Graham Greene, ‘Russian Roulette’ (from ‘The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard’, *The Lost Childhood*, 1946)

1. Faites un RESUME EN ANGLAIS du texte ci-joint.

   Evitez de reprendre trop souvent les mêmes termes que l'auteur du texte.

   Longueur maximum conseillée: une page ½.

   Cet examen consiste en un travail objectif de langue et ne requiert aucun commentaire de votre part.

2.1. Briefly state the meaning of each of the following phrases in its context:

   1. the unchanging backcloth
   2. quagmire of leaves
   3. eased the medicine down
   4. a wide arterial road
   5. my fifth dose

2.2. What is the reason for the narrator’s repeated action, and what effect does it have on him? Answer in no more than two sentences.

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agonies,” Rilke wrote, “wrought on scaffolds, in torture chambers, madhouses, operating theatres, underneath vaults of bridges in late autumn. ...”

1939 from Another Mexico (The Lawless Roads)

RUSSIAN ROULETTE

The wilderness of gorse, old trenches, abandoned butts was the unchanging backcloth of most of the adventures of childhood. It was to the Berkhamsted Common I had decamped for my act of rebellion some years before, with the intention, expressed in a letter, left after breakfast on the heavy black sideboard, that there I would stay, day and night, until either I had starved or my parents had given in; when I pictured war it was always in terms of this Common, and myself leading a guerrilla campaign in the ragged waste, for no one, I was persuaded, knew its paths so intimately (how humiliating that in my own domestic campaign I was ambushed by my elder sister after a few hours).

Beyond the Common lay a wide grass ride known for some reason as Cold Harbour to which I would occasionally with some fear take a horse, and beyond this again stretched Ashridge Park, the smooth olive skin of beech trees and the thick last year’s guaquarium of leaves, dark like old pennies. Deliberately I chose my ground, I believe without any real fear—perhaps because I was uncertain myself whether I was play-acting; perhaps because so many acts which my elders would have regarded as neurotic, but which I still consider to have been under the circumstances highly reasonable, lay in the background of this more dangerous venture.

There had been, for example, perhaps five or six years before, the disappointing morning in the dark-room by the linen cupboard on the eve of term when I had patiently drunk a quantity of hypno under the impression that it was poisonous; on another occasion the blue glass bottle of hayfever lotion which, as it contained a small quantity of cocaine, had probably been good for my mood; the bunch of deadly nightshade that I had eaten with only a slight narcotic effect; the twenty aspirins I had taken before swimming in the empty out-of-term school baths (I can still remember the curious sensation of swimming through wool); these acts may have removed all sense of strangeness as I dipped a bullet into a chamber and, holding the revolver behind my back, spun the chambers round.

Had I, at seventeen, romantic thoughts about my sister’s governess? Undoubtedly I must have had, but I think that at the most they simply eased the medicine down. Boredom, aridity, those were the main emotions. Unhappy love has, I suppose, sometimes driven boys to suicide, but this was not suicide, whatever a coroner’s jury might have said of it: it was a gamble with five chances to one against an inquest. The romantic flavour—the autumn scene, the small heavy compact shape lying in the fingers—that perhaps was a tribute to adolescent love, but the discovery that it was possible to enjoy again the visible world by risking its total loss was one I was bound to make sooner or later.

I put the muzzle of the revolver in my right ear and pulled the trigger. There was a minute click, and looking down at the chamber I could see that the charge had moved into place. I was out by one. I remember an extraordinary sense of jubilation. It was as if a light had been turned on. My heart was knocking in its cage, and I felt that life contained an infinite number of possibilities. It was like a young man’s first successful experience of sex—as if in that Ashridge glade one had passed a test of manhood. I went home and put the revolver back in the corner cupboard.

The odd thing about this experience was that it was repeated several times. At fairly long intervals I found myself craving for the drug. I took the revolver with me when I went up to Oxford, and I would walk out from Headington towards Elsfieald down what is now a wide arterial road, smooth and shiny like the walls of a public lavatory. Then it was a sodden unfrequented country lane. The revolver would be whipped behind my back, the chambers twisted, the muzzle quickly and surreptitiously inserted beneath the black and ugly winter tree, the trigger pulled.

Slowly the effect of the drug wore off—I lost the sense of jubilation, I began to gain from the experience only the crude kick of excitement. It was like the difference between love and lust. And as the quality of the experience deteriorated, so my sense of responsibility grew and worried me. I wrote a very bad piece of free verse (free because it was easier in that way to express my meaning without lit-
erary equivocation) describing how, in order to give a fictitious sense of danger, I would “press the trigger of a revolver I already know to be empty.” This piece of verse I would leave permanently on my desk, so that if I lost my gamble, there would be incontrovertible evidence of an accident, and my parents, I thought, would be less troubled than by an apparent suicide—or than by the rather bizarre truth.

