



# **Learn English Through Stories**

## **G Series**

### **G6**

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# 1. An Astrologer's Day

By R K Narayan



Punctually at midday, he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook and a bundle of palm leaf writing. His forehead was **resplendent** with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position: placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks; even a **half-wit's** eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed.

People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to marigolds or dahlia flowers. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which edged a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way: medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians and, above all, an auctioneer of cheap cloth, who created enough noise all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnuts, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it Bombay Ice-Cream one day, and on the next Delhi Almond, and on the third Raja's Delicacy, and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him.

A considerable portion of this crowd **dilly-dallied** before the astrologer too. The astrologer transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the **enchantment** of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gaslights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps and one or

two, like the astrologer's, managed without lights of their own. It was a **bewildering crisscross** of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and **shrewd** guesswork. All the same, it was as much an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the wages he carried home at the end of the day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his forefathers: namely, tilling the land, living, marrying and ripening in his cornfield and ancestral home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. To a villager, it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between.

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three paise per question and never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him with enough stuff for a dozen answers and several pieces of advice. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, "In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts," nine out of ten were **disposed** to agree with him. Or he questioned: "Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not **well disposed** towards you?" Or he gave an analysis of character: "Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an **impetuous** nature and a rough exterior." This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a **forbidding** exterior.

The nuts-vendor blew out his flare and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and

said: "You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me."

The other grumbled some vague reply. The astrologer pressed his invitation; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying: "You call yourself an astrologer?" The astrologer felt challenged and said, tilting the other's palm towards the green shaft of light: "Yours is a nature . . ."

"Oh, stop that," the other said. "Tell me something worthwhile . . ."

Our friend felt piqued. "I charge only three paise per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money..."

At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an anna (a six paise coin) and flung it out to him, saying, "I have some questions to ask. If I prove you are bluffing, you must return that anna to me with interest."

"If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees?"

"No."

"Or will you give me eight annas?"

"All right, provided you give me twice as much, if you are wrong," said the stranger.

This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a cigar. The astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the match light. There was a pause as cars hooted on the road, cart drivers swore at their horses and the babble of the crowd agitated the semi-darkness of the park. The other sat down, sucking his cigar, puffing out, and sat there ruthlessly. The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. "Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today..." He made preparations to bundle up.

The other held his wrist and said, "You can't get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing." The astrologer shivered in his grip, and his voice shook and became faint. "Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow." The other thrust his palm in his face and said, "Challenge is a challenge. Go on." The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up. "There is a woman..."

“Stop,” said the other. “I don’t want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not? Answer this and go. Otherwise, I will not let you go till you disgorge all your coins.” The astrologer muttered a few incantations and replied, “All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing? Otherwise, I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like.” After a good deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said, “You were left for dead. Am I right?”

“Ah, tell me more.”

“A knife has passed through you once?” said the astrologer.

“Good fellow!” He bared his chest to show the scar. “What else?”

“And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead.”

“I should have been dead if some passer-by had not chanced to peep into the well,” exclaimed the other, overwhelmed by enthusiasm. “When shall I get at him?” he asked, clenching his fist.

“In the next world,” answered the astrologer. “He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him.” The other groaned on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded.

“Guru Nayak...”

“You know my name!” the other said, taken aback.

“As I know all other things. Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is a two-day journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home.” He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it out to him. “Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again, and you will live to be a hundred.”

“Why should I leave home again?” the other said reflectively. “I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him.” He shook his head regretfully. “He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved.” “Yes,” said the astrologer. “He was crushed under a lorry.” The other looked gratified to hear it.

The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly midnight when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said, "Count them. One man gave all that."

"Twelve and a half annas," she said, counting. She was overjoyed. "I can buy some jalebis and laddoes tomorrow. The child has been asking for sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some delicious stuff for her."

"The swine has cheated me! He promised me a rupee," said the astrologer. She looked up at him. "You look worried. What is wrong?"

"Nothing."

After dinner, sitting on the bed, he told her, "Do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here and married you. He is alive."

She gasped. "You tried to kill!"

"Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled and quarrelled badly one day: why think of it now? Time to sleep," he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the bed.

## Vocabulary

- 1. Resplendent:** brightly coloured in an impressive way - *She looked resplendent in a silk dress.*
- 2. Halfwit:** an idiot or a stupid person – *“Oh, you halfwit idiot, what you’ve done to my car? You need your head examines.”*
- 3. Dilly-dallied:** moved slowly – *“Don't dilly-dally - just get your bags and let's go!”*
- 4. Enchantment:** a feeling of great pleasure - *The beauty of the scene filled us with enchantment.*
- 5. Bewildering crisscross:** amazingly strange, mysterious network
- 6. Shrewd:** clever - *He's too shrewd to be trusted in business matters.*
- 7. Disposed:** inclined - *Those who fail are disposed to blame the world for their failure.*
- 8. Well-disposed:** friendly or kindly - *He felt well-disposed towards her.*
- 9. Impetuous:** impulsive or violent - *He's so impetuous - why can't he think things over before he rushes into them?*
- 10. Forbidding:** unfriendly or hostile - *There was something a little severe and forbidding about her face.*



## 2. Graphology: An Index to Personality

The analysis of handwriting has a long history: some say it goes back to Roman times. Modern **graphology** began early in the 19th century when French churchman Jean Hippolyte Michon created the first graphological 'catalogue' examining, for example, where letters fall on the line, their shape and the pressure exerted.

Allan Conway, a professional graphologist for 12 years says, "Handwriting says more about you than many chosen words, simply because you cannot hide yourself in your handwriting: it's not really your hand that's writing, but your brain. It's your personality frozen in ink."

