



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Class: X

QUESTION BANK – A SHADY PLOT (2025-26)

SUMMARY

The writer Mr. Hallock, was told by his employer, Mr. Jenkins to write a ghost story. He told him to write a very horrifying story with supernatural elements because the public liked these kinds of stories. The writer agreed to write for him as no one else printed his stuff. He was not a writer of this genre. Whenever he decided to write a ghost story, surprisingly the plot had appeared from nowhere. When he sat down to write the story, no idea occurred to him. In fact, his mind wandered in all other directions like his wife's shopping trips and such other material things.

The writer spoke to himself, "This writing business is delightful, isn't it?" To his surprise, a voice at the other end of the room said, "Yes, it is." The writer was surprised to see a figure taking shape gradually. It was a woman, tall and angular, with enormous fishy eyes, wearing spectacles. She came and stood before the writer. He now wished to know why she had come. The writer was surprised at the answer she gave. She told him that he only called her to help him write the story.

Moreover, she told him that all the ghosts were going on a strike so he should stop bothering her for another plot. She elaborated that all the other stories that had been a hit had come from her only. She explained that she had been a writer in her other birth but now she had collected all other ghosts like her and set up a "Writers Inspiration Bureau."

"Now they extended help to those writers who had no ideas to write. The writer disagreed with the ghost's view for he had never seen her before so how could she have inspired him. She explained that she sat on his shoulder and gave him ideas to write. But now they all were fed up of being pulled out of beds at all times and had decided to go on a strike. The ghost wanted the writer to call all his friends and stop using the Ouija board.

The conversation of the writer and the ghost is interrupted by the arrival of his wife who is surprised to see her husband sitting in the dark and talking loudly to himself. However, she was going gaga over a recent purchase she had made. On the writer's query, she revealed that she had bought a Ouija board to help the writer to write the stories. She wanted to make story writing an easy task for him. The writer tried his best to dissuade his wife from keeping that board but she refused to listen.

Next day, he set out for his job. He worked as an accountant in a company. He could not leave his job and take to full time story writing due to financial problems. On reaching back from work, he was told by his cook to get ready and go downstairs as his wife had invited some guests. When he came down eventually, he was surprised to see their parlor full of women, belonging to his wife's book club.

They were sitting in two's and between them was kept a Ouija board. His wife wanted him to be a partner to Miss. Hinkle, who was left alone. Miss Hinkle took the writer's fingers and started

moving them on the board. Surprisingly the words spelt on the board were 'TRAITOR. 'Miss. Hinkle wanted the board to clarify as to who was a traitor. The Ouija board spelled out that it was Mr. Hallock. On enquiring about the identity of the speaker, it revealed it was someone with the name Helen. The fact created a fuss and everybody, including the writer's wife, gathered around them. All the Ouija boards signaled towards the writer. He could not answer and fled the scene and went to sleep.

Next morning, when he woke up, he found a slip of paper with a message written on it from his wife that she was leaving him for good and that her lawyer would communicate with him. The writer was shocked and surprised. Meanwhile that ghost Helen, reappeared and told the writer that she had been sent to ensure that his wife was going to get rid of that Ouija board. The writer was very angry and retorted that the ghost had made the writer lose his wife, his home and happiness.

The writer's wife Lavinia enters and tells him that she was moving out. The writer was trying to shield and cover Helen when Lavinia told him that he was behaving strangely. Just then the cook barged in and announced that she cannot work at a place where there were Ouija boards and activities relating to curses and charms. Lavinia was in no mood to be pacified and wanted to see who was hiding behind her husband. Helen did not disappear this time and boldly announced that she, indeed, was Helen. Lavinia felt very miserable to create such a ruckus and accuse her husband of infidelity. The writer felt inspired and realized that he had indeed hit upon an excellent plot for a ghost story.

Reference to Context

1. **"Get all your friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board, and then we'll start helping you to write."**
 - (a) Identify the speaker of the above lines.
Helen, the ghost
 - (b) To whom has this request been made?
John Hallock
 - (c) Why has the speaker made this request?
The ghost wanted to stop the usage of Ouija board as it was inconvenient or a nuisance for them and left them with no time for themselves.
 - (d) How has the speaker been 'helping you to write' ?
Helen was putting ideas into Hallock's mind to help him write ghost stories.
2. **"But what have I got to do with this? She gave me a pitying look and rose. "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."**
 - (a) Who is 'she' in the above passage?
(i) Helen (ii) Lavinia (iii) Gladolia (iv) Mrs William Augustus
 - (b) 'You are to exert your influence for :
 - (i) co-operating with her
 - (ii) providing all help to her
 - (iii) helping the ghosts to fight their problem
 - (iv) stopping the use of Ouija board**
 - (c) Before disintegrating the narrator was told:
(i) not to forget the strike
(ii) to help them

