

The first person they knew that came home on leave was Bill Monroe from Emerald Street and he was followed by a boy from Park Grove Street and one from over on Eldon Terrace, which seemed unfair as Albert had joined up before any of them. There was a big to-do one day because Bill Monroe hadn't gone back when he should have done and they sent in military policemen to take him back. His mother barred the front door with a broom handle and had to be lifted out of the way by the military policemen, one at each elbow, and Nell, who happened to be walking home from work along Emerald Street at the time, was reminded of Percy's funeral.

She had a further shock when an ordinary, civilian policeman appeared from nowhere and for a second Nell thought it was Percy. For a ridiculous moment she wondered if he'd come back to ask her why there was a little pearl and garnet ring on her engagement finger instead of the sapphire chips he'd given her which were now wrapped in tissue paper and put at the back of her drawer.

Bill Monroe was hauled off eventually and Nell didn't linger on the street. She felt embarrassed for him because she'd seen the look of terror on his face and thought how awful it must be to be such a coward and how unpatriotic as well - and she was surprised how many women came up to Mrs Monroe, who was raging and shouting and crying on her doorstep, and told her that she'd done the right thing.

Frank came home after the second battle of Ypres¹; he'd been in hospital in Southport with a septic foot and was given a few days' leave before going back to the Front. It was odd because before the war they'd hardly known him yet now he seemed like an old friend and when he came knocking at the back door they both hugged him and made him stay to tea. Nell ran out and got herrings and Lillian cut bread and put out jam and even Rachel asked how he was doing. But when they were all sat round the table, drinking their tea from the best service, the one that had gold rims and little blue forget-me-nots, Frank found himself unexpectedly tongue-tied. He had thought there were a lot of things about the war he wanted to tell them but was surprised to discover that the neat triangles of bread and jam and the prettiness of the little blue forget-me-nots somehow precluded him from talking about trench foot and rats, let alone the many different ways of dying he had witnessed. The smell of death clearly had no place in the parlour of Lowther Street, with the snowy cloth on the table and the glass-bead fringed lamp and the two sisters who had such soft, lovely hair that Frank ached to bury his face in it. He was thinking all these things while chewing his bread and casting around desperately for conversation, until with a nervous gulp from the gold and forget-me-nots he said, 'That's a grand cup, you should taste the tea we get,' and told them about the chlorinated water in the trenches. When he saw the look of horror on their faces he felt ashamed that he'd ever wanted to talk about death.

They, in turn, told him about Billy Monroe and he tut-tutted² in the right places although secretly he wished he had a mother who could somehow - anyhow - prevent him having to return to the Front because Frank knew he was going to die if he went back to the war. He listened politely while they told him about all the things they were doing - they showed him their knitting - they'd stopped knitting for the Belgians and now they were knitting socks for soldiers, and Nell told him about her new job, making uniforms, where she'd just been made a forewoman because of her experience with hats, and Lillian was working as a conductress on the trams and Frank raised both eyebrows and said, 'Never!' because he couldn't imagine a woman conductress and Lillian giggled. The two sisters were so full of life that in the end the war was left more or less unspoken of, except, of course, to say that Jack was well and sent his love and that he hadn't seen Albert at all but he was a lot safer behind the big guns in the artillery than he would be in the trenches.

And Rachel, the toad in the corner, unexpectedly spoke up and said, 'It must be dreadful in those trenches,' and Frank shrugged and smiled and said, 'Oh it's not too bad really, Mrs Barker,' and took another drink from his forget-me-not cup.

Kate Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 1995.

¹ 'the second battle of Ypres: 1915

² he tut-tutted: he made a sound to show his disapproval

NOTE AUX CANDIDATS

Les candidats traiteront le sujet sur la copie qui leur sera fournie et veilleront à :

- respecter l'ordre des questions et reporter la numérotation sur la copie (numéro et lettre repère, le cas échéant; ex.: 8b).
 - faire précéder les citations de la mention de la ligne.
- composer des phrases complètes à chaque fois qu'il leur est demandé de rédiger la réponse.
- respecter le nombre de mots indiqué qui constitue une exigence minimale. En l'absence d'indication, les candidats répondront brièvement à la question posée.

I - COMPRÉHENSION - EXPRESSION

1. What is the historical event referred to?
2. What do the following male characters have in common: Albert, Jack, Frank and Bill?
- 3.

Focus on Bill.

- a) Who did he visit when he "*came home on leave*" (1.1) and what happened during this visit? (30 words)
 - b) One character witnessed this episode. What did he or she think about it? (20-30 words)
 - c) What about the other neighbours' attitude towards this? (20 words)
4. Put the following events in chronological order:
- a) (1.4): "... *Bill Monroe hadn't gone back when he should have done...*"
 - b) (1.22): "... *they made him stay to tea.*"
 - c) (1.3): "... *Albert had joined up before any of them.*"
 - d) (1.19): "*Frank came home after the second battle of Ypres...*"
 - e) (1.5): "*His mother barred the front door...*"
 - f) (1.1): "*The first person they knew that came home on leave was Bill Monroe...*"
- 5.

Focus on Frank.

- a) Why has he come back? (20 words)
- b) Where and with whom does he spend one of his days' leave? Give full names whenever possible.
- c) How is he considered by these characters? Illustrate your answer with two quotes from the text. (30-40 words)

6. Explain how the war has changed the lives of the female characters. Give examples from the text to illustrate your answer. (60 words)
7. What does Frank really think about what happened to Bill? (30 words)
8. Explain why "... Frank found himself unexpectedly tongue-tied." (1.25)? (50 words)
9. Choose one of the following subjects. (250 words)
 - a) Frank returns to the trenches and meets a friend. Frank explains that he almost didn't come back. Write their conversation.
 - b) Some things are best left unsaid. How far do you agree?

II - TRADUCTION

Translate from the beginning of line 1 to line 10 "... Nell thought it was Percy".