**SUMMARY**

Don’t Look Now was written as part of a collection of short stories published in 1971 with the title Not After Midnight. It is commonly referred to as a horror story, but there is much more to it than that. In Don’t Look Now, as in The Birds (from the same collection) and Rebecca (1938), Daphne du Maurier examines the darker side of people, their fears and prejudices.

The story is set in Venice. A young married couple, John and Laura, are in Venice trying to get over the death of their daughter in an accident. They meet two strange elderly sisters, one of whom claims to be psychic and claims that she can see their daughter with them. Laura is delighted to hear this, but John treats the women with scepticism. Events spiral out of John and Laura’s control and lead to one of the most shocking endings in British literature.

The story was made into a film by Nicolas Roeg in 1973. The film often appears in cinema ‘best 100 films’ lists - it was at number 85 in the ‘centenary of cinema’ poll in 1995.

**ABOUT DAPHNE DU MAURIER**

Daphne du Maurier was born in 1907 into a wealthy family. She was educated at home with her two sisters. When she was young she was not subject to financial or parental constraint and she spent a lot of her time sailing, travelling around Europe with her friends and writing stories.

Du Maurier always wanted to be a writer, and her real career as a novelist started when she visited Cornwall, in the south-west of England, at the age of twenty. She realized she had found her ‘spiritual home’ and the kind of natural, outdoor life she wanted to live. From this point onwards, she felt she knew what kind of books she wanted to write. Her first novel - a romance called The Loving Spirit - was published in 1931. She married in 1932 but continued to write. In 1938 her most famous and most successful novel, a romantic thriller called Rebecca, was published. Over the next twenty years she wrote historical novels, short stories, and stories of mystery and suspense.

Du Maurier realized that her main audience was women and she tailored her writing for them. In the period around the Second World War (1939-45), when many writers were examining the problems of the world around them, Du Maurier continued to write historical novels. She died in 1989.

**BACKGROUND AND THEMES**

Daphne du Maurier was above all a storyteller. She wrote page-turners - that is, novels which are hard to put down. Many second-rate story-tellers are capable of this; but Daphne du Maurier’s books deal with people’s deep fears and deep longings. Her major novels fall into two categories: historical novels, and stories of mystery and suspense. Don’t Look Now is an outstanding example of the second category.

The background and setting of Don’t Look Now is the city of Venice, Italy. This setting is used to full effect in both the book and the film to enhance the element of the supernatural. As Venice is a city without traffic, except for that on the canals, it can be eerily quiet, especially in the back streets. What noise there is in the back streets is distorted - either by the water or by the echoey passageways. This setting is perfect for the main theme in the book - the supernatural. One cannot imagine the same eerie effects in the back streets of London or Paris.

The main theme running through the story is that of psychic ability and how that relates to time. John and Laura, the two main characters in the book, travel to Venice to try to get over the tragic death of their daughter. In Venice, they meet a woman who claims to be psychic and claims to have seen their daughter with them in Venice. Laura grasps this information eagerly and finds that it helps her come to terms with her daughter’s death. John, on the other hand, treats it very sceptically and refuses to believe the woman. He is even more annoyed by the woman when she also says that John himself is psychic but won’t accept his ability.

An important point in the story is when the woman says to John, ‘... you sometimes see Christine yourself, but you don’t know you’re doing it’ (page 12). Later in the book, John is obviously thinking about this when he sees the child in the dark coat, as in his mind he links the child with Christine.

John initially laughs at the idea that he might be in danger in Venice, but he respects his wife’s fears and agrees to leave when she asks. It is after she has taken
the plane back to England that events start to spiral out of John's control. He sees Laura on a boat with the psychic woman and her sister. When he does this, he can only follow the course of reason - he thinks that she must have come back to Venice. He does not stop to consider the strange woman's idea - that he may himself be psychic. Indeed, it is only at the end of the story, when John lies dying in the old house, that he finally accepts that he had a psychic vision. He accepts that what he actually saw was what was going to happen a few days in the future, when Laura comes back to Venice to get her husband's body.

