

Mijbil the Otter

Introduction

This chapter has been written by Gavin Maxwell. It recounts his experience with his pet otter, Mijbil.

Summary

The author, Maxwell, had a dog. It died. He decided to have another pet. In early 1956, he travelled to Southern Iraq. There it came to his mind to have an otter as a pet.

He casually mentioned this to a friend. After a few days when he returned to his bedroom, he found two Arabs with a note from his friend. In a sack there was an otter which his friend had arranged for him to keep as pet. It resembled a very small medievally conceived dragon. From the head to the tail it was coated with mud-armour. It took the author nearly a month to be able to remove the mud that covered his body and see his true colours. He christened it Mijbil. Mijbil was of a race previously unknown to science and was christened by zoologists as *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* or in normal language as 'Maxwell's Otter'. For the first day Mijbil was aloof and indifferent and he slept on the floor, far away from author's bed. But on the second night, it entered his bed and slept in the crook of his knees. Slowly, he started taking an interest in its surroundings. When it was taken to the bathroom, it plunged and rolled in water with joy. After two days, it was found in the bathroom. The author was surprised to see it struggling with the water tap. He also managed to open it. Mij, as he came to be called, used to spend most of his time playing with a rubber ball and marbles. The author's time passed peacefully in Basra. But then he had to shift to Camusfearna in England. He approached the British Airlines for taking an otter with him, but it refused. So, he booked a flight to Paris on another airline and from there to London. The airline insisted that Mij should be packed into a box not more than eighteen inches square. The author had the box made and before an hour, before he had to start, he put Mij into the box and went for his meal.

When the author returned from his meal, there was silence from the box, but he noticed blood around the airholes and chinks around the lid. He opened it and found Mij, exhausted and blood-spattered. It whimpered and caught his leg. The time was very short. It was just minutes until the time of the flight and the airport was five miles. So, he again put Mij into the box and held the lid with his hands. He hired a car that ran like a bullet from the street of Basra. The aircraft was waiting for the author and he was rushed through.

Luckily, his seat was at the extreme front. He covered the floor around his feet with newspapers, rang for the air hostess and gave her a parcel of fish for Mij to keep at a cool place. He also told her about the condition of Mij's box. The air hostess suggested that he should keep Mij on his knee. As the author brought him out, he disappeared at high speed down the aircraft. There were squawks and shrieks. One lady screamed out 'A rat! A rat!' The author dived for him but landed in curry. The air hostess assured him that she would find Mij and hand over it to him. Soon, the otter was back on his knees.

The author remained in London for a month. There, the otter would play for hours with toys, rubber fruit and a terrapin shell. The author even took it for exercise and both walked through the London streets.

In London, people found it difficult to recognise an otter. They guessed what kind of animal it was. People used to ask the author if it was a walrus or a baby seal or a squirrel. Other guesses were a beaver, a bear cub, a leopard and even a brontosaurus.

The author once saw a labourer in surprise. He was digging a hole in the street. Seeing the animal, he laid down his tools and growled out, 'Here, Mister—what is that supposed to be?'

Message

This chapter highlights the fact that pets add to the joy of living. Having a pet is a responsibility which should be fulfilled with all sincerity. Only then, the experience will be a joyful one for both.



Extract Based Questions ↘

1. Read the extract given below carefully and answer the questions that follow:

Early in the New Year of 1956, I travelled to Southern Iraq. By then it had crossed my mind that I should like to keep an otter instead of a dog and that Camusfearna, ringed by water a stone's throw from its door, would be an eminently suitable spot for this experiment.

(a) What experiment was he going to do?

(b) What was a suitable spot for his experiment?

(c) Why was it a suitable spot for his experiment?

- (i) It was surrounded by waterbodies
- (ii) No one lived there
- (iii) It was a zoo
- (iv) None of the above

(d) The phrase 'crossed my mind' means:

- (i) confused me
- (ii) threatened me
- (iii) missed my mind
- (iv) came into my mind

Answers

- (a) He was going to keep an otter as a pet.
- (b) Camusfearna was a suitable spot for his experiment.
- (c) (i) It was surrounded by waterbodies
- (d) (iv) came into my mind

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

When I casually mentioned this to a friend, he as casually replied that I had better get one in the Tigris marshes, for there they were as common as mosquitoes and were often tamed by the Arabs.

- (a) From where could the author get his pet easily?
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
The otters were hunted by the Arabs.
- (c) What did the author want?
- (d) The author compares the otters with

Answers

- (a) The author could get his pet easily from the Tigris marshes.
- (b) False
- (c) The author wanted to keep an otter as a pet.
- (d) mosquitoes

3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

Mijbil, as I called the otter, was, in fact, of a race previously unknown to science and was at length christened by zoologists *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*, or Maxwell's otter. For the first twenty-four hours, Mijbil was neither hostile nor friendly; he was simply aloof and indifferent, choosing to sleep on the floor as far from my bed as possible. The second night Mijbil came on to my bed in the small hours and remained asleep in the crook of my knees until the servant brought tea in the morning, and during the day he began to lose his apathy and take a keen, much too keen, interest in his surroundings.

