Fiction

UNIT 4

F.4 A Shady Plot

By Elsie Brown

1. Given below is a list of words related to ghosts and ghost stories with their jumbled up meanings against them. Match the words/expressions with their correct meanings:

Apparition	a feeling of anticipation of or anxiety over a future event
Poltergeist	a reanimated corpse that is believed to rise from the grave at night to suck the blood of sleeping people
Clairvoyance	a conjurer who expels evil spirits by conjuration
Crystal Ball	a spelling board device intended to communicate with and through the spirit world, obtaining answers to questions
Eerie	beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation
Medium	any of a set of 22 playing cards bearing allegorical representations, used for fortune telling
Transmigration	a supernatural appearance of a person or thing, a ghost, spectre or phantom
Psychic	so mysterious, strange, or unexpected as to send a chill up the spine
Ouija Board	the supposed power to see objects or events that cannot be perceived by the senses
Exorcist	a person through whom the spirits of the dead are alleged to be able to contact the living
Premonition	a globe of quartz crystal in which images, believed to portend the future, are supposedly visible to fortune tellers

Paranormal	to pass into another body after death: going from one state of existence or place to another
Tarot Card	capable of extraordinary mental processes, such as extrasensory perception and mental telepathy
Vampire	German word, meaning "noisy ghost"-a troublesome spirit that announces its presence with unexplainable sounds and the creation of disorder

2. The title of the story is A Shady Plot. The dictionary defines the words as:

shady *adjective*

a. Full of shade; shaded.

b. Casting shade: a shady grove.

c. Quiet, dark, or concealed; hidden.

d. Of dubious character or of questionable honesty.

plot *noun*

a. i) a small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose: a garden plot.

ii) a measured area of land

b. a ground plan, as for a building; a diagram.

c. storyline- the plan, scheme, or main story of a literary or dramatic work, as a play, novel, or short story

d. a secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; a scheme.

Based on the definitions above can you predict what the story will be about? Make a brief note of your prediction in your notebook.

3. Read the story given below. Your teacher will use a variety of techniques for different parts of the story. For example:

- Silent reading
- One student reading aloud to the whole class
- Students reading in small groups
- Dramatised reading in small groups

A SHADY PLOT

1. So I sat down to write a ghost story.

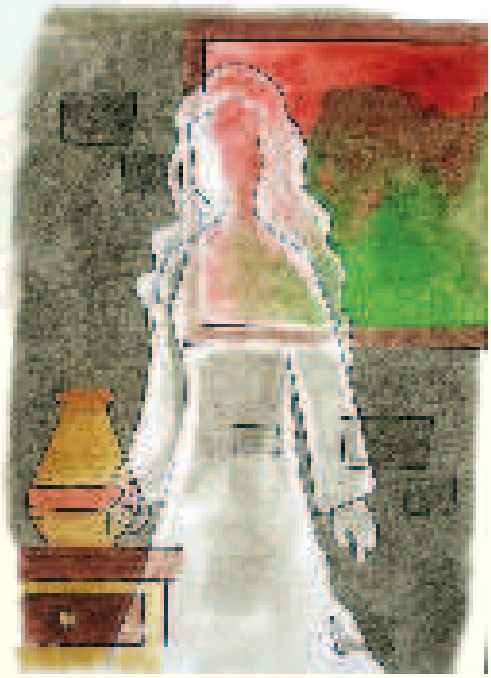
2. Jenkins was responsible.

3. "Hallock," he had said to me, "give us another on the supernatural this time. Something to give 'em the horrors; that's what the public wants, and your ghosts are live propositions."

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

5. I hadn't the shade of an idea, but at the time that didn't worry me in the least. You see, I had often been like that before and in the end things had always come my way--I didn't in the least know how or why. It had all been rather mysterious. You understand I didn't specialize in ghost stories, but more or less they seemed to specialize in me. A ghost story had been the first fiction I had written. Curious how that idea for a plot had come to me out of nowhere after I had chased inspiration in vain for months! Even now whenever Jenkins wanted a ghost, he called on me. And I had never found it healthy to contradict Jenkins. Jenkins always seemed to have an uncanny knowledge as to when the landlord or the grocer was pestering me, and he **dunned**[1] me for a ghost. And somehow I'd always been able to dig one up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit **cocky**[2] as to my ability.

6. 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, decidedly unghostly and material things, such as my wife's shopping and how on earth I was going to cure her of her alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along and work it to death. But I realized that would never get me any place, so I went back to staring at the ceiling.



