



0753CH04



4

Before you read

This is a story about an honest and hardworking old couple and their pet dog. The neighbours are troublesome, and the dog dies a sad death. The spirit of the dog gives solace and support to his master in unexpected ways.



The Ashes That Made Trees Bloom

I

In the good old days of the daimios, there lived an old couple whose only pet was a little dog. Having no children, they loved it as though it were a baby. The old dame made it a cushion of blue crape, and at mealtime Muko—for that was its name—would sit on it as snug as any cat. The kind people fed the pet with tidbits of fish from their own chopsticks, and all the boiled rice it wanted. Thus treated, the dumb creature loved its protectors like a being with a soul.

The old man, being a rice farmer, went daily with hoe or spade into the fields, working hard from morning until O Tento Sama (as the sun is called) had gone down behind the hills. Every day the dog followed him to work, never once



daimios: (in 19th century Japan) wealthy landowners

snug: comfortable

a being with a soul: like a human child (showing emotion)



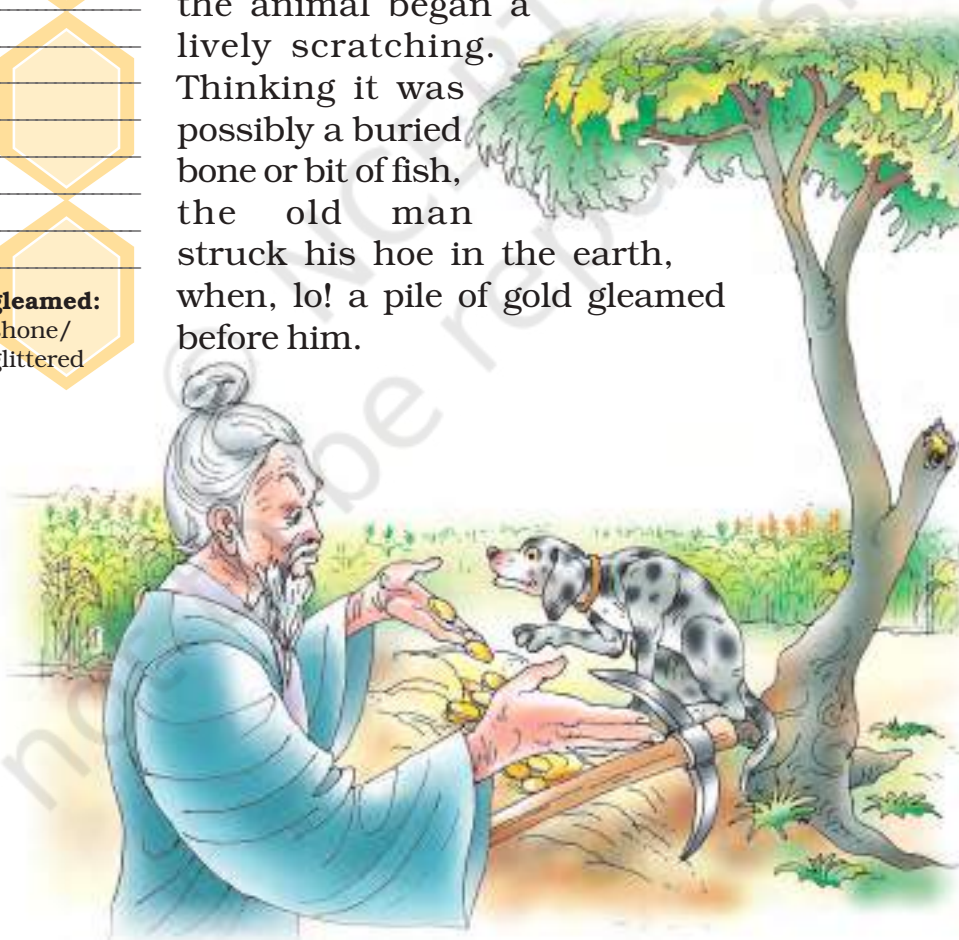
turned up:
dug up

on purpose:
intentionally

gleamed:
shone/
glittered

harming the white heron that walked in the footsteps of the old man to pick up the worms. For the old fellow was patient and kind to everything that had life, and often turned up a sod on purpose to give food to the birds.

One day the dog came running to him, putting his paws against his legs and motioning with his head to some spot behind. The old man at first thought his pet was only playing and did not mind it. But the dog kept on whining and running to and fro for some minutes. Then the old man followed the dog a few yards to a place where the animal began a lively scratching. Thinking it was possibly a buried bone or bit of fish, the old man struck his hoe in the earth, when, lo! a pile of gold gleamed before him.





