

Chapter 5

The Snake and the Mirror

A Legend of the Northland - Thinking about the Poem

Q. 1 Which country or countries do you think 'The Northland' refer to?

Ans.: The Northland is a polar region where days are shorter and nights are longer. It's a cold region covered with snow. People use reindeer to harness it to the sledge when it snows. Children wear furry clothes made of animal skin.

Q.2 What did St. Peter ask the old lady for? What was the lady's reaction?

Ans.: St. Peter after travelling round the earth reached to the old lady's cottage where she was baking cakes. He was very hungry and fainted due to fasting, and asked her for a single cake from her stock of cakes. The lady was selfish. She tried to bake a small cake for the saint.

Q. 3 How did he punish her?

Ans.: The priest got very angry with the old lady as he was hungry and faint due to his fasting, and the old lady was selfish and couldn't part with a single cake. So the priest cursed her that she would make her own home like the birds do and get her own food by boring all day into the woods, as she didn't deserve the human being form, the food, the shelter and the fire that keeps her warm. She quietly went inside her cottage and flew out from her chimney as a woodpecker.

Q. 4 How does the woodpecker get her food?

Ans. : The woodpecker got her food by boring holes into the trees.

Q.5 Do you think that the old lady would have been so ungenerous if she had known who St. Peter really was? What would she have done then?

Ans.: If the old lady had known who Saint Peter really was, even then she wouldn't have been generous in parting her bread with him. The poem describes the old lady as a very selfish and greedy woman, who couldn't even share a small part of her bread with a priest. She couldn't have learnt a lesson without being punished, and that is why Saint Peter cursed her that she would make her own home and find her food by boring all day into the woods.

Q.6 Is this a true story? Which part of this poem do you feel is the most important?

Ans. : No, this is not a true story. This is a story narrated by people in the northland but one can learn a lesson from it. The part of the poem where Saint Peter curses the old lady for being selfish is the most important part of the story. This is a lesson for people who are far selfish and don't deserve to be called human beings. They should respect the shelter provided to them, the food that they are getting from nature and the fire that keeps them warm.

Q.7 What is a legend? Why is this poem called a legend?

Ans.: A legend is a traditional story which is regarded as historical. This poem is called legend because of its tale being told to everyone by the Northland people. They narrate it curiously as it is a story to learn a lesson from, where a priest called Saint Peter cursed the old lady for her

extremely selfish behavior and she turned into a woodpecker, and she would have to make her own home and find her own food by boring all day into the woods as punishment for making the priest angry by her extremely selfish act.

Q.8 Write the story of 'A Legend of the Northland' in about ten lines.

Ans.: Once there was a priest known as Saint Peter who travelled round the earth and reached to a cottage where an old lady was baking cakes. The priest was very hungry and faint due to fasting and asked for a cake from her stock of cakes. She made little cakes but couldn't give that away to the priest as she thought the cakes seemed larger, and yet made another which was as thin as a wafer. She was a very selfish lady and put away all her cakes on the shelf. The priest got very angry and cursed the old lady that she didn't deserve the human form, or the food and the shelter and that she would spend her life making her own home and finding her own food by boring all day into the woods. She went quietly into her cottage and flew from her chimney as a woodpecker with only a scarlet cap on her head.

Q.1 Let's look at the words at the end of the second and fourth lines, viz., 'snows' and 'clothes', 'true' and 'you', 'below' and 'know.' We find that 'snows' rhymes

with 'clothes', 'true' rhymes with 'you' and 'below' rhymes with 'know'.

Find more such rhyming words.

Ans.: The following are other rhyming words from the poem:

(i) Earth – Hearth (Para 5)

(ii) Done – One (Para 1)

(iii) Lay – Away (Para 7)

- (iv) Flat – That (Para 9)
- (v) Lay – Away (Para 7)
- (vi) Myself – Shelf (Para 10)
- (vii) Faint – Saint (Para 11)
- (viii) Form – Warm (Para 12)
- (ix) Food – Wood (Para 13)
- (x) Same – Flame (Para 15)

Q. 2 Go to the local library or talk to older persons in your locality and find legends in your own language. Tell the class these legends.

Ans.: This answer is experience dependent. Please do it yourself.

Thinking about Language

Q. 1 Here are some sentences from the text. Say which of them tell you, that the author:

(a) was afraid of the snake, (b) was proud of his appearance, (c) had a sense of humour, (d) was no longer afraid of the snake.

1. I was turned to stone.

2. I was no mere image cut in granite.

3. The arm was beginning to be drained of strength.

4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, ‘O God’.

