

# ENGLISH

## CHAPTER 6: MIJBIL THE OTTER



## MIJBIL THE OTTER

### ~Summary~

**-by Gavin Maxwell**

#### Maxwell Decides to keep an Otter

Maxwell travelled to Southern Iraq in 1956. He decided to keep an otter as a pet. As his native place of living, Camusfearna, had much water around so, an otter was suitable for the experiment.

#### Maxwell and his friend Travel to Basra

When Maxwell mentioned about his wish to keep an otter as a pet to his friend, he suggested him to take an otter from Tigris marshes as they are quite common there. They were going to Basra to collect their mails. The mail of his friend reached but his mail did not arrive.

#### Maxwell Mail Arrives and He Gets the Otter

Maxwell sent a telegram to England as his mail had not arrived. For three days, there was no reply. He tried to make a phone call but due to some problems he was not able to get through. Finally, after five days his mail arrived. Once his mail arrived, he went to his room to read it. There, he saw two Arabs with an otter. They told that it was for him.

#### Strangeness of the Otter

The otter changed the life of Maxwell. The otter came on to the tiled floor from the sack (bag). At once, it appeared like a small dragon. From head to tail, his body was coated with mud. In between the mud, a velvet fur-like creature resembling a chocolate brown mole appeared. There was a lot of dust on his body. It took Maxwell a month's time to remove all the dust from his body.

#### Domestication of the Otter

Maxwell named the otter as Mijbil. In short, he was called Mij. For the first twenty-four hours, the otter was neither unfriendly nor friendly. He was aloof and indifferent. He kept on sleeping on the floor far from the bed. The second night, he came onto Maxwell's bed and slept in the



crook of his knees. In the day, he kept a keen interest in his surroundings. Maxwell made a body belt for him. The otter liked playing in the water in the bathroom.

### Mijbil's Escape from the Bedroom

Two days later, Mijbil escaped from Maxwell's bedroom. He went to the bathroom. He entered the bathtub and turned the tap on with his paws within minutes.

### Mijbil Becomes Friendly

Within a very less time, he became very friendly. He followed Maxwell when he called his name. He spent most of the time in playing with the rubber ball. He played it like a soccer ball. His favourite toys were the marbles.

### Taking Mijbil Back to Home

Days passed peacefully at Basra. Maxwell had a fear of transporting Mij to England and then to Camusfearna. The British airlines would not fly animals. He booked a flight to Paris and then from there to London. The airlines told him to pack Mij in a box. He made a box for Mij. He put him inside the box before the flight so that he become habitual to it. Then Maxwell went to have lunch.

### The Otter and the Box

When Maxwell came back after sometime, he was shocked to see a complete silence from the box. Blood was coming out from the airholes. He opened the box. He saw Mij covered with blood. Only 10 minutes were left for the flight and the airport was five miles away. He kept Mij inside the box and held the lid with his hands.

### Maxwell Leaves for Airport

Maxwell sat in the car with the box beside him. The driver drove the car very fast. Just when the aircraft was about to take off, he was rushed through to it by the angry officials at the airport.



## Maxwell in the Aircraft

Maxwell had booked the front seat for him. He covered the floor around his seat with newspapers. He gave the parcel of fish to the airhostess for the otter. She suggested him to keep the otter on his knees.

## Mijbil Goes Out of the Box

Mij was out of the box at once. He disappeared in the aircraft. There was a woman shouting, "A rat! A rat!" in fear. Maxwell tried to catch the otter but he failed. The airhostess told him to be seated and said that she would find the otter for him. Very soon the otter came near Maxwell and climbed on his knees. He started rubbing his face and neck with his nose.

## Mijbil Reaches London

Maxwell remained in London for almost a month. Mij kept on playing with ping-pong balls, marbles, rubber fruit and a terrapin shell that Maxwell had bought from the marshes.

