



**Learn English Through
Stories**
E Series

E19

**Adapted and modified by
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1. A Special Tree

By Ruskin Bond



One day, when Rakesh was six, he walked home from the Mussoorie bazaar eating cherries. They were a little sweet, a little sour, small, bright red cherries, which had come all the way from the Kashmir Valley.

Here in the Himalayan foothills where Rakesh lived, there were not many fruit trees. The soil was stony, and the dry cold winds **stunted (restricted)** the growth of most plants. But on the more sheltered slopes there were forests of oak and deodar.

Rakesh lived with his grandfather on the outskirts of Mussoorie, just where the forest began. His father and mother lived in a small village fifty miles away, where they grew maize, rice and barley in narrow terraced fields on the lower slopes of the mountain. But there were no schools in the village, and Rakesh's parents were keen that he should go to school. As soon as he was of school-going age, they sent him to stay with his grandfather in Mussoorie.

He had a little cottage outside the town.

Rakesh was on his way home from school when he bought the cherries. He paid fifty paise for the bunch. It took him about half-an-hour to walk home, and by the time he reached the cottage there were only three cherries left.

"Have a cherry, Grandfather," he said, as soon as he saw his grandfather in the garden.

Grandfather took one cherry and Rakesh promptly ate the other two. He kept the last seed in his mouth for some time, rolling it round and round on his tongue until all the **tang (after taste)** had gone. Then he placed the seed on the palm of his hand and studied it.

"Are cherry seeds lucky?" asked Rakesh.

"Of course."

"Then I'll keep it."

"Nothing is lucky if you put it away. If you want luck, you must put it to some use."

"What can I do with a seed?"

“Plant it.”

So Rakesh found a small space and began to dig up a flowerbed.

“Hey, not there,” said Grandfather, “I’ve sown mustard in that bed. Plant it in that shady corner, where it won’t be disturbed.”

Rakesh went to a corner of the garden where the earth was soft and yielding. He did not have to dig. He pressed the seed into the soil with his thumb and it went right in.

Then he had his lunch, and ran off to play cricket with his friends, and forgot all about the cherry seed.

When it was winter in the hills, a cold wind blew down from the snows and went *whoo-whoo-whoo* in the deodar trees, and the garden was dry and bare. In the evenings Grandfather and Rakesh sat over a charcoal fire, and Grandfather told Rakesh stories - stories about people who turned into animals, and ghosts who lived in trees, and beans that jumped and stones that wept - and in turn Rakesh would read to him from the newspaper, Grandfather’s eyesight being rather weak. Rakesh found the newspaper very dull - especially after the stories - but Grandfather wanted all the news...

They knew it was spring when the wild duck flew north again, to Siberia. Early in the morning, when he got up to chop wood and light a fire, Rakesh saw the V - shaped formation streaming northward, the calls of the birds carrying clearly through the thin mountain air.

One morning in the garden he bent to pick up what he thought was a small twig and found to his surprise that it was well rooted. He stared at it for a moment, then ran to fetch Grandfather, calling, “Dada, come and look, the cherry tree has come up!”

“What cherry tree?” asked Grandfather, who had forgotten about it. “The seed we planted last year - look, it’s come up!”

Rakesh went down on his haunches, while Grandfather bent almost double and peered down at the tiny tree. It was about four inches high.

“Yes, it’s a cherry tree,” said Grandfather. “You should water it now and then.” Rakesh ran indoors and came back with a bucket of water.

“Don’t drown it!” said Grandfather.

Rakesh gave it a sprinkling and circled it with pebbles. “What are the pebbles for?” asked Grandfather.

“For privacy,” said Rakesh.

He looked at the tree every morning but it did not seem to be growing very fast, so he stopped looking at it except quickly, out of the corner of his eye. And, after a week or two, when he allowed himself to look at it properly, he found that it had grown - at least an inch!

That year the monsoon rains came early and Rakesh plodded to and from school in raincoat and chappals. **Ferns** sprang from the trunks of trees, strange-looking lilies came up in the long grass, and even when it wasn't raining the trees dripped and mist came curling up the valley. The cherry tree grew quickly in this season.



Ferns

It was about two feet high when a goat entered the garden and ate all the leaves. Only the main stem and two thin branches remained.

“Never mind,” said Grandfather, seeing that Rakesh was upset. “It will grow again, cherry trees are tough.”

Towards the end of the rainy season new leaves appeared on the tree. Then a woman cutting grass scrambled down the hillside, her scythe swishing through the heavy monsoon foliage. She did not try to avoid the tree: one sweep, and the cherry tree was cut in two.

When Grandfather saw what had happened, he went after the woman and scolded her; but the damage could not be repaired.

