

The Lost Child

A. Before you read :

Have you ever visited any fair? Did you go alone with someone ?

What things did you see there? Which things attracted you a lot ?

Did you buy anything in the fair ? Do you remember any incident which you cannot forget ?

You are going to read a story. The title of the story is "The Lost Child".

B. The Text :

I

It was the festival of spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and streets appeared a colourfully dressed humanity. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock carts. One little boy ran between his father's legs, brimming over with life and laughter.

"Come, child, come" called his parents, as he lagged behind, fascinated by the toys in the shops that lined the way.

He hurried towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed, in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit of the day was tender and, giving him her finger to hold, said, "Look, child, what is before you!"

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale like melting gold as it swept across miles and miles of even land.

A group of dragon-flies were moving noisily on their bright purple wings in search of sweetness from the flowers. The child followed them in the air with his gaze, till one of them would still its wings and rest, and he would try to catch it. But his mother gave a cautionary call: "Come, child, come, on to the footpath."

He cheerfully ran towards his parents and walked by their side for a while, being, however, soon left behind, attracted by the little insects and worms along the footpath that were coming out of their hiding places to enjoy the sunshine.

"Come, child, come!" his parents called from the shade of a grove where they had seated themselves on the edge of a well. He ran towards them.

A shower of young flowers fell upon the child as he entered the grove, and, forgetting his parents, he began to gather the raining petals in his hands. But lo! He heard the cooing of doves and ran towards his parents, shouting, "The dove! The dove!" The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands.

"Come, child, come!" they called to the child, who had now gone running in fear round the banyan tree, and gathering him up they took the narrow, curved footpath which led to the fair through the mustard fields.

Now answer the following questions :

1. Find out the persons described in the story. Where are they going?
2. Why did the child lag behind ?

3. What things did the child see on his way to the fair ? What attracted him most ?
4. Did the child gather any thing on the way ? What was it ? What happened to it ?
5. What were his father and mother like ?
6. "Come, child, come" who said this ? How many times and why ?
7. What do you think the next part of the story will be about ?

II

He went towards the basket where the flowers lay heaped. As they neared the village, the child could see footpaths full of people. He felt at both repelled and fascinated by the confusion of the world he was entering.

A sweetmeat seller hawked, "gulab-jaman, rasagulla, burfi, jalebi," at the corner of the entrance. The child stared open eyed and his mouth watered for the burfi that was his favourite sweet. "I want that burfi," he slowly murmured. But he half knew, as he begged, that his plea would not be heeded because his parents would say he was greedy. So, without waiting for an answer he moved on.

A flower-seller hawked, "A garland of gulmohur, a garland of gulmohur!" The child murmured. "I want that garland." But he well knew his parents would refuse to buy him those flowers because they would say that they were cheap. So, without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A man stood holding a pole with yellow, red, green and purple balloons flying from it. Seeing the colourful pole, the child desired to possess them all.

But he well knew his parents would never buy him the balloons, because they would say he was too old to play with such toys. So he walked on farther.

A snake-charmer stood playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, its head raised in a graceful bend like the neck of a swan, while the music stole into its invisible ears. The child went towards the snake-charmer. But, knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the snake-charmer played, he proceeded farther.

There was a roundabout in full swing. Men, women and children, carried away in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter.

Now answer the following questions :

1. Who did the child see at the fair ?
2. Did the child want to buy anything in the fair ? What are they ? Why did he move on without waiting for his father's reply ?
3. Did his parents buy him anything ? Why ?
4. Did he like the music played by the snake charmer ? How do you know this ?
5. What was it that attracted the child most ?
6. The child made a bold request to his parents to go on the round-about. Will the parents allow him ?

III

The child watched them intently and then he made a bold request: "I want to go on the roundabout, please, Father, Mother."

There was no reply. He turned to look at his parents. They were not there ahead of him. He turned to look on either side. They were not there. He looked behind. There was no sign of them.

A full, deep cry rose within his dry throat and with a sudden jerk of his body he ran from where he stood, crying in real fear, "Mother, Father." Tears rolled down from his eyes. Out of fear he ran to one side first, then to the other, hither and thither in all directions, knowing not where to go. "Mother, Father," he cried. His yellow turban came untied and his clothes became muddy.

Having run to and fro for a while, he stood helpless, his cries changed into sobs. At little distances on the green grass he could see, through his filmy eyes, men and women talking. He tried to look intently, but there was no sign of his father and mother among these people.

He ran quickly again, this time to a temple to which people seemed to be crowding. Every little inch of space here was congested with men, but he ran through people's legs, his little sob lingering: "Mother, Father!" Near the entrance to the temple, however, the crowd became very thick: men jostled with each other. The poor child struggled to find a way between their feet, but finally failed and raised his voice with the highest pitch "Father, Mother!" A man in the rushing crowd heard his cry and, stooping with great difficulty, lifted him up in his arms.

Answer the following questions :

1. What is section III about ?
2. What was the most attractive thing for the child? How do you know this ?

3. What made the child cry? How did he try to look for his parents?
4. Who lifted the child up and how?
5. Do you think the child will find his parents?

