



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F17

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## **Contents**

- 1. The School Among the Pines Part 2.**
- 2. Goa.**
- 3. Grammar Page.**

# 1. The School Among the Pines

## Part 2

### 5

A few days later, a school party was on its way to Tehri to see the new dam that was being built.

Miss Ramola had arranged to take her class, and Mr Mani, not wishing to be left out, insisted on taking his class as well. That meant there were about fifty boys and girls taking part in the outing. The little bus could only take thirty. A friendly truck-driver agreed to take some children if they were prepared to sit on sacks of potatoes. And Prakash persuaded the owner of the diesel-roller to turn it round and head it back to Tehri – with him and a couple of friends up on the driving seat.

Prakash's small group set off at sunrise, as they had to walk some distance in order to reach the stranded road-roller. The bus left at 9 a.m. with Miss Ramola and her class, and Mr Mani and some of his pupils. The truck was to follow later.

It was Bina's first visit to a large town and her first bus ride.

The sharp curves along the winding, downhill road made several children feel sick. The bus-driver seemed to be in a tearing hurry. He took them along at rolling, rollicking speed, which made Bina feel quite giddy. She rested her head on her arms and refused to look out of the window. Hairpin bends and cliff edges, pine forests and snowcapped peaks, all swept past her, but she felt too ill to want to look at anything. It was just as well – those sudden drops, hundreds of feet to the valley below, were quite frightening. Bina began to wish that she hadn't come – or that she had joined Prakash on the road-roller instead!

Miss Ramola and Mr Mani didn't seem to notice the lurching and groaning of the old bus. They had made this journey many times. They were busy arguing about the advantages and disadvantages of large dams – an argument that was to continue on and off for much of the day; sometimes in Hindi, sometimes in English, sometimes in the local dialect!

Meanwhile, Prakash and his friends had reached the roller. The driver hadn't turned up, but they managed to reverse it and get it going in the direction of Tehri. They were soon overtaken by both the bus and the truck but kept moving along at a steady chug. Prakash spotted Bina at the window of the bus

and waved cheerfully. She responded feebly.

Bina felt better when the road levelled out near Tehri. As they crossed an old bridge over the wide river, they were startled by a loud bang which made the bus shudder. A cloud of dust rose above the town.

“They’re blasting the mountain,” said Miss Ramola. “End of a mountain,” said Mr Mani mournfully.

While they were drinking cups of tea at the bus stop, waiting for the potato truck and the road-roller, Miss Ramola and Mr Mani continued their argument about the dam. Miss Ramola maintained that it would bring electric power and water for irrigation to large areas of the country, including the surrounding area. Mr Mani declared that it was a menace, as it was situated in an earthquake zone. There would be a terrible disaster if the dam burst! Bina found it all very confusing. And what about the animals in the area, she wondered, what would happen to them?

The argument was becoming quite heated when the potato truck arrived. There was no sign of the road-roller, so it was decided that Mr Mani should wait for Prakash and his friends while Miss Ramola’s group went ahead.

Some eight or nine miles before Tehri the road-roller had broken down, and Prakash and his friends were forced to walk. They had not gone far, however, when a mule train came along – five or six mules that had been delivering sacks of grain in Nauti. A boy rode on the first mule, but the others had no loads.

“Can you give us a ride to Tehri?” called Prakash. “Make yourselves comfortable,” said the boy.

There were no saddles, only gunny sacks strapped on to the mules with rope. They had a rough but jolly ride down to the Tehri bus stop. None of them had ever ridden mules; but they had saved at least an hour on the road.

Looking around the bus stop for the rest of the party, they could find no one from their school. And Mr Mani, who should have been waiting for them, had vanished.

## 6

Tania Ramola and her group had taken the steep road to the hill above Tehri. Half-an-hour's climbing brought them to a little plateau which overlooked the town, the river and the dam-site.

The earthworks for the dam were only just coming up, but a wide tunnel had been bored through the mountain to divert the river into another channel. Down below, the old town was still spread out across the valley and from a distance it looked quite charming and picturesque.

"Will the whole town be swallowed up by the waters of the dam?" asked Bina.

"Yes, all of it," said Miss Ramola. "The clock tower and the old palace. The long bazaar, and the temples, the schools and the jail, and hundreds of houses, for many miles up the valley. All those people will have to go – thousands of them! Of course, they'll be resettled elsewhere."

"But the town's been here for hundreds of years," said Bina. "They were quite happy without the dam, weren't they?"

"I suppose they were. But the dam isn't just for them – it's for the millions who live further downstream, across the plains."

"And it doesn't matter what happens to this place?"

"The local people will be given new homes, somewhere else." Miss Ramola found herself on the defensive and decided to change the subject. "Everyone must be hungry. It's time we had our lunch."

