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The Manchester Grammar School

Entrance Examination 2017
English Section B - Comprehension

Comprehension Passage

Printed in this booklet 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, set in Victorian England, focuses on a young girl, Faith. At this point in the story, she is with her father, the Reverend Erasmus Sunderly. They are in the grounds of their house by the coast, going towards a tower.

The night was cold and starless, with just a few streaks of purple in the west. A single bat skimmed past and vanished, rapid as a heart flutter. Faith advanced across the grounds hesitantly. Her father gave her an impatient glance over his shoulder and beckoned to her to hurry.

"I must be back at the house by midnight," he whispered abruptly.

In the darkness the tower seemed larger, and grimly prison-like. Her father opened the door and disappeared into the darkness. When he re-emerged, his arms were filled with a cloth-shrouded object, and he was clearly struggling with the weight. He lowered it carefully into the wheelbarrow that stood by the entrance. Faith's nose filled with a strange, cold scent. The Reverend took up the handles of the barrow.

As the ground descended towards the beach, the path became more difficult. Whenever the wheel jolted, a little rustle of dropped leaves sounded from beneath the cloth, and each time her father drew in breath through his teeth.

On the beach the winds were colder and fiercer. The sea was black except for the seething shore, and brief scars of white foam. The cliffs seemed higher than they had by daylight, like giant bites taken out of the sky.

There was a sudden surge of the wind, and some unseen crack or cliff hollow gave off a throbbing whine not unlike a voice. Faith's father tensed, turning his head towards the source of the sound. He lowered the barrow, one hand sliding into his pocket as he listened. Eventually he relaxed.

With difficulty, her father manhandled the barrow across the beach to the little boat house. There he stooped by the rowing boat, examining it by the rays from the lantern, and knocking on the wood. After a while he nodded to himself. With visible effort, he lifted the plant pot and settled it near the stern.

"Get behind the boat, and push," he ordered, raising his voice to compete with the wind.

Faith's heart plummeted, her worst suspicions confirmed. Her father really *did* mean to take out the boat in the middle of the night. She pushed the boat as hard as she could.

"Father," ventured Faith, "how will we see the rocks?"

"Keep watch while I row, and warn me if you see rocks."

Faith stared out across the black shifting mass of the ocean. Every time a foam crest flared, she imagined it breaking on the hidden rocks. Nonetheless she hitched her skirts as best she could and clambered into the boat, while her father held the little vessel steady. Her father needed her, and whatever dangers were ahead they would be facing them together.

At first, each breaker kindly tried to push them back onto the beach. Faith's father worked the oars with an angry energy while the surf hissed around them. When the boat struggled into deeper water, the waves changed. Now they tipped and jostled the little vessel, like great black wolves in a playful mood.

Then the waves grew bigger and less playful, rolling under the boat with menacing unconcern. Whenever the boat tipped, every fibre in Faith's body was prepared for the capsize, the freezing shock of the water. She had never been taught how to swim, but her common sense told her that if she fell overboard, her layers of skirts might keep her afloat for a few seconds, but then they would soak up the seawater and become a terrible dead weight, tangling her legs and dragging her down to the seabed.

"Father, I can see a cave!"

The waves had them now, the oars helpless against the churning of the white water. The spray stung Faith's eyes. At last a breaker seized them and pushed them helplessly forward, into the mouth of the cave itself. The sky went out like a lamp, leaving only the radiance of the lantern.

"Wait here." Her father disappeared into the throat of the cave, carrying the pot as tenderly as if it were a wounded child. The light disappeared with him, leaving Faith in darkness.

At last Faith's father returned, carrying nothing but the lantern. He loosed the rope and jumped back into the boat without a word.

The haul back to the shore was a long one. At last the keel ground into the shore. Father and daughter climbed out and manhandled the boat back up the beach. Faith found that her legs were weak, her hands too numb to grip properly. The two of them leaned against the boat for a short while to recover.

"Good girl, Faith," the Reverend said at last. "Good girl." And suddenly Faith was no longer cold.

They walked back towards the house. Faith felt unsteady, but somehow, impossibly, there was dry ground beneath her boots. They had faced danger together, and had survived. She had been tested, and had passed.

"It is nearly midnight," murmured her father. "I am out of time. Faith - go in, and go to bed."

"You are not coming in?" Faith's concerns leapt to attention once again, like guard dogs. "Is something wrong? Shall I come with you?"

"No!" he replied abruptly. "No, that will not be necessary." There was a long pause. "Faith," he began in a quieter tone, "nobody must ever know that I left the house this night. Listen to me. If you are *ever* asked, you must tell them that we stayed up talking in my study until well after one in the morning. Do you understand?"

Faith nodded, though the nod was a half-lie. She did not really understand.

"I am not going far, and will be back very soon." Her father hesitated. "Faith, are your boots wet?"

Please turn over for the rest of the passage

"Yes" confessed Faith, touched by his concern. The walk from the beach had been squelchy and unpleasant.

"See to it that they are dry by morning, or the servants will notice and gossip about it. Nobody must suspect what we have done, nor where we have been. You must make sure there is no clue, no evidence."

He took a step away from the door and hesitated. He glanced over his shoulder at Faith, but the lantern was shrouded again and his expression lost in darkness.

"Show me how clever you can be, Faith."

END OF PASSAGE