

## JOURNEY BY NIGHT

The author describes a night's journey by a boy of just twelve years in this lesson. The boy has a load of his younger brother, who is suffering from stomach pain, in the sling tied to his back and forehead. He had to pass through dense forest replete with its dangers. Sometimes he was frozen to see the snake spreading its hood on his way, horrified to see the marks of the bear's paws and then he had a narrow escape from a herd of elephants. After that he had to cross two rivers.

### Detailed Summary of the Lesson

As the story begins, we find Sher Singh's younger brother twitching with pain in his stomach. He is in a small hut of Laldwani village. Sher Singh's age is twelve and his brother is of nine years.

The condition of the boy is getting worse.

The writer also tells us about Sher Singh in the second paragraph. He is a brown cheerful boy of the jungle, who was habitual of living in the hard conditions of life. These had been other children in the family, but they had died of several reasons. They had died of cholera, malaria, influenza or by jungle accidents.

Now, Sher Singh and Kunwar were left in the family.

Sher Singh's mother told him that she would wring out rags in boiling water and then lay them on the stomach of Kunwar so that the pain in his stomach might subside. The writer also comments that she did not smile and she did not weep. He means to say that she had already experienced the loss of her several children. She had already undergone the pain that a mother experience when her child or children die. That's why, she neither smiled nor wept.

Sher Singh was feeling very bad inside him because of the worse condition of his brother Kunwar. He asked her what he should do in that situation. Then he decided to bring sticks and dung for fuel.

He brought them by running here and there and then he tore the rags and also bought water.

Carelessly they used fuel to boil the water immediately. Both of them laid clothes dipped in steaming water on the stomach of Kunwar. But

after sometime, when Sher Singh's mother did not see any improvement, she told him that Kunwar must be carried to Kalaghat to be admitted in the hospital there.

At the mention of the word 'hospital', Sger Singh understood at once that his brother was about to die.

Actually, it was the perception that had developed in the minds of all the people living there. They thought that hospital was the place where only unfortunate people are taken.

It means that they had seen very few people who had come back survived from the hospital. That was the reason for their hopelessness about the hospital.

The boy felt his throat choked with emotions for his little brother. He suggested to his mother that he should go to call his father back from the expedition.

She said that it would take a long time to reach there and find him. Now the author acquaints us with Sher Singh's father whose name was Sher Singh, the Bahadur.

He was known far and wide as a famous hunter. The title 'Bahadur' was attached like a medal to his name due to his acts of bravery. He lived in the village Laldwani along with his family. There were several other families were also there in the village. His occupation was farming. He had some domestic animals also. Whenever there was some expedition for hunting animals or photography, people sent for Sher Singh, the bahadur.

He had such a sharp sense that he could find tigers where no tigers were thought to be there. He could look at the dry grass and tell what had happened there. He could understand the cry of a cheetal telling others about the killing a panther had done and also about possible killings. There was a long scar on his back that went down from his skull to the back and shoulder. It had happened when he was dragging his friend from the clutches of a tiger, which attacked him by its paw and dug the nails deep in his back making a long scar there.

Once a snake bit him and then he cut and burned that wound to neutralised the effect of poison on his leg.

His face had marks of scars and his two fingers were missing due to an accident. There was another incident that the author describes here. He walked for five miles with his 'pugree' wrapped around his

stomach to stop everything from falling down through the torn skin. That day had gone along with other male members of the village as beaters on a photographic expedition.

His house was made up of mud and grass in which Kunwar, his younger son lay crying on a low stringed 'charpoy'. Sometimes he coughed due to smoke in the hut and was mostly glazed and silent. (It meant, his body was shining under the effect of fever and perspiration.

Sher Singh saw his brother carefully and understood that there was death in his eyes. He was about to die if not taken to hospital at once. He told his mother that he would take him to the city because there was no man in the village.

His mother was to stay behind at home because she had to do several things. She would work in the fields and take care of the cattle and manage for their fodder, etc. Both of them understood each other's duty without uttering a single word.

