

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

Moments

3. Iswaran the Storyteller

by
R K Laxman

1. Summary

This is a short story written by R. K. Laxman, a famous Indian cartoonist and author. It recounts the story of Mahendra, a supervisor who moved from place to place to supervise construction sites, and his cook Iswaran. Iswaran was an excellent cook and besides looking after all his master's needs, he was also a very good story-teller. He was very fond of reading popular Tamil thrillers and would retell the simplest incidents in a dramatic manner.

Once he told the story about an elephant with tusks that escaped from a timber yard and destroyed most of the town that he lived in. When it entered his schoolyard, Iswaran, then studying in junior school, managed to stun the elephant by whacking it on its third toenail. Every day he recounted a thrilling story and thus kept his master entertained and did not let him feel the absence of a TV in his house.

One night after dinner, Iswaran told Mahendra that the factory area that they were staying in, was a burial ground. Besides skulls and bones he had seen the ghost of a woman holding a foetus in her arms. Mahendra was scared when he heard this, and avoided looking out of his bedroom window on full moon nights. One night, however, he heard some moans, looked out and saw a dark cloudy form holding a bundle. He was very scared, but convinced himself that it was a trick that his mind was playing on him. The next morning though, Iswaran confirmed that he too had seen the ghost. This scared Mahendra so much that he immediately resigned from his job and left the factory.

Can elephants get really violent?

An elephant in musth is a dangerous being, and can act without warning, notice or reasoning. It can turn over cars, attack and kill human beings. Generally, large males get into musth once a year. Even the most good natured elephants can become violent toward humans and other elephants during musth. Female elephants do not undergo musth.

Watch this video to understand how dangerous they can be. Click on the link below.

https://youtu.be/xbc_5x4s6Kg

2. Vocabulary

1. **Narrated** – told a story or described events as they happened
I felt very sorry for the beggar woman when she **narrated** the story of her sad life.
2. **Supervisor** – a person who watches other persons or activities to make certain that everything is done correctly, safely, etc.
The **supervisor** at the factory was very strict and would not give anyone free time to rest.
3. **Firm** – a company that sells goods or services
He worked in a **firm** that sold electronic goods.
4. **Chemical plant** – a factory that produces chemicals
Poisonous gases were coming out of the **chemical plant**.
5. **Ill-equipped** – not having the necessary equipment or ability
The policemen were **ill-equipped** to deal with the rioters.
6. **Makeshift** - temporary arrangement till something permanent is made
We need more **makeshift** public toilets in the city.
7. **Quarry** - a place where sand or stone is dug out of the ground
My father works very hard as a stone-cutter in a stone **quarry**.
8. **Asset** - a person or thing that is useful to somebody or something
Ramesh has an excellent cook; he is a great **asset** to the family.
A good education is a great **asset** for anyone.
9. **Attached** – to like someone or something very much
The little girl was very **attached** to her grandmother.
10. **Uncomplainingly** - without complaining
My mother does the household chores all day **uncomplainingly**.
11. **Weave** - to create something from several different things, also to create fabric from thread.
My grandmother would **weave** very interesting stories from her childhood and keep us interested.

12. **Anecdotes** - short interesting stories about a real person or event
Meena makes friends very easily as she always has interesting **anecdotes** to tell.
13. **Varied** – consisting of many different types of things
She had **varied** interests, like reading, cooking and swimming.
14. **Capacity** – the largest amount or number that a container, building, etc. can hold
The school has a **capacity** of 1000 students.
15. **Seemingly** – appearing to be something without really being that thing
The young man was **seemingly** hurt in the accident, but soon got up and walked away.
16. **Desolate** - lonely; very unhappy; empty and sad
The graveyard is a very dreary and **desolate** place.
17. **Landscape** – the appearance of an area of land, especially in the countryside
We stopped at the top of the hill to admire the beautiful **landscape**.
18. **Visible** – able to be seen
The ocean was **visible** from the top of the building.
19. **Miraculously** - in a way that is very surprising or difficult to believe
He met with a bad accident but was saved **miraculously**.
20. **Conjure** - to make something appear by magic
The magician **conjured** up a rabbit by waving his magic wand.
21. **Zinc-sheet** – sheet made of the bluish-white metal zinc, usually used as a temporary roof.
There was a shed at the end of the road covered by **zinc-sheets**.
22. **Shelter** – a place that protects you from bad weather or danger
When it started raining heavily they took **shelter** under the tree.
23. **Workplace** – the place where you work
Her **workplace** was in Lajpat Nagar.
24. **Leisurely** - without hurry
I like to have my breakfast **leisurely** on Sundays.