- (a) The otter was named 'Maxwell's otter' because
- (b) For the first twenty-four hours, it was:
 - (i) hostile and friendly
 - (ii) either hostile or friendly
 - (iii) aloof and indifferent
 - (iv) hostile but friendly
- (c) On the first night Mijbil slept on:
 - (i) the bed
 - (ii) the sofa
 - (iii) the floor
 - (iv) in the bathroom
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the text:
aloof : detached :: eager :

Answers

- (a) its race was unknown to science
- (b) (iii) aloof and indifferent
- (c) (iii) the floor
- (d) keen

4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

The aircraft was waiting to take off; I was rushed through to it by infuriated officials. Luckily, the seat booked for me

was at the extreme front. I covered the floor around my feet with newspapers, rang for the air hostess and gave her a parcel of fish (for Mij) to keep in a cool place. I took her into my confidence about the events of the last half hour. I have retained the most profound admiration for that air hostess; she was the very queen of her kind. She suggested that I might prefer to have my pet on my knee and I could have kissed her hand in the depth of my gratitude.

- (a) The officials were very angry with the author because
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
The author's seat was in the middle.
- (c) What did the air hostess suggest?
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the text:
profound : subtle :: enraged :

Answers

- (a) he was late
- (b) False
- (c) The air hostess suggested that the author might prefer to have his pet on his knee.
- (d) infuriated

5. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

But the question for which I awarded the highest score came from a labourer digging a hole in the street. I was still far from him when he laid down his tool, put his hands on his hips and began to stare. As I drew nearer I saw his expression of surprise and affront, as though he would have me know that he was not one upon whom to play jokes. I came abreast of him; he spat, glared and then growled out, 'Here Mister—what is that supposed to be?'

- (a) The author awarded the highest score for the question of:
 - (i) the air hostess
 - (ii) the woman
 - (iii) his friend
 - (iv) the labourer
- (b) What was the labourer doing?
- (c) The labourer seemed to be a:
 - (i) serious man
 - (ii) funny man
 - (iii) kind man
 - (iv) All of these
- (d) The word 'growled' means the same as:

Answers

- (a) (iv) the labourer
- (b) The labourer was digging a hole.
- (c) (i) serious man
- (d) grunted



Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. When did the author think to have an otter instead of a dog?

Ans. After the death of his pet dog, the author became aloof and disappointed. He thought of having another pet. In the early 1956, the author travelled to Southern Iraq. There he saw that people kept otters as pets. So, he too decided to keep an otter as a pet instead of a dog.

Q 2. What experiment did Maxwell think Camusfearna would be suitable for?

Ans. Maxwell thought that Camusfearna would be suitable for keeping an otter as otters live mainly in water. Camusfearna was ringed by water and was at a very short distance from author's house.

Q 3. Why does he go to Basra? How long does he wait there and why?

Ans. The author went to Basra to the Consulate-General to collect and answer mail from Europe. He waited there for five days. It was because his mail was delayed.

Q 4. What happened when the author reached his room after collecting his mail?

Ans. When the author reached his room after collecting his mail, he found two Arabs waiting there. They had something in a sack that squirmed from time to time. They gave him a note. It was from his friend. There was an otter inside the sack and it was for the author. His friend had arranged for the otter to be delivered to him.

Q 5. How did Maxwell get the otter? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. In 1956, after the death of his dog, Maxwell decided that he would keep an otter as a pet. He mentioned this casually to his friend who said that he could get the otter from the Tigris marshes where they were trained by Arabs. Maxwell at that time, was in Basra. Five days later when he returned to his hotel room after completing his work at the Consulate-General, he saw two Arabs squatting on the floor with a sack that squirmed from time-to-time. From the sack emerged the otter. Maxwell's friend had arranged this for him. In this way, Maxwell got the otter.

Q 6. Describe how the otter looks like.

Ans. Otters have long, slender bodies with dense, glossy brown fur from head to toe. Their length varies between 38 to 44 inches and they weight between 10 to 30 pounds. They have short legs, webbed toes and tapered muscular tails.

Q 7. What information did the author give us about otters?

OR

What group of animals do otters belong?

Ans. The author informs us that otters belong to a comparatively small group of animals called Mustellines. Other animals of this species were mink, stoat, mongoose, badger and weasel. He also informs us that otters are common in Tigris marshes, where they were tamed by the Arabs. He also tells us that otters love water. He also informs us that the real play of otter is when he lies on his back and juggles with small objects between his paws.

