

THE SNAKE AND THE MIRROR

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THEME OF THE CHAPTER:

'The Snake and the Mirror', a humorous narrative is based on the theme of human vanity and fears and how they affect people. Man is so proud of his physical beauty, that at times, he is often foolish and stupid in his attempts at estimating himself. The author through this story is trying to explain that it is important for us to live in the real world and not in the fictitious world.

An additional theme in the story is about how crises make people turn to God for help.

MESSAGE OF THE CHAPTER:

The chapter gives the message to the readers that faith in God and humility in thoughts are what makes a person strong enough to face any adversity or difficult situation in life.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:

The story is about a homeopathic doctor, unmarried and handsome, who was an admirer of his own beauty. He lived in a rented house which was an outhouse. It had two windows and tiled roof, there was no electricity, and the room was infested with rats.

One hot Sunday night, he had his meal at a restaurant and returned home. He lit the kerosene lamp, took off his coat and shirt, and opened two windows. He settled on a chair and started to read a medical book. There was a large mirror on a table on which stood a lamp. As it was too hot to sleep, he sat in front of the mirror admiring his looks and smiled and planned to look more presentable. Gradually his thoughts shifted from self - admiration to planning his future marriage. He was so engrossed in his day dreaming that he did not give much importance to the sudden silence. There was a sound of something falling from behind. He was slow to react. By the time he turned round to look, a snake had slid over the back of his chair, wriggled on to his shoulder and coiled round his left arm above the elbow. It was a dangerous snake. Its hood spread out just three inches away from his face. The doctor sat there like a stone statue, not making any movement, lest the snake strikes him. Suddenly he realized the presence of God. It seemed as though God had come in the form of snake to punish him for being proud and arrogant. He realized he was but a mere human, nothing to boast of. The moment he accepted his true worth, the snake left his hold and sat on the table in front of the mirror.

The doctor got up silently and sprinted out of the door. Next morning, when he returned to take his belongings, he noticed all his belongings were stolen as he had run away without even locking the door.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF THE DOCTOR

The doctor is the central character of the story. He practises homeopath and is obsessed with his own looks. He appears to be a man full of vanity as we see him looking into the mirror and admiring his own looks. He is portrayed in such a manner that he can assess himself critically and humorously. He honestly admits that as a new practitioner of medicine, he could not earn much and had to rent a poor house without even the facility of electricity.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS:

- 1. Discuss the element of humour in the story, 'The Snake and the Mirror' in about 100 – 120 words.**

Answer:

Although the author has depicted a very serious incident in the story but the way in which he has described each detail in it has the element of humour associated with it. This humour is generated by way of contrasts employed by the author. The doctor reveals his pride and arrogance by telling us how highly he rated his looks. This pride and arrogance stands in contrast to his admittance that he felt feeble and foolish when encountered by the snake. Again his desire to marry a fat and a wealthy lady doctor who could not run after him when he commits some silly mistake stands in contrast to the thin and agile lady, whom he finally marries.

Further, the doctor pokes fun at himself when he tells that the thief did not take away his dirty vest because he had a sense of cleanliness. His remark about the snake that perhaps it was making some decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its head is also very witty and humorous.

Thus, even a serious incident is made interesting by the doctor's witty treatment of a very dangerous situation.

- 2. The story 'The Snake and the Mirror', deals with the issue of human vanity and pride. Discuss this statement in light of the character of the doctor.**

Answer:

The doctor had a very high opinion of himself regarding both his appearance and his profession. He was conscious of his looks and wanted to look even

more handsome. He repeatedly looked at himself in the mirror to admire his handsomeness. He was also proud of being a doctor and was arrogant because of his professional qualifications.

But his short encounter with a snake, cured him of his pride. When the snake reached his shoulder and coiled itself around his arm, the doctor lost all arrogance and was reminded of the existence of God. Coming face to face with death, he realised that how weak and foolish he was. When he recalled that there were no medicines in his room to cure him of a snake – bite, he humbly and meekly regarded himself to be a stupid and helpless person.

Thus, the encounter with the snake transformed the doctor from a foolish man to a humble and God – fearing man.