25. **Muttering** - complaint expressed by mumbling or speaking softly
My grandfather is constantly **muttering** under his breath.
26. **Dozing** - light nap
I am always **dozing** in my Math class because I find it so boring.
27. **Imaginative** – something that is new or clever, or someone that is able to create new and interesting ideas or things
The **imaginative** little boy made up a story about a tiger roaming freely on the streets.
28. **Description** – something that tells you what something or someone is like
The man could give the police a detailed **description** of the robber who stole his car.
29. **Narrative** – a story or description of a series of events.
The children were listening very attentively to the **narrative**.
30. **Flourishes** - grow or develop in a healthy way; to be successful
My father's business **flourished** after he took it over from his ageing father.
31. **In thrall** - the state of being in someone's power or under their influence
The Guru held the audience **in thrall** with his lecture on life after death.
32. **Influenced** - the power to have an important effect on someone or something
I am deeply **influenced** by Mahatma Gandhi's teachings.
33. **Suspense** – the feeling of excitement that you have when you are waiting for something to happen
The teacher kept us all in **suspense** and said that she would announce the results the next day.
34. **Uprooted** - take out by the roots
During Partition, a lot of Indians and Pakistanis were **uprooted** from their homes.
I **uprooted** the tree with sadness because the termites had killed it.
35. **Arched** – curved shape or made something become a curved shape
She **arched** her eyebrows in surprise.

36. **Dramatic** – very sudden or noticeable; full of action and excitement; relating to plays and acting
Everyone watched on television the **dramatic** rescue of the little child from the bore-well.
37. **Gesture** - moving a part of the body to express something
Mother Teresa always showed **gestures** of kindness to poor people.
38. **Deserted** – a place where there are no people
A deer was walking down the **deserted** street at midnight.
39. **Spotted** – saw or noticed something or someone
She **spotted** her best friend sitting on a bench in the park.
40. **Enormous** - huge, big, large
Rashtrapati Bhavan is an **enormous** building.
41. **Bushy** - dense with bushes
The hedge had grown very **bushy**, so we had to cut some of it.
42. **Sprawled** - sit, lie or fall in an clumsy way
The child **sprawled** on the shop floor when his mother refused to buy him a toy.
43. **Inclined** - a tendency to do something
He is **inclined** to work hard, so he will definitely succeed.
44. **Uncritically** - without saying that somebody or something is bad or wrong
The teacher cleared our doubts **uncritically**.
45. **Hauled** - pull or drag with effort or force
The car was **hauled** away by the crane from the No Parking zone.
46. **Mahout** – a person who rides, controls, and cares for a working elephant
The **mahout** rode on the back of the huge elephant.
47. **Prologue** - an introductory section to a literary or musical work
A **prologue** should always be well- written in order to arouse the interest of the reader.
48. **Elaborate** - containing a lot of careful detail or many detailed parts
Sita had cooked an **elaborate** meal for her brother's birthday party.

