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**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BENGALURU - 27**

**II SEMESTER EXAMINATION**

**Open Elective Paper**

**OE OE 2 - Understanding Children’s Literature**

**Time: 2 hrs Max. Marks: 60**

1. **Read this excerpt from a story by Richmal Crompton :**

The stable population of the village in which William lived was a small one, and every one knew every one else, but there was another population, shifting and artistic, in which William took an absorbing interest. The village and the countryside around it had the reputation of being picturesque, and so it attracted artists. These artists generally took cottages for a month or so in the summer, ignored, and were ignored by, the local population, then drifted back to town for the winter.

William usually found this shifting population more human and understanding than the ordinary all-the-year-round population. He approved of artists. Sometimes he even wondered whether to abandon one of his many future careers (such as pirate or robber chief) in favour of that of an artist. They didn’t do any work. They just lounged about in the fields or woods all day in front of an easel, and their meals, which he had often shared, were unconventional picnic affairs that were much more enjoyable than the more conventional meals of his family and their friends. The only drawback to the life was that it must be dull, painting all day. William had tried painting, and, though he considered that he could paint as well as anyone, still he didn’t consider that, judged as a pastime, there was much in it, and always, after experimenting with this and other careers, he returned to his original decision to be a pirate.

It was exceedingly seldom that any of the artists appeared in winter or even early spring, and so William was much surprised and interested when Honeysuckle Cottage, just outside the village, which was regularly let to artists, suddenly betrayed signs of artistic habitation in early January. There wasn’t any doubt that it was artistic habitation. An easel and several canvases were being unloaded from the cab, and the lady who was supervising the unloading wore short untidy hair and no hat, and appeared almost immediately afterwards in an apple green smock, strolling about the garden, her hands in capacious pockets, whistling. William, watching her with interest through the hedge, observed that she was both young and pretty. Moreover she obviously had very good eyesight, for she suddenly spied him and called out ‘Hello!’

There was no challenge or reproach in the voice. It was interested and friendly. Evidently she did not share that curious grown-up convention that you should pretend complete indifference to all your neighbours’ affairs.

‘Oh, do come in,’ she said. ‘How nice to see someone.’

William, unaccustomed to this sort of welcome from grown-ups, entered the garden slowly and cautiously.

‘I was just going to explore,’ went on the artist, ‘and it’s so dull exploring by yourself. Do you know anything about this garden?’

William, of course, knew everything about that garden. He knew indeed far more than their owners about all the gardens in the village.

‘Yes,’ he said still rather cautiously, for William was always cautious in his adoption of new friends.

‘Well, do come in and help me. Is there anything interesting in it?’

William entered and, still warily at first, introduced her to her garden. His caution soon vanished. She was, as a grown-up, almost too good to be true. When she saw the open space in the middle of the little wood at the bottom of the garden, she called out, ‘Oh, what a lovely place for a fire,’ and when she found the little stream that ran through the end of it she said. ‘Wouldn’t it be fun to have races on it . . . and make a little backwater?’

The afternoon passed more quickly than William ever remembered an afternoon passing in the company of a grown-up. She said that her name was Miss Pollit, and that she’d be sketching in the field the next morning, and that he could come if he liked.

He found her already seated at her easel when he arrived. It seemed that she wanted to get the view of the copse down below the valley.

‘There’s a sort of purple light from the saplings that I want to get, William,’ she said. ‘You only get it at this time of the year.’

William received this statement with kindly indulgence. There wasn’t, of course, any purple light, but he knew that all artists suffered from a defect of vision that made them see thing differently from other people.

She worked hard, and yet she could talk at the same time. She told him about things that she’d done. She’d climbed mountains in Switzerland. She’d travelled on a tramp steamer half-way round the world. She’d gone on a big game shooting expedition, and killed two lions and an elephant. William listened enthralled. When she finished he asked her breathlessly to marry him. She said that she was frightfully sorry, but she was already engaged to someone else. He made up his mind never to marry anyone, consoling himself with the reflection that, after all, a pirate was better without a wife, though he couldn’t help feeling that she’d have made a splendid wife for a pirate. He went to see her every day, and the week of her visit flew by on wings. She asked him to tea on her last day.

