

Fiction text

This is an extract from *Smith* by Leon Garfield. Smith is a 12-year-old pickpocket living by his wits in 18th-century London. One day he robs an elderly gentleman of a document, but then immediately witnesses the old man being murdered by two men. Although he cannot read, Smith suspects the document is of great value to someone...



A Necklace of Flight

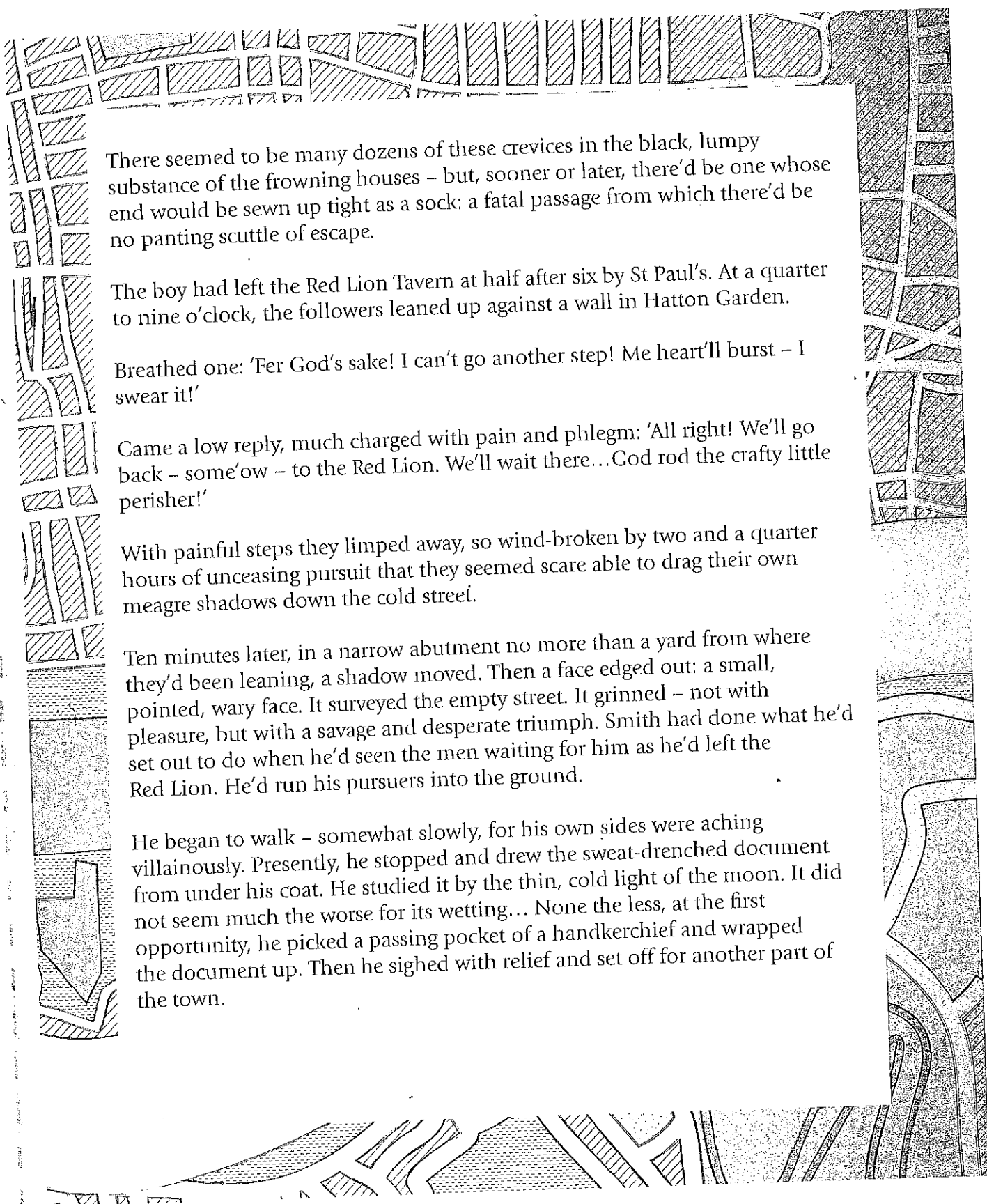
Two men – one short, the other tall – who might have been dressed in brown (the street was too dark to be sure), saw Smith hurry out of the Red Lion Tavern. They'd been in a doorway nearby. Deep in shadows. They did not think they'd been observed. After a few seconds they set off together in the wake of the hurrying boy. They followed him for about five minutes along the nearly empty Saffron Hill. Then they lost him. He seemed to have vanished into the gloomy air. Half a minute later he was seen – unexpectedly – on their left, at the corner of Cross Street, hurrying like a mad thing. They nodded and set off again.

