A Scribe reader's workout #1

Passage One: prose fiction Test 68A, test 68C

READING TEST

35 Minutes—40 Questions

DIRECTIONS: There are four passages in this test. Each passage is followed by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

Passage I

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the science fiction novel *Another Heaven, Another Earth* by H. M. Hoover (©1981 by H. M. Hoover).

Always in those first few minutes when the shuttle left the parent ship and accelerated to clear the gravitational pull of the larger mass, Lee was sure she had made a terrible mistake. She didn't belong here; none of them did—fragile creatures set in rows in a canister shot through black space. She belonged to Earth. To be here was madness, an insane presumption, and there was no way to escape.

All she was, all she had accomplished, meant nothing in this time of desperate sanity. The fifty-odd men and women in the cabin with her were all accomplished, all experts in their fields, and all incidental.

As the shuttle turned, the cameras gave them a view of the *Kekule*, the parent ship receding in the distance. Three miles long, half a mile deep and wide, the starship was a tribute to the art of welding. It floated in deep space like a chunk of bizarre litter. The word "starship" evoked a far more poetic image than the real thing, Lee thought as she watched.

Around her, people talked and laughed. She didn't join in, nor did they try to talk to her. Past experience had taught them she was best left alone in shuttles—unless they wanted to be snapped at. In the confinement of starships individual quirks became well-known.

The planet Xilan appeared on the screen, as green as Earth was blue. From this distance it suggested an agate ball, variegated with white, shining and untouched. It had been discovered five hundred Earth years before; there were records of several landings there, but little more than basic data survived in the corporate archives. At the time of its discovery Xilan had been considered too far from Earth to make colonization profitable, too far to plunder for mineral wealth. Technology was changing that.

Hours passed. Polar ice caps and land masses came into focus. The white became clouds and then the gleam of snow-capped mountains. A wide tapering of beige suggested that desert covered the center of one continent. Rivers veined into view. Several volcanoes plumed into the upper atmosphere.

For Leland Hamlin, biologist, all this had just one joyous message—a wide variety of life forms existed on this world, animals never seen before, each one unique and fascinating. The archives reported only lower life forms here, but to her that proved nothing. Five hundred years earlier, tests of sentience had been crude, full of Earthly chauvinism, unreliable.

Born in a ring-world colony in L_5, she had grown up without ever seeing any animals but humans—and she missed animals. Her father said she was a product of a more primitive era. The data banks of her first learning center had been almost exclusively devoted to zoology. At fourteen, she had qualified for a scholarship at an Earthside university.

She had gone to her home planet expecting to find the wealth of species detailed in her studies. She found instead that humans had permitted only those creatures which served them to survive. The rest were extinct and had been for generations past. The child in her never quite forgave her ancestors for that crime.

The ancient zoologist Beebe had written, ". . . when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can come again." And so, finding Earth desolate, she searched.

It was not a quest one could go on alone, although she would have liked to. But she had learned the practical must enter into the realization of any dream, so when an employment recruiter from one of Earth's largest corporations offered her a job as a biochemist on a deep space exploration venture, she accepted.

Fifteen space years had passed since then, and five more expeditions. Study during travel time had earned her two more doctorates. Two of her trip logs had been so well written, so alive with her enthusiasm, that they sold throughout Earth's federation as popular adventure books. She had gained also in that time a devout respect for life. It was so rare a phenomenon. Entire galaxies existed without a trace of it. Billions of years passed on planets while nothing ever changed but rock.

On Xilan's night side, in the lowest and last orbit, she saw a dull red glow of surface fire and something glinting in its light—lightning-struck vegetation, or molten lava? The shuttle was too close to the surface
85 and moving too fast for its cameras to see clearly. She glanced at nearby colleagues; none seemed to have noticed anything remarkable. The belltone signaled that they were landing.

1. The main character of the passage can best be described as a:
   - A. tourist looking for adventure.
   - B. traveler gathering information for an animal story.
   - C. scientist seeking evidence for her life's work.
   - D. scientist researching an astronomy book.

2. The main purpose of the third paragraph (lines 13–19) is to:
   - F. refute romantic ideas about starships.
   - G. explain how space travel creates litter.
   - H. indicate that traveling in space is like writing poetry.
   - J. point out the importance of space-age welding techniques.

