**The Distant Hours**

*This extract, adapted from “The Distant Hours” by Kate Morton focuses on Evie, the narrator, describing the arrival of a long lost letter.*

1 It started with a letter. A letter that had been lost a long time, waiting out half a  
 century in a forgotten postal bag in the dim attic of an ordinary house. I think   
 about it sometimes, that mailbag: of the hundreds of love letters, grocery bills,   
 birthday cards, notes from children to their parents, that lay together, swelling  
 and sighing as their thwarted messages whispered in the dark. Waiting, waiting, for  
 someone to realise they were there. For it is said, you know, that a letter will always  
 seek a reader; that sooner or later, like it or not, words have a way of finding the   
 light, of making their secrets known.

2 Forgive me, I’m being romantic – a habit acquired from the years spent reading   
 seventeenth-century novels with a torch when my parents thought I was asleep.   
 What I means to say is that it’s odd to think that if Arthur Tyrell had been a little   
 more responsible, if he hadn’t fallen into a slumber than Christmas Eve in 1941  
 instead of finishing his mail round, if the bag hadn’t been tucked in his attic and   
 hidden until his death some fifty years later when one of his daughters unearthed  
 it and called a national newspaper, the whole thing might have turned out   
 differently.

3 You probably heard about it when it happened; it was in all the newspapers, and   
 on the TV news. A TV channel even ran a special where they invited some of the   
 recipients to talk about their letter from fifty years ago. There was a woman whose  
 sweetheart had been in the RAF, and the man with the birthday card his evacuated  
 son had sent, the little boy who was killed by a piece of falling shrapnel a week or   
 so later. It was a very good programme, I thought: moving in parts, happy and sad  
 stories mixed with old film of the war. I cried a couple of times, but that’s not  
 saying much. I cry rather a lot.

4 Mum didn’t go on the show, though. The producers contacted her and asked   
 whether there was anything special in her letter that she’d like to share with the  
 nation, but she said no, that it was just an ordinary old clothing order from a shop   
 that had long ago gone out of business. But that wasn’t the truth. I know this   
 because I was there when the letter arrived. I saw her reaction to that lost letter  
 and it was anything but ordinary.

5 It was a morning in late February, winter still had us by the throat, the flowerbeds  
 were icy, and I’d come over to help with the Sunday roast. I was peeling potatoes in  
 the sink when the letter dropped through the slot in the door. The post doesn’t  
 usually come on Sundays so that should have tipped us off, but it didn’t.

6 “Evie, can you get that?” Evie is me: I’m sorry, I should have said so earlier. My  
 mother gestured towards the hallway.

7 I put down the potato, wiped my hands on a tea towel and went to fetch the post.  
 There was only one letter lying on the welcome mat: the official Post Office envelope  
 declaring the contents to be “redirected mail”. I read the label to Mum as I brought  
 it into the kitchen.

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Questions**

**Look at paragraph 1.**

1. “A letter that had been lost a long time…”  
Where exactly had the letter been for half a century? **1**

2. Why does the writer a list after “that mailbag:…” in paragraph 1? **1**

3. “…thwarted messages…”  
What do you think “thwarted” means in this expression? **1**

**Look at paragraph 2.**

4. “I’m being romantic…”  
Explain fully how Evie had become romantic. **2**

5. a) What was Arthur Tyrell’s job? **1**

b) **Using your own words as far as possible**, explain what he did on Christmas  
 Eve 1941. **2**

6. “…one of his daughters unearthed it…”  
What does the word “unearthed” tell the reader about the bag? **2**

**Look at paragraphs 3 and 4.**

7. “You probably heard about it when it happened…”  
How does the writer continue this idea? **2**

8. “A TV channel even ran a special…”  
**Using your own words as far as possible**, explain what the special was about. **2**

9. “It was a very good programme…”  
Why did Evie think it was a very good programme? **1**

10. a) “Mum didn’t go on the show, though.”  
 What reason did Evie’s mum give for not going on the show? **1**

b) Explain fully why Evie knew that her mum was not telling the truth. **2**

**Look at paragraphs 5 to 7.**

11. “…winter had us by the throat…”  
Identify the technique here and go on to show how it is effective. **2**