

Iswaran the Storyteller

Introduction

This story has been written by R.K. Laxman, a renowned Indian author. This story revolves around the story-telling skills of a man named Iswaran and his master Mahendra.

Summary

Mahendra was a junior supervisor in a firm which offered on hire supervisors at various types of construction sites. Mahendra's job was to keep an eye on the activities at the work site. Also his work required him to move from one place to another. He was a bachelor and led a simple life. This helped him to adjust to all kinds of odd conditions. One more asset which helped him to adjust was his cook Iswaran. He cooked for him, washed his clothes and told him stories at night.

One night, Iswaran told his master a story of a mad elephant. It broke loose. It trampled bushes and tore up creepers. The elephant reached the town, broke the fence and crushed many shops. People fled in fear from the town. The elephant entered the school where Iswaran studied in junior class. The teachers and the students watched the drama from the rooftop. Iswaran suddenly grabbed a cane from the hands of teacher. He ran down the stairs and into the open. The elephant grunted. It swung a branch of a tree which it held in its trunk. Iswaran moved slowly towards it, stick in hand. People were watching the scene from nearby housetops. The elephant looked on him red eyed. It was ready to rush towards him. It lifted its trunk and trumpeted loudly. At that moment Iswaran moved forward. He mustered all his force and quickly whacked the third toenail of the elephant. The beast looked stunned for a moment, then it shivered from head to foot and collapsed. A veterinary doctor had to be summoned to revive the animal.

Every night Iswaran recounted some story packed with adventure, horror and suspense. He made up for the lack of TV in Mahendra's living quarters.

One night, there was a full moon in the sky. That day was an auspicious day. According to tradition, various delicacies were prepared on that day to feed the spirits of ancestors. Iswaran also prepared a very delicious dinner. That night Mahendra enjoyed the meal very much and complimented Iswaran.

After the meal, Iswaran told Mahendra that he sometimes saw ghosts at night. He would see one horrible ghost of a woman at midnight during the full moon. It was an ugly creature with matted hair and a shrivelled face holding a foetus in its arms.

Mahendra shivered at the description and said, 'You are crazy Iswaran. There are no ghosts or spirits.'

One night, Mahendra was woken up from his sleep by a low moan close to his window. The wailing became louder. He looked out of the window. He saw a dark cloudy form holding a bundle. Mahendra broke into a cold sweat and fell back, panting. When Mahendra recovered he thought it was some trick of his subconscious mind. Next morning, Iswaran told Mahendra that he had also seen the female ghost. Mahendra hurried away to his office and resigned from his post.

Message

The story conveys the message that human companionship is above everything else.



Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. He had to keep moving from place to place every now and then as ordered by his head office: from a coal mining area to a railway bridge construction site, from there after a few months to a chemical plant which was coming up somewhere.

- (a) In this extract, 'he' refers to
- (b) 'He' had to keep moving from place to place every now and then as
- (c) 'Every now and then' means
- (d) Choose the antonym of 'construction'.
 - (i) Establishment
 - (ii) Erection
 - (iii) Demolition
 - (iv) Set up

Answers

- (a) Mahendra
 - (b) ordered by his head office
 - (c) occasionally
 - (d) (iii) Demolition
2. "The road was deserted and I was all alone. Suddenly I spotted something that looked like an enormous bushy beast lying sprawled across the road."
- (a) The storyteller is
 - (b) What was the 'enormous bushy beast' actually?
 - (i) An elephant
 - (ii) A fallen tree, with its green branches spread out
 - (iii) A fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out
 - (iv) A tree of enormous size with its green branches spread out
 - (c) 'Deserted' here suggests
 - (d) A word from the extract which means the same as 'huge' is

Answers

- (a) Iswaran
(b) (iii) A fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out
(c) without any people.
(d) enormous
3. "It came into the main road and smashed all the stalls selling fruits, mud pots and clothes. People ran helter-skelter in panic!"
- (a) said the above words to
(b) On the main road, the smashed all the stalls of fruits, mud pots and clothes.
(c) 'Helter-skelter' means
(d) Choose the antonym of 'panic':
(i) Composure (ii) Anxiety
(iii) Fright (iv) Rancour

Answers

- (a) Iswaran, Mahendra
(b) elephant
(c) disorderly haste or confusion
(d) (i) Composure
4. "I am not easily frightened by these things, sir. I am a brave fellow."
- (a) In the above extract, is speaking these words to
(b) What are 'these things' referred to by the speaker?
(i) The speaker sees some robbers on the road in the night.
(ii) The speaker sees some thieves on the road in the night.
(iii) The speaker sees some evil spirits during the night.
(iv) The speaker sees some soldiers during the night.
(c) State whether the given statement is True or False.
'Sir' in the above extract is Mahendra
(d) The word 'fellow' means the same as

