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# UNIT 7

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## 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall give you practice in reading comprehension by

- i) giving you an interesting story to read — 'The Baby-sitter' by Norah Burke, and
- ii) giving a glossary of difficult words and questions on comprehension.

We shall also set exercises on selected items of vocabulary.

In the section on grammar and usage we shall discuss the essential uses of the past perfect tense. We shall also ask you to re-write the story you have read with the help of a series of sentences given by us.

After completing the unit you should be able to

- read and appreciate simple short stories;
- use the past perfect tense correctly; and
- use a series of sentences to form a connected story.

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## 7.1 READING COMPREHENSION

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### 7.1.1 Introduction

Have you ever heard of human parents appointing an elephant baby-sitter to look after their child? Here is a remarkable story of loyalty and devotion written by a well-known contemporary writer.

Some of the words have been explained for you in the glossary given at the end of the story.

### 7.1.2 Passage for Reading

#### The Baby-Sitter

by Norah Burke

- 1 To his keeper, Karim, Gajpati was the biggest, best and most intelligent elephant in all Asia. He belonged to India's Forest Department and was employed in the Himalayan foothills as a *shikar* (hunting) elephant; he could penetrate the jungle like no other animal.

- 2 Gajpati stood ten feet tall and weighed more than four tons. His legs were like trees—his tracks 20 inches across — and he had more than once stamped a bear to a pulp. Yet Gajpati was a gentle animal. He was especially so with Karim, whom Gajpati loved with unselfish devotion, and with Karim's infant son. If the elephant was doing nothing when Karim's wife had water to fetch, or dinner to cook, either she or Karim would draw a circle in the dust in front of the tethered animal, and put the baby into it.
- 3 "Keep him inside there, O Lord of Elephants," they would order the big tusker, who gently restrained the child if he tried to crawl away.
- 4 One afternoon when they were camped near the Rapti River, Karim's wife took a big earthen jar and went off towards the river to fill it. After a while, when she failed to return, Karim shouted in the direction she had taken. But there was no reply. At his yell, every jungle sound had stopped except the roar of the river.
- 5 Quite suddenly Karim, with his heel, marked a circle in front of the elephant and put the baby into it.
- 6 "Look after him, Gajpati!"
- 7 He ran full speed to see what had happened to his wife.
- 8 Under Gajpati's trunk, next to his immense toenails, the baby lay and laughed up at the elephant. The infant could do as he liked, but each time he tried to crawl out of the circle he was picked up and put back in again. Gajpati scooped up some dust with his trunk and blew it over himself. Sometimes he flicked a little dirt over the baby, to discourage flies. And sometimes drops of green spit fell from Gajpati's pointed underlip onto the baby's tummy and tickled him. They were perfectly content together, these two. Here, inside the cool shade of the huge wild-mango tree to which Gajpati was tethered, time meant nothing.
- 9 Suddenly the sun was gone drawing over it a sky of velvet and diamonds. Immediately, the air was colder, and the baby began to cry. Jackals howled in the dusk, and there came the whoop of an eagle owl.
- 10 Not far away, in the rough grassland, a male hyena emerged from his burrow and stood silently sniffing the night air for news of food. He was a scavenger of carrion and an eater of skeletons. He would pick up any small, helpless creature he might find. In India, hyenas take human children every year.
- 11 His mate and an almost full-grown young hyena came out of the den, too. When they heard the baby crying, these bold and loathsome beasts, with their powerful crushing teeth, trotted off in that direction.
- 12 In camp, Gajpati was beginning to be agitated about the child. He realized that something was the matter, but what? He offered the baby a mouthful of leaves, and fanned him. It was no good. He put up his trunk and trumpeted for the owners of this baby to come back and do something.
- 13 They did not appear.
- 14 Gajpati scented the hyenas. He froze, and felt the breeze with his trunk to find out more.
- 15 There were three of them, out of sight, but quite close. Gajpati gathered the baby closer to his feet and squealed a threat.
- 16 An elephant's sense of smell is acute, but his vision poor. It was not till the hyenas were in the camp that Gajpati saw them. The sight made him range angrily, straining the chain that bound him. The elephant grumbled and blew.
- 17 The hyenas were nonplussed. One sat down out of reach and fixed its nocturnal eyes on the child. The others began to circle around behind.
- 18 In sudden exasperation, the elephant put his forehead against the mango tree, and braced the whole of his giant strength against it to break it down. He did not succeed, but the tree groaned at the roots.
- 19 Gajpati swung back and made for the sitting hyena, which sprang smartly away.
- 20 The hyenas behind him darted at the baby, so he wheeled towards them instead. They jumped out of reach.
- 21 He attacked the tree again. It shrieked as he strove against it. Now the baby was yelling at the top of his lungs, and blindly trying to crawl away; so Gajpati gave up. He backed up, shook his head, and gathered the baby to him.