Despite public **scepticism**, graphology plays a **covert** role in British management. Many companies use it for executive recruitment and analysis. Graphology tells them about the candidates' temperaments, highlighting both weaknesses and strengths. There are about 300 movements on an unlined A4 page of writing and students must find and interpret them all. He also needs to know three things about the writers: their sex, their age and if they are left or right-handed. Then he looks for 16 **dominant** elements, including the size of the writing, the pressure, the speed and slant of the words, how connected the characters are as well as the form of the connections, the proportions of the "middle zone" (covered by small letters such as "o" and "n") and "upper" and "lower" zones (where letters extend up or down, as with "d" or "p"), and the rhythm and regularity of writing. "But there is one golden rule," Rees says, "No single sign on its own must ever be taken to mean anything."

The principles, according to Conway, are straightforward. The baseline: whether the writing goes straight across the page or slants up and down, helps to determine the writer's state of mind.

A very upward baseline shows a creative, ambitious and outgoing person. A slightly downward one can **reveal** dissatisfaction or unhappiness though it could simply be a sign of fatigue. "A sharp downward baseline usually indicates serious problems or illness, probably emotional", says Conway, "while a straight one is an excellent sign of emotional **stability**. An irregular baseline can mean an excitable writer with poor self-discipline." The way letters are formed and connected is important: a writer with angular letters, for example, is often persistent and decisive. Arched letters suggest the writer is reluctant to express emotions freely and may appear cold. Where the bottoms of letters

are curved like a cup the writer is likely to be open to the world and at ease. And writing with letters threaded—connected together as if by a length of cotton—can indicate speed or laziness. The more connected the letters, the more coordinated the **patterns** of thought. Character size can also be **significant**. Larger letters tend to suggest vitality, enterprise and self-reliance, while small letters can reveal a lack of self-confidence, but are also found in fields of research where concentration and exactness are necessary.

The slant of a person's writing indicates their emotional makeup. Where all the letters are vertical the writer is likely to be someone uncomfortable in groups. For right-handers, a left-word slant shows **introversion** while a rightward slant reveals someone outgoing, friendly and ambitious. A constantly varying slant betrays an unpredictable personality.

The spacing between words points to the writer's organizational abilities: wide spacing suggests individuality, **extravagance**, self-confidence and **sociability**.

Even the colour of ink a person chooses can be telling. Blue may indicate someone with no desire to be exceptional or **pretentious**, green likes to impress and red to shock. Brown is often used by people who work in high-security jobs, able to keep secrets, while black shows a demanding or forceful character who wants to make an impression.

## Vocabulary

1. **Graphology:** the scientific study of handwriting;
2. **Scepticism:** doubt or disbelief
3. **Coverts:** concealed, secret, or hidden
4. **Dominant:** prominent or important
5. **Reveal:** show or reveal
6. **Stability:** fixed or being firm
7. **Significant:** Important
8. **Pattern:** design or sample
9. **Introversion:** the quality of being shy and quiet and preferring to be alone rather than spending time with others
10. **Extravagance:** using or spending too much money
11. **Sociability:** friendliness to the company of other people
12. **Pretentious:** pompous or showy

## 3. Grammar Page

Unit  
6

### Past continuous (I was doing)

**A** Study this example situation:



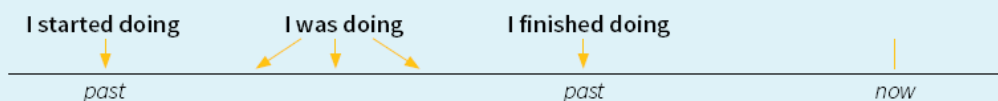
Yesterday Karen and Joe played tennis. They started at 10 o'clock and finished at 11.30. So, at 10.30 they **were playing** tennis.

they **were playing** = they were in the middle of playing, they had not finished

**was/were + -ing** is the past continuous:

he/she/it	<b>was</b>	<b>playing</b> <b>doing</b> <b>working</b> etc.
we/you/they	<b>were</b>	

**B** I **was doing** something = I was in the middle of doing it at a certain time. The action or situation started before this time, but had not finished:



- This time last year I **was living** in Hong Kong.
- What **were** you **doing** at 10 o'clock last night?
- I waved to Helen, but she **wasn't looking**.

**C** Compare I **was doing** (*past continuous*) and I **did** (*past simple*):

**I was doing** (= in the middle of an action)

- We **were walking** home when I met Dan. (in the middle of walking home)
- Kate **was watching** TV when we arrived.

**I did** (= complete action)

- We **walked** home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- Kate **watched** TV a lot when she was ill last year.

**D** You can say that something **happened** (past simple) in the middle of something else (past continuous):

- Matt **phoned** while we **were having** dinner.
- It **was raining** when I **got** up.
- I **saw** you in the park yesterday. You **were sitting** on the grass and **reading** a book.
- I **hurt** my back while I **was working** in the garden.

But we use the past simple to say that one thing happened *after* another:

- I **was walking** along the road when I **saw** Dan. So I **stopped**, and we **talked** for a while.

Compare:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we <b>were having</b> dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived) | <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we <b>had</b> dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner) |
|--|--|

**E** Some verbs (for example, **know** and **want**) are not normally used in continuous forms (**is + -ing**, **was + -ing** etc.). See Unit 4A for a list of these verbs.

- We were good friends. We **knew** each other well. (*not* we were knowing)
- I was enjoying the party, but Chris **wanted** to go home. (*not* was wanting)