The Seven Ages of Man

from As You Like It
by William Shakespeare

Jacques: All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,

Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts

Into the lean and slippered pantaloon
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes

And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

1 *pard* — leopard or large cat
2 *bubble* — short-lived
3 *capon* — a young, fattened chicken
4 *instances* — examples to prove a point
5 *pantaloon* — foolish old man in Italian comedy
6 *sans* — without

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In line 3, what do the words “exits” and “entrances” represent in this selection?
A. sorrow and love
B. illness and health
C. death and birth
D. misfortune and happiness

How does Shakespeare characterize a soldier in lines 11–15?
A. A soldier is short-tempered and eager for fame.
B. A soldier is loving and faithful to his mistress.
C. A soldier is honorable and loyal to the throne.
D. A soldier is jealous and cowardly in battle.

In lines 23–25, what does Shakespeare most likely mean by “his big manly voice, / Turning again toward childish treble, pipes / And whistles in his sound”?
A. The aging man plays many musical instruments.
B. The aging man’s voice changes from deep to high.
C. The aging man snores loudly in his sleep.
D. The aging man sings playful songs to his grandchildren.

In line 27, the word oblivion most likely means
A. liveliness.
B. courage.
C. nothingness.
D. misery.
Explain what Shakespeare means by the lines above. Use evidence from each of the ages to support your answer.

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His acts being seven ages.