

	going to shatter like on eggshell. His eyes were darting, looking around, looking at everything inside the room
455.	My neck was so stiff it was on fire. My face was numb.
456.	If the lamp crashed to the floor, the room would go black.
457.	He was nervous, jerky and seemed confused. His neck was flushing and dripping with sweat, his breathing laboured and fast.
458.	The tile hallway was damp from being mopped.
459.	Diagonally across from the elevator was the stainless steel refrigerator, and opening its massive door, I was greeted by the familiar blast of cold air.
460.	A brand-new Jaguar, shining like black glass, slowly pulled into the parking lot.

461.	Expecting the familiar beat-up Ford, I was startled when the new car's window hummed open and the electronic locks opened with a firm click.
462.	"I'm impressed," I said, settling into the plush interiors.
463.	A snowy-haired woman walked her snowy Maltese squinted at us as the dog sniffed a tuft of grass, which was followed by the inevitable.
464.	Her hair was honey blond and streaked gold by the sun. She was petite, with even, refined features.
465.	Pulling into a drive, he parked in front of the garage door. The grass was badly overgrown and spangled with tall dandelions swaying in the breeze, and there was a FOR SALE sign planted near the mailbox.
466.	We stood on the drive and looked around. The slanted rays of the sun were warm on

	the back of my shoulders and neck. The air was cool, the pervasive hum of autumn insects the only sound.
467.	I took a slow, deep breath. I was suddenly very tired.
468.	The karst mountains appeared through the grey veil of “fog”-air; pollution so thick it reduced visibility to less than a half mile-looking like bishops’ caps in a Vatican ceremony.
469.	The river showed little sign of strong current; the flat-bottomed fishing vessels moved lazily across the surface like sun-drugged water bugs.
470.	Vacationing couples not only bought discounted brand-name knockoffs from street vendors, they bought illusion as well. If they’d wanted reality, they would have stayed home.
471.	They watched the landscape of limestone

	<p>spires slip by while their feet vibrated from the shudder of the river boat's engine.</p> <p>Cormorants disappeared beneath the murky brown water only to reappear thirty seconds and twenty yards later.</p>
472.	<p>He spotted a nearly toothless old man with a hunched back and a fine smile watching him in the low light of the quay.</p>
473.	<p>He approached the man, dragging his reluctant girlfriend by the arm. Pointing to the water and then to the cormorants in the bamboo cage in front of the skiff and making diving motion with his hand, he won a vigorous nod of assent from this fisherman, who gestured them into his low flat boat.</p>
474.	<p>The notion made her uncomfortably aware of her own fragility in comparison.</p>
475.	<p>Damn the man! Why must he keep on staring at me in that horribly, brazen, unnerving fashion?</p>

476.	Her green eyes flashing sparks, she lifted her chin and stiffened her spine resolutely. She would not permit this arrogant man to intimidate her.
477.	“Gracias, señor,” she uttered coolly. The Spanish words she remembered from her childhood came of their own volition to her lips as she nodded curtly, a gesture both of thanks and dismissal.
478.	Unconsciously, though, the way in which she twisted and crushed her gloves as she spoke revealed her agitation, something the man’s appraising glance did not miss.
479.	A mocking smile curved his mouth, as though at some private joke.
480.	To her humiliation, she felt the flames upon her cheeks grow even hotter. She could not understand.
481.	May in Madras is a hot, brooding mouth. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks,

	black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust green trees. Red bananas ripen.
481.	“Dissolute blue bottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled by the sun.
482.	It was raining when Robert came back. Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing up like gunfire.
483.	The old house on the hill wore its steep gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. The walls, streaked with moss, had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground.
484.	The wild, overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lives. In the undergrowth a rat snake rubbed itself against a glistening stone.
485.	Hopeful yellow bullfrogs cruised the scummy pond for mates. A drenched mongoose

	flashed across the leaf-thrown driveway.
486.	The house itself looked empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandah bare. Unfurnished. But the sky blue Plymouth with chrome tailfins was still parked outside, and inside, Rachel's grand aunt was still alive; she was her grand father's younger sister.
487.	He was a small man, but well-built. Pleasant looking. He wore old-fashioned spectacles that made him look earnest and completely belied his easy-going charm and juvenile but totally disarming sense of humour.
488.	He was twenty-five and had already been working on the estate for six years.
489.	Filth had laid siege to the house like a medieval army advancing on an enemy castle. It clotted every crevice and clung to the windowpanes.
490.	Midges whizzed in teapots. Dead insects lay

	in empty vases. The floor was sticky. White walls had turned an uneven grey. Brass hinges and doorhandles were dull and greasy to the touch. Infrequently used plug points were clogged with grime.
491.	Her life is crumbling; she's holding it together like a child protecting a sandcastle from the waves.
492.	Keegan catches up to her. Short and overweight with the makings of an extra chin.
493.	He has a mouth that creases permanently downward. He is the sort of man who suspects that everybody else is happier than he is, with more money, better friends and more fruitful lives.
494.	His bottom lip quivers and his voice sounds almost posh.
495.	High in the gas-flame-blue sky, a plane glinted its way towards the west coast.

496.	Sun sparked off the bonnet, a long cloud cruised across the windscreen of the car.
497.	A breeze stroked his face and he found his free hand in his pocket, fingers rubbing the smooth coins he kept there.
498.	Lindsay jogged gently along the hard sand at the edge of the surf.
499.	Against the rhythmic beat of Air Nikes on wet sand and the thud of blood pulsing in her ears, the waves crashed less regularly.
500.	Ahead of her, the dog chased the foaming surf as it retreated across the sand to be sucked back into the vast body of water, occasionally pausing to bark a deep protest as some bubbles. It had been particularly attached to, disappeared.
501.	The first time I see her, she is standing on the train platform, clutching an infant in her arms.

502.	She braces herself and the baby as the purple line express soars past and out.
503.	It's the 8 th of April, ten degrees and raining.
504.	The rain lurches down from the sky, here, there and everywhere, the wind untamed and angry. A bad day for hair.
505.	The girl is dressed in a pair of jeans, torn at the knee. She has no hood, no umbrella.
506.	She tucks her chin into the coat and stares straight ahead while the rain saturates her.
507.	A little smile blossomed on her face.
508.	All these questions circled in my mind like birds of prey while I tried to get to sleep.

4

