The Snake And The Mirror

I. Answer each question below in a short paragraph (30–40 words)

1. “The sound was a familiar one.” What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? When and why did the sounds stop?

**Answer:** When the doctor entered his house he heard the familiar sound of rats scurrying through the beams of the roof. The statement that he and rats were housemates gives an impression that the house was full of rats. Doctor was used to noises made by rats. So he was not bothered about the noise. When a snake fell from the roof the sound stopped because the snake must have come there to catch its prey.

2. What two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?

**Answer:** The first important and earth shaking decision taken by the doctor was to shave daily to look handsome. The second decision was to smile the way he was smiling when looking at the mirror. He thought that he should look handsome because he was a bachelor and a doctor, so he was one of the most eligible bachelors.

3. “I looked into the mirror and smiled,” says the doctor. A little later he says, “I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself.” What is the doctor’s opinion about himself when: (i) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?

**Answer:** In the first instance the doctor is smiling to appreciate his youthful beauty. This happens to most of the people when they are of certain age group.

In the second instance when he is playing eyeball to eyeball with the snake, then he is smiling feebly as if to laugh at his helplessness.
A legend of the Northland

Away, away in the Northland,
Where the hours of the day are few,
And the nights are so long in winter
That they cannot sleep them through;
Where they harness the swift reindeer
To the sledges, when it snows;
And the children look like bear’s cubs
In their funny, furry clothes:

In this stanza the poet has tried to create a vivid picture of the background of the poem. The poem is set in the backdrop of Scotland, which is near the northern tip of the United Kingdom. This place is also somewhat nearer to the northern pole. Closeness to the north-pole gives this place a cold weather with very few hours of sunlight. The poet has written that here hours of the day are few and nights are so long in winter that people are unable to spend the whole night sleeping. When it snows in Scotland people harness their reindeers to pull their sledges. Because of extreme cold children look like bear’s cubs in because of funny and furry clothes.

They tell them a curious story —
I don’t believe ‘tis true;
And yet you may learn a lesson
If I tell the tale to you.

A story is quite famous and has been passed on through generations in the Scotland. The poet doesn’t believe in the authenticity of the story but yet is tempted to share the story. Mythological stories may not relate to realities but they always carry some good messages with them and that is why the poet is narrating the story.

Once, when the good Saint Peter
Lived in the world below,
And walked about it, preaching,
Just as he did, you know,
He came to the door of a cottage,
In travelling round the earth,
Where a little woman was making cakes,
And baking them on the hearth;
And being faint with fasting,
For the day was almost done,
He asked her, from her store of cakes,
To give him a single one.

Once Saint Peter was on his usual round of traveling and preaching people, he felt hungry. He chanced upon an old cottage where a little woman was making cakes. Saint Peter went near the woman and asked for some cakes to eat.

So she made a very little cake,
But as it baking lay,
She looked at it, and thought it seemed
Too large to give away.
Therefore she kneaded another,
And still a smaller one;
But it looked, when she turned it over,
As large as the first had done.
Then she took a tiny scrap of dough,
And rolled and rolled it flat;
And baked it thin as a wafer —
But she couldn’t part with that.
For she said, “My cakes that seem too small
When I eat of them myself
Are yet too large to give away.”
So she put them on the shelf.

The little woman started to bake a small cake for Saint Peter. After the cake was done she found it too big to be given for free. So she decided to bake an even smaller cake. This went on and on till she made a paper thin wafer for Saint Peter. She even kept that wafer instead of giving it to Saint Peter because she was too greedy to part with a single morsel of food.

Then good Saint Peter grew angry,
For he was hungry and faint;
And surely such a woman
Was enough to provoke a saint.
And he said, “You are far too selfish
To dwell in a human form,
To have both food and shelter,
And fire to keep you warm.
Now, you shall build as the birds do,
And shall get your scanty food
By boring, and boring, and boring,
All day in the hard, dry wood.”

On observing her greed Saint Peter became very angry at her. He said that she was too selfish to dwell in human form. He cursed her to become a bird and live searching for scant food in the jungle, by boring all day in the dry and hard wood.

Then up she went through the chimney,
Never speaking a word,
And out of the top flew a woodpecker,
For she was changed to a bird.
She had a scarlet cap on her head,
And that was left the same;
But all the rest of her clothes were burned
Black as a coal in the flame.
And every country schoolboy
Has seen her in the wood,
Where she lives in the trees till this very day,
Boring and boring for food.
After Saint Peter’s curse the little woman went up through the chimney and got changed to a woodpecker. Her whole body turned to coal black because of going up through the chimney. Her red cap turned to red plumage of the woodpecker. After that people have been seeing her in the wood where she lives by boring and boring the dry wood in search of food.

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