

# SHADY PLOT

- Elsie Brown

## Outline:

The story is about a man who starts getting cocky about his ability to bring forth ghost stories at his will and how he copes with the situation when he realises that he gets (the unwilling) help from a real ghost. The ghost demands a favour from him which he is unable to fulfill. The ghost then plays havoc with his married life leading to various comic situations, which leads to a big dispute with his wife.

## Summary:

The writer Mr Hallock was told by his employer Mr Jenkins to write a ghost story, a horrifying story with supernatural elements because the public liked this kind of stories. He was surprised how he could have been written the earlier ghost stories for he was not a specialist in this genre. Whenever he had decided to write a ghost story, surprisingly the plot had appeared from nowhere!

The writer sat down to pen the story, though no idea occurred to him. Infact his mind was wandering towards his wife's shopping trips and other unghostly things. The writer loudly said, 'This writing business is delightful, isn't it?' and to his surprise a voice at the other end of the room said. 'Yes, it is!' The writer was surprised to see a figure taking shape gradually. It was a woman, tall and angular with enormous fishy eyes. The writer wished to know why that woman had come. She gave a very surprising answer that the writer had only called her to help him in writing a story. Moreover she said that the ghosts were going on strike so the writer would stop bothering her for another plot. The ghost also explained that she had been a writer in the earlier birth but now she had collected other ghosts like her and set up a 'Writers' Inspiration Bureau', and extended their help to a writer who had no ideas. But now, they were all fed up for being pulled at all times, hence decided to go on strike. The ghost wanted the writer to call his acquaintances and stop using Ouija board.

The conversation of the writer and the ghostly figure was interrupted by the arrival of the writer's wife who is surprised to see her husband sitting in the dark and talking loudly to himself. On the writer's query she revealed that she had bought the Ouija board to make story writing easy for him.

On reaching home the next evening, the writer was told by his cook that his wife had invited some guests. He was surprised to see that their parlour was full of women sitting in two's and between them was a Ouija board. Immediately his wife called him in and wanted him to be a partner of Mrs Hinkle, who was left alone.

Mrs Hinkle took the writer's fingers and started moving them on the Ouija board. Surprisingly, the words spelt on the board were 'TRAITOR'. Mrs Hinkle wanted the board to clarify as to who was a traitor. The Ouija board spelled out that it was Mr Hallock. On enquiring what the identity of the speaker was, the board revealed that it was someone with the name of Helen.

This fact created a furore in the entire room. The women along with the writer's wife gathered around the writer and looked at him accusingly. All the Ouija boards signaled towards the writer. The writer

could not answer and fled the scene. Next morning, he noticed a slip of paper with the message that his wife was leaving him for good and her lawyer would communicate with him. The writer is shocked and disappointed at this development.

Meanwhile Helen, the ghost reappeared and told the writer that she had been sent to ensure when his wife was going to get rid of that Ouija board. The writer was very annoyed and he retorted back that the ghost had made the writer lose his wife, his home and his happiness.

Meanwhile, the writer's wife Lavinia entered and told him that she was moving out permanently. The writer was trying to cover Helen, when his wife remarked that he was behaving very strangely. Lavinia sprang quickly to see who was behind her husband. Helen did not disappear this time and boldly announced to Lavinia that she indeed was Helen. Lavinia felt very miserable to create such a ruckus and accuse her husband for no valid proof.

The writer felt inspired and realised that he had indeed hit upon an excellent plot for one more 'GHOST STORY'.

### **Answer the following questions:**

1. (5 b) Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Ans: The writer did not specialize in ghost stories. Infact he was surprised how he had ever written the first ghost story which made him popular. Thus, he starts liking the idea of writing ghost stories and says, "This writing business is delightful".

2. (5 d) Why had Helen, the ghost been helping the narrator to write ghost stories? Why was she going on strike? What condition did she place for providing continued help?

Ans: Helen had helped the narrator because he was keen to write ghost stories but had no ideas and his mind was impressionable. But now the ghosts were fed up of being called too often from their beds. They had given up haunting and had taken up answering questions on the Ouija board. But people had started pestering them too often. Helen promised to help the narrator if he could get his friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board.

3. (5 e) How does the ghost undermine the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories?

Ans: The narrator refused to believe that Helen had helped him all the ghost stories. She tells the narrator of the many times when she had leaned on the narrator's shoulder and had given him ideas, when he was thinking hard while writing a ghost story. Helen tries to tell the narrator that had she not been there for him as a muse, he would not have been able to write good ghost stories.