Another theme of the story is that of fate and our own part in it. While the story suggests that it is possible to tell the future, it also suggests that it is impossible to change it. The events leading to John's death could not have been prevented, because of his own nature and because of the events that came before his fatal decision to follow the 'child' into the old house. His sense of responsibility will not allow him to leave the 'child' to her own fate, as he believes that she is being pursued by a murderer. (She is, in fact, the murderer, and is being pursued by a policeman.) Added to his nature is the fact that he has lost his own child and we understand that in some way he feels responsible for that. When he sees the 'child' and links her in his mind with his daughter, his fate is sealed.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

(Ask students to do the photocopiable exercise under Student's Activities, 'Activities before reading the book', before doing this exercise.)

Game. Write these phrases on the board:
two strange sisters, a woman with empty eyes, they hear a dying cry, a child runs away, John is in danger, their son is in hospital in England, Laura takes the plane back to England, John sees Laura in Venice, a murderer in Venice, John sees the child again...

Ask students to work in groups and to try to guess what happens in the story from these phrases. If any students know the story, they can say how close the others are by saying 'cold' or 'warm', but they shouldn't tell them anything.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Pages 1-5

Ask students to look at page 4, where Laura returns to the table. In pairs, they work out the conversation between Laura and the strange woman. They can start with this, but should use their imagination.
PENGUIN READERS FACTSHEETS

STUDENT'S ACTIVITIES

PHOTOCOPIABLE

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Read the introduction on page v of your book. Look at the picture on the front of the book.
(a) Why are John and Laura in Venice?
(b) Is it going to be a happy or a sad story, do you think? Why?
(c) What kind of feeling do you have about the two women? Why?
(d) Do you know any other books by Daphne du Maurier? Do you like them?

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

PAGES 1 - 5

1. Finish the answers to the questions.
   (a) Why does John say ‘Don’t look now’ to Laura? Because the old women will know ...
   (b) Why does Laura want to laugh when she looks at the two women? Because she thinks ...
   (c) Why does Laura follow the old woman? Because she thinks that perhaps ...
   (d) Why isn’t John comfortable in the restaurant with the second woman? Because her eyes ...
   (e) What does the woman tell Laura? She says she can ....

2. Write the names of people in the sentences. Some names are used more than once.
   Laura, John, Laura and John, The two old women, One of the women, The woman with empty eyes
   (a) ... are looking at John in the restaurant.
   (b) ... are making up stories about the women.
   (c) ... are the same, like sisters.
   (d) ... goes to the back of the restaurant.
   (e) ... looks at John when Laura isn’t there.
   (f) ... follows the woman to the door at the back of the restaurant.
   (g) ... is worried because Laura is taking a long time.
   (h) ... leave the restaurant arm in arm.
   (i) ... is excited and happy.
   (j) ... saw Christine with John and Laura.

PAGES 6 - 20

PAGES 6-14

1. Where do John and Laura go first, second, third ...?
   (a) the small, dark back streets
   (b) their hotel near the Grand Canal
   (c) the square near the Church of San Zaccaria
   (d) the church on Torcello
   (e) their hotel near the Grand Canal
   (f) a restaurant near the church
   (g) Piazza San Marco

2. What does John feel? When?
   (a) He feels happy ...
   (b) He feels happy ...
   (c) He feels uncomfortable ...
   (d) He feels unhappy ...
   (e) He feels angry ...
   (f) He feels sad ...
   (i) when Laura goes to talk to the women.
   (ii) when Laura doesn’t see the child.
   (iii) when they go back to the hotel.
   (iv) when he sees the two women in the restaurant.
   (v) when Laura tells him that he’s in danger.
   (vi) when they leave the hotel.

