

padhai | Class X

English

Notes



**Full
Explanations**



**Character
Sketch**



**Word
Meanings**



**Tone, Central
idea, devices....**

First Flight

Mijbil the Otter

–GAVIN MAXWELL

Detailed Explanation:

At the beginning of 1956, Gavin Maxwell journeyed to southern Iraq and conceived the idea of keeping an otter instead of a dog at **Camusfearna**, a location described as being “surrounded by water just a short distance from its entrance.” This description forms vivid imagery and clearly indicates why such a place would be highly suitable for an unusual pet like an otter. A friend informed him that otters were plentiful in the **marshes of the Tigris** and were commonly domesticated by the **local Arabs**. Maxwell travelled to Basra to collect his mail from the Consulate-General, but due to repeated failures in **communication systems**, he was compelled to remain there for several days. Eventually, when his mail arrived, he returned to his room and found two Arabs sitting beside a sack that occasionally moved. Inside the sack was the otter sent by his friend. Maxwell remarks that the moment the sack was opened marked “a phase of my life that has not yet ended,” a deeply reflective statement revealing his lasting attachment to otters. The animal initially appeared “like a very small, mediievally-conceived dragon,” a striking simile that highlights its unusual and almost **mythical appearance** due to the mud covering it.

As the mud was gradually removed, the otter’s real appearance and beauty became clear. Maxwell named him **Mijbil**, or simply Mij. It was later discovered that this otter belonged to a species previously unknown to science and was eventually named **Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli**, or Maxwell’s otter. In the beginning, Mij remained distant and indifferent, displaying neither friendliness nor hostility, but this behaviour soon changed. On the second night, he climbed onto Maxwell’s bed and slept curled in the bend of his knees, indicating the early development of **trust** and attachment. Shortly afterwards, Maxwell took him to the bathroom using a lead. There, Mij showed extreme excitement in water, “**making enough slosh and splash for a hippo**,” a hyperbolic expression that humorously emphasizes his intense love for water. Maxwell observes that otters dislike still water and prefer to keep it constantly in motion, revealing an important aspect of their natural behaviour. Two days later, Mij escaped and went straight to the bathroom, where he managed to turn on the tap with his paws. This incident demonstrates both his intelligence and curiosity. He also enjoyed playing with objects such as marbles and a rubber ball. Maxwell compares him to “a **four-footed soccer player**,” a lively simile that vividly describes his playful movements and adds humour to the narrative.

As Maxwell spent peaceful days in Basra, he began to worry about the challenge of transporting Mij to England. Since **British airlines** refused to carry animals, he arranged an alternative route through Paris. The airline required that Mij be placed in a small box for the journey. When Maxwell returned after leaving him in the box for a short time, he was shocked to see **blood seeping** from its air holes, as Mij had tried desperately to escape. This incident highlights the distress caused when a **free-spirited animal is confined**.

Maxwell, filled with concern and affection, removed the sharp edges of the box and hurried to the airport, describing the taxi to be driven like a **riochetting bullet**. During the flight, the air hostess showed exceptional kindness and understanding, and Maxwell refers to her as **“the very queen of her kind,”** expressing deep admiration. When the box was opened, Mij escaped into the aircraft, creating confusion as passengers mistook him for various animals, and one woman screamed, “A rat!” However, Mij soon returned to Maxwell, climbed onto his lap, and gently rubbed his face and neck. This affectionate gesture reveals that beneath his restless nature, he was deeply attached to his owner.

After arriving in London, Maxwell and Mij stayed there for nearly a month. Mij continued to exhibit his playful and inventive character. He devised his own game using a **ping-pong ball** and a sloping suitcase, demonstrating intelligence and creativity. During walks in London, he developed **“compulsive habits,”** such as running along a low wall outside a primary school on his way back home. These repeated actions make him appear almost childlike. Maxwell humorously compares these habits to the fixed routines of schoolchildren. Mij also attracted widespread attention because people in London could not identify him. They guessed he was a baby seal, squirrel, walrus, hippo, beaver, bear cub, leopard, and even a brontosaurus. These exaggerated guesses add humour and emphasize **how unfamiliar otters were in London**. Through these incidents, the chapter becomes more than just a story about a pet; it transforms into a warm, observant, and often humorous account of the relationship between a man and an animal. Mijbil is portrayed as intelligent, affectionate, and energetic, while Maxwell emerges as patient, sensitive, and deeply appreciative of nature.

