



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G9

**Adapted and modified by
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1. The Doctor's Word

By R K Narayan

People came to him when the patient was on his last legs. Dr Raman often burst out, "Why couldn't you have come a day earlier?" The reason was obvious: visiting fee of twenty-five rupees, and more than that, people liked to **shirk** the fact that the time had come to call in Dr Raman; for them, there was something **ominous** in the very **association**. As a result, when the big man came on the scene it was always a quick decision one way or another. There was no scope or time for any kind of wavering or **whitewashing**. Long years of practice of this kind had **bred** in the doctor a certain curt truthfulness; for that very reason his opinion was valued; he was not a mere doctor expressing an opinion but a judge pronouncing a verdict. The patient's life **hung on** his words. This never **unduly** worried Dr Raman. He never believed that agreeable words ever saved lives. He did not think it was any of his business to provide comforting lies when nature would tell them the truth in a few hours. However, when he glimpsed the faintest sign of hope, he rolled up his sleeve and stepped into the arena: it might be hours or days, but he never withdrew till he **wrested** the prize from Yama's (god of death) hands.

Today, standing over a bed, the doctor felt that he himself needed someone to tell him soothing lies. He mopped his brow with his kerchief and sat down in the chair beside the bed. On the bed lay his dearest friend in the world: Gopal. They had known each other for forty years now, starting with their kindergarten days. They could not, of course, meet as much as they wanted, each being wrapped in his own family and profession. Occasionally, on a Sunday, Gopal would walk into the consulting room and wait patiently in a corner till the doctor was free. And then they would dine together, see a picture and talk about each other's life and activities. It was a classic friendship, which endured untouched by changing times, circumstances and activities.

In his busy round of work, Dr Raman had not noticed that Gopal had not called in for over three months now. He only remembered it when he saw Gopal's son sitting on a bench in the consulting hall one crowded morning. Dr Raman could not talk to him for over an hour. When he got up and was about to pass on to the operating room, he called up the young man and asked, "What brings

you here, sir?" The youth was nervous and shy, and said, "Mother sent me here."

"What can I do for you?" asked Doctor.

"Father is ill ..."

It was an operation day and he was not free till three in the afternoon. He rushed off straight from the clinic to his friend's house, in Lawley Extension.

Gopal lay in bed as if in sleep. The doctor stood over him and asked Gopal's wife, "How long has he been in bed?"

"A month and a half, Doctor."

"Who is attending him?" asked Doctor.

"A doctor in the next street. He comes down once in three days and gives him medicine."

"What is his name?" He had never heard of him. "Someone I don't know, but I wish he had had the goodness to tell me about it. Why, why couldn't you have sent me word earlier?"

"We thought you would be busy and did not wish to trouble you unnecessarily." They were apologetic and miserable. There was hardly any time to be lost. He took off his coat and opened his bag. He took out an injection tube, the needle sizzled over the stove. The sick man's wife whimpered in a corner and attempted to ask questions.

"Please don't ask questions," snapped the doctor. He looked at the children, who were watching the sterilizer, and said, "Send them all away somewhere, except the eldest."

He shot in the drug, sat back in his chair and gazed at the patient's face for over an hour. The patient still remained motionless. The doctor's face gleamed with perspiration, and his eyelids drooped with fatigue. The sick man's wife stood in a corner and watched silently. She asked timidly, "Doctor, shall I make some coffee for you?" "No," he replied, although he felt **famished**, having missed his midday meal. He got up and said, "I will be back in a few minutes. Don't disturb him on any account." He picked up his bag and went to his car. In a quarter of an hour, he was back, followed by an assistant and a nurse. The doctor told the lady of the house, "I have to perform an operation."

“Why, why? Why?” she asked faintly.

“I will tell you all that soon. Will you leave your son here to help us, and go over to the next house and stay there till I call you?”

The lady felt giddy and sank down on the floor, unable to bear the strain. The nurse attended to her and led her out.

