

Smile!

This is the opening chapter to a novel called Smile! by Geraldine McCaughrean. The central character is a photographer, and he is in great danger.

Suddenly he was falling, and his life went past in small, square pictures, framed in the windows of the cockpit. There were his family; his house; his friends; his wedding; his dog. There were pictures of the Past and pictures of the Future, too – all the things he had meant to do and now never would: bridges, faces, dawns, and sunsets.

There were flames, as well, but they were not imaginary. They really were running their orange tongues over the glass, licking away the views, gobbling up the sky. Flash would have liked to bid someone goodbye, but he was all alone in the plane.

The next he knew, the windows were full of desert: red gulches and yellow valleys and salt-white lakes. The landscapes were so beautiful and so strange that Flash wanted to capture them – trap them like rare, free-flying birds. He wanted to photograph them.

No time for developer and fixer. No time for darkrooms and prints. His hands closed around the only camera of any use to him.

Then the plane tilted and it was too late. The scenes framed in its windows flickered by too fast to focus upon. As a cinema film rattles free of its spool, so Flash's fall rattled to an end. The crashing aeroplane landed in a sea of grey-green trees, folding its wings upwards like a butterfly. Branches broke through the floor. Leaves burst into the cockpit. The glass windows crazed like eggshell. If Flash had not been thrown out through the shattering roof, his life would have finished then and there. The End.

He fell heels-over-heart into a clump of thorn bushes. Just once his eyelids blinked, like a camera shutter, and took in the sight of his aeroplane burning, raised aloft on the arms of three blazing trees. In his head, he titled the picture *Scorching the Sky*. Then his eyes closed and he returned to a darkroom empty of pictures or even of dreams.

Name: Class: Date:

- 1 Which word in the opening paragraph tells us that Flash is in a plane?
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- 2 What seems to be happening to the plane?
.....
- 3 Is there anyone else on board with Flash? **Find** and **copy** the sentence that tells us this.
.....
- 4 Find the paragraph beginning "*Then the plane tilted ...*"
a) What breaks the fall of the aeroplane?
.....
b) What saves the photographer's life?
.....
- 5 What is the last scene that Flash sees before his eyes close?
.....
- 6 In his head, he takes a photograph of the scene. What does he call it?
.....
- 7 In the opening paragraph, we are told that Flash's "*life went past in small, square pictures*".
a) What pictures of the past does he see?
.....
b) Explain why you think he sees these things.
.....
- 8 In the second paragraph, explain how the writer makes the flames seem threatening. What is this technique called?
.....
- 9 The writer says that Flash fell "*heels-over-heart*" into a thorn bush. Normally we would say *head over heels*. Why do you think the writer chooses this expression instead?
.....
- 10 In the final paragraph, the writer uses two photographic terms: *shutter* and *darkroom*. Choose one of these, and show how these are used to describe what happens to Flash.
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