

GCSE English Language AQA Brothers Paper 1

This extract is an entire short story about two brothers who have had a difficult childhood and have met up again following years of separation, Ciaran is the older brother, and Niall is the younger brother.

Lough, trees, a solitary cloud: the two brothers traipsed down the slope and clambered into the boat in an unsettling silence. Despite their close blood relationship, there was nothing physically to suggest that the two were related at all. Ciaran, the older of the two, had a round bloated stomach that caused his shirts to stretch in an unsightly way across his middle. Pink flesh and black curly hair peeking out between the gaping fabric. Ale and pub food and takeaways and an addiction to tobacco, had been combined with laziness, and an aversion to exercise- these were the things that caused Ciaran's paunchy face and rotund middle.

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Niall cautiously stepped into the boat. He was his brother's opposite: small, dark, careful. His face was marked with freckles, and they gave him a misleading look of youthfulness. He had pale blue eyes that always seemed to be wet with tears, and when he tried to look someone directly, his head ducked to the side with uncertainty. His brown hair had never greyed, nor thinned, and instead had continued to sprout in thick, soft, unruly curls all over his head. When nervous, his hands would run through his curls, rather boyishly, as if he were a shy kid on the first day of school. Sat in the boat, his leg jiggled up and down, and his hands taptaptapped the wooden sides. When Niall spoke, it came out as a hoarse whisper, as if his voice had become lost somewhere between the vocal chords and the mouth. He looked at the stones at the bottom of the lough shimmer in the sunlight like coins at the bottom of the wishing well. 'I wish...' he thought, 'I wish...'

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The lough rippled as the boat disrupted the water, and ribbons of waves petalled out as the two brothers guided their way into the centre of the lough. Niall looked out at the shadows falling from the fir trees, and guessed it was about midday. The brilliant blue sky had not been blighted by clouds all day...and now he could spot a dark cluster making their way towards them. 'Ah well,' he thought. 'A few hours fishing will come first.'

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Ciaran set up his rod, and load the bait onto his hook, and Niall watched him. The grubs wriggled and squirmed as the metal plunged into their centres, and in that moment, Niall felt like the worm- trapped and pathetic; at the mercy of someone bigger, stronger, harder. Fire waved up inside, and then washed away again. He went to speak, to ask Ciaran what he'd been doing with himself all these years, but the words vanished on his tongue...still the silence hung between them.

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"Are yis gonna have a go or wha'?" he spat, opening a can of lager. And Niall, stirred from his thoughts grunted in reply, and began setting up his own rod. The silence had now been broken, so Ciaran rambled on about how good the fishing was here, and how his man down in Cork had told him this was the place to go to to catch trout- and how much better it was than the limestone lakes in the south. Mayflies buzzed overhead, and Ciaran swatted them away irritably.

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"Ah come on now!" Ciaran cried, delighted with himself. He lent forward and got to his feet, pulling and yanking the line, already feeling for the net to scoop the trout up. Silver flashed and danced out of the water, and Niall sat back as the trout was fished out in the net. The fish feebly twisted and jumped about at the bottom of the boat; its glittering scales half hidden by the tangled string of the net. Ciaran's lip curled into an arrogant triumphant grin.

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"Didn't I tell yis!" he cried. And then said it again, and picked up the now pathetically flapping body. From his boot, he took a small, black, Japanese style stiletto blade. "Did ya know this is the way to kill 'em, Niall? Did ya?" and with a delighted flourish he rammed the blade into the fish, and gave an expert twist of the handle, severing the creature's spinal cord: the fish ceased all movements. Ciaran wiped the blade on his jeans, and then spun it round his fingers. Without missing a beat, he begun another monologue about Japanese spear fishermen.

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Dropping his line into the water, Niall ran his tongue over his teeth, and bit back the questions he wanted to ask: not about the fishing, but about where Ciaran had been for the last eighteen years. The last time Niall had seen Ciaran was when Niall himself was in the dock, about to go down after the judge had read out his miserable sentence. Niall had looked over to the gallery, and seen his brother's haunched shoulders disappearing through the doorway...and until his car had pulled up outside his house last week, Niall had assumed he had either left the country, or died.

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After he had been led down into the cells, Niall had sat on his bunk and wept; he'd entered guilty pleas to hit-and-run, and driving without insurance or a license and had . The Gardai had pulled him over after spotting him driving the wrong way down a dual carriage way. Ciaran had been in the backseat shaking with laughter; just like he always did when he made Niall take him joyriding. It was Ciaran who had taught him how to hotwire cars, and it had been Ciaran who had made him steal the cars to use as getaways after he and his mates had been out on the pinch. It was Ciaran's big mastermind plan, and Niall was always going to get a cut of the money to the next time...the next time...definitely the next time...But where was Ciaran when Niall was arrested? Gone. Legged it.

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Ciaran swigged the last of the can and opened his next one. His eyes were rolling; he'd been drinking before he'd picked them up. His monologue had moved on from fishing to Niall now: how great Niall was doing, and how Niall owed him a huge favour for all he'd done. Rage seemed to flood

Niall's body, and he considered his anger as if he were a doctor observing a body that didn't belong to him: the palms of his hands tingled, and the taste of metal flooded his mouth. He noticed that his breathing was laboured and shallowed, and he begun to wonder if he was having a heart attack.

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Staggering to his feet, Ciaran reached for another can and slipped on the blood mixed with the water in the hull of the boat. They lurched to one side from the sudden movement. The older brother's arms flapped in the air, desperately trying to regain balance- and then he tipped over the edge and splashed into the freezing water.

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Niall didn't move. Ciaran went down like a stone, and then bobbed back up- his head a little cork of indignity, arms splashing and flaying. The clouds had reached their crescheno overhead- the sky darkened and rain spattered, before a clap of thunder and the downpour started.

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"Help me, ya gobshi-" his voice gurgled as water slurped down his throat. The lough took him prisoner: thick jeans and a heavy jumper sodden and dragging him down.

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Niall pulled the anchor up, and took the oars, dipping them into the water and rowed calmly back to shore.

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Lough: Irish word for loch or lake
Gardai: the Irish police