

Comprehension

Love from Granny

(An extract from ["Granny" by A. Horowitz](#))

If Joe had doubts about Granny, the Christmas of his twelfth year was when they became horrible certainties.

Christmas was always a special time at Thattlebee Hall: specially unpleasant, unfortunately. For this was when the whole family came together and Joe found himself Surrounded by aunts and uncles, first cousins and second cousins - none of whom he particularly liked. And it wasn't just him. None of them liked each other either and they always spent the whole day arguing and scoring points off each other. One Christmas they had actually had a fight in the course of which Aunty Nita had broken Uncle David's nose. Since then, all the relations came prepared and as they trooped into the house, the metal detector would bleep like crazy, picking up the knives, crowbars and knuckle-dusters that they had concealed in their clothes.

Joe had four cousins who were only a few years older than him but who never spoke to him. They were very fat, with ginger hair and freckles and pink legs that oozed out of tight, snort trousers, like sausages out of a sausage machine. They were terribly spoiled of course, and always very rude to Joe. This was one of the reasons he didn't like them. But the main one was that Joe realized that if his parents had their way, he would end up just like them. They were reflections of him in a nightmare, distorted mirror.

But the star of Christmas Day was Granny. She was the head of the family and always came a day early, on Christmas Eve, to spend the night in the house. Joe would watch as the house was prepared for her coming.

First the central heating would be turned up. It would be turned up so high that by eleven o'clock all the plants had died and the windows were so steamed up that the outside world had disappeared. Then her favourite chair would be moved into her favourite place with three cushions - one for her back, one for her neck and one for her legs. A silver dish of chocolates would be placed on a table, carefully selected so only the soft centres remained. And a large photograph of her in a gold frame would be taken out of the cupboard under the stairs and placed in the middle of the mantelpiece. This had been happening every year for twelve years. But this year Joe noticed other things too. And he was puzzled.

First of all, Irma and Wolfgang were both in a bad mood. At breakfast, Irma burned the toast whilst Wolfgang spent the whole morning sulking, muttering to himself in Hungarian, which is a sulky enough language at the best of times. His parents were irritable too. Mrs Warden bit her nails. Mr

Warden bit Mrs Warden. By midday they had consumed an entire bottle of whisky between them, including the glass.

Joe had seen this sort of behaviour before. It was always the same when Granny came to visit. But it was only now that he began to wonder. Were they like this *because* Granny was coming? Could it be that they didn't actually want to see her at all?

It was seven o'clock on the evening of Christmas Eve when Granny finally arrived. She had told Mr Warden that she would be coming at lunch and Wolfgang had been dutifully waiting at the door since then. When the taxi did finally draw up, the unfortunate man was so covered in snow that only his head was showing and he was too cold to announce she was there. It was a bad start.

How old is Joe? (1)

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Why is Christmas an unpleasant affair at the Thattlebee Hall? (2)

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What does the writer mean by the phrase "all the relations came prepared"? (2)

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What image of Joe's cousins does the writer create? Explain in your own words. (4)

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What must be prepared for Granny's arrival? (6)

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How do we know that Joe's family members are frustrated? (6)

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What does Joe realise watching the family this year? (2)

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Why does the writer use the phrase "unfortunate man"? (2)

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