

## First Flight

### (Class X – NCERT English)

#### Chapter 8: Mijbil the Otter – Gavin Maxwell

##### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The chapter "Mijbil the Otter" is an autobiographical account by Gavin Maxwell about his experience of keeping an otter as a pet. It describes how he acquired the otter, named it Mijbil (or Mij), and the adventures they shared together. The story is both humorous and touching, showcasing the unique bond between humans and animals.

Gavin Maxwell was living in Southern Iraq when he decided to keep an otter as a pet after his beloved dog died. Otters are relatively common in the marshy region of Iraq, and Maxwell had heard that they make interesting and affectionate pets. He requested his friend to bring him an otter from the Tigris marshes.

His friend agreed and, after some time, managed to capture a young otter. The otter arrived at Maxwell's residence in Basra, Iraq, in a sack. When Maxwell opened the sack, a small, mud-coated creature emerged. The otter was covered in mud from the marshes, and Maxwell had to give it several baths before its actual appearance became clear.

After cleaning, Maxwell discovered that his new pet was a previously unknown subspecies of smooth-coated otter. This subspecies was later named after Maxwell - *Lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*. The scientific naming was a great honor and showed the uniqueness of the creature Maxwell had acquired.

Maxwell named his otter Mijbil, or Mij for short. Initially, Mijbil was aloof and indifferent to Maxwell. The otter would not eat and seemed sulky and withdrawn. Maxwell was worried that Mijbil might not survive or adapt to living with humans.

However, on the fifth day, something changed. Maxwell woke up to find Mijbil in his bed, nuzzling against him and making affectionate sounds. From that moment on, Mijbil transformed from an aloof creature into a playful, loving companion. The otter had decided to accept Maxwell and bond with him.

Mijbil proved to be an extremely playful and intelligent animal. He loved playing with various objects - marbles, rubber balls, and even ping-pong balls. Watching Mijbil play became one of Maxwell's greatest pleasures. The otter would invent his own games, showing remarkable creativity and intelligence.

One of Mijbil's favorite games involved a rubber ball. The otter discovered that if he placed the ball on a sloping surface in the bathroom, it would roll down. Mijbil would then place the ball in different positions and watch it roll, adjusting his technique to get different results. He spent hours perfecting this game, showing problem-solving skills and persistence.

Mijbil also loved water, as all otters do. He would play in the bathtub for hours, learning to turn the tap on and off by himself. He would create splashes, dive underwater, and perform acrobatic tricks in the bath. His joy in water was infectious, and Maxwell would often watch him play, amazed by his antics.

The otter also showed affectionate behavior toward Maxwell. He would follow Maxwell around the house, make small chirping sounds to communicate, and sleep on Maxwell's bed. The bond between them grew stronger each day, and Mijbil became less like a pet and more like a companion.

After spending several weeks in Iraq, Maxwell had to return to England. The journey back with an otter presented numerous challenges. First, he had to get official permission and documentation to take Mijbil out of Iraq. The paperwork was complicated, but Maxwell managed to complete it.

The next challenge was transporting Mijbil by air. The airline had strict rules about transporting animals. Mijbil had to travel in a special box designed for transporting animals. Maxwell was not allowed to keep the otter with him in the passenger cabin; Mijbil had to travel in the cargo hold.

Maxwell had a special box made for Mijbil - a large box with ventilation holes and enough space for the otter to move around. He lined it with soft materials to make it comfortable. The night before the flight, he put Mijbil in the box to let him get accustomed to it.

However, when Maxwell went to check on Mijbil before the flight, he discovered that the otter had nearly torn the box apart from the inside. Mijbil had created a hole in the box and injured himself in the process. There was blood on the lining, and the otter looked distressed.

Maxwell was in a panic. The flight was in a few hours, and the box was damaged. He had no time to get a new box made. He did his best to repair the damage, adding extra lining and reinforcing the weak spots. He hoped the repairs would hold for the duration of the flight.

At the airport, there was another complication. The airline officials insisted that the box be placed in the cargo hold, but Maxwell was worried about Mijbil's safety and comfort. After much discussion and perhaps some bending of rules, Maxwell managed to get permission to keep Mijbil's box near him in the plane, though not in the passenger cabin.

During the flight, Maxwell was extremely anxious. He kept thinking about Mijbil alone in the box, possibly frightened and uncomfortable. He could hear some sounds from the box and worried that Mijbil might be in distress. The hours of the flight seemed endless.

When the plane finally landed in London, Maxwell rushed to check on Mijbil. To his immense relief, the otter was alive and relatively calm. Though the box showed signs of Mijbil's attempts to escape, it had held together. Mijbil had survived the journey, though he seemed tired and stressed.

After clearing customs and all formalities, Maxwell took Mijbil to his home in London. The otter needed time to adjust to his new environment. England was very different from the warm, marshy regions of Iraq. The climate was colder, and the surroundings were urban rather than natural.

But Mijbil adapted remarkably well. He continued to be playful and affectionate. Maxwell would take him for walks on a leash, which attracted a lot of attention from Londoners. People had never seen an otter being walked like a dog, and they would stop to ask questions and admire Mijbil.

