



# **Learn English Through Stories**

## **G Series**

### **G14**

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

## **Contents**

- 1. All Creatures Great and Small**
- 2. Minimum Marriage Age.**
- 3. Jokes.**
- 4. Grammar Page – Present perfect and Simple Past 2.**

# 1. All Creatures Great and Small

By Ruskin Bond

Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up with in India, I had as my companions an odd assortment of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python and a Great Indian Hornbill. The person responsible for all this wildlife in the home was my grandfather. As the house was his own, other members of the family could not prevent him from keeping a large variety of pets, though they could certainly voice their objections; and as most of the household consisted of women - my grandmother, visiting aunts and occasional in-laws (my parents were in Burma at the time) - Grandfather and I had to be alert and resourceful in dealing with them. We saw eye to eye on the subject of pets, and whenever Grandmother decided it was time to get rid of a tame white rat or a squirrel, I would conceal them in a hole in the jackfruit tree; but unlike my aunts, she was generally tolerant of Grandfather's hobby, and even took a liking to some of our pets.

Grandfather's house and menagerie were in Dehradun and I remember travelling there in a horse-drawn buggy. There were cars in those days - it was just over twenty years ago - but in the foothills a tonga was just as good, almost as fast, and certainly more dependable when it came to getting across the swift little Tons river.

During the rains, when the river flowed strong and deep, it was impossible to get across except on a hand-operated ropeway; but in the dry months, the horse went splashing through, the carriage wheels churning through clear mountain water. If the horse found the going difficult, we removed our shoes, rolled up our skirts or trousers, and waded across.

When Grandfather first went to stay in Dehradun, early in the century, the only way of getting there was by the night mail coach.

Mail ponies, he told me, were difficult animals, always attempting to turn around and get into the coach with the passengers. It was only when the coachman used his whip liberally, and reviled the ponies' ancestors as far back as their third and fourth generations, that the beasts could be persuaded to move. And once they started, there was no stopping them. It was a gallop all the way to the first stage, where the ponies were changed to the accompaniment of a bugle blown by the coachman.

At one stage of the journey, drums were beaten; and if it was night, torches were lit to keep away the wild elephants who, resenting the approach of this

clumsy caravan, would sometimes trumpet a challenge and throw the ponies into confusion. Grandfather disliked dressing up and going out, and was only too glad to send everyone shopping or to the pictures - Harold Lloyd and Eddie Cantor were the favourites at Dehradun's small cinema - so that he could be left alone to feed his pets and potter about in the garden. There were a lot of animals to be fed, including, for a time, a pair of Great Danes who had such enormous appetites that we were forced to give them away to a more affluent family.

The Great Danes were gentle creatures, and I would sit astride one of them and go for rides round the garden. In spite of their size, they were very sure-footed and never knocked over people or chairs. A little monkey, like Toto, did much more damage.

Grandfather bought Toto from a tonga owner for the sum of five rupees. The tonga man used to keep the little red monkey tied to a feeding trough, and Toto looked so out of place there - almost conscious of his own incongruity - that Grandfather immediately decided to add him to our menagerie.

Toto was really a pretty little monkey. His bright eyes sparkled with mischief beneath deep-set eyebrows, and his teeth, a pearly-white, were often on display in a smile that frightened the life out of elderly Anglo-Indian ladies. His hands were not those of a Tallulah Bankhead (Grandfather's only favourite actress), but were shrivelled and dried-up, as though they had been pickled in the sun for many years. But his fingers were quick and restless; and his tail, while adding to his good looks - Grandfather maintained that a tail would add to anyone's good looks - often performed the service of a third hand. He could use it to hang from a branch; and it was capable of scooping up any delicacy that might be out of reach of his hands.

Grandmother, anticipating an outcry from other relatives, always raised objections when Grandfather brought home some new bird or animal, and so for a while we managed to keep Toto's presence a secret by lodging him in a little closet opening into my bedroom wall. But in a few hours he managed to dispose of Grandmother's ornamental wallpaper and the better part of my school blazer. He was transferred to the stables for a day or two, and then Grandfather had to make a trip to neighbouring Saharanpur to collect his railway pension and, anxious to keep Toto out of trouble, he decided to take the monkey along with him.

