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The Manchester Grammar School

Entrance Examination 2018
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.

It is war-time and Carrie and her brother Nick have been sent away from their home in London to live in the safety of a village in Wales with Mr Evans and his sister. Here, after their first night, they meet Mr Evans.

He wasn't an Ogre[1], of course. Just a tall, thin, cross man with a loud voice, pale, staring, pop-eyes, and tufts of spiky hair sticking out from each nostril.

Councillor Samuel Isaac Evans was a bully. He bullied his sister. He even bullied the women who came into his shop, selling them things they didn't really want to buy and refusing to stock things that they did. "Take it or leave it," he'd say. "Don't you know there's a war on?"

He would have bullied the children if he had thought they were frightened of him. But although Carrie was a little frightened, she didn't show it, and Nick wasn't frightened at all. He was frightened of Ogres and spiders and crabs and cold water and the dentist and dark nights, but he wasn't often frightened of people. Perhaps this was only because he had never had reason to be until he met Mr Evans, but he wasn't afraid of him, even after that first, dreadful night, because Mr Evans had false teeth that clicked when he talked. "You can't really be scared of someone whose teeth might fall out," he told Carrie.

The possibility fascinated him from the beginning, from the moment Mr Evans walked into the kitchen while they were having breakfast their first morning and bared those loose teeth in what he probably thought was a smile. It looked to the children more like the kind of grin a tiger might give before it pounced on its prey. They put down their porridge spoons and stood up, politely and meekly.

It seemed to please him. He said, "You've got a few manners, I see. That's something! That's a bit of sugar on the pill!"[2]

They didn't know what to say to this so they said nothing and he stood there, grinning and rubbing his hands together. At last he said, "Sit down, then, finish your breakfast, what are you waiting for? It's wicked to let good food get cold. You've fallen on your feet, let me tell you, you'll get good food in this house. So no fussiness, mind! No whining round my sister for titbits when my back's turned. Particularly the boy. I know what boys are! Walking stomachs! I told her, you fetch two girls now, there's just the one room, but she got round me, she said, the boy's only a baby!" He looked sharply at Nick. "Not too much of a baby, I hope. No wet beds. That I won't stand!"

Nick's gaze was fixed on Mr Evans' mouth. "That's a rude thing to mention," he said in a clear, icy voice that made Carrie tremble. But Mr Evans didn't fly into the rage she'd expected. He simply looked startled - as if a worm had just lifted its head and answered him back, Carrie thought.

He sucked his teeth for a minute. Then said, surprisingly mildly, "All right. All right, then. You mind your P's and Q's, see, and I won't complain. As long as you toe the chalk line! Rules are made to be kept in this house, no shouting, or running upstairs, and no Language." Nick looked at him and he went on - quickly, as if he knew what was coming, "No Bad Language, that is. I'll have no foul mouths here. I don't know how you've been brought up but this house is run in the Fear of the Lord."

Nick said, “We don’t swear. Even my father doesn’t swear. And he’s a Naval Officer.”

What an odd thing to say, Carrie thought. But Mr Evans was looking at Nick with a certain, grudging respect.

“Oh, an Officer, is he? Well, well.”

“A Captain,” Nick said. “Captain Peter Willow.”

“Indeed?” Mr Evans’ teeth clicked - to attention, perhaps. He said, grinning again, “Then let’s hope he taught you how to behave. It’ll save me the trouble,” and turned on his heel and went back to the shop.

Silence fell. Miss Evans moved from the sink where she’d been all this time, standing quite still, and started to clear the plates from the table.

Nick said, “You don’t mind Language, do you? I mean, I don’t know the deaf and dumb alphabet.”

“Don’t be smart,” Carrie said, but Miss Evans laughed. Hand to her mouth, bright squirrel eyes watching the door as if she were scared he’d come back and catch her.

She said softly, “Oh, his bark’s worse than his bite. Though he won’t stand to be crossed, so don’t be too cheeky and mind what he says! *I’ve* always minded him - he’s so much older, you see. When our Mam died - our Dad had been killed down the pit long before - he took me in and brought me up. His wife was alive then, poor, dear soul, and his son’s not much younger than I am. That’s Frederick, he’s away in the Army. Mr Evans brought us up together, made no difference between us. Never made me feel my place. When we were naughty, he’d give Fred the strap but he’d sit me on the mantelpiece to make me mind my manners. I’ve sat there many a time, scared to death of the fire and my feet pins and needles.”

She looked at the mantelpiece above the range fire and the children looked at it too. It was a horribly long way from the ground. Miss Evans said, “You might say he’s been more like a father to me than a brother.”

“Our father never sat anyone on a mantelpiece,” Nick said. “Or frightened anyone.”

END OF PASSAGE

[1] Ogre - a frightening giant (lines 1 and 8)

[2] sugar on the pill - medicines were traditionally coated in sugar to hide their bitter taste and allow them to be easily swallowed (line 19)