4. (5 f) Why does Mr Hallock want the ghost to disappear before his wife appears on the scene? What impression of his wife's character do you form from his words?

Ans: Lavinia is a sensitive woman and is subject to hysterics. If she sees John talking to a ghost she would lose it all. Lavinia is crazy about every new fashion and fad, so much feminine in nature that John fears the thought of how she would react in such a situation.

5. (5 h) What message does the ghost convey to the group that had assembled in the narrator's house? What is their reaction to the message?

Ans; Helen called John a traitor as he bluffs her. He had promised Helen that he would convince his friends to stop contacting ghosts; rather here he himself was doing the same. She is annoyed and filled with anguish and so goes to everyone's Ouija board one by one and tells that Mr. Hallock is a traitor. After this revelation everybody suspected John of cheating upon his wife, later John clarified to his wife and she even understood.

6. (5 i) Do you agree with the narrator calling the assembly of women 'manipulators'? Give reasons.

Ans: The narrator felt that everybody in the room was looking at him suspiciously. That is why he called the assembly of women "manipulators". The women were not manipulating things. However, they were just reporting what was happening at their Ouija Board.

7. (5 l) When confronted by Lavinia about his flirtations over the Ouija board, John insists that 'The affair was quite over-board, I assure you'. Bring out the **pun** in this statement.

Ans: John assures his wife that his flirtations with Helen the ghost are above board. He tries to tell her that whatever that has happened between him and Helen is over the board of Ouija and there was nothing that he wished to hide from his wife; in fact there was nothing to tell.

**PUN meaning – funny usage of a word or a phrase which has several meanings or a form of word play which suggests two or more meanings. Puns often are used in the titles of comedic parody.**

### **Examples of some easy Puns - Questions**

- What do you call a sleeping bull? A bull-dozer.
- What do you get from a pampered cow? Spoiled milk.
- Why are teddy bears never hungry? They are always stuffed!
- Why do fish live in salt water? Because pepper makes them sneeze!
- Where do polar bears vote? The North Poll.
- What did the judge say when the skunk walked in the court room? Odor in the court!
- Why did the snake cross the road? To get to the other sssssside!
- How does a lion greet the other animals in the field? Pleased to eat you.
- What fish only swims at night? A starfish!
- Why is a fish easy to weigh? Because it has its own scales!
- What do you get when a chicken lays an egg on top of a barn? An eggroll!
- Why didn't the chicken cross the road? To show everyone he wasn't chicken!
- Why did the lion spit out the clown? Because he tasted funny!
- What animals are on legal documents? Seals!
- What do you get when you cross a snake and a pie? A pie-thon!

8. (5 m) John's apprehensions about his wife's reactions to her encounter with the ghost are unfounded (groundless). Justify.

Ans: John thought that his wife would become hysterical if she saw the ghost Helen; however, when the encounter happened, she confidently spoke to the ghost and was not at all scared of it.

### **Exercise – 6: WRITING EXERCISES**

- A. Informal Letter – Use the correct format

#### **Key points to use**

*- my life had taken a strong turn – I wanted you to sort out my problems – last month I underwent a very bad phase of my life – I've always appreciated my husband's skill in writing – he also appreciated my endeavours – once during the Book Club game – Ouija board hinted that John was having an affair with someone called Helen – Later I discovered to my surprise that.. - I blamed myself for this entire ruckus.*

- B. Diary Entry – Remember the format

*- Day, Date, Time  
- First person  
- Focus only on the main subject mentioned in the question  
- Conclude with the signature*

## **GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

### **Short Answer Questions:**

1. Why was the writer getting overconfident about his ability of writing ghost stories?
2. What surprising revelation is made by the ghost? Why did the writer not believe her?
3. Why is the ghost fed up of Ouija board fanatics?
4. What reasons are given by Lavinia for not getting rid of the Ouija board?
5. What controversy or furore was caused in the parlour by the name of 'Helen'?
6. Helen, the ghost says, 'I'm too tired to materialise'. What does she imply by this statement?
7. Why did Helen pay a visit to the narrator again?
8. Why was the narrator unable to conceal Helen behind his back in front of his wife?
9. How did Lavinia react after facing Helen?
10. Why did the narrator have a strong urge to pen down his new story?

### **Long Answer Questions:**

1. John had become a nervous wreck. It had been a hard journey back to normalcy and marital bliss. What kind of disturbances took place in his married life?
2. Do you believe 'A Shay Plot' qualifies as a good ghost story? Justify.
3. You were in the situation of John Hallock, compelled by the readers to continue writing ghost stories and left with no more ideas. What would you do?