

Part 6

You are going to read an extract from a book about a trip to the country of Malawi. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A–H** the one which fits each gap (37–43). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

Lake Malawi's lost resort

Novelist **Marina Lewycka** reveals how getting lost in the African bush led her to find paradise by Lake Malawi

It's easy to get off the beaten track in Malawi. In fact it can be difficult to stay on it, as we found three years ago when we were driving up the lake road from Salima towards Nkhata Bay for a week's holiday, in my daughter's old low-slung Nissan Bluebird, her boyfriend at the wheel.

37

It became obvious that we weren't going to get to Nkhata Bay, and we'd have to stop somewhere overnight. We drove to a couple of upmarket lodges, but they were closed, or full, or just didn't like the look of us. We were directed to other, more remote places, which either didn't exist, or were also full; we were beginning to get worried.

38

After a kilometre or so, it divided into a number of less distinct ones. They were definitely not beaten – they were hardly more than faint trails. There was no light ahead – in fact, there was no light anywhere, apart from the stars, which hung so close and bright you almost felt you could reach up and pick them out of the sky like low-hanging fruit.

39

Beyond the narrow beam of our headlights, it was pitch black. All around us were prickly bushes, their vague menacing shapes blocking out the lie of the land. Swarms of mosquitoes smelled our fear, and swooped.

40

Then we heard voices, coming from somewhere beyond the bushes. Two boys appeared, followed by an older man. They greeted us, grinning. In fact, they might have been laughing at us. We didn't care. Greetings were

exchanged. People are very polite in Malawi.

41

We left the car on and followed them down a series of dark winding tracks, without knowing who they were or where they were taking us. At last we came to a small hamlet, half a dozen thatched mud-walled houses, all closed up for the night. They called, and a man emerged from one of the houses; he was tall, and blind in one eye. We asked whether we could stay at the Maia Beach accommodation. Apparently unsurprised by these three pale strangers who'd turned up on his doorstep in the middle of the night, he smiled his assent. He fetched keys, and we followed him as he set off again down a winding track through the bushes.

42

And there, along the shore, was a cluster of small bamboo huts. One was opened up for us. A torch was found. A price was agreed. Bedding was brought. The mosquito nets were full of holes, but I had a sewing kit, and the kindness of our hosts more than made up for any discomforts.

43

The next morning we were woken by bright sunlight, needling through the cracks in the bamboo wall, and the sound of children's voices. I pushed open the door of our hut, and gasped at the sheer beauty of our surroundings. We'd landed in paradise. There, just a few metres away, was a crescent of silver sand lapped by the crystal water of the lake. A couple of palm trees waved lazy branches against the sun. A gaggle of ragged smiling children had gathered at our door, chattering excitedly. As I stepped outside, they fell silent for a moment, then burst into a chorus: 'Good afternoon. Good morning. How are you? Do you speak English? What is your name?'

- A** It didn't take many words to explain what had happened. With some careful manoeuvring and some brute force, slowly, slowly, we inched on to firmer ground. We asked for directions to the Maia Beach resort. It transpired that it had closed down last year but someone in a nearby village had a key.
- B** It was that dangerous time when the roads are swarming with villagers and their animals, and drivers of vehicles without functioning lights or brakes career around potholes, also hurrying homewards. For twilight is short in Malawi, and when night comes, the darkness is absolute.
- C** After a while they thinned out and I could see the soft star-lit glimmer of Lake Malawi spread before us like a wide swathe of grey silk, so still you'd never have guessed it was water, apart from a faint ripple that wrinkled its surface when the breeze stirred.
- D** We drove back slowly, seeking a turning off the road, a track towards the lake, but there was no opening, not even a gap between the prickly bushes where the track should have been, only the same unrelenting vista of low trees, bushes and sand.
- E** This place, we were told, had been created by an English couple who intended to use the proceeds to fund a school and a health centre in the village. But few tourists had ever made it here, and no one knew whether the couple would ever return.
- F** Suddenly, out of the dusk, a crooked, hand-painted wooden sign flickered across our headlights: 'Maia Beach Cafe Accommodation'. We let out a cheer, executed a U-turn, and set out down the sandy track signposted towards the beach.
- G** We held our breath and listened to the silence. Somewhere far away there was a sound of drumming, and we could smell wood smoke, which suggested some kind of habitation.
- H** Then, all of a sudden, our wheels hit a patch of soft sand, skidded, and sank in. Getting out to assess the situation, we saw that three wheels were hopelessly churning up the sand; the fourth was spinning free, perched over a sandy bluff with a four-foot drop beneath. If we slipped down there, we would never, ever get the car out again.