Sher Singh's mother was hill woman. It meant that she was very laborious. She was habitual of carrying loads up and down the hill. Her home was away in the high mountains. She also knew how to make a sling that could help a person lifting loads on back. One part of the sling was to be tied round the forehead and another part of the cloth was to tie around the waist. In this way, the strong muscles of the neck and shoulders take fabulous weight up and down the valley without any fatigue (tiredness).

Sher Singh's mother took two saris and makes a sling. Then she lifted Kunwar, who had doubled up with pain, and put him into the sling with a great difficulty.

Sher Singh felt at once the heat of Kunwar's body through the cloth. Sher Singh also understood at once that the burden was too heavy for him to carry to such a long distance. His mother was also in despair (depression, hopelessness).

He said no word and set out on his journey silently.

### **Journey through the Jungle**

It was evening time when he set out on his journey. The writer describes here that the huts of Laldwani village looked golden in the glow of the sunrays falling on them.

The small fields for cultivation and the 'madaan' where their cattle grazed spread around the village. The villagers also had made hedges of piled up thorn branches around the village. It was done so that the wild animals would not find it easy to enter their village and prove dangerous for their own and their animal's life.

After that, there was a pound (a prison for the stray animal) where the forest guards would lock up the domestic animal in case it was found grazing in the restricted area of the forest.

Then followed an area where dry grass had been burnt to stop any forest fire moving towards the residential area.

The real jungle began beyond that.

First of all, there were shrubs, and rough grass in which there thorn trees here and there. Then followed 'sal' trees which were used for making the railway sleepers at Kalaghat, which was fifty miles away from Sher Singh's village.

Sher Singh had made a plan to reach Kalaghat by morning the next day. He would cross the dense forest and two rivers that lay between him and his goal. After that, he could get a lift in some bullock-cart or a truck during the last part of his journey.

The writer tells us that only ox and pony had been the means of transport since immemorial time. But then, motors had started to appear on the roads of that jungle.

But it was just a beginning for Sher Singh. He had to cover 50 miles to reach Kalaghat.

He started moving on the rutted track made by the wheels of the bullock carts. He was bare-footed and his toes would disappear in the silk-soft dust.

He was quite alone moving on his way to Kalaghat, but an unknown jungle sense made him hesitate to move further.

Suddenly a cobra hissed and stood in front of him swaying its hood. The spectacle mark at the back of its hood was clear in the disappearing rays of the evening sun.

Sher Singh stood frozen and after sometime, he started moving his steps backward. The snake wanted to move away and then it disappeared into the matted grass.

Sher Singh's legs were still shaking with fear. He was unable to move forward for some time.

As you know, he had on his back the load of ailing Kunwar. He continued twitching and groaning and his movements in the sling were making him heavier than before.

He wished for rest to relax his muscles, but he knew it was too early to stop for rest at that time.

Now, it was a second wind (turn) of his journey.

There was primeval (primal: very ancient) forest around him and a struggle of vegetation and the struggle of life continued there. It was very difficult for the undergrowth (the small plants like bushes, grass, etc.) to survive and the bamboo trees grew luxuriously (comfortably) from their nodules (it's a small lump-type growth from where other branch sprouts). Several wild animals like tigers, panthers, bear, elephants, monkeys and birds like raucous (creating loud sound) peacocks lived there.

The wild animals had to feed themselves on domestic animals and sometimes even men then as the number of deer had decreased by the poachers (persons who hunt birds and animals illegally).

After sometime, the night fell and the faint light of the evening gave way to the darkness of the night and then stars shone bright in the purple background. Sher Singh had good eyesight and he could see the things. Presently the moon also rose and spread its dim light.

He also saw the footmarks of a bear in the dust on the way and it made him scared and he looked here and there feeling uneasiness.

Once he had seen a man being mauled (attacked and injured) by a bear and his whose face was torn away. So he quickened his steps. He had reached a cliff (high area of a rock almost steep) above a river bed. He was so much tired that he felt that it was very difficult to move any further without taking rest. Sweat was now running down on his shaking muscles.

He put the sling in which he carried his brother down with an extra care so that it would not hurt him. But there was a little jolt (jerk, shake) and Kunwar cried a little at it. As he had pushed the band off his forehead, the hair under it was straining.