7. "This writing business is delightful, isn't it?" I said sarcastically at last, out loud, too. You see, I had reached the stage of imbecility when I was talking to myself.

8. "Yes," said a voice at the other end of the room, "I should say it is!"

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1. **dunned :** persistently ask for something that is overdue
2. **cocky :** overconfident

9. I admit I jumped. Then I looked around.

10. It was twilight by this time and I had forgotten to turn on the lamp. The other end of the room was full of shadows and furniture. I sat staring at it and presently noticed something just taking shape. It was exactly like watching one of these moving picture cartoons being put together. First an arm came out, then a bit of sleeve of a stiff white **shirtwaist**[3] , then a leg and a plaid skirt, until at last there she was complete,--whoever she was.

11. She was long and angular, with enormous fishy eyes behind big bone-rimmed spectacles, and her hair in a tight wad at the back of her head (yes, I seemed able to see right through her head) and a jaw--well, it looked so solid that for the moment I began to doubt my very own senses and believe she was real after all.

12. She came over and stood in front of me and glared--yes, positively glared down at me, although (to my knowledge) I had never laid eyes on the woman before, to say nothing of giving her cause to look at me like that.

13. I sat still, feeling pretty helpless I can tell you, and at last she barked: "What are you gaping at?"

14. I swallowed, though I hadn't been chewing anything.

15. "Nothing," I said. "Absolutely nothing. My dear lady, I was merely waiting for you to tell me why you had come. And excuse me, but do you always come in sections like this? I should think your parts might get mixed up sometimes."

16. "Didn't you send for me?" she crisped.

17. Imagine how I felt at that!

18. "Why, no. I--I don't seem to remember----"

19. "Look here. Haven't you been calling on heaven and earth all afternoon to help you write a story?"

20. I nodded, and then a possible explanation occurred to me and my spine got cold. Suppose this was the ghost of a stenographer applying for a job! I had had an advertisement in the paper recently. I opened my mouth to explain that the position was filled, and permanently so, but she stopped me.

21. "And when I got back to the office from my last case and was ready for you, didn't you switch off to something else and sit there **drivelling**[4] so I couldn't attract your attention until just now?"

22. "I--I'm very sorry, really."

3. **shirtwaist :** a woman's blouse shaped like a man's shirt
4. **drivelling :** speak nonsense

23. "Well, you needn't be, because I just came to tell you to stop bothering us for assistance; you ain't going to get it. We're going on strike!"

24. "What!"

25. "You don't have to yell at me."

26. "I--I didn't mean to yell," I said humbly. "But I'm afraid I didn't quite understand you. You said you were----"

27. "Going on strike. Don't you know what a strike is? Not another plot do you get from us!"

28. I stared at her and wet my lips.

29. "Is--is that where they've been coming from?"

30. "Of course. Where else?"

31. "But my ghosts aren't a bit like you----"

32. "If they were, people wouldn't believe in them." She **draped**[5] herself on the top of my desk among the pens and ink bottles and leaned towards me.

33. "In the other life I used to write."

34. "You did!"

35. She nodded.

36. "But that has nothing to do with my present form. It might have, but I gave it up at last for that very reason, and went to work as a reader on a magazine." She sighed, and rubbed the end of her long eagle nose with a **reminiscent**[6] finger. "Those were terrible days; the memory of them made me mistake purgatory for paradise, and at last when I attained my present state of being, I made up my mind that something should be done.

37. I found others who had suffered similarly, and between us we organized 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau.' We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression. The case is brought to the attention of the main office, and one of us assigned to it. When that case is finished we bring in a report."

38. "But I never saw you before----"

39. "And you wouldn't have this time if I hadn't come to announce the strike. Many a time I've leaned on your shoulder when you've thought you were thinking hard--" I groaned, and clutched my hair. The very idea of that horrible scarecrow so much as touching me! And wouldn't my wife be shocked! I shivered. "But," she continued, "that's at an end. We've been called out of our beds a little too often in recent years, and now we're through."

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5. **draped :** sat in an indolent manner; lolled
6. **reminiscent :** with one's mind full of memories

40. "But my dear madam, I assure you I have had nothing to do with that. I hope I'm properly grateful and all that, you see."

41. "Oh, it isn't you," she explained patronizingly. "It's those **Ouija board**[7] fanatics. There was a time when we had nothing much to occupy us and used to haunt a little on the side, purely for amusement, but not any more. We've had to give up haunting almost entirely. We sit at a desk and answer questions now. And such questions!" She shook her head hopelessly, and taking off her glasses wiped them, and put them back on her nose again.