Bina kept quiet. She didn't think the local people would want to go away. And it was a good thing, she mused, that there was only a small stream and not a big river running past her village. To be uprooted like this – a town and hundreds of villages – and put down somewhere on the hot, dusty plains – seemed to her unbearable.

"Well, I'm glad I don't live in Tehri," she said.

She did not know it, but all the animals and most of the birds had already left the area. The leopard had been among them.

They walked through the colourful, crowded bazaar, where fruit-sellers did business beside silversmiths, and pavement vendors sold everything from umbrellas to glass bangles. Sparrows attacked sacks of grain, monkeys made off with bananas, and stray cows and dogs rummaged in refuse bins, but nobody took any notice. Music blared from radios. Buses blew their horns. Sonu bought a whistle to add to the general din, but Miss Ramola told him to put it away. Bina had kept ten rupees aside, and now she used it to buy a cotton head-scarf for her mother.

As they were about to enter a small restaurant for a meal, they were joined by Prakash and his companions; but of Mr Mani there was still no sign.

“He must have met one of his relatives,” said Prakash. “He has relatives everywhere.”

After a simple meal of rice and lentils, they walked the length of the bazaar without seeing Mr Mani. At last, when they were about to give up the search, they saw him emerge from a by-lane, a large sack slung over his shoulder.

“Sir, where have you been?” asked Prakash. “We have been looking for you everywhere.”

On Mr Mani’s face was a look of triumph.

“Help me with this bag,” he said breathlessly.

“You’ve bought more potatoes, sir,” said Prakash.

“Not potatoes, boy. Dahlia bulbs!”

## 7

It was dark by the time they were all back in Nauti. Mr Mani had refused to be separated from his sack of dahlia bulbs, and had been forced to sit in the back of the truck with Prakash and most of the boys.

Bina did not feel so ill on the return journey. Going uphill was definitely better than going downhill! But by the time the bus reached Nauti it was too late for most of the children to walk back to the more distant villages. The boys were put up in different homes, while the girls were given beds in the school verandah.

The night was warm and still. Large moths fluttered around the single bulb that lit the verandah. Counting moths, Sonu soon fell asleep. But Bina stayed awake for some time, listening to the sounds of the night. A nightjar went *tonk-tonk* in the bushes, and somewhere in the forest an owl hooted softly. The sharp call of a barking-deer travelled up the valley, from the direction of the stream. Jackals kept howling. It seemed that there were more of them than ever before.

Bina was not the only one to hear the barking-deer. The leopard, stretched full length on a rocky ledge, heard it too. The leopard raised its head and then got up slowly. The deer was its natural prey. But there weren't many left, and that was why the leopard, robbed of its forest by the dam, had taken to attacking dogs and cattle near the villages.

As the cry of the barking-deer sounded nearer, the leopard left its look-out point and moved swiftly through the shadows towards the stream.

## 8

In early June the hills were dry and dusty, and forest fires broke out, destroying shrubs and trees, killing birds and small animals. The resin in the pines made these trees burn more fiercely, and the wind would take sparks from the trees and carry them into the dry grass and leaves, so that new fires would spring up before the old ones had died out. Fortunately, Bina's village was not in the pine belt; the fires did not reach it. But Nauti was surrounded by a fire that raged for three days, and the children had to stay away from school.

And then, towards the end of June, the monsoon rains arrived and there was an end to forest fires. The monsoon lasts three months and the lower Himalayas would be drenched in rain, mist and cloud for the next three months.

The first rain arrived while Bina, Prakash and Sonu were returning home from school. Those first few drops on the dusty path made them cry out with excitement. Then the rain grew heavier and a wonderful aroma rose from the earth.

"The best smell in the world!" exclaimed Bina.

Everything suddenly came to life. The grass, the crops, the trees, the birds. Even the leaves of the trees glistened and looked new.

That first wet weekend, Bina and Sonu helped their mother plant beans, maize and cucumbers. Sometimes, when the rain was very heavy, they had to run indoors. Otherwise they worked in the rain, the soft mud clinging to their bare legs.

Prakash now owned a black dog with one ear up and one ear down. The dog ran around getting in everyone's way, barking at cows, goats, hens and humans, without frightening any of them. Prakash said it was a very clever dog, but no one else seemed to think so. Prakash also said it would protect the village from the leopard, but others said the dog would be the first to be taken – he'd run straight into the jaws of Mr Spots! In Nauti, Tania Ramola was trying to find a dry spot in the quarters she'd been given. It was an old building and the roof was leaking in several places. Mugs and buckets were scattered about the floor in order to catch the drip.

Mr Mani had dug up all his potatoes and presented them to the friends and neighbours who had given him lunches and dinners. He was having the time of his life, planting dahlia bulbs all over his garden.

"I'll have a field of many-coloured dahlias!" he announced. "Just wait till the end of August!"

