Chapter 1: The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse

Exercise 1.1 — Reading with Insight

Q1 You will probably agree that this story does not have breathless adventure and exciting action. Then what in your opinion makes it interesting?

SOLUTION

The story's charm lies not in plot-driven suspense but in its richly drawn characters and the warm, humorous voice of the nine-year-old narrator Aram. Mourad, with his wild singing, his bond with animals, and his cheerful indifference to logic, is an irresistible character who captures the reader's imagination.

The central tension is moral rather than physical: the Garoghlanian family is legendary for its honesty across eleven centuries, yet Mourad has stolen a horse. Watching the boys navigate this contradiction — convincing themselves that riding a stolen horse for fun is not really stealing — creates gentle comic irony that keeps the reader engaged.

The writing itself is a source of pleasure. Saroyan's lyrical descriptions of the early morning ride, the smells and sounds of the countryside, and small episodes like the encounter with farmer John Byro are vivid and tender. The story also offers a quietly satisfying moral resolution: the horse is returned in better condition than it was taken, and the family's honour remains intact. It is this blend of warmth, humour, character, and an unspoken code of ethics that makes the story interesting.

Answer: The story's interest comes from its vivid, humorous characters, the gentle moral irony of honest people who 'borrow' a horse, Saroyan's lyrical prose, and a quietly satisfying ending — not from plot excitement.

Q2 Did the boys return the horse because they were conscience-stricken or because they were afraid?

SOLUTION

The boys returned the horse primarily because of conscience, not fear. When Aram learns that the horse belongs to John Byro and has been missing for a month, he asks Mourad to keep it until he learns to ride. Mourad's reaction is immediate and indignant: 'Are you inviting a member of the Garoghlanian family to steal? The horse must go back to its true owner.' This outburst shows that Mourad's sense of family honour, not the fear of being caught, drives the decision.

The encounter with John Byro on the road also points in the same direction. Byro examines the horse closely, acknowledges it is a perfect match for his stolen animal, but chooses to trust the boys because of the family's reputation for honesty. He says, 'I would swear it is my horse if I didn't know your parents.' The boys could easily have continued riding after this, since Byro decided not to suspect them. The fact that they return the horse the very next morning shows that it is their own conscience — the weight of Byro's trust and the family's eleven-century

reputation — that compels them, not external pressure or fear of punishment.

Answer: The boys returned the horse out of conscience and family pride, not fear. Byro's willingness to trust them despite his suspicion gave them a way out, but their own sense of the Garoghlanian honour made continuing to keep the horse impossible.

Q3 "One day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream..." The story begins in a mood of nostalgia. Can you narrate some incident from your childhood that might make an interesting story?

SOLUTION

Model answer: When I was about eight years old, my grandfather kept a small vegetable garden behind our house. One summer afternoon, I decided — without telling anyone — to harvest all the ripe tomatoes myself, imagining I would surprise the family at dinner. I picked every red tomato I could find, filled a basket, and proudly carried it to the kitchen.

What I did not know was that my grandfather had been carefully timing the harvest for a competition at the local mela the following week. When he walked into the kitchen and saw the basket, there was a long, terrible silence. I braced for a scolding, but instead he sat down heavily, looked at me, and then began to laugh. He said I had the instincts of a farmer even if I lacked the patience of one. We spent the rest of the evening making tomato chutney, and though he never entered that competition again, he told the story at every family gathering for years.

Looking back, what makes that afternoon vivid is not any great drama but the specific details — the smell of the garden, the weight of the basket, my grandfather's silence before his laughter — and the mixture of guilt and love I felt. Like Aram's summer with the white horse, it is a memory coloured equally by mischief and tenderness.

Answer: Model answer provided: a childhood incident involving an impulsive act done out of love, a moment of anxiety, and an elder's forgiving humour — recounted with specific sensory detail in the spirit of Saroyan's nostalgic opening.

Q4 The story revolves around characters who belong to a tribe in Armenia. Mourad and Aram are members of the Garoghlanian family. Now locate Armenia and Assyria on the atlas and prepare a write-up on the Garoghlanian tribes. You may write about people, their names, traits, geographical and economic features as suggested in the story.

SOLUTION

Atlas note: Armenia is a landlocked country in the South Caucasus region of western Asia, bordered by Turkey to the west, Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, and Iran to the south. Assyria was an ancient civilisation centred in the northern part of present-day Iraq, with historical populations also found in parts of Syria, Turkey, and Iran. In the story, the Assyrian farmer John Byro has settled in California's San Joaquin Valley, reflecting the diaspora of both

Armenians and Assyrians to the United States in the early twentieth century.

Write-up on the Garoghlanian family (based on the story):

The Garoghlanian family is an Armenian tribe settled, at the time of the story, on the outskirts of a Californian town near the San Joaquin Valley. They live in extreme poverty — the narrator notes that nobody could understand where they found money for food — yet they carry themselves with a quiet dignity rooted in their heritage.

Their most defining trait is honesty. The family has been celebrated for its integrity for approximately eleven centuries, even in the days when they were among the wealthiest in their homeland. Their pride in this reputation is fierce: when Aram suggests they might keep the horse a little longer, Mourad is offended at the very idea of a Garoghlanian behaving as a thief. This honesty is so widely known that even John Byro, who is nearly certain the horse is his, refuses to accuse the boys because he trusts their family's name.

The family also has a 'crazy streak' — a love of life, music, and animals that passes unpredictably through the generations. Mourad inherits this from his great-uncle Khosrove, a large, loud man famous for dismissing every problem — even a house fire — with the phrase 'It is no harm; pay no attention to it.' Character in this tribe, the narrator explains, is not inherited from one's father alone; the spirit distributes itself 'capriciously and vagrantly' across the clan.

Names in the story reflect Armenian convention: Mourad, Aram, Zorab, Khosrove, and Fetvajian are all Armenian names. The family's world is one of orchards, vineyards, irrigation ditches, and country roads — an agrarian landscape in which horses are both a practical necessity and an object of passionate longing.

Answer: Armenia lies in the South Caucasus; Assyria was an ancient civilisation in present-day Iraq/Syria. The Garoghlanian tribe is Armenian, defined by fierce honesty (eleven centuries of fame), poverty borne with pride, Armenian names, an agrarian setting in California's San Joaquin Valley, and a hereditary 'crazy streak' — love of life, animals, and music.