## Mijbil Plays Outside the House

Maxwell exercised Mij on a lead on the streets. Mij quickly developed certain habits during the walks on London streets. There was a primary school opposite to Maxwell's house. He would take Maxwell near the outer wall of it which was some two feet high. He would then gallop on to this. This distracted the students and the staff. The people in London were not able to recognise the otter and made wild guesses.

## Conclusion of Mijbil the Otter

In the chapter – Mijbil the Otter, the story explained the beautiful bond of the author with his pet otter, Mijbil and the series of incidents that followed during their onward journey to London.



## NCERT SOLUTION

### Questions (Page No. 106,108,110)

#### (ORAL COMPREHENSION CHECK)

Question. 1 What 'experiment' did Maxwell think Camusfearna would be suitable for?

Answer: Maxwell thought that he would keep an otter instead of a dog. Camusfearna, ringed by water a very short distance from its door, would be an eminently suitable spot for the experiment.

Question. 2 Why does he go to Basra? How long does he wait there, and why?

Answer: He went to Basra, to the Consulate-General, to collect and answer his mail from Europe. There, he found that his friend's mail had arrived, but his had not. He sent a message to England. When nothing happened even after three days, he tried placing a call to England. On the first day, the line was out of order; on the second day, the exchange was closed for a religious holiday. On the third day, there was another breakdown. He arranged to meet his friend, who had left, in a week's time. His mail finally arrived five days later.

Question. 3 How does he get the otter? Does he like it? Pick out the words that tell you this.

Answer: When he received his mail, he carried it to his bedroom to read. There, he saw two Arabs and beside them was a sack that twisted from time to time. They handed him a note from his friend saying that he had sent him an otter.

Yes, he liked it. We know this because he uses the term 'otter fixation' to refer to his feeling towards the otter. He felt that this otter fixation or this strong attachment towards otters was something that was shared by most other people who had ever owned one.

Question. 4 Why was the otter named 'Maxwell's otter'?

Answer: The otter was of a race previously unknown to science and was at length named by zoologists *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* or Maxwell's otter.

Question. 5 Tick the right answer. In the beginning, the otter was

- Aloof and indifferent
- Friendly
- Hostile

Answer: In the beginning, the otter was aloof and indifferent.

Question. 6 What happened when Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom? What did it do two days after that?



Answer: When Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom, it went wild with joy in the water for half an hour. It was plunging and rolling in it, shooting up and down the length of the bathtub underwater, and making enough slosh and splash for a hippo.

Two days after that, it escaped from his bedroom to the bathroom. By the time he got there, Mijbil was up on the end of the bathtub and fumbling at the chromium taps with its paws. In less than a minute, it had turned the tap far enough to produce some water and after a moment, achieved the full flow.

Question. 7 How was Mij to be transported to England?

Answer: Maxwell booked a flight to Paris and from there he would go on to London. The airline insisted that Mij should be packed in a box (not more than eighteen inches square) that was to be placed on the floor, near his feet.

Question. 8 What did Mij do to the box?

Answer: Maxwell had put Mij in the box and left for a meal. When he came back, he saw a horrific spectacle. There was complete silence from the box. However, from its air holes and chinks around the lid, blood had trickled and dried. He took off the lock and tore open the lid. Mij, exhausted and covered with blood, whimpered and caught his leg. It had torn the lining of the box to shreds. He removed the last of it so that there were no cutting edges left.

Question. 9 Why did Maxwell put the otter back in the box? How do you think he felt when he did this?

Answer: By the time Maxwell had removed the last of the lining of the box so that there were no cutting edges left, it was just ten minutes for the flight to take off. He had to rush to the airport, which was five miles away, and that is why he put the miserable otter back into the box. Like the otter, Maxwell would also have felt miserable for putting it back in the box, particularly so, after seeing that the otter disliked being in the box.

Question. 10 Why does Maxwell say the airhostess was “the very queen of her kind”?