49. **Tusker** - An elephant with tusks
A **tusker** can be dangerous when he is not with his herd.
50. **Stamping** – putting feet down on the ground hard and quickly, making a loud noise, often to show anger
The little child showed his anger by **stamping** his feet, when his parents did not buy him the toy.
51. **Creepers** – plants that grow along the ground, or up walls or trees
The **creepers** had covered all the walls of the house.
52. **Emulation** - to copy and try to do as well
She learnt how to dress well by **emulating** her sister.
53. **Outskirts** – the areas that form the edge of a town or city
The farm is located on the **outskirts** of Delhi.
54. **Smashed** – caused something to break noisily into a lot of small pieces
The cup slipped from my hand and was **smashed** on the floor.
55. **Helter-skelter** – quickly and in all directions
The people ran **helter-skelter** down the steps to escape from the fire.
56. **Panic** – a sudden strong feeling of fear that prevents reasonable thought and action
There was **panic** in the country when war broke out suddenly.
57. **Grunted** – made a low rough noise, usually made by a pig
He **grunted** while picking up the heavy box.
58. **Wandered** – walked around slowly in a relaxed way or without any clear purpose of direction
I **wandered** in the park enjoying the beautiful flowers.
59. **Flattening** – becoming level or causing something to become level
The bull dozer was **flattening** the ground, where the building stood.
60. **Helplessly** – in a way that you are unable to do anything to help yourself or anyone else
I looked on **helplessly** as the dog tore my shoes into bits and pieces.
61. **Depredations** - attacks which are made to destroy something
The **depredations** of war are very heavy.

62. **Inhabitants** - a person or animal that occupies a place
Pandas are the **inhabitants** of China.
63. **Disappeared** – went somewhere where people or things could not be seen or found
She **disappeared** into the kitchen and came out after half an hour with some hot pakoras and tea.
64. **Grabbed** – took hold of someone or something suddenly and roughly
She **grabbed** my hand and dragged me on to the stage.
65. **Cane** – slender stick used for supporting plants, as a walking stick, or for giving punishment
The teacher was waving the **cane** and threatening to beat the naughty boys.
66. **Menacingly** – in a way that makes you think that someone is going to do something bad or that something bad is going to happen
The mother looked **menacingly** at her naughty boy when he broke the glass.
67. **Hypnotised** - capturing the attention and mind of someone
The magician **hypnotised** the entire audience.
68. **Trumpeted** - make a loud sound resembling that of a trumpet
The elephants in the herd **trumpeted** loudly when they saw a tiger approaching.
69. **Mustering** - assembling or collecting
My brother **mustered** the courage to tell my parents that he did not want to study medicine.
70. **Whacked** - strike forcefully with a sharp blow
My father **whacked** me for bunking school to go to a movie.
71. **Stunned** - astonish or shock someone so that they are unable to react.
The spread of the Coronavirus infection has **stunned** the entire world.
72. **Shivered** - shake uncontrollably due to fear or cold
The homeless always **shiver** in the cold during the harsh winters of Delhi.
73. **Collapsed** - fainted or fell down unconscious
He **collapsed** with high fever.

74. **Mumbling** - speaking quietly making it difficult for others to hear
The teacher was always **mumbling**, so we found it hard to understand what he was saying.
75. **Rapt** – giving complete attention
The children listened with **rapt** attention as their grandmother told them stories from the Mahabharata.
76. **Pick up the thread** – to start again after an interruption
They could not **pick up the thread** of the discussion as it had become very late.
77. **Conclusion** – the final part of something
We never heard the **conclusion** of the story because we were interrupted by our friends.
78. **Pending** – about to happen or waiting to happen
There was a lot of work pending, but Sunil continued to waste time.
79. **Veterinary** – relating to the diseases, injuries and treatment of animals
My dog fell very sick so we had to take him to a **veterinary** hospital.
80. **Summoned** – ordered someone to come or be present at a particular place, or to officially arrange a meeting of people
When my grandfather fell sick, my cousin immediately **summoned** the doctor.
81. **Revive** - to return to consciousness or life
The doctors tried hard to **revive** my grandmother who had gone into a coma.
82. **Shrug** – to raise your shoulder and then lower them in order to say you do not know or are not interested
Rahul just **shrugged** his shoulders, when he was asked if he was interested in attending extra classes.
83. **Casually** – in a way that does not show any particular interest or care
She just turned the pages of the book **casually** and did not read it at all.
84. **Karate** – a sport originally from Japan, in which people fight using their arms, legs, hands and feet.
He stood first in the **karate** championship.