IV

"How did you get here, child? Whose baby are you?" the man asked worriedly. The child wept more bitterly than ever now and only cried, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

The man tried to soothe him by taking him to the roundabout. "Will you have a ride on the horse?", he gently asked as he approached the ring. The child did not look at it, but he only shouted, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

The man headed towards the place where the snake-charmer still played on the flute to the swaying cobra. "Listen to that nice music, child!" he pleaded. But the child shut his ears with his fingers and shouted his double-pitched strain: "I want my mother, I want my father!" The man took him near the balloons, thinking the bright colours of the balloons would distract the child's attention and quieten him. "Would you like a rainbow coloured balloon?", he very lovingly asked. The child turned his eyes from the flying balloons and just sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

The man, still trying to make the child happy, bore him to the gate where the flower-seller sat. "Look! Can you smell those nice flowers, child! Would you like a garland to put round your neck?" The child turned his nose away from the basket and repeated his sob, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

Thinking he could change the child's mind and make him happy by a gift of sweets, the man took him to the counter of the sweet shop. "What sweets would you like, child?" he asked. The child turned his face from the sweet shop and only sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father!"

(Mulk Raj Anand)

C. Glossary :

humanity	:	people in general
brimming	:	to be full of something
lag behind	:	to move more slowly than other people
fascinated	:	very interested
suppress	:	to prevent from expressing feeling or emotion
stare	:	act of looking at
plead	:	to ask for something in a strong and serious way
tyrant	:	who has complete power in a country and uses it in a cruel and unfair way
cautionary	:	giving advice or warning
petal	:	the delicate (light and pleasant) coloured part of a flower
cooing	:	soft low sound of doves / pigeons
heap	:	to put a lot of something in a pile on something
whirlpool	:	a swimming pool in which water moves in circles

- repel : to make somebody feel horror or disgust
- sweet meat : a sweet / candy; any food preserved in sugar
- hawk : to try to sell things by going from place to place asking people to buy them
- burfi : a kind of sweet
- murmur : to say something in a soft quiet voice that is difficult to hear and understand
- plea : an urgent emotional request for something
- heed : to pay careful attention to somebody's advice or warning.
- coil : to wind into a series of circles
- shriek: to give a loud high shout (when excited, frightened or in pain)
- dizzy : feeling as if everything is spinning around
- intently : with strong interest and attention
- hither and thither : in many different directions.
- congested : crowded
- jostle : to push roughly against somebody in a crowd
- stoop : to bend the body forwards and downwards
- soothe : to make somebody feel calmer / better

- approach : to come near
- swaying : moving slowly from side to side
- distract : to take somebody's attention away from that he wants
- queiten : to make someone calmer / less noise / silent

Answer the following questions :

1. What did the man want to know from the child?
2. Did the man try to make the child happy? How?
3. How did the child react to the man's offerings?
4. What impression do you have on the man who helped the child?
5. Will the man be able to find the child's parents? What will happen to the lost child?

ACTIVITY - I

- (A) **The following is the summary of the story 'The Lost Child'. Fill in the blanks of the summary with the suitable words from the bracket.**

(interest, happy, flowerseller, roundabout, balloons, toys, village fair, snake charmer, sweetmeat seller, dragon flies, parents, beautiful groove, temple gate, ran, cried, father and mother)

Once a child went to a _____ with his parents. Fascinated by the _____ he lagged behind. On his way to the fair he saw the _____, a _____ etc. The child with his parents arrived the village square and saw a _____ with various sweets, a _____ with garlands of gulmohur, a man holding with

_____, a _____ playing a flute to a snake and a _____ in full swing. He wanted to go on the round about and couldn't find his _____ in the crowd. Then he _____, _____ here and there in the crowd to find his parents. At the _____ a man lifted him up in his arms and asked him about his _____. The man wanted to make the child _____ but the child lost _____ in the things that he had wanted earlier.

WRITING

1. What were the things the child saw on his way to the fair? Why did he lag behind his parents ?
2. What things in the fair attracted the child? Why did he move on without waiting for an answer from his parents?
3. When did he realize that he had lost his way? How is it described in the story ?
4. Why did the lost child lose interest in the things that he had wanted earlier ?
5. What do you think happens in the end ? Does the child find his parents ?

(B) Read the following sentences and order them as they are used in the story and then fill in the blanks of the table. One is done for you.

- (a) I want that burfi.
- (b) I want that toy.

- (c) I want that garland.
- (d) Come, child, come, on to the footpath.
- (e) I want to go on the round about, please, father, mother.
- (f) Come child come.
- (g) Listen to that nice music, child.
- (h) Look child what is before you !
- (i) I want my mother, I want my fathers !
- (j) Father, mother !
- (k) Whose baby are you /
- (l) What streets would you like.

Section (Part)	(What) Statements	Who said ?	To whom ?
I	(f) come, child, come	parents	child
II			
III			
IV			

- (C) The main ideas of the story, "The Lost Child" are given below. Read and put them in the appropriate boxes of the Flow Chart. One has been done for you.

- The child's cry out of fear without seeing his parents in the crowd.
- The child's hesitation towards the attracted things in the fair and his sobbing to see his father and mother.
- His eagerness to have different things from a sweetmeat seller with sweets, a flower seller with garlands, a snake charmer with a snake, a roundabout with fullswing in the fair.
- Attraction of the toys, a flowering mustard field, a group of dragon flies, the little insects and worms, a beautiful grove, the banyan tree etc. on the way to village fair.
- A child's visit to a village fair with parents.

FLOW CHART

A Child's visit to a village fair with parents