3. The main purpose of the seventh paragraph (lines 41–47) is to:
   - A. explain the difference between higher and lower life forms.
   - B. compare modern and historical scientific tests of sentience used on Xilan.
   - C. indicate Lee's great hope that earlier reports on Xilan had been inaccurate.
   - D. inform readers that archives from earlier research on Xilan existed.

4. In the passage, the quotation from Beebe (lines 61–64) is most likely included to make a point about the:
   - F. mechanics of breathing.
   - G. extinction of animal species.
   - H. last human being in the galaxy.
   - J. beliefs of ancient zoologists.

5. Information in the passage indicates that Lee's dream is to:
   - A. find someone to share her quest.
   - B. find a place to house the animals left on Earth.
   - C. be the first woman to travel on deep-space expeditions.
   - D. discover a place where animal life abounds.

6. In the context of the passage, the statement in lines 23–24 most nearly means that:
   - F. unusual individuals choose to have careers on starships.
   - G. starships are physically smaller in reality than they appear to be.
   - H. people often become claustrophobic when working on starships.
   - J. people in close proximity learn what to expect from each other.

7. The passage mentions Xilan having all of the following features EXCEPT:
   - A. mountains.
   - B. islands.
   - C. rivers.
   - D. volcanoes.

8. As it is used in line 47, the word *crude* most nearly means:
   - F. unaltered.
   - G. primitive.
   - H. vulgar.
   - J. impolite.

9. The passage makes clear that animals have disappeared on Earth due to the:
   - A. fulfillment of Beebe's prediction about species.
   - B. volcanic destruction of the environment.
   - C. vegetation being struck by lightning.
   - D. human selection of useful animals.

10. As it is used in line 79, the word *it* most nearly refers to:
    - F. the phenomenon of life.
    - G. Earth's federation.
    - H. time passing.
    - J. the night side of Xilan.

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Passage I

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the novel *Queen of Dreams* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (©2004 by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni).

The narrator of the passage is a girl named Rakhi.

My father has been telling us stories all week, while he tries out snacks and sweets on us. I'm rusty, he claims. Got to get in shape. But I suspect he just loves to feed us. I enjoy the snacks, but it's the stories I really crave. He has told us about his early days as a student in America, about the odd jobs he held to make money—a janitor in a hospital, a slot-machine repairman in a casino. About the people he met in these places. I would never have guessed that such a consummate storyteller lay waiting all these years inside my father. He prolongs the suspense until we're about to shake him; he makes us burst out laughing at unexpected jokes. My favorite stories are about his life in India. But so far he has not told us any stories involving my mother, though he does mention her—lovingly, ruefully—in passing.

From time to time my father sings as he cooks, mostly songs from the movies, though sometimes a haunting tune that sounds far older will wind like wood smoke through the store. They make me restless, these tunes, as though there is something inside my chest that wants to escape. There's a feeling like pinpricks in my fingers, a need to paint—something I haven't been able to do since my mother's death.

When I ask, he tells me these are folk songs that field hands sing in Bengal. He picked them up during school holidays when he visited his uncle, who was the subestate manager for the royal family of Nataal. I sense a story there. No, stories tucked within the envelopes of other stories, an entire post office worth of them, filling me with giddy anticipation.

But today my father tells us this is no time for lolling around, listening to foolish tales. Tomorrow's a big day. Flyers have been passed out via Marco and his friends, advertisements have been placed in the *East Bay Express* and *India West*. I've given in and let my father deploy Sonny as our publicist, and he's been talking up our new concept at the nightclub. We must be ready, my father insists. He needs to make another batch of gawja, those crisp diamonds of fried dough crusted with sugar. He wasn't satisfied with the consistency of the melted sugar last time. We assure him that the gawjas were delicious, but he shakes his head. Nothing less than perfection will do for our grand reopening, as he calls it. He assigns Belle the task of writing our new menu on the board. She asks if she should provide brief descriptions of the items, but he says no. No pandering to tourist types here, he adds sternly. This is a real cha shop. If people ask, you can explain. But you'll be surprised at how much they know already—and how much they can learn on their own. Jespal, who has just come in, is set to dusting the furniture. As for me, he shoos me outside to paint. The new name has to be dry by the time we open tomorrow. I comply, a little taken aback by his bustling, managerial manner. Is there no end to the personalities hiding inside my father's skin? Don't rush it, he warns as he disappears into the back room.