Answer: Maxwell said that the airhostess was “the very queen of her kind” because she was extremely friendly and helpful. He took her into his confidence about the incident with the box. She suggested that he might prefer to have his pet on his knee. Hearing this, he developed a profound admiration for her, for she understood the pain of both the otter and its owner.

Question. 11 What happened when the box was opened?

Answer: When the box was opened, Mij leapt out of it immediately. It disappeared very quickly down the aircraft. Several passengers shrieked. A woman stood up on her seat screaming that there was a rat. He saw Mij’s tail disappearing beneath the legs of an Indian passenger. He dived for it, but missed. The airhostess suggested him to be seated and that she would find the otter.





After a while, Mij had returned to him. It climbed on his knee and began to rub its nose on his face and neck.

Question. 12 What game had Mij invented?

Answer: Mij invented a game with a ping-pong ball, which kept him engrossed for up to half an hour at a time. Maxwell had a suitcase that had become damaged, such that the lid, when closed, remained at a slope from one end to the other. Mij discovered that if the ball was placed on the high end, it would run down the length of the suitcase. It would dash around to the other end to surprise the ball. Then, it would grab it and trot off with it to the high end once more.

Question. 13 What are 'compulsive habits'? What does Maxwell say are the compulsive habits of

- i. School children
- ii. Mij?

Answer: Compulsive habits are habits that are impossible to control. According to Maxwell, children on their way to and from school must place their feet squarely on the centre of each paving block; they must touch every seventh upright of the iron railings, or pass to the outside of every second lamp post. Such were the compulsive habits of children.

Opposite to Maxwell's flat, there was a single-storied primary school. Along its frontage ran a low wall some two feet high. On its way home, Mij would tug Maxwell to this wall, jump onto it, and gallop the full length of its thirty yards, distracting both the pupils and the staff. Such was the compulsive habit of Mij.

Question. 14 What group of animals do otters belong to?

Answer: Otters belong to a comparatively small group of animals called Mustellines, shared by the badger, mongoose, weasel, stoat, mink and others.

Question. 15 What guesses did the Londoners make about what Mij was?

Answer: According to Maxwell, the average Londoner does not recognize an otter. The Londoners who saw Mij made different guesses about who Mij was. They guessed, among other things, that it was a baby seal, a squirrel, a walrus, a hippo, a beaver, a bear cub, a leopard and a brontosaurus.

## Questions (Page No. 110-111)

### (THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT)

Question. 1 What things does Mij do which tell you that he is an intelligent, friendly and fun-loving animal who needs love?

Answer: Mij was an intelligent animal. It invented its own game out of the ping-pong balls. It screwed the tap till water began to flow and then it would play and splash in the water. Though it was aloof and indifferent in the beginning, it soon became very friendly. It formed a special



attachment with Maxwell. It responded when Maxwell called out his name. It grew desperate when Maxwell left it in a box and it got hurt while trying to come out of it. After Maxwell took it out, it clung to his feet. It was a fun-loving animal. It enjoyed playing all kinds of games. It would play with a selection of toys, ping-pong balls, marbles, rubber fruit, and a terrapin shell. It required love and affection from Maxwell and it got that readily.

Question. 2 What are some of the things we come to know about otters from this text?

Answer: Otters belong to a comparatively small group of animals called Mustellines, shared by the badger, mongoose, weasel, stoat, mink and others. Maxwell's otter was of a race previously unknown to science and was at length named by zoologists *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* or Maxwell's otter. They are found in large numbers in marshes. They are often tamed by the Arabs. It is characteristic of otters that every drop of water must be extended and spread about the place; a bowl must at once be overturned, or, if it would not be overturned, be sat in and splashed in until it overflowed. For them, water must be kept on the move. Otters love playing various games, especially with a ball.

Question. 3 Why is Mij's species now known to the world as Maxwell's otter?

