



Notes of Chapter 5 – The snake and the mirror

Think About the Text

I. Answer each question below in a short paragraph (30 – 40 words).

1. “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, rented, unelectrified room that was full of rats. He heard the sound of rats, running back and forth the beam. He heard the thrice but then it stopped suddenly as if the rats had seen a snake in front of them.

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

Ans: The doctor first decided to shave daily and grow a thin moustache and secondly, he decided to keep an attractive smile always on his lips. These were the two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions the doctor made while looking in the mirror.

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

Ans: He had an inflated opinion about himself when he first smiled looking in the mirror, when he was admiring his looks and profession.

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

Ans: Later the doctor smiled at his helplessness and foolishness. But his thoughts changed after he encountered the snake and accepted his stupidity.

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.

1.

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



Ans: The doctor is a poor person with hardly any wealth. He lived in a small, rented room with no electricity and lots of rats in it, since he just started with his medical practice, he didn't have much.

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

Ans: He wants to be a person who is rich and attractive and hence decides to grow a thin moustache.

2.

(i) The person he wants to marry

Ans: He wants to marry a woman who is fat so she couldn't run after him to catch him. She should possess a lot of money and have a good medical practice.

(ii) The person he actually marries

Ans: He couldn't marry the girl of his dreams. He instead got married to a thin reedy woman who has a gift of sprinter.

3.

(i) His thoughts when he looks into the mirror

Ans: While looking into the mirror, he found his smile attractive. He decides to grow a thin moustache and keep smiling to show the joy and satisfaction he carries within.

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

Ans: The sight of the snake frightened him. He sat like a stone image in flesh, but his mind was active and felt the presence of the creator.

Summary of Chapter 5 – The snake and The Mirror

The story "The Snake and the Mirror" was written by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. The story was originally written in the Malayalam language and was translated into English by V. Abdulla. This is a story about a homoeopathic doctor during his early career days. The narrator of this story is the doctor himself, where he narrates this story to some individuals. In this story, the doctor tells us that he lived in a small, rented room during that time.

Furthermore, the tiles of the room were supported by gables which in turn were supported by the beam. Moreover, rats were roaming



all over the room and there was no electricity supply. Hence, the room was in a dire (very bad) state.

In the doctors' story, it was the summer season going on and it was night. The doctor came back to his room after finishing his meal at a restaurant. The room was certainly dark due to lack of electricity. As such the doctor made use of a kerosene lamp to lighten up his room. The doctor also took off his coat and shirt.

There were two windows in the room that were opened by him. After sitting on a chair, the doctor took a medical book to read. On the table, there was a large mirror and a lamp.

Due to the immense summer heat, it was too hot for the doctor to sleep. So, he began to gaze in the mirror and became lost in admiring himself. Furthermore, whilst admiring himself, a desire came in him to look more presentable. Gradually, there was a shifting of his thoughts from self-admiration to future marriage. The doctor thought of marrying a rich doctor, who was rich and fat.

The doctor didn't pay much attention to the sudden silence and the scampering from the rats came to a halt. Furthermore, there was a sound of something falling but the doctor was slow to react. By the time, he had a look, there was a snake wriggling on the back of the chair. Soon, the snake coiled on the left arm of the doctor. The snake was merely inches away from his face. Consequently, the doctor went into a deep shock and became like a statue. At this moment, the doctor felt the presence of God. It seems that this snake was like a punishment from God to the doctor due to his being too arrogant. Soon, he came to the realization that he a mere human and he should not boast.

At this realization of his true worth, the snake left the doctor and moved towards the mirror. As such, the doctor silently escaped, and his life was saved.