

Step Up Unit 1: OCR GCSE English Language Section A – Lesson 4

A Place Beyond

She ran her hand over the coarse railings, their cracked paintwork scraping abrasively against her supple fingertips. Once majestic barriers, the sands of time had worn them down to dereliction. Wandering aimlessly, Ayila's hand trailed across the arcs, curves and lumpen adornments, flowing like tributaries and leading eventually to the grandiose gate which she now stood before, her touch lingering on the rose motif at the heart of it. Noticeably smoother than any other part of the perimeter, this floral garland also retained some colour; where much of the oppressive black surface had given way to a silvery grey, the rose flushed an autumnal auburn. She wondered if its coating had been expensive gold leaf. Placing her palm upon this most ornate detail, she slowly enfolded her fingers around it, then suddenly recoiled as she felt its sharp edges prick her flesh.

For the first time on her travels, Ayila felt vulnerable. The gothic façade of the place had not given her pause for thought, so entranced was she with the idea of adventure and a quest that offered much-needed respite from the dreariness of domestic life. That momentary sensation of pain, however, served to remind this ordinary girl that she was sleepwalking into unknown territory. What was her hitherto tedious existence being swapped for?

Fortified by the realisation that there was no returning to the remote land from which she'd come, Ayila reached for the latch and gave it a decisive push. As the rickety gate swung open, the granite gatepost crumbled further, hunks of formerly proud masonry sent tumbling into a shallow grave of upturned soil. With a self-assurance that felt alien to someone who'd been raised to believe that meekness was a virtue, the bold young woman strode across the boundary, along the gravel pathway and up to the imposing front door. Taking its rusty brass knocker in hand, she repeated her purposeful action with the gate latch, banging it forcefully against the solid oak admission point. Then she waited.

"Quickfire Questions

What is happening in this extract?

What impression are you given of the setting?

What impression are you given of Ayila?

Do you think this extract is taken from the beginning, middle or end of the narrative? Explain your answer.