Answer: Maxwell's otter was of a race previously unknown to science and was at length named by zoologists *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli* or Maxwell's otter.

Question. 4 Maxwell in the story speaks for the otter, Mij. He tells us what the otter feels and thinks on different occasions. Given below are some things the otter does. Complete the column on the right to say what Maxwell says about what Mij feels and thinks.

What Mij does	How Mij feels or thinks
Plunges, rolls in the water and makes the water splosh and splash	
Screws the tap in the wrong way	
Nuzzles Maxwell's face and neck in the aeroplane	

Answer:

What Mij does	How Mij feels or thinks
Plunges, rolls in the water and makes the water splosh and splash	Went wild with joy
Screws the tap in the wrong way	Irritated and disappointed
Nuzzles Maxwell's face and neck in the aeroplane	Distressed chitter of recognition and welcome

Question. 5 Read the story and find the sentences where Maxwell describes his pet otter. Then choose and arrange your sentences to illustrate those statements below that you think are true.

Maxwell's description

- i. makes Mij seem almost human, like a small boy.





- ii. shows that he is often irritated with what Mij does.
- iii. shows that he is often surprised by what Mij does.
- iv. of Mij's antics is comical.
- v. shows that he observes the antics of Mij very carefully.
- vi. shows that he thinks Mij is a very ordinary otter.
- vii. shows that he thinks the otter is very unusual.

Answer:

- i. He spent most of his time in play.
- iii. I watched, amazed; in less than a minute he had turned the tap far enough to produce a trickle of water, and after a moment or two achieved the full flow.
- v. A suitcase that I had taken to Iraq had become damaged on the journey home, so that the lid, when closed, remained at a slope from one end to the other. Mij discovered that if he placed the ball on the high end it would run down the length of the suitcase. He would dash around to the other end to ambush its arrival, hide from it, crouching, to spring up and take it by surprise, grab it and trot off with it to the high end once more.
- vii. It is not, I suppose, in any way strange that the average Londoner should not recognize an otter, but the variety of guesses as to what kind of animal this might be came as a surprise to me. Mij was anything but an otter.

## Questions (Page No. 111-113)

### (THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE)

Question. 1 From the table below, make as many correct sentences as you can using *would* and/or *used to*, as appropriate. (Hint: First decide whether the words in italics show an action, or a state or situation, in the past.) Then add two or three sentences of your own to it.

Emperor Akbar	Would Used to	Be fond of musical evenings
Every evening we		Take long walks on the beach
Fifty years ago, very few people		Own cars
Till the 1980s, Shanghai		Have very dirty streets.
My uncle		Spend his holidays by the sea.

Answer:

1. Emperor Akbar used to be fond of musical ev
2. Every evening we used to take long walks on the beach.
3. Fifty years ago, very few people used to own cars.
4. Till the 1980s, Shanghai used to have very dirty streets.
5. My uncle would spend his holidays by the sea.
6. My uncle used to take long walks on the beach.



7. My uncle used to be fond of musical evenings.

Question. 2

A. Look at these examples from the text, and say whether the modifiers (in italics) are nouns, proper nouns, or adjective plus noun.

- i. An otter fixation
- ii. The London streets
- iii. The iron railings
- iv. Soft velvet fur
- v. The Tigris marshes
- vi. A four-footed soccer player.

Answer:

- i. Noun
- ii. Noun
- iii. Proper noun
- iv. Proper noun
- v. Adjective plus noun
- vi. Adjective plus noun

B. Given below are some nouns, and a set of modifiers (in the box). Combine the nouns and modifiers to make as many appropriate phrases as you can. (Hint: The nouns and modifiers are all from the texts in this book.)

temple  
person  
gifts  
time  
crossing  
physique

girls  
thoughts  
scream  
subject  
flight  
coffee

triangle  
boys  
farewell  
landscape  
chatterbox  
view

dresses  
roar  
expression  
handkerchief  
profession  
celebration

college	rough	hundred	stone	ordinary
love	uncomfortable	white	slang	slack
bare	railroad	termendous	family	marriage
plump	invigorating	panoramic	heartbreaking	birthday
incorrigible	ridiculous	loud	first	three