42. "But what have I got to do with this?"

43. She gave me a pitying look and rose.

44. "You're to exert your influence. Get all your friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board, and then we'll start helping you to write."

45. "But----"

46. There was a footstep outside my door.

47. "John! Oh, John!" called the voice of my wife.

48. I waved my arms at the ghost with something of the motion of a beginner when learning to swim.

49. "Madam, I must ask you to leave, and at once. Consider the impression if you were seen here----"

50. The ghost nodded, and began, very sensibly, I thought, to demobilize and evaporate. First the **brogans**[8] on her feet grew misty until I could see the floor through them, then the **affection**[9] spread to her knees and gradually extended upward. By this time my wife was opening the door.

51. "Don't forget the strike," she repeated, while her lower jaw began to disintegrate, and as my Lavinia crossed the room to me the last vestige of her ear faded into space.

52. "John, why in the world are you sitting in the dark?"

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7. **Ouija board:** a board on which are marked the letters of the alphabet. Answers to questions are spelt out by a pointer or glass held by the fingertips of the participants, and are supposedly formed by spiritual forces
8. **brogans :** a heavy ankle-high work boot with laces
9. **affection :** (here) condition; state of being affected

53. "Just--thinking, my dear."

54. "Thinking, rubbish! You were talking out loud."

55. I remained silent while she lit the lamps, thankful that her back was turned to me. When I am nervous or excited there is a muscle in my face that starts to twitch, and this pulls up one corner of my mouth and gives the appearance of an idiotic grin. So far I had managed to conceal this affliction from Lavinia.

56. "You know I bought the loveliest thing this afternoon. Everybody's wild over them!"

57. I remembered her craze for taking up new fads and a **premonitory**[10] chill crept up the back of my neck.

58. "It--it isn't----" I began and stopped. I simply couldn't ask; the possibility was too horrible.

59. "You'd never guess in the world. It's the duckiest, darlingest Ouija board, and so cheap! I got it at a bargain sale. Why, what's the matter, John?"

60. I felt things slipping.

61. "Nothing," I said, and looked around for the ghost. Suppose she had lingered, and upon hearing what my wife had said should suddenly appear----Like all sensitive women, Lavinia was subject to hysterics.

62. "But you looked so funny----"

63. "I--I always do when I'm interested," I gulped. "But don't you think that was a foolish thing to buy?"

64. "Foolish! Oh, John! Foolish! And after me getting it for you!"

65. "For me! What do you mean?"

66. "To help you write your stories. Why, for instance, suppose you wanted to write an historical novel. You wouldn't have to wear your eyes out over those musty old books in the public library. All you'd have to do would be to get out your Ouija and talk to Napoleon, or William the Conqueror, or Helen of Troy--well, maybe not Helen--anyhow you'd have all the local colour you'd need, and without a speck of trouble. And think how easy writing your short stories will be now."

67. "But Lavinia, you surely don't believe in Ouija boards."

68. "I don't know, John--they are awfully thrilling."

69. She had seated herself on the arm of my chair and was looking dreamily across the room. I started and turned around. There was nothing there, and I sank back with relief. So far so good.

10. premonitory : a foreboding.

70. "Oh, certainly, they're thrilling all right. That's just it; they're a darn sight too thrilling. They're positively devilish. Now, Lavinia, you have plenty of sense, and I want you to get rid of that thing just as soon as you can. Take it back and get something else."

71. My wife crossed her knees and stared at me through narrowed lids.

72. "John Hallock," she said distinctly. "I don't propose to do anything of the kind. In the first place they won't exchange things bought at a bargain sale, and in the second, if you aren't interested in the other world I am. So there!" and she slid down and walked from the room before I could think of a single thing to say. She walked very huffily.

73. Well, it was like that all the rest of the evening. Just as soon as I mentioned Ouija boards I felt things begin to cloud up; so I decided to let it go for the present, in the hope that she might be more reasonable later.

74. After supper I had another try at the writing, but as my mind continued a perfect blank I gave it up and went off to bed.

75. The next day was Saturday, and it being near the end of the month and a particularly busy day, I left home early without seeing Lavinia. Understand, I haven't quite reached the point where I can give my whole time to writing, and being **bookkeeper**[11] for a lumber company does help with the grocery bills and pay for Lavinia's fancy shopping. Friday had been a half holiday, and of course when I got back the work was piled up pretty high; so high, in fact, that ghosts and stories and everything else vanished in a perfect tangle of figures.

