

DETAILED TEXT

The Priceless Gift

A. Lead in

Do you like to offer some gift to somebody on his / her birthday, wedding or some special occasion? What sort of things would you like to give? Discuss about it with your classmates. Why does a small gift become so valuable?

What do you see when you enter a restaurant? Read this interesting story, 'The Priceless Gift'. Here 'priceless' means something which has a high value, because it is rare. Match your points of discussion with this description.

B. The Text :

I

I went to a vegetarian restaurant. It was lunch time. There were people eating and drinking. The restaurant was very crowded. I saw that *some of the chairs and tables had been pushed* into a corner. I chose the corner table, seated myself and started skimming through the newspaper.

At that moment I noticed a very young girl looking at me. Her eyes were large and they had a sad expression.

As she was going out she asked the cashier in a low voice, 'Is that gentleman an Indian?'

'I think so', the cashier replied. The girl looked at me *once* more, and went out.

It surprised me. Why? What was the matter? Her interest in me *aroused* my curiosity in her. When I had finished my lunch I asked the waiter, 'Do you know the girl who was sitting out there?'

'No, Sir, I notice she has lunch here on Saturdays. She comes on *pay day* only. Perhaps she does not earn much.'

I was moved by what he said. The curiosity I felt about the girl *persisted*. Why had she enquired about me? Who was the mysterious child? I kept thinking of her *poverty-stricken* sad anxious figure. Could I help her in any way?

The week passed. Saturday came again. I went to the same restaurant. As I entered I saw her sitting at the same table as before. She was eating. I went up to her and *took the chair opposite hers*.

I wished her a good afternoon and then by making one brief remark after another, I was able to start a conversation. At last she asked, 'Are you an Indian? My brother is in India. He is a soldier. We have not had a letter from him for a long time. My mother is very worried. She is afraid something has happened to him.'

I learned that her only guardian was her brother. She lived with her old, widowed mother *Mrs. Bethy*.

I understood how she felt. I think she wanted me to see her mother but she did not have the courage to ask me to accompany her home.

We finished our lunch and got up together. As we walked I asked her, 'May I know your name?'

'My name is Maggie.'

We chatted pleasantly and soon reached a bus stand. This gave me the opportunity of asking her where she worked.

'Do you usually go this way?' I asked.

'No', she answered. 'I usually take the village bridge. *It is being repaired* at the moment.'

Soon we approached their neighbourhood. We had reached a narrow doorway. Maggie took a *thin latch key* out of her pocket and opened the door. She entered and said, 'Please come in'.

Together we descended the stairs to the kitchen.

'Mother', said Maggie from the doorway, 'an Indian gentleman has come to see you'.

'Where is he?' the old woman asked eagerly. With a smile I stepped into the kitchen behind Maggie.

She introduced us. 'How do you do?' I said and *held out my hand*.

'Excuse me. My hands are covered with flour. I am making cakes. People will come to buy them this evening. This is the way we make our living – lots of trouble.'

Saturday night is a time of festivity in poor neighbourhoods. All kinds of things are sold on this night. The streets are more crowded than any other day. This is the day when they are able to spend a little from their weekly wages.

II

'What kind of country is India, sir?' asked Mrs. Bethy as she resumed her cooking.

'A beautiful country'.

'Safe to live in? Aren't there too many snakes and tigers? Don't they kill people?'

'This type of question has often been asked. Don't believe that snakes and tigers are killed by the people if they come too close.'

'My son is in the Punjab. He is a soldier. What kind of place is the Punjab?'

'The Punjab is a fine place. It is a very healthy place to live in'.

'I'm glad to hear it'. Mrs. Bethy said.

Her baking was finished. 'Maggie', she said, 'take Mr. Gupta upstairs. I'll wash my hands and bring tea'.

As we drank tea I talked about India. Mrs. Bethy showed me a photograph of her son. *It had been kept very neatly in an envelope by the mother*. His name was *Franky*.

'Maggie', said Mrs. Bethy, 'show Mr. Gupta the ring which your brother sent you.'