"Watch out for those porcupines," warned his sister. "They eat dahlia bulbs too!"

Mr Mani made an inspection tour of his moat, no longer in flood, and found everything in good order. Prakash had done his job well.

Now, when the children crossed the stream, they found that the water-level had risen by about a foot. Small cascades had turned into waterfalls. Ferns had sprung up on the banks. Frogs chanted.

Prakash and his dog dashed across the stream. Bina and Sonu followed more cautiously. The current was much stronger now and the water was almost up to their knees. Once they had crossed the stream, they hurried along the path, anxious not to be caught in a sudden downpour.

By the time they reached school, each of them had two or three leeches clinging to their legs. They had to use salt to remove them. The leeches were the most troublesome part of the rainy season. Even the leopard did not like them. It could not lie in the long grass without getting leeches on its paws and face.



One day, when Bina, Prakash and Sonu were about to cross the stream they heard a low rumble, which grew louder every second. Looking up at the opposite hill, they saw several trees shudder, tilt outwards and begin to fall. Earth and rocks bulged out from the mountain, then came crashing down into the ravine.

“Landslide!” shouted Sonu.

“It’s carried away the path,” said Bina. “Don’t go any further.”

There was a tremendous roar as more rocks, trees and bushes fell away and crashed down the hillside.

Prakash’s dog, who had gone ahead, came running back, tail between his legs.

They remained rooted to the spot until the rocks had stopped falling and the dust had settled. Birds circled the area, calling wildly. A frightened barking-deer ran past them.

‘We can’t go to school now,’ said Prakash. ‘There’s no way around.’ They turned and trudged home through the gathering mist.

In Koli, Prakash’s parents had heard the roar of the landslide. They were setting out in search of the children when they saw them emerge from the mist, waving cheerfully.

## 9

They had to miss school for another three days, and Bina was afraid they might not be able to take their final exams. Although Prakash was not really troubled at the thought of missing exams, he did not like feeling helpless just because their path had been swept away. So he explored the hillside until he found a goat-track going around the mountain. It joined up with another path near Nauti. This made their walk longer by a mile, but Bina did not mind. It was much cooler now that the rains were in full swing.

The only trouble with the new route was that it passed close to the leopard’s lair.

The animal had made this area its own since being forced to leave the dam area.

One day Prakash's dog ran ahead of them, barking furiously. Then he ran back, whimpering.

"He's always running away from something," observed Sonu. But a minute later he understood the reason for the dog's fear.

They rounded a bend and Sonu saw the leopard standing in their way. They were struck dumb – too terrified to run. It was a strong, sinewy creature. A low growl rose from its throat. It seemed ready to spring.

They stood perfectly still, afraid to move or say a word. And the leopard must have been equally surprised. It stared at them for a few seconds, then bounded across the path and into the oak forest.

Sonu was shaking. Bina could hear her heart hammering. Prakash could only stammer: "Did you see the way he sprang? Wasn't he beautiful?"

He forgot to look at his watch for the rest of the day.

A few days later Sonu stopped and pointed to a large outcrop of rock on the next hill.

The leopard stood far above them, outlined against the sky. It looked strong, majestic. Standing beside it were two young cubs.

"Look at those little ones!" exclaimed Sonu.

"So it's a female, not a male," said Prakash.

"That's why she was killing so often," said Bina. "She had to feed her cubs too."

They remained still for several minutes, gazing up at the leopard and her cubs. The leopard family took no notice of them.

"She knows we are here," said Prakash, "but she doesn't care. She knows we won't harm them."

"We are cubs too!" said Sonu.

"Yes," said Bina. "And there's still plenty of space for all of us. Even when the dam is ready there will still be room for leopards and humans."

The school exams were over. The rains were nearly over too. The landslide had been cleared, and Bina, Prakash and Sonu were once again crossing the stream.

There was a chill in the air, for it was the end of September.

Prakash had learnt to play the flute quite well, and he played on the way to school and then again on the way home. As a result he did not look at his watch so often.

One morning they found a small crowd in front of Mr Mani's house.

"What could have happened?" wondered Bina. "I hope he hasn't got lost again."

"Maybe he's sick," said Sonu.

"Maybe it's the porcupines," said Prakash.

But it was none of these things.

Mr Mani's first dahlia was in bloom, and half the village had turned out to look at it! It was a huge red double dahlia, so heavy that it had to be supported with sticks. No one had ever seen such a magnificent flower!

Mr Mani was a happy man. And his mood only improved over the coming week, as more and more dahlias flowered – crimson, yellow, purple, mauve, white – button dahlias, pompom dahlias, spotted dahlias, striped dahlias... Mr Mani had them all! A dahlia even turned up on Tania Romola's desk – he got on quite well with her now – and another brightened up the headmaster's study.

