



**Learn English Through
Stories**
E Series

E20

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1. Tiger My Friend Part 1

By Ruskin Bond

1

On the left bank of the river Ganges, where it flows out from the Himalayan foothills, is a long stretch of heavy forest. There are villages on the fringe of the forest, inhabited by farmers and herdsmen. Big-game hunters came to the area for many years, and as a result the animals had been getting fewer. The trees, too, had been disappearing slowly; and as the animals lost their food and shelter, they moved further into the foothills.

There was a time when this forest had provided a home for some thirty to forty tigers, but men in search of skins and trophies had shot them all, and now there remained only one old tiger in the jungle. The hunters had tried to get him, too, but he was a wise and crafty tiger, who knew the ways of man, and so far he had survived all attempts on his life.

Although the tiger had passed the prime of his life, he had lost none of his majesty. His muscles rippled beneath the golden yellow of his coat, and he walked through the long grass with the confidence of one who knew that he was still a king, although his subjects were fewer. His great head pushed through the foliage, and it was only his tail, swinging high, that sometimes showed above the sea of grass.

He was heading for water, the water of a large marsh, where he sometimes went to drink or cool off. The marsh was usually deserted except when the buffaloes from a nearby village were brought there to bathe or wallow in the muddy water.

The tiger waited in the shelter of a rock, his ears pricked for any unfamiliar sound.

He knew that it was here that hunters sometimes waited for him with guns. He walked into the water, amongst the water-lilies, and drank slowly. He was seldom in a hurry when he ate or drank.

He raised his head and listened, one paw suspended in the air.

A strange sound had come to him on the breeze, and he was wary of strange sounds. So he moved swiftly into the shelter of the tall grass that bordered the marsh, and climbed a hillock until he reached his favourite rock. This rock was big enough to hide him and to give him shade.

The sound he had heard was only a flute, sounding thin and reedy in the forest. It belonged to Nandu, a slim brown boy who rode a buffalo. Nandu played vigorously on the flute. Chottu, a slightly smaller boy, riding another buffalo, brought up the rear of the herd.

There were eight buffaloes in the herd, which belonged to the families of Nandu and Chottu, who were cousins. Their fathers sold buffalo-milk and butter in villages further down the river.

The tiger had often seen them at the marsh, and he was not bothered by their presence. He knew the village folk would leave him alone as long as he did not attack their buffaloes. And as long as there were deer in the jungle, he would not be interested in other prey.

He decided to move on and find a cool shady place in the heart of the jungle, where he could rest during the hot afternoon and be free of the flies and mosquitoes that swarmed around the marsh. At night he would hunt.

With a lazy grunt that was half a roar, 'A-oonh!' – he got off his haunches and sauntered off into the jungle.

The gentlest of tigers' roars can be heard a mile away, and the boys, who were barely fifty yards distant, looked up immediately.

"There he goes!" said Nandu, taking the flute from his lips and pointing with it towards the hillock. "Did you see him?"

"I saw his tail, just before he disappeared. He's a big tiger!"

"Don't call him tiger. Call him Uncle."

"Why?" asked Chottu.

"Because it's unlucky to call a tiger a tiger. My father told me so. But if you meet a tiger, and call him Uncle, he will leave you alone."

"I see," said Chottu. "You have to make him a relative. I'll try and remember that."

The buffaloes were now well into the march, and some of them were lying down in the mud. Buffaloes love soft wet mud and will wallow in it for hours. Nandu and Chottu were not so fond of the mud, so they went swimming in deeper water. Later, they rested in the shade of an old silk-cotton tree.

It was evening, and the twilight fading fast, when the buffalo herd finally made its way homeward, to be greeted outside the village by the barking of dogs, the gurgle of hookah-pipes, and the homely smell of cow-dung smoke.

2

The following evening, when Nandu and Chottu came home with the buffalo herd, they found a crowd of curious villagers surrounding a jeep in which sat three strangers with guns. They were hunters, and they were accompanied by servants and a large store of provisions.

They had heard that there was a tiger in the area, and they wanted to shoot it.

These men had money to spend; and, as most of the villagers were poor, they were prepared to go into the forest to make a *machaan* or tree-platform for the hunters. The platform, big enough to take the three men, was put up in the branches of a tall mahogany tree.

Nandu was told by his father to tie a goat at the foot of the tree. While these preparations were being made, Chottu slipped off and circled the area, with a plan of his own in mind. He had no wish to see the tiger killed and he had decided to give it some sort of warning. So he tied up bits and pieces of old clothing on small trees and bushes. He knew the wily old king of the jungle would keep well away from the area if he saw the bits of clothing – for where there were men's clothes, there would be men.

The vigil kept by the hunters lasted all through the night, but the tiger did not come near the tree. Perhaps he'd got Chottu's warning; or perhaps he wasn't hungry.

It was a cold night, and it wasn't long before the hunters opened their flasks of rum. Soon they were whispering among themselves; then they were chattering so loudly that no wild animal would have come anywhere near them. By morning they were fast asleep.

They looked grumpy and shamefaced as they trudged back to the village.

“Wrong time of the year for tiger,” said the first hunter.

“Nothing left in these parts,” said the second.

“I think I’ve caught a cold,” said the third. And they drove away in disgust.

It was not until the beginning of the summer that something happened to alter the hunting habits of the tiger and bring him into conflict with the villagers.

