 Past the Shallows

Setting

The setting in Past the Shallows plays an important role in shaping how the characters experience the world and their relationships with others.

As readers it is important that we are able to visualise the setting and recognize how it contributes to our understanding of the narrative and the characters.

Task 1: Choose two of the descriptions below and create a visual representation of images that capture the description. You can find the images or create them.

Prologue

1. “Out past the shallows, past the sandy-bottomed bays, comes the dark water – black and cold and roaring. Rolling out the invisible paths. The ancient paths to Bruny, or down south along the silent cliffs, the paths out deep to the bird islands that stand tall between nothing but water and sky.

Wherever rock comes out of deep water, wherever reef rises up, there is abalone. Black-lipped soft bodies protected by shell.

Treasure.” – Prologue

George’s House 1

1. “You couldn’t see George’s house or even his front paddock from here. You could only see trees. Maybe he’d be safe if he stayed behind the line of trees.

…

There was a track, a kind of path that he hadn’t noticed before. It was muddy and slippery with leaves and Harry was glad he had worn his gumboots and not his sneakers. There were probably leeches here. He walked slowly and he kept on listening.

He looked up: some of the eucalypts were really tall – straight and tall and full at the top, blocking out the sky. He heard sticks and branches crack, but he knew that sound. It was always there if you listened, always there in the distance, even when there was no wind. It was the sound of the crack wattle cracking. The sound of wattle dropping branches into the river. And upstream, on tight bends and narrow channels, there were so many branches that they almost dammed the water. They almost choked it. But downstream the current was strong. The water just swallowed the sticks and branches and flushed them out to sea.

Harry turned a corner and suddenly he could see it, the paddock and the shack.” – pp 61-62

George’s House 2

1. “There was smoke coming from the chimney and it was probably warm inside. Harry had forgotten his gloves and his ears were cold. He dug his hands into Jake’s brown fur but the dog kept moving. It just wanted to play.

Harry stood up. He stepped onto the small veranda, stood in front of the door. He wished he could see inside without having to open the door. There could be anything in there. Anything waiting for him. It could be a trap and no one would know he was here. He took a deep breath and reached out for the door handle. The door creaked open.

Harry looked into the darkened room. George was standing by a table pouring hot water into a teapot. Jake pushed between Harry’s legs and went inside. Harry felt warm air on his face and he followed.

…

From the outside, this place looked just like a picker’s hut, all weathered up and grey. But the inside was bright and neat and clean and Harry thought it was nicer than where he lived, nicer than the brown house, even though it was just one room and there was only a sink instead of a bathroom and the toilet must be somewhere down the back. There were even fresh flowers in a vase. White flowers. Lilies.” – pp 65-66

Aunty Jean’s House

1. “Aunty Jean’s house was white on the outside and white in the inside, and they had to leave their boots at the door. Sometimes she made them take off their socks as well in case they were damp and left marks on the thick new carpet. She always offered them clean socks to put on but Miles would never touch them. Anyway, the carpet felt so nice on his bare feet, springy and soft, but the Saturday afternoon roast always took forever to cook.

…

Aunty Jean put her knife and fork down on her plate and finally they were allowed to get up and take the dishes into the kitchen.

The clock above the cooker said it was 1:55pm.

Miles filled the sink and started to wash the dishes. He squeezed the detergent hard, made the water slimy and full of suds. And he washed like mad, lining the dishes up neatly until the rack was full.

Aunty Jean came into the kitchen and put the kettle on. She got out three tea cups and put them on the bench.

…

‘Go to the cupboard and get a towel,’ she said suddenly, and when Miles looked up she was staring right at him.

He turned away, walked down the hall. The linen cupboard was huge and there were piles of sheets and pillowcases and quilts and Miles didn’t know what the hell they were all for. Aunty Jean lived alone for ages, since Uncle Nick, and no one ever came to visit except them and they never stayed over. Never.

The towels were on a shelf at eye height and they were all white. There were no other colours, not even cream. It was weird. Miles pulled one out but they were packed in so tight that about five came loose and fell on the floor. He bent down to pick them up and there was a wooden box at the bottom of the cupboard. It was a big box, pushed right to the back – old wood, dark like blackwood. He had never seen it before.

He looked down the hall. He could hear Aunty Jean talking but the door to the kitchen was closed just enough so that he couldn’t see her.

He squatted down, pulled the box out. It had brass handles and carved flowers on the lid.

Inside there were carefully folded things.

Soft things.

