Bad Memories
by ReadWorks

Jeremiah was not an old man. Anyway, he wasn't old compared to the old man he sat across from, on the old man's couch, in the old man's living room that smelled like eggs and mildew. Both men, old and not-quite-so-old, sipped lemonade. The couch was designed with flowers. It was so old the flowers looked like they were wilting, like they had been plucked and left out to die. The old man was named Paul. Paul looked like he was going to fall asleep. He nodded forward, his head tilted over. Jeremiah slapped him on the arm.

"I'm not asleep!"

Jeremiah raised an eyebrow. "You were going to fall asleep."

"I'm not going to fall asleep!"

Jeremiah sighed. On the coffee table in front of them was Jeremiah's laptop. On the laptop was a picture. The picture was the same photograph Jeremiah had placed on the table in the IHOP: a tall, thin man at a piano, with a gleaming ring on his finger and a smirk on his face as if he were keeping a secret. Jeremiah turned the laptop toward Paul.

"Do you recognize this man?" Jeremiah asked.

Paul had fallen asleep.

Jeremiah repeated the question.

"I'm not asleep!"

"Paul. Please."

"I'm not asleep. I just don't want to look. No, no, I don't think I'll look. No, thank you."

This had Jeremiah confused. He raised an eyebrow. "Why not?" he asked Paul.

Paul took a deep breath. He really sucked it in, as though the room might run out of air. And then he began slowly to speak. He chose his words with care. "When you're my age," he said, "you know what you can trust, and you know what you can't trust. I know I can trust my feelings."
He looked up at Jeremiah and continued, "My gut feelings, you understand? And I know I can't trust some stranger who shows up at my door, unannounced, and asks me questions about things that happened sixty years ago. About things that *maybe didn't even happen* sixty years ago! Who knows! I don't know! You remember sixty years ago? Of course not, you weren't even born! Weren't even a single cell. And yet you have the nerve-" Paul began to shake but managed to regain control. "The nerve. To enter my house. And ask me-me of all people!-about the one man whose name I never want to hear again. No-I'll say it one more time. Just so you'll be satisfied. Just for your pleasure. One more time: Sweet Lou. That's it. That's the last you'll hear from me! No more!"

Paul sprung from the couch with such force he might have been sixty years younger. He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah, causing Jeremiah to knock over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table. It fell to the wood floor and smashed. Lemonade pooled on the floor, but Paul didn't notice. Paul was already out of the room, muttering to himself and waving his hands. Jeremiah sat back down on the couch, with his socks in the puddle of lemonade.

He leaned forward and grabbed the laptop, and he placed it on his lap. He stared at Sweet Lou, the Sweet Lou who sixty years ago disappeared in a cloud of mystery. Sweet Lou's smile—what did it mean? What did Sweet Lou know that the rest of us would never know?

Jeremiah reached into his traveling bag and took out a notepad of yellow lined paper with a list of names. He crossed Paul's name off the list. This trip had cost him much time and much money, and Jeremiah had little of either to spare. He was beginning to doubt he would ever uncover the story of Sweet Lou. Sadness crept over him.

Jeremiah sat in the room that smelled like eggs and mildew, under a ceiling fan that creaked in circles and hardly moved the air at all. He stared at the photograph, at Sweet Lou. A single tear fell down his cheek.
1. What does the photograph on Jeremiah's laptop show?
   A. a man drinking lemonade
   B. a tall man at a piano
   C. a man eating at a restaurant
   D. an old man sitting on a couch

2. What point of view is this story told from?
   A. third person limited point of view
   B. first person point of view
   C. second person point of view
   D. third person omniscient point of view
3. Refer to this excerpt from the story for Questions 3 and 4.

Paul took a deep breath. He really sucked it in, as though the room might run out of air. And then he began slowly to speak. He chose his words with care. 'When you're my age,' he said, 'you know what you can trust, and you know what you can't trust. I know I can trust my feelings.'

He looked up at Jeremiah and continued, 'My gut feelings, you understand? And I know I can't trust some stranger who shows up at my door, unannounced, and asks me questions about things that happened sixty years ago. About things that maybe didn't even happen sixty years ago! Who knows! I don't know! You remember sixty years ago? Of course not, you weren't even born! Weren't even a single cell. And yet you have the nerve-' Paul began to shake but managed to regain control. 'The nerve. To enter my house. And ask me—me of all people!—about the one man whose name I never want to hear again. No—I'll say it one more time. Just so you'll be satisfied. Just for your pleasure. One more time: Sweet Lou. That's it. That's the last you'll hear from me! No more!'

Based on this information, what can you conclude about Paul's feelings toward Sweet Lou?

A. They are feelings of disturbance and distress.
B. They are feelings of happiness and satisfaction.
C. They are feelings of uncertainty and curiosity.
D. They are feelings of enthusiasm and eagerness.

4. Based on the excerpt, what can you conclude about how Paul feels toward Jeremiah?

A. Paul is pleased with Jeremiah.
B. Paul is angry with Jeremiah.
C. Paul admires Jeremiah.
D. Paul is bored by Jeremiah.
5. What is a theme of this story?

   A. the challenges of old age  
   B. the importance of hard work  
   C. the pain of old memories  
   D. the excitement of solving a mystery

6. Read these sentences from the text.

Jeremiah reached into his traveling bag and took out a notepad of yellow lined paper with a list of names. He crossed Paul's name off the list. This trip had cost him much time and much money, and Jeremiah had little of either to spare. He was beginning to doubt he would ever uncover the story of Sweet Lou. Sadness crept over him.

Based on these sentences, what does the phrase "sadness crept over him" mean?

   A. He began to feel sad.  
   B. He crawled over the floor.  
   C. He felt something crawling on him.  
   D. He stopped feeling sad.

7. Read this sentence from the text.

He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah, causing Jeremiah to knock over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table.

How could this sentence be broken up without changing the meaning?

   A. He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah. For example, Jeremiah knocked over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table.  
   B. He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah. First, Jeremiah knocked over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table.  
   C. He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah. Instead, Jeremiah knocked over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table.  
   D. He sprung to his feet with such force he surprised Jeremiah. As a result, Jeremiah knocked over his glass of lemonade on the coffee table.
8. What does Jeremiah know about the man in the photograph at the beginning of the story?

9. What has Jeremiah learned about the man in the photograph by the end of the story that he did not know before?

10. Near the end of the story, Jeremiah begins "to doubt he would ever uncover the story of Sweet Lou." Based on everything Jeremiah knows about Sweet Lou at that point, what might "the story of Sweet Lou" be? Support your answer with evidence from the text.