



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E9

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1. Memories of Dad

The suspense was over when my high school results finally came out. But I was upset. I hadn't done as well as I had expected.

My father tried to console me. "Why are you worried? You have done very well, my dear."

"No, I haven't, Papa," I protested, controlling my tears, and wondering if I had disappointed him.

"It doesn't really matter," he assured me. "Do you know what I got when I finished high school?"

I looked into Papa's face and waited for the answer to his own question.

"You know," he told me, "I've never told you this. I got just a third division. But, look at me, I've done quite well."

Papa got a third division! I was almost in shock. Then I thought to myself, "I've done a lot better than that. Why am I so upset?" I certainly felt better.

"Everything is under control!" said Papa, smiling.

That was his favourite phrase. Posted in Kolkata, my father was then a senior official in the Indian Railway Service, and an expert in goods traffic operations. He was soon to become a director with the Railway Board. By the time he retired in 1981, he was general manager of the Central Railways. By the time Papa passed away in November 2000, his name had found a place in several hearts as well. He was open, easy-going, and full of life. We were extremely close. However, I had so much more to learn about him from many things I came to know after his death.

In September 2000, he was in hospital for treatment of cancer and given just two months to live. When he found out, his reaction was an extremely rational one. He asked me to fetch files from his cupboard, so that he could explain the details of my mother's pension. He also dictated his will from his hospital bed. "Everything is under control!"

After Papa's death, Satish, our old family assistant, was heartbroken. We tried to cheer him up.

"Your Papa had scolded me only once in all these years!" he cried. Satish pointed to the watch on his left wrist. "I had been coming late for work and everyone in the family was complaining about it," said Satish. "Then, one

day, your Papa gave me this watch and told me, now that you have a watch, you can't be late'." That was the scolding Satish received.

On the fourth day after Papa's death, my sister and I had to perform a ceremony. Since several relatives were expected, we decided to order lunch from a caterer in our locality, reputed for his home-cooked food. But, when we went to pay the owner, we got a surprise. He refused to accept any money! "When I wanted to start my catering business, it was your father who lent me money," he told us. It seems Papa never asked for it back. Now, after four or five years, the caterer wanted to repay that debt. Of course, we made him accept the full payment for the fine food and service. 'It was Papa's gift and it ought to remain so,' I told him.

Some days later, there was yet another piece of information as we were preparing for the main ceremony. Vikram, my brother drove me to the local market. On recognizing our car, the parking assistant, in his twenties, came running towards us and asked why he had not seen its owner for long. We had to break the news to him and to our utter surprise, he started crying. We were really surprised by this reaction from a stranger. But the man told us that Papa used to pay his daughter's school fees and buy her books. It seems it was on my father's advice that he'd even started sending the child to school.

More than three years after Papa's death, as we were looking into Papa's personal things, we came across an old file with Papa's certificates and I found among them, his high school diploma from 1937, the one he'd told me about 30 years earlier, about the third division that had made no difference in his life or career. It made me realise that mere marks and first class are not the only ways to succeed. But there was one more fact. Papa had actually got a first division, a rare achievement in his day. Today, years after his passing, when I think of Papa, I see a man who was able to sympathise with others so easily and touch their lives in a special way.

2. Bed Number-29

By Tariq Rahman

Brakes shrieked, something struck, someone cried and there was darkness spreading all around me. Pain leapt in my whole body and a gentle voice said, "Please don't move, sir. It might be dangerous." I tried to understand what had happened — I recalled the predawn glow; trees and flowers, the dew-bathed grass, — all waiting for the sunrise — I had imprisoned this all on the canvas, my masterpiece, the joy of life. So I named it 'Life' — then I remembered the busy street scene, the roar of traffic, the car — and the crash. My hand touched the bandages on my eyes. "No God," I moaned, "not this."

