

**FICTION: A SHADY
PLOT SUMMARY**

John Hallock, a ghost story writer, is given the task of writing another one of the same 'genre' by Mr Jenkins, the only publisher of his stories.

An over-confident John starts thinking about the 'plot' of his new story but to his amazement he finds ideas missing his imagination, at this very juncture he sees an abnormal, ghostly 'she' figure in his room.

The ghost claims that she has been the reason behind him writing his ghostly stories that easily by providing him ideas and plots.

She informs John that she has no further intention to help him as she, along with other members of Writer's Inspiration Bureau, is going on strike to protest against the misuse of 'Ghost Calling Board', i.e., Ouija Board by human beings. She also proposes a way out that if he uses his status and authority as a writer in convincing people of not misusing the Board, she would again be the same helping 'spirit' for him.

Even as John ponders of helping himself by following the line of suggestion by the 'she ghost', his 'shopping savvy' wife shares with him the horrible 'breaking news' that she has 'picked up' an Ouija Board for both of them.

To John's greater shock his wife Lavinia arranges an 'Ouija Board party' for her friends on the next day.

John is forced to become a part of the party in the capacity of 'pair mate' to 'flirtatious' Laura Hinkle.

During the course of the party, all the Ouija Boards are attended by the same 'she ghost' who accuses John to be a 'traitor', John leaves the party in embarrassment. On account of the happening in the party, Lavinia concludes that John is her 'betrayed'.

On the next morning of the party Lavinia informs John (through a paper slip) about her decision of leaving him for her grandmother's place immediately and serving him legal divorce papers later on.

John feels miserable as he believes that without Lavinia life is going to end for him forever.

The ghost 'Helen' re appears before John to know that when his wife is going to get rid of the 'Board'

Lavinia enters in John's room and suspects that John is hiding someone from her. At this very moment Gladolia, their maid enters to whom Lavinia instructs to burn the Ouija Board.

Finally, Lavinia is able to glimpse up Helen and suddenly she bursts into laughter as she finds 'Helen' to be an ugly one.

The ghost disappears and John yells that he has got a plot for his story which he has been trying for the past two days.

MAIN CHARACTERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

JOHN HALLOCK	LAVINIA
John Hallock is an amateur story writer and he has got the tag of an expert of ghost stories. He is an over confident fellow who believes that he can manage any one and anything easily. He is also very creative and thus he is able to write successful ghost stories	Her primary identity is that she is the wife of John Hallock. She is a very interesting character. She is spendthrift and spends a lot of money on any 'fad'. She is also adventurous and that's why she picks up Ouija Board for her. She suspects John and believes him to be a

one after another with newness. He is also a sceptical fellow who suspects about anything and everything. He also carries a great sense of humour even during difficult period of his life.

flirt. She is also adamant of her choices and decisions.

EXTRACT BASED COMPREHENSION QUESTION EXERCISES

[A] "Well, I was in no position to contradict Jenkins, for, as yet, his magazine had been the only one to publish my stuff. So, I had said, "Precisely!" in the deepest voice I was capable of and ad gone out."

- (a) Who was Jenkins?
- (b) What kind of stuff did the author use to write?
- (c) What is the meaning of the word 'contradict'?

Answers:

- (a) Jenkins was the publisher who used to publish the stories of the writer.
- (b) The author used to write 'ghostly stories'.
- (c) to oppose

[B] "So I went home and sat down before my desk and sucked at the end of my pencil and waited, but nothing happened. Pretty soon my mind began to wander off on other things."

- (a) What did the author wait for?
- (b) Where did the author's mind begin to wander?
- (c) What is the meaning of the phrase- 'wander off'?

Answers:

- (a) The author waited for ideas to take shape as plot for his new ghost story.
- (b) The author's mind began to wonder off on things related to his personal life like his wife's whim for shopping and how he would find a solution to it.
- (c) To get diverted

[C] "Then it began to fly around so fast that I gave up any attempt to follow it. My companion was bending forward and had started to spell out loud: 'T-r-a-i-t-o-r' Traitor! Why, what does she mean?"

- (a) What did the speaker stop following?
- (b) Why is the speaker called a 'traitor'?
- (c) What is the meaning of the word- traitor?

Answers:

- (a) The speaker, Mr. Hallock, stopped following the sparkling alphabetical blocks of the Ouija Board.
- (b) The ghost had asked the narrator to get his friends and followers to stop using the board but here he himself has been using the board.
- (c) deceiver

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

Q.1. What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write and why?

Answer. Jenkins wants the narrator to write another ghostly story because he knows that the narrator has got this special ability of writing such stories with ease and his past history also authenticates this.

Q.2. What makes Helen, the ghost, and her other co-ghosts to organise 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau'?

Answer. The ghost Helen and her other co-ghosts organise 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau' to help writer lacking in ideas or storyline for their literary work.

Q.3. Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do?

Answer. John's wife Lavinia is angry as she believes that her husband is a flirt and has an affair with other woman. As part of her reaction she decides to leave him for her grandmother's place immediately and later on serving him legal divorce paper

Q.4. Why does John wish he were dead?

Answer. John wishes to be dead as his wife has decided to leave him and get divorced from him. He feels that it would mean the end of life of him.

VALUE BASED QUESTION WITH ANSWER

Q.1. What lesson does John Hallock learn from his experience of the Ghost?

Answer. John Hallock is an over-confident writer of ghost stories and he believes that writing stories of such a genre is a cake walk for him and that's why his approach towards ghost story writing is casual but his experience with the she ghost teaches him that life is unpredictable and not everything should be taken casually every time. There is a thin difference between being confident and casual about something and one should have this very sense. Because of his over confidence in his ability he approaches his family crises in a casual way when he asks his wife to go to her grandmother's place and he will follow her later on. He invites a massive trouble for himself through his casual and overconfident approach. Thus, we learn that we must adopt serious approach towards life.

ADDITIONAL SHORT ANSWER/VALUE BASED QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:

- Q.1. What made the author over-confident about his story writing skills?
- Q.2. The narrator does not relish writing ghost stories any further, still he does so, why?
- Q.3. Why was the writer not able to imagine ideas of his new ghost story?
- Q.4. The narrator makes an ironical statement that story writing business is delightful.
Why is the statement termed as ironical?
- Q.5. What statement does the narrator make about the ghost's appearance?
- Q.6. What reason does the ghost point out for her arrival before the narrator?
- Q.6. Why does John want his wife to get rid of Ouija Board?
- Q.7. What made John to become part of the party? Did he like it?
- Q.8. How did the ladies react when all the Boards start calling the narrator a 'traitor'?
- Q.9. How does Lavinia react at the sight of the ghost Helen? Why does the narrator feel so unusual about it?
- Q.10. Why does the ghost decide to leave the place?

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS:

- Q.1. 'The writer of the story is sarcastic in representing female characters.' Do you agree with him in this regard or you carry your own opinion about women?
- Q.2. 'John Hallock teaches some very important life skills to us while dealing with situations and persons.' Comment on the statement.