



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G10

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. The Missing Mail

Though his round covered only Vinayak Mudali Street and its four parallel roads, it took him nearly six hours before he finished his round and returned to the head office in Market Road to deliver accounts. He allowed himself to get mixed up with the fortunes of the persons to whom he was carrying letters. At Number 13, Kabir Street, lived the man who had come halfway up the road to ask for a letter for so many years now. Thanna had seen him as a youngster, and had watched him day by day greying on the platform, sitting there and hoping for a big prize to come his way through solving crossword puzzles. “No prize yet,” he announced to him every day, “but don’t be disheartened.”

“Your interest has been delayed this month somehow,” he said to another.

“Your son at Hyderabad has written again, madam. How many children has he got now?”

“I did not know that you had applied for this Madras job; you haven’t cared to tell me! It doesn’t matter. When I bring you your appointment order you must feed me with coconut sweet noodles.”

And at each of these places, he stopped for nearly half an hour. Especially if anyone received money orders, he just settled down quite nicely, with his bags and bundles spread about him, and would not rise till he gathered an idea of how and where every rupee was going. If it was a hot day he sometimes asked for a **tumbler** of buttermilk and sat down to enjoy it. Everybody liked him on his beat. He was a **part and parcel** of their existence, their hopes, aspirations and activities.

Of all his contacts, the one with which he was most intimately bound up was Number 10, Vinayak Mudali Street. Raman was a senior clerk in the Revenue Division Office, and Thanna had carried letters to that address for over a generation now. His earliest association with Raman was years and years ago. Raman’s wife was away in the village. A card arrived for Raman. Thanna, as was his custom, glanced through it at the sorting table itself; and, the moment they were ready to start out, went straight to Vinayak Mudali Street, and though in the ordinary course over 150 addresses preceded it. He went straight to Raman’s house, knocked on the door and shouted, “Postman, sir, postman.” When Raman opened it, he said, “Give me a handful of sugar before I give you this card. Happy father! After all these years of prayers! Don’t

complain that it is a daughter. Daughters are God's gift, you know... Kamakshi. Lovely name!"

"Kamakshi," he addressed the tall, **bashful** girl, years later. "Get your photo ready. Ah so shy! Here is your grandfather's card asking for your photo. Why should he want it, unless it be..."

"The old gentleman writes rather frequently now, doesn't he, sir?" he asked Raman, as he handed him his letter and waited for him to open the envelope and go through its contents. Raman looked worried after reading it. The postman asked, "I hope it's good news?" He leaned against the veranda pillar, with a stack of undelivered letters still under his arm. Raman said, "My father-in-law thinks I am not sufficiently active in finding a husband for my daughter. He has tried one or two places and failed. He thinks I am very **indifferent**..." "Elderly people have their own anxieties and worries," the postman replied. "The trouble is," said Raman, "that he has set apart five thousand rupees for this girl's marriage and is worrying me to find a husband for her immediately. But money is not everything..." "No, no," echoed the postman, "unless the destined hour is at hand, you are in a private hospital waiting for an operation..."

Day after day for months Thanna delivered the letters and waited to be told the news. "Same old news, Thanna... **Horoscopes** do not agree... They are demanding too much... Evidently, they do not approve of her appearance." "Appearance! She looks like a queen. Unless one is totally blind . . ." the postman retorted angrily. The season would be closing, with only three more auspicious dates, the last being May 20. The girl would be seventeen in a few days. The reminders from her grandfather were becoming fiercer. Raman had exhausted all the possibilities and had **drawn a blank** everywhere. He looked helpless and miserable. "Postman," he said, "I don't think there is a son-in-law for me anywhere..."

"Oh, don't utter inauspicious words, sir," the postman said. "When God wills it..." He reflected for a while and said, "There is a boy in Delhi earning two hundred rupees a month. Makunda of Temple Street was after him. Makunda and you are of the same sub-caste, I believe..."

"Yes..."

“They have been negotiating for months now. Over a hundred letters have passed between them already... But I know they are definitely breaking off... It is over some money question... They have written their last message on a postcard and it has infuriated these people all the more. As if postcards were an instrument of insult! I have known most important communications being written even on picture postcards; when Rajappa went to America two years ago he used to write to his sons every week on picture postcards...” After this digression, he came back to the point. “I will ask Makunda to give me the horoscope. Let us see...” The next day he brought the horoscope with him. “The boy’s parents are also in Delhi, so you can write to them immediately. No time to waste now.”