My life was a nightmare of sounds, feelings, smells, tastes and dreadful depression. It was a cage of darkness which held me prisoner — darkness and me, that's all. Time stood still, the sun rose no more for me; the bloom of flowers, the streams and the clear sky were just memory. Life seemed to be dying with me. Hour after hour, I would lie on the bed as if staring at the ceiling. "How do you do?" He was my ward-mate, Naeem, who was known as Number-Twenty-Nine, that being the number of his bed. A soft-spoken, cheerful man who comforted me with many a story, diverting my mind from the shocking realities of life. Except he limped and was on Bed No. 29, I hardly knew anything about him. He wonderfully described the birds hopping among the smiling brightness of the morning that I imagined I could see the scene myself. "Go on," I would urge, whenever his voice stopped. Thus he would minutely describe the scene outside his windows the whole day. This gave hope to me.

"Listen," he said one morning. "Start painting, which, as you said, was your hobby before." I lashed out at him. I shouted, getting hysterical, that he had no right to joke about my art. He limped away to his bed.

Days passed. Then one day I asked him if he had been moved by anything. "Yes," he began slowly, "well, many things." He suddenly brightened. "Ah yes! Once I walked by a farmhouse, on a golden October evening and I saw a haystack. It wasn't straw, it was pure gold. All around the world was ablaze with colour — red leaves, white ducks, basking in the last golden rays of the sun setting on the blood-red west. There I stood and gasped, unable to move" — "What?" I cried, "Didn't you paint it?" There was an uneasy silence which embarrassed me for having asked such a question, after all, I thought, everyone is not an artist. "I mean, I would have painted it," I said hurriedly.

“Why don’t you paint? It is in my mind, and I know you can paint. Do, please, say yes.” He pleaded, and before I knew what I did, I said, “Yes”.

My life took a new turn. He had provided everything needed for painting, and when the hospital attendants cried out in surprise as they entered the room, he made them quiet. Then the miracle started, with an eager but almost trembling finger, I started drawing a scene I had once admired. I laboured on and on sketching the scene from the canvas of my memory on the paper, too absorbed to think of my blindness. I finished the scene and in a shaky voice called for Naeem. He bounded to my bed, and for a while, I heard nothing. My heart sank. “I must have bungled it,” I thought. Then his voice broke the silence. “It’s marvellous. It’s unbelievable, you’re a genius, a genius man, who would say you are blind,” I felt relaxed and I said, “Really! I could never believe it, had it not happened to me.”

Every morning, after breakfast, Naeem would come to my bed, in a dreamy voice he would describe a scene, which I would work from dawn to dusk, as if the day would never end. One canvas finished and another started. It was wonderful. Naeem would make me draw all the magic dreamland scenery. Losing myself in his world of colours, forgetting my blindness, I created on paper all he said. He always praised me and I became more and more convinced of my genius. He would himself mix the colours, and suggest a faint shade here, a dark line there.

It was then that the doctors operated on me again. Naeem had taken over the work of reading to me, or describing a scene from my window, as I was unable to move from the bed. As days passed, my anxiety increased — partly because I wanted to see the world of colours with my own eyes, but mostly because I had spent my last rupee on this very operation, and in case of failure, I would have to lead the wretched life of darkness and misery.

I went to the doctor’s room with the nurse, when Naeem came and said, “It’s a beautiful day, I hope you see it soon.” I tried to answer but there was a lump in my throat.

I smelt the smell of the operation theatre, I felt gloved hands touching me gently. My bandage was being unwound. The clock ticked and a voice said, “Open your eyes” and I opened my eyes. There was the same unending darkness.

I was back in my room, helped by the nurse. So there was my life — full of darkness. I buried my head in the pillow. Naeem was on my side - consoling me. “I will be going soon, Naeem,” I said sadly one day. “I have no money

now, this operation cost me all I had.” He was shocked. “Oh No! I have some money, you can have it,” he said softly. I replied firmly, “Thanks, Naeem. I have never begged nor will I, thanks all the same.” He tried to persuade me, but I didn’t listen.