This time they kept him in sight for nearly ten minutes; then he vanished near Cony Court. They waited a while, listening, for the narrow streets and alleys hereabouts were very quiet, and even a rat's scuttle would have been heard. Now they entered the shadowy confines of the court – were about three yards within in – when the boy was seen again, darting desperately back towards Cross Street, his alarmed eyes glittering in the light of some late merchant's window.

Back went the two followers, their shoulders hunched – for the night was growing bitterer by the minute – and their feet kissing the cobbles with a grim, urgent passion. They did not let him out of their sight for more than an instant. Portpool Lane – Hatton Garden – Chart Street – back into Saffron Hill, then Holborn Hill – Union Court – Hatton Garden again – and so to Cross Street – Saffron Hill – Cox's Court...

An intricate necklace of flight was being threaded as the three hurrying figures shifted through and round the lanes, courts and alleys that lay, ragged and near deserted, under a gnawed rind of the moon.

Sometimes there was not above five seconds between them; and then they'd lose him for a few seconds – oddly, unaccountably – like he'd gone up in a puff of black smoke... Till there he'd be again, come suddenly from some dark passageway of which nothing had been seen till then.



There seemed to be many dozens of these crevices in the black, lumpy substance of the frowning houses – but, sooner or later, there'd be one whose end would be sewn up tight as a sock: a fatal passage from which there'd be no panting scuttle of escape.

The boy had left the Red Lion Tavern at half after six by St Paul's. At a quarter to nine o'clock, the followers leaned up against a wall in Hatton Garden.

Breathed one: 'Fer God's sake! I can't go another step! Me heart'll burst – I swear it!'

Came a low reply, much charged with pain and phlegm: 'All right! We'll go back – some'ow – to the Red Lion. We'll wait there... God rod the crafty little perisher!'

With painful steps they limped away, so wind-broken by two and a quarter hours of unceasing pursuit that they seemed scarce able to drag their own meagre shadows down the cold street.

Ten minutes later, in a narrow abutment no more than a yard from where they'd been leaning, a shadow moved. Then a face edged out: a small, pointed, wary face. It surveyed the empty street. It grinned – not with pleasure, but with a savage and desperate triumph. Smith had done what he'd set out to do when he'd seen the men waiting for him as he'd left the Red Lion. He'd run his pursuers into the ground.

He began to walk – somewhat slowly, for his own sides were aching villainously. Presently, he stopped and drew the sweat-drenched document from under his coat. He studied it by the thin, cold light of the moon. It did not seem much the worse for its wetting... None the less, at the first opportunity, he picked a passing pocket of a handkerchief and wrapped the document up. Then he sighed with relief and set off for another part of the town.

Character

Read the story extract *A Necklace of Flight* on pages 64 and 65 and then answer the following questions.

1. Find and copy two groups of words that the author uses to describe Smith's appearance.

.....

..... 2 marks

2. Thinking about the whole extract, what is your impression of Smith as a character?

Tick one.

He is scared and lucky.

He loves playing tricks on people.

He is crafty and determined.

He doesn't know his way around London.

1 mark

3. At quarter to nine, the two men stop and talk. Re-read what they say. What does it tell you about how they are feeling?

.....

..... 2 marks

4. Imagine you are the author. Write a few sentences that describe what Smith was thinking as he watched the two men give up and leave. You can use the first person ('I').

Imagine you are in Smith's position. How would you feel?

Smith thought, ...

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.....

.....

..... 3 marks

Theme

Read the story extract *A Necklace of Flight* on pages 64 and 65 and then answer the following questions.

1. One of the themes is danger. The author uses the items listed below to create this threatening feeling. Find and copy some words to show how he does this.

Location

.....

Time of day

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Short sentences

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Parenthesis

.....

Adjectives or adverbs

.....

Metaphors, similes or personification

.....

6 marks

2. The author writes that Smith was threading 'an intricate necklace of flight'.

A synonym for 'intricate' is 'maze-like' or 'complex'.

a) What is this type of comparative phrase called?

Tick one.

onomatopoeia

metaphor

simile

personification

1 mark

b) Another theme is Smith's life in London. What does this phrase tell us about how Smith has learnt to survive?

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2 marks