

**Passages for
Reading and
Comprehension**

Roland John

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and
Comprehension

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University of London Press Ltd

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Preface

The language level of this book is substantially more advanced than that of the author's *Comprehension and Exercises in English* (University of London Press Ltd, 1968), but its purpose is similar: to provide, at a recognized milestone in school English studies, a selection of passages, with exercises, for class reading and practice. In the case of the earlier book, that milestone is the final year of the Preparatory (or Primary) course. The present collection is intended for students in the final year of Secondary (or Intermediate) studies.

Enjoyable reading is of first importance. This book includes pieces of literary and general interest. There are passages with a scientific appeal, either practical or topical. Several are of special interest to girls. The passages have been selected or specially written in response to the interest that students have shown in similar writing. The collection is graded in difficulty, most of the specially written passages occurring in the first half of the book.

The questions and exercises are planned chiefly to offer help in the understanding of the passages and to practise the vocabulary; and so to enhance the value of the reading. Some of the exercises deal with particular difficulties.

Teachers may prefer to work out their own methods of using the book. The author suggests a first reading and study of a passage in class, followed by attention to the questions on it (generally Sections A, B and C). The piece should then be read again in class, and students encouraged to read it privately. The other exercises may be tackled when time allows.

I Caught in an Animal Trap

Mary Kingsley

Mary Kingsley (1862–1900) was the niece of the writer, Charles Kingsley. During her short life, she travelled widely in West Africa and wrote interesting and amusing accounts of her journeys.

In this passage, she describes an unpleasant accident. ‘The Duke’, ‘the Passenger’ and ‘Wiki’ are the nicknames which she gave to three of her porters.

5 I noticed suddenly that my path seemed to lead into some low bushes. But it came out again, I could see, on the far side. My porters were a long way behind me; and so I decided to take a short cut and go straight through the bushes. The next news was that I lay on a lot of sharp spikes, at the bottom of a big hole, fifteen feet below the ground. ‘That short cut wasn’t a very good idea,’ I thought.

10 At times like these, a traveller realises the advantage of a good, long, thick skirt. Before I left England, many people had advised me to wear men’s clothes in the bush. ‘In rough country, trousers will be much better,’ they said. If I had taken their advice, I would have been spiked to the bone and finished. But here I was, feeling rather sore, with the fullness of my skirt under me, sitting on nine sharp spikes, each about twelve inches long, in comparative comfort, calling loudly to be pulled out.

15 The Duke came along first and looked down at me. I said, ‘Get a rope and pull me out.’ He said, ‘Ah,’ and sat down on one of the boxes. The Passenger came next, and he looked down the hole too. ‘You dead?’ he said. ‘No,’ said I. ‘Get a rope and pull me out.’ He said, ‘Oh,’ and sat down next to the Duke. At last Wiki arrived. He went and chose very carefully the one and only rope suitable for raising an English lady of my exact colour, age and size out of that particular hole. By the time he took, it was a very important and difficult choice. But he brought it at last, and I was soon out, feeling very much
20 ashamed of myself.

If you’re ever going through the African bush, examine the ground before taking a short cut; and, of course, wear a thick skirt.

330 words

<i>porter</i>	(introduction) a person who carries luggage
<i>short cut, n.</i>	(line 3) a way from one place to another that makes the usual distance shorter
<i>spike</i>	(line 4) a piece of wood or metal with a sharp point
<i>the bush</i>	(line 9) (in Africa, India, etc.) country with bushes, trees, grass, etc. not used by farmers
<i>spiked</i>	(line 10) cut (by a spike)
<i>finished</i>	(line 11) killed
<i>comparative comfort</i>	(line 13) more comfort than would have been possible if she had been wearing men's clothes

A

Indicate by a tick (✓) the statement in each group that is correct or the nearest in meaning to the information given in the passage:

- 1 a The path really went round the bushes.
 b The path seemed to disappear in some low bushes.
 c She could not see the path, and so she went into the bushes.
- 2 a No one knew that there was a deep hole among the bushes.
 b The hole was a trap for catching animals.
 c The porters knew about the hole but had not told Miss Kingsley.
- 3 a Her thick skirt saved her from a serious injury.
 b She had been advised to wear a skirt to prevent injury.
 c She was glad that she had taken the advice.
- 4 a The porters did nothing to help her out of the hole.
 b The porters threw a rope down the hole and pulled her out.
 c After a long time, Wiki brought a rope and pulled her up.

B

Write a complete sentence in answer to each of these questions:

- 1 What made her think that the path through the bushes was safe?
- 2 What advice had other travellers given her?
- 3 Why had the porters not advised her about the hole?
- 4 What usually happens if you take 'a short cut'?

C

Give a short, factual answer to each of these questions:

- 1 Why were there spikes at the bottom of the hole?
- 2 What might have happened if Miss Kingsley had been wearing trousers?
- 3 How did she get out of the hole?
- 4 Which porter helped her?

D

Complete these sentences, using the information given in the passage:

- 1 The other two porters rested while . . .
- 2 If Miss Kingsley had not been well ahead of the porters . . .
- 3 'The Passenger' seemed a good nickname for him because . . .
- 4 Although she was not seriously hurt, . . .

E

Use the right word from the list in each space:

sore, exact, far, sharp, rough, straight

- 1 This path is a short cut; it leads . . . to the village.
- 2 I fell down a week ago, and my knee is still . . .
- 3 The new school is at the . . . end of the village.
- 4 This piece of ground is too . . . to make a good garden.
- 5 He lives in Bridge Street, but I do not know his . . . address.
- 6 You need a very . . . knife to cut a piece of leather.