A week later, on their way home – it was almost the last day of the school term – Bina, Prakash and Sonu talked about what they might do when they grew up.

"I think I'll become a teacher," said Bina. "I'll teach children about animals and birds, and trees and flowers."

"Better than maths!" said Prakash.

"I'll be a pilot," said Sonu. "I want to fly a plane like Miss Ramola's

brother.”

“And what about you, Prakash?” asked Bina.

Prakash just smiled and said, “Maybe I’ll be a flute-player,” and he put the flute to his lips and played a sweet melody.

“Well, the world needs flute-players too,” said Bina, as they fell into step beside him.

The leopard had been stalking a barking-deer. She paused when she heard the flute and the voices of the children. Her own young ones were growing quickly, but the girl and the two boys did not look much older.

They had started singing their favourite song again.

*Five more miles to go!*

*We climb through rain  
and snow, A river to  
cross...*

*A mountain to pass...*

*Now we’ve four more miles to go!*

The leopard waited until they had passed, before returning to the trail of the barking- deer.

## 2. Goa

Long known within India as the “go-to” destination for those seeking a great beach holiday, Goa’s beautiful western coastline, overlooking the Arabian Sea, has only recently been discovered by tourists from overseas. Goa’s more than 60 miles of beautiful coastline is home to some of the world’s loveliest beaches, each with their own particular appeal. For those looking for peace and quiet, isolated Agonda Beach is a good choice, while Calangute Beach is by far the most commercial and crowded. For those in search of posh resorts, yoga getaways, and spa vacations, the beaches of Mandrem, Morjim, and Ashwem are fashionable among wealthy Indians and Westerners alike. Palolem is another popular option in a beautiful setting.

Goa is a state in India within the coastal region known as the Konkan in Western India. It is bounded by Maharashtra to the north and Karnataka to the east and south, with the Arabian Sea forming its Western coast. It is India’s smallest state by area and the fourth smallest by population. Goa has the highest GDP per capita among all Indian states, and that is two and a half times that of the country. It was ranked the best placed state by the “Eleventh Finance Commission” for its infrastructure and ranked on top for the best quality of life in India by the National Commission on Population based on the 12 Indicators.

Panaji is the state’s capital, while Vasco da Gama is its largest city. The historic city of Margao still exhibits the cultural influence of the Portuguese, who first landed in the early 16th century as merchants and conquered it soon thereafter. Goa is a former Portuguese province; the Portuguese overseas territory of Portuguese India existed for about 450 years until it was annexed by India in 1961.

Goa is visited by large numbers of international and domestic tourists each year for its beaches, places of worship and world heritage architecture. It has rich flora and fauna, owing to its location on the Western Ghats range, a biodiversity hotspot.

### Vocabulary

1. coastline: the land along a coast
2. posh: stylish, elegant and expensive
3. spa: a place where people can relax and improve their health with, for example, a swimming pool

6. annexed: occupied; 7. flora and fauna: plants and animals
8. biodiversity: the existence of a large number of different kinds of animals and plants
4. GDP: abb. for gross domestic product
5. infrastructure: the basic systems and services that are necessary for a country or organisation to run smoothly
9. hotspot: a place where there is a lot of activity and excitement

## 3. Grammar Page

### 11. Expressions that separate subjects and verbs

→ Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by words such as 'as well as, along with, besides, with, together with' and some other prepositional phrases', in that condition choose the verb according to the number of the first subject.

Riya as well as her sisters **knows** this very well.

The daughters as well as their mother **have** arranged a party.

The students along with their teacher **were** in the classroom.

The politician, along with the newsmen, **is** expected shortly.

The chair, together with the tables, **is** new.

The apples in this basket **are** ripe.

All the songs on this CD **are** pretty good.

The boy at the door **is** waiting for somebody.

The workers, rather than the manager, **have** done it.

The condition of these villagers **is** pitiable.

### 12. Subjects with 'and'

→ A compound subject whose parts are joined by 'and' normally takes a plural verb.

Riya and Mona **are** in the park.

Father and son **have** dug the field.

Blue and pink **are** my favourite colours.

Dogs and cats **are** pet animals.

My brother and sister **study** in Grade VII.

He and I **have** planned a surprise party for Tina.

Both he and his wife **are** vegetarians.

Milk, juice and bread **are** available in this shop.

My friend and my cousin **are** in the hall.

The writer and the editor **were** in the park.

→ When two nouns together joined by 'and' form a phrase which expresses a single idea, the subjects agree with singular verbs.

Truth and honesty **is** a good virtue.

Slow and steady **wins** the race.

Time and tide **waits** for none.

Bread and butter **is** a good breakfast.

Whisky and soda **is** only his food.

The crown and glory of life **is** character.

Rice and curry **is** my favourite dish.

A horse and carriage **is** ready for us.

Law and order **is** the government's main concern.