

A Gorilla in the Guest Room

by Gerald Durrell

1. (a) Describe the incidents that formed a bond between N'Pongo and Nandy in the story 'A Gorilla in the Guest Room'.

Answer: Gerald Durrell while recounting the memories of N'Pongo's arrival into the zoo gives us a thorough account of the life of the gorilla and his relationship with humans and with his wife Nandy. Durrell understood that gorillas need to have their own family to play with; the humans could not have replaced the companionship of his own kind and if deprived of it the ape would have become melancholic and morose. Thus, Durrell was determined to get a mate for N'Pongo despite the paucity of funds.

Nandy unlike N Pongo had suffered under the hands of humans and was apprehensive and fearful about the race. She seemed to lack respect and trust for humans and was completely antisocial. Before introducing Nandy to N'Pongo, they allowed her a rest period of twenty-four hours in a separate cage. She did not seem to evince any interest either in N'Pongo or the humans around her. While looking at the cage from another side she seemed to be least interested, wondering only about the next action of humans that could inflict a sense of pain in her.

The day, when Nandy was supposed to be let into the cage of N'Pongo, was 'fraught with anxiety'. The author was aiming a union of two opposites in the ape world. While N Pongo was pro-humans and extremely friendly. Nandy was antisocial and felt uncomfortable with their presence around her. Both seemed to mistrust each other and gauged one another from a distance. N'Pongo was the first to initiate an action. He pulled her hair teasingly only to retreat to his position while Nandy slow in her reaction smarted at the indignation meted out on her.

To ensure a healthy and friendly knowing of each other, the author and his people at the zoo set in the next line of defence they had prepared for the two. Both the apes were presented with a plateful of assorted fruits. N'Pongo decided to investigate Nandy's plate as he felt he lacked the delicacies that she had Nandy however, displayed such belligerence

that N'Pongo cowardly returned to his pile of food.

There seemed to be little jousts in the next days between the male and the female gorilla where both played little games with each other but by the end of the day, they had declared a truce and readiness to go ahead with the relationship. Nandy was allowed to share his quarters and they even shared the shelf to sleep, signalling the happy communion of the two.

(b) How did the author manage to get both the gorillas into the zoo?

Answer: Gerald Durrell was a conservationist and a wildlife enthusiast. He was keen to contribute to the conservation of wildlife. The decision to get a gorilla for him was not a pre-meditated one. On receiving a call from an animal dealer with the availability of a gorilla for twelve hundred pounds, Durrell jumped at the idea and agreed to bring it to the zoo.

Durrell seemed to be in no financial condition to afford a gorilla. His wife advised him against the idea and asked him to consider their debt-ridden situation before agreeing to such a 'nonsensical idea'. Gerald was however convinced of his motive as well as his decision and decided to try his hand at attaining the animal through getting sponsorship from the rich on the island.

He received a list of the rich people on the island and decided to approach them for funds. Durrell managed to collect two hundred pounds by calling different people for sponsorship, yet he was short of a huge sum. He decided to call Major Domo who appreciated his efforts and willingly contributed the entire leftover sum to buy the gorilla. In no time, the author had flown down to London and got the gorilla at the zoo.

Durrell was later convinced that a gorilla needs a family to stay healthy and not degenerate into a melancholic morose creature. Thus, procuring him his own family was a necessity and so the arrival of Nandy was confirmed despite the lack of funds. The author called the same dealer from whom he had procured N Pongo and found Nandy available at fifteen hundred pounds. The amount though huge was worked out by Durrell with the dealer on instalment terms and he also made a collecting box made from which hung the notice. We

have bought Nandy on the instalment plan. Please help us to keep up the instalments.' Nandy arrived with much fanfare and bated breath as she was supposed to be the loving mate of the much friendly and loved ape N Pongo in the entire zoo.

(c) Why did the author refuse his mother's request to keep N'Pongo at their home?

Answer: Gerald Durrell from the very beginning was not enthusiastic about keeping an ape at the house, having suffered the predicament of keeping Chumley, the chimpanzee at his place. Chumley had turned his house upside down with his antics and created a bomb-site and since then Durrell had decided that he would not have any ape at his home.

However, N'Pongo was different from the rest. He displayed the most beautiful behaviour and captivated the author and his family's heart completely. Apart from the occasional wetting hiatus, N'Pongo was gentle and careful in all his examinations of the room and its things. The author's family had become attached to N'Pongo's presence in the house and persuaded him to keep him in the house. Durrell had learnt from his last experience that the ape is mild in temperament as a baby but one cannot afford to have an adult gorilla living in the house.

