Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

Assignment: Fire Buckets

1. **Who came in for stock medicines? What did he bring along with him?**

Ans: The young captain came in for stock medicines. He brought two pounds of butter and a box of chocolates and the news that Edward Heinlein was going to visit their village.

1. **How did the news of Edward Heinlein’s arrival spread in the village?**

Ans: The young captain had heard at Seth’s shop that Edward Heinlein was going to arrive in the village. Before he had picked up his supplies from the shop. When the young captain met the compounder to barter the goodies with the stock medicines, the young captain informed him about it. New didn’t take a long time to travel, as this village was small although it acted as a town.

1. **How famous was Seth? Where was his shop?**

Ans: Seth was so famous that he had forgotten his name as everyone called him Seth. It was because the entire village had only one shop. His shop was behind the houses of the engineer and the two doctors, where stood the offices and the clerical quarters.

1. **Which bungalow was at the elevation? Why did it still not make the bungalow as the fulcrum?**

Ans: PO’s bungalow, in spite of being on a hillock, did not make it as a fulcrum. On the contrary, it was the hospital which was the axis around which the entire place revolved. The hospital was considered more important for the right reasons.

1. **Mention three reasons why the hospital was considered as the axis.**

Ans: The reasons why the hospital was considered as the axis are; First, it had a refrigerator while even offices or houses did not have it. Secondly, it doubled up as a newsroom. Thirdly, it radiated gossip.

1. **Why did everyone come to know about Edward Heinlein’s arrival in one hour?**

Ans: Everyone came to know about Edward Heinlein’s arrival in one hour as there weren’t many people to qualify as people. Everyone knew everyone literally. There were eleven houses for the doctor, the engineer, Political Officer, his assistant, the clerks, compounder, nurses and the lone Seth included.

1. **Describe the houses.**

Ans: Villagers inhabited similar looking small houses which were whitewashed with lime. These houses had similar looking gardens. Some gardens were tended jealously while some were running wild. The houses had two or three little rooms, a little open corridor shaded by a slopey tin roof leading to the kitchen behind. The corridor was flanked by a courtyard enclosed by low whitewashed boundary walls. The courtyard always had a heap of fuel wood under a tin shed and many buckets lined up to catch rainwater.

1. **How was villagers’ opinion different from that of anthropologists’ about the tribal people?**

Ans: Villagers looked upon these tribals as sources of their jobs, creatures who spoke gibberish. Whereas the anthropologists considered them as human beings.

1. **How bored were the inhabitants of the village?**

Ans: The inhabitants of the village were extremely bored and they would always lookout for excitement. Even the arrival of tins of fresh biscuits in the Seth’s shop was news to be chewed over. The news of Edward Heinlein’s arrival was a whole new ball game though. The news of his arrival was a sensation to them.

1. **Explain the phrase ‘anthropologist with an adventurer’s soul’. Justify with examples.**

Ans: Edward Heinlein, the anthropologist, is described as someone with an adventurer’s soul. He preferred the tent been put up to the dak bungalow. He knew the languages that the tribes spoke. He lived and danced with them and wrote down everything in his notebook.

1. **How did the governor make things easy for the anthropologist?**

Ans: The governor gave his jeep for Edward to commute from one place to another. He instructed the army officers too. The army officers, obediently, gave him the capacious of their tents and cooked for him.

1. **Describe the hospital.**

Ans: **(Following points to be mentioned in the answer)**

Spotlessly clean building- gleaming white walls and the most beautiful building in town-It had a thick cloth punkah-Three wards, one for males, the other for females and a special ward for TB patients-An operation theatre- it had a refrigerator-Fire buckets hung outside the hospital-The hospital had a fire extinguisher- The hospital was the axis around the place revolved. It also doubled as the newsroom and also radiated gossip.

1. **Where were the fire buckets hung? Why was it ‘the butt of ridicule’?**

Ans: The fire buckets were hung outside the hospital veranda, under the overhanging roof. A pole was slung from two slim pillars and from this pole slung three buckets. The butt of ridicule among adults and the favourite little ‘sandy thingies’ of children are the fire buckets as the children would use the sand to make their sandcastles.

1. **Mention the contrasting opinion among villagers and the army with respect to the fire buckets.**

Ans: The adults laughed at the fire buckets although the buckets were considered as a precaution in case of fire. They would wonder about its utility as the hospital had never caught fire in its entire life despite all the wood it had. The adults knew that the hospital would never catch fire because everything was damp most of the time as it rained so much. The children had considered the fire buckets as their playthings and the sand would be used to make their sand castles. On the contrary, the army people would regularly top the fire buckets with dry sand. They knew that sand would never fail in any emergency as stranger things have been known to happen. The army goes by its rule and it is to be prepared.

1. **Why would the city folks visit the hospital, according to the writer? What would the PO’s wife and the staff wonder?**

Ans: The city folks visited the hospital as they liked to look at the buildings and there was no other building there worth gazing at. The staff found it a headache to attend the visitors and their presence caused a lot of trouble in the hospital. The PO’s wife found it astonishing.