“Maybe it will die now,” said Rakesh.

“Maybe,” said Grandfather.

But the cherry tree had no intention of dying.

By the time summer came round again, it had sent out several new shoots with tender green leaves. Rakesh had grown taller too. He was eight now, a sturdy boy with curly black hair and deep black eyes. “Blackberry eyes,” Grandfather called them.

That monsoon Rakesh went home to his village, to help his father and mother with the planting and ploughing and sowing. He was thinner but stronger when he came back to Grandfather's house at the end of the rains to find that

the cherry tree had grown another foot. It was now up to his chest.

Even when there was rain, Rakesh would sometimes water the tree. He wanted it to know that he was there.

One day he found a bright green **praying-mantis** perched on a branch, peering at him with bulging eyes. Rakesh let it remain there; it was the cherry tree's first visitor.



Praying-mantis

The next visitor was a hairy caterpillar, who started making a meal of the leaves. Rakesh removed it quickly and dropped it on a heap of dry leaves.

“Come back when you’re a butterfly,” he said.

Winter came early. The cherry tree bent low with the weight of snow. Field-mice sought shelter in the roof of the cottage. The road from the valley was blocked, and for several days there was no newspaper, and this made Grandfather quite grumpy. His stories began to have unhappy endings.

In February it was Rakesh's birthday. He was nine - and the tree was four, but almost as tall as Rakesh.

One morning, when the sun came out, Grandfather came into the garden to ‘let some warmth get into my bones,’ as he put it. He stopped in front of the cherry tree, stared at it for a few moments, and then called out, “Rakesh! Come and look! Come quickly before it falls!”

Rakesh and Grandfather gazed at the tree as though it had performed a miracle. There was a pale pink blossom at the end of a branch.

The following year there were more blossoms. And suddenly the tree was taller than Rakesh, even though it was less than half his age. And then it was taller than Grandfather, who was older than some of the oak trees.

But Rakesh had grown too. He could run and jump and climb trees as well as most boys, and he read a lot of books, although he still liked listening to Grandfather's tales.

In the cherry tree, bees came to feed on the nectar in the blossoms, and tiny birds pecked at the blossoms and broke them off. But the tree kept blossoming right through the spring, and there were always more blossoms

than birds.

That summer there were small cherries on the tree. Rakesh tasted one and spat it out. "It's too sour," he said.

"They'll be better next year," said Grandfather.

But the birds liked them - especially the bigger birds, such as the bulbuls and scarlet minivets - and they flitted in and out of the foliage, feasting on the cherries.

On a warm sunny afternoon, when even the bees looked sleepy, Rakesh was looking for Grandfather without finding him in any of his favourite places around the house. Then he looked out of the bedroom window and saw Grandfather reclining on a cane chair under the cherry tree.

"There's just the right amount of shade here," said Grandfather. "And I like looking at the leaves."

"They're pretty leaves," said Rakesh. "And they are always ready to dance, if there's a breeze."

After Grandfather had come indoors, Rakesh went into the garden and lay down on the grass beneath the tree. He gazed up through the leaves at the great blue sky; and turning on his side, he could see the mountains striding away into the clouds. He was still lying beneath the tree when the evening shadows crept across the garden. Grandfather came back and sat down beside Rakesh, and they waited in silence until the stars came out and the **nightjar** began to call. In the forest below, the crickets and cicadas began tuning up; and suddenly the trees were full of the sound of insects.



A nightjar bird

"There are so many trees in the forest," said Rakesh. "What's so special about this tree? Why do we like it so much?"

"We planted it ourselves," said Grandfather. "That's why it's special."

"Just one small seed," said Rakesh, and he touched the smooth bark of the tree that he had grown. He ran his hand along the trunk of the tree and put his finger to the tip of a leaf. "I wonder," he whispered. "Is this what it feels to be God?"

2. Haripant the Wise

By Sudha Murthy

During the reign of one of the Vijayanagar emperors, there lived a wise magistrate named Haripant. His verdicts were always fair and people came to him from all over the vast kingdom so he could settle their disputes.

In the city, there lived a greedy ghee merchant named Shiriyala Shetty. His shop always had twenty barrels of ghee, but of these, fifteen would be good and the remaining five adulterated. He would mix the adulterated ghee with the good one and sell it to the people. This went on for a long time, till finally the people got tired of being cheated and complained to Haripant.

Haripant got the ghee examined and found it to be adulterated indeed. He gave Shiriyala a choice of punishment. He could either drink the five barrels of adulterated ghee from his shop, or he could get hundred lashings, or pay a thousand gold coins to the treasury.

Shiriyala started thinking. Losing a thousand gold coins was too much and a hundred lashings too painful. So he decided to drink up the five barrels of ghee.

