5 The Snake and the Mirror

**Thinking about the Text**  
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**I. Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph**

Question 1.  
“ The sound was a 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?  
Answer:  
The doctor heard the sound of rats. The sound was a familiar one. He heard this sound four times. The phrases are ‘Again I heard that sound from above’, ‘Again came that noise from above’, ‘Suddenly there came a dull thud as if a rubber tube has fallen’. The sounds stopped after the appearance of the snake.

Question 2.  
What two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?  
Answer:  
The doctor took the following two ‘important’ and ‘earth shaking’ decisions:

(a) He would shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome.  
(b) He would always keep that attractive smile on his face.

Question 3.  
“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) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?  
Answer:  
The doctor thought that he had a good smile when he first smiled. But when he smiled a little later, he laughed at his destiny. His life was in danger. His thoughts got changed because of the snake. He was quite near to death.

**II. 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).

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

Question 1.

1. The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)
2. The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)

Answer:

1. The doctor is a poor man. He does not have much money. His house has no electricity. It is a small rented room which has many rats. He has about sixty rupees in his suitcase. Along with some shirts and dhotis, he also possesses one solitary black coat.
2. He wants to be a handsome person. So he decides to shave daily and grow a thin moustache. He also wishes to accumulate wealth.

Question 2.

1. The person he wants to marry
2. The person he actually marries

Answer:

1. He intends to marry a woman doctor who has plenty of money and a good medical practice. He wishes to have a fat wife so that she cannot run after him and catch him when he would make a mistake.
2. The person he actually marries is a thin reedy person with the gift of a sprinter.

Question 3.

1. His thoughts when he looks into the mirror
2. His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm

Answer:

1. He thinks that he should look smart. So he decides to shave daily and retain his smile. He is happy and contented when he looks into the mirror.
2. When the snake coiled around his left arm above the elbow, he kept sitting there holding his breath. He became motionless. He was afraid of the snake.

**Thinking about language**  
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Question 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.

Answers:

* The sentences (1), (3), (4), (5) tell that the author (a) was afraid of the snake.
* The sentences (6) and (8) tell that he  
  (b) was proud of his appearance.
* The sentences (9) and (10) tell that  
  (c) he had a sense of humour.
* The sentences (2) and (7) tell that (d) he was no longer afraid of the snake.

Question 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 ……………….

Answers:

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.

Question 3.  
In the sentences given below some words and expressions are italicised. They variously mean that one

* is very frightened.
* is too scared to move.
* is frightened by something that happens suddenly.
* makes another feel frightened.

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,
2. I got a fright when I realised 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. Paralysed with fear, the boy faced his abductors.
7. The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle.

Answers:

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, (too scared to move).
3. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him. (frightened by something that happens suddenly)
4. You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind me like that, (made someone feel frightened)
5. Wait until I tell his story—it will make your hair stand on end. (very frightened)
6. Paralysed 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)

Question 4.  
Report these questions, using if/whether or why/when/where/how/which/what. Remember the italicised 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?”

Answers:

1. Meena asked her friend if he (she) thought his (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 they 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.

**Short Answer Type Questions (2 marks each)**  
**(About 30-40 words each)**

Question 1:What was the doctor thinking while he was seated before the mirror ?  
Answer:  
The doctor thought of various medicine he had and if any medicine was good enough to save him if the snake did bite him. He also realized that God had punished him for being so proud and arrogant.

Question 2:Why did the doctor run from his house ?  
**Or**  
Why did the doctor run away to his friend’s house ?  
Answer:From writer’s arm the snake slithered into his lap, crept onto the table and then moved towards the mirror. The writer revived, got up from the chair and leapt into the yard and ran to his friend’s house to save his life.

Question 3:How did the doctor show the presence of mind when he encountered the snake ?  
Answer:  
The doctor showed great presence of mind on seeing the snake: He neither jumped nor cried out.  
He sat on the chair holding his breath. His body was still but his mind remained very active.

Question 4:How did the snake change the writer’s opinion about himself ?  
Answer:  
The writer was proud of being a doctor. Coming face-to-face with the snake made him humble. He  
thought he was only a poor and stupid doctor who should not be proud of his profession.

