

The further you go down the Portobello Road, the crummier it gets. It's just about OK until you reach the Electric Cinema, but after that it's downhill all the way. You come to a flyover at the bottom by which time you're in a different world. You've left the antique shops and the bustling stalls behind you. Now you're in a flat wasteland, up to your ankles in litter. It's amazing how quickly a short walk can take you from one side of London to the other.

The Hotel Splendide was the sort of place that would be hard to find unless you knew it was there – perhaps the sort of place you might choose if you didn't want to be found. It was right at the far end of the Portobello Road, halfway down a narrow cul-de-sac, nestling in the armpit of the flyover which swept round the building as if holding it in a clammy, concrete embrace. You wouldn't get much sleep at the Hotel Splendide, not with the traffic roaring past only a couple of metres from your bedroom window. For the top floor of the building, beneath the flat roof, was level with the raised highway. Roll over in bed and you risked being run over by a lorry. That is, if the bedbugs and cockroaches hadn't got you first.

- 1) How does the Portobello Road change as you walk along it?
- 2) What does the author mean by a quick walk taking you 'from one side of London to the other'?
- 3) What surrounds the Hotel Splendide?
- 4) Why is it difficult to get a good night's sleep at the hotel?
- 5) Give two reasons why the name 'Splendide' is not appropriate for the hotel.
- 6) Why do you think the Dwarf chose to stay at this hotel?
- 7) Find an example of a metaphor in this text.

The first thing I saw was a flapping curtain and a shadowy figure disappearing outside. I couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman. There was just the flash of a leg hanging over the edge of the sill and then it was gone.

It was a small room, just big enough for a bed, a table, a chest of drawers and a corpse. I closed the door behind me. Johnny Naples was lying on the bed. He wasn't dead yet but the big red splotch on his shirt told me that his time was running out about as quickly as his blood. I went over to the window and looked outside. But I was too late. Whoever had climbed out had jumped the short distance to the flyover and run for it. Maybe they'd had a car waiting for them. Anyway, they were gone.

The dwarf groaned and I looked back again. The room was probably in a mess to begin with but I guessed there had been a fight. There was a chair upturned on the floor and a lamp had been knocked over on the table. My eyes fell on a packet of book-matches. I don't know why I picked them up and put them in my pocket. I knew we didn't have a lot of time and that any clue – no matter how small – might help. Maybe it was just I didn't want to look at the dwarf. Anyway, that's what I did.

- 1) How did the killer escape the room?
- 2) Find a synonym for 'corpse'.
- 3) How does the author show that the dwarf has been shot?
- 4) How does Nick think that the killer escaped?
- 5) Why does Nick think that there has been a fight?
- 6) How does the author suggest the matches may be an important clue?
- 7) Why did Nick not want to look at the Dwarf?

At that moment there was a rattle as a key was turned in the lock and the door swung open. Herbert groaned. The man who had just come in didn't look too happy either.

"Herbert Simple," he said.

"Inspector Snape," Herbert muttered in a strangled voice.

"Chief Inspector Snape," the man growled. "No thanks to you."

The Chief Inspector was blond-haired and built like a rugby player, with those slightly squashed shoulders that come from too many scrums. His skin was the colour of raw bacon and he spoke with a northern accent. He was wearing an off-white shirt that had probably been pure white when he put it on and a tie that had slipped over his collar in its struggle to get away from his bulging neck. He was followed by a smaller, squatter version of himself with black, permed hair, an open-neck shirt and a gold medallion glittering in the forest of his chest. The assistant – if that's what he was – stood there, pounding one fist into the palm of his hand, looking at us with unfriendly, muddy-brown eyes. Well if these are the cops, I thought, hate to meet the robbers.

- 1) How does the author show that Herbert and Inspector Snape already know each other?
- 2) Why does Snape use the name 'Herbert Simple' instead of 'Tim Diamond'?
- 3) Why do you think Snape's shirt has turned from pure white to off-white?
- 4) How does the author make Snape seem like a dangerous or scary person?
- 5) What does it mean that Snape's assistant is wearing an 'open neck' shirt?
- 6) How does the author suggest that Snape's assistant is a violent man?