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The Manchester
Grammar School

Entrance Examination 2013
English Paper 2

Comprehension Passage

Printed inside this cover you will find the passage on which the comprehension paper is based. The questions are printed in the blue booklet and you should write your answers in the spaces provided on those pages.

You have a minimum of 5 minutes to read through the passage carefully, making any notes that you need alongside the text. You should not begin answering questions until the 5 minute period has finished.

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.

This story involves two boys, the narrator and Jon. The events take place in the countryside.

We set off together up the slope, Jon first, with me at his heels. Jon was the same as he always was, calm and intense, with his eyes squinting, concentrating on what we were going to do, but with no sign of impatience. That suited me well, for it was no secret that compared to him I was a slow-coach in most of our exploits. He had years of training behind him.

It was very early. We walked along the barbed wire fence by Barkald's meadow. Barkald's farm was on the far side of the road, close up to the forest. In the forest he kept four horses in a large area he had fenced in with barbed wire, from tree to tree at two heights.

Jon and I left the meadow path and walked down the road. Although we had been this way many times before it was different now. We were out stealing horses and we knew it showed. Barkald's house sat heavy and grey at the edge of the forest. It seemed threatening. The windows were dark, but maybe he was standing there looking down the road and could see the way we were walking and knew.

But it was too late to turn round. We walked down the gravel road, until the house disappeared round a bend, then up another path and into the forest. At first the wood was thick and dark. Then the light above us began to gradually expand until suddenly we saw two strands of barbed wire glinting, and we were there.

We looked in at the clearing. Only a few pine and birch trees stood strangely tall and solitary. The grass was growing lush and thick, and behind some bushes further on we saw the horses, only their rumps visible, tails swishing horse flies.

Jon bent down and climbed between the two strands of barbed wire, and I lay on the ground and rolled underneath the lower one. We came through without a tear in either trousers or sweaters. We got warily to our feet and walked through the grass towards the horses.

'That birch over there,' said Jon, pointing. 'Climb into it.'

A big birch tree stood apart, not far from the horses, with strong branches, the lowest of them three metres off the ground. Without hesitation I walked softly over to the tree. The horses raised their heads and turned them towards me as I approached, but they stayed where they were, still munching. Jon walked around them in a semicircle from the other side. I carefully climbed the trunk, then hoisted myself up onto the branch, to sit there, feet dangling.

'OK,' I called quietly. 'Ready.'

Jon squatted in front of the horses and talked to them in a low voice. They stood quite still with their heads towards him and their ears pushed forward. Suddenly, he sprang up shouting 'Hoi!' and stretched out his arms. The horses wheeled round and started to run. Two went off to the left and two came straight for my tree.

I twisted around with my stomach against the branch, kept my balance with my hands and opened my legs in the air like a pair of scissors. I felt a faint drumming in my chest from the hooves on the ground and up through the tree, and also a trembling from a different place, from inside myself.

And then the horses were there. I heard their hard breathing. The vibration in the tree grew stronger, and the sound of the hooves filled my head. When I could just see the muzzle of the nearest one beneath me, I slid off the branch with my legs stiffly to the sides. I let go and landed on the horse's back a bit too close to its neck. Its shoulder bones hit me hard between my legs as I landed and sent a jet of nausea up into my throat. It looked so simple when Zorro did it in the film, but now tears began to flow, and I wanted to be sick, but I bent forward and grabbed a firm hold of the mane with both hands. The horse tossed its head wildly, and accelerated into a full gallop. The other horse followed, and together we thundered off across the clearing.

There was a rushing sound, and the hoof beats died down, and the horse's back drummed through my body like the beating of my heart. Then there was a sudden silence around me that spread over everything. It was so weird, it was like a film without sound. 'Yahoo!' I screamed, and could hear my own voice, but it seemed to be coming from a different place. I was in two places at once, and nothing hurt. For a moment I was completely happy.

And then I saw something sparkle through the trees in front of me. It was the barbed wire. I clung hard to the mane and thought: We're going to jump. But we did not jump. Just before the fence both horses turned sharply and the laws of physics tore me from my horse's back and sent me kicking and flailing through the air and right over the fence. I felt the wire tear at the sleeve of my sweater and a smarting pain, and then I was lying in the heather. The impact knocked the air out of my body.

I was still lying there flat out when I saw Jon on horseback with a rope round the horse's muzzle come up to the fence. With the rope he could control it. He stopped just on the other side by pulling the rope, and the horse halted almost sideways to the fence. He looked down at me.

'Lying there, are you?' he said.

I stood up. It hurt, in my back and along one side, but nothing inside was damaged. Blood was running from a cut on my forearm and out through the sweater, which had a big tear in it, but that was all.

'Are you going to get on again?' he said.

'I don't think so,' I said.

I thought Jon smiled a bit, but I was not sure, because the sun was in my face. He slid off his horse and loosened the rope round its muzzle, then sent it off with a wave of his hand. It was happy to leave.

END OF PASSAGE

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