

## Grandpa fights an Ostrich

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Before my grandfather joined the Indian Railways, he worked for a few years on the East African Railways, and it was during that period that he had his now famous encounter with the ostrich. My childhood was frequently enlivened by this oft told tale of his, and I give it here in his own words-or as well as I can remember them !

While engaged in the laying of a new railway line, I had a miraculous escape from an awful death. I lived in a small township, but my work lay some twelve miles away, and I had to go to the work-site and back on horseback.

One day, my horse had a slight accident, so I decided to do the journey on foot, being a great walker in these days. I also knew of a short-cut through the hills that would save me about six miles.

This short-cut went through an ostrich farm-or “camp”, as it was called. It was the breeding season. I was fairly familiar with the ways of ostriches, and knew that male birds were very aggressive in breeding season, ready to attack on the slightest provocation, but I also knew that my dog would scare away any bird that might try to attack me. Strange though it may seem even the biggest ostrich (and some of them grow to a height of nine feet) will run faster than a racehorse at the sight of even a small dog. So, I felt quite safe in the company of my dog, a mongrel who had adopted me some two months previously.

On arrival at the ”camp”, I climbed through the wire fencing and, keeping a good look-out, dodged across the open spaces between the thorn bushes. Now and then I caught a glimpse of the birds feeding some distance away.

I had gone about half a mile from the fencing when up started a hare. In an instant my dog gave chase. I tried calling him back even though I knew it was hopeless. Chasing hares was that dog's passion.

I don't know whether it was the dog's bark or my own shouting, but what I was most anxious to avoid immediately happened. The ostriches were startled and began darting to and fro. Suddenly, I saw a big male bird emerge from a thicket about a hundred yards away. He stood still and stared at me for a few moments. I stared back. Then, expanding his short wings and with his tail erect, he came bounding towards me.

As I had nothing, not even a stick, with which to defend myself, I turned and ran towards the fence. But it was an unequal race. What were my steps of two or three feet against the creature's great strides of sixteen to twenty feet ? There was only one hope : to get behind a large bush and try to elude the bird until help came. A dodging game was my only chance.

And so, I rushed for the nearest clump of thorn bushes and waited for my pursuer. The great bird wasted no time-he was immediately upon me.

Then the strangest encounter took place. I dodged this way and that, taking great care not to get directly in front of the ostrich's deadly kick. Ostriches kick forward, and with such terrific force that, if you were struck, their huge chisel-like nails would cause you much damage.

I was breathless, and really quite helpless, calling wildly for help as I circled the thorn bush. My strength was ebbing. How much longer could I keep going ? I was ready to drop from exhaustion.

As if aware of my condition, the infuriated bird suddenly doubled back on his course and charged straight at me. With a desperate effort I managed to step to one side. I don't know how, but I found myself holding on to one of the creature's wings, quite close to its body.

It was now the ostrich's turn to be frightened. He began to turn, or rather waltz, moving round and round so quickly that my feet were soon swinging out

from his body, almost horizontally ! All the while the ostrich kept opening and shutting his beak with loud snaps.

Imagine my situation as I clung desperately to the wing of the enraged bird. He was whirling me round and round as though he were a discus-thrower-and I the discus! My arms soon began to ache with the strain, and the swift and continuous circling was making me dizzy. But I knew that if I relaxed my hold, even for a second, a terrible fate awaited me.

Round and round we went in a great circle. It seemed as if that spiteful bird would never tire. And, I knew I could not hold on much longer. Suddenly the ostrich went into reverse ! This unexpected move made me lose my hold and sent me sprawling to the ground. I landed in a heap near the thorn bush and in an instant, before I even had time to realise what had happened, the big bird was upon me. I thought the end had come. Instinctively I raised my hands to protect my face. But the ostrich did not strike.

I moved my hands from my face and there stood the creature with one foot raised, ready to deliver a deadly kick ! I couldn't move. Was the bird going to play cat-and mouse with me, and prolong the agony ?

As I watched, frightened *and* fascinated, the ostrich turned his head sharply to the left. A second later he jumped back turned, and made off as fast as he could go. Dazed, I wondered what had happened to make him beat so unexpected a retreat.

I soon found out. To my great joy, I heard the bark of my truant dog, and the next moment he was jumping around me, licking my face and hands. Needless to say, I returned his caresses most affectionately ! And, I took good care to see that he did not leave my side until we were well clear of that ostrich "camp".