At about eight in the evening, the patient opened his eyes and stirred slightly in bed. The assistant was overjoyed. He exclaimed enthusiastically, “Sir, he will **pull through**.” The doctor looked at him coldly and whispered, “I would give anything to see him pull through but, but the heart...”

“The pulse has improved, sir.”

“Well, well,” replied the doctor. “Don’t trust it. It is only a false flash-up, very common in these cases.” He **ruminated** for a while and added, “If the pulse keeps up till eight in the morning, it will go on for the next forty years, but I doubt very much if we shall see anything of it at all after two tonight.”

He sent away the assistant and sat beside the patient. At about eleven the patient opened his eyes and smiled at his friend. He showed a slight improvement, he was able to take in a little food. A great feeling of relief and joy went through the household. They swarmed around the doctor and poured out their gratitude. He sat in his seat beside the bed, gazing sternly at the patient’s face, hardly showing any signs of hearing what they were saying to him. The sick man’s wife asked, “Is he now out of danger?” Without turning his head the doctor said, “Give glucose and brandy every forty minutes; just a couple of spoons will do.” The lady went away to the kitchen. She felt restless. She felt she must know the truth whatever it was. Why was the great man so **evasive**? The suspense was unbearable. Perhaps he could not speak so near the patient’s bed. She beckoned to him from the kitchen doorway. The doctor rose and went over. She asked, “What about him now? How is he?” The doctor bit his lips and replied, looking at the floor, “Don’t get excited. Unless you must know about it, don’t ask now.” Her eyes opened wide in terror. She clasped her hands together and implored, “Tell me the truth.” The doctor replied, “I would rather not talk to you now.” He turned around and went back to his chair. A terrible wailing shot through the still house; the patient stirred and looked about in bewilderment. The doctor got up again, went over to the kitchen door, drew it in securely and shut off the wail.

When the doctor resumed his seat, the patient asked in the faintest whisper possible, "Is that someone crying?" The doctor advised, "Don't **exert yourself**. You mustn't talk." He felt the pulse. It was already agitated by the exertion. The patient asked, "Am I going? Don't hide it from me." The doctor made a deprecating noise and sat back in his chair. He had never faced a situation like this. It was not in his nature to whitewash. People attached great value to his word because of that. He stole a look at the other. The patient motioned a finger to draw him nearer and whispered, "I must know how long I am going to last. I must sign the will. It is already... Ask my wife for the despatch box. You must sign as a witness."

"Oh!" the doctor exclaimed. "You are exerting yourself too much. You must be quieter." He felt idiotic to be repeating it. "How fine it would be," he reflected, "to drop the whole business and run away somewhere without answering anybody any question!" The patient clutched the doctor's wrist with his weak fingers and said, "Raman, it is my good fortune that you are here at this moment. I can trust your word. I cannot leave my property unsettled. That will mean endless misery for my wife and children. You know all about Subbiah and his gang. Let me sign before it is too late. Tell me..."

"Yes, presently," replied the doctor. He walked off to his car, sat in the back seat and reflected. He looked at his watch. Midnight. If the will was to be signed, it must be done within the next two hours, or never. He could not be responsible for a mess there; he knew the family affairs too well and about those wolves, Subbiah and his gang. But what could he do? If he asked him to sign the will, it would virtually mean a death sentence and destroy the thousandth part of a chance that the patient had of survival. He got down from the car and went in. He resumed his seat in the chair. The patient was staring at him appealingly. The doctor said to himself, "If my word can save his life, he shall not die. The will be damned." He called, "Gopal, listen." This was the first time he was going to do a piece of acting before a patient, simulate a feeling and conceal his judgement. He stooped over the patient and said, with deliberate emphasis, "Don't worry about the will now. You are going to live. Your heart is absolutely sound." A new glow suffused the patient's face as he heard it. He asked in a tone of relief, "Do you say so? If it comes from your lips it must be true ...". The doctor said, "Quite right. You are improving every second. Sleep in peace. You must not exert yourself on any account. You must sleep very soundly. I will see you in the morning." The patient looked at him

gratefully for a moment and then closed his eyes. The doctor picked up his bag and went out, shutting the door softly behind him.