Thus in an hour the old couple were made rich. The good souls bought a piece of land, made a feast for their friends, and gave plentifully to their poor neighbours. As for the dog, they petted him till they nearly smothered him with kindness.

Now in the same village there lived a wicked old man and his wife, not a bit sensitive and kind, who had always kicked and scolded all dogs whenever any passed their house. Hearing of their neighbours' good luck, they coaxed the dog into their garden and set before him bits of fish and other dainties, hoping he would find treasure for them. But the dog, being afraid of the cruel pair, would neither eat nor move.

Then they dragged him out of doors, taking a spade and hoe with them. No sooner had the dog got near a pine tree growing in the garden than he began to paw and scratch the ground, as if a mighty treasure lay beneath.

"Quick, wife, hand me the spade and hoe!" cried the greedy old fool, as he danced with joy.

Then the covetous old fellow, with a spade, and the old crone, with a hoe, began to dig; but there was nothing but a dead kitten, the smell of which made them drop their tools and shut their noses. Furious at the dog, the old man kicked and beat him to death, and the old woman finished the work by nearly chopping off his head with the sharp hoe. They then flung him into the hole and heaped the earth over his carcass.

The owner of the dog heard of the death of his pet and, mourning for him as if he had been his own child, went at night under the pine tree. He



coaxed:
persuaded;
enticed

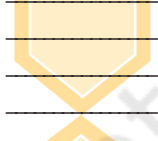
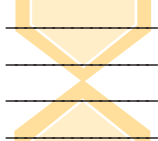
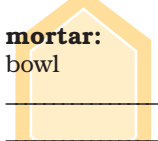
dainties:
tasty food

covetous:
greedy

crone: old
woman (old
man's wife)

flung: threw

carcass:
dead body



mortar:
bowl

set up some bamboo tubes in the ground, such as are used before tombs, in which he put fresh flowers. Then he laid a cup of water and a tray of food on the grave and burned several costly sticks of incense. He mourned a great while over his pet, calling him many dear names, as if he were alive.

That night the spirit of the dog appeared to him in a dream and said, "Cut down the pine tree over my grave, and make from it a mortar for your rice pastry and a mill for your bean sauce."



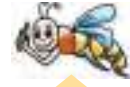


So the old man chopped down the tree and cut out of the middle of the trunk a section about two feet long. With great labour, partly by fire, partly by the chisel, he scraped out a hollow place as big as a small bowl. He then made a long-handled hammer of wood, such as is used for pounding rice. When New Year's time drew near, he wished to make some rice pastry. When the rice was all boiled, granny put it into the mortar, the old man lifted his hammer to pound the mass into dough, and the blows fell heavy and fast till the pastry was all ready for baking. Suddenly the whole mass turned into a heap of gold coins. When the old woman took the hand-mill, and filling it with beans began to grind, the gold dropped like rain.

Meanwhile the envious neighbour peeped in at the window when the boiled beans were being ground.

"Goody me!" cried the old hag, as she saw each dripping of sauce turning into yellow gold, until in a few minutes the tub under the mill was full of a shining mass of gold.

So the old couple were rich again. The next day the stingy and wicked neighbour came and borrowed the mortar and magic mill. They filled one with boiled rice and the other with beans. Then the old man began to pound and the woman to grind. But at the first blow and turn, the pastry and sauce turned into a foul mass of worms. Still more angry at this, they chopped the mill into pieces, to use as firewood.



pounding:
crushing;
grinding

stingy:
miserly



Comprehension Check



1. Why did the neighbours kill the dog?
2. Mark the right item.
 - (i) The old farmer and his wife loved the dog
 - (a) because it helped them in their day-to-day work.
 - (b) as if it was their own baby.
 - (c) as they were kind to all living beings.
 - (ii) When the old couple became rich, they
 - (a) gave the dog better food.
 - (b) invited their greedy neighbours to a feast.
 - (c) lived comfortably and were generous towards their poor neighbours.
 - (iii) The greedy couple borrowed the mill and the mortar to make
 - (a) rice pastry and bean sauce.
 - (b) magic ash to win rewards.
 - (c) a pile of gold.

II

Not long after that, the good old man dreamed again, and the spirit of the dog spoke to him, telling him how the wicked people had burned the mill made from the pine tree. "Take the ashes of the mill, sprinkle them on the withered trees, and they will bloom again," said the dog-spirit.

The old man awoke and went at once to his wicked neighbour's house, where he found the miserable old pair sitting at the edge of their square fireplace, in the middle of the floor, smoking and spinning. From time to time they warmed their hands and feet with the blaze from

withered:
bare and dry



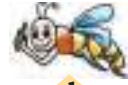
some bits of the mill, while behind them lay a pile of the broken pieces.