Unfortunately, I could not accompany Grandfather on this trip, but he told me about it afterwards.

A black kitbag was provided for Toto. When the strings of the bag were tied,

there was no means of escape from within, and the canvas was too strong for Toto to bite his way through. His initial efforts to get out only had the effect of making the bag roll about on the floor, or occasionally jump in the air - an exhibition that attracted a curious crowd of onlookers on the Dehradun railway platform.

Toto remained in the bag as far as Saharanpur, but while Grandfather was producing his ticket at the railway turnstile, Toto managed to get his hands through the aperture where the bag was tied, loosened the strings, and suddenly thrust his head through the opening.

The poor ticket collector was visibly alarmed; but with great presence of mind, and much to the annoyance of Grandfather, he said, "Sir, you have a dog with you. You'll have to pay for it accordingly."

In vain did Grandfather take Toto out of the bag to prove that a monkey was not a dog or even a quadruped (four-footed animal). The ticket collector, now thoroughly annoyed, insisted on classing Toto as a dog; and three rupees and four annas had to be handed over as his fare. Then Grandfather, out of sheer spite, took out from his pocket a live tortoise that he happened to have with him, and said, "What must I pay for this, since you charge for all animals?"

The ticket collector retreated a pace or two; then advancing again with caution, he subjected the tortoise to a grave and knowledgeable stare.

"No ticket is necessary, sir," he finally declared. "There is no charge for insects." When we discovered that Toto's favourite pastime was catching mice, we were able to persuade Grandmother to let us keep him. The unsuspecting mice would emerge from their holes at night to pick up any corn left over by our pony; and to get at it they had to run the gauntlet of Toto's section of the stable. He knew this, and would pretend to be asleep, keeping, however, one eye open. A mouse would make a rush in vain; Toto, as swift as a cat, would have his paws upon him. Grandmother decided to put his talents to constructive use by tying him up one night in the larder, where a guerrilla band of mice were playing havoc with our food supplies.

Toto was removed from his comfortable bed of straw in the stable, and chained up in the larder, beneath shelves of jam pots and other delicacies. The night was a long and miserable one for Toto, who must have wondered what he had done to deserve such treatment. The mice scampered about the place, while he, most uncat-like, lay curled up in a soup tureen, trying to snatch some sleep. At dawn, the mice returned to their holes; Toto awoke, scratched himself, emerged from the soup tureen, and looked about for something to eat. The jam pots attracted his notice, and it did not take him

long to prise open the covers. Grandmother's treasured jams - she had made most of them herself - disappeared in an amazingly short time. I was present when she opened the door to see how many mice Toto had caught. Even the rain god, Indra, could not have looked more terrible when planning a thunderstorm; and the imprecations Grandmother hurled at Toto were surprising coming from someone who had been brought up in the genteel Victorian manner.

The monkey was later reinstated in Grandmother's favour. A great treat for him on cold winter evenings was the large bowl of warm water provided by Grandmother for his bath. He would bathe himself, first of all gingerly testing the temperature of the water with his fingers. Leisurely he would step into the bath, first one foot, then the other, as he had seen me doing, until he was completely sitting down in it. Once comfortable, he would take the soap in his hands or feet, and rub himself all over. When he found the water becoming cold, he would get out and run as quickly as he could to the fire, where his coat soon dried. If anyone laughed at him during this performance, he would look extremely hurt, and refuse to go on with his ablutions.

One day Toto nearly succeeded in boiling himself to death. The large kitchen kettle had been left on the fire to boil for tea; and Toto, finding himself for a few minutes alone with it, decided to take the lid off. On discovering that the water inside was warm, he got into the kettle with the intention of having a bath, and sat down with his head protruding from the opening. This was very pleasant for some time, until the water began to simmer. Toto raised himself a little, but finding it cold outside, sat down again. He continued standing and sitting for some time, not having the courage to face the cold air. Had it not been for the timely arrival of Grandmother, he would have been cooked alive.

If there is a part of the brain especially devoted to mischief, that part must have been largely developed in Toto. He was always tearing things to bits, and whenever one of my aunts came near him, he made every effort to get hold of her dress and tear a hole in it. A variety of aunts frequently came to stay with my grandparents, but during Toto's stay they limited their visits to a day or two, much to Grandfather's relief and Grandmother's annoyance.

