

A Hero by R. K. Narayan

Introduction: *A Hero* is culled from a collection of short stories called *Malgudi Days*. This is a story about a boy who is afraid to sleep alone but is forced to do so by his father. But at the end of the day, he emerges as a hero. Apart from sleeping alone he also catches a thief.

Summary

R. K. Narayan is an Indian writer, novelist and short story writer. *Malgudi* is a fictional place created by R. K. Narayan. He has beautifully portrayed the child and his psychology. Swami is a timid boy afraid of dreams and ghosts. To save himself from fear he used to sleep with his grandmother during the night. His father wants him to grow up and face life's challenges courageously. Swami's father forces him to sleep in his office alone. When Swami sleeps in his father's office he has nightmares about the ghost and wakes up with a start. At the same time, Swami spots an intruder breaking into the office. Mistaking him for the ghost, Swami grabs the intruder's leg, bites his ankle and yells for help. The family members catch the thief and hand him over to the police. The police appreciate him and want him to join the police force but Swami wants to work as an Engine driver or Bus conductor. Appreciations shower on him. Swami shows his bravery and gets rid of fear. Humour and irony run throughout the story.

Detailed Summary

The story of 'A Hero' is very interesting and entertaining. It deals with the character of Swami, a boy who studies in the second standard. He is the portrayal of the growing up pangs of a boy who despises school, as he makes excuses and roams around *Malgudi* (fictional place) with his friends. Being a small boy Swami is timid and afraid of dreams and ghosts. To save himself from fear he used to sleep with his grandmother during the night. In his opinion, only aged and strong persons can do wonderful things. His father wants him to grow up and face life's challenges leaving his cosy zone under the umbrella of parents. Swami, to account for his bravery, sleeps all alone in his father's office, and wakes up by catching a thief all by his leg. This is an act of bravery makes him a courageous hero.

R. K. Narayan has beautifully portrayed the child and his psychology. This story opens with a lively dialogue between the son and the father. The conversation between the father and the son has been presented in a delightful manner. His father reads an article about the bravery shown by an 8-year old boy who came face to face with a tiger and his flight up a tree where he stayed for half a day on the tree and people came that way killed the tiger and rescued the boy. Swami questions his father, "How could a boy fight a tiger?" Father answers that human can do anything with courage. "Courage is everything, strength and age are not important". Swami's father feels that Swami should do something similar. His father then challenges, or rather forces, him to sleep in his office. Though Swami has agreed to sleep in his father's office it is clear that he is afraid. Swami's father thinks that Swami needs to grow up and sleep alone without the comfort of sleeping by his grandmother's side. Swami's father is not only hoping that he is able to teach Swami a lesson about growing up but he may also be hoping that Swami will develop the independence that he thinks Swami should have.

Swami has two close friends, Mani and Rajam. When Swami tells his friends of the ordeal, his friends warn him about a ghost living near the office. Swami asks his friends for advice on how to escape from his father's challenge. They tell him to go to bed before his father comes home from work. Swami acts as he has been advised by his friends. He goes to bed and covers himself with a blanket. He starts snoring under the blanket till he finds his blanket being pulled away by the father. Swami stirs and groans as if he is in sleep. Father rolls up his bed and takes Swami to the office to sleep there alone.

Swami's heart beats faster. He remembers all the stories of devils and ghosts he has heard in his life. Recalls the devil in the banyan tree at his street end; Munisami's father who spat out blood when ghost slapped his cheek; ticking of the clock, rustle of trees, snoring sounds, and some vague night insects humming frightens Swami. He hurriedly gets up and spreads his bed under the bench and crouches there. Dreamt of a tiger chasing him desperately trying to escape but his feet would not move Swami groans in despair. He opens his eyes but himself lonely, he sweats with fright. He feels something is moving towards the bench. In horror thought that his end has approached, Swami jumps at it hugs it with all his might. He starts biting the person. "Aiyo! Something has bitten me," comes a loud cry followed by a heavy tumbling and falling amidst furniture. People in the house rush to the office room. And all three of them fell on the burglar who lay

amidst the furniture with a bleeding ankle. They catch him and hand him over to the police.

Swami's actions elevate him to the status of hero. His classmates look at him with respect and his teacher pats his back. He is happy enough to take the adulation he receives from others. The police are grateful to him for helping them to catch the most notorious house breakers of the district. The police want him to join the police force but Swami wants to work as an engine driver or a bus conductor. Though Swami shows his bravery and gets rid of fear he prefers to sleep by his grandmother. The day when Swami's father returns home at night ironically comments, "No wonder he wants to be asleep before I should return home-clever boy!" Mother having lost her temper replies, "You let him sleep where he likes. You needn't risk his life again". Swami following the conversation from under the blanket feels tremendously relieved to hear that his father is giving him up.

Swami's family is an excellent representation of a typical Indian family packed with humour. The reader is entertained highly by the utilisation of reader reflection by the characters Swami, his father, mother and grandmother depicted by R.K Narayan. He entertains the readers by the use of characterised family, childish humour and elements of literary and language devices with the twist of irony. R.K Narayan puts a moral through the story that courage is everything, strength and age is not important and that with courage one can do anything courageously. Swami questions his father How a boy can fight a tiger. Father answers that human can do anything with courage. He further says that courage is everything, strength and age are not important.