She brought it and asked, 'Can you see the past and future in it?' I took it and examined it.

'When Franky sent the ring', Mrs. Bethy said, 'he wrote that if you concentrate on a distant person as you gaze into it, you will be able to see him and what he is doing. We have not had any news from Franky for a long time. But we have not been able to see anything. Why don't you try? You are an Indian, you may be able to do it?'

I did not have the heart to tell the mother and daughter that the ring was nothing much— not a miraculous thing from a distant land. How could I shatter their dream?

III

Several months passed. I visited Maggie and Mrs. Bethy. But no news had come from Franky. Mrs. Bethy was sick, in a serious condition, aggravated by her anxiety for Franky. I was in a fix. What could I say to console the mother? Only God knew whether Franky was still alive or dead.

'Mr. Gupta', the girl said, 'My mother has not been ill like this before. I have read in books that Indians love the truth. If you could bring yourself to tell mother only once, after looking into the crystal, that Franky is all right, that he is alive— will it be too much of a lie? Will it be very wrong?'

I thought it over, I am not a very virtuous man so I decided to do this, the least of my offences.

Maggie brought me the ring. I took it and approached her mother's bedside. Wishing her a good morning I said, 'Mrs. Bethy, your son is alive. He is well'.

The old woman raised her head a little off the pillow. Tears of happiness welled up in her eyes. Mrs. Bethy soon recovered.

It was almost time for me to return to India. I wished to go, to say goodbye to Maggie and her mother. But the family was in mourning. *Franky had been killed in the fighting on the frontier.* I calculated and found that Franky had been dead some days when I told his mother he was alive and well. I felt ashamed to face Mrs. Bethy so I wrote a letter to them, announcing my departure and bidding them goodbye.

The morning of my last day in London dawned. I was to leave that night. As I was having my breakfast, there was a knock at the door.

Maggie had come to say goodbye. She was wearing black.

'Are you leaving today?' she asked. 'Yes', I replied, 'today is the day of my departure.'

'How long will it take to reach your country? In which part of the country do you live?' She wanted to know.

'I have entered the Punjab service. I shall not know exactly where I am posted until I arrive there'.

'Is the frontier very far from there?'

'No, not very'.

'Franky is buried near the frontier.' The girl's eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

'When I go to that part of the country I shall visit your brother's grave and write to you'.

IV

Maggie's face filled with gratitude. As she thanked me her voice choked. She took a shilling out of her packet, saying, 'Please buy flowers with this when you go, and lay them on my brother's grave for me.'

In my emotion I lowered my eyes. The child had earned the shilling with so much toil. I felt like returning it to her, explaining that in our country flowers grow in great profusion.

But I considered, 'Why should I deprive her of the joy this sacrifice would give her?' She was foregoing so much for love of her brother. The joy of doing it was beyond all price. The grief in her heart would be eased a little. I picked up the shilling.

'Maggie', I said, 'I shall use this shilling to buy flowers and put them on your brother's grave.'

Maggie stood up. 'How can I ever thank you', she said. 'Goodbye. Remember to write'.

I got up and held her hand. 'Goodbye, Maggie, God bless you,' I said. Maggie left. I wiped a tear from my eyes and went upstairs to pack my bags.

C. Notes and Glossary :

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| aroused | - awakened, stirred - This story has aroused my interest. |
| persisted | - continued to exist. The pain persisted into the morning. |
| mysterious | - strange. |
| poverty-stricken | - suffering extremely because of lack of money. |
| opportunity | - situation that makes it possible for you to do something that you want to do |
| a thin latch key | - a thin key for a latch (lock) |
| festivity | - celebration. |
| concentrate | - to give all attention. |
| miraculous | - amazing, unbelievable, surprising and fortunate. |
| aggravated | - worsened |
| in a fix | - in a dilemma |
| crystal | - a mineral or a rock (clear and transparent) |

offences	- crime, wrong-doing
welled up	- appeared.
mourning	- lamenting or grieving for
announcing	- declaring, revealing, reporting.
grave	- a grave is a place where a dead person is buried.
gratitude	- the feeling of being grateful

I must express my gratitude to the chief guest for accepting our invitation.

shilling	- a unit of money (20 shillings make an English pound)
profusion	- abundance, plenty.
foregoing	- sacrificing.

