



11+ Comprehension

Arrival in Corfu

We threaded our way out of the noise and confusion of the Customs shed into the brilliant sunshine on the quay. Around us the town rose steeply, tiers of multi-coloured houses piled haphazardly, green shutters folded back from their windows, like the wings of a thousand moths. Behind us lay the bay, smooth as a plate, smouldering with that unbelievable blue.

Larry walked swiftly, with head thrown back and an expression of such regal disdain on his face that one did not notice his diminutive size, keeping a wary eye on the porters who struggled with his trunks. Behind him strolled Leslie, short, stocky, with an air of quiet belligerence, and then Margo, trailing yards of muslin and scent. Mother, looking like a tiny, harassed missionary in an uprising, was dragged unwillingly to the nearest lamp-post by an exuberant Roger, and was forced to stand there, staring into space, while he relieved pent-up feelings that had accumulated in his kennel. Larry chose two magnificently dilapidated horse-drawn cabs, had the luggage installed in one, and seated himself in the second. Then he looked round irritably.

“Well?” he asked. “What are we waiting for?”

“We're waiting for Mother,” explained Leslie. “Roger's found a lamp-post.”

“Dear God!” said Larry, and then hoisted himself upright in the cab and bellowed, “Come *on*, Mother, come on. Can't the dog wait?”

“Coming, dear,” called Mother passively and untruthfully, for Roger showed no signs of quitting the post.

“That dog's been a nuisance all the way,” said Larry.

“Don't be so impatient,” said Margo indignantly; “the dog can't help it... and anyway, we had to wait an hour in Naples for *you*.”

“My stomach was out of order,” explained Larry coldly.

“Well, presumably *his* stomach's out of order,” said Margo triumphantly. “It's six of one and a dozen of the other.”

“You mean half a dozen of the other.”

“Whatever I mean, it's the same thing.”

At this moment Mother arrived, slightly dishevelled, and we had to turn our attentions to the task of getting Roger into the cab. He had never been in such a vehicle, and treated it with suspicion. Eventually we had to lift him bodily and hurl him inside, yelping frantically, and then pile in breathlessly after him and hold him down. The horse, frightened by this activity, broke into a shambling trot, and we ended in a tangled heap on the floor of the cab with Roger moaning loudly underneath us.

“What an entry,” said Larry bitterly. “I had hoped to give an impression of gracious majesty, and this is what happens... we arrive in town like a troupe of medieval tumblers.”

“Don't keep *on*, dear,” Mother said soothingly, straightening her hat; “we'll soon be at the hotel.”

So our cab clopped and jingled its way into the town, while we sat on the horsehair seats and tried to muster the appearance of gracious majesty Larry

45 required. Roger, wrapped in Leslie's powerful grasp, lolled his head over the side
of the vehicle and rolled his eyes as though at his last gasp. Then we rattled past
an alley-way in which four scruffy mongrels were lying in the sun. Roger
stiffened, glared at them and let forth a torrent of deep barks. The mongrels were
immediately galvanized into activity, and they sped after the cab, yapping
50 vociferously. Our pose was irretrievably shattered, for it took two people to
restrain the raving Roger, while the rest of us leaned out of the cab and made wild
gestures with magazines and books at the pursuing horde. This only had the effect
of exciting them still further, and at each alley-way we passed their numbers
increased, until by the time we were rolling down the main thorough- fare of the
55 town there were some twenty-four dogs swirling about our wheels, almost
hysterical with anger.

“Why doesn't somebody *do* something?” asked Larry, raising his voice
above the uproar. “This is like a scene from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*”

60 “Why don't *you* do something, instead of criticizing?” snapped Leslie, who
was locked in combat with Roger.

Larry promptly rose to his feet, snatched the whip from our astonished
driver's hand, made a wild swipe at the herd of dogs, missed them, and caught
Leslie across the back of the neck.

65 “What in the world d'you think you're playing at?” Leslie snarled, twisting
a scarlet and angry face towards Larry.

“Accident,” explained Larry airily. “I'm out of practice... it's so long since
I used a horse-whip.”

“Well, watch what you're doing,” said Leslie loudly and belligerently.

“Now, now, dear, it was an accident,” said Mother.

70 Larry took another swipe at the dogs and knocked off Mother's hat.

“You're more trouble than the dogs,” said Margo.

“Do be careful, dear,” said Mother, clutching her hat; “you might hurt
someone. I should put the whip down.”

75 At that moment the cab shambled to a halt outside a doorway over which
hung a board with Pension Suisse inscribed on it. The dogs, feeling that they were
at last going to get to grips with this effeminate black canine who rode in cabs,
surrounded us in a solid, panting wedge. The door of the hotel opened and an
ancient bewhiskered porter appeared and stood staring glassily at the turmoil in
the street. The difficulties of getting Roger out of the cab and into the hotel were
80 considerable, for he was a heavy dog, and it took the combined efforts of the
family to lift, carry, and restrain him. Larry had by now forgotten his majestic
pose and was rather enjoying himself. He leapt down and danced about the
pavement with the whip, cleaving a path through the dogs, along which Leslie,
Margo, Mother, and I hurried, bearing the struggling, snarling Roger. We
85 staggered into the hall, and the porter slammed the front door and leant against it,
his moustache quivering. The manager came forward, eyeing us with a mixture of
apprehension and curiosity. Mother faced him, hat on one side of her head,
clutching in one hand my jam-jar of caterpillars.

Questions

(25 Marks)

1. How does the author use figurative language to create a vivid image of the setting in the first paragraph? (6)

2. Define the following words as they are used in the text: (4)

a. Belligerence (line 9)

b. Exuberant (line 11)

c. Galvanized (line 49)

d. Cleaving (line 83)

3. What do we learn about the personalities of Larry and Margo from their conversation in lines 15 – 30? Support your answer with close reference to the text. (6)

4. Rewrite the following sentence in your own words: (3)

The dogs, feeling that they were at last going to get to grips with this effeminate black canine who rode in cabs, surrounded us in a solid, panting wedge.

5. Using the passage as a whole, explain what impressions you get of the mother's character. Provide evidence to support your answer. (6)