But it was back at Berkhamsted that I paid a permanent farewell to the drug. As I took my fifth dose it occurred to me that I wasn’t even excited: I was beginning to pull the trigger about as casually as I might take an aspirin tablet. I decided to give the revolver—which was six-chambered—a sixth and last chance. Twirling the chambers round, I put the muzzle to my ear for the last time and heard the familiar empty click as the chambers revolved. I was through with the drug, and walking back over the Common, down the new road by the ruined castle, past the private entrance to the gritty old railway station—reserved for the use of Lord Brownlow—my mind was already busy on other plans. One campaign was over, but the war against boredom had got to go on.

I put the revolver back in the corner cupboard, and going downstairs I lied gently and convincingly to my parents that a friend had invited me to join him in Paris.

1946 from “The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard.”

The Lost Childhood

First Travels

Reading out telegrams from the platform and everyone sang the International; then they’d speak a little and then another telegram arrived. They were poor and pinched and noisy; one wondered why it was that they had so much good news coming to them which didn’t make any difference at all. All the good news and the singing were at the end of an alley in a wide cold hall; they couldn’t get out; in the little square the soldiers stood in tin helmets beside their stacked rifles. That night from the window of an hotel I saw a man and woman copulating; they stood against each other under a street lamp, like two people who are supporting and comforting each other in the pain of some sickness.

The next day I read in the paper how the Reds had tried to get out, but the soldiers had stopped them; a few people were hurt, a few went to prison. . . .

The aeroplane rocked over Hanover, the last of the storm scattering behind it, dipped suddenly down five hundred feet towards the small air station, and soared again eastwards. Behind the plane the sun set along the clouds; we were above the sunset; looking back it lay below, long pale ridges of stained clouds. The air was grey above the lakes; they were sunk in the ground, like pieces of lead; the lights of villages in between. It was quite dark long before Berlin, and the city came to meet the plane through the darkness as a gorse fire does, links of flame through the heavy green night. A sky-sign was the size of a postage stamp; one could see the whole plan of the city, like a lit map in the Underground when you press a button to find the route. The great rectangle of the Tempelhof was marked in scarlet and yellow lights; the plane swerved away over the breadth of Berlin, turned back and down; the lights in the cabin went out and one could see the headlamps sweeping the asphalt drive, the sparks streaming out behind the grey Lufthansa wing, as the wheels touched and rebounded and took the ground and held. That was happiness, the quick impression; but on the ground, among the swastikas, one saw pain at every yard. . . .

Coming into Riga, I had deceived myself into thinking I was on the verge of a relationship with something new and lovely and happy as the train came out from the Lithuanian flats, where the peasants were ploughing in bathing-slips, pushing the wooden plough through the stiff dry earth, into the shining evening light beside the Latvian river. I had left Berlin in the hard wooden carriage at midnight; I hadn’t slept and I’d eaten nothing all day. There was a Polish Jew in the

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2.1. Briefly state the meaning of each of the following phrases in its context:

   1. bouts of sleeplessness
   2. unleash a thin shriek
   3. elusive mosquito-bites
   4. breeze into
   5. pushed right over the edge

2.2. Define in two sentences the motivation of Aurora’s behaviour towards her grandmother and towards her mother.

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At the age of thirteen my mother Aurora da Gama took to wandering barefoot around her grandparents’ large, odorous house on Cabral Island during the bouts of sleeplessness which became, for a time, her nightly affliction, and on these nocturnal odysseys she would invariably throw open all the windows — first the inner screen-windows whose fine-meshed netting protected the house from midges mosquitoes flies, next the leaded-glass casements themselves, and finally the slatted wooden shutters beyond. Consequently, the sixty-year-old matriarch Epifania — whose personal mosquito-net had over the years developed a number of small but significant holes which she was too myopic or stingy to notice — would be awakened each morning by itching bites on her bony blue forearms and would then unleash a thin shriek at the sight of flies buzzing around the tray of bed-tea and sweet biscuits placed beside her by Tereza the maid (who swiftly fled). Epifania fell into a useless frenzy of scratching and swatting, lunging around her curvaceous teak bedstead, often spilling tea on the lacy cotton bedclothes, or on her white muslin nightgown with the high ruffled collar that concealed her once swan-like, but now corrugated, neck. And as the fly-swatter in her right hand thwacked and thumped, as the long nails on her left hand raked her back in search of ever more elusive mosquito-bites, so Epifania da Gama’s nightcap would slip from her head, revealing a mess of snaky white hair through which mottled patches of scalp could (alas!) all too easily be glimpsed. When young Aurora, listening at the door, judged that the sounds of her hated grandmother’s fury (oaths, breaking china, the impotent slaps of the swatter, the scornful buzzing of insects) were nearing peak volume, she would put on her sweetest smile and breeze into the matriarch’s presence with a gay morning greeting, knowing that the mother of all the da Gamas of Cochin would be pushed right over the edge of her wild anger by the arrival of this youthful witness to her antique helplessness. Epifania, hair a-straggle, kneeling on stained sheets, upraised swatter flapping like a broken wand, and seeking a release for her rage, howled like a weird sister, rakshasa or banee at intruding Aurora, to the youngster’s secret delight.