The good old man humbly asked for the ashes. Though the covetous couple turned up their noses at him and scolded him as if he were a thief, they let him fill his basket with the ashes.

On coming home, the old man took his wife into the garden. It being winter, their favourite cherry tree was bare. He sprinkled a pinch of ashes on it, and, lo! it sprouted blossoms until it became a cloud of pink blooms which perfumed the air. The news of this filled the village, and everyone ran out to see the wonder.

The covetous couple also heard the story, and, gathering up the remaining ashes of the mill, kept them to make withered trees blossom.

The kind old man, hearing that his lord, the daimio, was to pass along the high road near the



**turned up
their noses:**
treated him
with contempt

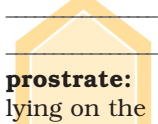




train:
procession



prostrate:
lying on the
ground face
downward



palanquin:
royal van/
cart



gleefully:
happily



village, set out to see him, taking his basket of ashes. As the train approached, he climbed up into an old withered cherry tree that stood by the wayside.

Now, in the days of the daimios, it was the custom, when their lord passed by, for all the loyal people to shut up their high windows. They even pasted them fast with a slip of paper, so as not to commit the impertinence of looking down on his lordship. All the people along the road would fall upon their hands and knees and remain prostrate until the procession passed by.

The train drew near. One tall, competent man marched ahead, crying out to the people by the way, "Get down on your knees! Get down on your knees!" And every one kneeled down while the procession was passing.

Suddenly the leader of the van caught sight of the aged man up in the tree. He was about to call out to him in an angry tone, but, seeing he was such an old fellow, he pretended not to notice him and passed him by. So, when the daimio's palanquin drew near, the old man, taking a pinch of ashes from his basket, scattered it over the tree. In a moment it burst into blossom.

The delighted daimio ordered the train to be stopped and got out to see the wonder. Calling the old man to him, he thanked him and ordered presents of silk robes, sponge-cake, fans and other rewards to be given him. He even invited him to his castle.

So the old man went gleefully home to share his joy with his dear old wife.



But when the greedy neighbour heard of it, he took some of the magic ashes and went out on the highway. There he waited until a daimio's train came along and, instead of kneeling down like the crowd, he climbed a withered cherry tree.

When the daimio himself was almost directly under him, he threw a handful of ashes over the tree, which did not change a particle. The wind blew the fine dust in the noses and eyes of the daimio and his wife. Such sneezing and choking! It spoiled all the pomp and dignity of the procession. The man whose business it was to cry, "Get down on your knees," seized the old fool by the collar, dragged him from the tree, and tumbled him and his ash-basket into the ditch by the road. Then, beating him soundly, he left him for dead.

Thus the wicked old man died in the mud, but the kind friend of the dog dwelt in peace and plenty, and both he and his wife lived to a green old age.

WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS
[a Japanese tale]



a particle:
even a little
bit

seized: caught

green: (here)
healthy,
active and
prosperous

Working with the Text

Answer the following questions.

1. The old farmer is a kind person. What evidence of his kindness do you find in the first two paragraphs.
2. What did the dog do to lead the farmer to the hidden gold?
3. (i) How did the spirit of the dog help the farmer first?
(ii) How did it help him next?





4. Why did the daimio reward the farmer but punish his neighbour for the same act?

Working with Language

1. Read the following conversation.

RAVI : *What* are you doing?

MRIDU : I'm reading a book.

RAVI : *Who* wrote it?

MRIDU : Ruskin Bond.

RAVI : *Where* did you find it?

MRIDU : In the library.



Notice that '*what*', '*who*', '*where*', are **question words**. Questions that require information begin with question words. Some other question words are '*when*', '*why*', '*where*', '*which*' and '*how*'.

Remember that

- *What* asks about actions, things, etc.
- *Who* asks about people.
- *Which* asks about people or things.
- *Where* asks about place.
- *When* asks about time.
- *Why* asks about reason or purpose.
- *How* asks about means, manner or degree.
- *Whose* asks about possessions.

Read the following paragraph and frame questions on the italicised phrases.

Anil is *in school*. I am in school too. Anil is sitting *in the left row*. He is *reading a book*. Anil's friend is sitting *in the second row*. He is *sharpening his pencil*. The teacher is writing on the blackboard. Children are writing in their copybooks. Some children are *looking out of the window*.