76. When I got off the street car that evening my mind was still churning. I remember now that I noticed, even from the corner, how brightly the house was illuminated, but at the time that didn't mean anything to me. I recall as I went up the steps and opened the door I murmured: "Nine times nine is eighty-one!"

77. And then Gladolia met me in the hall.

78. "Misto Hallock, de Missus sho t'inks you's lost! She say she done 'phone you dis mawnin' to be home early, but fo' de lawd's sake not to stop to **argify**[12] now, but get ready fo' de company an' come on down."

79. Some memory of a message given me by one of the clerks filtered back through my brain, but I had been hunting three lost receipts at the time, and had completely forgotten it.

80. "Company?" I said stupidly. "What company?"

81. "De Missus's Ouija boahrd pahrty," said Gladolia, and rolling her eyes she disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

11. **bookkeeper** : accountant
12. **argify** : (here) argue

82. I must have gone upstairs and dressed and come down again, for I presently found myself standing in the dimly lighted lower hall wearing my second best suit and a fresh shirt and collar. But I have no recollections of the process.

83. There was a great chattering coming from our little parlour and I went over to the half-opened door and peered through.

84. The room was full of women--most of them elderly--whom I recognized as belonging to my wife's Book Club. They were sitting in couples, and between each couple was a Ouija board! The mournful squeak of the legs of the moving triangular things on which they rested their fingers filled the air and mixed in with the conversation. I looked around for the ghost with my heart sunk down to zero. What if Lavinia should see her and go mad before my eyes! And then my wife came and tapped me on the shoulder.

85. "John," she said in her sweetest voice, and I noticed that her cheeks were very pink and her eyes very bright. My wife is never so pretty as when she's doing something she knows I disapprove of, "John, dear I know you'll help us out. Mrs. William Augustus Wainright 'phoned at the last moment to say that she couldn't possibly come, and that leaves poor Laura Hinkle without a partner. Now, John, I know some people can work a Ouija by themselves, but Laura can't, and she'll just have a horrible time unless you----"

86. "Me!" I gasped. "Me! I won't----" but even as I spoke she had taken my arm, and the next thing I knew I was sitting with the thing on my knees and Miss Laura Hinkle opposite, grinning in my face like a flirtatious crocodile.

87. "I--I won't----" I began.

88. "Now, Mr. Hallock, don't you be shy." Miss Laura Hinkle leaned forward and shook a bony finger almost under my chin.

89. "I--I'm not! Only I say I won't----!"

90. "No, it's very easy, really. You just put the tips of your fingers right here beside the tips of my fingers----"

91. And the first thing I knew she had taken my hands and was **coyly**[13] holding them in the position desired. She released them presently, and the little board began to slide around in an aimless sort of way. There seemed to be some force tugging it about. I looked at my partner, first with suspicion, and then with a vast relief. If she was doing



13 **coyly :** flirtatious but pretending to be shy or modest

it, then all that talk about spirits----Oh, I did hope Miss Laura Hinkle was cheating with that board!

92. "Ouija, dear, won't you tell us something?" she cooed, and on the instant the thing seemed to take life.

93. It rushed to the upper left hand corner of the board and hovered with its front leg on the word "Yes." 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?"

94. "I don't know," I said desperately. My collar felt very tight.

95. "But she must mean something. Ouija, dear, won't you explain yourself more fully?"

96. "'A-s-k-h-i-m!' Ask him. Ask who, Ouija?"

97. "I--I'm going." I choked and tried to get up but my fingers seemed stuck to that dreadful board and I dropped back again.

98. Apparently Miss Hinkle had not heard my protest. The thing was going around faster than ever and she was reading the message silently, with her brow corrugated, and the light of the huntress in her pale blue eyes.

99. "Why, she says it's you, Mr. Hallock. What does she mean? Ouija, won't you tell us who is talking?"

100. I groaned, but that **inexorable**[14] board continued to spell. I always did hate a spelling match! Miss Hinkle was again following it aloud: "'H-e-l-e-n.' Helen!" She raised her voice until it could be heard at the other end of the room. "Lavinia, dear, do you know anyone by the name of Helen?"

101. "By the name of----? I can't hear you." And my wife made her way over to us between the Book Club's chairs.

102. "You know the funniest thing has happened," she whispered excitedly. "Someone had been trying to communicate with John through Mrs. Hunt's and Mrs. Sprinkle's Ouija! Someone by the name of Helen----"

103. "Why, isn't that curious!"

104. "What is?"

105. Miss Hinkle **simpered**[15].

106. "Someone giving the name of Helen has just been calling for your husband here."

