A Shady Plot

**Question 5-(a):**

What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?

Jenkins had always called upon Hallock whenever he wanted a ghost story to be published in his magazine. John’s ghosts were live propositions as Jenkins called them. This time again Jenkins wanted Hallock to come up with another supernatural thriller, which would give the readers horrors and that is what the public wanted too.

**Question 5-(b):**

Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

The narrator lacked the self confidence as he himself talked of how he didn’t specialise in ghost stories; instead, he said that the ghost stories specialised in him. His first story had been a ghost fiction too; however, for that also he had to chase inspiration in vain for months. This all shows that the narrator was, though natural, an accidental ghost fiction writer.

**Question 5-(c):**

What makes Helen, the ghost, and her other co-ghosts organize The Writer's Inspiration Bureau?

Helen and other co-ghosts organised The Writer’s Insipiration Bureau because they felt there were many writers without ideas, however, with a vulnerable mind who were looking for an inspiration to write ghost stories. The bureau would assign a ghost to such a writer so that he/she could write good ghost stories.

**Question 5-(d):**

Why had Helen, the ghost been helping the narrator write ghost stories? Why was she going on strike? What condition did she place for providing continued help?

Helen provided inspiration to the narrator to write ghost stories. She and co-ghosts were going on a strike because they were tired of answering questions of Ouija board fanatics. They felt they were disturbed too often to answer silly questions. She urged the narrator to influence his friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board. It was on this condition she promised to help the narrator to write stories.

**Question 5-(e):**

How does the ghost undermine the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories?

Helen tells the narrator that she had helped him write his ghost stories. She tells the narrator of the many times when she had leaned on the narrator’s shoulder and had given him ideas, when he was thinking hard while writing a ghost story. Helen tries to tell the narrator that had she not been there for him as a muse, he would not have been able to write good ghost stories.

**Question 5-(g):**

Why does the narrator hesitate to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board Party?

Helen, the ghost, had asked the narrator to influence his friends to stop using the Ouija board. It was only on this condition that Helen promised to help the narrator to write ghost stories. If Helen sees him now himself trying to communicate ghosts through Ouija board, he fears how and what she would do to him. That is why the narrator was reluctant to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board party.

**Question 5-(f):**

Why does John want the ghost to disappear before his wife appears on the scene? What impression of his wife's character do you form from his words?

Lavina is a sensitive woman and is subject to hysterics. If she sees John talking to a ghost she would lose it all. Lavinia is crazy about every new fashion and fad, so much feminine in nature that John fears the thought of how she would react in such a situation.

**Question 5-(h):**

What message does the ghost convey to the group that had assembled in the narrator's house? What is their reaction to the message?

Helen called John a traitor as he bluffs her. He had promised Helen that he would convince his friends to stop contacting ghosts; rather here he himself was doing the same. She is annoyed and filled with anguish and so goes to everyone’s Ouija board one by one and tells that Mr. Hallock is a traitor. After this revelation everybody suspected John of cheating upon his wife, later John clarified to his wife and she even understood.

**Question 5-(i):**

Do you agree with the narrator calling the assembly of women "manipulators?" Give reasons.

The narrator felt that everybody in the room was looking at him suspiciously. That is why he called the assembly of women “manipulators”. The women were not manipulating things. However, they were just reporting what was happening at their Ouija Board.

**Question 5-(j):**

Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do?

John’s wife is angry because she, like other women, believed what the spirit said through the Ouija board, about her husband. A woman even reported that Helen has called John a traitor. Lavinia thought that her husband was cheating on her. She decided to go to her grandmother’s house. She also decided to separate from her husband.

**Question 5-(k):**

Why does John wish he were dead?

John wished he was dead because a brief meeting with a ghost had created such situations that he was about to lose his wife, whom he loved dearly; it destroyed his happiness and home.

**Question 5-(l):**

When confronted by Lavinia about his flirtations over the Ouija Board, John insists that 'the affair was quite above-board, I assure you, my love'. Bring out the pun in John's statement.

John assures his wife that his flirtations with Helen the ghost are above board. He tries to tell her that whatever that has happened between him and Helen is over the board of Ouija and there was nothing that he wished to hide from his wife; in fact there was nothing to tell.

**Question 5-(m):**

John's apprehensions about his wife's reaction to her encounter with the ghost are unfounded. Justify.

John thought that his wife would become hysterical if she saw the ghost Helen; however, when the encounter happened, she confidently spoke to the ghost and was not at all scared of it.

**Question 6-(a):**

After her reconciliation with her husband, John Hallock, Lavinia writes a letter to her friend expressing how her relationship with him had almost been on the verge of breaking and what saved it. Write her letter.

**Note:** *This question is to be answered on the basis of your own understanding, experience and thoughts. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, sample solutions have been provided for your reference.*

Dear Friend,

How are you? Hope you are doing fine. Sorry about delaying in replying to your letter. I was caught in some personal problems.

I want to share something very strange that happened to me. A few days back I purchased an Ouija board. I called my friends over for an Ouija board session. John was also part of it. Suddenly a ghost, named Helen, started communicating with all of us together. She called John a traitor. I was confused. I did not understand what was happening. We do not know anybody with such a name. It occurred to me that John was cheating on me. I decided to leave him and go to my grandmother’s house. When I went to see him before leaving, I found him talking to the same ghost. I saw the ghost with my own naked eyes and I also spoke to her. It was then that I realised that Helen was helping him write all those superb ghost stories. Finally, the misunderstanding was cleared. Now I am in my own home, happy with my husband. And, yes, no more Ouija board parties for me!

So much for now.

Love

Yours truly

Lavinia

**Question 6-(b):**

John Hallock reflects upon his experience with Helen's ghost and in retrospect he finds it quite amusing. All the same he is relieved that he is no longer plagued by it. Ironically, the self same ghost inspires his creativity and he writes a diary entry reflecting upon the comical aspect of his experience. Write his diary entry.

**Note:** *This question is to be answered on the basis of your own understanding, experience and thoughts. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, sample solutions have been provided for your reference.*

Dear Diary,

The past few days have been a rollercoaster ride for me. I was sitting in my study trying to write a ghost story and suddenly a ghost appeared. At first I could not believe it, however, slowly I got talking to it. She declared that she and other ghosts were going on a strike. Imagine ghosts going on a strike! Apparently, she had helped me write all my earlier ghost stories, as what she claimed. She then appeared in the Ouija board session that my wife had organised for her friends. She called me a traitor openly in front of all my folks. My wife and her friends almost believed that I was cheating on my wife. Lavinia threatened to leave me. Here I was caught between a ghost who threatened to go on a strike and a wife who was on the verge of leaving me. Phew!!

Thankfully Lavinia, got a chance to meet and speak to Helen and her misunderstanding was cleared. One good thing came out of these encounters with Helen, I now have got an idea for my next story. This one is going to be my best story so far.