85. **Ju-jitsu** – a type of self-defence from Japan, that does not involve weapons; karate and judo are based on it
He spent many years learning **ju-jitsu** from his teacher.
86. **Temporarily** - not permanent
We had to move out of the house **temporarily** as it was infested with termites.
87. **Paralyse** - make a person unable to move his body or body parts.
A snake bite can **paralyse** a person.
88. **Nervous System** – an animal's or a person's nervous system consists of its brain and all the nerves in its body that together make movement and feeling possible by sending messages around the body
She had a disease of the **nervous system** and so could not walk at all.
89. **Recounting** - telling a story or describing an event
My grandmother used to **recount** stories from her past in a very dramatic manner.
90. **Credible** - something that you can believe
The child told his teacher that a cat had eaten his homework - this was not a **credible** story.
91. **Inimitable** - original; too good to be copied by anyone
My English teacher's narratives are **inimitable**.
92. **Auspicious** – suggesting a positive and successful future
We had a huge feast at home on the **auspicious** occasion of Diwali.
93. **Tradition** – a belief or a way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time
According to **tradition** married women must fast on Karva Chauth.
94. **Spirits** – forms of dead persons similar to ghosts
Everyone said that the old house was haunted by the **spirits** of the people who lived in it many years ago.
95. **Ancestors** – a person related to you who lived a long time ago
His **ancestors** belonged to the royal family of Kashmir.
96. **Complimented** - praising someone or something
Sachin Tendulkar was often **complimented** on his unique style of batting.

97. **Culinary** – connected with cooking or kitchens
He used his **culinary** skills to cook a very delicious meal.
98. **Unexpectedly** - suddenly
Some guests arrived at our house **unexpectedly**, so nobody was at home to welcome them.
99. **Launched** – to begin something or introduce something
The Adult Literacy Programme will be **launched** on the first of May.
100. **Garish** - gaudy
Clowns in a circus put **garish** makeup on their faces.
101. **Occupying** – filling or using a place or a period of time
The people who were **occupying** the space under the flyover have moved to a shelter for homeless persons.
102. **Jerked** – made a short sudden movement or caused someone or something to do this
She **jerked** her head up when she heard the child crying.
103. **Reverie** - a state of being lost in your thoughts almost like dreaming
The student came out of her **reverie** when the school bell rang.
104. **Drifted** - to be carried or moved along by wind or water
The boat **drifted** into the sea and gradually disappeared from my sight.
105. **Satisfying** – making you feel pleased by providing what you need or want
It was very **satisfying** to hear that all the students in the class passed the board exams.
106. **Skull** – the bones of the head that surround the brain and give the head its shape
The medical student had a human **skull** on his table.
107. **Creature** – any large or small living thing that can move independently
Snakes are shy **creatures**, but everyone is scared of them.
108. **Matted** – twisted into a firm messy mass
She had not bathed for several days and her hair was **matted** with dirt.

