

Reading Zone 13.5

Read the following passage and then answer the questions that follow. You can check your answers on page 253.

My first evening in Hollywood. It was so typical that I almost thought it had been arranged for me. It was by sheer chance, however, that I found myself rolling up to the home of a millionaire in a handsome black Packard. I had been invited to dinner by a perfect stranger. I didn't even know my host's name. Nor do I know it now.

The first thing which struck me, on being introduced all around, was that I was in the presence of wealthy people, people who were bored to death and who were all, including the octogenarians, already three sheets to the wind. The host and hostess seemed to take pleasure in acting as bartenders. It was hard to follow the conversation because everybody was talking at cross purposes. The important thing was to get an edge on before sitting down to the table. One old geezer who had recently recovered from a horrible automobile accident was having his fifth old fashioned—he was proud of the fact, proud that he could swill it like a youngster even though he was partially crippled. Every one thought he was a marvel. There wasn't an attractive woman about, except the one who had brought me to the place. The men looked like businessmen, except for one or two who looked like aged strike breakers. There was one fairly young couple, in their thirties, I should say. The husband was a typical go-getter, one of those ex-football players who go in for publicity or insurance or the stock market, some clean all-American pursuit in which you run no risk of soiling your hands. He was a graduate of some Eastern University and had the intelligence of a high-grade chimp.

That was the set-up. When every one had been properly soused dinner was announced. We seated ourselves at a long table, elegantly decorated, with three or four glasses beside each plate. The ice was abundant, of course. The service began, a dozen flunkies buzzing at your elbow like horse flies. There was a surfeit of everything: a poor man would have had sufficient with the hors-d'oeuvres alone.

As they ate, they became more discursive, more argumentative. An elderly thug in a tuxedo who had the complexion of a boiled lobster was railing against labor agitators. He had a religious train, much to my amazement, but it was more like Torquemada's than Christ's. President Roosevelt's name almost gave him an apoplectic fit. Roosevelt, Bridges, Stalin, Hitler—they were all in the same class to him. That is to say, they were anathema. He had an extraordinary appetite which served, it seemed, to stimulate his adrenal glands. By the time he had reached the meat course he was talking about hanging being too good for some people. The hostess, meanwhile, who was seated at his elbow, was carrying on one of those delightful inconsequential conversations with the person opposite her. She had left some beautiful dachshunds in Biarritz, or was it Sierra Leone, and to believe her, she was greatly worried about them. In times like these, she was saying, people forget about animals. People can be so cruel, especially in time of war. Why, in Peking the servants had run away and left her with forty trunks to pack—it was outrageous. It was so good to be back in California. God's own country, she called it. She hoped the war wouldn't spread to America. Dear me, where was one to go now? You couldn't feel safe anywhere, except in the desert perhaps.

The ex-football player was talking to someone at the far end of the table in a loud voice. It happened to be an Englishwoman and he was insulting her roundly and openly for daring to arouse sympathy for the English in this country. "Why don't you go back to England?" he shouted at the top of his voice. "What are you doing here? You're a menace. We're not fighting to hold the British Empire together. You're a menace. You ought to be expelled from the country."

The woman was trying to say that she was not English but Canadian, but she couldn't make herself heard above the din. The octogenarian, who was now sampling the champagne, was talking about the automobile accident. Nobody was paying any attention to him. Automobile accidents were too common—everyone at the table had been in a smash-up at one time or another. One doesn't make a point about such things unless one is feeble-minded.

The hostess was clapping her hands frantically—she wanted to tell us a little story about an experience she had in Africa once, on one of her safaris.

“Oh, can that!” shouted the football player. “I want to find out why this great country of ours, in the most crucial moment...”

“Shut up!” screamed the hostess. “You’re drunk.” “That makes no difference,” came his booming voice. “I want to know if we’re all hundred percent Americans—and if not why not. I suspect that we have some traitors in our midst,” and because I hadn’t been taking part in any of the conversation he gave me a fixed, drunken look which was intended to make me declare myself. All I could do was smile.

1. Who says “you couldn’t feel safe anywhere, except in the desert perhaps”?
 - (A) The author
 - (B) The narrator
 - (C) The host
 - (D) The hostess
 - (E) The football player
2. What is the narrator’s tone?
 - (A) Ironic
 - (B) Objective
 - (C) Impressed
 - (D) Spiteful
 - (E) Disapproving
3. When would be the appropriate era for this piece?
 - (A) The Spanish Inquisition
 - (B) World War II
 - (C) Pre-World War II
 - (D) Post-World War II
 - (E) Vietnam

4. What was a subject of discussion prior to dinner?
- (A) America's entry into the war
 - (B) The octogenarian's condition
 - (C) Model trains
 - (D) Anathema
 - (E) The hostess's African safari
5. Why did the football player accuse the narrator of being a traitor?
- (A) The narrator supported Roosevelt.
 - (B) The narrator did not support Roosevelt.
 - (C) The narrator advocated support for the British.
 - (D) The narrator remained silent.
 - (E) The football player didn't accuse him.
6. To whom did the octogenarian tell the story of his accident?
- (A) The old accident victim
 - (B) The football player
 - (C) The football player's wife
 - (D) The narrator
 - (E) No one at all
7. According to the passage, the hostess has never traveled to
- (A) Biarritz
 - (B) Africa
 - (C) Germany
 - (D) Peking
 - (E) Sierra Leone
8. What topic "stimulated the adrenal glands" of one of the guests?
- (A) Hitler and Stalin
 - (B) Roosevelt and Bridges
 - (C) The main course
 - (D) America's entry into the war
 - (E) Alcohol

9. How long had the author been in Hollywood on the evening discussed?
- (A) He had lived there for over ten years.
 - (B) He was spending his first night in Hollywood.
 - (C) He was spending his third night in Hollywood.
 - (D) He had lived there for one year.
 - (E) He had lived there for three years.
10. Which of the following best describes the author's attitude toward the other guests?
- (A) Comical
 - (B) Respectful
 - (C) Dislike
 - (D) Anathema
 - (E) Friendly