14 **inexorable :** unstoppable

15 **simpered :** smile in a silly, often coy manner

107. "But we don't know anyone by the name of Helen----"

108. Lavinia stopped and began to look at me through narrowed lids much as she had done in the library the evening before.

109. And then from different parts of the room other manipulators began to report. Every plagued one of those five Ouija boards was calling me by name! I felt my ears grow crimson, purple, maroon. My wife was looking at me as though I were some peculiar insect. The squeak of Ouija boards and the murmur of conversation rose louder and louder, and then I felt my face twitch in the spasm of that idiotic grin. I tried to straighten my wretched features into their usual semblance of humanity, I tried and----

110. "Doesn't he look sly!" said Miss Hinkle. And then I got up and fled from the room.

111. I do not know how that party ended. I do not want to know. I went straight upstairs, and undressed and crawled into bed, and lay there in the burning dark while the last guest gurgled in the hall below about the wonderful evening she had spent. I lay there while the front door shut after her, and Lavinia's steps came up the stairs and--passed the door to the guest room beyond. And then after a couple of centuries elapsed the clock struck three and I dozed off to sleep.

112. At the breakfast table the next morning there was no sign of my wife. I concluded she was sleeping late, but Gladolia, upon being questioned, only shook her head, muttered something, and turned the whites of her eyes up to the ceiling. I was glad when the meal was over and hurried to the library for another try at that story.

113. I had hardly seated myself at the desk when there came a tap at the door and a white slip of paper slid under it. I unfolded it and read:

114. "DEAR JOHN,

115. "I am going back to my grandmother. My lawyer will communicate with you later."

116. "Oh," I cried. "Oh, I wish I was dead!"

117. And:

118. "That's exactly what you ought to be!" said that horrible voice from the other end of the room.

119. I sat up abruptly--I had sunk into a chair under the blow of the letter--then I dropped back again and my hair rose in a thick prickle on the top of my head. Coming majestically across the floor towards me was a highly polished pair of thick laced shoes. I stared at them in a sort of dreadful fascination, and then something about their gait attracted my attention and I recognized them.

120. "See here," I said sternly. "What do you mean by appearing here like this?"

121. "I can't help it," said the voice, which seemed to come from a point about five and a half feet above the shoes. I raised my eyes and presently distinguished her round protruding mouth.

122. "Why can't you? A nice way to act, to walk in sections----"

123. "If you'll give me time," said the mouth in an exasperated voice, "I assure you the rest of me will presently arrive."

124. "But what's the matter with you? You never acted this way before."

125. She seemed stung to make a violent effort, for a portion of a fishy eye and the end of her nose popped into view with a suddenness that made me jump.

126. "It's all your fault." She glared at me, while part of her hair and her plaid skirt began slowly to take form.

127. "My fault!"

128. "Of course. How can you keep a lady up working all night and then expect her to retain all her faculties the next day? I'm just too tired to materialize."

129. "Then why did you bother?"

130. "Because I was sent to ask when your wife is going to get rid of that Ouija board."

131. "How should I know! I wish to heaven I'd never seen you!" I cried. "Look what you've done! You've lost me my wife, you've lost me my home and happiness, you've----you've----"

132. "Misto Hallock," came from the hall outside, "Misto Hallock, I's gwine t' quit. I don't like no **hoodoos**[16]." And the steps retreated.

133. "You've----you've lost me my cook----"

134. "I didn't come here to be abused," said the ghost coldly. "I--I----"

135. And then the door opened and Lavinia entered. She wore the brown hat and coat she usually travels in and carried a suitcase which she set down on the floor.

136. That suitcase had an air of solid finality about it, and its lock leered at me **brassily**[17].

137. I leaped from my chair with unaccustomed agility and sprang in front of my wife. I must conceal that awful phantom from her, at any risk!

138. She did not look at me, or--thank heaven!--behind me, but fixed her injured gaze upon the waste-basket, as if to wrest dark secrets from it.

139. "I have come to tell you that I am leaving," she **staccatoed**[18].

16 **hoodoos :** placing curses and charms to bring bad luck on some one

17 **brassily :** rudely; insolently

18 **staccatoed :** spoke in an abrupt, detached manner

140. "Oh, yes, yes!" I agreed, flapping my arms about to attract attention from the corner. "That's fine--great!"

141. "So you want me to go, do you?" she demanded.

142. "Sure, yes--right away! Change of air will do you good. I'll join you presently!" If only she would go till Helen could depart! I'd have the devil of a time explaining afterward, of course, but anything would be better than to have Lavinia see a ghost. Why, that sensitive little woman couldn't bear to have a mouse say boo at her--and what would she say to a ghost in her own living-room?