A ray of hope touched Raman’s family.

“I have still a hundred letters to deliver, but I came here first because I saw this Delhi postmark. Open it and tell me what they have written,” said Thanna. He trembled with suspense. “How prompt these people are! So they approve of the photo! Who wouldn’t?”

“A letter every day! I might as well apply for leave till Kamakshi’s marriage is over...” Raman said another day. “You are already talking as if it were **coming off** tomorrow! God knows how many hurdles we have to cross now. Liking a photo does not prove anything...”

The family council was discussing an important question: whether Raman should go to Madras, take the girl with him, and meet the party, who could come down for a day from Delhi. The family was divided over the question. Raman, his mother and his wife—none of them had defined views on the question, but yet they opposed each other **vehemently**.

“We will be the **laughingstock** of the town,” said Raman’s wife, “if we take the girl out to be shown around...”

“What **queer notions**! If you stand on all these absurd **antiquated** formalities, we shall never get anywhere near a marriage. It is our duty to take the girl over even to Delhi if necessary...”

“It is your pleasure, then; you can do what you please; why consult me?...”

Tempers were at their worst, and no progress seemed possible. The postman had gotten into the habit of dropping in at the end of his day’s work and joining in the council. “I am a third party. Listen to me,” he said. “Sir, please

take the train to Madras immediately. What you cannot achieve by a year's correspondence you can do in an hour's meeting."

"Here is a letter from Madras, madam. I am sure it is from your husband. What is the news?" He handed the envelope to Raman's wife, and she took it in to read. He said, "I have some registered letters for those last houses. I will finish my round and come back . . ." He returned as promised. "Have they met, madam?"

"Yes, Kamakshi's father has written that they have met the girl, and from their talk Kamakshi's father infers they are quite willing..."

"Grand news! I will offer a coconut to our Vinayaka tonight."

"But," the lady added, half-overwhelmed with happiness and half-worried, "there is this difficulty. We had an idea of doing it during the next month... It will be so difficult to hurry through the arrangements now. But they say that if the marriage is done it must be done on the twentieth of May. If it is postponed the boy can't marry for three years. He is being sent away for some training..."

"The old gentleman is as good as his word," the postman said, delivering an insurance envelope to Raman. "He has given the entire amount. You can't complain about the lack of funds now. Go ahead. I'm so happy you have his approval. More than their money, we need their blessings, sir. I hope he has sent his heartiest blessings..."

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," replied Raman. "My father-in-law seems to be very happy at this proposal."

A five-thousand-rupee marriage was a big affair for Malgudi. Raman, with so short a time before him, and none to share the task of arrangements, became distraught. Thanna placed himself at his service during all his off-hours. He cut short his eloquence, advice and exchanges in other houses. He never waited for anyone to come up and receive the letters. He just tossed them through a window or an open door with a **stentorian** shout, "Letter, sir." If they stopped him and asked, "What is the matter with you? In such a hurry!" "Yes, leave me alone till the twentieth of May. I will come and squat down in your house after that," and he was off. Raman was in great tension. He trembled with anxiety as the day approached nearer. "It must go on smoothly. Nothing should prove a hindrance." "Do not worry, sir; it will go through happily, by God's grace. You

have given them everything they wanted in cash, presents and style. They are good people..."

"It is not about that. It is the very last date of the year. If for some reason some obstruction comes up, it is all finished forever. The boy goes away for three years. I don't think either of us would be prepared to bind ourselves to wait for three years."