1. **According to the PO’s wife, why was the garden in front of her bungalow better than the hospital?**

Ans: PO’s wife would wonder why people would want to go to the hospital and look at the shelves full of spirit bottles instead of dahlias and geraniums that begged for attention. She found it astonishing as people would prefer smelling antiseptics and listen to the incessant coughing of patients instead of the experiencing the heavy pods of balsam, butterflies with their brilliant colours or dripped orchids from vines that rested on the limbs of the trees.

1. **What would PO’s wife do in regards to the shy orchids, daises and dahlias?**

Ans: In regards to the shy orchids, daises and dahlias, PO’s wife went looking for shy orchids hiding behind stones and would make sketches of them in the hope of one day getting to know their names. She planted daises and dahlias and embroidered those flowers on blue and green casement and would make place mats out of them. They were much admired at dinners.

1. **Mention preparation made by Swaroopamma, Baruah and Dr. Radha Trivedi.**

Ans: Swaroopamma, the nurse, went home and soacked her white uniform in bleach that she would use sparingly, for she knew bleach would reduce the life of clothes. Baruah, the accounts clerk, left immediately to round up any eggs. He would need them for pudding. His puddings were famous. It was best to start collecting them soon. Radha Trivedi, the doctor, made sure that everything was in place- the steel medicine trays washed and clean, the thermometers with their faces buried in little jars, the steel syringes with their narrow glass panels lined with a measuring table and needles all boiled and clean.

1. **Which issue put Seth in a fix regarding the biscuits?**

Ans: When Seth dug into his store for biscuits, sadly only a single round tin of assorted biscuits was left. It wouldn’t be a great idea to give army biscuits as Heinlein would guess where they came from. Heinlein had the ear of the governor who know that pilfering and trading on the sly was a common practice. And Heinlein having those biscuits would certainly confirm it.

1. **Would Radha Trivedi take the front door usually? Why was that day different?**

**Ans:** No, normally, Radha would take the back door to go to her house that was behind the hospital. She didn’t like walking back and forth on account of snakes, though in her two years she had only seen one. That day it was different as she wanted to meet PO’s wife to see if all preparations were over and have a nice cup of tea.

1. **What happened when the doctor stepped out of the hospital?**

**Ans:** When Radha stepped out of the hospital she stopped dead as nobody had remembered the fire buckets. They looked awful as the paint was peeling off and it was a sad blot to the spotlessly clean hospital of which the entire community was so proud.

1. **How were the fire buckets painted yellow?**

Ans: When Radha had seen the paint peeling off from the fire buckets, she looked for Baruah but he was nowhere to be found. She told the compounder Hazarika to paint it but was already tired and he was looking forward to spend the evening with his son. As he had no time, he told Shangte Nika, the punkah puller who painted it yellow.

1. **Why did the hospital staff not go to welcome Heinlein?**

Ans: Heinlein, being an anthropologist, would not like that the hospital staff has come to welcome him instead of being at the service of the patients in the hospital. They were aware that he would frown if they quit their jobs to go garlanding him.

1. **What kind of preparations were made at the hospital?**

Ans: A day prior to Heinlein’s arrival, the hospital was given an extra scrubbing. Sheets were closely examined and the best were kept aside to be changed the next morning. On the day of his arrival, the hospital staff was busy with the work of looking after patients. The sheets had been changed, the patients were being sponged, temperatures were being recorded and the compounder was making neat packets of medicines prescribed.

**(Radha Trivedi’s contribution to the hospital can be added to this answer-Refer to Q.18)**

1. **How did Heinlein and the villagers react after seeing the fire buckets? Why?**

**Ans:** When Heinlein saw the fire buckets being painted bright yellow, his eyes widened imperceptibly. He smiled as the villagers froze. They suddenly came together as they would come in an emergency. The villagers surrounded him trying to shield the buckets from his vision. Heinlein tried to say something but the villagers did not give him any chance to speak.

1. **Why was it imperative that Heinlein spends as much time inside in the hospital? How many rounds of tea was he given?**

Ans: It was imperative that Heinlein spends as much time inside the hospital so that the villagers get time to get the paint cans from Seth’s shop and paint the fire buckets. He had two rounds of tea. The second was to keep him engaged in the hospital and buy themselves some time to rectify the mistake.

1. **What was Heinlein actually going to say after he saw the yellow buckets? When did he get the chance to speak?**

Ans: Heinlein was going to say that since yellow was the clan colour of the local tribe and they considered it to be auspicious, he was happy that the villagers were trying to adapt and make the place a little more welcoming for them. It was nice to see that they were willing to accept the tribals. Unfortunately, Heinlein got the chance to speak after the villagers had gone to the trouble of painting the buckets red.

1. **Did the puddings indeed not taste good that evening?**

Ans: No, the puddings tasted as usual. But the villagers’ mood was spoiled as all the efforts to impress Heinlein had gone vain due to the small mistake of repainting the fire buckets red.