Q 8. Why was the otter named 'Maxwell's otter'?

Ans. Mijbil, the otter, belonged to a race previously unknown to science. So, it was christened by zoologists as Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli or simply as Maxwell's otter.

Q 9. What happened when Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom? What did it do two days after that?

OR

What happened when Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom? What does it tell us about Mijbil?

(CBSE 2015)

Ans. When Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom, it became wild with joy plunging and rolling in it, shooting up and down the length of the bathtub underwater and slashing and splashing water. After two days, it went into the bathroom by itself and struggled with the chromium tap till it had a full flow. This tells us that Mijbil loved water.

Q 10. What special characteristics of Mijbil did Maxwell learn after he took him to the bathroom?

(CBSE 2015)

Ans. Maxwell learnt that otters run wild while in water. They plunge and roll in it. They shoot up and down the length of the bathtub underwater. They also spread water like a hippo. The otters think that water should be splashed until it overflows.

Q 11. What game did Mij invent? (CBSE 2016)

OR

Give an example to show that Mijbil is an intelligent animal.

Ans. With a ping-pong ball, Mij invented a game which kept him engrossed. One of the author's suitcase had become damaged and because of this, the lid, when closed remained at a slope from one end to the other. Mijbil discovered that if he placed the ball on the high end it would run down the length of the suitcase. Then he would dash around to the other end to ambush its arrival, hide from it, crouching to spring up and take it by surprise and then grab it. This also shows that Mijbil was an intelligent animal.

Q 12. How was Mij to be transported to England?

OR

What was done by the author to transport Mijbil to London?

Ans. Mij was to be transported to England via Paris. He was to be first taken to Paris by an aircraft and from there to London. The airline had insisted that Mij should be packed in a box not more than eighteen inches square and the box was to be kept on floor, near author's feet.

Q 13. Why does Maxwell say the air hostess was 'the very queen of her kind'?

Ans. Maxwell narrated the incident of Mijbil trying to break the box and injuring himself to the air hostess. The air hostess patiently listened to him and then suggested that Maxwell should keep Mijbil on his knees. Her compassionate and kind behaviour led Maxwell to comment that she was 'the very queen of her kind.'

Q 14. Describe the scene created by the otter inside the aircraft.

Ans. Mijbil, the otter, came out of the box. He disappeared at high speed down the aircraft. A woman stood and cried, 'A rat! A rat!' The author dived to catch him, but

landed up in curry which was kept under the seat of a partly white turbaned Indian. The air hostess told the author to resume his seat and that she would find the otter for him. Soon Mij bounded onto his knee and began to nuzzle his face on author's neck.

Q 15. How did Mijbil pass his time in London?

Ans. Mijbil had a passion for playing. He invented his own games. He would play for hours with different toys. There were ping-pong balls, marbles, rubber fruit and a terrapin shell. These would keep him busy for hours at time.

Q 16. What compulsive habits had Mijbil developed?

(CBSE 2015)

Ans. Maxwell used to take Mijbil for walks and it was during these walks that Mijbil developed certain compulsive habits. There was a primary school just opposite Maxwell's house. On his way home, Mijbil would go to the wall of the school, jump on it and gallop the full length of its thirty yards.

Q 17. What guesses did the Londoners make about what Mij was?

(CBSE 2015)

Ans. The Londoners could not form a confirmed view about Mij. They were unable to recognise him. For them, it was a baby seal, walrus, a hippo, a beaver, a bear-cub, a leopard and even a brontosaurus.

 **Long Answer Type Questions** ↘

Q 1. How did the otter behave in the beginning? How did he become familiar with the author?

OR

Why do you think the otter was not friendly at first with the narrator? How did it behave at first? Why?

(CBSE 2019)

Ans. The author called the otter Mijbil. For the first twenty-four hours, Mijbil was neither unfriendly nor friendly. He was simply aloof and indifferent. He chose to sleep on the floor as far from the author's bed as possible. I think it was because he was afraid to be in an unfamiliar environment.

The second night, Mijbil came on to his bed in the small hours and slept in the crook of his knees until the servant brought tea in the morning. During the day, Mijbil began to lose his feeling of disinterest and started taking a keen interest in his surroundings.

The author made a body-belt for him and took him to the bathroom, where for half-an-hour he went wild with joy in the water of the bathtub. Slowly and gradually, the otter became familiar with the author.

Q 2. Give a sketch of traits of Mijbil, the otter.