One afternoon, Naeem came running to my bed, “Listen, old fellow, there is a friend of mine who is an art lover. He wants to buy your paintings.” “How can that be, they must be beautiful!” I thought. “He is rich, we can strike a bargain.” I consented and Naeem danced around the room with joy. The next day he handed me some crisp bank notes. My happiness knew no bounds. Hope soared once again. Once again I was living for something.

I took to painting again. Every morning Naeem would sit by my side, and begin his dreamy tale. I drew on and on. The unknown buyer appeared off and on and bought my paintings. Naeem described scenes of the four seasons with such feelings, especially the sunset ones — pink, purple, white, violet and all shades of gold were splashed before my ‘mind’s eye’.

All my paintings had been bought, and I found myself ready for the third operation. After the operation, when I regained consciousness, I was told not to move or speak with anyone. When my bandage was to be opened I asked for Naeem, but the nurse said he was ill, and could not come. The doctor removed the bandage and when I opened my eyes, a flash of light tore through my eyes — I could see.

They wheeled me back to my room. I cried, “Naeem, Naeem. Sister, where is Naeem?” The nurse’s face turned pale as she handed me Naeem’s letter — “The goddess of art smiled at me, and then as quickly as she had come she vanished. Mad with grief, I rushed to the cupboard, and there lay all my paintings. Mere masses of haphazard lines, without any colour. The nurse spoke, “He was a very great man. With all his money he bought these paintings, and moved out of the hospital when he couldn’t afford it. He couldn’t have his third operation.”

“What,” I cried, “operation? Which operation?”

“Why? His eyes, of course, he was blind,” she said. I was unable to move for some time. Tears blinded my eyes. Under his pillow were four paintings he had painted of the four seasons before he was blind. He described those paintings to me — and tried to paint them on my canvas. Tears blinded my eyes as I held his paintings in my hand.

3. Grammar Page

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are used to ask questions. The words **who**, **whose**, **what**, **which** and **whom** are interrogative pronouns.

- Who** used all my paper?
- Who** is Mom talking to?
- Who** are those people?
- Whose** pen is this?
- Whose** are these shoes?
- What** is your brother's name?
- What** does Tom want?
- What** is the date today?
- What** do you want to be when you grow up?
- Which** of these desks is yours?
- Which** do you prefer?
- Which** of your sisters is the tallest?
- Whom** did the President criticize?

Notes

- In writing and formal speaking, you can also use **whom** as the object of verbs and prepositions. For example:
 - Whom** did the president criticize?
 - Whom** is the principal talking to?
 - or
 - To **whom** is the principal talking?but you cannot use **whom** as the subject of a verb. So you cannot say:
 - ✗ **Whom** came to the party last night?You have to say:
 - ✓ **Who** came to the party last night?
- **Who** can be used as the subject or the object of a verb. For example:
 - Who** broke the window? (*as the subject*)
 - Who** are you inviting to your party? (*as the object*)
- **Who** can be used as the object of a preposition. For example:
 - Who** is Mom talking to?
- You can also use **whom** as the object of a preposition. For example:
 - Whom** is Mom talking to?If you put the preposition before the interrogative pronoun, you must use **whom**:
 - To **whom** is Mom talking?

Indefinite Pronouns

An **indefinite pronoun** does not refer directly to any other word. Most indefinite pronouns express the idea of quantity.

- Everybody** is welcome at the meeting.
- Many** prefer their coffee with sugar.
- Does **anybody** care for a cheese sandwich?
- Few** choose to live in the arid desert.

Indefinite Pronouns

all	each	most	other
another	either	neither	several
any	everybody	nobody	some
anybody	everyone	none	somebody
anyone	few	no one	someone
both	many	one	such

The pronoun **they** is considered an indefinite pronoun when it makes an indefinite reference.

They produce a lot of coal in your state.
Why don't **they** repair the bad roads?