

Iswaran the Storyteller

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Chapter Overview

The story revolves around a junior construction supervisor, Mahendra and his cook Iswaran. Iswaran was fond of telling stories to Mahendra so he would narrate a story every evening.

His stories were influenced by the popular Tamil thrillers that he read everyday. He got inspired by reading these stories. His one such story of a female ghost, disturbed Mahendra the most that he decided to leave the place the next day.

Summary

Mahendra : A Junior Supervisor

Mahendra was a junior supervisor in a firm. The firm offered various construction sites including factories, bridges, dams, etc to supervisors on hire. His job was to keep an eye on the activities at the work site. Due to his job, he had to move from one place to another. Mahendra was a bachelor who led a simple life. His requirements were less, so he could adjust to all conditions.

Iswaran, Mahendra's Cook

Mahendra had a cook named Iswaran. Iswaran did all household works of Mahendra. He would cook, wash his clothes and entertain him with his stories. Iswaran also had an amazing capacity to produce vegetables and cooking ingredients which were not found anywhere.

Iswaran's Daily Routine

Mahendra would leave for work early in the morning with some food. After Mahendra left for work, Iswaran would clean the shed, wash the clothes and would take a bath while praying. After eating his lunch, he used to read popular Tamil thriller and then would go off to sleep.

Iswaran : A Great Storyteller

Iswaran was greatly influenced by the Tamil thrillers that he had read. This influence was visible in his methods of story telling. He would narrate even the smallest incidents with suspense and surprise. For example, he described an uprooted tree as a bushy beast (wild animal) by using dramatic expressions and movements. Iswaran's imaginative stories entertained Mahendra who would listen to him without any judgement.

Iswaran's Story of a Tusker

Iswaran narrate an incident about a mad tusker (elephant) to Mahendra. He narrate that one day a mad elephant escaped from the timber yard in his home town and destroyed everything that came in his way. It tore up the creepers and broke the branches.

After sometime, the elephant reached the town. It came to the main road and smashed the stalls selling fruits, mud pots and clothes.

Then, the elephant entered the school ground and destroyed everything in it. During this incident, all the boys of school had locked themselves in their classrooms and the teachers climbed to the terrace.

Suddenly, Iswaran, a young boy of school, took a cane (stick) from one of his teacher. He ran to the ground and hit the third toenail of the elephant and the elephant fell down. At this point, Iswaran would leave the story unfinished.

Iswaran's Concludes the Tusker Story

After sometime, Iswaran conclude the story and told Mahendra that an animal doctor was called to examine the elephant. After two days, the elephant was taken to the jungle by his mahout. When Mahendra asked Iswaran, how he had controlled the elephant, then Iswaran told that it was either Ju-jitsu or karate which paralysed his nervous system.

Story of a Female Ghost

One day, Iswaran prepared a delicious dinner because it was the auspicious day of feeding the spirits of the ancestors. While Mahendra had his dinner, Iswaran told Mahendra about the factory where they were staying.

He informed Mahendra that this factory area was initially a burial ground. He himself had come across skulls and bones on the path and saw ghosts at night. He further told Mahendra about an ugly female ghost who would roam around at midnight during full moon. She would appear to be a skeleton carrying a foetus in her arms.

Mahendra's Reaction

Iswaran's ghost story disturbed Mahendra a lot. He immediately called the story to be imaginative and went to sleep. However, the story had greatly affected Mahendra. From that day, Mahendra would look outside the window every night to make sure that there was no movement outside. Earlier, Mahendra used to admire the landscape on full moon nights but now he avoided looking outside.

Mahendra Sees the Ghost

One night, Mahendra woke up when he heard a low moan or sound close to his window. At first, he decided not to look out but the sound became louder so, he looked out. He saw a dark cloudy figure holding a bundle. Mahendra was terrified by seeing it. Later he thought that it might have been some trick of his subconscious mind.

Mahendra's Decision to Leave the Place

The next morning, Mahendra was ready to go to his office. He had completely forgotten his experience. But Iswaran reminded him about the ghost. He told Mahendra that he had heard the sound coming from Mahendra's room and had come to see him. Mahendra was horrified at this reminder. He decided to leave the place next day and handed over his papers.