Toto, however, took a liking to Grandmother, in spite of the beatings he often received from her. Whenever she allowed him the liberty, he would lie quietly in her lap instead of scrambling all over her as he did on most people.

Toto lived with us over a year, but the following winter, after too much bathing, he caught pneumonia. Grandmother wrapped him in flannel, and Grandfather gave him a diet of chicken soup and Irish stew; but Toto did not recover. He was buried in the garden, under his favourite mango tree.

Perhaps it was just as well that Toto was no longer with us when Grandfather brought home the python, or his demise might have been less conventional. Small monkeys are a favourite delicacy with pythons.

Grandmother was tolerant of most birds and animals, but she drew the line at reptiles. She said they made her blood run cold. Even a handsome, sweet-tempered chameleon had to be given up. Grandfather should have known that there was little chance of his being allowed to keep the python. It was about four feet long, a young one, when Grandfather bought it from a snake charmer for six rupees, impressing the bazaar crowd by slinging it across his shoulders and walking home with it. Grandmother nearly fainted at the sight of the python curled round Grandfather's throat.

"You'll be strangled!" she cried. "Get rid of it at once!"

"Nonsense," said Grandfather. "He's only a young fellow. He'll soon get used to us."

"Will he, indeed?" said Grandmother. "But I have no intention of getting used to him. You know quite well that your cousin Mabel is coming to stay with us tomorrow. She'll leave us the minute she knows there's a snake in the house."

"Well, perhaps we ought to show it to her as soon as she arrives," said Grandfather, who did not look forward to fussy Aunt Mabel's visits any more than I did.

"You'll do no such thing," said Grandmother.

"Well, I can't let it loose in the garden," said Grandfather with an innocent expression. "It might find its way into the poultry house, and then where would we be?"

"How exasperating you are!" grumbled Grandmother. "Lock the creature in the bathroom, go back to the bazaar and find the man you bought it from, and get him to come and take it back."

In my awestruck presence, Grandfather had to take the python into the bathroom, where he placed it in a steep-sided tin tub. Then he hurried off to the bazaar to look for the snake charmer, while Grandmother paced anxiously up and down the veranda. When he returned looking crestfallen, we knew he hadn't been able to find the man.

"You had better take it away yourself," said Grandmother, in a relentless mood. "Leave it in the jungle across the riverbed."

"All right, but let me give it a feed first," said Grandfather; and producing a plucked chicken, he took it into the bathroom, followed, in single file, by me,

Grandmother and a curious cook and gardener.

Grandfather threw open the door and stepped into the bathroom. I peeped round his legs, while the others remained well behind. We couldn't see the python anywhere.

"He's gone," announced Grandfather. "He must have felt hungry."

"I hope he isn't too hungry," I said.

"We left the window open," said Grandfather, looking embarrassed.

A careful search was made of the house, the kitchen, the garden, the stable and the poultry shed; but the python couldn't be found anywhere.

"He'll be well away by now," said Grandfather reassuringly.

"I certainly hope so," said Grandmother, who was half way between anxiety and relief.

Aunt Mabel arrived next day for a three-week visit, and for a couple of days Grandfather and I were a little apprehensive in case the python made a sudden reappearance; but on the third day, when he didn't show up, we felt confident that he had gone for good.

And then, towards evening, we were startled by a scream from the garden. Seconds later, Aunt Mabel came flying up the veranda steps, looking as though she had seen a ghost.

"In the guava tree!" she gasped. "I was reaching for a guava, when I saw it staring at me. The look in its eyes! As though it would devour me..."

"Calm down, my dear," urged Grandmother, sprinkling her with eau-de-cologne. "Calm down and tell us what you saw."

"A snake!" sobbed Aunt Mabel. "A great boa constrictor. It must have been twenty feet long! In the guava tree. Its eyes were terrible. It looked at me in such a queer way..."

My grandparents looked significantly at each other, and Grandfather said, 'I'll go out and kill it,' and sheepishly taking hold of an umbrella, sallied out into the garden. But when he reached the guava tree, the python had disappeared.

