



LISTEN TO THE RECORDING AND FILL IN THE BLANKS WITH THE MISSING WORDS.



UNIT 6

Perspectives

I could see her defeat and helplessness. The attendant seemed unaware, as if his perception had grown a reptilian covering. What did she care for the campaign for the preservation and welfare of copperheads and rattlers and common grass snakes? What did she care about someday walking through the woods or the desert and deciding between killing a snake or setting it free, as if there would be time to decide, when her journey to and from school in Philadelphia held enough danger to occupy her? In two years or so, she'd retire and be in that apartment by herself with no ①....., and everyone knew what happened then, and how she'd be afraid to answer the door and to walk after dark and carry her ②..... in the street. There was enough to think about without learning to handle and love the snakes, harmless and otherwise, by having them ③..... around her neck for everyone, including the children – most of all the children – to witness the outbreak of her fear.

'See, Miss Aitcheson's touching the snake. She's not afraid of it at all.' As everyone watched, she touched the snake. Her fingers ④..... She touched it again.

'See, she's not afraid. Miss Aitcheson can stand there with a beautiful snake around her neck and touch it and ⑤..... it and not be afraid.'

The faces of the children were full of admiration for the teacher's ⑥....., and yet there was a cruelly persistent tension; they were waiting, waiting.

'We have to learn to love snakes,' the attendant said. 'Would someone like to come out and stroke teacher's snake?'

Silence. One shamefaced boy came forward. He stood ⑦..... in front of the teacher.

'Touch it,' the attendant urged. 'It's a friendly snake. Teacher's wearing it around her neck and she's not afraid.'

The boy darted his hand forward, rested it lightly on the snake, and immediately withdrew his hand. Then he ran back to his seat. The children ⑧..... with glee.

'He's afraid,' someone said. 'He's afraid of the snake.' The attendant soothed. 'We have to get used to them, you know. Grownups are not afraid of them, but we can understand that when you're small you might be afraid, and that's why we want you to learn to love them. Isn't that right, Miss Aitcheson? Isn't that right? Now who else is going to be brave enough to touch teacher's snake?'

Two girls came out. They stood ⑨..... side by side and stared at the snake and then at Miss Aitcheson. I wondered when the torture would end. The two little girls did not touch the snake, but they smiled at it and spoke to it and Miss Aitcheson smiled and ⑩..... how brave they were.

'Just a minute,' the attendant said. 'There's really no need to be brave. It's not a question of bravery. The snake is harmless, absolutely harmless. Where's the bravery when the snake is harmless?'

Suddenly the snake moved round to face Miss Aitcheson and ⑪..... its flat head towards her cheek. She gave a scream, flung up her hands, and tore the snake from her throat and threw it on the floor, and, ⑫..... across the room, she collapsed into a small canvas chair beside the Bear Cabinet and started to cry.

I didn't feel I should watch any longer. Some of the children began to laugh, some to cry. The attendant picked up the snake and ⑬..... it. Miss Aitcheson, recovering, sat helplessly exposed by the small piece of useless torture. It was not her fault that she was ⑭..... -, her eyes tried to tell us. She looked at the children, trying in some way to force their admiration and respect; they were shut against her.

She was evicted from them and from herself and even from her own fear-infested tomorrow, because she could not promise to love and ⑮..... what she feared. She had nowhere, at that moment, but the small canvas chair by the Bear Cabinet of the Natural Science Museum.

I looked at my watch. If I hurried, I would catch the train from Thirtieth Street. There would be no time to make the journey through the human heart. I hurried out of the museum. It was freezing cold. The icebreakers would be at work on the Delaware and the Susquehanna; the mist would have risen by the time I arrived home. Yes, I would just catch the train from Thirtieth Street. The journey through the human heart would have to wait until some other time.