

Composition | Sample answer

Short Story

The cemetery was seldom frequented upon the hour approaching midnight.

Ophelia drifted in and out of consciousness, gazing upward with solemn eyes. Her view was reminiscent of a canvas flooded in ink and adorned in freckles of glittering constellations. The moonlight pooled over the ashen hills of the graveyard, illuminating the jagged silhouette of the nearby cathedral. The melancholy church bell rang out a dozen times and reverberated down her spine. The distinct smell of chimney smoke and iron swirled through the wind like dancing leaves and the bitter air of late November brought with it an arbitrary smattering of icy rain which dissolved within the soil.

Ophelia seemed to sit here, with her spine curved against an ancient willow tree, in perpetuity. She had an over-abundance of time in order to grow accustomed to her surroundings. Despite this, she still felt a pang of trepidation, heavy as the weight of the sky pressing against her chest, every time she glanced around at the marble headstones. They were scattered sporadically, draped in a patina of ivy and age, slumping indolently against the damp earth. Beside her lay an uncovered grave, freshly dug earth and the protruding smell of coffin varnish and holy water still prominent. This grave in particular, happened to sport a gravestone which was adorned in an ornate inscription of her own name.

With the only audible sound being that of the whispers of spirits as they drifted past like silky shoals of fish, Ophelia heard the aching whine of the cemeteries' gate echo sharply throughout the grounds. A broad shouldered figure appeared through the misty fog. His face was obscured in shadow. He shuffled across the gravelled path. He stepped over the tangled tree roots which twisted through the earth like rotting veins. Ophelia's heart sank to the floor as he stopped abruptly at her gravestone, close enough in proximity that she was able to discern the purple

shadows which hung from his sullen grey eyes and nestled in his ashen skin. Ophelia stared at this man for what seemed like an eternity as he stood in silence. She watched as his chest rose and fell rapidly as though he were short of breath. She knew that rhythm, that stance, those eyes, all too well. She felt an acidic bile churn and spit through the burning pit of her stomach. Her eyes penetrated his, urging for him to acknowledge her. He didn't stare back. Instead, he wiped a rolling bead of sweat from his forehead, cleared his husky throat and turned his back on her. His wrinkled face dripped like candle-wax as he faded slowly into the smog which hung throughout the grounds like a quilt of billowing breath. Tonight, however, Ophelia would not allow him to merely disappear. She wanted revenge.

She peeled herself from the ground and followed the sound of his footsteps as they crunched against the gravelled path. She drifted through the set of wrought iron gates, dripping in amber rust and groaning deeply under the weight of the hinges as he pushed them open. She floated through the cobblestoned streets in a dreamlike fluidity. The heels of his leather boots clacked against the pavement, echoing through the unaccompanied silence. She wondered, suddenly, if he would be able to hear her voice.

"Hello?" she called out, her voice a hissing croak as though she hadn't spoken for years. A plume of dust spilling from her marble lips against the icy air.

The man froze. Her heart pounded. A pool of yellow lamplight cast an ominous shadow behind him, accentuating his broad frame. He turned furtively to face Ophelia.

"Who's there?" He whispered, his black eyebrows furrowed and his lips twitched.

"Ophelia?"

As though it were with the prompt of his voice, Ophelia's eyes began to flutter and without much warning she was flung into what felt like a tumultuous ocean. She swam underwater through a realm of blurred memories. She could hear snippets of her mothers' soothing voice, her brother as he erupted into laughter, her friends' squeal in excitement at some trivial affair. Suddenly, however, she was jolted into a

memory of that night. The first night she had seen his face. The last night she had been alive.

“Stop fidgeting, Ophelia” He slurred. She could smell the liquor from his panting breath. Bitter and stale. His eyes were grey and stoic. His cheeks were flushed and swollen. There was an old kitchen knife in one of his hands; the other was pinning her shoulder against the concrete. She couldn’t move; She couldn’t speak; She couldn’t breathe.

A sudden gasp for air sent her back into reality. He was still there, standing under the street light. He seemed to remain entirely oblivious to her presence, and so she remained silent. He lingered for a moment, staring right through her, only to suddenly tighten the jacket around his shoulders and quicken in pace until he reached home.