- 22 Changing his tactics, he stood perfectly still, close to the now leaning tree, and watched.
- 23 The hyenas were hungry, bold, and began to close in.
- 24 They were watching the elephant with respect, but they did not allow for the slack of the chain.
- 25 Gajpati struck like lightning and in a moment got one hyena under his forefeet. Almost at once the struggle was over, the body stamped to a pulp. With a squeal of triumph and rage, Gajpati threw the carcass aside.
- 26 It scattered the others, who made off, leaving elephant and baby in peace for an hour or two.
- 27 Pillowed in dust, and exhausted by hunger, the baby lay half-sleeping, half-sobbing, and sucked at the stub of sugarcane that Gajpati offered him. Then, warmed by the elephant's sweet breath, he slept. A little after midnight, Gajpati dozed, too.
- 28 Presently, the baby stirred, sat up, and began to crawl away.
- 29 He was already out of reach when the elephant woke.
- 30 In the grey of early morning, Gajpati saw the hyenas coming back, and the baby several yards away.
- 31 He forged out to the full length of his range. Iron links bit into his flesh. Blood poured down.
- 32 The hyenas saw their chance and darted in.
- 33 At the same moment, the great tree gave and smashed down upon elephant and baby together. Breaking branches and rushing leaves covered them both.
- 34 The violence sent the hyenas off in a flash, and they did not return.
- 35 When Karim and his wife ran gasping into camp, they saw only the fallen tree and Gajpati under it.
- 36 Their baby?
- 37 They tore their way into the leaves and branches. Beneath it all, the child lay sleeping in the curl of the elephant's trunk. His mother, in tears, snatched him up. He was very dirty and scratched, but whole.
- 38 And Gajpati?
- 39 He lay with closed eyes beneath the tree.
- 40 "Fool! Traitor!" raged Karim. "So! Was the baby nothing to thee, that thou wouldst break loose and leave him?"
- 41 He took his axe and began to free the elephant, watched by his wife, who stood with her son in the arms and trembled still after her night's adventures.
- 42 To have dropped her water jar into deep rapids had been bad enough. Then, as she tried to recover it, to be swept downstream had been a nightmare. Karim had raced off down the river to look for her, but was overtaken by night and lost in the jungle. At dawn they had found each other as both rushed home to the child.
- 43 Now, panting and grunting, Karim cleared away the branches and undid Gajpati's chain.
- 44 "He will die of his injuries," choked the woman.
- 45 But the elephant got his front feet onto the ground and heaved free of the last branches. He was up, bruised, bleeding and shaking.
- 46 "Thou worthless traitor!" Karim told the animal bitterly.
- 47 The big elephant stood and sucked his trunk in shame and remorse for wrongdoing.
- 48 "Look!" gasped the woman.
- 49 Where Gajpati had heaved himself free of branches, these had parted to disclose the body of the hyena, and hyena tracks were everywhere. Karim and his wife read the story: Gajpati was no traitor. There followed such words of praise that made Gajpati lift his head and blink.

### 7.1.3 Glossary

The numbers refer to the paragraphs in the story. In words of 2 or more syllables, the mark ' is placed before the syllable that has the main stress; the mark , before a syllable

indicates secondary stress.

- 1 **'penetrate** : force his way through
- 2 **pulp** : the condition of being soft and liquid  
**'tethered** : tied (with a rope or chain) so that the animal is free to move within a limited area
- 3 **re'strained** : held (the child) back
- 8 **scooped** : took up as with a scoop (= a container for holding and moving loose material)
- 9 **whoop** : a loud shout
- 10 **hy'ena** : an animal of Asia and Africa, rather like a dog, which eats meat and has a wild cry like a laugh
- 11 **'carrion** : dead and decaying flesh
- 15 **squealed** : made a long high sound
- 16 **range (v.)** : move about
- 17 **'non'plussed** : surprised  
**noc'turnal** : used at night
- 18 **ex'asperation** : anger  
**braced** : put (his forehead) firmly (against the tree)
- 24 **'slack of the 'chain** : the part of the chain that hung loose
- 25 **'carcass** : the body of a dead animal
- 42 **'rapids** : part of a river where the water moves very fast over the rocks

#### 7.1.4 Chronological Sequence

In this section we shall draw your attention to the chronological sequence stated or implied in the story, that is, the order in which the events take place. In many reading texts there is a sequence of events which is essential to the understanding of the passage. In the following exercise, we shall give you a jumbled list of the main events of the story and then ask you to re-order them chronologically. You will realize that this task requires constant reference to the story to find out when exactly the various events took place.

##### Exercise 1

Here is a list of the main events of the story you have just read. However, it is not in the order in which the events actually happened. Rearrange the list correctly, referring to the story whenever necessary. The first event has been indicated for you.

