***The Bell Jar*: Written Task 1**

**Rationale:**

This written task is linked to part 3 of the course: Literature – Texts and Contexts. The task is based on the novel, *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. In chapter 10 of the novel, after Esther is rejected from her summer writing course, she opens a letter from Buddy Willard. After reading his letter, she writes an angry response to him on the reverse side of his letter and sends it off in the same envelope. This task is the imagined exchange of words between those two characters during this event.

This task intends to explore several aspects and themes of the novel. Firstly, it explores the stereotypical male view of women’s roles in America during the 1950’s and highlights the oppressive dominant patriarchal values of the era, expressed in the novel. The task attempts to look at an alternative narrative perspective by offering a candid male voice, which is not directly expressed in the novel, except through occasional and brief direct speech. The task attempts to understand the complex relationship that Esther and Buddy share, and explore how the two very opposing characters interact. Buddy is traditional and conservative, whereas Esther tries to break free from societal norms and expectations of the period.

The nature of the task is an exchange of letters. They are private letters; the audience of each letter is exclusively the person they are writing to. The writing is casual as the characters are familiar with one another. Buddy’s letter reflects his pretentious, condescending attitude towards Esther. His main purpose is to try to make Esther jealous and, in turn, make her want to be with him again. Esther, maddened by this, counters Buddy in a purposely short, angry and mockingly sarcastic reply. Her main purpose is to anger Buddy as he had angered her.

Word Count: 300

Dear Esther,

How have you been? It’s been a while since we last saw each other, and I think you’ll agree that we didn’t part on the best of terms. I didn’t want our relationship to end bitterly; in fact, I hope we can still be friends. So I just wanted to write to you to clear things up.

Esther, I forgive you. In fact, I have to thank you for ending our relationship for had I still been attached to you up to this point, I would have never met the love of my life, Sarah. Sarah was a nurse I had my eye on for a while here at the hospital. However, in the past, I never acted upon my feelings for her because I was devoted to you and I thought my infatuation for her was a mere product of my spending time away from you. Around the time that you ended our relationship, Sarah caught the TB virus and was admitted as a patient in the room next to mine. The time after we broke up was tough and Sarah visited my room regularly to check up on me. She was the one who helped me through and who consoled me when times were rough. We became closer and what started out as a crush has now blossomed into true love. I made a mistake the last time, but I’m sure I found the one now. She seems keen on the idea of marrying, becoming my wife, and having my children.

Actually, I have to admit that at first I could not understand why you rejected me all those months ago and, at the time, I felt much resentment towards you. But then I realised that perhaps some girls may not want to live the secure, safe, happy lifestyle that a man with money and a respected profession, like myself, can provide. Times are changing, I understand. Nowadays, we see all sorts of girls all dressed up in suits, living by themselves, earning their own money, becoming “independent”. I respect them. It must be difficult, after all, to live that life, competing with us men in fields that we are naturally more qualified for. I also understand how women may think it exciting to work alongside men for the first time and so are seizing the opportunity to do so before the fad dies. It is just a trend after all. And, like all trends, this one is bound to die off in a few months. Women will get bored, they’ll change their minds and then they’ll want to return to the safety of their husband’s house house again, you’ll see! Women are such capricious creatures after all. So I don’t blame you if you change your mind about the engagement. Maybe, in the future, if you do, we can try to work things out again.

In fact, Mother just rented out a quaint little house in the Adirondacks for the month of July to be closer to me. So if you are interested in trying to work things out between us, you could stay with her for a few weeks. She still asks of you regularly and I know how fond you both were of each other, so I think it would be a good idea. Who knows, maybe I’ll forgive you and we can start over anew and forget about the past.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours truly,

Buddy

Buddy,

I thought I’d inform you that I, myself, have found someone else. His name is Constantin. He is a simultaneous interpreter working for the UN. He is smart, he is handsome and we are engaged. Yes, engaged. There really was no hesitation when he asked me to marry him. We are getting married this Spring. It’s going to be a small ceremony with only our closest family and friends. At first I couldn’t decide whether I wanted us to live in the city or the country. But instead of calling me neurotic, he said that, using the piles of money he makes from his “respected profession” at the UN, we could buy two houses – one in the city and one in the country – and we could travel between the two as we pleased. But the main reason why I want to marry him is because I know he would be a great father to our children. Buddy, the reason why I don’t want to marry you is not because you’re a pretentious, stuck-up mama’s boy who only cares about himself, or because you sleep around with other women you barely know. Nor is it because you want me to give up what I love to do to instead be imprisoned in my own house. No, it’s because I don’t want to sentence my children to growing up with a complete hypocrite as their father.

Don’t write back.

Esther

Word Count: 817