- (iii) to stop talking to a ghost
(iv) to exert his influence to help them
3. "You know I bought the loveliest thing this afternoon. Everybody's wild over them."
(a) Who is the speaker?
(i) Helen (ii) Gladolia (iii) Jenkins **(iv) Lavinia Hallock**
(b) What did she / he buy?
(i) jewellery **(ii) Ouija board** (iii) fancy items (iv) clothes
(c) What characteristics of the speaker is revealed here?
(i) jealous (ii) miser (iii) **spendthrift** (iv) loves novelty and thrills
4. **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.**
The author was coming back _____
(i) from office
(ii) from an official meet
(iii) from a party
(iv) after a meeting with Jenkins
(b) What was the author waiting to happen?
(i) for an encounter with God
(ii) for the result of his magic mantra
(iii) for the result of invocation to ghosts
(iv) for an idea of a plot to write a ghost story
(c) Where did the author's mind began to wander?
(i) to think about his new job
(ii) to think about his last story
(iii) about the new house he had bought
(iv) on the material things like his wife's shopping and how he was going to cure her alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along.
5. **She sighed, and rubbed the end of her long eagle nose with a reminiscent 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."**
(a) Who is 'she'?
(i) Lavinia **(ii) Helen** (iii) Gladiola (iv) None of the above
(b) The ghost in her other life had been a / an:
(i) educated woman (ii) uneducated woman **(iii) writer** (iv) ghost story writer
(c) 'something should be done' is:
(i) to be on strike
(ii) to do something for the story writer
(iii) to lessen the miseries of past life
(iv) to form a union
6. **Lavinia looked at that apparition, that owl-eyed phantom, in pearl skirt and stiff shirt waist, with hair skewed back and no powder on her nose. I threw a protective husbandly arm about her to catch her when she should faint. But she didn't swoon. A broad, satisfied smile spread over her face.**
(1) '..... and 'no powder on her nose' indicates that the Ghost was
(a) **a real ghost**
(b) a woman in real posing as a ghost

- (c) Helen, a real woman
- (d) in need of powder on her face
- (2) The narrator threw a protecting husbandly arm about Lavinia hoping that**
 - (i) she would faint
 - (ii) she would be afraid of a ghost
 - (iii) she would fall
 - (iv) she would fear on seeing a ghost and would faint.**
- (3) 'A broad satisfied smile spread' on Lavinia's face shows that she was**
 - (i) very bold
 - (ii) courageous
 - (iii) powerful and courageous
 - (iv) courageous, bold and not afraid of the ghost**

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

- (1) The lady referred to in the lines above is
 - (a) Lavinia (b) Gladolia (c) **Helen** (d) Miss Hinkle
- (2) What work had she done all night that had made her too tired to materialize?
 - (a) talking through the Ouija board** (b) helping the author with a plot. (c) going on a strike (d) organizing the Writer's Inspiration Bureau.
- (3) Why had the lady materialized inspite of being too tired?
 - (a) to talk to John Hallock.
 - (b) to ask John when his wife was going to get rid of the Ouija Board**
 - (c) to tell John Hallock to stop writing about ghosts.

8. (d) to disrupt John Hallock's family.

9. "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.

- (a) By 'writing business' the narrator means _____
 - (i) writing stories for magazines.
 - (ii) writing letters to friends.
 - (iii) writing adventure novels.
 - (iv) writing ghost stories.**
- (b) The narrator uses the word ' _____ ' sarcastically.
 - (i) writing (ii) business **(iii) delightful** (iv) stage
- (c) The word 'imbecility' here means _____
 - (i) inability **(ii) stupidity**
 - (iii) availability (iv) creativity

10. "I ain't stayin' round no place „long wid dem Ouija board contraptions. I'se skeered of hoodoos. I's done gone, I is."

- (a) Who is the speaker?
 - (i) Lavinia **(ii) Gladiola** (iii) Hallock (iv) The narrator
- (b) What is the speaker scared of?
 - (i) spirits communicating through Ouija boards**
 - (ii) cooking for so many guests
 - (iii) ghosts living in the attic
 - (iv) none of the above
- (c) What is hoodoo?

