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## **The Conjuror's Revenge by Stephen Leacock**

Stephen Butler Leacock, (1869-1944) popularly known as Stephen Leacock was an internationally popular Canadian writer. He was an educator, lecturer, essayist, and author of more than thirty books and light-hearted sketches. The present humorous story is taken from his book, *Literary Lapses*. It is a story of a skilled and smart magician. The magician revenges a man (named 'The Quick Man' in the story) who devalues all his tricks in a public performance, saying 'he had it up to his sleeve'. The story ends with the magician's revenge on the Quick Man. "The Conjuror's revenge" is a short story written by Stephen Leacock. The story tells how a conjuror teaches a lesson to a person who tries to spoil his magic show.

One day a conjuror was demonstrating his magic tricks in a show. He produced a bowl of goldfish out of an empty cloth. The audience felt thrilled and applauded. But, the quick man in the front row commented that the magician had it up to his sleeve. Later, the magician showed other tricks such as the Hindustani rings trick, producing 17 eggs out of an empty hat, etc. But the quick man continuously whispered that the magician kept all those things secretly under his dress. His comments spoiled the show and the audience lost interest in the show.

The magician decided to take revenge on the quick man for spoiling his show. He requested the quick man to give his gold watch, kerchief, collar, and spectacles. With the quick man's permission, he smashed all these things in the name of the latest Japanese tricks. The quick man was puzzled at this. Finally, the conjuror announced that the show was over. The audience felt thrilled and left the show feeling that the conjuror showed some interesting tricks. The quick man could not speak anything. Thus, the conjuror took revenge on the quick man, for spoiling his show with his comments.

It is a humorous story of a conjurer (magician) who revenges a man from the audience who makes fun of his tricks. The conjurer performs several tricks for the audience. Each time when he performs a trick the Quick Man in the audience says that

the trick has been done with the help of items hidden up the conjurer's sleeve. When the conjurer produces a bowl of fish from a piece of empty cloth – the Quick Man says that it must have been up his sleeve. For all the other tricks that the conjurer performs which includes rings, eggs, cards, bread, live guinea pig and a rocking chair, the Quick Man says that these must have kept all the items up in his sleeve. Such constant comments by the Quick Man upset the conjurer but he does not show it and continues to perform his tricks. The Quick Man's comments make the audience feel that the tricks are nothing special and are the result of the conjurer having things hidden up his sleeve. This upsets the conjurer. In spite of his uneasiness, he goes on performing one trick after the other. Still when the Quick Man continues to comment and devalue the tricks, the conjurer decides to take revenge. He appears to perform a trick using items borrowed from Quick Man. First of all, he takes the Quick Man's watch and breaks it into pieces. He pays no attention when Quick Man tells the audience that it is resting on the conjurer's sleeve. The conjurer then takes the Quick Man's handkerchief and puts holes in it. The Quick Man thinks that this is also a trick that he does not understand. The conjurer then takes the Quick Man's hat and dances on it. He then moves to burn the Quick Man's collar and shatters his spectacles. The Quick Man thinks that this is just a trick. Later, the Quick Man and the audience realize that what the conjurer did with the Quick Man's things are actually destroyed and are no tricks. Thus, the conjurer takes his revenge and teaches him a lesson that he will never forget. The moral of the story is that, when we cannot appreciate a person, we should learn to keep it to ourselves. If we unnecessarily irritate or cause any harm to another person, we will have to face the consequences.

### **Characters-**

**The character of the Quick Man** is the heart of the story. From the beginning of the conjurer's show, the Quick Man keeps disturbing the show for the conjurer by saying that he has kept the things hidden up his sleeve. This upsets the conjurer and spoils the show for the audience. In this respect, the Quick Man may be considered to be the villain of the story. He is also the cause of the final trick of the conjurer which leads to much amusement for the audience. If the Quick Man is not there, the story

will end very uneventfully and it will not be a good readable story. In other words, it is the character of The Quick Man that adds magical beauty to the story. Moreover, the story becomes humorous because of the Quick Man's spoiling nature. Therefore, though the Quick Man is villainous by nature, it gives significant importance to the character of the conjurer.

**The conjurer** is a skilled magician. He can do difficult tricks like taking out eggs from a hat. When he wants to teach the Quick Man a lesson he quickly thinks and calls it a 'Japanese trick' invented by the natives of Tipperary. This shows that he has a good imagination. The conjurer tolerates the Quick Man for a long while before taking revenge. This shows that the conjurer has a lot of patience. From the language used by the conjurer, one can say that he is also a well-educated person. The humorous part of his character is the seriousness. He never makes the Quick Man realize what he is going to do. The way he ends the show also shows how he uses serious words to create peals of laughter among the audience.

### **Questions-Answers-**

#### **What is the mood of the conjurer as he introduces his trick?**

The conjurer is confident and enthusiastic to show his tricks to entertain the audience.

#### **What is the mood of the audience?**

The audience was thrilled, amazed, and curious to see the conjurer performing his trick.

#### **Why does he use the word 'Presto'?**

'Presto' is the phrase of announcement for the successful completion of a trick. He used 'Presto' to show the audience that he performed the trick so easily that it seems to be magic.

#### **At whose expense was the Conjurer entertaining the audience?**

The Conjurer was entertaining at the expense of the Quick Man.

#### **Why did he decide to play such tricks?**

The Quick Man spoiled all of conjurer's tricks by convincing the audience that those were no tricks, however, 'He-had-it-up-his-sleeve'. The reputation of the conjurer was

sinking and he was losing the excitement of his audience, hence he decided to take revenge by playing such tricks.

