

2 The following text is taken from the writer's autobiography. It describes her memories of growing up in Egypt.

- (a) Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to create a sense of mood and place. [15]
- (b) Later in her autobiography the writer describes another place which brings back strong memories of a particular time in her life.

Write a section (between 120–150 words) of this description. Base your answer closely on the style and features of the writing in the original extract. [10]

It was as if there were to life itself a quality of music in that time, the era of my childhood, and in that place, the remote edge of Cairo. There the city petered out into a scattering of villas leading into tranquil country fields. On the other side of our house was the profound, unsurpassable quiet of the desert.

There was, to begin with, always the sound — sometimes no more than a mere breath — of the wind in the trees, each variety of tree having its own music, its own way of conversing. I knew them all like friends (when we left in the summers for Alexandria I would, the last day, make the round of the garden saying goodbye to the trees), although none more intimately than the two trees on either side of the corner bedroom I shared with Nanny. On one side was the silky, barely perceptible breath of the mimosa, which, when the wind grew strong, would scratch lightly with its thorns at the shutters of the window facing the front of the house, looking out onto the garden. On the other side was the dry, faintly rattling shuffle of the long-leaved eucalyptus that stood by the window facing the street. On hot nights the street lamp cast the shadows of the slender twirling eucalyptus leaves onto my bedroom wall, my own secret cinema. I would fall asleep watching those dancing shadows — imagining to myself that I saw a house in them and people going about their lives. They would appear at the door or windows of their shadow house and talk and come out and do things on the balcony. I would go to bed looking forward to finding out what had happened next in their lives. 5  
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I loved the patterns of light cast by leaves on the earth and I loved being in them, under them. The intricate, gently shifting patterns that the flame tree cast where the path widened toward the garden gate, fading and growing strong again as a cloud passed, could hold me still, totally lost, for long moments.

Almost everything then seemed to have its own beat, its own lilt: sounds that distilled the sweetness of being, others that made audible its terrors, and sounds for everything between. The cascading cry of the karawan, a bird I heard but never saw, came only in the dusk. Its long melancholy call descending down the scale was like the pure expression of lament at the fall of things, all endings that the end of light presaged<sup>1</sup>. 25  
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Then there was the music of the street beyond the garden hedge in the day, not noisy but alive, between long intervals of silence, with the sounds of living. People walking, greeting one another, the clip-clop of a donkey, sometimes of a horse. Street vendors' calls — “tama-a-tim” for tomatoes, “robbabe-e-eccia-a” for old clothes and furniture. And the sound, occasionally, of cars, though rarely enough for us to be able to detect the horn and the engine even of our own car. Our dog, Frankie, could detect it long before we could, when the car was still almost two miles away. 35

Then there was the sound sometimes, in the earliest morning, of the reed piper walking past our house. His pipe sounded private, like someone singing to himself. A simple, lovely sound, almost like speech, like a human voice. He would say “good morning” with his pipe and one knew it to be “good morning”. When he passed, it would feel as if something of infinite sweetness had momentarily graced one’s life and then faded irretrievably away. 40

Years later I’d discover that in Sufi poetry this music of the reed is the quintessential music of loss and I’d feel, learning this, that I’d always known it to be so. In the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, the classic master-poet of Sufism, the song of the reed is the metaphor for our human condition, haunted as we so often are by a vague sense of longing and of nostalgia, but nostalgia for we know not quite what. Cut from its bed and fashioned into a pipe, the reed forever laments the living earth that it once knew, crying out, whenever life is breathed into it, its ache and its yearning and loss. We too live our lives haunted by loss we too, says Rumi, remember a condition of completeness that we once knew but have forgotten that we ever knew. The song of the reed and the music that haunts our lives is the music of loss, of loss and of remembrance. 50

That’s how it was in the beginning, how it was to come to consciousness in this place and this time and in a world alive, as it seemed, with the music of being. 55

<sup>1</sup> *presaged*: anticipated