

The Magic Flute

A. Before you read :

Have you heard anyone play the flute ? Did you enjoy listening to it ?

Can a flute be magical ? How ?

Here in the story a boy played the flute. What made him play the flute ?

Read the story and know about it.

B. The text :

The sun was setting as Sukumar walked up the dirt path and into the small village. He was a boy of about eleven or so. In the distance lay the majestic Himalayas. Sukumar was alone and knew no one in the village, but he hoped to find someone who would put him up for the night. In the distance a girl was calling her mother, and he was reminded of his own mother, who was dead. He was filled with memories of her and took out his flute to play.

As he stood there playing, a middle- aged woman carrying a heavy load of grass on her back came up the path behind him. She was the wife of the village headman. She stopped and listened silently to the boy's tune. Sensing her presence, Sukumar looked at her. When their eyes met, it seemed to both of them that they had always known each other.

The woman asked, "My son, where are you going ?"

"I'm a stranger here, mother, looking for a place to spend the night," he replied.

"Come with me, my son," she said. "That's your sister calling me. When I heard your flute, I felt in my heart that you too were calling me with your tune. Come along, we must go home."

Tucking away his flute, the boy followed the woman to her house.

Now answer the following questions :

1. What was the name of the boy? Why was he going to the village?
2. Why did he play the flute?
3. Who was the middle-aged woman? When she met Sukumar, how did both of them feel?
4. What did she ask Sukumar to do?

Do you think Sukumar will stay in the elderly woman's house? Why? / Why not?

II

At the age of five Sukumar had lost his own mother. But he believed that she still lived within his heart. The flute he carried had been a gift from his father. After the death of his mother, his father would play his own flute every evening before going to bed. One night Sukumar asked him, "Where is Mama? Why can't we see her anymore?"

Putting down the flute, the man said, "Your mother now lives in the house of the Gods. Although she is far beyond the sky, she is with us in our hearts."

Sukumar then asked, "Are you ever able to meet her in your heart?"

Gazing down at the boy, he answered, "Yes my son, when I play the flute."

"Oh, how I want to see her! Please make me a flute too so that I'll know she's with me when I play it."

Soon afterwards, Sukumar's father carefully fashioned a flute for the boy and taught him how to play it. A few days after this, Sukumar's father died. Sukumar took his flute, and set out on a journey when he met the village headman's wife who had called him 'son'. In her, he felt he had found his own true mother once again.

As Sukumar entered the yard with the woman, he saw her young daughter, Sayapatri. The woman nodded toward Sukumar and said, "Daughter, I've brought home a nice boy to stay with us - no, I mean I've brought home your brother." Both were happy. Sayapatri, who had no brothers, now had Sukumar, and he in turn now had a sister.

Soon the village headman came home. The woman said to her husband, "I met this boy on the road today. He plays the flute very well."

During dinner, the man said nothing to the boy. This made Sukumar sad and uncomfortable. After dinner, Sukumar took out his flute and began to play softly. The family sat there silently, enraptured by the boy's music.

The next morning Sukumar got up early and prepared to leave. But the woman stopped him saying, "We're mother and son. I won't let you leave your home." And so Sukumar stayed with the family.

Now answer the following questions :

1. Which part of the story takes place earlier- the part in section A or the part in section B ?

2. Sukumar had lost his mother as a child. He wanted to know where she was. What did his father tell him ?
3. Why did Sukumar want his father to make a flute for him ?
4. What happened when Sukumar lost his father ? Why do you think he left his home ?
5. Who was Sayapatri ? How did the middle-aged woman introduce Sukumar to her ?
6. How did Sukumar feel in Sayapatri's house ? Why ?
7. Sukumar wanted to leave the next morning. What happened ?

III

One day, the two children walked down to a nearby stream. Sukumar sat silently on a boulder, staring at the water. Unable to control her curiosity, Sayapatri asked, "What are you thinking about, my brother?"

"Dear sister, you have your own mother, and she loves you because you're her daughter. But my mother's gone. And the only way I can ever meet her is by playing my flute."

Sayapatri was shocked by his answer. "But, my brother, isn't my mother also your mother ? Am I not your sister ?", she asked.

Hesitating, he replied, "Yes, you're my sister, and she's my mother, but....."

"But, what, my brother?"

"You have the love of your father, but I've lost mine."

"But isn't my father also yours?"

"No, for I haven't yet won his heart. I'll win his heart by playing my flute."

