



By Gavin Maxwell

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Oral Comprehension Check

1. What 'experiment' did Maxwell think Camusfearna would be suitable for?

Answer:

Maxwell thought that he would keep an otter instead of a dog. Camusfearna, ringed by water a very short distance from its door, would be an eminently suitable spot for the experiment.

2. Why does he go to Basra? How long does he wait there, and why?

Answer:

He went to Basra, to the Consulate-General, to collect and answer his mail from Europe. He had had to wait there for five days. To start with his mail didn't reach on time. Then he tried to make a telephone call. This incident is of those days when one had to book an international call 24 hrs in advance. The telephone line was not working properly on the first day. Next day it was some public holiday so it was not working. Finally after a tortuous wait of five days his mail arrived.

3. How does he get the otter? Does he like it? Pick out the words that tell you this.

Answer:

When he received his mail, he carried it to his bedroom to read. There, he saw two Arabs and beside them was a sack that twisted from time to time. They handed him a note from his friend saying that he had sent him an otter.

Yes, he liked it. We know this because he uses the term 'otter fixation' to refer to his feeling towards the otter. He felt that this otter fixation or this strong attachment towards otters was something that was shared by most other people who had ever owned one.

4. Why was the otter named 'Maxwell's otter'?

Answer:

The otter was of a race previously unknown to science and was at length named by zoologists *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* or Maxwell's otter.

5. Tick the right answer. In the beginning, the otter was
aloof and indifferent

friendly

hostile

Answer:

In the beginning, the otter was aloof and indifferent.

6. What happened when Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom? What did it do two days after that?

Answer:

When Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom, it went wild with joy in the water for half an hour. It was plunging and rolling in it, shooting up and down the length of the bathtub underwater, and making

enough slosh and splash for a hippo.

Two days after that, it escaped from his bedroom to the bathroom. By the time he got there, Mijbil was up on the end of the bathtub and fumbling at the chromium taps with its paws. In less than a minute, it had turned the tap far enough to produce some water and after a moment, achieved the full flow.

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1. How was Mij to be transported to England?

Answer:

Maxwell booked a flight to Paris and from there he would go on to London. The airline insisted that Mij should be packed in a box (not more than eighteen inches square) that was to be placed on the floor, near his feet.

2. What did Mij do to the box?

Answer:

The box was lined with metal sheet. Mij didn't find it comfortable to be there so tried to escape. In its attempt to escape Mij tore into the metal lining of the box. As a result it hurt itself and started bleeding.

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3. Why did Maxwell put the otter back in the box? How do you think he felt when he did this?

Answer:

As there was no other way to carry Mij to London so the author had put it back into the box. He must have felt pity on the way the otter had hurt itself. Moreover, he must be worried as well.

4. Why does Maxwell say the airhostess was "the very queen of her kind"?

Answer:

Maxwell said that the airhostess was "the very queen of her kind" because she was extremely friendly and helpful. He took her into his confidence about the incident with the box. She suggested that he might prefer to have his pet on his knee. Hearing this, he developed a profound admiration for her, for she understood the pain of both the otter and its owner.

5. What happened when the box was opened?

Answer:

When the box was opened, Mij went out of the box. He disappeared at a high speed down the aircraft. There were cries all around. A woman stood up on her seat screaming that there was a rat. He saw Mij's tail disappearing beneath the legs of an Indian passenger. He dived for it, but missed. The airhostess suggested him to be seated and that she would find the otter. After a while, Mij had returned to him. It climbed on his knee and began to rub its nose on his face and neck.

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1. What game had Mij invented?

Answer:

Mij had invented a game with ping-pong ball. He would put the ball at one end of a sloping lid and then grab it as it ran to the other end.

2. What are 'compulsive habits'? What does Maxwell say are the compulsive habits of

(i) school children

(ii) Mij?

Answer:

Compulsive habits are usually strange act or behaviour which a person does without clear reason.

On their way to and from school, children make it a habit to place their feet exactly on the centre of each paving block. Similarly, Mij had made it a habit to jump on to the school wall and go galloping all along its length of thirty yards.

3. What group of animals do otters belong to?

Answer:

Otters belong to a comparatively small group of animals called Mustellines, shared by the badger, mongoose, weasel, stoat, mink and others.

4. What guesses did the Londoners make about what Mij was?

Answer:

According to Maxwell, the average Londoner does not recognize an otter. The Londoners who saw Mij made different guesses about who Mij was. They guessed, among other things, that it was a baby seal, a squirrel, a walrus, a hippo, a beaver, a bear cub, a leopard and a brontosaur.

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