



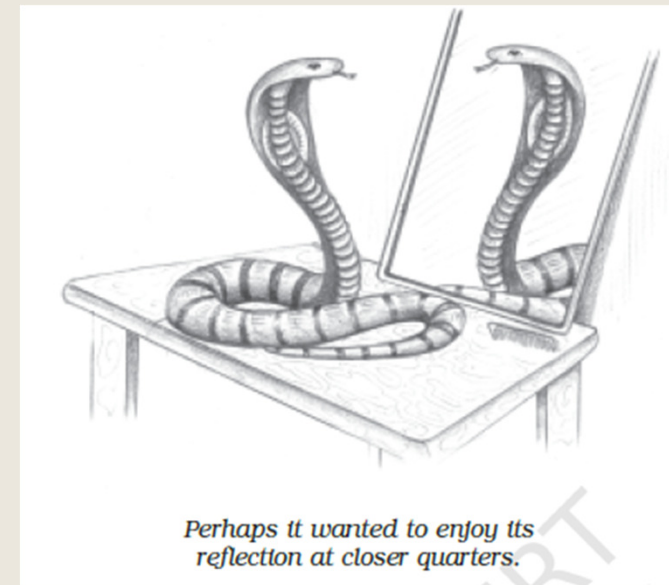
THE SNAKE AND THE MIRROR

by
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ABOUT THE STORY

- The story is a narrative within the narrative. The writer tells us the story which was told to him by a homeopathic doctor. As we see from the title, **The Snake and the Mirror** are the two most important things in the story. This homeopathic doctor encountered a snake, the snake fell on the doctor.



THEME

- The humorous anecdote revolves around the theme of human vanity and fears and how they affect people. The narrator is a homoeopath doctor who is struggling with his poverty and sluggish practice. Nonetheless, he is vain about his looks with or without his moustache and beard and has the ambition of looking more and more handsome. He also hopes to marry and lead a happy life. Sudden arrival of a snake on the scene turns him pale with fear, but somehow he manages to keep his calm. Meanwhile, attracted by the mirror, the snake decides to ignore him. The narrator takes this opportunity to make a good escape. The snake appears to be almost as vain as the doctor himself.
- An theme in the story is how crises make people turn to God for help.

TITLE

- The story is appropriately titled 'The Snake and the Mirror', for it relates an incident in which a snake is so enamoured with its image in the mirror that it spares the life of the narrator. The entire action of the story revolves around the snake and the mirror. The main narrator, who is at the centre of the narrative until the snake appears, turns into a marginal element who is affected by the action instead of affecting it. He has to be thankful to the mirror that the snake spared his life. Had the snake bitten him, he would have surely died of fear and poison, for there was no medicine in his room for snake-bite.

INTRODUCTION

- This is an interesting story. It is about a doctor's encounter with a snake. The doctor lived in a small rented room full of rats. One night, he was reading a book. A kerosene lamp was burning on the table. There was also a large Mirror on the table. Suddenly something fell on the back of the chair. He turned to see what it was. He froze with fear when he saw that it was a big snake. The snake then coiled itself around the doctor's left arm. The doctor prayed to God. Then the snake looked into the mirror on the table. Luckily, the snake liked its own image in the mirror. It wanted to have a closer look at its image. So it uncoiled itself from the arm and came on the table. The doctor at once got and ran out of the room. He spent the night at the house of one of his friends. The next morning he came back to his room. He was shocked to find that during the night some thief had taken away everything from his room.

THE DOCTOR

- In the story 'The Snake and the Mirror', the homoeopath doctor has been portrayed as a person who can assess himself critically and humorously. He honestly admits that as a new practitioner of medicine, he could not earn much and had to rent a poor, rat-infested house without even the facility of electricity. He also admits with a funny intent that he wanted to marry a fat and rich lady-doctor as it would help him run away without getting caught when he would make some silly mistake. This witty side of the doctor is seen again at the end of the story when he remarks that the thief did not take away his dirty vest because he had a sense of cleanliness.
- The doctor was quite vain about his appearance and his qualification. He often admired his reflection in the mirror and thought of ways to look more handsome. He was a bachelor and wanted to look handsome. However, his ability to admit his follies helped him to realise that to be alive was more important than to look good. His arrogance turned into modesty after his encounter with the snake. In addition, he had admirable patience and presence of mind. When the snake landed on him, he did not jump or cry. Keeping his cool, he remembered God and actively thought about the medicine he would require in case the snake bit him. He also made the most of the opportunity when the snake was absorbed in its reflection in the mirror. Thus, the doctor is a candid person, a witty man, and an interesting character who relates his encounter with the snake in a lighter vein.

MESSAGE

- The story conveys the message that one should never be proud of one's beauty, strength or achievements. The fear of death makes a person realize how futile the worldly achievements are. It is faith in God and modesty in thoughts which make a person strong. The doctor in the story is cured of his arrogance after a close brush with death.

HUMOUR

- Although the story “The Snake and the Mirror” by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer is the narration of a serious incident, it is not devoid of the element of humour. This humour is generated by way of contrasts employed by the writer. The doctor reveals his pride and arrogance by telling us how highly he rated his looks and his profession as a doctor. This pride and arrogance stand in contrast to his admittance that he felt feeble and foolish when encountered by the snake. Again, his desire to marry a fat and wealthy lady-doctor who cannot run after him when he commits some silly mistake stands in contrast to the thin and agile lady, with the physique of a sprinter, whom he finally marries. Further, the doctor pokes fun at himself when he tells that the thief did not take away his dirty vest because he had a sense of cleanliness. His remark about the snake that perhaps it was making some decision about growing a moustache or using eyeshadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its head is also very witty and humorous.
- Thus, even a serious incident is made interesting by the doctor’s witty treatment of a very dangerous situation.