F

Use these phrases in sentences of your own:

a good idea

at a time like this (at times like these)

(cut) to the bone

comparative comfort (ease, health, etc.)

the one and only (chair, person, etc.)

2 The Price of a House

In some places there are never enough houses for all the people who want one. That is why the price, or the rent, keeps on rising. Other things get more expensive too, of course, but a house is different. It is the biggest thing that a man ever really wants to buy.

But there are still some places where houses are cheap. The oasis of Kerimi is one such place. Houses there are 'dirt cheap', as the English saying goes. It is natural, perhaps, because they are all made of dried mud.

Ismail was an official of the government. He arrived one evening at the largest village in the oasis of Kerimi. It was eight hundred miles from the capital. Still dusty from the journey, he went immediately to visit the Mudir.

5 Ismail introduced himself. He was, he said, an electrical engineer and would be in charge of the new power-station that was being built. He expected to stay in Kerimi for at least a year. He needed a house and hoped the Mudir would help him to find one.

'That's easy,' the Mudir said. 'There's an empty place you can have at once. It's an old house that belongs to a friend of mine.'

10 'How much is the rent?' Ismail asked.

'Rent? Oh, rent, yes. Well, if you'd like to give the old man something—but I'm sure he won't take it. Just invite him in for a cup of coffee now and again. He'll be very pleased.'

15 The house was one of the oldest in the village and, like all the others, was built of hard mud. Ismail loved it as soon as he saw it. It was clean and comfortable, and a stream of clear water ran behind it to the fields. Ismail moved in that evening.

20 Just five days later, the people of Kerimi were astonished to see dark clouds in the sky. The children were very frightened—they had never seen such clouds before. It was twelve years since any rain had fallen in Kerimi. That night there was a cloudburst over the village, and heavy rain fell for three hours. The oasis was flooded. Ismail's house, and several other houses near

the stream, collapsed in a river of mud. Eight men spent half that night in the Mudiriya.

25 'We can soon build a new house for you,' the Mudir said to Ismail the following morning. 'It will only take about a week.'

'That's very kind of you,' Ismail said. 'But I'm worried.' He laughed uncomfortably. 'I haven't got much money with me. How much will it cost?'

30 'About £15, I think,' the Mudir said. 'You'll be able to pay that in a month or two, won't you?'

'Oh, yes. I thought it would be more.'

Ismail's new house had a big room—twelve metres long and seven metres wide—and a small kitchen. The stream still ran behind it.

35 'You can entertain all the men of the village here,' the Mudir said. 'There are only forty-four of us.'

410 words

cloudburst (line 21) a great rainstorm

collapse (line 23) fall down

A

Indicate by a tick the statement in each group that is correct or the nearest in meaning to the information given in the passage:

1 a Kerimi is the name of the largest village in the oasis.

b There are several villages in Kerimi, but their names are not given.

c The oasis has only one village, called Kerimi.

2 a The people of Kerimi were accustomed to paying rent.

b The Mudir was surprised by Ismail's question about the rent.

c The Mudir fixed the rent, but it was not high.

3 a The children were frightened because they knew there would be a cloudburst.

b The strange, dark clouds frightened the children.

c The children were frightened because they had never seen rain before.

4 a Ismail's clothes were so wet that he laughed uncomfortably.

b Ismail was worried because he would have to wait a week for his new house.

c Ismail laughed uncomfortably because he was afraid that he could not afford a new house.

B

Write a complete sentence in answer to each of these questions:

- 1 Why had Ismail gone to Kerimi?
- 2 Which houses suffered most in the flood?
- 3 Why did eight men spend half the night in the Mudiriya?
- 4 What do you think pleased Ismail most about his new house?

C

Give a short, factual answer to each of these questions:

- 1 Where is Kerimi?
- 2 What did the Mudir think was a suitable 'rent' for the old house?
- 3 How long did the cloudburst last?
- 4 What was the area of the floor in Ismail's new room?

D

Notice the sentence *Ismail introduced himself* (line 4).

Use a similar pronoun (e.g. *myself, herself, themselves*, etc.) to complete each of these sentences:

- 1 Having no brothers or sisters, Mary must usually amuse . . .
- 2 The doctor warned me to look after . . . in the winter.
- 3 The new student presented . . . to the headmaster.
- 4 She said, 'Cook . . . a meal if you're hungry.'

E

'It's an old house that belongs to *a friend of mine*' (line 9).

a friend of mine = one of my friends

a few clothes of hers = a few of her clothes

Use a similar phrase to complete each of these sentences:

- 1 He has gone to Cairo to visit (one of his uncles).
- 2 I have to borrow (one of your books), if you don't mind.
- 3 Mustafa was (one of Ismail's neighbours).
- 4 I am giving a party for (some of our friends).

F

... the new power-station that *was being built* (line 5).

Notice this Passive form of the Past Continuous tense. It means: Workmen were *still* building the power-station (when Ismail arrived at Kerimi).

Look at the example, and then try to use the same form of the verb in the other sentences:

Example: The school (paint) when I went to see it.

The school *was being painted* when I went to see it.

1 It was January, and the corn (plant).

2 We left that house because we (annoy) by the neighbours.

3 The men stayed in the Mudiriya while the new houses (build).

4 The women and children (look after) by their friends.

G

Write a paragraph (about 80 words), without conversation, to describe the first two hours that Ismail spent in the oasis of Kerimi.