***His First Flight ------ By Liam O’ Flaherty***

His First Flight – Introduction

The story by “Liam O’ Flaherty” is an account of a young bird that is afraid to fly for the first time. He believes that his wings would not support him. Despite his younger siblings flying fearlessly with much shorter wings, he could not gather the courage to do the same. He was punished to stay hungry if he did not try. Thus, it was his mother that compelled him to fly by using food as a trap. The lesson reflects how one hesitates to take the first step and that fear is all in the mind. One should trust one’s abilities because “the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself”.

His First Flight Summary

The story “His First Flight” by “Liam O’ Flaherty” is about a young seagull who is afraid to fly. All his younger siblings despite their much shorter wings flew fearlessly while he could not gather the courage to trust his own wings.

The young seagull became sad when he saw his parents perfecting his younger siblings in the art of flying. His parents scold and taunt him for not even trying. They even call him a “coward”. They tell him a lot to at least try and also threaten him to leave him alone and hungry if he does not.

The following day, he is left in isolation and upon feeling hungry; he tries to seek the attention of his family members. Only his mother, who is withering a fish in an attempt to eat it, notices his son. The young seagull cries out of starvation hoping his mother would help. On seeing his mother come to him with the fish, he gets excited. But on noticing that his mother stopped mid-way, he gets maddened out of hunger and takes a dive at the fish, forgetting for a moment that he is afraid to fly. Finally, he took his first flight.

All the family members celebrate his victory by cheering and dancing around him. He also attempts at floating in the sea that he was once afraid of. Thus, he overcomes his fear and realises that it is all in the mind.

Questions and Answers

Q1. Why was the young seagull afraid to fly? Do you think all young birds are afraid to make their first flight, or are some birds more timid than others? Do you think a human baby also finds it a challenge to take its first steps?

A. The young seagull was afraid to fly because it was his first flight and he feared of falling and hurting himself. He doubted that his wings would not be able to support him.

It is natural that doing something for the first time is challenging and fearful. Thus, I think all birds must be hesitating before taking their first flight, some more than others. Yes, just like young birds, human babies also find it a challenge to take the first step to walk or crawl.

Q2. “The sight of the food maddened him.” What does this suggest? What compelled the young seagull to finally fly?

A. The young seagull was very hungry. It was this hunger that ultimately compelled it to fly. Its hunger only intensified when it saw its mother tearing at a piece of fish that lay at her feet. It cried to her, begging her to get some food. When its mother came towards it with food in her beak, it screamed with joy and anticipation. However, she stopped midway. It wondered why she did not come nearer. Not being able to resist or control its hunger any longer, it dived at the food that was in its mother’s beak. At that moment, his hunger overpowered his fear of the great expanse of sea beneath the cliff. Finally, this plunge was followed by the natural reaction of its body, i.e. to fly.

Q3. “They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly.” Why did the seagull’s father and mother threaten him and cajole him to fly?

A. Unlike his younger siblings, the poor seagull could not gather enough courage to take his first flight. Thus, his parents taunted him for being a coward. They even threatened that they would let him starve if he did not try. They thought hunger would make him fly looking for his food. They did all of this because they wanted him to fly. They threatened and cajoled ( convinced) him to fly but it was all in vain.

Q4. Fear and lack of confidence stop one from learning new things. Do you agree? How did these two traits of the young seagull make him coward? How did he overcome these short comings?  
Answer: Yes, It is true that fear and lack of confidence stop one from learning new things as in the story, the young seagull lacked the value of courage and confidence in his character. He was too scared of flying. His family tried hard to make him fly but he refused to do so because of his fear of sinking in the seawater. They even scolded him for his cowardice. They tried to tempt him with food but he was not willing to learn flying. Once he dived, his fear disappeared and he enjoyed his first flight.  
It is a fact that unless we try for something and overcome our fear, we can’t learn anything. Confidence and motivation are two most important traits that make any learning possible.

***MEANINGS***

Seagull- a bird that lives near the sea and has short legs, long wings, and white and grey feathers  
Ledge- a narrow horizontal shelf projecting from a wall (or here) a cliff  
Brink- the extreme edge of land before a steep slope or a body or water  
Expanse- a wide continuous area of something

Flapped- (of a bird) move (its wings) up and down when flying or preparing to fly  
Muster- gather  
Plunge- jump or dive  
Shrilly- with a high pitched and piercing voice or sound  
Upbraiding- scold

Herring- a soft-finned sea fish  
Devour- eat quickly  
Cackle- laugh in a loud, harsh way  
Cowardice- lack of bravery

Ascending the sky- the act of rising up through the air  
Preening-to tidy and clean its feathers  
Hump- a rounded raised mass of earth or land  
Scrapped- discard

Derisively- in a manner expressing contempt or ridicule.  
Plaintively- sad  
Uttered- make a sound with one’s voice  
Halted- stopped

Monstrous- horrible  
Seized- grab  
Headlong- with the head foremost  
Soaring- flying or rising high in the air  
Swooped- (especially of a bird) move rapidly downwards through the air  
Curvetting- perform a series of jumps on the hind legs

Shrieking- making a high-pitched piercing cry or sound  
Shrilly- loudly and forcefully  
Ridges- a long, narrow hilltop, mountain range, or watershed  
Cawed- utter a caw

Beckoning- gesture