It was four hours past the Muhurtam (auspicious time) on the day of the wedding. A quiet had descended on the gathering. The young smart bridegroom from Delhi was seated in a chair under the pandal. The fragrance of sandals, flowers, and holy smoke hung about the air. People were sitting around the bridegroom talking. Thanna appeared at the gate loaded with letters. Some young men ran up to him demanding, "Postman! Letters?" He **held them off**. "Get back. I know to whom to deliver." He walked over to the bridegroom and held up to him a bundle of letters very respectfully. "These are all greetings and blessings from well-wishers, I believe, sir, and my own go with every one of them..." He seemed very proud of performing this task, and looked very serious. The bridegroom looked up at him with an amused smile and muttered, "Thanks." "We are all very proud to have your distinguished self as a son-in-law of this house. I have known that child, Kamakshi, ever since she was a day old, and I always knew she would get a distinguished husband," added the postman, and brought his palms together in a salute, and moved into the house to deliver other letters and to refresh himself in the kitchen with tiffin and coffee. Ten days later he knocked on the door and, with a grin, handed Kamakshi her first letter. "Ah, scented envelope! I knew it was coming when the mail van was three stations away. I have seen hundreds like this. Take it from me. Before he has written the tenth letter he will command you to pack up and join him, and you will grow a couple of wings and fly away that very day, and forget forever Thanna and this street, isn't it so?" Kamakshi blushed, snatched the letter from his hands and ran in to read it. He said, turning away, "I don't think there is any use waiting for you to finish the letter and tell me its contents."

On a holiday, when he was sure Raman would be at home, Thanna knocked on the door and handed him a card. "Ah!" cried Raman. "Bad news, Thanna. My uncle, my father's brother, is very ill in Salem, and they want me to start immediately."

“I’m very sorry to hear it, sir,” said Thanna, and handed him a telegram.
“Here’s another...”

Raman cried, “A telegram!” He glanced at it and screamed, “Oh, he is dead!” He sat down on the platform, unable to stand the shock. Thanna looked equally miserable. Raman rallied, gathered himself up and turned to go in. Thanna said, “One moment, sir. I have a **confession** to make. See the date on the card.”

“May the nineteenth, nearly fifteen days ago!”

“Yes, sir and the telegram followed next day—that is, on the day of the marriage. I was unhappy to see it... “But what has happened has happened,” I said to myself, and kept it away, fearing that it might interfere with the wedding.”

Raman glared at the postman and said, “I would not have cared to go through the marriage when he was dying...” The postman stood with bowed head and mumbled, “You can complain if you like, sir. They will dismiss me. It is a serious offence.” He turned and descended the steps and went down the street on his rounds. Raman watched him **dully** for a while and shouted, “Postman!” Thanna turned round; Raman cried, “Don’t think that I intend to complain. I am only sorry you have done this...”

“I understand your feelings, sir,” replied the postman, disappearing around a bend.

Vocabulary

1. **Tumbler:** a glass
2. **Part and parcel:** an essential part a description of what is going to happen to you, based on the position of the stars and planets at the time of your birth: of something
3. **Bashful:** shy or self-conscious
4. **Indifferent:** uninterested or uncaring
5. **Horoscopes (Kundli or Tewa):** a description of what is going to happen to you, based on the position of the stars and planets at the time of your birth.
6. **Draw a blank:** to be unsuccessful in every attempt
7. **Come off:** if something comes off, it is successful or effective.
8. **Vehemently:** forcefully; in a way that shows very strong feelings, especially anger
9. **Laughingstock:** a joke; when you become a laughingstock, everybody laughs at you.
10. **Queer notions:** a strange idea
11. **Antiquated:** old-fashioned
12. **Stentorian:** very loud
13. **Hold somebody off:** keep somebody at a distance
14. **Confession:** you make a confession when you admit that you are guilty of something

2. The History of the Postal System – Great Britain

The Post Office is experiencing its busiest time of the year, with cards and parcels flooding through the system throughout December, right up to Christmas. In fact, an amazing 1.7 billion Christmas cards and 130 million parcels containing gifts are sent each year in Great Britain.

The Post Office is a national institution in the UK, with early origins dating back to the 16th century during the reign of King Henry VII, who first established a Master of the Posts in 1516. The position later became the Postmaster General – a role which continued for more than 450 years until it was finally abolished in 1969.

Early years

In the early years, the postal service wasn't available to ordinary people and was rather the privilege of the upper classes. However, in 1635 King Charles I made it available to all. Unlike the modern system, the postage costs were paid by the recipient and not the sender.

In 1654, military and political leader Oliver Cromwell granted a monopoly to the Office of Postage over the postal delivery services in England. Three years later, fixed postal rates were launched.

