**Scoop**

**by Evelyn Waugh**

This extract describes the Boot family and their old country house, called Boot Magna Hall.

The immense trees which encircled Boot Magna Hall, shaded its drives and rides, and stood singly and in groups about the park, had suffered, some from ivy, some from lightning, some from various malignant disorders that vegetation is heir to, but all principally from old age. Some were supported with trusses and crutches of iron, some were filled with cement; some, even now, in June, could show only a handful of green leaves at their extremities. Sap ran thin and slow; a gusty night always brought down a litter of dead timbre.

The lake was moved by strange tides. Sometimes, as at the present moment, it sank to a single, opaque pool in a wilderness of mud and rushes; sometimes it rose and inundated five acres of pasture. There had once been an old man in one of the lodges who had understood the working of the water system; there were sluice gates hidden among the reeds, and manholes dotted about the place known only to him, furnished with taps and cocks; that man had been able to control an ornamental cascade and draw a lofty jet of water from the mouth of the dolphin on the South terrace. But he had been in his grave fifteen years and the secret had died with him.

The house was large but by no means too large for the Boot family, which at this time numbered eight. There were in the direct line: William who owned the house and estate, William’s sister Priscilla who claimed to own the horses, William’s widowed mother who owned the contents of the house and exercised ill-defined rights of the flower garden, and William’s widowed grandmother who was said to own “the money”. No one knew how much she possessed; she had been bedridden as long as William’s memory went back. It was from her that such large cheques were issued from time to time necessary for balancing the estate accounts and paying for Uncle Theodore’s occasional, disastrous visits to London. Uncle Theodore, the oldest of the male collaterals, was by far the gayest. Uncle Roderick was in many ways the least eccentric. He had managed the estates and household throughout William’s minority and continued to do so with a small but regular deficit which was made up annually by one of grandmamma’s cheques. Lady Trilby was William’s Great Aunt Anne, his father’s elder sister; she owned the motor-car, a vehicle adapted to her own requirements; it had a horn which could be worked from the back seat; her weekly journey to church resounded through the village like the Coming of the Lord. Uncle Bernard devoted himself to scholarship but received little general recognition, his researches, though profound, were narrow, being connected solely to his own pedigree. He had traced William’s through three different lines from Ethelred the Unready and only lack of funds fortunately prevented him from prosecuting a claim to the abeyant barony of de Butte.

Explain what these word and phrases mean in the context of the extract above. You may use a dictionary or look them up online. Some may have more than one meaning so think about what it means here. Some have been done to help you.

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| **Word or Phrase** | **Meaning** |
| malignant disorders | Potentially fatal disease. |
| vegetation is heir to | Plants can get. |
| opaque |  |
| inundated |  |
| sluice gates |  |
| ornamental cascade | A type of fountain or water feature. |
| the direct line | The closest relatives. |
| estate |  |
| balancing the estate accounts |  |
| collaterals |  |
| eccentric |  |
| William’s minority |  |
| deficit |  |
| scholarship |  |
| profound |  |
| his own pedigree |  |
| Ethelred the Unready |  |
| abeyant |  |
| barony of de Butte | The title Baron de Butte. If they succeeded in claiming it, William would be called Lord de Butte. |

The Boot family were once wealthy but are now less well off and are struggling to look after the large house and gardens. What evidence of this is there in the text?

This book was written in 1938. What clues in the text and the way it is written tells that this is an old book?

Do the Boot family sound like hard working, busy people or do you think they are idle and lazy? Use evidence from the text to give reasons for your answer. (Hint: How do most people get money that is not mentioned at all.)

**Challenge**

Write your own description of a large country house. You could look at some pictures online to help you. It could be a beautiful, well cared for house or it could be neglected and decaying like Boot Magna Hall. You could also imagine what the people who live in the house are like.

Here are some examples of houses you could look at to help you:

Mottisfont Abbey

Beulieu Palace House

Broadlands

Hinton Ampner

Exbury House