I trace the letters, then begin to fill them in. *Kurma House*. My father is the author of this name. I pointed out to him that kurma is a dinner dish, something we don't plan to serve. He shrugged. We are artists, Rakhi, he said loftily. Must we be bound to literalities?

The heft of the brush in my hand, heavy with paint, feels so right. Even though this isn't the same as composing a painting, there are resemblances. The dip of the wrist as I tap it against the edge of the can, the curve of the arm as I trace the top of the *K*. I hadn't realized how much my body had missed such movements.

As I paint, my eyes stray to the inside of the store. Jespal has done a good job of cleaning the glass—it's almost as though it doesn't exist. He reads out items from a list my father has jotted down while Belle writes them on the board. From time to time their eyes meet and they smile shyly. Suddenly it comes to me that within the year they will marry. (Is this prophecy, intuition, or just a guess? How far can I trust it, I who am not my mother?) Watching them, I feel at once happy and lonely. It's not the loneliness of being without a mate, but something more primal. As though I were the only being left on this side of the glass, while the rest of the world—happy, uncaring—lived out its life on the other side. They were aware of my presence, they even

85 waved to me from time to time, as Belle was doing, but they didn't know how it felt to be looking in, waving back, unable to cross over.

1. Based on the passage, Rakhi's opinion of her father as a storyteller is that he is:
   - A. a little rusty after years of not practicing but improving with every story he tells.
   - B. compelling when describing events that really happened but dull when making up tales.
   - C. so gifted that she can hardly believe his talents have only recently come to her attention.
   - D. amusing most of the time but occasionally silly in a way that embarrasses her.

2. Which of the following statements about Rakhi as a painter is NOT supported by the passage?
   - F. The act of painting for the shop's reopening reacquaints her with movements she has missed without realizing it.
   - G. Listening to her father sing sometimes stirs in her the feeling that she needs to paint.
   - H. From the time of her mother's death to the eve of the shop's reopening, she hasn't been able to paint.
   - J. She had learned to paint from her mother, whose artwork will hang on the walls of the newly reopened shop.

3. In the passage, Rakhi compares some of her father's tunes to:
   - A. smoke moving through the store.
   - B. lovely paintings that inspire her.
   - C. wind rustling in the trees.
   - D. scary old movies.

4. In the third paragraph (lines 25–31), the father responds to Rakhi's question by:
   - F. saying he is too busy getting ready for the shop's reopening to answer any questions.
   - G. telling a story about a young field hand working for a royal family.
   - H. claiming that the songs he sings were sent to him in envelopes inside of envelopes.
   - J. explaining that he learned the songs of field hands when he visited his uncle in Bengal.

5. As presented by Rakhi in the last paragraph, the two people in the shop can accurately be described as all of the following EXCEPT:
   - A. aware of her presence.
   - B. sometimes shy in one another's company.
   - C. engaged in tasks related to the shop's reopening.
   - D. troubled by questions Rakhi asked them earlier.

6. As it is used in line 3, the statement "Got to get in shape" can best be described as the father talking to:
   - F. himself quietly in an effort to resist eating another serving of sweets.
   - G. his children in an effort to explain his recent burst of trying out treats on them.
   - H. his children to encourage them to eat heartily in preparation for the tasks of the coming day.
   - J. himself in the voice of a character from one of his children's favorite stories.

7. Rakhi states that the stories of her father's that she likes the most are the ones about:
   - A. his job at a casino.
   - B. her mother.
   - C. his life in India.
   - D. her childhood.

8. It is most reasonable to infer that the question in lines 56–57 is prompted by Rakhi's feeling of:
   - F. outrage over the seemingly endless demands her father is making of her.
   - G. relief that the unpleasant work of the day is finished and she is now free to do as she pleases.
   - H. surprise in response to the ongoing changes in her father's behavior.
   - J. pride as a result of being trusted by her father to perform an important job.

9. As it is used in line 57, the word *it* most nearly refers to the:
   - A. telling of a story.
   - B. decision to marry.
   - C. making of a perfect batch of gawja.
   - D. painting of the new name.

10. In the passage, the father refers to himself and Rakhi as:
   - F. leaders.
   - G. artists.
   - H. storytellers.
   - J. tourist types.