

The Letter in the Wall

A story about love, loss, and a letter that waited seventy-two years to be read.

B2 Level

Adults (17+)

Story

14 Pages

45 min

Claire Ashworth buys a Victorian house and discovers a sealed letter from 1952 behind the kitchen wallpaper. Written by Thomas to Margaret, it reveals a love story cut short by class prejudice. Claire traces Thomas to New Zealand and discovers Margaret is still alive at ninety-five — a moving exploration of love, time, and second chances.

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and comprehend a literary short story at B2 level
- ✓ Learn 20 advanced vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading for detail, inference, and theme
- ✓ Analyse character motivation and narrative structure
- ✓ Answer comprehension questions to demonstrate understanding

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1 Read the Story

Chapter 1: The Renovation

Claire Ashworth had not planned to buy the house on Mulberry Lane. She had been looking for something modern — a clean, efficient apartment with white walls and large windows. But the estate agent had insisted on showing her one last property. The house was a Victorian terrace with a blue front door and a garden so overgrown that it was impossible to see where the path ended and the flower beds began.

Despite everything, Claire bought it. She could not explain why. There was something about the house that felt familiar, as though she had dreamed about it once and forgotten the dream upon waking. She moved in on a rainy Saturday in March, armed with a toolbox, a stack of paint samples, and a stubborn determination to turn the place into a home.

The renovation began with the kitchen. Claire tore out the old cabinets, pulled up the cracked linoleum floor, and stripped the wallpaper from the walls. It was behind the wallpaper, in a cavity between the plaster and the brickwork, that she found the letter.

Chapter 2: The Letter

The envelope was yellowed with age and sealed with a circle of red wax. On the front, in elegant handwriting, was a single name: Margaret. Claire opened it carefully. Inside was a single sheet of writing paper, dated 14th September 1952.

The letter read: My dearest Margaret, I am writing this knowing that you will probably never read it. By the time you receive this — if you ever do — I will be on a ship bound for New Zealand, and the life we might have shared will exist only in my memory.

I want you to know that leaving was not my choice. Your father made it very clear that a man of my circumstances was not suitable for his daughter. All I have is a heart that belongs entirely to you, and a promise that I will carry you with me wherever I go. If you ever find this letter — tucked behind the wallpaper in the kitchen where we once stood and talked about the future — please know that I never stopped loving you. Yours, always, Thomas.

Claire read the letter three times. Then she sat on the dusty kitchen floor and cried — not for herself, but for Thomas and Margaret, two people she had never met, separated by pride and circumstance over seventy years ago.

Chapter 3: The Search

Claire became obsessed. She wanted to know who Thomas and Margaret were, and whether the letter had served its purpose. She started at the local library, searching through old census records and parish registers. Together with the librarian Daphne, they found a Margaret Hargreaves listed at 14 Mulberry Lane in 1951. She had been twenty-three years old and unmarried.

Thomas was harder to trace. There were dozens of men named Thomas who had emigrated to New Zealand in the early 1950s. Weeks passed with no results. Then, one Thursday evening, she received an email from a woman named Sarah Calloway in Auckland. The subject line read: I think you are looking for my grandfather.

Chapter 4: Thomas Calloway

Sarah confirmed that her grandfather was Thomas Calloway. He had arrived in New Zealand in November 1952 aboard a merchant ship. He had settled in Christchurch, worked as a carpenter, married a local woman named Anne in 1958, and raised three children. He had died in 2019 at the age of ninety-two.

"My grandfather was a quiet man," Sarah wrote. "He kept a photograph in his wallet for his entire life — a photograph of a young woman. When my grandmother once asked him who she was, he simply said, 'Someone I should have fought harder for.'" Claire asked Sarah the question she had been dreading: Was Margaret still alive?

Chapter 5: The Care Home

Margaret Hargreaves was ninety-five years old and living in a care home called Rosewood Manor. She had never married. She had worked as a librarian for forty years before retiring. Claire visited her on a Sunday morning with white roses — symbolising remembrance — and the letter.

She handed Margaret the envelope. The old woman opened the letter and read it slowly. When she finished, she held the letter against her chest and closed her eyes. A single tear rolled down her cheek. "Seventy-two years," she whispered. "I waited seventy-two years to read this letter."

"He loved you," Claire said gently. "He never stopped." Margaret opened her eyes. "And I never stopped loving him. I just never knew if he felt the same."

Chapter 6: The Conversation

The video call was arranged for the following Saturday. Sarah appeared on the screen from Auckland. "My grandfather talked about you more than he ever admitted," she said. "My mother always said you were the love of his life." They talked for over an hour.

Sarah shared photographs of Thomas — as a young man, as a father, as a grandfather.

Before they said goodbye, Sarah held up a small black-and-white photograph. "This is the photograph he kept in his wallet," she said. "Is this you?" Margaret leaned towards the screen. "Yes," she whispered. "That was taken in the garden at Mulberry Lane. I was twenty-two." She touched the screen with her fingertips. "Thank you for showing me that he remembered."

Epilogue

Claire finished renovating the kitchen in June. She kept one small section of the original wall intact, where the letter had been hidden. She framed a copy of the letter and hung it alongside a photograph of Thomas and Margaret, young and smiling, standing in front of the blue door.