- Ruskin Bond

## Glossary

ostrich	/ˈɒstrɪtʃ/	a very large African bird with beautiful feathers, which runs very quickly but cannot fly
encounter	/ɪnˈkaʊntə(r)/	meet with, e.g. an enemy or a great difficulty
enliven	/ɪnˈlaɪvən/	bright and full of action
miraculous	/mɪˈrækjʊləs/	a wonderful unexpected event
mongrel	/ˈmɒŋɡrəl/	dog of mixed birth
startled	/ˈstɑːtlɪd/	surprised and frightened
dart	/dɑːt/	run quickly
thicket	/ˈθɪkɪt/	place where there are many trees and bushes
ebbing	/ɛbɪŋ/	become gradually lower and weaker
exhaustion	/ɪgˈzɔːstʃən/	to use up completely
infuriated	/ɪnˈfjʊəriətɪd/	to make (some one) extremely angry
waltz	/wɔːls/	dance made up of six steps, for two persons dancing together
swing	/swɪŋ/	to (cause to) move backwards and forwards or round and round from a fixed point above
discus	/ˈdɪskʊs/	flat round object used for throwing
spiteful	/ˈspaɪtfl/	showing spite
instinctively	/ɪnˈstɪŋktɪvli/	natural ability
wonder	/ˈwʌndə(r)/	surprise and admiration
retreat	/rɪˈtriːt/	act of going back e.g. from an enemy
truant	/ˈtruːənt/	purposely staying away without permission

## Exercises

### Vocabulary

- A. Refer to the dictionary and find out the meanings of the following. Use them in sentences. You can use the sentences given in the dictionary as models.

strange, instant, passion, emerge, unequal, strides, elude, dodging, terrific, desperate

- B. Use the following expressions in your own words.

needless to say .....

strange though it may seem .....

a glimpse of .....

in an instant .....

suddenly .....

- C. Pick out from this lesson some words that suggest.

1. movement
2. surprise
3. anger

- D. Choose the correct word and fill in the blanks.

1. I was ----- by the maddening behaviour of the clerk at the post office. (infuriated, delighted, admired)
2. She's made a ----- recovery. (strange, miraculous, shocking)
3. I had to go to the ----- . (work-site, work-sight, work-cite)
4. The dog was jumping around me, -----my face and hands. (licking, liking, leaking)
5. My horse had a ----- accident. (feeble, small, slight)

## Comprehension

### A. Answer each of the following questions in about 25 words.

1. Why did Grandpa decide to go through the ostrich camp ?
2. Why did he feel quite safe in such a dangerous situation ?
3. What was the only chance to keep him safe during the chase ?
4. Why was the huge bird frightened ?
5. Describe the unexpected withdrawal of the ostrich.

### B. Answer each of the following questions in about 50 words.

1. Why did Grandpa dare to cross the ostrich farm ?
2. Describe the nature and behaviour of ostriches as known to Grandpa.
3. There was an unequal race between Grandpa and the ostrich. Describe it.
4. What traits of character do you notice in Grandpa ?

## Grammar

### A. Study these sentences.

- Now and then I caught a glimpse of birds.
- He began to turn or rather waltz.
- All the while the ostrich kept opening and shutting his beak with loud snaps.
- I don't know whether it was the dog's bark or my own shouting but what I was most anxious to avoid immediately happened.

The underlined words are connectors. In the first sentence 'and' connects words, in the second sentence 'or' connects phrases in the third sentence 'and' connects clauses and in the fourth sentence 'or' connects phrases, 'but' and 'whether' connects clauses.

**B. Fill in the blanks with appropriate connectors given in brackets.**

1. He roamed the whole world over to find a real princess \_\_\_\_\_ there was always something wrong. (and, but)
2. He may offer either Mathematics \_\_\_\_\_ Physics. (nor, or)
3. The frock was splashed \_\_\_\_\_ so were Akoulya's eyes \_\_\_\_\_ nose. (nor, and, but, or )
4. Some patients had died \_\_\_\_\_ the doctor arrived. (before, after)
5. Their game plan was almost final \_\_\_\_\_ they were beginning to play well as a team. (but, and)

**Speaking Activity**

- A. Discuss with your friends in the class and find out main characteristics of Ostriches.

**Writing Activity**

- A. How will you save yourself if you are chased by a dog ? (50 words)
- B. Make an entry in your diary of a day when you missed your school bus. (150 words)

**Think it over**

- A. An ostrich is a large bird. There is a proverb on the habit of this bird. Why shouldn't we adopt 'ostrich policy'? Think.
- B. When a person encounters a dangerous situation, he prepares himself to face it. Experience helps him ? How?

## Things to do

We read about 'disaster management.' Collect information about the situation described below :

<b>Disaster</b>	<b>What should be done</b>
1. Fire breaks out in the school	
2. There is an earthquake, the students are in the classes.	
3. There is a bus accident.	
4. A building collapses in your neighbourhood.	