On his way home, he stopped for a moment at his hospital, called out his assistant and said, "That Lawley Extension case. You might expect the collapse any second now. Go there with a tube of... in hand, and give it in case the struggle is too hard at the end. Hurry up."

The next morning he was back at Lawley Extension at ten. From his car, he made a dash for the sick bed. The patient was awake and looked very well. The assistant reported a satisfactory pulse. The doctor put his tube into his heart, listened for a while and told the sick man's wife, "Don't look so unhappy, lady. Your husband will live to be ninety." When they were going back to the hospital, the assistant sitting beside him in the car asked, "Is he going to live, sir?"

"I will bet on it. He will live to be ninety. He has **turned the corner**. How he has survived this attack will be a puzzle to me all my life," replied the doctor.

Vocabulary

1. **Shirk:** avoid
2. **Ominous:** threatening
3. **Association:** connection
4. **Whitewashing:** hiding
5. **Bred:** produced
6. **Hung on:** depended
7. **Unduly:** excessively
8. **Wrested:** took
9. **Pull through:** recover
10. **Ruminated:** reflected
11. **Evasive:** vague
12. **Exert yourself:** make an effort
13. **Turn the corner:** if a situation turns the corner, it starts to improve after a difficult period.

2. Zebras



Zebras are among the most beautiful animals on earth. With their bold black-and-white stripes, they stand apart from other African animals. They roam freely over the large African plains. Many people don't know it, but the zebra is one of the few wild horses left in the world today. All horses belong to the same animal group, known as Equus. Zebras are shorter than most other horses, their ears are larger, and some of them make a barking sound! Most importantly, only zebras have stripes—even their manes are striped! Many zebras have been killed for their beautiful skins. Fortunately, things are being done to protect zebras now. African governments and wildlife groups have set up nature preserves, where zebras can live without the risk of being hunted.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
9

Present perfect continuous (I have been doing)

A It's been raining.

Study this example situation:



Is it raining?

No, but the ground is wet.

It's been raining. (= It has been ...)

have/has been + -ing is the *present perfect continuous*:

I/we/they/you he/she/it	have has	(= I've etc.) (= he's etc.)	been	doing working learning etc.
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We use the present perfect continuous for an activity that has recently stopped or just stopped:

- Why are you out of breath? **Have you been running?**
- Paul is very tired. **He's been working** hard.
- Why are you so tired? **What have you been doing?**
- I've **been talking** to Amanda and she agrees with me.
- Where have you been? I've **been looking** for you.

have/has been + -ing
present perfect continuous

now

B It's been raining for two hours.

Study this example situation:



It began raining two hours ago and it is still raining.

How long **has it been raining?**

It's been raining for two hours. (= It has been ...)

We use the present perfect continuous in this way, especially with **how long**, **for ...** and **since ...**. The activity is still happening (as in this example) or has just stopped.

- How long have you been learning** English? (= you're still learning English)
- Ben is watching TV. **He's been watching** TV all day.
- Where have you been? **I've been looking** for you **for the last half hour**.
- Chris **hasn't been feeling** well **recently**.

You can use the present perfect continuous for repeated actions:

- Silvia is a very good tennis player. **She's been playing** since she was eight.
- Every morning they meet in the same cafe. **They've been going** there **for years**.

C Compare I am doing and I have been doing:

I am doing
present continuous

now

- Don't disturb me now. **I'm working**.
- We need an umbrella. **It's raining**.
- Hurry up! **We're waiting**.

I have been doing
present perfect continuous

now

- I've **been working** hard. Now I'm going to have a break.
- The ground is wet. **It's been raining**.
- We've **been waiting** for an hour.