GOING ALONE

In the previous year Christian Thrale, who was then in his late twenties, unexpectedly had an evening free from his weekend work at a government office. Looking back, it seemed to have been an evening free, also, of himself. He did not often go alone to a concert or other cultural events. On your own, you were at the mercy of your responses. Accompanied by someone else, on the other hand, you retained control. You could also share your opinion, seldom favourable, while walking home. The concert, on that particular evening, was too easy to get into. Passing in light rain, he saw posters and bought a seat on the aisle. He was scarcely in his seat when he had to stand up again to let two women into the row. He lifted the folded raincoat, hat, and damp umbrella he had dumped on the empty seat alongside; and the younger woman, having stood back for the elder, now sat there. He had noticed her large-eyed good looks at once when she glanced up saying sorry. But as the struggling out of coats went on, and the drawing off of stubborn gloves, he lost interest.

It was the other woman he became aware of. The older woman was small and dark and wore a red felt hat on her head, trimmed with navy ribbon. Around her shoulders there was a shawl of little furs. That she was in some way related to the girl, was evident from their manner together, though not of an age to be her mother. It was hard to summarise, even in guesses, even in his mind, the relation of girl to woman. Until, as the musicians started to appear and more arrivals pushed along the rows, the phrase came to him: she is in her power. The older woman had been coaxed for an outing, in the desperation of an interminable Sunday. That she expected nothing of the music was apparent from her turning this way and that, providing her own commentary. 'The way people dress! Will you just look at that one? I ask you 'They might have smartened the place up a bit by now. Wouldn't you think?' The girl sat quietly, something she would not be allowed to get away with. 'You're cheery I must say. First you tell me I'm depressed, and then you don't have a solitary word to say for yourself'.

The lights lowered. Throughout the first work Christian was aware of the woman simmering there, a boiling turned low. The girl between them was impassive, hands lightly clasped, slim knees aligned under dark skirt. At the interval the little woman, murmuring to the girl, got up and went out to the ladies' room. She was no sooner down the aisle than Christian spoke. He had never done such a thing in his life, but knew there was no time to lose. They got swiftly through some chit-chat about the music, and by the time the woman returned Christian had written a phone number and suggested Saturday. All this, which should have seemed extraordinary to him, appeared inevitable and entirely right.

He got to his feet, and Grace said, 'Dora, this is Mr Thrale: He saw Dora's face flash with the realisation that they had stolen a march on her, and with an impulse to spoil things. Dora saw a sandy man, quite tall, who could easily present a threat. Christian had discovered they were half-sisters and from Australia. When the concert was over, he hailed a taxi for them.

He did not, during that week, tell himself that he must have been love-struck, even though love-struck was one of his expressions. He knew that something out of the ordinary had been set in motion. But he did wonder if it would survive a second meeting with Grace, whose attraction could well be reduced in another setting. To do him justice, Christian feared rather than hoped for this.

1. **What was unusual about Christian's decision to go to the concert?**

A He was not particularly keen on cultural events.

B He had nobody to discuss the experience with.

C He had heard negative opinions about it

D He normally spent his free time outdoors.

2. **In the second paragraph, what do we learn about Christian's reaction to the younger woman?**

A He was annoyed she took a long time to settle down.

B He wished she had sat somewhere else in the hall.

C He feared she might have noticed his interest in her.

D He didn't pay a great deal of attention to her initially.

3. **What made Christian think the two women might be related?**

A their physical appearance

B the age difference between them

C the way they were behaving

D the similarity of their voices

4. **How did Christian feel when he spoke to the younger woman?**

A concerned about the older woman's reaction

B amazed by his own level of courage

C confident it was the correct thing to do

D worried about making the wrong impression

5. **The look on Dora's face indicated to Christian that she was**

A moved.

B embarrassed.

C amused.

D angry.

6. **What did Christian fear might happen when he met Grace again?**

A She might regret having met him.

B He might no longer think so highly of her.

C He might feel uncomfortable with her.

D She might realise he was not attractive.