‘We’ll have a fire in the wood,’ she said, ‘and we’ll cook sausages and ham and eggs, and we’ll make a lock and a backwater in the stream, and have a regatta with races on it. And I’ll show you the witch doctor’s bones that I got in Africa. Come in old clothes, and then we can get in as much of a mess as we want to.’

William was so much excited at this prospect that he could hardly live through the hours that intervened between the invitation and the visit.

But on the morning of the day before the visit a dreadful thing happened. Miss Pollit met him in the village and called out lightly as she passed:

‘I say, I met a Mrs. Lane yesterday and she told me that her boy was a great friend of yours, so I’ve asked him to come too.’

Hubert Lane! Hubert Lane had been away from home for a week, but he’d come back in time to spoil what should have been the greatest day of William’s life. Ever since Mrs. Lane’s futile attempt to put an end to the feud between the two boys, she had, in face of all evidence to the contrary, persisted in looking upon them and referring to them as ‘great friends.’

And now Hubert was coming to tea with Miss Pollit, coming to help make a fire and cook sausages and ham and eggs, to help make a backwater and a lock in the little stream and to have races on it, and to see the witch doctor’s bones that she’d brought from Africa.

The presence of Hubert, of course, would shed a blight upon every minute of it . . . It was too late to say anything. William had been struck speechless with horror, and already she was out of sight. He stood, silent and motionless, considering the situation. Impossible for her, of course, to cancel her invitation to Hubert, even if he made her understand that they were deadly foes. The only thing to do was to say nothing and go through with it, hoping for the best. Hubert might have one of his bilious attacks that day and be unable to come. Hubert had a fatal habit of over-eating, which necessitated occasional retirement from public life for a day or two. William was of an optimistic nature. There wasn’t any reason why Hubert shouldn’t have one of his attacks of ‘gastric trouble’ (as his mother called them) on the day he’d been asked to tea to Miss Pollit’s. William hung about the baker’s shop that morning, hoping that a particularly lurid cake that he saw upon the counter was destined for the Lanes’ household. It looked the sort of cake that would incapacitate Hubert for at least three days. William, in fact, ended by fully persuading himself that Hubert would spend to-morrow in bed. He felt quite happy and secure when he rose the next day. He was sure that Hubert had eaten half the lurid cake, and was now groaning in the throes of his ‘gastric trouble.’

During the morning William sauntered gaily down the road and past the Lane house. He threw a glance up at the window which he knew was Hubert’s bedroom, and smiled triumphantly. But the smile was short lived, for there at the front gate stood Hubert looking revoltingly healthy, and holding a bunch of hothouse flowers tied with a ribbon.

‘Look what I’m going to take to Miss Pollit, William,’ he said. ‘You’re going’ there too, aren’t you?’

Hubert’s small pig-like eyes gleamed with triumph. He knew that William had no hothouse flowers or indeed any flowers of any sort, and no money to buy any. Hubert always loved to go one better than anyone else. He smirked with his most nauseous friendliness as he spoke.

William walked on as if he hadn’t heard him, but he walked gloomily. The whole afternoon was spoilt now. He’d been looking forward to it more than he remembered ever looking forward to anything, and now Hubert with his bunch of hothouse flowers was going to spoil every minute of it. She wouldn’t like Hubert, of course, but he’d be there all the time listening, sneering, sniggering, being in fact his natural and objectionable self, storing up phrases and incidents to taunt William with from a safe distance afterwards.

William set off from home very early in the afternoon wearing his old clothes, but without the zest and eagerness that generally accompanied them. He walked indeed as slowly and dejectedly as if he had been wearing his hated Eton suit.

