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0860/27/11

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2013

MONDAY, 29 APRIL
10.35 AM – 11.25 AM

ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
Foundation 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.

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In this story, Leo, the narrator, and his friend Sean explore some empty buildings.

1 It was always better going to Sean's for tea. First of all my little brother, David, was not there to annoy us, trying to barge into the room. Even when we barricaded the door, he would find a way. Either that or he'd kick up such a fuss, my mum would insist we let him in. "I'll be good," he would promise. He never was. Two seconds through the door and he was diving on us, bombarding us with pillows, wanting to play.

2 And secondly, and more importantly, Sean's mum didn't ask too many questions when we went out. Just told us to be careful. Don't get into any trouble.

3 The lighter nights were coming in—late February—and after our tea we ran through the estate, checking out where we could explore next.

4 Over the railway bridge at the end of Sean's estate there was a long line of empty tenement properties. Clyde Terrace. The council was planning to pull them down. They were going to build new houses here, in this prime spot that had a spectacular view right over the Clyde. But so far nothing had been done to them. They had been boarded up for months, with steel panels on the windows and doors. They looked impregnable. But that was only a challenge to me and Sean.

5 "Let's separate, Leo," Sean suggested. "You start over there." He nodded to the other end of the terrace. "I'll start here. Text me when you find a way in."

6 I watched him go, crouching along the walls like an SAS commando on a mission. I had to smile.

7 "Nobody can see you here, pal," I was thinking. Because the back of the properties only looked on to another line of derelict housing.

8 It was such a waste, I thought, all those empty houses, when it could have been a great place for people to live.

9 I waited till Sean was out of my sight before I began to move just as stealthily towards the far end of the terrace. Every so often I stopped to tug at a steel panel to see if it might come loose. But every window, every entry was sealed tight. I was almost ready to give up—to text Sean that I was having no luck—when I spotted it. The steel corner over one of the windows was bent out as if someone had prised it open. Vandals probably—like me—trying to get in. I crouched closer and gave it a tug. It scraped across the sill, but with another pull it creaked a little wider. I could fit in there, I thought. Skinny little me? No problem. But maybe not Sean.

10 I pulled my phone from my pocket to text him I'd found a way and only then noticed I had no charge in my battery.

11 I looked back along the line of tenements but there was no sign of my mate. Maybe he had found another way in, had tried to text me and failed and had decided to go inside by himself.

12 So would I then. I slipped my phone back in my pocket and took out my torch. Then I squeezed inside.

13 The torch's beam sent a long thin light across the floor. I moved it around and realised I was in an old kitchen. No graffiti. No pipes or wires pulled out. The vandals hadn't been here yet.

14 And for a split second—a micro-second—I wondered, why not? These houses had been lying derelict for months. Usually it only took days for the vandals to move in.

15 But the thought was gone in an instant. I was the first one here, that was all. Boldly going where nobody had gone before. A pioneer explorer in a new land. I opened the door of the kitchen and stepped into the living room. Black as pitch. My torchlight caught a picture still hanging on a wall. I peered closer. A steamer coming into harbour, gulls flocking around it. It reminded me that this had been someone's house—someone's home once. I moved further into the room.

16 The house was thick with silence. It seemed to me I was cut off from the world outside. Totally alone. I swept the light across the bare floorboards and immediately swept it back again.

17 One of the floorboards was lying loose.

18 I was down on my knees in an instant. Maybe, I was thinking, someone had left a box of money under those floorboards, their life savings, and had forgotten to take it with them. Or maybe stolen jewellery, or . . . my imagination went into overdrive.

19 Or maybe a body.

20 I sniffed the air . . . but there was nothing.

21 This was definitely time for a mint. I sat back, pulled one from the bag in my pocket and flicked in into my mouth.

22 That loose floorboard had to be significant. There had been no vandals in here, so why was the floorboard loose?

23 My hand was almost touching it when I remembered Sean. Should I go back outside, find him, help him to squeeze inside so we could discover the secret under the floorboards together? Of all times for my phone to have no battery!

24 But on the other hand, maybe there would be nothing there at all.

25 But it was too late to go back for Sean. I couldn't wait. He'd understand.

26 I reached out and lifted the floorboard free.

Adapted from "Grass" by Cathy MacPhail

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