3. Choose the right answer.
   (a) Why does John leave the church on Torcello quickly?
      (i) He isn’t interested in seeing it.
      (ii) Laura isn’t interested in seeing it.
      (iii) He wants to get away from the two women.
   (b) Why do John and Laura go for a walk before dinner?
      (i) Because Laura isn’t hungry.
      (ii) To get lost in the back streets.
      (iii) To visit the church of San Zaccaria.
   (c) Why is John uncomfortable in the restaurant?
      (i) Because there are a lot of people there.
      (ii) Because the two old sisters are there.
      (iii) Because he can’t understand Italian.
   (d) What does Christine want John and Laura to do?
      (i) Visit some other cities in Italy.
      (ii) Go home immediately.
      (iii) Leave Venice immediately.
   (e) What does the shorter sister say about John?
      (i) He can see things other people can’t see.
(ii) She is worried about him.
(iii) He is leaving in the morning.
(f) What does the man at the hotel give to John?
   (i) a letter from his son
   (ii) a letter from his son’s school
   (iii) a letter to his son

Pages 15-20

1. Look at A and B. Which is John? Which is Laura?
   A. This person is going to ...
      (a) take a plane to London
      (b) stay at Johnnie’s school
      (c) go to Johnnie’s school
      (d) take a boat to the airport
   B. This person is going to ...
      (a) take the boat to England
      (b) take the train to Calais
      (c) drive to Milan
      (d) stay in Venice for a few hours

   What is the person going to do first, second, etc.? Write, 1, 2, 3, and 4.

2. Answer the questions with Because ...
   (a) Why is Laura worried when the phone call from the school comes?
   (b) Why is she going to take the plane back to England?
   (c) Why doesn’t she want John to fly back, too?
   (d) Why will John phone Laura at the school?
   (e) Why is the holiday suddenly finished for John?

Pages 21-35

1. Are these sentences right or wrong? Write R or W.
   (a) John wants to leave Venice as quickly as he can.
   (b) Laura looks happy with the two sisters on the boat.
   (c) John asks the man in the hotel to find Laura and bring her to the phone.
   (d) Laura isn’t at the hotel when John gets back.
   (e) The people at the airport say that Laura was on the plane.
   (f) There was a murder in Venice.

2. Look up imagine in your dictionary. What did John see? What did John imagine?
   (a) Laura is in the plane with the other English people.
   (b) Laura is in a boat going back to Venice.
   (c) She is wearing her red coat.
   (d) Laura doesn’t want to drive to Milan with John.
   (e) The two old sisters want to kill Laura.

Pages 29-35

1. The words in italics are mistakes. Put them right.
   (a) Johnnie is getting worse.
   (b) John is happy when he hears Laura on the phone.
   (c) He has dinner in the hotel.
   (d) The two sisters are at the train station.
   (e) The sisters say that John saw Laura on the boat last week.
   (f) John thinks that a policeman is running after the child.
   (g) The person in the dark coat is really a young man.
   (h) At the end of the story, John lives.

2. Talk about these questions with other students.
   (a) How does John feel when he hears Laura on the phone?
   (b) Why is there a policeman at the hotel when he goes back after dinner?
   (c) Do the sisters think John saw them with Laura in the boat? How did that happen?
   (d) Why does John follow the child in the dark coat?
   (e) What happens at the end of the story?
   (f) How did John see Laura on the boat with the two women? Why was Laura back in Venice?

Activities after reading the book

1. Three of these things did not really happen in the story. Write a cross (X) next to them.
   (a) The sisters say that John is in danger.
   (b) The ‘child’ is really the murderer.
   (c) John and Laura go on holiday to Venice.
   (d) John drives the car to Milan.
   (e) John sees Laura on a boat with the two women.
   (f) John and Laura’s daughter, Christine, dies.
   (g) Laura takes a plane back to England.
   (h) One of the strange sisters knew Christine.
   (i) Their son’s school writes to them.
   (j) They meet two strange women in a restaurant.
   (k) John finds Laura back at the hotel.
   (l) The old woman kills John.
   (m) John goes to the police station and hears about the murderer.
   (n) Laura comes back to Venice.
   (o) They see a child running away in the back streets.
   (p) John sees the child again and follows her into a house.

2. Which of these things happened first, second, third? Write 1-13 next to the sentences (but not those with a cross (X) next to them).