READING AND COMPREHENSION

Frances at her aunt’s house

Francis **wriggled** and stared at the ceiling. This was her first ever visit to her cousins’ house and she wasn’t liking it one bit. Until a month ago she had lived happily in Northern Ireland and now she had come to live in England –“across the water” as her grandmother referred to it.

Mum and aunt Moira were **talking nineteen to the dozen** about their families and there was plenty to hear and tell. They hadn’t seen each other for a long time.

Frances had been lumbered with her cousin, Patrick. Aunt Moira had asked him to show Frances the family photo album, which he’d done in about thirty seconds flat. Now he was amusing himself by carefully the wings off a struggling fly which had landed on the table in front of him.

Patrick was casting sly glances at Frances, watching for her reactions. She was trying to ignore him but angry buzzing inside her head was growing louder. In her imagination she **conjured** up a huge, hairy spider which hung, suspended from a fine thread, above Patrick’s head. The spider was so enormous that Frances half hoped that its thread would snap, causing it to fall and crush her cousin to a pulp. She decided that plan B was better – the one where the spider dismembers Patrick before eating him slowly.

‘’ Isn’t she sweet,” crooned Aunt Moira, as if she’d noticed Frances for the first time. “Won’t you look at that red hair isn’t it something?’’

“Yeah, ginger string,” muttered Patrick, flicking the remains of the fly at his cousin.“I’ m off out, Mum. ‘Bye, Aunt Geraldine, see you.’’

‘’But, Patrick…’’ Aunt Moira’s voice trailed off as Patrick went, slamming the door behind him.

“I’ am sorry about Pat. He’s been acting funny lately. He misses his dad. “Now then, Frances,’’ she continued. ‘I’ have enough raspberry trifle for tea. I hope you will like it.’’ Frances was staring at the ceiling but the spider had gone. She had trouble keeping her apparitions once her anger had disappeared. She often tried to hang onto her anger but had decided it’s a bit like being happy – you either are or aren’t. It’s not something you can fake.

Frances turned quickly and looked at her aunt, who was glancing anxiously at the ceiling and then back at her.

“Sorry, Aunt. What was it you said? I didn’t quite catch I, ‘Said Frances **meekly**. Unlike Patrick and the fly, she thought, with disgust.

‘’do you like raspberry trifle? It’s tea time. I cannot imagine why Patrick has gone off.’’

I wondered what the nasty smell was, thought Frances, wrinkling up her nose. She didn’t like to suggest that Patrick had gone off to kill a cat or mug a mouse, so she smiled politely and answered, ‘’Yes, thank you. Auntie Moira, I love raspberry trifle.’’

The table was set and the tea was ready but Patrick had not returned.

“Frances, would you be a darling and pop upstairs and wake Joe?’’ asked Aunt Moira. ‘’ He’s had a good nap and should be ready to his tea now. He’s an angel child, that one. He and Patrick are like chalk and cheese.’’

Frances agreed. She had only been in the MacGuire household for two hours but already she had **sorted out the sheep from the goats**. Little Joe was a lamb but Patrick was one of those **belligerent** old billy goats that goes around head- butting everything. She tiptoed upstairs and quickly opened the door of Joe’s bedroom, hoping to wake him gently. But she needn’t have worried. Joe was wide awake, playing and crooning to himself. He looked up at her and his eyes widened with pleasure. Scrambling to his feet he steadied himself against the bars of the cot and held up his arms to Frances

(Source: ‘Frances and the Hounds of Darkness’ by Joan Caryon.)

Comprehension questions

Answer the following questions using complete and grammatical sentences

1. Explain the meaning of the following words as used in the passage (5 mks)
2. Wriggled
3. Conjured
4. Meekly
5. Belligerent
6. Crooning
7. What does the writer mean by:
8. Talking nineteen to the dozen (1mk)
9. Sorted out the sheep from the goats (1mk)
10. Why didn’t Frances like the visit to her aunt’s house? (1mk)
11. How was her cousin Patrick amusing himself? (2mk)
12. What duty was Patrick given by his mother? Did he perform it well? Give reasons for your answer (2mks)
13. From what Patrick says and does in the passage, describe his character (2mks)
14. How does the idea of the spider in Frances’ mind, sum up the relationship between Frances and her cousin? (2mks)
15. What excuses does aunt Moira give for her son’s behavior? (2mks)
16. Identify a simile used in the passage and explain its meaning (2mks)