143. Lavinia cast a cold eye upon me. "You are acting very queerly," she sniffed. "You are concealing something from me."

144. Just then the door opened and Gladolia called, "Mis' Hallock! Mis' Hallock! I've come to tell you I'se done lef' dis place."

145. My wife turned her head a moment. "But why, Gladolia?"

146. "I ain't stayin' round no place 'long wid dem Ouija board contraptions. I'se **skeered**[19] of hoodoos. I's done gone, I is."

147. "Is that all you've got to complain about?" Lavinia inquired.

148. "Yes, ma'am."

149. "All right, then. Go back to the kitchen. You can use the board for kindling wood."

150. "Who? Me touch dat t'ing? No, ma'am, neva!"

151. "I'll be the **coon**[20] to burn it," I shouted. "I'll be glad to burn it."

152. Gladolia's heavy steps moved off kitchenward.

153. Then my Lavinia turned **waspishly**[21] to me again. "John, there's not a bit of use trying to deceive me. What is it you are trying to conceal from me?"

154. "Who? Me? Oh, no," I lied elaborately, looking around to see if that dratted ghost was concealed enough. She was so big, and I'm rather a smallish man. But that was a bad move on my part.

155. "John," Lavinia demanded like a ward boss, "you are hiding somebody in here! Who is it?"

156. I only waved denial and gurgled in my throat. She went on, "It's bad enough to have you flirt over the Ouija board with that hussy----"

157. "Oh, the affair was quite above-board, I assure you, my love!" I cried, leaping lithely about to keep her from focusing her gaze behind me.

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19 **skeered :** scared

20 **coon :** (here) the one doing a menial job

21 **waspishly :** in an irritated manner

158. She thrust me back with sudden muscle. "I will see who's behind you! Where is that Helen?"

159. "Me? I'm Helen," came from the ghost.

160. Lavinia looked at that apparition, that owl-eyed phantom, in plaid skirt and stiff shirtwaist, with hair skewed back and no powder on her nose. I threw a protecting husbandly arm about her to catch her when she should faint. But she didn't swoon. A broad, satisfied smile spread over her face.

161. "I thought you were Helen of Troy," she murmured.

162. "I used to be Helen of Troy, New York," said the ghost. "And now I'll be moving along, if you'll excuse me. See you later."

163. With that she telescoped briskly, till we saw only a hand waving farewell.

164. My Lavinia fell forgivingly into my arms. I kissed her once or twice fervently, and then I shoved her aside, for I felt a sudden strong desire to write. The sheets of paper on my desk spread invitingly before me.

165. "I've got the **bulliest**[22] plot for a ghost story!" I cried.

4. Based on your reading of the story above, answer the following questions by ticking the correct options.

1. The narrator earns his living by .....

   a) writing ghost stories

   b) working as a reader for a magazine

   c) working as a stenographer

   d) working as an accountant in a lumber company

2. The writer was overconfident about his ability to write ghost stories because .....

   a) whenever magazines wanted a ghost story, they got in touch with him

   b) he was always able to write a ghost story whenever he had to write one

   c) the readers appreciated his ghost stories

   d) he knew the ghost lady would help him write a good ghost story

3. The sight of the ghost materialising in his room filled the narrator with .....

   a) fear

   b) excitement

22 **bulliest :** best; excellent

c) joy

d) anticipation

4. The ghost wanted John to ……..

a) stop his wife from using the Ouija board

b) stop using the Ouija board himself

c) stop his guests from using the Ouija board

d) stop people from using the Ouija board

5. John wants the ghost to disappear before his wife enters the room and waves his arms at the ghost with something of the motion of a beginner when learning to swim. His movement shows his ……

a) fear

b) amusement

c) desperation

d) anxiety

6. When the narrator says his wife is never so pretty as when she's doing something she knows he disapproves of, his tone is …….

a) amused

b) ironic

c) angry

d) irritated

7. The ghost says "It's all your fault.'It' here refers to ……

a) the narrator's wife's anger

b) the ghost's anger

c) the narrator's wife leaving him

d) the ghost materialising in sections.

8. Gladolia wishes to leave the narrator's house as …….

a) she does not like the Ouija boards

b) she is afraid of the ghost

c) she is afraid of magic and hoodoo

d) she likes Ouija boards and hoodoo

5. Answer the following questions briefly.

a) What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?

b) Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

c) What makes Helen, the ghost, and her other co-ghosts organize The Writer's Inspiration Bureau?

