

0860/31/11

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2013

MONDAY, 29 APRIL
2.30 PM – 3.20 PM

ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
Credit Level
Reading
Text

Read carefully the passage overleaf. It will help if you read it twice. When you have done so, answer the questions. Use the spaces provided in the Question/Answer booklet.



A young woman, Anne, arrives in a small French town to take up a new job.

- 1 In those days the station in Janvilliers had an arched glass roof over the southbound platform as if in imitation of the big domes of St Lazare, in Paris. When it rained, the impact of the water set up a nervy rattle as the glass echoed and shook against the fancy restraint of its iron framework. There was a more modest rumble emitted by the covered footbridge, while from the gutters there came an awful martyred gurgling as they sought out broken panes and unmended masonry down which to spit the water that was choking them. The thin sound of the locomotive's wheeze as it braced itself for its final three stops up the coast was thus barely audible to the two people who alighted from the train that damp but not untypical Monday night.
- 2 One was the driver, who was following the custom of years by climbing down from his cab, hat pulled over his ears, and racing to the side-door of the station buffet where his cup of coffee would be waiting for him. There was no time for conversation—just a quick gulp and he was gone, as usual, scuttling back up the platform, hoisting himself aboard with a word to the fireman and a reinvigorated haul on the levers as the engine hissed and the train set off to arrive, as usual, a minute and a half late at its next stop.
- 3 The other was a slight, dark-haired girl with two heavy suitcases, frowning into the rain and trying not to feel frightened. She stood in the doorway of the ticket hall, hoping someone would have been sent to fetch her. “Be brave, little Anne, be brave,” old Louvet, her guardian, would have said to her if he had been there, or—for all Anne knew—alive. After a time she did see the long bending approach of headlights, but the car circled the fountains in the middle of the square and disappeared in a spray of water.
- 4 Anne saw a dripping form, male by the look of it and wrapped in a cape, approach her from the darkness. His voice was rough and grudging. “Are you the waitress? For the Hotel du Lion d’Or?” His face now appeared in what light spilled over from the yellow lamp in the ticket hall. He was a youth of about nineteen with thick black eyebrows and dark curls stuck against his forehead under a leather cap. His cheeks were traumatised by spots.
- 5 “Yes, that’s right. Who are you?”
- 6 “I work there. My name’s Roland. I’ve got the van. The boss said to come and meet you. It’s over here.”
- 7 He led the way, shambling in a mixture of embarrassment and an attempt to keep dry by wrapping his cape around him, which caused his knees to come too close together. Anne followed, struggling to keep up because of the heavy suitcases. Roland took her round the back of the station yard and gestured to a small van. He unslashed the canvas from the open back and gestured to her to throw in her suitcases. With considerable shouting and violence towards the tinny machine, he succeeded in making it creep, then jerk, then rush across the darkened square as he fought to locate the gears. Nervous at what might be waiting for her, Anne began to talk.
- 8 “What do you do at the hotel?”
- 9 Roland made no reply but pulled back the window on his side of the van and pushed at the little windscreen-wiper. The rubber had almost worn away on the fragile stick, and its small motor functioned properly only in dry weather. Roland peered forward in an attempt to see through the misty swathe that the wiper cut intermittently across the glass. Anne couldn’t think what to say to him; it seemed rude not to make conversation, but she didn’t want to distract him.
- 10 “Do you often drive this van?”

- 11 “No. Well, yes, it’s not that I’m not used to it, of course. I drive it just as much as anyone else. But petrol, you know.”
- 12 “Is the boss very mean then?”
- 13 “No, it’s Madame. *He* couldn’t care less.”
- 14 “Madame his wife?”
- 15 “No. Madame Bouin, the manageress. She thinks we should only go to the market once a week and load up. You know, the big market down the road. The rest of the time we have to get the stuff from here. She sends us on foot.”
- 16 They negotiated the perimeter of another square, with the town hall, a curious building beneath a black slate roof in the grand eighteenth-century manner, in one corner. They drove on in silence down a street called the rue des Ecoles, swung sharply left and found themselves face to face with the Hotel du Lion d’Or.
- 17 “I hadn’t realised it was so near. I could have walked”, said Anne.
- 18 The hotel was secluded from the square by a courtyard and a grey wall with a pair of rusting iron gates. Anne heaved her cases up to the front doors through whose glass panels she could make out a broad lobby, leading up to a staircase in the crook of which was the reception desk. She was aware of a woman behind it watching her as the suitcases dripped gently on to the parquet floor. She put them down on a threadbare mat in front of the counter.
- 19 “Mademoiselle?” It was the woman behind the desk who spoke, her voice not so much interrogative as menacing. Madame Bouin, Anne supposed. Her eyes had a calm quality despite the fact that one of them was enlarged by the thick lens of her spectacles. Her bearing managed to combine world-weariness with a feline state of readiness. Anne had a sense that anything she herself might say would have been anticipated by this woman, and nothing she could devise would please her. Presumably she behaved in the same way with the guests.
- 20 “I’ve come to take the waitress job.”
- 21 “Have you now? Then why have you come through the front door? I understood from Monsieur the Patron that you had had previous experience of hotel work. Is this what you were told is normal?”
- 22 The woman’s voice remained as level as her eyes.
- 23 “I’m sorry, I—I didn’t know the way in.”
- 24 Madame Bouin said nothing. Instead, she took a card from among a sheaf of papers in front of her. “Details. Insurance and so on,” she said, handing the card across the desk. Anne took the forms and a pen from the desk.
- 25 Surname: Louvet. She had grown used to this lie. The local lawyer had advised her as a child to abandon her family name when it was appearing daily in the newspapers. Forenames: Anne Marie Thérèse. These at least, and the date of her birth, she could give truthfully. Her handwriting was determined and precise. By the space for “Previous Place of Employment” she put the name of a café near the Gare Montparnasse. Next of kin: she wrote down the name of Louvet, her assumed father, blurring with skilled certainty, though not without a qualm, the lines of her identity.
- 26 She handed back the completed card to Madame Bouin.

Adapted from “The Girl at the Lion d’Or” by Sebastian Faulks

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