Margaret and Sarah continued to talk every week. Claire often thought about how a single sheet of paper, written in love and hidden in hope, had waited patiently for seventy-two years to be found. And she thought about how, sometimes, the most important things in life are the ones that arrive too late to change the past but just in time to heal the present.

2 Key Vocabulary

These words from the story will help you expand your English vocabulary.

Word	Type	Definition	Example
insisted	<i>verb</i>	strongly said that something must happen	<i>She insisted on paying for dinner.</i>
overgrown	<i>adj.</i>	covered with plants that have grown too much	<i>The abandoned garden was completely overgrown.</i>
familiar	<i>adj.</i>	already known; giving a feeling of comfort	<i>The melody sounded strangely familiar.</i>
stubborn	<i>adj.</i>	refusing to change one's mind; determined	<i>He was too stubborn to ask for help.</i>
cavity	<i>noun</i>	a hole or empty space inside something solid	<i>The dentist found a cavity in her tooth.</i>
elegant	<i>adj.</i>	graceful and attractive in appearance or style	<i>She wore an elegant black dress to the event.</i>
fragile	<i>adj.</i>	easily broken or damaged; delicate	<i>Handle the vase carefully — it is very fragile.</i>
circumstances	<i>noun</i>	conditions and facts connected to a situation	<i>Under the circumstances, we had no other option.</i>
pride	<i>noun</i>	deep satisfaction; also excessive self-importance	<i>His pride prevented him from apologising.</i>
obsessed	<i>adj.</i>	unable to stop thinking about something	<i>She became obsessed with solving the puzzle.</i>
census	<i>noun</i>	an official count or survey of a population	<i>The national census takes place every ten years.</i>
emigrated	<i>verb</i>	left one's country to live in another	<i>They emigrated to Canada for a better life.</i>
merchant	<i>adj.</i>	relating to trade or commerce	<i>The merchant ship carried goods across the Atlantic.</i>
dreading	<i>verb</i>	feeling great worry or fear about something	<i>She was dreading the job interview.</i>
remembrance	<i>noun</i>	the act of remembering someone or something	<i>They held a ceremony in remembrance of the victims.</i>
granddaughter	<i>noun</i>	the daughter of a person's son or daughter	<i>His granddaughter visits him every weekend.</i>
admitted	<i>verb</i>	accepted something reluctantly	<i>He admitted that he had made a mistake.</i>
wept	<i>verb</i>	cried with tears	<i>She wept with joy when she heard the news.</i>
intact	<i>adj.</i>	not damaged; complete and whole	<i>The ancient vase was found completely intact.</i>

librarian	<i>noun</i>	a person who works in a library	<i>The librarian helped me find the reference book.</i>
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3 Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Why did Claire buy the house on Mulberry Lane?

- A) It was modern and affordable.
- B) She felt an unexplainable connection to it.
- C) Her family had lived there before.
- D) The estate agent gave her a discount.

2. Where did Claire find the letter?

- A) In a locked drawer in the bedroom.
- B) Hidden behind the wallpaper in the kitchen.
- C) Inside an old book on the shelf.
- D) Under the floorboards in the hallway.

3. Why did Thomas leave England?

- A) He was offered a job in New Zealand.
- B) Margaret asked him to leave.
- C) Margaret's father disapproved of him.
- D) He wanted to travel the world.

4. How did Claire discover Thomas's identity?

- A) Margaret told her directly.
- B) She found his passport in the house.
- C) A woman named Sarah responded to her online research.
- D) The librarian recognised the handwriting.

5. What had Thomas kept in his wallet his entire life?

- A) The original letter he wrote.
- B) A photograph of Margaret in her garden.
- C) A pressed flower from Mulberry Lane.
- D) Margaret's handwritten recipe.

6. How old was Margaret when Claire found her?

- A) Eighty-two.
- B) Eighty-eight.
- C) Ninety-five.
- D) One hundred and one.

7. What was Margaret's reaction when she read the letter?

- A) She was angry it had taken so long.
- B) She held it to her chest and cried.
- C) She refused to believe it was real.
- D) She laughed and said she had forgotten Thomas.

8. What does 'emigrated' mean in this story?

- A) Returned to one's home country.
- B) Moved temporarily for work.
- C) Left one's own country to live in another.
- D) Travelled for a holiday.

9. What did Claire do with the wall section?

- A) She covered it with new wallpaper.
- B) She kept it intact and framed the letter beside it.
- C) She donated it to a museum.
- D) She plastered over it.

10. What is the main message of the story?

- A) Old houses are always full of secrets.
- B) Love letters should always be posted immediately.
- C) Important things sometimes arrive late but can still bring healing.
- D) Renovating old houses is a rewarding hobby.

4

Answer Key

1. B) She felt an unexplainable connection to it.
2. B) Hidden behind the wallpaper in the kitchen.
3. C) Margaret's father disapproved of him.
4. C) A woman named Sarah responded to her online research.
5. B) A photograph of Margaret in her garden.
6. C) Ninety-five.
7. B) She held it to her chest and cried.
8. C) Left one's own country to live in another.
9. B) She kept it intact and framed the letter beside it.
10. C) Important things sometimes arrive late but can still bring healing.

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