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

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

f) Why does John 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?

g) Why does the narrator hesitate to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board Party?

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?

i) Do you agree with the narrator calling the assembly of women "manipulators?" Give reasons.

j) Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do?

k) Why does John wish he were dead?

l) When confronted by Lavinia about his flirtations over the Ouija Board, John insists that 'the affair was quite above-board, I assure you, my love'. Bring out the pun in John's statement.

m) John's apprehensions about his wife's reaction to her encounter with the ghost are unfounded. Justify.

6. Answer the following questions in detail:

a) After her reconciliation with her husband, John Hallock, Lavinia writes a letter to her friend expressing how her relationship with him had almost been on the verge of breaking and what saved it. Write her letter.

b) John Hallock reflects upon his experience with Helen's ghost and in retrospect he finds it quite amusing. All the same he is relieved that he is no longer plagued by it. Ironically, the self same ghost inspires his creativity and he writes a diary entry reflecting upon the comical aspect of his experience. Write his diary entry.

7. The narrator and his wife reveal something about their character in their words and actions. We also learn about them from what other people say. Can you pick out the words that describe them from the box given below? Also, pick out lines and instances from the story to illustrate your choice.

shy arrogant loyal clever overconfident manipulative
protective self- disparaging suspicious sceptical jealous fearless
firm shrewd strong gullible sly creative
loves novelty and thrills

Person	Extract from story	What it tells us about the character
John Hallock	1. …in the end things had always come my way….. somehow I'd always been able to dig one (plot) up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit cocky as to my ability (to write stories).	1. _____
	2. "But my ghosts aren't a bit like you----".	2. sceptical
	3. We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression.	3. gullible
	4. _____ _____ _____	4. creative
	5. _____ _____ _____	5. protective
Lavinia Hallock	1. _____ _____ _____	1. loves novelty and thrills
	2. _____ _____	2. Spendthrift
	3. _____ _____	3. suspicious
	4. _____ _____ _____	4. jealous

	5. Buys the Ouija board but says it is for John's research 6. Does not flinch when she meets the ghost but talks to her casually.	5. manipulative 6. strong

8. **Gladolia, the narrator's cook, is an African. The language she speaks is different from that of the others. This is known as Dialect. A dialect consists of words or phrases that reflect the regional variety of a language. An author often uses a regional dialect to make the dialogue more authentic. Initially a dialogue may seem a little difficult to understand. However, as you continue reading, the language will become more comprehensible.**

Working in groups, write what Gladolia's words mean as shown.

Column A	Column B
• Misto Hallock	• Mister Hallock
• de Missus	
• sho t'inks you's lost!	
• she done 'phone you dis mawnin'	
• fo' de lawd's sake	
• not to stop to argify now	
• I's gwine t' quit.	
• I don't like no hoodoos.	
• I'se done lef' dis place	
• I is	

9. **Read and understand the following ghost phrases and expressions:**

a) **To give up the ghost--** *to die or to stop trying*

b) **A ghost of a chance--** *a poor chance, not likely to happen*

c) **The ghost at the feast--** *something or someone that spoils your enjoyment by reminding you of something unpleasant*

d) **Ghost town--** *a town where most people have left-abandoned and deserted*

e) **Ghost-write-** *to write for someone else*

f) **Lay the ghost of something/somebody (to rest)--** *to finally stop being worried or upset by something or someone that has worried or upset you for a long time*

g) **Ghost image --** *secondary image, esp. one appearing on a television screen as a white shadow, caused by poor or double reception or by a defect in the receiver*

h) **the ghost of a smile -** *faint trace of a smile*

i) **As white as a ghost-** *very pale or white in the face*

Now complete the following story by using the appropriate phrases in the blanks given below:

I was alone in a place that bore a deserted look like that of a _____. I increased the pace of my footsteps as I walked through the dark forest. I felt someone walking behind me. I turned immediately and spotted the contour of a figure in the form of a _____ .It smiled at me wickedly .I started shaking with fear and perspiring profusely when I felt its skeletal hand upon my neck. I woke up with a start, relieved that it was only a nightmare.

This was not the first time I had had one. It had all started when I had watched the horrendous horror film with a eerie ghost character that had a scary ghost of a smile on its face.It had been almost a month. The strange thing was that I saw a similar face at the station the next morning. That was uncanny.

I was to attend a dinner at my friend's at Northanger Abbey that night. I had decided to narrate my experience to the group that would assemble there although I knew there was _____ that they would be convinced.

