

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

8700/1 Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose-fiction

The Tiredness of Rosabel by Katherine Mansfield

An extract from a short story written in 1908.

Please turn the page over to see the source

Source A

This extract is from the beginning of a short story by Katherine Mansfield. It is the early 1900s and Rosabel, a lower class girl who works in a hat shop, is on her way home.

1 At the corner of Oxford Circus, Rosabel bought a bunch of violets, and that was practically
the reason why she had so little tea – for a scone and a boiled egg and a cup of cocoa are
not sufficient after a hard day's work in a hat shop. As she swung onto the step of the bus,
grabbed her skirt with one hand and clung to the railing with the other, Rosabel thought she
5 would have sacrificed her soul for a good dinner, something hot and strong and filling.

6 Rosabel looked out of the windows; the street was blurred and misty, but light striking on
the panes turned their dullness to opal and silver, and the jewellers' shops seen through
this were fairy palaces. Her feet were horribly wet, and she knew the bottom of her skirt and
petticoat would be coated with black, greasy mud. There was a sickening smell of warm
10 humanity – it seemed to be oozing out of everybody in the bus – and everybody had the
same expression, sitting so still, staring in front of them. Rosabel stirred suddenly and
unfastened the two top buttons of her coat... she felt almost stifled. Through her
half-closed eyes, the whole row of people on the opposite seat seemed to resolve into one
14 meaningless, staring face.

15 She began to think of all that had happened during the day. Would she ever forget that
awful woman in the grey mackintosh, or the girl who had tried on every hat in the shop and
then said she would 'call in tomorrow and decide definitely'? Rosabel could not help
smiling; the excuse was worn so thin.

19 But there had been one other – a girl with beautiful red hair and a white skin and eyes the
20 colour of that green ribbon shot with gold they had got from Paris last week. Rosabel had
seen her carriage at the door; a man had come in with her, quite a young man, and so well
dressed.

'What is it exactly that I want, Harry?' she had said, as Rosabel took the pins out of her hat,
untied her veil, and gave her a hand-mirror.

25 'You must have a black hat,' he had answered, 'a black hat with a feather that goes right
round it and then round your neck and ties in a bow under your chin – and a decent-sized
feather.'

The girl glanced at Rosabel laughingly. 'Have you any hats like that?'

They had been very hard to please; Harry would demand the impossible, and Rosabel was
30 almost in despair. Then she remembered the big, untouched box upstairs.

'Oh, one moment, Madam,' she had said. 'I think perhaps I can show you something that
will please you better.' She had run up, breathlessly, cut the cords, scattered the tissue
paper, and yes, there was the very hat – rather large, soft, with a great, curled feather, and
a black velvet rose, nothing else. They had been charmed. The girl had put it on and then
35 handed it to Rosabel.

'Let me see how it looks on you,' she said.

Rosabel turned to the mirror and placed it on her brown hair, then faced them.

'Oh, Harry, isn't it adorable,' the girl cried, 'I must have that!' She smiled again at Rosabel. 'It suits you, beautifully.'

40 A sudden, ridiculous feeling of anger had seized Rosabel. She longed to throw the lovely, perishable thing in the girl's face, and bent over the hat, flushing.

'It's exquisitely finished off inside, Madam,' she said. The girl swept out to her carriage, and left Harry to pay and bring the box with him.

45 'I shall go straight home and put it on before I come out to lunch with you,' Rosabel heard her say.

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