



Owl Tutors 11 + Entrance Examination

English Paper 4 A (Comprehension)

Total marks: 25

Time allowed:

5 minutes reading, then 40 mins writing

Full name:

The Woman in Black

At first all seemed very quiet, very still, and I wondered why I had awoken. Then, with a missed heartbeat, I realized that Spider was up and standing at the door. Every hair of her body was on end, her ears were pricked, her tail erect, the whole of her tense, as if ready to spring. And she was emitting a soft, low growl from deep in her throat. I sat up paralysed, frozen in the bed, conscious only of the dog and the prickling of my own skin and of what suddenly seemed a different kind of silence, ominous and dreadful.

And then, from somewhere within the depths of the house – but somewhere not very far from the room in which I was – I heard a noise. It was a faint noise, and, strain my ears as I might, I could not make out exactly what it was. It was a sound like a regular yet intermittent bump or rumble. Nothing else happened. There were no footsteps, no creaking floorboards, the air was absolutely still, the wind did not moan through the casement. Only the muffled noise went on and the dog continued to stand, bristling at the door, now putting her nose to the gap at the bottom and snuffling along, now taking a pace backwards, head cocked, and, like me, listening, listening. And, every so often, she growled again.

In the end, I suppose because nothing else happened and because I did have the dog to take with me, I managed to get out of bed, although I was shaken and my heartbeat uncomfortably fast within me. But it took some time for me to find sufficient reserves of courage to enable me to open the bedroom door and stand out in the dark corridor. The moment I did so, Spider shot ahead and I heard her padding about, sniffing intently at every closed door, still growling and grumbling down in her throat.

After a while, I heard the odd sound again. It seemed to be coming from along the passage to my left, at the far end. But it was still quite impossible to identify. Very cautiously, listening, hardly breathing, I ventured a few steps in that direction. Spider went ahead of me. The passage

led only to three other bedrooms on either side and, one by one, regaining my nerve as I went, I opened them and looked inside each one. Nothing, only heavy old furniture and empty unmade beds and, in the rooms at the back of the house, moonlight. Down below me, on the ground floor of the house, silence, a seething, blanketing, almost tangible silence, and a musty darkness, thick as felt.

And then I reached the door at the very end of the passage. Spider was there before me and her body, as she sniffed beneath it, went rigid, her growling grew louder. I put my hand on her collar, stroked the rough, short hair, as much for my own reassurance as for hers. I could feel the tension in her limbs and body and it answered to my own.

My throat felt constricted and dry and I had begun to shiver. There was something in that room and I could not get to it, nor would I dare to, if I were able.

By Susan Hill

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Questions and answers to follow.

Questions

- 1) Who is Spider? (1 mark)
- 2) What is Spider doing? (2 marks)
- 3) How does the narrator describe the noise? (2 marks)
- 4) How would you describe the atmosphere in the room? (Use your own words.) (3 marks)
- 5) Find three phrases where the writer is building tension? (3 marks)
- 6) Explain one example of sensory language. How does it make the writing more interesting? (3 marks)
- 7) Why does the narrator go out into the corridor? (2 marks)
- 8) Use the following quotation to explain how the narrator feels at the end of the passage. (1 mark)

'My throat felt constricted and dry and I had begun to shiver.'
- 9) Look at the last sentence of the extract. Explain how a phrase in this sentence makes you feel. (2 marks)
- 10) Think about what you have learnt so far. What do you think that the narrator will find if they open the door? (1 mark)
- 11) Carry on the narrative using as much imagery as you can. (5)

Answers

- 1) Spider is the narrator's dog. (1)
- 2) Spider is growling at the door because they want to leave the room / because they want to investigate the noise. (2)
- 3) The narrator describes the noise to be faint and muffled. Other acceptable answers are regular / intermittent bump or rumble. (2)
- 4) The atmosphere in the room is strange and tense with the feeling that something scary is about to happen. Any similar answer that engages with the sense of tension. (3)
- 5) Tension is built by the writer using the following phrases: 'I sat up paralysed, frozen in the bed', 'And, every so often, she growled again', 'After a while, I heard the odd sound again.' Any phrases that show an understanding that the dog, the silence and the narrator's actions are being used to create tension. (3)
- 6) The sensory language in 'a musty darkness, thick as felt,' makes the language more interesting because it helps us feel how heavy the darkness is. Accept any other example of sensory language with an explanation. (3)
- 7) The narrator goes out into the corridor because she has the dog with her, and she wants to investigate the sound. (2)
- 8) The quotation shows us that the narrator feels fearful of what is behind the door. (1)

- 9) The phrase, 'there was something in that room', makes me feel a strong sense of dread for what the narrator might discover. (2)

- 10) Award any responses that focus on the silence or the thing making the sound. (1)

- 11) In the continuation award one mark for similes, alliteration, metaphors, senses, onomatopoeia and personification. (5)