WORD MEANINGS

The given page nos. correspond to the pages in the prescribed textbook.

| Word | Meaning |
|-----------------|---|
| keep an eye on | look after |
| coming up | being constructed |
| ill-equipped | not having proper facilities |
| makeshift | temporary |
| quarry | a place or deep pit from which stones are extract |
| uncomplainingly | without any protest |
| anecdotes | a real story about an incident or person |
| desolate | uninhabited or isolated |
| conjure up | make |
| dozing | sleeping |

| Word | Meaning |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| thriller | novel with an exciting plot |
| running to | consisting of |
| hold in thrall | captivate attention |
| sprawled | lie, spread out |
| hauled | pull or drag with effort |
| mahout | person who controls an elephant |
| prologue | introduction |
| tusker | elephant with big tusks |
| emulation | imitation |
| smash | break something noisily |
| depredations | destruction/damage |

| Word | Meaning |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| menacingly | frighteningly |
| red eyed | angrily |
| trumpeted | cried loudly (for elephant) |
| mustering | to collect or gain |
| whacked | strike forcefully |
| revive | bring back to consciousness |
| shrug casually | raise shoulders uncaringly |
| credible | something that can be believed |
| inimitable | typical |
| more than make up for | replace with ease |

| Word | Meaning |
|------------------------|---|
| culinary skills | cooking ability |
| garish | detailed and showy |
| reverie | daydreaming |
| matted | tangled in a thick mass |
| shrivelled | wrinkled and shrunken |
| figment of imagination | something that can be made up, invented or imagined |
| figment | made up |
| retired | went to sleep |
| sulk | be silent out of disappointment. |

| Word | Meaning |
|-----------------|--|
| unease | anxiety |
| vicinity | the area near or surrounding a particular place. |
| sea of darkness | total darkness |
| moan | a low sound made by a person expressing suffering. |
| prowling | move in a quiet manner |
| guttural | sound produced from back of throat |

| Word | Meaning |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| lest | to avoid any risk |
| behold | see or observe |
| Wailing | crying |
| feline | like a cat |
| panting | breathing with short quick breaths |
| ghastly | causing horror or fear |
| subconscious | part of mind which he was unaware of |

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

Thinking About It (Page 18)

1 In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?

Or Mention any two qualities of Iswaran which made him an asset to Mahendra.

Ans. Iswaran was called Mahendra's asset because of his complete dedication towards his master. He cooks for him, washes his clothes and chats with him at night. He was also a great storyteller and entertains Mahendra with his stories. Thus, he was a hard-working and loyal servant.

2 How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?

Or How did Iswaran the storyteller describe the uprooted tree?

Ans. Iswaran describes the uprooted tree on the highway in a dramatic way. He begins by saying that the road was empty and he was all alone. Suddenly, he spotted something that looked like a large bushy beast lying across the road.

As he came closer he saw that it was a fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out. He wanted to create a long-lasting effect on the listener. He used suspense and a surprise ending to narrate every small incident to make it effective.

3 How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?

Or How did Iswaran make himself the hero in the elephant story?

Or How did Iswaran manage to bring down the mad elephant?

Or According to Iswaran how did he tackle the elephant in the school building?

Ans. One day Iswaran narrates the story of a mad elephant or tusker to Mahendra. Once a mad elephant escaped the timber yard and had entered the town. It was destroying everything that came in its path. The elephant then entered the school ground and started destroying everything.

Seeing the wild elephant, the boys of the school locked themselves in classroom and the teachers ran to the terrace.

Iswaran informed Mahendra that he was in junior class at that time. He took a cane from one of his teacher and ran to the ground. Then he hit the elephant on his third toenail. As a result, the elephant fell onto the ground.

This incident does not appear to be sensible as it is difficult to believe that a child could control a wild-mad elephant.

4 Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?

Ans. The author says so because Iswaran provided a great company to Mahendra. He would chat with Mahendra at night when he returned from his work. Iswaran would also entertain Mahendra by telling stories. Thus, with Iswaran around Mahendra never felt bored and never felt the necessity of having a TV for entertainment.

5 Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a full moon night?

Ans. Mahendra calls ghosts and spirits a figment when Iswaran told him that the place at which they are living was a burial ground and he had seen ghosts at night. However, Mahendra was frightened and disturbed when he encountered the ghost himself.

On one full moon night, Mahendra woke up when he heard a low moan close to his window but he did not look outside.

When the sound became louder he looked out. He saw a dark cloudy figure holding a bundle. This sight terrified him. He broke into cold sweat and fell back on the pillow.

6 Can you think of some other ending for the story?

Ans. The story could have ended on a more positive note. Instead of leaving the place, Mahendra could have been shown as a courageous man and proving the ghost theory wrong.

Another ending can be of both Mahendra and Iswaran leaving the place together and in turn continuing their bond as depicted earlier in the story.

7 Is Iswaran a fascinating storyteller? Discuss with your friends the qualities of a good storyteller. Try to use these qualities and tell a story.

Ans. Yes, Iswaran is a fascinating storyteller. He knows how to build up suspense in his stories. He uses dramatic gestures to make his stories realistic.

A good storyteller should have the following qualities

- (i) He should have good oratorical skills, acting out what he is telling.
- (ii) He should be able to vary the tone of his voice according to the situation.
- (iii) He should be able to create and maintain the interest of the listeners through the use of suspense.
- (iv) He should have a vivid imagination to think up interesting stories.
- (v) He should have a sense of humour which he should use effectively for making his stories enjoyable.

Tell a story: Do it yourself