

GCSE English Language

AQA Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing List 42b

This extract is from the middle of a novel set in the future, where babies can be screened for deformities, and genetic illnesses removed during gestation (in the womb) this part of the story, Ania is working in a laboratory entering the code that the computer screens and removes from the babies' DNA.

"All Section 8 lab technicians are to report to their supervisor: there is a new update. Repeat, there is a new update. Collect update 42b immediately. All data entry using list 42a must cease- there is a new update."

As if in synchronisation, rows of technicians scraped their chairs back, and slid their visors up. Ania logged out of her system, and followed the chain of technicians out of the data entry room, and down the corridor to the supervisor chamber. White coats whipped around their knees as their pace increased: no one wanted to look as if they were hanging back. Small cameras perched up in the corners of the ceiling whirred as they tracked their movement around the building. Someone, somewhere, sat behind a dozen screens, tracking each technicians movement, as if they were a conductor in front of their orchestra, keeping time with their baton.

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Ania marched into her chamber, and settled herself into the information seat. She wore a mask of absolute inscrutability- years of working at the laboratory had taught her to remove emotion from her face. Some of the things she had been asked to do had been unpalatable, and when she had been notified of her move into neonatal, and antenatal, she felt happy that she had clearly proven to the uploaders that she was competent, she was reliable, she was trustworthy. They were entrusting her with some of their most advanced work. Tears had no place in a laboratory. They were advancing the human race: that achievement outweighed the cost. Glossy blonde hair and dark green eyes that flickered with ambition, Ania was a model employee. They liked their technicians to be photogenic, it helped when showing foreign ministers round to promote their work. It was as if they were saying: 'Here, look at our beautiful employees; if you engineer your unborn children, you too can have beautiful citizens, just like this.'

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The lights dimmed, and Ania blinked as her pupils dilated to adjust to the low light- and then in front of her, the blue screen appeared, and the presentation began. Asia's brain switched off for the first part- nothing but recaps of the last list, and more promotion of the benefits of the work by the laboratory. Her mind wandered...what was her mother doing now? Where was she?

Ania was the last person to see her mother. It was the day after Ania was promoted to laboratory technician: Katarina had kissed Ania goodbye, and had promised her a special celebration meal. When Ania returned home all of her mother's things had vanished. She called her relatives, her relatives called her friends, her friends called the police, and then the police called Ania. Ania repeated herself so many times that she became dizzy with the truth. No, her mother had not told her she was going away. No, she and her mother did not argue. No, she did not think her mother had simply decided to go back home to Slov Republic. No, No, No.

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A month passed, and Ania changed the lease over to her own name, and quietly got on with her life. A letter arrived from the police telling her that her mother had been found in the capital of Slov, and that she didn't want to contact her. Ania threw it in the bin, and made a cup of blue tea. The presentation moved onto the new list; Ania was alert, and sat up, leaning forward with concentration. The film showed an empty classroom, and a portentous man wandered into view; obligatory clipboard in one hand, and a lab coat open to show an expensive suit. The scientist began to outline the main changes to the list. As he spoke, the presentation was intercut with images of people suffering the genetic mutations that they were now able to eliminate. Ania resisted the urge to roll her eyes. 'All the dramatics to make us comply' she thought, 'just give me the list and I'll be able to get back to work.'

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"New to this update is the inclusion of the more psychological genetic mutations," purred the voice. Ania's face kept absolutely still, and there was the almost imperceptible sound of the video camera zooming in. Any kind of movement, even a slight reaction could result in Ania being pulled off her system and face retraining to ensure compliance. The presentation continued.

"The brain is divided into several portions..." droned the voice, as more evocative images flashed before her. Tangled in between the scientific jargon, and the technical instruction, Ania heard a combination of words that made her breath catch in her throat. She was sat in front of a doctor, nine years old, and having her condition explained to her. She was eleven years old, taking tablets and reading the directions on the box. She was fifteen years old, and entering in the details of her medical history for her college application. She was twenty one years old, and hacking into the government data system and deleting her medical records from her personnel file.

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She blinked, and concentrated on keeping her breathing steady. The presentation buzzed to a finish, and Ania exited the room, joining the back of the queue of techs returning to their systems. No one spoke, but smiles were exchanged; always conscious of the constant presence above, no one would go further than a smile.

Logging back in, Ania swiped down her visor and begun her data entry. Update 42a was now redundant, and she first deleted that from her system. She brought up the calculator, and started her work on the equations needed for 42b; already a seed of a plan had implanted in her brain, germinating with her growing rage.

"42a is now deleted from every system, work can now begin on calculating and inputting the data for 42b. Await notification for the mutations you must input."

Above her head a clock ticked. Ania waited for her notification, praying that she would receive the section containing that dreaded combination of words.