

Delprøve 2 B

General instructions

- 1. Answer all the questions in this section. The answer to each question must be given separately.**
- 2. The total length of your paper must be about 600-900 words.**

The Bad Boy

1. Write a summary of the short story in no more than 150 words.
 2. Characterize the narrator and her relationship with her sister.
 3. Comment on the mother's attitude towards Larry.
 4. In a short essay discuss how mentally disabled people should be treated by their families.
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The Bad Boy

(An Irish short story written in 1988.)

There's a strange man who lives down the valley from us. My mother calls him the bad boy but I believe he's been a man for many years now. But I know he's bad because he never goes to Mass, not even at Christmas. For all that, I like him. He has a gypsy face and black hair that curls like a child's, and his beard is always just about to grow. His voice is husky with too much smoking and drinking, and when he talks to you one of his eyes turns slowly, casually towards the other. I don't know how he does it, but it fascinates me. He's pretty slow. His father goes out fishing, and sometimes he goes out with him. Sometimes you see him following the tide out if he's in the mood for cockling with the gangs.

My mother was the first to notice that he was interested in Geraldine.

The first sign was when he cycled home with her one night from the hospital. I saw them coming up the lane together and thought nothing of it, because when Geraldine swerved in at our gate he cycled straight on past, with neither of them looking at the other; but my mother stood up from her gardening, and thought everything. She watched while Geraldine pulled off her bicycle clips.

My mother followed her into the kitchen. Geraldine was red-cheeked with the cycling, and still breathless when I came in. My mother took both her cold hands in her own and shouted at her.

"That Larry's a bad boy. You know that, don't you?"

Poor Geraldine didn't know whether to nod her head or shake it. She rolled her *eyes* mysteriously. I could see the pressure of my mother's fingers, and kept well out of it. Besides, I was puzzled and curious.

"Tomorrow, you stay at the hospital till your father comes for you. D'you hear?"

"You'll ask me first," my father said. "I'm not acting chauffeur every five minutes."

My mother didn't leave go of Geraldine's hands, nor did she look at my father, but said with a cold quiet that chilled me, "No man *is* interested in Geraldine. If this Larry's interested in her, then it's for only one thing."

During the family prayers that evening Geraldine received a special mention. "Let her not be led into temptation," my mother whispered fervently. "In her heart she's still a child. Let her always be a child in Your eyes."

"She's nearly thirty," my father reminded my mother when she hung the rosary beads back up.

35 "She's a child," my mother asserted. "And always will be. Look at her now, won't you."

Geraldine was brushing my hair. She had always done this for me at night, and I loved her to do it. She was the only one who had the patience to get all the tangles out. She sat back on her heels to admire the job when she'd finished, and
4 0 tonight, for the first time ever, handed me the brush and leaned forward till her head was on my lap. I stroked her thin, greasy strands with the brush. I could see her pink scalp.

"Poor Geraldine," I said, not meaning to. She rolled her head sideways to peer up at me through her fringe.

y5 "Poor, poor, poor," she murmured. She laughed, sucking the dribble on her wet lips. "Poor Dendine."

"You can't even say your own name," I said. "You should have had an easy name, like Anne."

"Lie Kan," she echoed. "Kan."

Geraldine stood up and pulled me out of my chair for bed. We cleaned our teeth in the cracked bowl together, taking it in turns to spit out the fizz of paste. Hers always had a touch of blood in it, because she brushed her gums too hard. She seemed to fall asleep before I was in bed, but during the night I heard her lumbering round the room and I sat up, surprised to see her fully dressed and pulling on her thick

35 socks.

"Geraldine, where are you going?" I asked her. "It's too early for *Mass*." She looked dismayed, caught out in mischief, and then decided that she hadn't heard me. She crept out of the room as though I was still fast asleep, and made every step creak on her cautious way downstairs. I heard the whine of the front door, and ran to the
b o window to see, her jogging down the lane in her wellies.