D. Let's understand the text :

1. What did the writer experience in the restaurant ?
2. What did he notice there ?
3. What was the writer's first impression of the girl ?
4. What made the writer surprised ?
5. Why did he enquire from the cashier ?
6. What information did he get from the cashier ?
7. Where did the writer go on the next Saturday ?
8. Why did he arrange the chair opposite hers ?
9. What query did the girl make about the writer ?
10. What impression did the writer have about the family of the girl ?
11. How was the writer treated at Maggie's house ? Who was there to welcome him ?
12. What was Mrs. Bethy doing when the writer met her ?
Why was she unwilling to go for a handshake ?

13. Why did the girl usually visit the restaurant on Saturdays ?
14. What did Mrs. Betty believe about the ring ?
15. What made the author to tell a lie about the ring ?
16. Did the telling of a lie benefit Mrs. Bethy ?
17. Why did the writer feel guilty about himself ?
18. What was Maggie's gift to the writer ?
19. Why was it a priceless gift ?
20. Did Maggie love her brother dearly ? Give reasons.

E. Let's understand the text better :

1. Why did the writer choose the corner table in the restaurant ?
2. How did the writer start a conversation with the young girl ?
3. How could the writer guess the girl to be poverty-stricken ?
4. Which of the following do you think the author will talk about after meeting the girl ?
 - (a) Meeting the girl again
 - (b) Enquiring about her nature of work
 - (c) about her family
 - (d) all the above.
5. 'I was moved by what he said'. What impression did the writer get about the girl ?
6. What impression did the girl have on India ?
7. 'Will it be too much of a lie' ? Why did the girl say so ?
8. Why did the writer feel ashamed to face Mrs. Bethy at the time of his return to India ?
9. Why was the shilling Maggie presented to the writer was an invaluable offering ?

F. Let's learn some words :

- (A) Words which are not derived or developed from other words are called primary words. They belong to the original stock of words in the language. Compound words are formed noun to noun (moonlight, village bridge) adjective + noun (sweetheart), verb + noun (breakfast) gerund + noun (drawing room), preposition + noun (overcoat) noun + adjective (life long).

By adding prefixes like mis, un, in, dis, it, anti, de, make the word negative and by adding suffixes we change the words from noun to adjective, adjective to verb, adjective to adverb and verb to noun. This is called derivation. Thus we find a family of words.

Here is an exercise for you. Fill in the gaps using the appropriate form in each sentence : one has been done for you.

Example : 1. There is an _____ of anger on his face. (express)

There is an expression of anger on his face.

2. He made his _____ from the scene after a dialogue. (depart)
3. She performed well at her first _____. (opportune)
4. She showed a _____ for my past life. (curious)
5. I had a _____ with my friend. (converse)
6. You need a lot of _____ on the subject to understand it perfectly. (concentrate)

(B) Look at the following dialogues carefully and write them in the correct sequence as they occur in the story.

1. 'How can I ever thank you ?' she said.
2. 'Are you leaving today ? she asked.
3. 'When I go to that part of the country / I shall visit your brother's grave and write to you.'
4. 'Excuse me, my hands are covered with flour ?'

5. 'My son is in the Punjab. He is a soldier'.
6. 'May I know your name?'
7. 'Are you an Indian? My brother is in India'.
8. 'What kind of country is India, Sir?'
9. 'Show Mr. Gupta the ring which your brother sent you'.
10. 'Mrs. Bethy, your son is alive. He is well'.

(C) Study the following combination (collocation) of words. One is adjective and the other is noun. Examples.

Happy man (Adj. + Noun)

Previous day (Adj. + Noun)

Wonderful place (Adj. + Noun)

Power house (Noun + Noun) the first noun becomes adjective

Good manners (Adj. + Noun)

Japanese girl (Adj + Noun)

There are a group of adjectives (descriptive words) chosen from the text.

