ISTEP+ Grade 10
Released Items

English/Language Arts
Part 1
Read the story “Maude’s Story.” Then answer the question.

Maude’s Story

1 “Care for another?” Marcel asked, bustling off before I could even offer a distracted nod in response. He knew my habits well and could be reasonably certain that I’d stick around for another cup of coffee or two. Or five. He was a much better waiter than I had any right to expect, actually. I occupied the same table five days out of six for hours at a time, alternately scribbling like a madman and staring off into space. I would have thought he’d rather wait on a steady stream of ordinary people than on one wild-eyed writer, but he seemed to like me well enough.

2 I started coming to Proust’s about a year ago to sit on the cramped patio, sip mediocre coffee, and soak up the universe. People-watching, they call it, and it’s what I do when I need inspiration. I’m fairly successful as writers go—not a household name, necessarily, but my books sell well enough to make a tidy income. I attribute that success to the people-watching habit I’ve cultivated over the years. The activity is more or less what its name implies. I sit someplace where I have a view of the city’s foot traffic and watch the to-ing and fro-ing of the local populace. When a particularly interesting individual walks by, I make up a background story. Where is that woman going in such a hurry? Why does that man look so angry? Occasionally, these little tales of mine develop into full-grown stories, and the angry man who walked by me one day becomes a character in my next novel.

3 I had been frequenting the café long enough that Marcel and I had reached about our hundredth cup of coffee. When he returned with it, he asked what brought me to the café so often. I told him about my writing and, after some more questions on his part, about people-watching. The next day he surprised me by pointing to a woman who was standing across the street and asking, “What’s her story?”
I hesitated a moment, finding myself reluctant to share this part of my world with someone. Though I catch only flashes of them as they walk past, the people I observe are part of my own story. My writing is the most important aspect of my life. These people who stroll by, oblivious to my writer’s gaze, are more than my muses. They are my friends, my family.

“’Well,’ I began slowly, ‘her name’s Maude. You see how she’s clutching that map like a life preserver? She’s new to the city, and she’s lost.”

“She looks pretty upset, too,” Marcel added, surprising me further with this unprompted addition to my story.

“Yes. That’s because she’s on her way to meet someone, and she’s running late.”

“Who’s she meeting?”

“An old friend, actually. They’d lost touch over the years, but the rise of social media reunited them. Virtually, at least. This will be the first time they’ve seen each other in person in more than a decade, and Maude is nervous.”

“Why’s she nervous? I thought they were friends,” Marcel prompted me.

“Maude isn’t really used to being around people anymore,” I elaborated. “She works from home, and when she wants to talk to friends or family, she just uses her phone or computer. Face-to-face interaction has become something of a foreign concept to her.”

“That sounds like a lonely way to live.”
“Yes, she’s been very lonely. But she won’t realize it until she sees this friend of hers.”

“She’s going to make the meeting after all, then?” Marcel was beginning to sound interested in Maude’s story.

“I can’t tell you that. I haven’t written it yet,” I replied. Perhaps frustrated with my incomplete plot, Marcel offered me only the ghost of a smile before leaving to attend to another customer.

From that point forward, Marcel would pause at my table for a few moments every day to ask for somebody’s story. Despite my initial reluctance, I began to enjoy telling him my tales; it was like sharing a secret with a friend.

“Why is that man wearing a suit with sneakers?” Marcel would ask.

I would lean forward, whispering conspiratorially, “He overslept this morning and had to get dressed in a hurry. He won’t realize what kind of shoes he’s wearing until the middle of an important meeting with a client this afternoon.”

One day I was in the middle of a story about the woman across the street with an outrageously large hat when my phone buzzed, signaling a text message. I spared it a quick glance, then rolled my eyes and turned it face down on the table. Marcel looked at me with raised eyebrows, a slight question written on his face.

“Some friends of mine are getting together for dinner tonight, and they’ve been bugging me to join them. I’ve told them a dozen times I can’t. I have too much work to do.”

“You barely set your pen down all day while you’re here,” he pointed out. “Surely you can spare a couple of hours away from the old ball and chain.”
“I’m working on something I think could be really good, though. You remember our friend Maude? It’s her story.”

Marcel just shook his head, smiling slightly. If I hadn’t known better, I would have said there was a shadow behind that smile—one that looked suspiciously like pity.

I didn’t meet my friends for dinner that night, or for lunch the next weekend. I turned my phone to silent, and as the days passed I didn’t even notice when it stopped ringing altogether. I wrote furiously every day at Proust’s and late into the night at home, pouring out page after page like a storm cloud pours rain.

When I felt like I was about halfway through with the novel, I gathered the pages I had written and took them with me to the café. I sat at my normal table and was puzzled when an unfamiliar young woman approached to take my order.

“Well, I guess Marcel deserves a day off every once in a while,” I joked to the new server.

“Yesterday was his last day,” she responded.

“Wow, that was sudden,” I said, feeling confusion creep across my face.

“He put his notice in a while ago, actually. I guess he found a job closer to where he lives.”

I paused for a moment before speaking again. “Oh, okay. Well, I’ll just take a cup of coffee, then. Cream, no sugar, please.”

As the server walked away to fill my order, I looked down at the table, turning my attention to the manuscript in front of me and the story of sad, lonely Maude.
Explain how the narrator and Marcel's interactions change as the story advances. Support your answer with details from the story.