***SUBJECT: ENGLISH LANGUAGE***

***CLASS: SS2***

***TOPIC: READING COMPREHENSION***

***TITLE: THE UNAFRAID LOVER***

The next day there was a meeting of the court. Questions of money were to be talked about.

When we entered the hall, Nyleptha was already on her throne and was proceeding with business as usual. All around her were noblemen, government officials, priests and an unusually strong guard.

It was easy to see from the excitement on the faces of everybody present that no one was thinking much of business. All knew that the country was on the edge of war. We went to our places, and for a little time things went on as usual. Then suddenly we heard a noise outside and the shouting of a great crowd. The curtains at the end of the hall were drawn wide and through them entered the Lady of the Agon, the High Priestess, and on either sides were other priests. Behind them, a small company of guards. One looks at Sorais was enough to show that she had not come there on any message of peace, for, instead of her usually white garment, she wore a shining shirt of mail, and in her hand she carried a silver spear. She stopped at the great Black Stone and laid her hand on it. Then she cried out with a loud voice to Nyleptha on the throne, 'Greetings, O Queen!'

'Greetings, my royal sister!' answered Nyleptha. 'Draw near. Fear not; you shall not be harmed.'

Sorais answered with a proud look, and came on up the hall till she stood in front of the throne. 'Greetings, O Queen!' she said again.

'I ask you one question and you shall give the answer to me and to the people of Zu-Vendis. Are you or are you not intending to take this foreign wolf as your husband and to share your throne?' She pointed at Sir. Henry with her spear.

Curtis turned to Sorais and said in a loud voice, 'Yesterday you had other names than 'wolf' to call me by, O Queen.'

Nyleptha saw that the secret was out, and she answered the question in her own way.

Up she rose, and, descending from the throne, moved in all the glory of her royal grace to where her lover stood. There she stopped, and took off the golden band that was around her arm. Then she told him to kneel, and taking the golden band with both her hands she bent it round his neck, and then she kissed him on the forehead, and called him her 'dear lord.'

Then, turning, she said, 'My sister, lords, priests, and people who are gathered together, by this sign do I take him to be my husband, here in the face of you all. Am I not a Queen, free to choose the man whom I will love? He has won my heart, and with it goes my hand and my throne and all that I have. If he had been the poorest man in my kingdom, I would have done the same; but he is a great lord, fairer and stronger than any here, and having more wisdom and knowledge of strange things. Why then should I not choose him?'

She took his hand and gazed proudly on him, and holding it, stood there, boldly facing the people. And such was her sweetness and the power of her beauty, so sure was she of him and herself, so ready to risk all things and to suffer all things for him, that most of those who saw the sight caught the fire from her eyes and shouted and cheered her wildly.

It was a bold stroke for her to make, but it touched the people's hearts, for all the world loves a lover and most of all a love which is brave and unafraid. The people cheered till the roof rang.

(From *Allan Quatermain* by Sir. H. Rider Haggard, pages 86-89)

***COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS***

a) i) Who was Nyleptha?

ii) What was her relationship with Sorais?

b) What evidence showed Sorais was posed for war?

c) Why were people not thinking much of the business of the day?

d) i) How did Nyleptha demonstrate her acceptance of Curtis?

ii) How do you think Sorais would feel when the people cheered?

e) i) Why was Sorais against the union?

ii) What would Nyleptha give to the man she loved?

***Submit at the school’s security post***