



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E11

**Adapted and modified by
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1. The Portrait of a Lady

By Khushwant Singh

My grandmother, like everybody's grandmother, was an old woman. She had been old and wrinkled for the twenty years that I had known her. People said that she had once been young and pretty and had even had a husband, but that was hard to believe. My grandfather's portrait hung above the mantelpiece in the drawing room. He wore a big turban and loose-fitting clothes. His long, white beard covered the best part of his chest and he looked at least a hundred years old. He did not look like the sort of person who would have a wife or children. He looked as if he could only have lots and lots of grandchildren. As for my grandmother being young and pretty, the thought was almost revolting. She often told us about the games she used to play as a child. That seemed quite absurd and undignified on her part and we treated it like the fables of the Prophets she used to tell us.

She had always been short and fat and slightly bent. Her face was a criss-cross of wrinkles running from everywhere to everywhere. No, we were certain she had always been as we had known her. Old, so terribly old that she could not have grown older, and had stayed at the same age for twenty years. She could never have been pretty, but she was always beautiful. She hobbled about the house in spotless white with one hand resting on her waist to balance her stoop and the other telling the beads of her rosary. Her silver locks were scattered untidily over her pale, puckered face, and her lips constantly moved in inaudible prayer. Yes, she was beautiful. She was like the winter landscape in the mountains, an expanse of pure white serenity breathing peace and contentment.

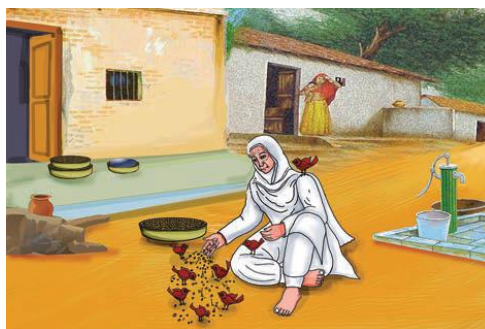


My grandmother and I were good friends. My parents left me with her when they went to live in the city and we were constantly together. She used to wake me up in the morning and get me ready for school. She said her morning

prayer in a monotonous sing-song while she bathed and dressed me in the hope that I would listen and get to know it by heart; I listened because I loved her voice but never bothered to learn it. Then she would fetch my wooden slate which she had already washed and plastered with yellow chalk, a tiny earthen ink-pot and a red pen, tie them all in a bundle and hand it to me. After a breakfast of a thick, stale chapatti with a little butter and sugar spread on it, we went to school. She carried several stale chapattis with her for the village dogs.

My grandmother always went to school with me because the school was attached to the temple. The priest taught us the alphabet and the Morning Prayer. While the children sat in rows on either side of the verandah singing the alphabet or the prayer in a chorus, my grandmother sat inside reading the scriptures. When we had both finished, we would walk back together. This time the village dogs would meet us at the temple door. They followed us to our home growling and fighting with each other for the chapatti we threw to them.

When my parents were comfortably settled in the city, they sent for us. That was a turning point in our friendship. Although we shared the same room, my grandmother no longer came to school with me. I used to go to an English school on a motor bus. There were no dogs in the streets and she took to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of our city house.



As the years rolled by, we saw less of each other. For some time she continued to wake me up and get me ready for school. When I came back she would ask me what the teacher had taught me. I would tell her English words and little things about Western science and learning, the law of gravity, Archimedes' Principle, the world being round etc. This made her unhappy. She could not help me with my lessons. She did not believe in the things they taught at the English school and was distressed that there was no teaching about God and the scriptures. One day, I announced that we were being given music lessons.

She said nothing but her silence meant disapproval. She rarely talked to me after that.

When I went up to University, I was given a room of my own. The common link of friendship was snapped. My grandmother accepted her seclusion with resignation. She rarely left her spinning wheel to talk to anyone. From sunrise to sunset she sat by her wheel spinning and reciting prayers. Only in the afternoon, she relaxed for a while to feed the sparrows. While she came and perched on her legs, others on her shoulders. Some even sat on her head. She smiled but never shooed them away. It used to be the happiest half-hour of the day for her.

When I decided to go abroad for further studies, I was sure my grandmother would be upset. I would be away for five years, and at her age, one could never tell. But my grandmother could. She was not even sentimental. She came to leave me at the railway station but did not talk or show any emotion. Her lips moved in prayer, her mind was lost in prayer. Her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary. Silently she kissed my forehead, and when I left I cherished the moist imprint as perhaps the last sign of physical contact between us.

But that was not so. After five years I came back home and was met by her at the station. She did not look a day older. She still had no time for words, and while she clasped me in her arms I could hear her reciting her prayers. Even on the first day of my arrival, her happiest moments were with her sparrows whom she fed longer and with frivolous rebukes.

In the evening a change came over her. She did not pray. She collected the women of the neighbourhood, got an old drum and started to sing. For several hours she thumped the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum and sang of the home-coming of warriors. We had to persuade her to stop to avoid overstraining. That was the first time since I had known her that she did not pray.

The next morning she was taken ill. It was a mild fever and the doctor told us that it would go. But my grandmother thought differently. She told us that her end was near. She said that, since only a few hours before the close of the last chapter of her life she had omitted to pray, she was not going to waste any more time talking to us.

We protested. But she ignored our protests. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling her beads. Even before we could suspect, her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers. A peaceful pallor spread on her face and we knew that she was dead.

