

Sumitra's story

The day before Aunt Leela got married, Mr Patel took Sumitra to Kampala to buy fireworks. Bap always bought the fireworks. He had become something of an expert in staging a display. He had names of all the different brands and would spend hours poring over catalogues and working out dramatic colour effects.

"It is important," he told his daughter as the bus jolted on, "to provide the correct balance. Would you, for example, send up a Golden Glory after a Golden Peacock?"

"No, Bap," Sumitra answered dutifully, staring out of the dusty windows at the dry countryside.

"No!" echoed her father, pleased. "You need a Purple Plunderer, an Emerald Emperor, a Blue Bomber to give the right variety and atmosphere." He murmured the names of the fireworks again, savouring the sounds and the images they evoked. They conjured up visions of the Gujarat province where he had been born: temples, peacocks, flowers all touched with the hidden passion and mystery of India.

"And not only colour, but pacing is important," he continued, underlining his message with an outstretched finger. "First a quick rocket, to lift the eyes, then an action firework exploding in the middle distance, then some fire crackers, for excitement!" Sumitra had heard it all before. She leant back drowsily on the hard seat and let Bap ramble on.

There were five coins in her cotton purse and they rattled faintly every time the bus jolted over the bumpy road. She loved the long journey across the sun-baked land. They passed through villages where Indian women crouched outside the houses, making *chapattis* in the sun. They went by African townships where naked children shouted and played outside the huts. Occasionally, high on the hills, they caught a glimpse of the white homes of the British. Here and there waterfalls cascaded down the slopes, running into lakes in which African boys were bathing while women washed clothes.

Bap reread his well-thumbed brochure. "Scarlet Pimpernel, Amber Adventurer, Silver Streak," he intoned. He wanted the celebrations for his sister Leela to be a success.



Answer in sentences.

- 1 Why was Mr Patel buying fireworks?
- 2 What does "poring over catalogues" mean?
- 3 What did Sumitra call her father?
- 4 Which word in the passage means "sleepily"?
- 5 Which of the following items was not a firework in Mr Patel's catalogue?
Coral Cascade Golden Glory Purple Plunderer
- 6 What does "a well-thumbed brochure" mean?
- 7 What relation was Mr Patel to Leela?
- 8 What did Mr Patel mean when he said, "Pacing is important"?
- 9 What do you find out about the place where this passage is set? Describe the place in your own words.
- 10 Mr Patel was "something of an expert" at arranging firework displays. What does this mean?