"Aunt Mabel must have frightened it away," I said.

"Hush," said Grandfather. "We mustn't speak of your aunt in that way." But his eyes were alive with laughter.

After this incident, the python began to make a series of appearances, often



in the most unexpected places. Aunt Mabel had another fit of hysterics when she saw him admiring her from under a cushion. She packed her bags, and Grandmother made us intensify the hunt.

Next morning I saw the python curled up on the dressing table, gazing at his reflection in the mirror. I went for Grandfather, but by the time we returned the python had moved elsewhere. A little later he was seen in the garden again. Then he was back on the dressing table, admiring himself in the mirror. Evidently he had become enamoured of his own reflection. Grandfather observed that perhaps the attention he was receiving from everyone had made him a little conceited.

“He’s trying to look better for Aunt Mabel,” I said; a remark that I instantly regretted, because Grandmother overheard it, and brought the flat of her broad hand down on my head.

“Well, now we know his weakness,” said Grandfather.

“Are you trying to be funny too?” demanded Grandmother, looking her most threatening.

“I only meant he was becoming very vain,” said Grandfather hastily. “It should be easier to catch him now.”

He set about preparing a large cage with a mirror at one end. In the cage he left a juicy chicken and various other delicacies, and fitted up the opening with a trapdoor. Aunt Mabel had already left by the time we had this trap ready, but we had to go on with the project because we couldn’t have the python prowling about the house indefinitely.

For a few days nothing happened, and then, as I was leaving for school one morning, I saw the python curled up in the cage. He had eaten everything left out for him, and was relaxing in front of the mirror with something resembling a smile on his face - if you can imagine a python smiling... I lowered the trapdoor gently, but the python took no notice; he was in raptures over his handsome reflection. Grandfather and the gardener put the cage in the pony-trap, and made a journey to the other side of the riverbed. They left the cage in the jungle, with the trapdoor open.

“He made no attempt to get out,” said Grandfather later. “And I didn’t have the heart to take the mirror away. It’s the first time I’ve seen a snake fall in love.”

“And the frogs have sung their old song in the mud...” This was Grandfather’s favourite quotation from Virgil, and he used it whenever we visited the rainwater pond behind the house where there were quantities of mud and

frogs and the occasional water buffalo. Grandfather had once brought a number of frogs into the house. He had put them in a glass jar, left them on a windowsill, and then forgotten all about them. At about four o'clock in the morning the entire household was awakened by a loud and fearful noise, and Grandmother and several nervous relatives gathered in their nightclothes on the veranda. Their timidity changed to fury when they discovered that the ghastly sounds had come from Grandfather's frogs. Seeing the dawn breaking, the frogs had with one accord begun their morning song.

Grandmother wanted to throw the frogs, bottle and all, out of the window; but Grandfather said that if he gave the bottle a good shaking, the frogs would remain quiet. He was obliged to keep awake, in order to shake the bottle whenever the frogs showed any inclination to break into song. Fortunately for all concerned, the next day a servant took the top off the bottle to see what was inside. The sight of several big frogs so startled him that he ran off without replacing the cover; the frogs jumped out and presumably found their way back to the pond.

It became a habit with me to visit the pond on my own, in order to explore its banks and shallows. Taking off my shoes, I would wade into the muddy water up to my knees, to pluck the water lilies that floated on the surface.

One day I found the pond already occupied by several buffaloes. Their keeper, a boy a little older than me, was swimming about in the middle. Instead of climbing out on to the bank, he would pull himself up on the back of one of his buffaloes, stretch his naked brown body out on the animal's glistening wet hide, and start singing to himself.

When he saw me staring at him from across the pond, he smiled, showing gleaming white teeth in a dark, sun-burnished face. He invited me to join him in a swim. I told him I couldn't swim, and he offered to teach me. I hesitated, knowing that Grandmother held strict and old-fashioned views about mixing with village children; but, deciding that Grandfather - who sometimes smoked a hookah on the sly - would get me out of any trouble that might occur, I took the bold step of accepting the boy's offer. Once taken, the step did not seem so bold.