- (i) _____
- (ii) _____
- (iii) _____
- (iv) _____
- (v) _____
- (vi) _____
- (vii) _____

2. Write appropriate question words in the blank spaces in the following dialogue.

NEHA : _____ did you get this book?

SHEELA : Yesterday morning.

NEHA : _____ is your sister crying?

SHEELA : Because she has lost her doll.

NEHA : _____ room is this, yours or hers?

SHEELA : It's ours.

NEHA : _____ do you go to school?

SHEELA : We walk to school. It is near by.

3. Fill in the blanks with the words given in the box.

how	what	when	where	which
-----	------	------	-------	-------

- (i) My friend lost his chemistry book. Now he doesn't know _____ to do and _____ to look for it.
- (ii) There are so many toys in the shops. Neena can't decide _____ one to buy.
- (iii) You don't know the way to my school. Ask the policeman _____ to get there.
- (iv) You should decide soon _____ to start building your house.
- (v) Do you know _____ to ride a bicycle? I don't remember _____ and _____ I learnt it.
- (vi) "You should know _____ to talk and _____ to keep your mouth shut," the teacher advised Anil.



4. Add im- or in- to each of the following words and use them in place of the italicised words in the sentences given below.

patient proper possible sensitive competent

- (i) The project appears *very difficult* at first sight but it can be completed if we work very hard.
 - (ii) He *lacks competence*. That's why he can't keep any job for more than a year.
 - (iii) "Don't *lose patience*. Your letter will come one day," the postman told me.
 - (iv) That's *not a proper* remark to make under the circumstances.
 - (v) He appears to be *without sensitivity*. In fact, he is very emotional.
5. Read the following sentences.

It was *a* cold morning and stars still glowed in *the* sky.
An old man was walking along *the* road.

The words in italics are articles. 'A' and 'an' are **indefinite articles** and 'the' is the **definite article**. 'A' is used before a singular countable noun. 'An' is used before a word that begins with a vowel.

- a boy
- a mango
- a university
- an actor
- an apple
- an hour

Use *a*, *an* or *the* in the blanks.

There was once _____ play which became very successful. _____ famous actor was acting in it. In _____ play his role was that of _____ aristocrat who had been imprisoned in _____ castle for twenty years. In _____ last act of _____ play someone would come on _____ stage with _____ letter which he would hand over to _____ prisoner. Even though _____ aristocrat was not expected to read _____ letter at each performance, he always insisted that _____ letter be written out from beginning to end.



6. Encircle the correct article.

Nina was looking for (a / the) job. After many interviews she got (a / the) job she was looking for.

A : Would you like (a/an/the) apple or (a/an/the) banana?

B : I'd like (a/an/the) apple, please.

A : Take (a/an/the) red one in (a/an/the) fruit bowl.
You may take (a/an/the) orange also, if you like.

B : Which one?

A : (A/An/The) one beside (a/an/the) banana.



Speaking and Writing

1. Do you remember an anecdote or a story about a greedy or jealous person and the unhappy result of his/her action? Narrate the story to others in your class.

Here is one for you to read.

Seeing an old man planting a fig tree, the king asked why he was doing this. The man replied that he might live to eat the fruit, and, even if he did not, his son would enjoy the figs.

"Well," said the king, "if you do live to eat the fruit of this tree, please let me know." The man promised to do so, and sure enough, before too long, the tree grew and bore fruit.

Packing some fine figs in a basket, the old man set out for the palace to meet the king.

The king accepted the gift and gave orders that the old man's basket be filled with gold.

Now, next door to the old man, there lived a greedy old man jealous of his neighbour's good fortune. He also packed some figs in a basket and took them to the palace in the hope of getting gold.

The king, on learning the man's motive, ordered him to stand in the compound and had him pelted with figs. The old man returned home and told his wife the sad story. She consoled him by saying, "You should be thankful that our neighbour did not grow coconuts."



2. Put each of the following in the correct order. Then use them appropriately to fill the blanks in the paragraph that follows. Use correct punctuation marks.

- English and Hindi/both/in/he writes
- and only/a few short stories/many books in English/in Hindi
- is/my Hindi/than my English/much better

Ravi Kant is a writer, and _____
_____. Of course, he is much
happier writing in English than in Hindi. He has written
_____.

I find his books a little hard to understand.
_____.

3. Are you fond of reading stories? Did you read one last month? If not, read one or two and then write a paragraph about the story. Use the following hints.

- title of the story
- name of author
- how many characters
- which one you liked
- some details of the story
- main point(s) as you understand it



Tell your friends why they should also read it.

Thought What?

*I thought a thought.
But the thought I thought wasn't
the thought
I thought I thought.*