- 1 Karim made Gajpati look after the baby when his wife did not return from the river.
- 2 The baby was frightened by all the noise and violence around him.
- 3 A little later, when they saw the dead hyena, they realized that Gajpati had been a devoted baby-sitter.
- 4 Gajpati pulled the tree down and chased the hyena away.
- 5 A little after mid-night Gajpati dozed off.
- 6 Gajpati gathered the baby to him and stood still.
- 7 Meanwhile the baby lay under Gajpati's trunk and laughed up at him.
- 8 One afternoon Karim's wife went off towards the river to fetch water.
- 9 Three hyenas appeared in the dusk.
- 10 They first blamed the elephant for not taking good care of the child.
- 11 When the elephant woke up, he saw the hyenas return and the baby several yards away.
- 12 He crushed the hyena that tried to get near the child.
- 13 When Karim and his wife returned, they saw the child sleeping in the curl of Gajpati's trunk.
- 14 The baby woke up and began to crawl away.
- 15 The other two hyenas ran away when Gajpati struck.
- 16 Gajpati tried to break the tree down to attack the hyenas.
- 17 In trying to recover her water jar, she fell into the river and was swept downstream.

- 18 He ran fast to see what had happened to his wife.
- 19 They tried to take the baby away.
- 20 He was overtaken by night and got lost in the jungle.

*Begin :*

- 1 One afternoon Karim's wife went off towards the river to fetch water.
- 2 .....
- 3 .....
- 4 .....
- 5 .....
- 6 .....
- 7 .....
- 8 .....
- 9 .....
- 10 .....
- 11 .....
- 12 .....
- 13 .....
- 14 .....
- 15 .....
- 16 .....
- 17 .....
- 18 .....
- 19 .....
- 20 .....

### 7.1.5 Comprehension Questions

#### Exercise 2

Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1 Gajpati was baby-sitting for Karim and his wife for the first time. Do you agree? How do you know?  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 2 Do you think the baby minded being looked after by the elephant? Why do you think so?  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 3 'In India hyenas take human children every year' (Paragraph 10). What function do you think this sentence performs in the story?  
.....  
.....
- 4 "... these bold and loathsome beasts ..." (Paragraph 11). Whose opinion is this?  
.....  
.....

5 Read the last paragraph of the story again. Which of the following words do you think Karim and his wife used? Give reasons for your choice(s).

- a) saviour, b) guardian angel, c) devoted friend, d) loyal servant.

.....  
.....

## 7.2 VOCABULARY

### Exercise 3

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below, choosing suitable words taken from the list given at the end:

- 1 Rain has ..... right through this coat.
  - 2 A banana is mainly ..... except for its skin.
  - 3 If you can't ..... your dog from biting the milkman, you must lock him up.
  - 4 "Go away!" I shouted in .....
- cut, kernel, pulp, penetrated, teach, dismay, restrain, exasperation.

## 7.3 GRAMMAR AND USAGE

In this section we shall discuss the essential uses of the **Past Perfect Tense**. There are several examples of this tense form in the story. Look at paragraphs 2, 42 and 49 for instances of the Past Perfect. As you know, the Past Perfect is used

- i) to show that one action took place in the past before another action :  
Karim's wife *had* already *fallen* into the river when he got there.
- ii) to express the continuation of an action up to a certain time in the past :  
Gajpati *had looked after* the baby on several occasions by the time the encounter with the hyenas took place.
- iii) to express a hypothetical (=supposed) condition:  
If Karim *had looked* for his wife during the day, he would not have got lost.
- iv) after *wish* to express what is impossible :  
Karim said to his wife, "I wish you *had not fallen* into the river".
- v) in Reported Speech, to talk about things that had already happened at the time when we were talking or thinking:  
She said that she *had* accidentally *fallen* into the river.

In the following exercises we shall concern ourselves only with the first two uses of the Past Perfect.

### Exercise 4

Match the questions in Column A with the appropriate replies in Column B. Also, fill in the blanks with the Past Perfect forms of the verbs in brackets. The first one has been done for you.

- | A   | B   |
|---|---|
| 1 Did you put the milk in the fridge? (b)             | a She realized that she ..... (already read) all the books.               |
| 2 Did you have a good dinner at Sheela's wedding? ( ) | b No, Mother had already put ..... (already put) it in before I got home. |
| 3 Why didn't you go to the movie with Avinash? ( )    | c No, they ..... (already finish) eating by the time I got there.         |







5 devoted friend

Gajpati loved Karim and his son with unselfish devotion.

**Exercise 3**

1 penetrated 2 pulp 3 restrain 4 exasperation

**Exercise 4**

1 (b) had already put

2 (c) had already finished

3 (d) had already seen

4 (a) had already read

5 (f) had already closed

6 (e) had just passed.

**Exercise 5**

2 We noticed that we had left a bowl of custard on the dining table.

3 Also, we had not shut the front door firmly.

4 Apparently, a thief had come in.

5 He had eaten all the custard.

6 He had also taken away our favourite music cassettes.