

How does the writer use details of setting to suggest ideas in this literary extract?

A LITTLE BEFORE two o'clock, I climb from my backyard over the cinder-block wall into the passage. Actually, it's not the corridor you'd expect a passage to be; that's only what we call it for lack of a better name. Strictly speaking, it isn't a corridor at all. A corridor has an entrance and an exit, forming a route from one place to another.

But this passage has neither entrance nor exit, and leads smack into a cinder-block wall at one end and a chain link fence at the other. It's not even an alleyway. For starters, an alley has to at least have an entrance. The neighbors all call it "the passage" for convenience sake.

The passage meanders between everyone's backyards for about six hundred feet. Three-foot-something in width for the most part, but what with all the junk lying around and the occasional hedge cropping in, there are places you can barely squeeze through sideways.

From what I've heard—this is from a kindly uncle of mine who rents us our house ridiculously cheap—the passage used to have an entrance and an exit, offering a shortcut across the block, street-to-street. But then, with the postwar boom years, new homes were built in any available space, hemming in the common ground to a narrow path. Which ushered in the none-too-inviting prospect of having strangers walking through backyards, practically under the eaves, so the residents surreptitiously covered the entrance. At first an innocent little bush barely disguised the opening, but eventually one resident ex-

panded his yard and extended his cinder-block wall to completely seal it over. While the corresponding other aperture was screened off with a chain link fence to keep the dogs out. It hadn't been the residents who made use of the passage to begin with, so no one complained about its being closed at both ends. And anyway, closing it wouldn't hurt as a crime-prevention measure. Thus, the path went neglected and untrafficked, like some abandoned canal, merely serving as a kind of buffer zone between the houses, the ground overgrown with weeds, sticky spiderwebs strung everywhere a bug could possibly alight.

Now, why should my wife frequent such a place? It was beyond me. Me, I'd only set foot in the passage one time before. And she can't even stand spiders.

Analyse the way the writer presents character and situation in this extract:

I MET HER NEAR the end of September. It had been raining that day from morning to night—the kind of soft, monotonous, misty rain that often falls at that time of year, washing away bit by bit the memories of summer burned into the earth. Coursing down the gutters, all those memories flowed into the sewers and rivers, to be carried to the deep, dark ocean.

We noticed each other at the party my company threw to launch its new advertising campaign. I work for the PR section of a major manufacturer of electrical appliances, and at the time I was in charge of publicity for a coordinated line of kitchen equipment, which was scheduled to go on the market in time for the autumn-wedding and winter-bonus seasons. My job was to negotiate with several women's magazines for tie-in articles—not the kind of work that takes a great deal of intelligence, but I had to see to it that the articles they wrote didn't smack of advertising. When magazines gave us publicity, we rewarded them by placing ads in their pages. They scratched our backs, we scratched theirs.

As an editor of a magazine for young housewives, she had come to the party for material for one of these "articles." I happened to be in charge of showing her around, pointing out the features of the colorful refrigerators and coffeemakers and microwave ovens and juicers that a famous Italian designer had done for us.

"The most important point is unity," I explained. "Even the most beautifully designed item dies if it is out of balance with its surroundings. Unity of design, unity of color, unity of function: This is what today's *kit-chin* needs above all else. Research tells us that a housewife spends the largest part of her day in the *kit-chin*. The *kit-chin* is her workplace, her study, her living room. Which is why she does all she can to make the *kit-chin* a pleasant place to be. It has nothing to do with size. Whether it's large or small, one fundamental principle governs every successful *kit-chin*, and that principle is unity. This is the concept underlying the design of our new series. Look at this cooktop, for example. . . ."

She nodded and scribbled things in a small notebook, but it was obvious that she had little interest in the material, nor did I have any personal stake in our new cooktop. Both of us were doing our jobs.



Comment on aspects of the narrator's voice that reveal certain ideas in this passage:

NOW MY INABILITY to sleep ceased to frighten me. What was there to be afraid of? Think of the advantages! Now the hours from ten at night to six in the morning belonged to me alone. Until now, a third of every day had been used up by sleep.

5 But no more. No more. Now it was mine, just mine, nobody else's, all mine. I could use this time in any way I liked. No one would get in my way. No one would make demands on me. Yes, that was it. I had expanded my life. I had increased it by a third.

10 You are probably going to tell me that this is biologically abnormal. And you may be right. And maybe someday in the future I'll have to pay back the debt I'm building up by continuing to do this biologically abnormal thing. Maybe life will try to collect on the expanded part—this "advance" it is paying me now. This is a groundless hypothesis, but there is no ground for

15 negating it, and it feels right to me somehow. Which means that in the end, the balance sheet of borrowed time will even out.

Honestly, though, I didn't give a damn, even if I had to die young. The best thing to do with a hypothesis is to let it run any course it pleases. Now, at least, I was expanding my life, and it

20 was wonderful. My hands weren't empty anymore. Here I was—alive, and I could feel it. It was real. I wasn't being consumed any longer. Or at least there was a part of me in existence that was not being consumed, and that was what gave me this intensely real feeling of being alive. A life without that feeling

25 might go on forever, but it would have no meaning at all. I saw that with absolute clarity now.

After checking to see that my husband was asleep, I would go sit on the living-room sofa, drink brandy by myself, and open my book. I read *Anna Karenina* three times. Each time, I

30 made new discoveries. This enormous novel was full of revelations and riddles. Like a Chinese box, the world of the novel contained smaller worlds, and inside those were yet smaller worlds. Together, these worlds made up a single universe, and the universe waited there in the book to be discovered by the

35 reader. The old me had been able to understand only the tiniest fragment of it, but the gaze of this new me could penetrate to the core with perfect understanding. I knew exactly what the great Tolstoy wanted to say, what he wanted the reader to get from his book; I could see how his message had organically

40 crystallized as a novel, and what in that novel had surpassed the author himself.

No matter how hard I concentrated, I never tired. After reading *Anna Karenina* as many times as I could, I read Dostoyevski. I could read book after book with utter concentration

45 and never tire. I could understand the most difficult passages without effort. And I responded with deep emotion.

I felt that I had always been meant to be like this. By abandoning sleep I had expanded myself. The power to concentrate was the most important thing. Living without this power would

50 be like opening one's eyes without seeing anything.