There had been no rain for almost two months, and the tall jungle grass had become a sea of billowy dry yellow. Some city-dwellers, camping near the forest, had been careless while cooking and had started a forest fire. Slowly it spread into the interior, from where the acrid fumes smoked the tiger out towards the edge of the jungle. As night came on, the flames grew more vivid, the smell stronger. The tiger turned and made for the marsh, where he knew he would be safe provided he swam across to the little island in the centre.

Next morning he was on the island, which was untouched by the fire. But his surroundings had changed. The slopes of the hills were black with burnt grass, and most of the tall bamboo had disappeared. The deer and the wild pig, finding that their natural cover had gone, moved further east.

When the fire had died down and the smoke had cleared, the tiger prowled through the forest again but found no game. He drank at the marsh and settled down in a shady spot to sleep the day away.

The tiger spent four days looking for game. By that time he was so hungry that he even resorted to rooting among the dead leaves and burnt-out stumps of trees, searching for worms and beetles. This was a sad comedown for the king of the jungle. But even now he hesitated to leave the area in search of new hunting grounds, for he had a deep fear and suspicion of the unknown forests further east – forests that were fast being swept away by human habitation. He could have gone north, into the high mountains, but they did not provide him with the long grass he needed for cover.

At break of day he came to the marsh. The water was now shallow and muddy, and a green scum had spread over the top. He drank, and then lay down across his favourite rock, hoping for a deer; but none came. He was about to get up and lope away when he heard an animal approach.

The tiger at once slipped off his rock and flattened himself on the ground, his tawny stripes merging with the dry grass.

A buffalo emerged from the jungle and came to the water. The buffalo was alone. He was a big male, and his long curved horns lay right back across his shoulders. He moved leisurely towards the water, completely unaware of the tiger's presence.

The tiger hesitated before making his charge.

It was a long time – many years – since he had killed a buffalo, and he knew instinctively that the villagers would be angry. But the pangs of hunger overcame his caution. There was no morning breeze, everything was still, and the smell of the tiger did not reach the buffalo. A monkey chattered on a nearby tree, but his warning went unheeded.

Crawling stealthily on his stomach, the tiger skirted the edge of the marsh and approached the buffalo from behind. The buffalo was standing in shallow water, drinking, when the tiger charged from the side and sank his teeth into his victim's thigh.

The buffalo staggered, but turned to fight. He snorted and lowered his horns at the tiger. But the big cat was too fast for the brave buffalo. He bit into the other leg and the buffalo crashed to the ground. Then the tiger moved in for the kill.

After resting, he began to eat. Although he had been starving for days, he could not finish the huge carcass. And so he quenched his thirst at the marsh and dragged the remains of the buffalo into the bushes, to conceal it from jackals and vultures; then he went off to find a place to sleep.

He would return to the kill when he was hungry.

2. The Woman and the Farmer

Noora and Sohail lived in a small village. They made their living by making, baking, and selling clay pitchers. One day, Sohail died of tuberculosis (TB). His body was buried in the village graveyard. His wife Noora used to go every day to his grave and lament her loss.

In the same village lived Banta. He married Santi when he was 20. Santi was a stern lady. Banta was always scared of her. Two years later, Santi died of cholera.

One day, as usual, Noora was bewailing at her husband's grave. Banta, who was engaged in ploughing not far from the spot, set eyes upon Noora. He desired to have her for his wife; so he left his plough and came and sat by her side, and began to shed tears himself.

She asked him why he wept; and he replied, "I have lately lost my wife, who was very dear to me, and tears ease my grief."

"And I," said she, "have lost my husband." And so for a while they mourned in silence.

Then he said, "Since you and I are in like case, shall we not do well to marry and live together? I shall take the place of your dead husband, and you, that of my dead wife."

Noora consented to the plan, which indeed seemed reasonable enough, and they dried their tears.

Noora thought a Punjabi song:

ਉਥੇ ਲੈ ਚਲ ਚਰਖਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਹਲ ਵਗਦੇ

Take my spinning-wheel there, where you are ploughing you fields.

Meanwhile, a thief had come and stolen the oxen which Banta had left with his plough. On discovering the theft, he beat his breast and loudly bewailed his loss.

When Noora heard his cries, she came and said, "Why, are you weeping still?" To which he replied, "Yes, and I mean it this time."

Noora left and thought to herself, "Crocodile tears – they pretend to be sad but they are not sad at all..."

3. Grammar Page

Verbs and Tenses Continue

The third person singular form of some verbs is made by adding **es** at the end. Some examples are verbs that end in **sh, ch, ss, x, zz** and **o**.

brushes	watches	kisses	fixes
rushes	reaches	misses	mixes
polishes	teaches	passes	buzzes
crashes	catches	presses	does
washes	touches	dresses	goes

Here are some sentences with verbs in their **third person singular form**. The subjects are in bold and the verbs are in color.

She always **brushes** her teeth at bedtime.

Dad **polishes** his shoes until they shine.

My brother **watches** television after school.

Kim **catches** the ball with one hand.

Dad **mixes** flour and water when he makes bread.

The bee **buzzes** around the flowers.

My friend Sanjay **goes** to the same school as I do.

How do you make the third person singular form of most verbs that end in **y**? Usually, you just change the **y** to an **i** and then add **es**.

carry - carries	hurry - hurries	copy - copies
cry - cries	fly - flies	marry - marries
study - studies	worry - worries	bully - bullies

A cat **carries** its kitten with its mouth.

Mr. Chen **hurries** to work every morning.

The baby **cries** a lot at night.

This plane **flies** to the island every day.

Alice **tries** hard at school.

She **copies** all the questions in her notebook.