

Story 5 A Face in the Dark

EXTRACT I

Q: Who was Mr. Oliver? What was his usual activity during the evening?

(i) Mr. Oliver was an Anglo-Indian teacher, who was teaching in a school, located three miles away from Shimla. He would usually walk down to the Shimla Bazaar and would return after dark by taking a shortcut through the pine forest.

Q: What was called Eton of the East? Why?

(ii) The all-boys school in Shimla, in which Mr. Oliver was a teacher has been called "Eton of the East". Eton college is one of most reputable and expensive English boarding school for boys in Eton, Berkshire, near Windsor (UK). Mr. Oliver's school was called "Eton of the East" because the school had been run on English public school lines and the boys, were mostly from wealthy Indian families.

Q: What kind of weather was there on the night when Oliver was returning to his school? How does it add to the setting of the story?

(iii) That night strong wind was blowing through the pine forest which created sad, eerie sounds. Supernatural atmosphere is created by the elements like eerie sounds of the pine trees, batteries of the torch running down, flickering light, silent sobbing, and lantern swinging in the middle of the path. All these things prepare us for some mysterious or uncanny happenings. running down, creating an atmosphere of fear and suspense.

Q: What did Oliver encounter while coming back to school one night? What did he do after that?

iv) While walking back to school one night, he encountered a boy sitting alone on a rock. The boy's head was hung down and his face was held in his own hands. After seeing the boy, Oliver stopped near the boy asked him what he was doing there and why he was crying.

Q: What kind of man was Oliver as described at the beginning of the story? How did he prove himself opposite of this description?

v) Oliver was a courageous man, who did not believe in imaginary or ghost stories. So he never felt fear while walking through the pine forest at night. But in the end of the story he was so scared by the events which took place with him which may be due to his loneliness and therefore, caught in the grip of some psychological fears that gave rise to these imaginary, faceless creatures.

EXTRACT II.

Q: Where did Mr. Oliver find the boy? What did he notice about the boy?

(i) Walking through the pine forest on his way back to school, Oliver found the boy sitting on a rock. He noticed that the boy was crying with his head hung down and his face held in his hands.

Q: Why do you think the boy was called a miscreant? In what condition was he found by Oliver?

(ii) A miscreant is a person who has done some mischief. Boys were not supposed to be out after dark. The boy was out in the forest after dark so he was called a miscreant. The boy sitting alone on the rock in the forest.

Q: How did Mr. Oliver express his concern for the boy? How did the boy react to it?

iii) Mr. Oliver asked him what he was doing there and why he was crying. The boy did not respond and continued to sob. Oliver again enquired what was troubling him and asked him to look up.

Q: How can you explain the boy's "strange, soundless weeping"?

iv) The boy's "strange, boundless weeping" hints at the supernatural element of the story. The "strange, soundless weeping" that Oliver heard could be explained on the basis that Oliver was a lonely man caught in psychological fears and was imagining frightening and scary things such as "soundless weeping" and "faceless" faces.

Q: What strange revelation took place when the boy finally looked up at Oliver? How did Mr. Oliver react to it?

(v) When the boy finally looked up at Oliver, it was revealed that the boy had no face. It was without eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It was just a round head with a school cap on it. Mr. Oliver started trembling in fear. His torch fell from his hands. He turned and ran blindly through the trees. He was shouting for help while running towards the school.

EXTRACT III

Q: Whose "trembling hand" is referred to in the above extract? Why was it trembling?

(i) Oliver's "trembling hand" is referred to here.

It was trembling, as Oliver was horrified to see that the boy's face was featureless, without eyes, ears, nose or mouth.

Q: Explain the sentence:

"He turned and scrambled down the path, running blindly through the trees.." Why did Mr. Oliver do so?

ii) The "faceless" boy terrified Oliver so much so that he immediately turned and in panic ran blindly through the forest calling for help.

Q: What answer did Oliver give for the watchman's questions in the extract above?

(iii) Oliver told the watchman that he had encountered something horrible that night—a "faceless" boy weeping in the forest.

Q: The story ends with a thrilling climax. Do you agree? Why?

iv) Oliver ran away from the faceless boy and called for help. He saw a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. What followed next was a thrilling climax as Oliver while running stumbled up to a watchman only to find that he too was faceless, with no features or even eyebrows. The climax is reached when the wind blew out the lamp, leaving the readers to imagine what might have happened to Oliver.

Q: Comment on the appropriateness of the title of the story. justify your answer. Give reasons to justify your answer.

(v) The title A Face in the Dark is suitable as it describes a strange experience of Mr Oliver, the protagonist of the story. Oliver, on his way back at night, meets a boy in an isolated place sitting on a rock. A close look at the boy horrifies him as he has no face-no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. As he runs horrified by the strange experience, he meets the watchman who is also without a face. Thus, the boy and the watchman, who appeared to be having a face in the dark, did not have a face when seen in light.