- (i) a game of spirits
- (ii) placing curses and charms to bring bad luck**
- (iii) a method of calling spirits of those long since dead
- (iv) none of the above

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. How does the author of 'A Shady Plot' earn his living?

Hallock enjoyed great popularity as a ghost story author. He has the ability to write a new narrative whenever his publisher requests one. Being a writer, though, was insufficient. He was married to a stubborn and capricious woman who loved to spend money on the latest trends. Hallock was forced to work as a bookkeeper at a timber firm in order to satisfy her demands.

2. Comment on Elsie Brown's writing style in the story, A Shady Plot.

Elsie Brown's writing style in 'A Shady Plot' is characterized by its light and humorous tone. The story is written in the first-person point of view of the protagonist, John Hallock. Brown's writing is concise and clear, with a good use of dialogue and description to create vivid scenes and characters. She uses irony and satire to poke fun at the publishing industry and its practices. Overall, her writing style effectively conveys the story's humour and underlying message, making it an enjoyable and thought-provoking read.

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

Helen, the ghost had been a writer in her other life. She remembers those days as the most terrible ones, where they used to work in very tough conditions. Her life was hell as she did not have ideas for stories. Now when she became a ghost, she planned to do something for all those who have suffered on the same grounds. So, along with similar ghosts she formed a bureau to help writers without ideas but with an impressionable mind willing to accept ideas. The bureau would assign a ghost to such a writer so that he/she could write good ghost stories. They would pass on their ideas to the writers secretly.

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

Helen, the ghost, had asked the narrator to influence his friends to stop using the Ouija board. It was only on this condition that Helen promised to help the narrator to write ghost stories. If Helen sees him now trying to communicate ghosts through Ouija board, he fears how and what she would do to him. That is why the narrator was reluctant to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board party.

5. What kind of woman is Lavinia?

Lavinia is married to John. She is a bossy individual. She is a compulsive spendthrift who frequently spends a lot of money on the newest trends. Ouija boards are her most recent trend. She purchases one and invites friends over for a Ouija party. Hallock characterises his wife as a very delicate young woman. Lavinia is highly impressionable, unpredictable, and gullible. She tends to suspect her spouse of having an extramarital connection since she is so possessive of him.

6. 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?

Helen, the ghost had been helping the narrator as he did not have ideas to write ghost stories and she could understand his misery as a writer. She along with all the members of the bureau were going on a strike as a mark of protest against the needless use of the Ouija board by the people. She and her other co-ghosts had to work in very tough conditions. In the recent years they had even been called off from their beds. They called the ghosts often and asked many questions. This left the ghosts with no time for haunting people for fun. She wanted the narrator to stop his friends and acquaintances from using the Ouija board if he wanted their help in writing ghost stories.

7. **Why was John Hallock eager to burn the Ouija Board?**

As the Ouija Board was the source of all his problems, John Hallock wishes to burn it. Helen the ghost had visited him to assist in removing it, and as a result, his wife began to suspect him of having an affair. To make matters worse, the ladies who utilised the Ouija Board during the party made Lavinia distrust John, making the situation even worse for John and his marriage. In addition, their househelp had declared her resignation because she was afraid of the board.

8. **Why is Helen, the ghost, upset with people using Ouija Boards?**

The ghost was upset with people using Ouija Boards as the people used to get full control of the ghost and could call upon them anytime. The ghosts were obliged to attend to them and answer their stupid questions. People used to trouble and bother ghosts using Ouija boards by calling them at odd times.

9. **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?**

John does not want to lose his wife's faith in him, and neither he wants his wife to get scared by seeing a ghost, because like all sensitive women, Lavinia was subject to hysterics. This is the reason why he wants the ghost to disappear before his wife appears on the scene. His wife is like any other possessive and jealous women who would never like to see her man with any other woman.

10. **Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do? Why does John wish he were dead?**

John's wife is angry because she, like other women, believed what the spirit said through the Ouija board, about her husband. A woman even reported that Helen has called John a traitor. Lavinia thought that her husband was cheating on her. She decides to go to her grandmother's home and get separated from John. John wished he was dead because the misunderstanding created due to the female ghost had almost ruined his life. His married life was about to end and it would destroy his home and happiness.

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

John was trying to hide the ghost from Lavinia because he thought that his wife would become hysterical if she saw the ghost Helen. However, when the encounter happened, Lavinia felt relaxed on realizing that Helen was not a human but a ghost. She confidently spoke to the ghost and was not at all scared of it rather she had a broad, satisfied smile over

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her face. She cancelled her plan of leaving the marital home. She even discontinued the use of Ouija boards and directed the cook, Gladolia to burn it. so, his apprehensions turned out to be unfounded.