**What was the reaction of the audience?**

The audience left convinced that all the tricks were not done up the conjurer's sleeve.

**What were the first two tracks performed by the conjurer? Was he successful at them? Why/Why not?**

The first trick he performed was taking out a bowl of goldfish from an empty cloth. The second trick was with Hindustani rings, which were apparently separate, however, joined at a blow of the conjurer. He did perform both the tricks successfully and the audience was in a great surprise, however, their astonishment was overpowered and convinced by the comments of the Quick Man who ridiculed his skills.

**'The egg trick was ruined.' How was it ruined?**

The egg trick was ruined like all other tricks by the comments of the Quick Man, when he said, 'He-has-a-hen-up-his-sleeve' and the audience was convinced with him.

**How did the audience react to the Quick Man?**

The audience was convinced by the comments of the Quick Man and was doubtful about the tricks being performed by the conjurer.

**Why was the Quick Man puzzled by the conjurer's treatment of his possessions?**

The conjurer took the Quick Man's gold watch threw it in the mortar and smashed it with the hammer, the Quick Man whispered that the conjurer had slipped it up to his sleeve. Then the conjurer punched holes in his handkerchief, danced on his silk hat, burnt his celluloid collar, and smashed his spectacles. By this time the Quick Man was quite puzzled and he knew that he was beaten up by the conjurer and he could not keep passing the same comment that, 'He-had-it-up-his-sleeve'

**How does the conjurer keep up the suspense till the end of the show?**

The conjurer keeps up the suspense till the end of the show by not letting either Quick Man or the audience realize that the trick he was performing at the end of the show was not a trick but was the actual destruction of the possessions of the Quick Man.

**How did the conjurer end his performance?**

The conjurer stood upright and gave a bold announcement that with the gentleman's permission, he had broken his watch, made holes in his handkerchief, danced on his

silk hat, burnt his celluloid collar, and smashed his spectacle. If he further permits, he would like to paint green stripes on his overcoat or tie a knot to his suspenders, however, there was no sign of agreement from the Quick Man and hence the conjurer ended his performance with a big bang. He left the audience convinced that all his tricks were not done up his sleeve. This end was also the conjurer's revenge on the Quick Man who had spoilt his tricks.

**By referring to the story, narrate how the conjurer carries on his performance despite the Quick Man's objections?**

The conjurer performed several tricks for the audience. However, each time he performed a trick the Quick Man in the audience would say that the trick was done with the help of items hidden up the conjurer's sleeve. When the conjurer produced a fish bowl from a piece of empty cloth – the Quick Man said that this must have been up to his sleeve. For all the other tricks that the conjurer performed – which includes rings, eggs, cards, bread, a live guinea pig, and a rocking chair – the Quick Man said that the must-have had it up to his sleeve. These constant comments by the Quick Man upset the conjurer but he did not show it and went on with his trick. However, the Quick Man's comments made the audience feel that the tricks were nothing special and were a result of the conjurer having things hidden up his sleeve. This upset the conjurer. However, in spite of his discomfort, he went on performing one trick after the other till he could take it no more. He decided to take revenge. Appearing to perform a trick using items borrowed from Quick Man – he took the Quick Mans watch and pound it to pieces. He paid no heed when Quick Man told the audience that the watch had been slipped into the conjurer's sleeve. The conjurer then took the Quick Man's handkerchief and punched holes in it. The Quick Man thought that this also was a trick that he did not understand. The conjurer then took the Quick Man's hat and trampled on it. He then proceeds to burn the Quick Man's collar end and smashed his spectacles. The Quick Man, all the while thought that this was just a trick. However, later the Quick Man and the entire audience towards the end realized that what the conjurer did with the Quick Man's things were actually destroyed and were no tricks. Thus, the conjurer took his revenge.

**Give the character sketch of the conjurer. What do you find humorous about this character? How does the conjurer keep up the suspense till the end of the show?**

The conjurer was a skilled magician. He was so talented that they could produce even a fishbowl from a piece of empty cloth. He could do difficult tricks like extracting eggs from a hat. The conjurer was also a person who could think on his feet. When he wanted to teach the Quick Man a lesson, he quickly thought of what he would do and even thought of a background introduction to the trick. He called it a Japanese trick invented by the natives of Tipperary. This shows that he had a good imagination. The conjurer tolerated the Quick Man for a long while before taking revenge. This shows that the conjurer had a lot of patience. From the language used by the conjurer, one can say that he was well educated. The humorous part of his character is the seriousness with which he asked for various items of clothing and accessories from Quick Man. At no point in time did he even let Quick Man realize that he was taking revenge for Quick Man spoiling his show. The way he ends the show also shows how he uses serious words to create peals of laughter among the audience. The conjurer keeps up the suspense till the end of the show by not letting either Quick Man or the audience realize that the “trick” that he was performing at the end of the show was not a trick but was the real destruction of the possessions of Quick Man.

**What role does Quick Man play in the story? If the Quick Man were not there, how would the story end?**

Quick Man is the heart of the story. From the beginning of the conjurer’s show, Quick Man keeps spoiling the show for the conjurer by saying that he had things hidden up his sleeve. This upset the conjurer and spoiled the show for the audience. Therefore, the Quick Man may be considered to be the villain of the story. The Quick Man also is the cause of the final trick of the conjurer which leads to much amusement for the audience. If the Quick Man were not there, the story would have ended very uneventfully without the conjurer having to do a “trick” in which there was no magic. The story would have ended in the audience dispersing after having witnessed the conjurer’s tricks. There would have been no humour in the story.

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