We lifted her off the bed and, as is customary, laid her on the ground and covered her with a red shroud. After a few hours of mourning we left her alone to make arrangements for her funeral. In the evening we went to her room with a crude stretcher to take her to be cremated. The sun was setting and had lit her room and verandah with a blaze of golden light. We stopped half-way in the courtyard. All over the verandah and in her room right up to where she lay dead and stiff wrapped in the red shroud, thousands of sparrows sat scattered on the floor. There was no chirruping. We felt sorry for the birds and my mother fetched some bread for them. She broke it into little crumbs, the way my grandmother used to, and threw it to them. The sparrows took no notice of the bread. When we carried my grandmother's corpse off, they flew away quietly. Next morning the sweeper swept the bread crumbs into the dustbin.

2. May the Best Jokester Win?

When Perla found out she would be spending a few days at her grandparents' house, she squealed with excitement. Her grandpa was a real Jokester. For several years, they had been in an intense prank war. As soon as she arrived, Perla began plotting her first prank. The next morning, Grandpa sat down to eat his breakfast of Raisin Bran and orange juice as usual. When he went to take a bite, however, he noticed that his regular spoon had been replaced by a giant ladle! It was even worse, all the raisins had disappeared from his cereal. "Who took my raisins?!" Grandpa bellowed. He looked around and saw Perla hiding a few feet away. Pretending to be upset, he began to chase her around the house. After he caught her, he held her upside down over the table as she giggled. He pried the raisins from her fingers one by one until her palms were empty and the bowl was full. Then he sat down and ate his cereal using the big ladle.

Later that night, Perla found her favourite doll wrapped in toilet paper. It was sitting on her bed next to a sign that read, "I want my Mummy." The next morning, Grandpa found plastic ants in his shampoo when he went to wash his hair. That same day, after dinner, Perla went to pour a glass of milk and jumped back in shock when it came out yellow! Grandpa stood smiling a few feet away. He was holding a box of food colouring in his hand.

Several hours later, Perla woke up in the middle of the night to a loud squeal. She looked around, startled by the noise. Her heart was pounding hard. After a moment, though, she realized what had happened. Grandpa had placed a squeaky dog toy under her pillow. Perla spent the next day trying to think of the perfect final prank. She would be leaving the next morning and needed something good. Finally, she had an idea.

She went to the closet where her old toys were kept and began digging. She pulled out several dolls and dress-up clothes before she found what she was looking for. It was a toy keyboard that sounded out the letters of the alphabet when you pressed on them. Smiling, she put it under Grandpa's pillow. The next morning at breakfast, she asked Grandpa how he had slept. She smiled innocently.

Grandpa scowled, pretending to pout. He continued to eat his Raisin Bran, full of raisins this time, in silence. Anxious to hear if her prank had worked, Perla turned to her grandmother. "Grandma, how did he sleep?" "Oh, you

wouldn't believe it!" Grandma hollered from the other side of the room.
"He woke up at 2:00 am singing the ABCs!"

3. Nature



I sometimes feel that nature is the artist and the art itself. Or we can say nature is the creator and the creation itself.

Nature is an important and integral part of us. We are extremely lucky that we are blessed with nature, however, nowadays some of us fail to recognize it.

Nature is rich in beauty as well as diversity. The countless objects of nature are things of beauty. They provide joy to the onlookers. I sometimes go to the mountains and feast my eyes on the views.

Nature has been an inspiration for numerous poets, writers, artists and more of yesteryears. This remarkable creation inspired them to write poems and stories in the glory of it. They truly valued nature which reflects in their works even today. Essentially, nature is everything we are surrounded by like the water we drink, the air we breathe, the sun we soak in, the birds we hear chirping, the moon we gaze at and more. Above all, it is rich and colourful and consists of both living and non-living things. Therefore, people of the modern age should also learn something from people of yesteryear and start valuing nature before it gets too late.

Nature has been in existence long before humans and ever since it has taken care of mankind and nourished it forever. In other words, it offers us a protective layer which guards us against all kinds of damage and harm. Survival of mankind without nature is impossible and humans need to understand that.

If nature has the ability to protect us, it is also powerful enough to destroy the entire mankind. Every form of nature, for instance, plants, animals, rivers, mountains, moon, and more holds equal significance for us. The absence of one element is enough to cause a catastrophe in the functioning of human life.

We fulfil our healthy lifestyle by eating and drinking healthy, which nature gives us. Similarly, it provides us with water and food that enables us to do so. Rainfall and sunshine, the two most important elements to survive are derived from nature itself.

Further, the air we breathe and the wood we use for various purposes are a gift of nature only. But, with technological advancements, people are not paying attention to nature. The need to conserve and balance natural assets is rising day by day which requires immediate attention.

4. Grammar Page

Adjective Endings

Adjectives have many different endings.

Some adjectives end in **-ful**. These adjectives describe noun or pronouns that are **full of something** or **have a lot of something**.

a beautiful face	a painful injury	a careful student
a cheerful baby	a joyful smile	a helpful teacher
a powerful machine	a wonderful time	playful children
a skillful player	a useful book	colorful clothes

Some adjectives end in **-ous**.

a famous writer	a courageous soldier
a mountainous area	an adventurous explorer
a dangerous job	a poisonous snake
a humorous film	a generous gift
mischievous children	marvelous results

Some adjectives end in **-y**.

a messy room	a noisy car	dirty hands
a sleepy dog	a cloudy sky	thirsty children
a muddy path	a sunny day	stormy weather
an easy test	a lazy worker	juicy fruit

Some adjectives end in **-less**. These adjectives describe a person or thing that does not have something.

a cloudless sky	a meaningless word
a sleeveless dress	a fearless fighter
a careless driver	homeless people
a joyless song	seedless grapes
a useless tool	harmless animals