5. I didn’t tremble. I didn’t cry out.

6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.
7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.
8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!
9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness...! The rascal could have taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.
10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead?

Ans. :

(a) was afraid of the snake –

1. I was turned to stone.
3. The arm was beginning to be drained of strength.
5. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out.

(b) was proud of his appearance –

6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.
8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!

(c) had a sense of humor –

2. I was no mere image cut in granite.
4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, 'O God'.
7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.
9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness...! The rascal could have

taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.

(d) was no longer afraid of the snake –

10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead

Q. 2 Expressions used to show fear

Can you find the expressions in the story that tell you that the author was frightened? Read the story and complete the following sentences.

1. I was turned _____.
2. I sat there holding _____.
3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like _____.

Ans. : 1. I was turned to stone.

2. I sat there holding my breath.

3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like a stone image in the flesh.

Q. 3 Match the meanings with the words/expressions in italics, and write the appropriate meaning next to the sentence. The first one has been done for you.

1. I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits. (very frightened)
2. I got a fright when I realized how close I was to the cliff edge.
3. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him.
4. You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind me like that.

5. Wait until I tell his story — it will make your hair stand on end.

6. Paralyzed with fear, the boy faced his abductors.

7. The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle.

Ans.: 1. I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits.
(Very frightened)

2. I got a fright when I realized how close I was to the cliff edge.
(Frightened by something that happens suddenly)

3. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him. (Very frightened)

4. You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind me like that.
(Frightened by something that happens suddenly)

5. Wait until I tell his story — it will make your hair stand on end. (Makes another feel frightened)

6. Paralyzed with fear, the boy faced his abductors. (Too scared to move)

7. The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle. (Too scared to move)

Q.4 Report these questions using if/whether or
why/when/where/how/which/what.

Remember the italicized verbs change into the past tense.

1. Meena asked her friend, “Do you think your teacher will come today?”

2. David asked his colleague, “Where will you go this summer?”

3. He asked the little boy, “Why are you studying English?”

4. She asked me, “When are we going to leave?”

5. Pran asked me, “Have you finished reading the newspaper?”

6. Seema asked her, “How long have you lived here?”
7. Sheila asked the children “Are you ready to do the work?”

Ans.:

1. Meena asked her friend if she thought her teacher would come that day.
2. David asked his colleague where he would go that summer.
3. He asked the little boy why he was studying English.
4. She asked me when we were going to leave.
5. Pran asked me if I had finished reading the newspaper.
6. Seema asked her how long she had lived there.
7. Sheila asked the children if they were ready to do the work.

Thinking about the Text

Q.1 A Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30 – 40 words).

“The sound was familiar one.” What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? How many times did he hear it? (Find the places in the text.) When and why did the sounds stop?

Ans.: The doctor lived in a small room. He heard the sound of rats. He knew there was a regular traffic of rats to and from the beam. He heard it thrice. The sound stopped suddenly as the rats had seen a snake.

Q.1 B Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30 – 40 words).

What two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?

Ans.: The doctor took an “important” decision that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache. And then he made another “earth shaking” decision that he would always keep his attractive smile on his face.

Q.1C Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30 – 40 words).

“I looked into the mirror and smiled,” says the doctor. A little later he says, “I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself.” What is the doctor’s opinion about himself when:

(i) The first smiles, and

(ii) The smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?

Ans.: (i) When the doctor first smiled, he had inflated opinions about himself. He was admiring his looks and the fact that he was a bachelor and a doctor.

(ii) When the doctor smiled again, he actually smiled at his poverty, foolishness, and stupidity. The thought of having no medicines if the snake strikes him made him feel foolish and stupid from being a proud doctor.

Q. 2 This story about a frightening incident is narrated in a humorous way. What makes it humorous? (Think of the contrasts it presents between dreams and reality. Some of them are listed below.)

1. (i) The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)

(ii) The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)

2. (i) The person he wants to marry

(ii) The person he actually marries

3. (i) His thoughts when he looks into the mirror

(ii) His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm

write short paragraphs on each of these to get your answer.

Ans.: The doctor narrated the story in a humorous way.

He lived in a small rented, un-electrified room which was full of rats.

He could never resist looking himself into the mirror, and dream of various ways by which he could look more handsome like he wanted to grow a moustache and thought he had an attractive smile.

He dreamed of marrying a rich-fat woman, who would not be able to chase him if he leaves but instead ends up with a thin-reedy woman who was a sprinter.

When he encountered the snake, he sat like a stone with flesh and started feeling the presence of God. He even tried in his imagination to write 'O God' outside his heart, which makes the frightening incident humorous.