He dived off the back of his buffalo, and swam across to me. And I, having removed my clothes, followed his instructions until I was floundering about among the water lilies. His name was Ramu, and he promised to give me swimming lessons every afternoon; and so it was during the afternoon - especially summer afternoons when everyone was asleep - that we usually met. Before long I was able to swim across the pond to sit with Ramu astride a contented buffalo, the great beast standing like an island in the middle of a

muddy ocean.

Sometimes we would try racing the buffaloes, Ramu and I sitting on different mounts. But they were lazy creatures, and would leave one comfortable spot only to look for another; or, if they were in no mood for games, would roll over on their backs, taking us with them into the mud and green slime of the pond. Emerging in shades of green and khaki, I would slip into the house through the bathroom and bathe under the tap before getting into my clothes.

One afternoon, Ramu and I found a small tortoise in the mud, sitting over a hole in which it had laid several eggs. Ramu kept the eggs for his dinner, and I presented the tortoise to Grandfather. He had a weakness for tortoises, and was pleased with this addition to his menagerie, giving it a large tub of water all to itself, with an island of rocks in the middle. The tortoise, however, was always getting out of the tub and wandering about the house. As it seemed able to look after itself quite well, we did not interfere. If one of the dogs bothered it too much, it would draw its head and legs into its shell and defy all their attempts at rough play.

Ramu came from a family of bonded labourers, and had received no schooling. But he was well-versed in folklore, and knew a great deal about birds and animals.

“Many birds are sacred,” said Ramu, as we watched a blue jay swoop down from a peepul tree and carry off a grasshopper. He told me that both the blue jay and the God Shiva were called ‘Nilkanth’. Shiva had a blue throat, like the bird, because out of compassion for the human race he had swallowed a deadly poison which was intended to destroy the world. Keeping the poison in his throat, he did not let it go any further.

“Are squirrels sacred?” I asked, seeing one sprint down the trunk of the peepul tree.

“Oh, yes, Lord Krishna loved squirrels,” said Ramu. “He would take them in his arms and stroke them with his long fingers. That is why they have four dark lines down their backs from head to tail. Krishna was very dark, and the lines are the marks of his fingers.”

Both Ramu and Grandfather were of the opinion that we should be more gentle with birds and animals and should not kill so many of them.

“It is also important that we respect them,” said Grandfather. “We must acknowledge their rights. Everywhere, birds and animals are finding it more difficult to survive, because we are trying to destroy both them and their forests. They have to keep moving as the trees disappear.”

This was especially true of the forests near Dehradun, where the tiger and the pheasant and the spotted deer were beginning to disappear.

Ramu and I spent many long summer afternoons at the pond. I still remember him with affection, though we never saw each other again after I left Dehradun. He could not read or write, so we were unable to keep in touch. And neither his people, nor mine, knew of our friendship. The buffaloes and frogs had been our only confidantes. They had accepted us as part of their own world, their muddy but comfortable pond. And when I left Dehradun, both they and Ramu must have assumed that I would return again like the birds.

## 2. Minimum Marriage Age

At what age couples should be allowed to get married is a debatable topic. Many countries around the world have set this limit to be 18 with some exceptions: as low as 15 and as high as 21. With the increase of literacy and global awareness, many people believe that the minimum age should be at least 21 before couples share nuptial bed while others are of the opinion that there should be no limit at all. In my judgement it depends on the culture and the circumstances of the people.

Country like India, where majority of the marriages are arranged by the parents, setting the minimum to be at least 21 is very desirable. The population of the country is growing too fast. People need time to get mature and make rational decisions before they take marriage vows. People's perception changes with education and experience: when they are young they may pay more attention to beauty and good looking; as people get mature they see life from different perspectives. They want to be prosperous and make long term plans – not just the fever of love.

However, other people think that the minimum age of 21 is too high, especially for girls. If the girl has finished her education at 16, what is she to do for five years? If the parents see a suitable match for her and she can settle with her in-laws, it takes weight off from their shoulders.

Nonetheless, the situation is very different in the western countries. A lot couple cohabits or live-in relationship before they get married. More than 50% children are born in the U.K. to unmarried parents. In my opinion rather than making rigid laws, we should educate people about the importance and the consequences of a marriage. In my own situation, we were both under 20 when we got married and we went to college together to complete our degrees. I think we had the best of both worlds – got married young and completed education.

