

Summary

Iswaran's story was told to Ganesh by Mahendra who worked as a junior supervisor at different construction sites. As Mahendra was unmarried, he was able to live in the temporary shelters provided by the construction company. Iswaran accompanied Mahendra wherever he went. He was an advantage to him as he provided him company, cooked food for him and even washed his clothes. Mahendra says that Iswaran would gather all the things required to prepare a meal within no time. Every morning Mahendra would get ready, eat his breakfast, take his lunch along and go for his work. In the meantime, Iswaran would clean the living place, wash the clothes, take a bath, eat his lunch, read his favourite Tamil story book and take a nap. In the evening, Iswaran would entertain Mahendra with his stories. He had the art of storytelling as he would use his body gestures, facial expressions and voice modulation in order to bring his characters to life. Even though the stories seemed untrue, Iswaran narrated them in such a unique way that Mahendra listened to him with curiosity. Iswaran would start a story with an introduction, he would lay the background of the character, followed by the story. He described a simple incident in such detail, along with actions that it would create suspense in the listener's mind. Once he told Mahendra the story of an elephant that had escaped from the jungle and entered the town. The beast reached Iswaran's school. As it destroyed the school property, all the students locked themselves up in the classroom. At that time, Iswaran was studying in one of the junior classes. He was watching the incident from the rooftop. He took a stick from the teacher and came down stairs, in the ground. He walked towards the elephant as it threatened to attack him. Iswaran was not scared of it. He gathered all his strength and hit the elephant on its toenail quickly. This attack stunned the elephant, it fainted and fell on the ground. He did not complete the story and said that he was getting late for the dinner. He went to get the dinner but Mahendra was curious to know what happened next. As Iswaran did not continue with the story, Mahendra had to remind him that the ending was pending. Then Iswaran said that a veterinary doctor was called. He brought the elephant back to consciousness and after two days a mahout was called who took the elephant back to the jungle. Mahendra asked Iswaran that how did he manage to overpower the huge beast. Iswaran replied that he used the technique of a Japanese martial art which was either Karate or Jujitsu. He had read about it somewhere, that the martial art was able to make a person unconscious by paralyzing the nervous system. Everyday Iswaran would narrate one or the other story which was entertaining for him and fulfilled the absence of a television in his living quarter. One morning Iswaran asked permission to cook a special dinner as it was the day when they cooked meal for the dead elders of the family. That evening Mahendra enjoyed a tasty meal and complimented Iswaran on his cooking skills. As Mahendra was relaxing after the meal, to his dislike, Iswaran

started narrating a story related to ghosts and supernatural powers. He said that the factory area where they lived was earlier a burial ground. On the very first day, he had seen a human skull lying around. He added that he was not afraid of ghosts and saw many bones and skulls. On a full moon night, he saw an ugly ghost of a woman who had a shrunken face, matted hair and held an unborn baby in its arms. Mahendra was uneasy and scolded Iswaran for talking nonsense. He said that Ghosts did not exist and ordered him to get himself examined as he thought that he had gone mad. Since that day, Mahendra felt uneasy and would peep out of the window in order to check the presence of any ghost around. One night, Mahendra woke up from his sleep as he heard someone crying. At first, he thought that it was a cat looking for mice. As the sound became more harsh and deep, Mahendra could not ignore it and gave into the desire of peeping out of the window. As he looked out, he saw the white moonlight and a dark shadow holding a bundle in its arms. As he saw the ghost he started sweating, breathing heavily and fell back on the bed. After sometime, Mahendra thought that probably his subconscious mind was playing a trick on him and actually there was no ghost. He got ready the next morning and had forgotten the incident of the previous night. Iswaran greeted him and gave him his lunch bag. He said that a few days ago Mahendra had scolded him for discussing the ghost but last night he saw it himself. Iswaran had heard Mahendra crying at night. It was confirmed that Mahendra had seen the ghost the previous night and it was not a trick played by his mind. Once again, Mahendra was frightened, he left in a hurry and resigned from the job. He could not live at a haunted place for a single day.

Question and Answers

1. In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?

A. Iswaran is an asset to Mahendra as he accompanies him everywhere. He cooks food for him, washes his clothes, cleans the living place and entertains him with his unique stories.

2. How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?

A. Iswaran would raise his eyebrows in a curve and raise his arms in a dramatic gesture. He would say that once he was walking down the empty highway all alone. He saw a huge beast lying on the road. He thought of going back but as he got closer, he saw that it was a tree that had broken and had fallen on the road. Its branches appeared to be the beast's limbs that had spread out on to the road.

He wanted to create a scene in the listener's mind so that he would get captivated in the story. Iswaran wanted to create curiosity in the mind of the listener as to what happened next in the story.

3. How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?

A. Firstly, he gave an introduction that his village was surrounded by a dense forest. The wood was processed at the timber yards and the logs of timber were transported onto the lorries by elephants. He added that the beasts were huge and in case one of them went mad, it could not be controlled even by an experienced mahout. He would get so caught up in the excitement of his own story that he would get up from the floor and jump about, stamping his feet in emulation of the mad elephant. Iswaran's talent of narrating a story was praise-worthy. He put in a lot of effort to make it engrossing for the listener.

4. Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?

A. Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters because his stories were so entertaining that every night they made up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living place. He would enjoy the unique way in which Iswaran narrated a story which was full of adventure, suspense and horror.

5. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a fullmoon night?

A. Mahendra scolds Iswaran and says that ghosts do not exist. On a full moon night, he woke up from his sleep as he heard someone crying. At first, he thought that it was a cat which was hunting mice but as the sound grew louder and harsher, he was tempted to peep out of the window. In the white moonlight, he saw a dark, shady figure holding a bundle in its arms. Initially, he got scared but overcame it as he felt that his subconscious mind had played a trick on him. The next day, the presence of the ghost was confirmed by Iswaran and Mahendra realized that he actually saw a ghost the previous night. He did not want to live at a haunted place and so, resigned from the job.

6. Can you think of some other ending for the story?

A. I think the story has ended in a good way. I cannot think of another ending for the story.