

This is a complete short story, set in The Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. The narrator is returning to where she used to live – but something is not quite right.

I Used To Live Here Once by Jean Rhys

She was standing by the river and looking at the stepping stones and remembering each one. There was the round unsteady one, the pointed one, the flat one in the middle – the safe stone where you could stand and look round. The next wasn't so safe for when the river was full the water flowed over it and even when it showed dry it was slippery. But after that it was easy and soon she was standing on the other side

The road was much wider than it used to be but the work had been done carelessly. The felled trees had not been cleared away and the bushes looked trampled. Yet it was the same road and she walked along feeling extraordinarily happy.

It was a fine day, a blue day. The only thing was that the sky had a glassy look that she didn't remember. That was the only word she could think of. Glassy. She turned the corner, saw that the road was much wider, but it had the same unfinished look.

She came to the worn stone steps that led up to the house and her heart began to beat. The screw pine was gone, so was the mock summer house called the ajoupa, but the clove tree was still there and at the top of the steps the rough lawn stretched away, just as she remembered it. She stopped and looked towards the house that had been added to and painted white. It was strange to see a car standing in front of it.

There were two children under the big mango tree, a boy and a little girl, and she waved to them and called 'Hello,' but they didn't answer her or turn their heads. Very fair children, as Europeans born in the West Indies so often are: as if the white blood is asserting itself against all odds.

The grass was yellow in the hot sunlight as she walked towards them. When she was quite close she called again, shyly: 'Hello.' Then 'I used to live here once,' she said.

Still they didn't answer. When she said for the third time 'Hello,' she was quite near them. Her arms went out instinctively with the longing to touch them.

It was the boy who turned. His grey eyes looked straight into hers. His expression didn't change. He said: 'Hasn't it gone cold all of a sudden? D'you notice? Let's go in'

'Yes, let's,' said the girl.

Her arms fell to her sides as she watched them running across the grass to the house. That was the first time she knew.

Attempt all the questions below. There are 50 marks available. The last question is worth 25 marks, and you should allow at least 20 minutes to complete it. Ask for more paper if necessary.

1. Which stepping stone was unsafe, and why? (2 marks)

2. How is the road different? (2 marks)

3. Why do you think the narrator feels “extraordinarily happy”? (2 marks)

4. What do you think the narrator means by describing the sky as “glassy”?
(2 marks)

5. How do you think the narrator feels when she sees the house? (2 marks)

6. Describe what the narrator may be feeling as she attempts to communicate with the children. (4 marks)

7. How do the children react to what is happening? (4 marks)

8. Explain what you think the writer knows at the end of the story, and how the story has been building up to it. (7 marks)

9. Plan and write a short piece of writing that ends with the line “That was the first time she knew”. You may write either fiction or non-fiction. (25 marks)