That evening after the two children had gone to sleep, the father said, "Orphans aren't very dependable. Sukumar will be like that too. One day he'll get up and leave. In the meantime, he'll probably just sit around here loafing and living off our kindness. And he'll end up being a bad influence on our Sayapatri."

The woman was shocked by her husband's words. "But my dear, of course he's an orphan, which is why we must become his parents," She said.

Now answer the following questions :

1. What reason did Sukumar give Sayapatri for being sad ?
2. How did he plan to win Sayapatri's father's heart ?
3. Why did Sayapatri's father not like Sukumar ?
4. What do you think Sukumar will do now ?

IV

One spring evening, Sukumar sat by the window, gazing out at the full moon. He was filled with sadness. Despite all his efforts, he was still unable to win the love of Sayapatri's father.

In the pre dawn hours of the next morning, he quietly left the house while the rest of the family lay sleeping. All day he climbed over hills and down through the valleys. At sunset, he found himself on the summit of a mountain. A shrine to a goddess stood there, and he decided that he would take shelter in it for the night. Once inside, he felt very lonely and sad. He felt that by leaving Sayapatri and her mother, he had once again lost his family.

The next night he again slept in the shrine, dreaming of Sayapatri. In his dream she was standing in front of him, asking him to follow her. When he awoke from his sleep, he knew that he would return home. But when he reached

Sayapatri's house, many villagers were around the yard and all wore gloomy looks on their faces.

Silently Sukumar entered the house. Inside, Sayapatri lay on her mother's lap. Looking up and seeing him, the woman cried out, "My son, look what's happened to your dear sister! People say she'll recover, but oh, I don't know."

Sukumar approached them slowly, tears streaming down his face. Stretching out his hand, he softly stroked his sister's cheek.

"On the night you left, she suddenly came down with a very high fever. Since yesterday she's been like this- in a coma. I think her spirit's left her body and gone off in search of you. Please, my son, do something to revive her."

Sukumar brought out his flute and began to play it very quietly. As the tune floated across the room, Sayapatri's eyelids began to flutter. Slowly her eyes opened. Seeing Sukumar, she murmured, "My brother, oh my brother! You've returned."

Putting down his flute, Sukumar replied, "Yes, my dear sister, I'm here. It's me, your brother."

Suddenly the father moved next to Sukumar and, with tears in his eyes, hugged the boy to his chest. "Truly you're my own dear son. Never, never will I let you go again."

The mother sat there, shedding tears of joy. Sayapatri and Sukumar looked at each other and smiled.

Translated by Abhi Subedi (Adapted)

1. Why did Sukumar leave Sayapatri's house ?
2. Why did Sukumar feel sad in the temple ?
3. Why did Sukumar decide to return to Sayapatri's house ?
4. When Sukumar entered the house, what did he see ?
5. According to her mother, what was wrong with Sayapatri ?

6. What did Sukumar do when he heard Sayapriti's mother ? What happened to Sayapriti then?
7. Sayapriti's father did something unexpected. What was it ?
8. Do you think this is a happy story or a sad story? Why ?
9. Why is the story entitled "The Magic Flute" ? How was the flute magical ?

C. Glossary :

majestic	: beautiful or impressive
tuck away	: to hide something
set out	: began
gaze	: to look someone steadily
nodded	: answered 'yes'.
enraptured	: filled with joy
staring at	: looking at something for a long time with wide open eyes.
loafing	: spending time carelessly
summit	: the highest point / top (of a mountain)
stroked	: touched in a gentle, loving way
flutter	: to move in excitement
hugged	: held someone tightly putting arms around.
gloomy	: unhappy : having no hope.

D. Let's Write :

Write the answers to the following questions in about 50 words each :

1. Why and how did Sukumar learn to play the flute ?
2. How did he come to Sayapatri's house ?
3. Why did Sayapriti's father not want Sukumar in his house ?
4. Why did Sukumar go back to Sayapriti's house ?
5. How did Sayapriti recover ?

E. Activity :

The following is the summary of the story. But there are eight mistakes in the summary. Underline the mistakes. Rewrite the summary after correcting the mistakes.

Sukumar was an orphan who was 11 years old. His mother had made a guitar for him and he played it very well. One day, he came to a village and the Headman's daughter took him to her house. She introduced him to her son, Sayapatri. But Sukumar was sad because Sayapatri's mother did not love him. So, one day he left their house and went to live in a shrine on a mountain. One, night he had a dream. He saw Sayapatri's mother calling him. He went back to Sayapatri's. He found that Sayapatrai's mother was very sick. He played his flute and slowly she opened her eyes. Sayapatri hugged him and the story ended happily.