Long Questions and Answers

1. Trace the events that happened till N'Pongo was introduced into the zoo.

Answer: Gerald Durrell, an animal lover, set up a zoo in the island of Jersey. He wanted it to be a conservation centre for endangered animals. A dealer in such animals asked whether he required a baby gorilla. It was a rare opportunity. It was expensive too. His wife objected but he ignored her protests and decided to approach the rich in the locality. He made two hundred pounds but as a windfall, one Major Domo agreed to give him rest of the money. Excitedly, he announced the arrival of a gorilla to his workers. He flew over to London airport and met the dealer who opened the door of a crate and N'Pongo walked into his life.

N'Pongo was eighteen inches when he stood up. He was solid bone and muscle: handsome and healthy. There was not an ounce of spare fat on him and his chocolate coloured fur was thick and smooth. His deep-set eyes twinkled with humour. He lay back in the narrator's

arms and investigated his beard with his forefinger. He giggled with glee when he was tickled and ate a banana with growlings of pleasure. Then amidst much protest, he was pushed back to his crate and was airlifted to Jersey.

Since the cage was not fully ready, the gorilla was put up in the writer's guest room. His courteous manners and sad expression won the hearts of the writer's wife and mother, and they plied him with delicacies. The staff came to pay homage to him. When he became tired of lying on the sofa, he walked around the room, inspecting the things around him, even touching everything delicately. His behaviour was exemplary and the writer's mother wanted him to stay with them permanently.

The gorilla did not leave the guest room intact. There were raspberry stains on the walls, and straw on the floor, the handle on the door drooped. But unlike the other chimpanzee guests, the gorilla was less dramatic and demonstrative. He would protest mildly and then would enter the cage, realizing he had no other go. When he ultimately entered the zoo, he won everyone's affection with his behaviour, appearance and disposition.

2. Narrate how the author took care of the gorillas, in the zoo or how does the author bring about the essential characteristics of the two gorillas?

Answer: When N'Pongo grew up, the author felt that he needed a mate. Finance was poor, but a female gorilla was brought into the zoo, on an instalment basis. Nandy was her name, and she was healthy, had glossy skin and lustrous eyes. She was kept in a separate cage, next to her future husband's, but both of them did not evince an interest in each other. One morning she was let into N'pongo's cage and all waited with bated breath to see how they adapted to each other. They sat opposite to each other contemplating. N'pongo rolled himself to the ground, circled around the newcomer, reached out a long powerful arm gripped a handful of her hair, pulled it and went off as nothing had happened. Nandy was a bit too late to react, and her grunt of indignation went unnoticed. A big plate of assorted fruits was given to each. N'pongo, thinking that Nandy's plate had more fruits tried to inspect it, but Nandy, still smarting under the insult, acted so aggressively, that her opponent retreated to his own pile of food. They ate at two ends of the cage.

That night, N'Pongo slept on his wooden shelf, and Nandy on the floor. The next day, they had their own jousts, working out a protocol, but by evening they had settled down, with both sharing the wooden shelf. The marriage of the Gorillas was a success, they plainly adored each other. N'pongo was clownish while his wife was serious. He was like a mischievous child, teasing her in good humour and she seemed to accept him as he was. At times, she would lose her temper and chase him, or pound him with her fist, but he used to enjoy it with laughter spilling out of his eyes.

Although the author was happy to have such rare and valuable animals in the zoo, there were moments of anxiety, when they fell ill. Every time one of them got sawdust in their noses, all would worry if they would get pneumonia, and the functioning of their bowels was a topic daily discussed. A magnificent communication apparatus was installed with black boxes at several points, even in his house, that could relate the current status of the animals. N'Pongo, unfortunately, fell seriously ill. He started to look off colour, losing all his exuberance. He just lay staring into space, taking only milk and a little food. The only symptom was acute diarrhoea. He started losing weight rapidly. The second day he stopped eating, even refused milk, so he could not administrate antibiotics. He was slipping into melancholia. The writer and his wife got some watermelon along with exotic fruits. Fortunately, the gorilla took a liking for the melon and he could be given the antibiotic injection. Initially there was no si improvement, but later on he drank Complian and ate a variety of fruits. The had to leave for France. He kept on ringing, which cost a fortune, but heh be apprised of the condition of his pet gorilla. By the time he returned, N'E had put on all the weight he had lost and was his former self. This mad author feel that it was delightful to have creatures like these, but it was an edged sword, for the anxiety suffered during their illness made him wonder: he started it in the first place.