109. **Shrivelled** - to become smaller especially because of age or dry conditions
My grandfather has **shrivelled** gradually.
110. **Skeleton** – the frame of bones supporting a human or animal body
The monk had not eaten for several days and was as thin as a **skeleton**.
111. **Foetus** - a young human or animal that is still developing in a womb
An ultrasound of a pregnant woman's womb can tell the age of the **foetus**.
112. **Interrupted** – when someone or something stops something from happening for a short period
I could not work in peace at home as I was **interrupted** often by my family.
113. **Figment of your imagination** - an experience that is thought to be real but is actually imagined (idiom)
Ghosts are a **figment of your imagination**.
114. **Digestive System** – the organs of your body involved with the digestion of food
The stomach is a part of the **digestive system**.
115. **Sulk** – to be silent and refuse to smile or be pleasant because you are angry about something
The little child continued to **sulk** even after he was given the toy.
116. **Talkative** – talking a lot
Sunita was a very **talkative** girl and was punished often in class for talking when the teacher was teaching.
117. **Unease** - a worried or uncomfortable feeling
I woke up with **unease** when I had a nightmare about a ghost in my room.
118. **Peered** - to look closely or carefully at somebody or something
I **peered** into my textbook and pretended to be studying when the teacher came closer.
119. **Vicinity** - neighborhood; nearby
There are no shopping malls in the **vicinity** of my house.
120. **Sea of darkness** - complete darkness (metaphor)
A **sea of darkness** loomed over Vijay when he lost both his parents in a car accident.

121. **Twinkling** – shining with a light that is bright and then less bright
In the village we can look up and see the sky filled with **twinkling** stars.
122. **Prowling** - an animal that is hunting, or a person who is about to do something bad
The tigers **prowl** in the jungle at night.
123. **Guttural sound** - sound produced in the throat; harsh-sounding
My brother makes a **guttural sound** when he snores in his sleep.
124. **Resisted** – to fight against something or someone that is attacking you; to refuse to accept or be changed by something
The young man **resisted** the robber as much as he could.
125. **Curiosity** – an eager wish to know or learn about something
The little boy opened the bundle of clothes out of **curiosity**.
126. **Lest** – for fear that
I did not climb up the slippery stairs **lest** I fell down.
127. **Behold** - see or observe someone or something remarkable
To **behold** the Taj Mahal for the first time was an awesome experience.
128. **Wailing** – making a long, high cry, usually because of pain or sadness
The child started **wailing** as soon as her mother left the room.
129. **Feline** - relating to cats or other members of the cat family
The tiger is a **feline** animal.
130. **Temptation** – the wish to do or have something that you know you should not do or have
I could not resist the **temptation** and ate a huge slice of the delicious cake.
131. **Windowsill** – a shelf below a window – either outside or inside a building
Beautiful flowers were blooming in pots on the **windowsill**.
132. **Clutching** - holding tightly
Babies always **clutch** on to their mothers when they see strangers.
133. **Cold Sweat** - when you sweat and your skin feels cold, often out of fear
When I came across a snake in the bushes, I broke into a **cold sweat**.

134. **Experience** – something that happens to you that effects how you feel
The fighter pilot told us about his **experience** during the war.
135. **Auto suggestion** – the influencing of your physical or mental state by thoughts and ideas that come from yourself rather than from other people
She was cured more by **auto suggestion** than by the doctor's medicines.
136. **Subconscious** - the hidden part of your mind that can affect the way you behave
Dreams are created by the **subconscious** mind.
137. **Faded** - to disappear slowly from memory or vision
The day **faded** away into night.
138. **Moaning** - to make a low sound in pain or sadness
The dog was **moaning** in pain after a boy hit him with a stone.
139. **Resolving** - finding an answer to a problem; deciding
I tried my best, but was unsuccessful in **resolving** the problem with the machine.

3. Questions

1. In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?
2. How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?
3. How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?
4. Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?
5. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a full-moon night?
6. Can you think of some other ending for the story?

4. Talk About It

Is Iswaran a fascinating storyteller? Discuss with your friends the qualities of a good storyteller. Try to use these qualities and tell a story.

5. Suggested Reading

- 'The Story Teller' by Saki (H.H. Munro)
- *Ghost Stories* (ed.) Ruskin Bond
- 'The Canterville Ghost' by Oscar Wilde
- 'Pret in the House' by Ruskin Bond