

Tender Heart High School ,Sec-33B ,Chandigarh

Class: IX. Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat

Subject: English Literature 25.11.24

SETTING OF THE POEM:

Skimbleshanks is described as 'The Railway Cat', who lives on the Night Mail, an overnight express train that travels on the British West Coast Main Line between London Euston and Glasgow Central (Scotland). There are references in the poem of a number of stations in cities in England and Scotland such as Crewe, Carlisle, Dumfries and Gallowgate that establish the setting as 20th century England. The poem begins at a station at 11.39 at night when the train is about to depart but cannot do so without Skimbleshanks. Finally, the train leaves the station at 11.42 when Skimbleshanks appears from the luggage van.

There are a number of words related to a train journey like Night Mail, Sleeping Car Express, the guards, the porters, the stationmaster, the driver, the first and the Third class, the Northern mail, cosy berth, the coupe with the name of individual Passengers, etc. Besides, the facilities provided in the train to make the journey pleasant and safe for the passengers, immediately connect the readers and they imagine that they themselves are a part of a train journey. Above all there is Skimbleshanks, the main character in the poem, who appears as a supervisor on the train. He works diligently keeping the watch and helping out passengers aboard the train. He takes great pride in his work and considers himself to be very important, claiming that the train cannot operate without him.

Skimbleshanks, the title character – is portrayed as a bright and energetic brown Tabby cat who lives and works on the mail trains. The poem begins with the journey in the train that is all I ready to leave the station.

The Poem in Detail

Lines 1-4

The Night Mail is about to leave at 11.39 and there is a lot of commotion with everyone whispering 'Where is Skimble?' and wondering if he has gone to play the frivolous game of hunting the thimble. The train can't start without Skimble.

Lines 5-8

Everyone – the guards, the porters and even the stationmaster's daughters are looking for Skimble in every nook and corner because unless Skimble is brisk and comes soon, the Night Mail would be delayed.

Lines 9-12

At the last minute, just before the scheduled departure time of the train at 11.42 Skimble appears out of the luggage van from the rear of the train. He was busy in the luggage van.

Lines 13-16

As soon as Skimbleshanks appears he flashes his glassy green eyes towards the signal and it turns green in response. The train heads north

Lines 17-20

It is very clear that Skimble is in charge of the train as he supervises the driver, the guards and the card-playing bagmen.

Lines 21-24

As he goes through the corridors of the train, he checks the faces of all the passengers, both in the first class as well as the third. It appears that he is patrolling the train and is aware of whatever is happening in every corner of the train.

Lines 25-28

He stares intently into the eyes of everyone giving them the feeling that he can read their thoughts. Everyone is very quiet when Skimble is on his rounds as riotous behavior is not approved by him.

Lines 29-32

Skimbleshanks is serious about his work so nobody dares to play pranks on him. Nothing could go wrong on the train when he is aboard.

Lines 33-36

It is an absolute pleasure to enter the train coupe bearing your name. The berth is neat with a freshly folded clean sheet. There is not a speck of dust around.

Lines 37-40

The coupe has all kinds of facilities-a handle to open the window to let the air in, a basin to wash your face and a handle to shut the window if you find the breeze too cold to make you sneeze.

Lines 41-44

When you are settling in, a guard comes to ask how you would like your morning tea-weak or strong. Skimble would be right behind the guard to ensure that he gets you your morning tea to your liking because if the guard forgets, Skimble could remind him and thus with Skimble around nothing can go wrong.

Lines 45-50

As you pull off the bedspread to sleep in your cosy berth, you can be assured there would be no mice under your bed, all thanks to the railway cat.

Lines 51-54

On his night watch Skimble is alert and fresh. This is because he has tea, possibly with a shot of whiskey. The only time he stops is to catch a stray flea on the train.

Lines 55-60

While all the passengers on board are fast asleep, Skimble inspects the station at Crewe, happily greets the stationmaster at Carlisle and enquires after policemen at Dumfries.

Lines 61-66

When the train finally stops at Gallowgate, Skimble helps the passengers to get off the train. He waves his long brown tail to bid 'adieu' to the passengers. His tail appears to say till we meet again and you are sure to meet the railway cat board the Midnight Mail on your next journey.