Though Shiriyala sold adulterated stuff in his shop, he had always made sure his own food was of the best quality. So after drinking one barrel of the bad ghee he started feeling sick. By the third barrel, he was vomiting. At this point he decided to opt for the lashings instead. But his was a pampered body, unused to any hard work. After ten lashes, he started trembling, by twenty he was giddy, and by forty he was half dead. "Stop!" he screamed. "I will pay the thousand gold coins! Just let me go."

Finally Shiriyala had to pay the money, and he ended up suffering all three punishments, something he would not forget in a hurry. The people of the city got to use only the best quality ghee in their food from then on!

Another time, Gunakara, a poor coolie, was walking by Vibhandaka's clothes store. Vibhandaka was a rich merchant who owned a huge clothes store right in the centre of the town. It was a winter morning and Gunakara was carrying a large sack of waste from a nearby eatery to the rubbish dump. As he was passing by Vibhandaka's store, he slipped and fell. His sack opened up and the stinking waste lay all over Vibhandaka's shop floor. The merchant immediately started screaming, "Look at this mess. Clean it right away before my customers come."

Trembling, Gunakara took a broom and bucket of water and started cleaning. He cleaned and polished till not a speck of dirt remained on the floor. But Vibhandaka would not give in so easily. "The floor is wet," he shouted. "Get a cloth and wipe it." Gunakara scratched his head. "I don't have any cloth on me," he said. "Anyway, by the time your customers come the sun will be out and it will dry up. Or you give me a cloth and I will wipe the floor." Now the merchant was even angrier. "Is this a warehouse of old clothes? Where will I get a spare cloth from? You take off your coat and wipe the floor with it."

This was too much. Gunakara was wearing an old, worn woollen coat, the only warm clothing he possessed.

"I am a poor man," he tried to explain. "Some rich person like you gave me this used coat for the winter. If I use this coat to clean the floor, what will I wear? Please let me go."

But Vibhandaka was adamant. "No. If the dirty smell persists after you go no customer will come to the shop. I will suffer big losses. My reputation will be ruined and I will become a pauper. So quick, take off your coat and clean up."

By now, word of the argument had spread and a crowd had gathered. Haripant, on his way to court, heard the angry exchanges and pushed his way through the crowd. Everyone fell back. Justice would now be done, they were sure. When he had heard the entire story, Haripant turned to Gunakara. "He is right. If you don't clean up well, Vibhandaka will suffer huge losses. Take off your coat and clean the floor." A hush fell on the crowd. How could Haripant deliver such an unjust verdict? As the murmurs grew, Haripant held up his hand. "I am not done yet," he announced. "There is a second part to my verdict." Turning to the merchant he said, "And you will compensate Gunakara's family for his untimely death."

"What death?" howled an enraged Vibhandaka. Haripant was calm. "Your complaint was based on an 'if'. 'If' customers smelt the dirty smell, they would abandon your shop and you would be ruined. Similarly, 'if' Gunakara loses his coat today, he may catch a cold and fever and die in a few days. His whole family depends on his earnings, so they may starve. Some of them might also die due to starvation. So you have to compensate his family.'

Haripant smiled as Vibhandaka stood looking worried. "Gunakara, clean up," he said. "And, Vibhandaka, let him go inside the store and choose the best and warmest coat for the winter." The people who had gathered around applauded the clever verdict.

3. Grammar Page

5 Verbs and Tenses

Most verbs describe actions, so they are called **action verbs**. Action verbs tell what people or things are doing. Here are some common action verbs.

drink	look	jump	swim	fall
eat	shout	walk	throw	climb
laugh	run	sit	catch	dance

Subject and Verb Agreement

When you use a verb, you have to say who or what is doing the action. This 'who or what' is the **subject** of the verb. The subject and the verb match each other. You say that the subject and the verb *agree* when they match each other.

Use a **singular verb** if the subject is a **singular noun**. For example, the subjects 'my dad' or 'our school', or any of the pronouns **he**, **she** or **it**, require a singular verb. Most singular verbs end in **s**. Look at the subjects and their verbs in these examples. The subjects are in bold and the verbs are in color.

- He always **drinks** milk when he's hot.
- She **eats** bananas for breakfast.
- Mom **walks** to work every day.
- My sister **dances** like a professional dancer.
- The baby **falls** when she **tries** to walk.
- Our cat **climbs** the trees in our garden.

This form of the verb is called the **third person singular**. You use it when the subject of the verb is not you or the person you are speaking to, but some other person—a third person—or a thing.

Here are some more **third person singular verbs** that end in **s**.

plays	sings	shines	rides	smiles
draws	paints	blows	thinks	stops
reads	rains	travels	talks	starts