Answers

- (a) Iswaran, the cook Mahendra, the employer
(b) (iii) The speaker sees some evil spirits during the night.
(c) True
(d) person
5. "You know, sir, this entire factory area we are occupying was once a burial ground," he started. Mahendra was jerked out of the pleasant reverie he had drifted into after the satisfying meal. "I knew on the first day itself when I saw a human skull lying on the path. Even now I come across a number of skulls and bones," Iswaran continued.
- (a) A burial ground is a place where

- (b) "I knew on and bones."
Who states the above statement to whom?
(i) Mahendra to Iswaran
(ii) Iswaran to Mahendra
(iii) Mahendra to the ghost of a female
(iv) Iswaran to the ghost of a female
(c) Iswaran saw a on the path.
(d) A word from the extract which is opposite in meaning to the word 'sorrowful' is

Answers

- (a) dead bodies are buried
(b) (ii) Iswaran to Mahendra
(c) human skull
(d) pleasant



Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What did Iswaran do after Mahendra left for work?

Ans. After Mahendra left for work, Iswaran would tidy up the shed and wash clothes. After that he took leisurely bath, pouring several buckets of water over his head and muttering a prayer all the time. After this, he would have his lunch and then would read for a while before dozing off.

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

Ans. Iswaran describes the uprooted tree on the highway as, "The road was deserted and I was alone. Suddenly I spotted something that looked like an enormous bushy beast lying sprawled across the road. But as I came closer I saw that it was a fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out." He wanted to create suspense and surprise in his listeners.

Q 3. 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. Iswaran told stories to Mahendra which never failed to entertain him. These stories contained elements of suspense and surprise. He served as a pastime for Mahendra. Therefore, the author says that he seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters.

Q 4. What did Iswaran tell Mahendra about the factory area which they were occupying?

Ans. Iswaran told Mahendra that the entire factory area which they were occupying was once a burial ground. He told Mahendra that he had seen human skulls and bones lying on the path. He also told him that he saw a ghost of the woman on a full moon night. The ghost was an ugly creature with matted hair and a shrivelled face and she held a foetus in her arms.

Q 5. Draw a character sketch of 'Iswaran, the storyteller'.

Ans. Iswaran is a cook. He is attached to Mahendra. He serves Mahendra like a servant. He cooks food for him. He washes his clothes. He entertains Mahendra. He narrates stories to him. He makes them



interesting by his art of narration. He is a storehouse of stories.

He reads Tamil thrillers and is greatly influenced by them. He is also superstitious and believes in ghosts. He is however brave and is not scared of them.



Long Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. In what way was Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?

Ans. Iswaran was Mahendra's cook. He was quite attached to Mahendra and followed him without any complaint to wherever he was posted. He cooked for Mahendra, washed his clothes and chatted away with him at night. He had an amazing capacity to produce vegetables and cooking ingredients, seemingly out of nowhere and could miraculously conjure up the most delicious dishes made with fresh vegetables within an hour of arriving at the new workplace. Thus, Iswaran was an asset to Mahendra.

Q 2. How did Iswaran narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?

Ans. Iswaran came from a place which was famous for timber. The timber was carried by elephants. One day an elephant escaped from the timber yard and began to roam about, stamping on bushes, tearing up wild creepers and breaking branches at will. The elephant reached the outskirts of the town and broke the fences like they were matchsticks. It smashed the stalls selling fruits, mud pots and clothes. People ran here and there to save themselves from the elephant. At last it entered Iswaran's school by breaking the brick wall. It pulled out the football goal post and tore down the volleyball net. All the

students ran into the classrooms and shut the door. The teachers climbed up to the terrace of the school building and watched helplessly at the havoc created by him. Suddenly, Iswaran grabbed a cane from the hands of one of the teachers and ran down the stairs into the open. He slowly moved towards the elephant. The elephant looked at him red-eyed and lifted its trunk and trumpeted loudly. At that moment, Iswaran moved forward and whacked the third toenail of the elephant with full force. The elephant shivered from head to foot and collapsed. A veterinary doctor was summoned to revive the elephant and two days later it was led away by its *mahout* to the jungle.

The story does not appear to be plausible.

Q 3. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of imagination. What happens to him on a full moon night?

Ans. Mahendra does not believe in ghosts. He calls ghosts or spirits a figment of imagination and scolds Iswaran on narrating their tales. But one full moon night, he was woken up by a low moan. He thought it could be a cat. But the moaning became louder and louder. He then looked out and saw a cloudy form clutching a bundle. He thought this was the female ghost which Iswaran had been talking about. Mahendra broke into a cold sweat. He fell back on the pillow breathing heavily.

Next morning, he had forgotten about it. But Iswaran told him that he had also seen the female apparition. A chill went down Mahendra's body. He left the place the very next day.

