The Manchester Grammar School

Entrance Examination 2012
English Paper 2

Comprehension Passage

Printed inside this cover you will find a passage on which the comprehension is based. The questions are printed in the booklet enclosed and you should write your answers in the spaces provided on these sheets.

Do not open this booklet until told to do so.

Read through the passage very carefully. We recommend that you spend at least five minutes reading and re-reading the following material before you begin to answer the questions.

The Carver family have just moved to a very large, old and rambling house. It is the evening of their first day there. They are tired after spending the day moving and unpacking boxes.

At last, the whole family gathered on the porch and sat on the steps of their new home for a well-deserved rest, gazing at the red sun that was settling over the sea as the afternoon came to an end.

‘That’s enough for one day,’ Mr Carver announced. He was covered in soot and cobwebs.

‘It will take us a couple of weeks to get the house in shape,’ Mrs Carver added. ‘At the very least.’

‘There are spiders upstairs,’ Alice said. ‘They’re enormous.’

‘Spiders? Wow!’ cried Emma. ‘What did they look like?’

‘They looked just like you,’ replied Alice.

‘Let’s have a peaceful evening, please,’ their mother interrupted them, rubbing the bridge of her nose. ‘Don’t worry about the spiders, Alice. Max will kill them.’

‘There’s no need to kill them; Max can collect them and put them outside in the garden,’ said Mr Carver. ‘They’re nature’s creatures and deserve their day in the sun like the rest of us.’

‘I always end up with the heroic missions,’ muttered Max sarcastically. ‘Can the extermination, I mean, relocation, wait until tomorrow?’

‘Alice?’ his mother pleaded.

‘I’m not sleeping in a room full of spiders and goodness knows what else,’ Alice declared. ‘No matter how deserving they are.’

‘Oh, you’re such a baby,’ said Emma.

‘And you’re a monster’, replied Alice.

‘Max, before your two sisters start scratching each other to death, will you get rid of the wretched spiders?’ said their father in a tired voice.

Max went inside the house, ready to wipe out its previous lodgers by all means possible. As he climbed the stairs to the upper floor, he saw the glittering eyes of a cat watching him steadily from the top step. Perhaps it had been left behind by the previous owners. It certainly seemed to be at home, guarding the upper floor like a sentinel. He stopped for a second, then resumed his climb. He was not going to be afraid of a stray cat; he would not give it the satisfaction. As soon as Max went into one of the bedrooms, the cat followed him.

The wooden flooring creaked softly under his feet. Max began his spider hunt in the room facing south-west. He examined the floor carefully. After the cleaning session, the room was reasonably dirt free and it took Max only a couple of minutes to locate his first target – a fat spider marching from one of the corners in a straight line towards him. The creature must have been about three centimetres long and had eight black, bristly legs, with a golden mark on its body. No wonder Alice had panicked. There was no way in the world he was going to pick up that thing and carry it to the garden.

Max reached out his hand to grab a broom that was leaning against the wall and got ready to slam it down on the spider. He was steadying himself for the kill, when suddenly the cat pounced, opened its jaws and devoured it. Max let go of the broom and looked at the cat in astonishment. It threw him a malicious look, swallowed the spider and left the room, presumably in search of its next course.

Max walked over to the window. Beyond the yard, behind the fence that surrounded the house, was a field of wild grass, and about a hundred metres further on was what looked like a small enclosure bordered by a wall of pale stone. The vegetation had invaded the grounds, transforming the enclosure into a jungle from which emerged what seemed to be figures: human figures. In the twilight, Max had to strain his eyes to make out what he was seeing. It appeared to be an abandoned garden. A garden of statues. Max was hypnotised by the strange vision of the figures trapped in the undergrowth, locked inside a walled garden that reminded him of a village graveyard. A huge, metal gate locked with chains secured the entrance. In the distance, beyond the enclosed garden, was a thick forest that seemed to extend for miles.

‘What a place to explore!’ thought Max.

END OF PASSAGE

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