They are – miraculous, mysterious, brief, only, weekly, virtuous, serious, healthy, sad.

Fill in the gaps choosing the appropriate adjectives. One has been done for you.

- (i) I hope that some miraculous change will occur.
- (ii) The children have _____ appetite.
- (iii) There was some _____ news for the child.
- (iv) She suffered from a _____ illness.
- (v) He leads a _____ life all the time.
- (vi) He started with a _____ description of the subject.
- (vii) He attends every _____ meeting.
- (viii) Ramesh is the _____ child of his father.

- (D) Compound adjectives are beautifully formed with the adding of noun with participle. One of such compound adjectives is used in the text.

i.e., poverty stricken

In column 'A' there are the nouns and in column 'B' there are participles kept in disordered manner. You are to match them and make compound adjectives (The first noun becomes the adjective).

'A'

moth

heart

bed

hand

'B'

ridden

made

broken

eaten

Words in the circles are not written in order. Put them in order and make sentences.

wearing
she the
was moth
eaten cloth
old

receive
she was news
to
heartbroken
the

is
child the
completely and
ill
bed ridden

table
the on toy
the is
handmade

Government
the helped
by peasants
poverty stricken
were the

G. Let's learn use of language :**Active and Passive Voice.**

Much objective writing is done in the passive voice. For the passive voice we may use any one of the tenses. With each one we have to use the relevant tense of 'be' along with the past participle of the main verb.

Tense	Form	Examples in the passive (from the text)
Simple Present	is/am/are+past participle	My hands <u>are covered</u> with foam.
Present Progressive	is/am/are + being + PP	It <u>is being repaired</u> at the moment.
Present Perfect	has/have + been + PP	It <u>has been kept</u> very neatly in that envelope.
Present perfect Progressive		
Simple past	was/were + PP	Maggie's face <u>was filled</u> with gratitude.
Past Progressive	was/were + being + PP	A letter <u>was being written</u> to her.
Past Perfect	had + been + PP	Some of the chairs and tables <u>had been pushed into</u> corners.
Past Perfect Progressive		
Future time	shall/will + be + PP	All kinds of things <u>will be sold</u> in the night.
Referring to Future in past	would + be + PP	The grief in her heart <u>would be eased</u> a little.

Note : The present perfect progressive and past perfect progressive in the passive voice are very rarely used.

1. Supply the correct form of the verb to fill in the gaps in the following narration.

When the match was coming to an end I _____ (tell) by my father to leave the stadium quickly to attend to my cousin at the hospital where he _____ (bring) by an ambulance. I _____ (shock) to hear this. An auto rickshaw _____ (arrange) and I reached the hospital and then to the ward in no time. I saw that my cousin _____ (bandage) and was lying on the bed with a saline hanging on a stand beside the bed. The nurse told me he _____ (inject) with antibiotics.

H. Let's write :

There are a few dialogues between the teacher and Deepak. Some dialogues are omitted. Fill in the dialogues according to the sequence. A few hints are given in the bracket.

Teacher : Deepak. Please come here if you have finished writing.

Deepak : Sir, it is over.

Teacher : _____ (demand the copy)

Deepak : Here is my copy. Sir, the question was difficult.

Teacher : _____ ? (enquiring)

Deepak : Yes Sir, we were taught this subject twice. But I was confused.

Teacher : (Checking the note) Deepak, _____
_____ ?

Deepak : Sir, this sentence was actually told by you.

Teacher : It is just and _____ .

Deepak : Sir, I remember your words.

Rome was not built in a day.

Teacher : _____ ? (Asks to know his response)

Deepak : Sir, I was greatly moved by it.

Teacher : _____ ?

Deepak : Sir, I found this sentence in a book.

Teacher : _____ ?

Deepak : I bought the book in the exhibition.

There was a great rush in the exhibition.

Teacher : _____ ?

Deepak : I also bought one story book.

Teacher : It is better to have companionship of books.

After you have completed writing the dialogues, have a role play with your peers inside the classroom.