Ans. When the author first saw Mijbil the otter, he thought that it resembled a very small, medievally conceived dragon. The otter had a soft velvet fur like that of a chocolate brown mole. Initially, Mijbil was neither hostile nor friendly. He was simply aloof and indifferent. But slowly he became familiar with the author. He used to take a keen interest in his surrounding. He used to go wild with joy in water. He was a quick learner. The author had opened taps in

front of him only once. The next time, Mijbil was able to turn the tap the right way. Mijbil spent most of his time in play. He was also intelligent and an innovator. With the ping-pong ball, he invented a game which kept him engrossed for up to half an hour. He was also quick to develop compulsive habits.

Q 3. What things does Mij do which tell you that he is an intelligent, friendly and fun-loving animal who needs love?

Ans. Mij does a number of acts which tell us that he is an intelligent, friendly and fun-loving animal who needs love. These acts are as follows:

(i) **Acts which tell us he is intelligent:** The following acts tell us that Mij is intelligent:

(a) Author had taken Mij to bathroom to play. Two days later, he himself ventured into the bathroom and was able to open the taps to produce a full flow of water.

(b) With the ping-pong ball, he invented a game of his own. One of author's suitcase had been damaged. So, the lid, when closed, remained at a slope from one end to another. Mij used to place the ball at the high end and then used to dash around the other end to ambush its arrival, hide from it, crouching to spring up and take it by surprise, grab it and trot off with it to the high end once more.

(ii) **Acts which tell us he is friendly:** The following acts tell us that Mij is friendly:

(a) On the second night of his arrival, Mijbil came to author's bed in the small hours and slept in the crook of his knees until the servant brought tea in the morning.

(b) Mij used to follow the author even without a lead and used to come to the author when he called his name.

(c) When author was travelling to London, on a plane, Mijbil managed to escape from his box. However, after some time he bounded onto author's knee and began to nuzzle his face and neck.

(iii) **Act which tell us he is fun-loving:** The following act tell us that Mijbil is fun-loving:

The author took Mijbil to the bathroom where he went wild with joy in the water, plunging and rolling in it, shooting up and down the length of the bathtub underwater.

Q 4. After reading 'Mijbil the Otter' one can be sure of the fact that animals are very faithful, friendly, intelligent and need love. One also feels that they are an integral part of human life as we can't do without them. It is their value. Write a paragraph about them and how far do they deserve to be owned?

Ans. Animals are an integral part of human life. We simply can't do without them. Together with living and non-living things, they constitute ecological balance and ecological balance is very necessary for the existence of all. We find that animals

are very useful to us and fulfil our needs. For instance, snakes and peacocks are useful for the farmers. Bullocks and horses drive our carriages. They can't speak, but they can express their love, jealousy, sincerity, obedience, faithfulness, etc. They are loyal, friendly and useful. All the animals serve the humans in one way or the other. So, they need to be protected and loved by us. I personally do not think that they deserve to be owned. Like us, they are also entitled to be free. If we keep them in our homes, then we are curbing their freedom. We are separating them from their own kind. The love and kindness of their owners cannot compensate for this. So, they should not be owned. However, it can be ensured that they are safe and secure in their original environment.

Q 5. Mijbil and the Tiger, both were looked after by humans. Assume they both meet each other in the zoo and have a conversation about their lifestyle and feelings.

Write this conversation as per your understanding of Mijbil the Otter and A Tiger in the Zoo.

You may begin like this

Tiger: Thanks for visiting me, though I don't usually like visitors.

Mijbil: Oh? I would love visitors, I think.

(CBSE SQP 2022-23)

Ans. Mijbil : Hi!

Tiger : Thanks for visiting me, though I don't usually like visitors.

Mijbil : Oh? I would love visitors, I think. You live in the safest place. You don't need to hunt. You get timely meal in proper amount. Then what bothers you?

Tiger : But at the cost of my freedom. I have been in captivity so cannot roam here and there like you. This cage is quite congested. I find it hard to even move properly. Does your master not cage you?

Mijbil : No, I am not caged or chained as my master knows that I will never create any trouble for him. I love being his pet and love spending time in his company.

Tiger : I wish I were allowed to roam freely like you. The zoo staff is not as kind and understanding as your master. I do not hurt anyone until hungry or provoked. We can coexist. They can also release me to my natural habitat.

Mijbil : You want to live in the wild. I am scared of being alone there. I would not survive even for a day. I am happy with my master and I want him to be around all the time.

Tiger : I wish I had the master like yours. I hate being tamed and it feels extremely bad when the visitors make noise and throw things at you. I cannot rest properly due to their activities which do nothing but enrage me unnecessarily.

Mijbil : I really feel sorry for you. One should accept one's fate and try to stay happy.

Tiger : You are right, there is nothing that I can do. I should better stop regretting. I should accept my fate and try to stay happy and be satisfied with my surroundings and what I get in the zoo. ●