They were all baby things.

‘Miles! The towel!’

Miles shut the lid and slid the box away. He picked up one of the towels and shoved the rest back in the cupboard without folding them.” – pp 83-86

Granddad’s Shed 1

1. “Harry walked over and poked his head through the shed door. It seemed so much bigger inside now that it was half empty – big and dark. He couldn’t see Miles anywhere.

Miles?’

No answer. Harry stayed in the doorway anyway. There was still so much stuff in the shed. It was going to take them all day. They wouldn’t be doing anything else. Just this.

‘Miles?’

‘I’m here,’ he said. His voice came from down the back, behind a stack of old chairs. Harry made his way over, ducking through the spaces left between furniture. Miles was sitting down on a low seat leaning against the back wall of the shed.

‘It’s Mum’s,’ he said.” – p 90

Granddad’s Shed 2

1. “Miles found the old carved notches on the kitchen door: the marked heights of all of them. Of Mum and Aunty Jean. Harry and Joe. Miles ran his finger along the last marking for him. It was hard to believe he had ever been so small. He was smaller than Harry was now. He always thought he would live here one day.

He walked outside and opened the door to the workshop. The workbenches and metal lathe were still there, too heavy to move. And there were piles of collected wood stacked in the corner. Not wood for the fire, but good wood, supple wood full of oil. Granddad’s wood.

Granddad had made beautiful things. He made wood glow and shine, and Miles was going to be just like him. He didn’t want to just be a carpenter like Joe. He didn’t want to build houses and kitchens or fixtures on boats. He was going to make furniture. Good furniture. Just like Granddad.

Miles walked into the workshop. He picked up a small gnarled piece of king billy from the pile and breathed it in. It smelled of the earth, even after all this time.” – pp 128-129

Family Home

1. “The air was cold and the house was quiet. Harry got out of bed and shoved his bare feet into his sneakers. Out in the kitchen, if he stood right on the tips of his sneakers, he could just reach the peanut butter jar up in the top cupboard. He ran his finger around the inside of the almost empty jar. There was only enough peanut butter for one slice, so he put two pieces of bread in the toaster and made a toast sandwich.

Even though the embers were dead Harry sat down by the wood heater to eat.” – p. 11

“Apart from two small bedrooms, the brown house was only one room, a kitchen-lounge with a concrete bathroom tacked on. Harry looked terrified but he opened the door anyway and ducked out. Miles heard his feet hit the lino in the kitchen and Jeff and Dad hadn’t stopped talking. Maybe they wouldn’t notice. Miles got out of bed just in case. He waited by the door. He didn’t hear the toilet flush, but the talking had stopped.” – pp 141-142

Cloudy Bay

1. “Harry stood on the sand and looked down the wide curved beach of Cloudy Bay. Everything was clean and golden and crisp, the sky almost violet with the winter light, and he wished he wasn’t afraid.” – p 1

“That day at Cloudy.

Uncle Nick rode a longboard – the old kind, fat and slow, but he could make it move. Like running free on the water, working the small waves all the way from the point to the sand. Uncle Nick, fluid and silent in all that bright light.

‘You ready?’ he said.

And Miles knew he wanted to feel it.

What it was like.

So he lay on the front of that big board. Held on while the white water splashed up in his face, freezing, and he could see nothing but Nick’s arms reaching out to scoop through the water again and again. He felt the board move up and over, up and over until they were out deep. Until they were in the clear.

Nick helped him sit upright and tall on the nose of the board, and with his legs hanging over the sides he was brave. He looked down into the water. All the way to the bottom.

Ripples in the soft sand. Balls of loose seaweed flying free and weightless. The black rock and reef hiding thin beneath the san.

‘Safe here,’ he said, Uncle Nick.

And when Miles looked up there was a line of water, long and straight and rolling. And it was coming.

Everything was silent then. There was only feeling. Rolling, rolling; and silent.

The pulse. It lifted them up gentle and slow. Lifted them so high so they could see.

Then it let them loose. Left them behind. And time came back.

Miles turned his face towards the beach, followed the line with his eyes. He watched it rise up. Watched it crack and peel, perfect to the shore.

And he saw Mum standing there on the sand all golden in the sun. – pp 166-167

“They moved silently into the bay and through thinning mist, Cloudy looked brand new. Just born, the outlines becoming sharp as the sun rose and the fog cleared. And like a dream, the waking cliffs glowed orange and the sand lit up silver and the sky, still pale violet, was full and open.” – pp 245-246