His dejection lasted till he reached the main street of the village, and then vanished completely at the sight of a herd of cows stampeding in all directions on meeting a charabanc. The farmer, who was in charge of them, was dancing about and waving his arms on one side of the road, and his boy doing the same on the other, while the cows scattered wildly into gardens or down side roads. Some bystanders came to the farmer’s aid, and William, joining them, went in pursuit of a cow that had plunged down a narrow lane. It was, however, a more difficult task than he had foreseen. The cow ran when William ran, and walked when William walked, and William found it impossible to catch. They wandered further and further from the village. No one seemed to be following them, or to care whether William caught the cow or not. The lust of the chase, however, had entered into William’s soul. He had forgotten everything but his pursuit of this elusive cow. He would catch the cow even if it took him half across England. When they had proceeded in this way for some distance, the cow seemed suddenly to tire of the game, and stood still, allowing him to come right up to it. He approached it, his heart swelling with the pride of achievement. His cow! His captured cow! He walked round it several times with a possessive swagger. He even addressed it with a mixture of propitiation and command. ‘Hey, you there . . . hey, cow!’ It turned its large eyes upon him. It looked as if it wanted something. Perhaps it was hungry. A heavy load of responsibility seemed to descend upon William. It was his cow. It must be fed. He gazed searchingly around him, and finally espied a haystack in a neighbouring field. He crawled through a hole in the hedge, and returned in a few minutes with an armful of hay. The cow ate it with every appearance of enjoyment. But, having eaten it, it turned its large, soulful eyes again beseechingly upon William. It must still be hungry. William set off upon another short voyage of discovery, which revealed to him a ‘clamp’ of turnips in a field on the other side of the road. William scrambled through the hedge and returned with an armful of turnips. His cow ate them with equal relish. William’s elation knew no bounds. To have a cow of one’s own, to feed it . . . He decided to be a farmer when he grew up. Then he remembered the real farmer, who was presumably awaiting his return in the village street, and, having cut a stick from the hedgerow, he gently tapped his charge with it, and turned her back again towards the village. She seemed to understand quite well what was expected of her. She ambled comfortably and slowly along the road followed by her new guardian.

William marched behind her whistling, his stick over his shoulder. The cow in front of him was not one cow but thousands. He was the greatest cattle farmer in the world. All the land as far as he could see belonged to him. He was driving a huge herd of his cattle from one pasturage to another somewhere in the heart of Africa or India. The woods around were thick with Red Indians who wished to attack him and steal his cattle. They were creeping along under cover. Occasionally one or two of them would venture into the open, and then he would turn, raise his stick to his shoulder and fire, and the Red Indians would fall dead. He was the best shot in the whole world. The Red Indians had guns, too, and sometimes shot at him, but they always missed him. Thus beguiled, the road back to the village was very short. Having arrived there with his charge, he looked about him. The street was empty. No farmer, no cows, no boys, no anyone. The place wore its usual mid-afternoon ‘deserted village’ appearance. William and his cow looked at each other. And suddenly William remembered his engagement. He had started off unduly early, but it was quite time now that he was on his way to Miss Pollit’s. He didn’t know which farm the cow belonged to, and there was no one about to ask. Well, he’d just have to leave it. Probably it would find its way home by itself. Or the farmer would come back for it. Anyway, William had done his best for it, and he couldn’t be expected to do more.

Turning his back on the cow, he set off briskly towards Miss Pollit’s. It wasn’t till he’d gone several yards that he discovered that the cow was following him. The cow evidently considered that it belonged to him. He had fed it with hay and turnips. He had taken it into his charge. It had no intention of being left alone and ownerless in the middle of the village street. William, in order to escape the embarrassing companion, quickened his pace to a run. The cow, seeing its new friend and owner vanishing in the distance, quickened its pace to a run. William was in the terrible position of appearing to be chased by a cow. He stopped. The cow approached slowly and trustingly, obviously ready for any more contributions of hay or turnips that might be forthcoming. William considered the situation. It was, he was sure, contrary to all rules of etiquette to go out to tea accompanied by a cow. Even to Miss Pollit, who was so kind and understanding, he couldn’t very well take a cow with him for tea. He tried a deep and cunning ruse. He walked for a few yards in one direction, followed by the cow, then turned swiftly and walked in the other hoping that the cow would go straight on. But the cow turned too, and continued to follow him. William sat on the bank by the roadside to consider the situation again, his head in his hands. His cow stood over him, breathing heavily down his neck.

**I.A. Answer the following questions in about 200 words each: (4x15=60)**

1. Comment on the portrait of boyhood that this extract offers. What distinction can you make between Hubert and William?
2. What idea of femininity does the writer offer through Miss Pollitt? Comment on William’s great fondness for her.
3. How do you think the story might end? What would be a satisfactory ending for you?
4. William’s is a life of leisure. When was the last time you had as much free time ? What did you do with it?