

GCSE - AQA Style

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

Source A: an extract from 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' by Louis de Bernières

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SOURCE A

'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' is set on the Greek island of Kefalonia during World War II. In this extract the villagers, as yet untroubled by war, gather to watch the entertainment provided by Megalo Velisarios – the strongman.

CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN

Megalo Velisarios, famous all over the islands of Ionia, garbed¹ as a pantomime Turk in pantaloons and curlicued slippers, self-proclaimed as the strongest man who had ever lived, his hair as prodigiously² long as that of a Nazarene³ or Samson⁴ himself, was hopping on one leg in time to the clapping of hands. His arms outstretched, he bore, seated upon each stupendous bicep, a full-grown man. One of them clung tightly to his body, and the other, more studied in the virile arts, smoked a cigarette with every semblance of calm. On Velisarios' head, for good measure, sat an anxious little girl of about six years who was complicating his manoeuvres by clamping her hands firmly across his eyes.

'Lemoni!' he roared. 'Take your hands from my eyes and hold onto my hair, or I'll have to stop.'

Lemoni was too overwhelmed to move her hands, and Megalo Velisarios stopped. With one graceful movement like that of a swan when it comes in to land, he tossed both men to their feet, and then he lifted Lemoni from his head, flung her high into the air, caught her under her arms, kissed her dramatically upon the tip of her nose, and set her down. Lemoni rolled her eyes with relief and determinedly held out her hand; it was customary that Velisarios should reward his little victims with sweets. Lemoni ate her prize in front of the whole crowd, intelligently prescient⁵ of the fact that her brother would take it from her if she tried to save it. The huge man patted her fondly upon the head, stroked her shining black hair, kissed her again, and then raised himself to his full height. 'I will lift anything that it takes three men to lift,' he cried, and the villagers joined in with those words that they had heard so many times before, a chorus well-rehearsed. Velisarios may have been strong, but he never varied his patter.

'Lift the trough.'

Velisarios inspected the trough; it was carved out of one solid mass of rock and was at least two and a half metres long. 'It's too long,' he said, 'I won't be able to get a grip on it.'

Some in the crowd made sceptical noises and the strongman advanced upon them glowering, shaking his fists and posturing, mocking himself by this caricature of a giant's rage. People laughed, knowing that Velisarios was a gentle man who had never even become involved in a fight. With one sudden movement he thrust his arms beneath the belly of a mule, spread his legs, and lifted it up to his chest. The startled animal, its eyes popping with consternation⁶, submitted to this unwonted treatment, but upon being set lightly down threw back its head, brayed with indignation, and cantered away down the street with its owner in close pursuit.

¹ Garbed - dressed in distinctive clothes

² Prodigiously - impressively or remarkably

³ Nazarene - a native or inhabitant of Nazareth

⁴ Samson - a biblical figure who tells Delilah, his wife, that he will lose his strength with the loss of his hair.

⁵ Prescient - having or showing knowledge of events before they take place

⁶ Consternation - feeling anxiety or dismay, typically at something unexpected

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