Answer:

**Temple** – white temple, stone temple, first temple



**Person** – incorrigible person, ridiculous person

**Gifts** – hundred gifts, ordinary gifts, birthday gifts

**Time** – college time, rough time, first time

**Crossing** – railroad crossing, first crossing

**Physique** – plump physique, ordinary physique

**Three girls** – first three girls, incorrigible three girls

**Thoughts** – incorrigible thoughts, uncomfortable thoughts, ridiculous thoughts, heartbreaking thoughts, first thoughts, ordinary thoughts

**Scream** – tremendous scream, loud scream

**Subject** – college subject, ordinary subject

**Flight** – rough flight, first flight

**Coffee** – invigorating coffee, ordinary coffee

**Triangle** – love triangle

**Boys** – college boys, incorrigible boys, rough boys, hundred boys

**Farewell** – college farewell, heartbreaking farewell

**Landscape** – bare landscape, rough landscape, white landscape

**Chatterbox** – incorrigible chatterbox

**View** – tremendous view, panoramic view, ordinary view

**Dresses** – hundred dresses, ordinary dresses, birthday dresses, marriage dresses

**Roar** – tremendous roar, loud roar

**Expression** – bare expression, slang expression, slack expression

**Handkerchief** – white handkerchief, ordinary handkerchief

**Profession** – family profession, first profession, ordinary profession



**Celebration** – tremendous celebration, family celebration, birthday celebration.

Question. 3 Read this sentence:

He shook himself, and I half expected a cloud of dust. The author uses a cloud of dust to give a picture of a large quantity of dust. Phrases like this indicate a particular quantity of something that is not usually countable. For example: a bit of land, a drop of blood, a pinch of salt, a piece of paper.

**A. Match the words on the left with a word on the right. Some words on the left can go with more than one word on the right.**

(i)	A portion of	1	Blood
(ii)	A pool of	2	Cotton
(iii)	Flakes of	3	Stones
(iv)	A huge heap of	4	Gold
(v)	A gust of	5	Fried fish
(vi)	Little drops of	6	Snow
(vii)	A piece of	7	Water
(viii)	A pot of	8	Wind

Answer:

(i)	A portion of	5	Fried fish
(ii)	A pool of	1	Blood
(iii)	Flakes of	6	Snow
(iv)	A huge heap of	3	Stones
(v)	A gust of	8	Wind
(vi)	Little drops of	7	Water
(vii)	A piece of	2	Cotton
(viii)	A pot of	4	Gold

**B. Use a bit of/a piece of/a bunch of/a cloud of/a lump of with the italicised nouns in the following sentences. The first has been done for you as an example.**

(i) My teacher gave me some advice.

My teacher gave me a bit of advice.

(ii) Can you give me some clay, please.

\_\_\_\_\_

(iii) The information you gave was very useful.

\_\_\_\_\_

(iv) Because of these factories, smoke hangs over the city.

\_\_\_\_\_

(v) Two stones rubbed together can produce sparks of fire.

\_\_\_\_\_

(vi) He gave me some flowers on my birthday

\_\_\_\_\_



Answer:

(i) My teacher gave me some advice.	My teacher gave me a bit of advice.
(ii) Can you give me some clay, please.	Can you give me a lump of clay, please.
(iii) The information you gave was very useful.	The piece of information you gave was very useful.
(iv) Because of these factories, smoke hangs over the city.	Because of these factories, a cloud of smoke hangs over the city.
(v) Two stones rubbed together can produce sparks of fire.	Two pieces of stones rubbed together can produce sparks of fire.
(vi) He gave me some flowers on my birthday	He gave me a bunch of flowers on my birthday.

