

The Letter

Summary: This story was written by Dhumketu. This story is about an old man who was a hunter during his heydays. When his daughter got married, he understood the pain of separation. After that, he gave up hunting began another phase of his life, i.e. to wait for a letter from his daughter. He goes to the post office every day to enquire about the letter. The post office becomes a pilgrimage for him and he continues his daily pilgrimage for five years. Everyone in the post office makes fun at him but nobody ever tries to understand the pain of an old man who is waiting for a letter from his beloved daughter. On his last visit to the post office, the old man gives five guineas to a clerk and requests him to deliver the letter to his grave whenever the letter comes. One day; the postmaster is anxiously waiting for a letter from his sick daughter and his agony makes him realize the pain and agony which the old man must have suffered. It was on that day when letter from the old man's daughter arrives. But it was too late because the old man had died by that time. However, at the end of the story; everyone in the post office appear to realize the importance of human emotions and relationships.

Multiple Choice Questions.

1. Ali's walking to the Post Office daily even in biting cold weather shows his _____.
- courage
 - optimism
 - foolishness
 - strength of will

Answer: (ii) optimism

2. The Post Office is referred to as Ali's "place of pilgrimage" as he _____.
- visited it daily
 - came there to pray for a letter from his daughter
 - went there with faith and hope
 - believed God would bless him if he went there

Answer: (iii) went there with faith and hope

3. The Post Master's rudeness to Ali reveals his _____.
- lack of empathy
 - preoccupation with his work
 - preconceived notions
 - sensitivity

Answer: (i) lack of empathy

4. Ali did not come to the Post Office for several days as _____.
- he had given up hope
 - he was upset by the Post Master's rebuke
 - he was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office

d. he was busy hunting

Answer: (iii) he was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office

5. "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait." The Post Master was waiting for _____.
- a letter from Miriam
 - a letter from his own daughter
 - a letter from Ali
 - Ali to deliver Miriam's letter to him.

Answer: (ii) A letter from his own daughter

Answer the following questions briefly

1. Who was Ali? Where did he go daily?

Answer: Ali was an old man. He used to go to the Post Office daily.

2. "Ali displays qualities of love and patience". Give evidence from the story to support the statement.

Answer: Ali loves his daughter too much. This is evident from the fact that when his daughter goes away from him, he realizes the pain of separation. He has truckload of patience which is evident in his daily sojourn to the Post Office.

3. How do you know Ali was a familiar figure at the post office?

Answer: All the staffs at the post office know him by face and name. They even remember his daughter's name. The staffs often discuss the mental state of Ali during breaks. This shows that Ali was a familiar figure at the post office.

4. Why did Ali give up hunting?

Answer: When Ali's daughter got married and left her; he understood the pain of separation. He began to empathise with the

animals whose near and dear ones get killed by a hunter. After that, Ali gave up hunting.

Question Answers

1. What impression do you form of the postmaster after reading the story "The Letter"?

Answer: The postmaster is like most of the ordinary people who seldom bother to think about other's problems. People are usually too occupied with their own affairs to think about others. It is only when we have to suffer similar problem that we realize the plight of others. This is what happened to the postmaster.

2. The postmaster says to Ali, "What a pest you are, brother!" Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer: I do not agree with this statement. In real life, we often come across people who behave like the postmaster in this story. Such people usually have shut their mind from the outside world. We should learn to develop concern and respect for others. Without trying to understand someone's problem; we should not simply brush aside a person. Sometimes, we need to put ourselves in other's shoes. This has happened in this story as well; when the postmaster has to wait for a letter from his own daughter.

3. "Ali came out very slowly, turning after every few steps to gaze at the post office. His eyes were filled with tears of helplessness, for his patience was exhausted, even though he still had faith." Why were Ali's eyes filled with tears of helplessness? What had exhausted his patience but not his faith?

Answer: Ali's advancing age and falling health may have made him to think that his end was near. He could have sensed that his death would come sooner than later. It may have exhausted his patience

because he knew that he was running short of time. But he had faith in his love for his daughter.

4. "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait." Who is tortured by doubt and remorse? Why? What is he waiting for?

Answer: The postmaster was tortured by doubt and remorse. He was in doubt about well being of his daughter. He was remorseful for failing to deliver the letter to Ali in time. He is now waiting for a letter from his own daughter.

Explain the following phrases/ sentences in your own words.

- a. happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close

Answer: A person at his deathbed usually reminisces about happy memories.

- b. the sounds helped him along his lonely way

Answer: Different sounds coming from different houses appeared to motivate him to continue his journey.

- c. the cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles

Answer: The intense cold had made the whole place almost lifeless.

- d. when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn

Answer: During old age, he gave up his bad ways and began a new life.

- e. the whole universe is built up through love and that the grief of separation is inescapable

Answer: The whole universe is based on mutual love and none can escape the grief of separation.

- f. the post-master, a man with a face as sad and as inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside

Answer: An expression-less postmaster was sitting on his chair.

- g. And so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names

Answer: The clerk read out the names from the envelope.

- h. The haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety, and had laid bare his human heart

Answer: The ill temper of the official had deeply hurt him.