The man’s house stood in solitude. Overgrown weeds wrapped like snakes around the ornamental fence which framed the property. The cracked windows shone like sheets of silver against the reflected moonlight and the brickwork bordered on precarious as the edifice appeared to slump entirely to one side. The unkempt lawn swam across the entryway as he stepped through the gate, Ophelia close behind him. The front door creaked and whined like that of an ancient tomb as he pushed it open. They made their way inside and the sudden aroma of death and rotting wood pervaded her senses as though the house itself had let out an overdue exhale. The hallway was consumed by an infinite void of darkness, the moon scantily illuminating the ancient paintings on the walls. The man peeled the coat from his worn frame and dropped it blithely beside him. He kicked off his shoes and began to climb the narrow staircase as though each step would collapse beneath his weight. The eyes of the oil-painted Victorian figures followed Ophelia as she floated weightlessly behind him. She ran her finger along the balustrade, a layer of dust and cobwebs gathered within her translucent fingers and pirouetted to the floor in ivory tears of light.

They stepped into the cold bathroom. The unadorned lightbulb hummed with energy as he flicked the switch. Ophelia glanced around the dimly lit room in despair. The tiled floor was covered in a patina of grime and sporadic cracks. The mould-infested ceiling seemed to be peeling off in shreds and the cobwebs in the corners of the room billowed aimlessly as a chilling breeze swirled through the slightly ajar window. The ceramic sink squeaked as he fiddled with a rusty tap. He held his osseous palms under the stream of boiling water and he splashed it against his face. A sheet of milky steam pierced the frigid air and gradually appeared on the bathroom mirror. He hunched over the basin, his eyes tightly shut; Ophelia narrowed her own. He shouldn't be allowed to move on like this, to wash his skin, to feel at peace, to exist. She felt a sudden bitterness throb through her bones. She glided subconsciously beside him. Her diaphanous finger trembled with increasing rage. She traced the word 'guilty' against the dripping condensation. He peeled his eyes open to find the word glowing eerily against the stark lamp above him as though it were written in blood.

"Ophelia?" He heaved. He broke contact with his own reflection as his bulging eyes shifted around the room. "Are you there?"

"Yes..." Ophelia's voice hissed malevolently against the rigid hairs of his neck, resentment bubbling within her pulsating body.

He dug his nails into the basin, reaching blindly for a sense of balance as his legs trembled and buckled beneath him. She smiled wickedly as she noticed his chest rising and falling erratically in an attempt to steady his shallow breath. She felt the satiating fury hum throughout her veins as though it were a bow running slowly against the strings of a cello; the melody of murder. She glared at his reflection with an unyielding hatred. Without warning, a prominent crack began to bleed through the centre of the mirror and spread like black veins. He recoiled in horror as her twitching eyes rolled back and a sinister roar escaped her lips. The looking glass

shattered into a million pieces. She plucked one of the shards from the floor and held it up to his neck.

“Please forgive me Ophelia.” He panted, saliva dripping pathetically from his cracked lips. “I never wanted any of this...”

“Then why did you kill me?!” Her voice bellowed. “You deserve this! You deserve much more than this!”

“I know I do, believe me Ophelia. I know what I deserve.” He spat.

She twisted the silver piece of glass in her hand as it glinted in the artificial light. She had dreamt of the day she could plunge the shard right through the tender skin of his chest. She wanted to feel the bones of his ribs and the thick muscles of his heart as the fragmented glass ripped through his flesh. She wanted to see his eyes widen in terror as he saw her stand there with a smile plastered on her face similar to how he had smiled. She would watch in glee as the crimson blood splattered from his lips as he heaved a phlegmatic cough. The viscous liquid almost congealing through the fabric of his worn shirt as he would crumble to the floor and let out a final breath in defeat, succumbing to an endless oblivion that he had similarly subjected her to. She wanted to end his life as abruptly as he had ended hers. She wanted to kill this man.

More than that, however, she wanted revenge. She stared at his cadaverous face. Ophelia knew that she didn't hold much physical power in the mortal realm. He could escape her grip with ease. Why didn't he? His words echoed in the air. ‘I know what I deserve.’ Though his teeth chattered pathetically and the tears streamed in tandem with the water from the faucet, she noticed that, without explicitly stating it, he seemed to be pleading. Pleading for something, for anything, for an end. This man was so plagued with guilt that he was rendered unable to look at his own reflection, unable to bare the sight of himself. A life like this seemed worse than death itself. A life like this seemed, to her at least, a more appropriate revenge. Thus, Ophelia dropped the shard of glass and stepped away

from his cowering frame without saying a word. She felt a certain heaviness lift from her chest as she drifted down the stairs of the house. She smiled as she heard her name echo through the walls. She wandered out the door and into the shadows of the night, unburdened and free.