‘Oho-ho, girl, what a shock you gave, one day you will killofy my heart.’

So it was that Aurora da Gama got the idea of murdering her grandmother from the lips of the intended victim herself. After that she began making plans, but these increasingly macabre fantasies of poisons and cliff-edges were invariably scuppered by pragmatic problems, such as the difficulty of getting hold of a cobra and inserting it between Epifania’s bed-sheets, or the flat refusal of the old harridan to walk on any terrain that, as she put it, ‘tilted up or down’. And although Aurora knew very well where to lay her hands on a good sharp kitchen knife, and was certain that her strength was already great enough to choke the life out of Epifania, she nevertheless ruled out these options, too, because she had no intention of being found out, and too obvious an assault might lead to the asking of uncomfortable questions. The perfect crime having failed to make its nature known, Aurora continued to play the perfect granddaughter; but brooded on, privately, though it never occurred to her to notice that in her broodings there was more than a little of Epifania’s ruthlessness:

‘Patience is a virtue,’ she told herself. ‘I’ll just bide-o my time.’

In the meanwhile she went on opening windows during those humid nights, and sometimes threw out small valuable ornaments, carved wooden trunk-nosed figures which bobbed away on the tides of the lagoon lapping at the walls of the island mansion, or delicately worked ivory tusks which naturally sank without trace. For several days the family was at a loss to understand these developments. The sons of Epifania da Gama, Aurora’s uncle Aires-pronounced-Irish and her father Camoens-pronounced-
The morning sunlight understood that it had done too much

before. The sky, now a thick, overcast gray, filled with clouds that
were moving slowly across the horizon. The world was bathed in
soft, diffused light that softened the edges of objects and
created a hazy, dreamlike quality to everything.

The silence of the early morning was palpable, with only the
occasional sound of birds singing in the distance breaking the
peace. The world was quiet and still, as if holding its breath
before the day began.

As the sun slowly rose, casting long shadows across the
landscape, the world slowly came to life. The birds grew
more active, their songs becoming more complex and
diverse as they vied for attention in their territories. The
rustling of leaves and the gentle breeze provided a
constant backdrop to the morning's unfolding.

The world was alive, yet it still maintained a sense of
tranquility and calm. It was as if the morning had been
prepared for this moment, allowing nature to
express itself in all its beauty and diversity.

And so the day began, with the sun rising higher and
higher in the sky, casting its warm, golden light across the
land. It was a new day, full of promise and possibility,
offering endless opportunities for growth and
expansion. The world was alive and vibrant, ready to
迎接 the challenges and experiences that lay ahead.
E. M. Forster, « Art for Art's sake »

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2.1. Briefly state the meaning of each of the following phrases in its context:

   1. in the swim
   2. fix our hearts
   3. harnessed the atom
   4. our mudding race

2.2. Answer in a sentence or two the following questions:

   1. What quality, according to Forster, does the work of art possess that society, politics and science do not?
   2. How does this quality of the art work differ from other manifestations of the same quality?

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E. M. FORSTER

Art for Art's Sake

Art Academy of Arts and Letters in New York
There was no need to despair, but rather to accept the situation and move on. The feeling of loss and disappointment, however, lingered, and it was difficult to shake off. The potential for something better was there, but it required effort and determination to pursue it.

The second possibility was a new and unexpected option. It was a possibility that had never been considered before, but it was present and available. The key was to recognize it and act upon it. The potential for growth and change was there, waiting to be discovered.

In the end, the decision was made. The choice was between sticking with the familiar and comfortable, or taking a chance on something new and uncertain. The decision was made, and the journey began.

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