My mother and father seemed to be a heaving bundle rocking in their sleep. I didn't know how to disturb them. I went back into my room and dressed quickly, keeping my night-clothes on underneath. My mother whimpered across the landing; my father moaned. The bundle gasped some kind of pain. I ran away from it and out
65 into the bitter cold of the night. I ran down the hill in the direction Geraldine had taken, and it wasn't long before I saw her.

"Geraldine!" I shouted. "Wait for me!"

She half-turned, changed her mind, and lunged off the lane into the shadowed trees.

Then I saw Larry waiting at the far end of the lane for her, and I realised what it was all about. He ducked his head when he saw me, in that familiar mocking servile way he has, and I felt betrayed. Geraldine lumbered up behind me, panting from the race, and laughing. Larry nodded to her.

"So you've brought your sister, have you?"

"We'll go back now, Geraldine," I said. "She has to go".

"Does she now?" He held his hand out and Geraldine stepped forward shyly and took it, and I like a fool hung back while they climbed over the stile at the side of the lane and went down into the fields.

I saw them heading out across the wet mud-flats in a silver track of moonlight,
So Geraldine stumpy and slow and slurping the mud with her wellingtons, and Larry
easing her out of the sticky slime. I kicked off my shoes and plunged in after them.
When I reached them Larry and Geraldine were squatting in the mud by a little
channel dug into it, and he was whispering to her *as* if she was a child.

He pointed to a froth of brown bubbles and eased his hand into the mud.
85 When he brought it out again he had a cockle in his palm. Geraldine laughed and held
out her hands for it.

He had to lean forward and gently prise open her hand, finger by finger, till
he eased his own fingers into her hollowed palm and crooked out the white shell and
held it between his lips and hers; in all that time that seemed like infinity he never
90 took his eyes off hers, nor did she look away from him.

"Geraldine," I said, uneasy, locked out, and she laughed and broke her look
away from his and dived her hand again and again into the mud, so it splattered her
arms and her face with the frenzy of her movements. And suddenly she'd had
enough.

95 She put her hands out onto his shoulders to heave herself up and steadied
herself against him as he stood up too.

I followed them, and it wasn't until I sat on a stone to rub the sparkling dry
sand off my feet and slip my shoes back on that they acknowledged me. In all that
time it had been *as* though they hadn't noticed me at all, and I was an eavesdropper in
100 a deep and intimate conversation.

We hurried back home. I had a thousand thoughts whirling in my head, yet I
was aware of a calm kind of stillness about Geraldine that I'd never known before,
even in the way she walked, and in her soft and steady breathing; in the white silver
silk of her face in the early light, and in the kind warmth of her *eyes*. How I would
105 have wished to know that peace in her again.

The next night my father met her on the way back from work, and although she
came home on her bicycle he drove behind her, and she rode into the yard and came
inside without saying anything. After night prayers my mother locked the house
doors on the *inside*, which she had never done before, and let us see her doing it. She
110 took the key upstairs with her. Geraldine bit her lip and tried to turn the door
handle, first to the front door and then the back door, and as though it was a puzzle
to be solved she tried the windows too, and the doors again, and again.

Nobody said anything, that day or ever. I didn't dare to share her sorrow with
her. Child *as* I was, I saw her as a woman of mystery and sorrow, and that gave her,
115 poor simple thing, a kind of dignity for me.

And then, in the freakish spring tides four members of the cockle-gang were
swept out to sea, and one of them was Larry. He was found days later, recognised and
claimed by his father, and very quickly removed. My aunt, telling us this at table, said
that several girls in the village would be in mourning for him now, and quite a few
120 children would never see their father again. I glanced at Geraldine but it seemed that
for the day she'd forgotten who he was, and was far more interested in squeezing
tomato seeds, which *she* hated, out through the gaps in her teeth, and picking them
out to add to the pyre at the side of her plate.

*(Adapted from "The Bad Boy" by Berlie Doherty. The story was first published in the
Critical Quarterly)*