## 3. Jokes

### The Servants of People

An American delegation on a visit to India were being shown round the capital. In the evening they were taken to the Secretariat for a panoramic view of Vijay Chowk and Rajpath. Came the closing hour and thousands upon thousands of clerks poured out of their offices. The place was crammed with bicycles and pedestrians.

“Who are all these people?” asked the leader of the American delegation. “They are the common people of India; the real rulers of the country,” proudly replied the minister accompanying the visitors.

A few minutes later came a fleet of flag-bearing limousines escorted by pilots on motorcycles followed by jeeps full of armed policemen.

“And who are these?” asked the American.

“These are us,” replied the minister with the same pride, “the servants of the people.”

What do you call a teacher with no arms, no legs, and no body?

**The Head...**

### A Sack of Grain

A Haryanavi peasant was walking down the road carrying a heavy sack of grain on his head. A kind Sardar farmer drawing his bullock cart offered him a lift. The Haryanavi gratefully accepted the offer and sat down in the cart but kept the sack on his head.

“Chaudhury, why don't you put down the sack on the *gadda*?” said the Sardar.

“Sardarji,” replied the Haryanavi, “your cart is already heavily loaded. I don't want to put more burden on your poor bullock.”

## 4. Grammar Page

Unit  
14

### Present perfect and past 2 (I have done and I did)

A

We do not use the present perfect (**I have done**) when we talk about a *finished* time (for example, **yesterday / last year / ten minutes ago** etc.). We use a past tense:

- It **was** very cold **yesterday**. (*not has been*)
- Paul and Lucy **arrived ten minutes ago**. (*not have arrived*)
- Did you eat** a lot of sweets **when you were a child**? (*not have you eaten*)
- I **got** home late **last night**. I **was** very tired and **went** straight to bed.

Use the past to ask **When ... ?** or **What time ... ?**:

- When did** your friends **arrive**? (*not have ... arrived*)
- What time did** you **finish** work?

Compare:

*Present perfect*

- Tom **has lost** his key. He can't get into the house.
- Is Carla here or **has she left**?

*Past simple*

- Tom **lost** his key **yesterday**. He couldn't get into the house.
- When did** Carla **leave**?

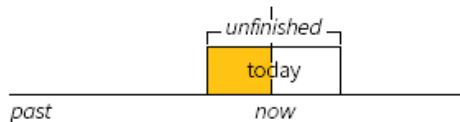
B

Compare:

*Present perfect (have done)*

- I've **done** a lot of work **today**.

We use the present perfect for a period of time that continues *until now*. For example:  
**today / this week / since 2010.**

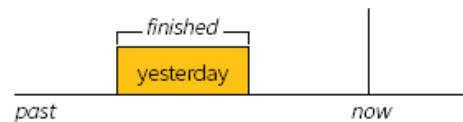


- It **hasn't rained this week**.
- Have you seen** Anna **this morning**? (it is still morning now)
- Have you seen** Ben **recently**? (in the last few days or weeks)
- I've **been working** here **since 2010**. (I still work here now)
- I don't know where Lisa is. I **haven't seen** her. (= I haven't seen her recently)
- We've **been waiting** for an hour. (we are still waiting now)
- Jack lives in Los Angeles. He **has lived** there for seven years.
- I've **never ridden** a horse. (in my life)
- It's the last day of your holiday. You say: It's **been** a really good holiday. I've really enjoyed it.

*Past simple (did)*

- I **did** a lot of work **yesterday**.

We use the past simple for a *finished* time in the past. For example:  
**yesterday / last week / from 2010 to 2014.**



- It **didn't rain** last week.
- Did you see** Anna **this morning**? (it is now afternoon or evening)
- Did you see** Ben **on Sunday**?
- I **worked** here **from 2010 to 2014**. (I don't work here now)
- A: **Was** Lisa at the party **on Sunday**?  
B: I don't think so. I **didn't see** her.
- We **waited** (*or were waiting*) for an hour. (we are no longer waiting)
- Jack **lived** in New York for ten years. Now he lives in Los Angeles.
- I **never rode** a bike **when I was a child**.
- After you come back from holiday you say: It **was** a really good holiday. I really enjoyed it.