The General Post Office was established by Charles II in 1660, marking the official launch of the service in England. This was followed by the introduction of the postage date stamp in 1661 and the appointment of the first Postmaster General in the same year. Mail coaches began operating between London and Bristol in 1784 – the first coaches resembled ordinary family carriages, but were easily recognised by their Post Office livery.

Self-adhesive stamps

Uniformed postmen were employed for the first time in 1793, while the first mail train on the Manchester-Liverpool route appeared in 1830. The adhesive postage stamp was invented by Birmingham schoolteacher Rowland Hill in 1837 – he was later knighted for his invention.

Post Office money orders were introduced in 1838 and two years later, the momentous Penny Black stamp – the first postage stamp with its own adhesive – was released across the nation. The same year, the Penny Post system enabled people to send a letter for the uniform rate of one penny.

Pillar boxes

The first red Post Office pillar box appeared in Jersey in 1852 and the following year, more appeared across Britain. Market Drayton and Shrewsbury were the locations of the first wall post boxes in 1857.

Telegraphs were introduced in 1870 and the same year, the half-a-penny rate was introduced for sending postcards and new laws banned the sending of “obscene” and “indecent” literature through the post. The first postmen on bicycles appeared on our streets in 1880 and the following year, Postal Orders were introduced. The parcel post was launched in 1883.

20th century

The early 20th century saw some major changes: The Wireless Telegraphy Act 1904 was passed as a result of the development of radio links for sending telegraphs and the General Post Office licensed all senders and receivers. The Post Office launched its national telephone system in 1912.

Offering a cheaper postage rate for a slower delivery service, the second-class stamp was introduced in 1968, and in the same year, the National Giro Bank was born. One year later, the Post Office Act 1969 saw the General Post Office become a nationalised industry, rather than a government department.

Postcodes

Everyone uses postcodes today without giving them a second thought, but when they were first introduced across Britain in 1974 to make mail sorting easier, they were an innovative invention.

The eighties saw the postal service’s telecommunications arm branch off to form British Telecom in 1981. The remainder of the business was rebranded as the Post Office. Further divisions were created in 1986 – the parcel delivery, letter delivery and post office arms of the service were split into separate businesses under the Post Office Group umbrella.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
10

Present perfect continuous and simple (I have been doing and I have done)

A Compare these two situations:



There is paint on Kate's clothes. She **has been painting** her bedroom.

has been painting is the *present perfect continuous*.

We are thinking of the activity. It does not matter whether it has been finished or not. In this example, the activity (painting the bedroom) has not been finished.



The bedroom was green. Now it is yellow. She **has painted** her bedroom.

has painted is the *present perfect simple*.

Here, the important thing is that something has been finished. 'She **has painted**' is a completed action. We are thinking about the *result* of the activity (the painted bedroom), not the activity itself.

B Compare these examples:

- My hands are very dirty. I've **been repairing** my bike.
- Joe **has been eating** too much recently. He should eat less.
- It's nice to see you again. What **have you been doing** since we last met?
- Where have you been? **Have you been playing** tennis?
- My bike is OK again now. I've **repaired it**. (= I've finished repairing it)
- Somebody **has eaten** all the chocolates. The box is empty.
- Where's the book I gave you? What **have you done** with it?
- Have you ever played** tennis?

C

We use the continuous to say *how long* (for something that is still happening):

- How long **have you been reading** that book?
- Amy is writing emails. She's **been writing** emails all morning.
- They've **been playing** tennis since 2 o'clock.
- I'm learning Arabic, but I **haven't been learning** it very long.

We use the simple to say *how much, how many* or *how many times* (for completed actions):

- How many pages of that book **have you read**?
- Amy **has sent** lots of emails this morning.
- They've **played** tennis three times this week.
- I'm learning Arabic, but I **haven't learnt** very much yet.

D

Some verbs (for example, **know**) are not normally used in continuous forms (**be + -ing**):

- I've **known** about the problem for a long time. (*not I've been knowing*)
- How long **have you had** that camera? (*not have you been having*)

For a list of these verbs, see Unit 4A. For **have**, see Unit 17.

But note that you *can* use **want** and **mean** in the present perfect continuous (**have/has been + -ing**):

- I've **been meaning** to phone Anna, but I keep forgetting.