Question 5:While looking into the mirror, what important and earth-shaking decisions did the doctor make ?  
**Or**  
What were the two important decisions taken by the doctor while looking into the mirror ?  
Answer:  
The important decision made by the doctor was that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache, to look more handsome.  
The earth-shaking decision made by the doctor was that he would always keep that attractive smile on his face.

Question 6:What did the doctor do on seeing the snake ?  
Answer:  
The doctor saw the snake’s reflection in the mirror. He, then, went to have a closer look. He got up from the chair and ran away from the house.

Question 7:What type of woman did the doctor in the story “The Snake and the Mirror”, want to get married to and why?  
Answer:  
The doctor, who had plenty of money and good medical practice, wanted to get married to a woman who was fat. The reason he gave was that if he, the doctor husband ever made any mistake, and tried to run away, she would not be able to catch him and stop him from escaping.

Question 8:Why did the author of “The Snake and the Mirror” fantasize a fat woman as his wife ?  
Answer:  
The author of “The Snake and the Mirror’ fantasizes a fat woman as his wife since she would never be able to catch the doctor on his mistakes. She would not be able to run after him and he would be saved of all kinds of punishments. Thus, the author fantasizes a fat woman as his wife.

Question 9:Why did the snake leave the doctor’s arm?  
Answer:  
The snake left the doctor’s arm because it saw its reflection in the mirror and was fascinated by it and so wanted to enjoy its own reflection by having a closer look. Like his parents even he respects all religions.

Question 10:What made the doctor utter “Death lurked four inches away” ?  
Answer:The doctor was under the grip of the snake, and sat motionless as a statue, his body was inactive but mind was completely active. He knew very well that the snake would bite him at the slightest movement. This is what made his utter these words.

**Long Answer Type Questions (4 marks each)**  
**(About 80-100 words each)**

Question 1:“Birds of the same feathers flock together” goes the saying. Does the encounter between the snake and the doctor in the story “The Snake and the Mirror” support the saying? Why or why not?  
Answer:  
Yes, the story supports the saying which means that the people of similar habits and tastes find each other. The doctor enjoyed self-appreciation and could not resist the temptation of looking at his reflection in the mirror. He also takes a number of decisions, so as to improve his looks. The snake that coiled itself on the doctor’s arm, kept staring at its reflection in the mirror for a long time, enjoying its beauty and appreciating its form. The snake was so much engrossed in its beauty that it forgot as to why it had come to the author’s house.

Question 2:Without mirror, the story will lose its charm and reality. Justify.  
Answer:The story would lose its charm and reality without the mirror because it fascinates both the characters i.e., doctor and the snake. The doctor makes two important decisions – saving daily and growing thin moustaches to make himself more handsome and keeping a smile on the face all the time while looking at himself in the mirror. The snake also feels attracted to look at his face in the mirror and leaves the doctor’s arm. It sits on the table in front of mirror and the doctor finds an opportunity to move away to save himself. Thus, the story does revolve around the mirror and therefore its important.

Question 3:What are the similarities between the doctor and the snake ?

Answer:  
The doctor and the snake had striking similarities. Both were victims of self-adoration. This is clearly visible in two decisions of the doctor- to shave daily and a grow moustache and also to wear an attractive smile on his face to look handsome. While the snake enjoyed looking at his reflection at closer quarters. It did not move the doctor’s arm and later crept into the table and moved towards the mirror. ,

Question 4:Justify the title of the story ‘The Snake and the Mirror’.

Answer: The story revolves round the narrator, the snake, and the mirror. The narrator hears some familiar sounds – a dull thud and a snake lands on his shoulder. The doctor is terrified and sits there like a stone. He suddenly feels the presence of the creator of the world and death 4-inches away. He forgets danger and smiles feebly. The snake looks into the mirror, moves towards the mirror and wants to enjoy a close reflection in the mirror. Thus the title is justified as the story revolves around the snake and the mirror.

Question 5:Describe in detail the doctor’s feelings when he saw the snake coiled around his arm?Answer:The doctor was so engrossed in his day dreaming that he did not realize that a snake had wriggled  
over the back of the chair and landed on his shoulders and could round his left arm with its hood spread out. The doctor sat there without moving an inch, he was afraid lest the snake might strike.  
He thought of various medicines he had and if any one of them was good enough to save him if the \* snake struck him. He realized the presence of God and felt that it was a punishment for being proud and arrogant.