Reference Information:

- 1. Setting of Camusfearna:** Camusfearna was located in an area surrounded by water very close to its entrance, which led Maxwell to believe it would be a suitable place for keeping an otter.
- 2. Place from where Mij was brought:** Mijbil originated from the marshy regions of the Tigris in southern Iraq, where otters were abundant and frequently domesticated by the Arabs.
- 3. Reason Maxwell stayed in Basra:** He had gone to the Consulate-General to collect his mail, but delays in telegraph and telephone communication forced him to remain there for several days.
- 4. How Maxwell received the otter:** Two Arabs arrived carrying a sack along with a note from his friend that read, “Here is your otter...”, making the delivery sudden and unexpected.
- 5. Mij’s first appearance:** When the sack was opened, Mij resembled “a very small, mediievally-conceived dragon” due to the dried mud covering his body, creating a striking and memorable image

6. **Scientific importance of Mij:** Mijbil belonged to a species previously unknown to science and was later named *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*, or Maxwell's otter.
7. **Mij's early behaviour:** Initially, he remained neither aggressive nor friendly but distant and indifferent during the first twenty-four hours.
8. **Love for water:** His excitement in the bathroom reflected a natural trait of otters. Maxwell notes that they dislike still water and prefer to splash and keep it moving.
9. **Sign of intelligence:** Mij learned to operate the bathroom tap on his own, although he sometimes turned it incorrectly and became irritated.
10. **Favourite games:** Mij enjoyed playing with marbles, rubber balls, ping-pong balls, rubber fruit, and a terrapin shell. He also invented a game involving a sloping suitcase and a ball.

Character Sketches:

- **Mijbil:**

- Clever, energetic, and affectionate otter.
- Initially aloof but forms a strong bond with Maxwell.
- Playful with objects and shows intelligence by operating a tap and inventing games.
- Exhibits childlike habits and deep affection for Maxwell, making him the emotional focus of the narrative.

- **Gavin Maxwell:**

- Sensitive, observant, and caring animal lover.
- Chooses to keep an otter instead of a dog, demonstrating adventurous thinking.
- Provides detailed observations of Mij and displays humor in vivid comparisons.
- His deep attachment to Mij is apparent during stressful moments, portraying him as a thoughtful naturalist.

- **Air Hostess:**

- Minor yet crucial character, calm and compassionate during a tense situation.
- Offers practical help and listens to Maxwell with understanding.

Her kindness adds warmth and reassurance to the story.

Central Message

The chapter conveys that animals possess intelligence, emotions, and the ability to form deep bonds. It highlights that a meaningful relationship can develop between humans and wild creatures through patience, care, and understanding. It also emphasizes the importance of respecting animals as individuals rather than treating them merely as pets or objects of curiosity. Additionally, the chapter celebrates the joy, wonder, and humour that animals bring into human life.

Narrator's Tone

The tone of the narrator is affectionate, observant, humorous, and occasionally filled with चिंता. He expresses warmth and fascination while describing Mij's behaviour, uses humour in narrating unusual incidents, and conveys anxiety during the challenging journey. Overall, the tone remains personal and engaging, allowing the reader to experience both the amusement and emotional depth of the story.

Word Meanings

Aloof – distant and not friendly.

Indifferent – showing no interest or concern.

Apathy – lack of enthusiasm or feeling.

Christened – given a name.

Thralldom – state of being under strong influence or control.

Fixation – an intense attachment or interest.

Medievally-conceived – imagined in the style of the Middle Ages.

Squirmed – moved with twisting or wriggling motions.

Fumbling – attempting something in an awkward way.

Flick – a quick, light movement.

Provoking – causing irritation or reaction.

Dreaded – greatly feared.

Prospect – a possibility or expectation.

Appalling – extremely shocking or bad.

Spectacle – an unusual or striking sight.

Whimpered – made a soft cry of pain or fear.

Infuriated – extremely angry.

Ricochetting – bouncing off after hitting a surface.

Nuzzle – to rub gently in affection.

Bounded – moved quickly with leaps.

Engrossed – completely absorbed or interested.

Ambush – to attack suddenly from a hidden place.

Compulsive habits – repeated actions that are hard to control.

Distraction – something that diverts attention.

Upright – a vertical support or post.

Barrage of conjectural questions – a rapid series of guessing questions.

Mustellines – a group of animals including otters, badgers, and weasels.

Affront – an act that causes offence or insult.

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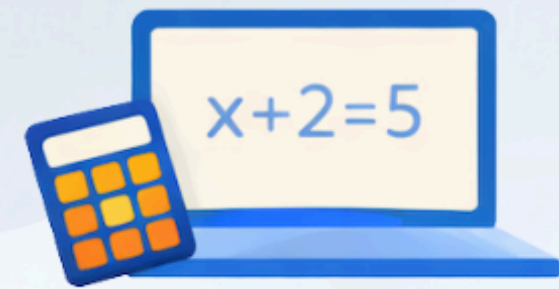
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