After everyone had finished pouring their drinks to themselves, I cleared my throat and started narrating my spooky experience. However, every one of the group started accusing me of being _____ and held me responsible for spoiling the spirit of revelry. I gave up the ghost and sat quietly waiting for the party to be over. Back at home, the fears returned .I knew I had to talk about my experience to somebody to feel better. I have now decided to _____ and publish my experience under a pseudonym. Only then can I _____.

10. SPEAKING

Ghosts and haunting have fascinated the public for centuries. Although many doubt the existence of ghosts or other paranormal entities, many people dedicate their lives to searching and recording paranormal activity. Ghost tours, support groups, and research societies, to name just a few, permeate our society and seek to answer questions about paranormal activity.

Interview your friends, relatives and people in your neighbourhood about whether they believe in the existence of ghosts. Ask them to tell you of any specific experiences they might have had in this context. In your groups identify the most fascinating anecdote you gathered on the basis of your interactions. Narrate it to the class.

11. WRITING

Do you think a story has an atmosphere? Complete the following blanks to make up your ghost story by choosing the correct options.

A Ghost Story

She opened the _____ (secret door/ spaceship's hatch/ door of the cottage/ cemetery gate/ door of the castle/ cockpit) _____ (brashly/ loudly/ silently/ stupidly/ fearfully/ joyously). Standing in front of her was a _____ (terrifying/ handsome/ smelly/ anonymous/ tiny/ huge/ bossy) _____ (policeman/ spy/ apparition/ witch/ prince/ wizard) with a _____ (wand/ rose/ rod/ knife/ scythe/ coded message) in his/ her (its) _____ (ghoulish/ bony/ beautiful/ fair/ manly/ gloved/ magical) hand.

Now that you have shared a ghost story/anecdote as well as completed a guided story in the class, create your own Ghost story on the basis of the starters given below:

a) ***Stephen knew he would never sleep. The noises, those horrid sounds, would keep him awake...***

b) ***Tap, tap, tap. Was it the branches of the nearby tree, or fingernails against the window?***

c) ***People often say, 'There's no such thing as ghosts....***

You are familiar with the key elements of a short story viz setting, plot, conflict, character and point of view. Given below are specifics to be kept in mind while writing a Ghost story. Also make use of the vocabulary that you have learnt from the story A Shady Plot.

- Colours, sounds, feeling words
- Strong definite characters
- Creating suspense
- Setting the scene and the atmosphere

- Describing the weather
- Clear opening line
- Personal feelings
- Clear ending
- Describing the sounds
- Adding a dramatic element
- Mystery

Useful words and phrases to consider

when writing a ghost story

Chill ,Spooky, Gloom , Flooding, Scary , Hair-raising, Cobwebs, Eerie , Frightened , Spine-chilling , Spirit, Grotesque ,Old and cold , Shivers of fear, Uncanny atmosphere, Paranormal, Abandoned , Spectre , Dare , Chain-rattling , Shriek, Phantom, deathly , Creepy, Whispering, Cries, Howling , Frostiness , Blood-curdling Sensation , Indistinct, Supernatural , Weird, Wicked laughter, Horror, Aura , Lifeless , Scream, Shrill , Darkness, Abnormal, Mist , Fog , Vision, Headless, Footsteps , Graveyard, Apprehension , Corpse , Ghoul , Phantasm , Horse and Carriage, Hooves

SPEAKING

12. While conventional Ghost stories are scary and gruesome, several modern versions are humorous. The Canterville Ghost, by Oscar Wilde, is one of the best ghost stories written in the vein of laughing satire. The story that you just read is another example in case. Humour arises out of the narrator's ability to laugh at himself, clever use of language as well as comic situations. Discuss within your groups what makes the Shady Plot humorous. Share your views during a whole class discussion.

LISTENING TASK

13. Listen to the extract from The Canterville Ghost by Oscar Wilde and complete the following tasks as directed.

1. Answer the following questions:

1. The Ghost loved the stormy weather because ….(Complete the statement by ticking the correct option)

   a) he liked the rain

b) he liked the strong wind that shook and rattled all the windows and doors in the old house

c) his plan would fail otherwise

d) such weather was ideal for frightening the people in the house

2. The Ghost was particularly angry with Washington and wished to frighten him because…. .....(Complete the statement)

3. The Ghost did not wish to frighten Virginia because ….(Complete the statement)

4. The Ghost was most angry with ….(Complete the statement by ticking the correct option)

a) Mr and Mrs Otis

b) Virginia

c) Washington

d) The Twins

5. Write two striking qualities of the Ghost as are revealed in this extract.

a) _____

b) _____