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

The ghost undermines the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories by telling him that she would help him to write ghost stories only if he Stops his friends and acquaintances from using the Ouija board.

13. Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence form the story.

The narrator likes to write ghost stories but not every time. He himself says that he could not contradict Jenkins because his magazine had been the only one to print his stuff. Thus we can say that he has no choice but to write ghost stories.

14. Helen calls the people using Ouija boards 'Fanatics'. Why?

According to Helen, all those people who used the Ouija boards were fanatics because they were indulged in this communication with and through the spirit world to obtain answers to questions rather frequently. This gave no relief to the spirits and they were kept occupied. They were to sit at the desk and answer questions even at odd hours and had no time for rest or sleep.

15. At one-point Hallock calls Helen that horrible scarecrow. Why?

Helen appeared to be a horrible scarecrow to Hallock because of her ugly appearance. She was long and angular with enormous fishy eyes. She wore bone-rimmed spectacles. She had a long eagle-nose which made her look like a scarecrow. Hallock did not like to even think that Helen had touched him when she told him that she had leaned on his shoulder.

16. What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?

Jenkins wants the narrator to write ghost stories. He wants him to write stories on supernatural elements because the public likes horror. He offers him to write because he thinks he is good at it and his ghosts are very lively.

17. Why did Lavinia buy a Ouija board?

Lavinia was a compulsive shopper. She was more of a shopaholic. she bought the Ouija board because it was at a bargain price. She justified her act by connecting it to her husband's interest and said that the board would help him write stories and historical novels. He would not have to consult books and would straight away talk to the spirits to add colour to the stories. She found it to be thrilling.

18. Why did Hallock looked "so funny" to Lavinia when she entered his room just after his first meeting with Helen had ended?

Hallock was waving his arms in desperation when Lavinia entered the room. The dark room and the funny expression on his face just like that of an idiotic grin left Lavinia rather surprised.

19. What does Ouija board in a Shady plot symbolize?

Connection between the physical and metaphysical world/Curiosity and fascination --- of the unknown/Desire/medium to communicate with spirits/Probable consequences of meddling with forces beyond human/understanding---- leads to trouble/confusion/disruption/ chaos in John's life. (value points)

20. How does Helen's appearance in the party make Lavinia get rid of her superstitious belief in Ouija boards?

Helen was quite superstitious and she bought a Ouija Board from the sale and organised a Ouija board party. The author was also forced to participate in the party. All the boards in the party screamed the author's name and called him a traitor. Everyone in the party believed that the narrator was having an affair with a woman called Helen. Lavinia was very angry and she made up her mind to leave the author. But when Lavinia entered the author's room and saw Helen, the ghost, she forgave her husband. She then told the ghost; she forgave her husband and told her maid to burn the Ouija Boards in the kitchen fire.

21. Why did the ghost come to meet John and what did she announce?

When John was facing problems in writing a ghost story, Helen was sent to him by 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau' to help him. But she explained the problems of the ghosts and said that the ghosts were fed up with the excessive use of the Ouija boards by the people. They were going on strike and they would not help anyone in writing ghost stories. So, she requested John to persuade the people to stop the use of Ouija boards. She warned further that the ghosts would go on strike if the use of the Ouija boards continued.

22. Why was John not worried when Jenkins asked him for a ghost story?

John had been writing ghost stories for several years. It was an easy piece of work for him. He impressed Jenkins first time by writing a ghost story. Since then whenever Jenkins assigned John the task of writing a ghost story, ideas for writing the same would come to him without making much effort. Like previous occasions he was sure that he would have no difficulty in writing a ghost story.

23. What problems did Helen, the ghost, cause in John Hallock's life?

OR

How did the 'Ouija board party' prove disastrous for John Hallock?

Helen came to John to get rid of her own problems. So, she showed her eagerness to help John in writing a ghost story. In return, she wanted John's help. John had to persuade the people to stop the use of Ouija boards. So, John and Helen promised to help each other. But John's wife arranged a Ouija board party in her house. It was the violation of the promise made by John. So, when the party was going on Helen appeared and called John a traitor. It was wrongly interpreted by everyone and John felt humiliated as everybody blamed that he had fallen in love with Helen. His wife warned John that she was going to leave his house and divorce him very soon. The maid servant was also going to leave his house. John was already in extreme stress as the publisher was putting pressure on him to write the ghost story and John was unable to have any idea for writing the same. So, we can say that Helen was the root cause of the various problems being faced by John Hallock.