These walks became famous locally. Mijbil enjoyed exploring the streets and parks of London. He would investigate everything with his curious nose, play in puddles, and sometimes create small chaos by running after pigeons or trying to climb on things.

The reactions of people who saw Mijbil were varied and often humorous. Some thought he was a strange type of dog, others guessed he might be a seal or a baby walrus. Very few people correctly identified him as an otter. Maxwell found these interactions amusing and would patiently explain what Mijbil was.

One funny incident occurred when a curious Londoner asked Maxwell what kind of animal Mijbil was. Maxwell, tired of explaining, jokingly said it was a special type of hippopotamus. The person believed him! This shows how unusual it was to see an otter in London.

Mijbil's presence in Maxwell's London flat brought joy and companionship but also chaos. The otter would sometimes knock things over, make messes, and generally behave like the wild creature he essentially was. But Maxwell loved him dearly and accepted these inconveniences as part of living with such an unusual pet.

The chapter ends with Maxwell reflecting on the unique relationship he shared with Mijbil. It was a bond based on mutual affection and trust. Mijbil gave Maxwell companionship, entertainment, and a connection to the natural world. In return, Maxwell provided Mijbil with care, protection, and love.

The story is significant because it shows how animals, even wild ones, can form deep emotional bonds with humans if treated with kindness and respect. It also highlights the intelligence and personality of otters, creatures that most people know very little about.

## Central Themes

### 1. Human-Animal Bond

The story beautifully illustrates the deep emotional connection that can form between humans and animals. Mijbil and Maxwell develop a relationship based on trust, affection, and mutual companionship.

### 2. Intelligence of Animals

Mijbil displays remarkable intelligence through his games, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability to new environments. The story challenges the notion that only humans are intelligent and creative.

### 3. Adventure and Companionship

Traveling with an otter from Iraq to London presents numerous adventures and challenges. The journey shows how companionship makes difficulties more bearable and life more interesting.

### 4. Adaptation and Resilience

Both Mijbil and Maxwell show adaptability - the otter adjusts to living with a human and to a completely different environment in London, while Maxwell adapts his life to accommodate an

unusual pet.

### 5. Joy in Simple Things

Mijbil finds immense joy in simple activities like playing with a ball or splashing in water. The story reminds us that happiness often comes from simple pleasures rather than complex possessions.

## Character Analysis

### 1. Gavin Maxwell

The narrator and Mijbil's owner. He is patient, observant, loving, and adventurous. He forms a deep bond with Mijbil and goes to great lengths to ensure the otter's comfort and safety. He represents someone who can appreciate and respect the natural behavior of wild animals while also providing them with care.

### 2. Mijbil (Mij)

The otter who is the central character of the story. Initially aloof, he becomes playful, affectionate, and intelligent. He shows curiosity about his environment, creativity in inventing games, and deep loyalty to Maxwell. He represents the untamed spirit of wild animals and their capacity for affection.

### 3. Maxwell's Friend

The person who captured Mijbil in Iraq and brought him to Maxwell. Though not a major character, he plays an important role in facilitating Maxwell's acquisition of the otter.

### 4. Londoners

The various people who encounter Mijbil during his walks in London. Their varied and often amusing reactions highlight how unusual it was to see an otter in an urban setting.

## Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Otter** – a semiaquatic carnivorous mammal
- **Marshes** – wetlands with soft, muddy ground
- **Aloof** – not friendly or forthcoming; distant
- **Indifferent** – having no particular interest or sympathy
- **Nuzzling** – rubbing gently with the nose
- **Sulky** – moody and bad-tempered
- **Hostile** – unfriendly and antagonistic
- **Fumbling** – using hands clumsily while doing something
- **Compulsive** – irresistibly driven to do something
- **Amicable** – friendly and pleasant
- **Fixation** – an obsessive attachment to someone or something
- **Ricocheted** – rebounded off a surface
- **Squatting** – crouching close to the ground

- **Thralldom** – state of being in someone's power
- **Provoking** – causing annoyance or anger

### Exam-Ready Key Points

- Gavin Maxwell decides to get an otter as a pet after his dog dies
- His friend brings him an otter from the marshes of Iraq
- The otter is named Mijbil (Mij) and belongs to a previously unknown subspecies
- Initially, Mijbil is aloof and indifferent to Maxwell
- On the fifth day, Mijbil bonds with Maxwell and becomes affectionate
- Mijbil is extremely playful and intelligent, inventing his own games
- His favorite activities include playing with balls and splashing in water
- Maxwell has to transport Mijbil from Iraq to London by air
- Mijbil damages his transport box, causing worry before the flight
- The journey is stressful but Mijbil survives and adapts to London
- Maxwell walks Mijbil on a leash in London, attracting much attention
- People mistake Mijbil for various animals - few recognize him as an otter
- The story shows the deep bond between humans and animals
- It demonstrates animal intelligence, adaptability, and capacity for affection