Feeling helpless, Sher Singh uttered sobbing (taking sudden sharp breaths while weeping) to his brother, "What can I do for you?"

The child was delirious (excitement that is especially caused by fever) and answered meaninglessly.

As his muscles came back to their normal position, he felt acute pain. Blood was coming back at the spot on the forehead where there was a constant pressure of the band due to the load of the boy Kunwar. He lay for a while by putting his back against a tree to relax his body and closed his eyes also.

At that very moment, he heard the jostle and cries (squeal: yelling/shrill cry) of elephants coming towards the direction where Sher Singh was relaxing.

The elephant usually do not travel silently in the jungle and presently a herd of them was coming up towards a new feeding ground. Sher Singh was happy to think that he was not in their way.

He was above the elephants sitting at the slope of the rock from where the river-bed looked like an ivory in the moon light. He could see a spread of pebbles on each side of the river. In between, there was flowing shallow water creating a chuckling sound and in which there were plenty of fish moving here and there. There lay long spread of sand on which the elephants were moving fast crushing the sand and leaving behind their foot marks in a jumbled way.

There were cows and babies and a male tusker among them. An oily flow of musth (The condition in which elephants are very aggressive) was coming down his cheeks. In that condition, he could kill a man. Normally the elephants do not bother. Their ears were flapping, their tails were in up position, and their shadows were clearly visible on sand. They were now passing just below where Sher Singh was taking rest. Sher Singh could hear the squeak (screeching sound) of sand that was being crushed by their feet. The sound of rubbing against each other was also reaching his ears. He could easily see their heads and black backbones tossing when they were moving with quick steps.

The tusker seemed very much cautious and observant because he was moving his trunk to and fro in the air to learn from the coming breeze about any danger to the herd. Presently, he hesitated (not willing to move). He must have got the smell of the boys who were sitting above him on the cliff. He moved his trunk towards the boys.

Sher Singh was chilled (frozen) due to fright. He was in such a position that he was unable neither to climb nor to run from there with the burden of Kunwar on his back.

He started uttering prayer after prayer like a frightened spirit.

The tusker showed different reactions. He snorted, trumpeted, shook his head and then suddenly moved quickly in angry mood up the river bed. The entire herd followed him.

Sher Singh breathed one more prayer of thanks at that time. Now he decided to move from there at once. He sat down to pick up the sling and put on its band on the forehead. He tried two times with all his might, but could not lift Kunwar. Then he heard the trumpet of an elephant at some distance. The fear made him jump at once. He was able to lift his brother.

Presently he scrambled (moved quickly but with difficulty using his hands down the rock) in the river bed.

He was well acquainted (introduced to) with this river as he must have seen it during the day. He knew that, sometimes, more water also is added to it if snow-water comes flooding down. Before that, he could easily wade (to walk with an effort) through it. The water was spread to a broad stretch but was shallow (not deep). He came to know that the water was shallow because it was creating some sound when the current of water strikes against pebbles.

He saw a troutlet (a small fish) moving in water as it was made clear by the moon light.

He put his step into the water.

He felt it cooler than usual as some icy water had got mixed into it. He had to go slow but carefully because he could fall down as the stones were slimy. Finding footholds carefully, he moved on and he was now waist deep. It was because more water had been added in the river.

He thanked God thinking that there was a bridge at the second river.

It was not a proper bridge made up of cement, sand, concrete and steel. It was made up of bamboo sticks, poles, rings laced with thick grass and surfaced with river gravel (small stones).

As Sher Singh moved up to the shore, water appeared into his footprints. He also saw footprints of a tiger that seemed to walk out of the river a few moments ago because his footprints looked to be fresh as they had some glitter (shine of water) of water in them.

He plodded (went on moving into the river as if you were tired).

Steadily (in a balanced manner).

Every hour or so he had to take some rest. It became very difficult for him to move further after taking rest because he was very much tired. He had mastered the method of picking up the load of his brother Kunwar. While going on, he started sobbing as his body was not able to take the load any further, but he had to reach the hospital to save the life of his brother.