



**Learn English Through
Stories**
E Series

E23

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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Contents

- 1. What's in It for Me.**
- 2. The Cunning Fruit.**
- 3. Friendship.**
- 4. Grammar Page.**

What's in It for Me?

By Sudha Murty

Moosa the mouse walked jauntily down the road, whistling a happy tune to himself. There had been a storm earlier in the day which had got rid of the summer heat. He had just eaten a big, juicy mango that had fallen in the storm, so his tummy was full and he was as pleased as Punch. On the road, he saw a twig, also fallen from the tree above in the storm. Now a mouse will store and keep anything, hoping it will be of use one day. So Moosa picked up the twig in his mouth and set off.

A little ahead he met a potter. The potter was sitting with his head in his hands. Why? Because his oven had been drenched in the rain and now he did not have enough dry wood to light it again. How would he bake his pots and sell them?

As the potter sat wailing in front of his house, Moosa walked up and watched him for some time. "Wossh up, brother?" he asked with the twig still clutched in his mouth.

At first the potter paid no attention to the strange talking mouse. Then when Moosa asked him again and again, he told the little creature why he was crying. Moosa nodded, kept the twig aside and said, "See, this twig has dried in the wind and can be used to light your kiln. I'll happily give it you, Brother Potter, but what's in it for me?"

The potter thought hard and, deciding that a little mouse could not ask for much, said, "I will give whatever you ask for."

In a flash Moosa replied, "Then give me that large pumpkin that is lying in the corner of the room."

The potter was astonished—how can a mouse carry a pumpkin? Besides, he had been looking forward to the lovely pumpkin curry his wife would make for him that night. "Choose something else, little mouse," he urged. But Moosa was stubborn—the pumpkin for the twig or nothing.

So the potter gave Moosa the pumpkin. The mouse was delighted. He had made a mighty human do what he wanted! He left the pumpkin near the potter's house saying he would collect it soon and set off down the road again.

Further ahead, a milkman was sitting by his cows, shaking his head.

"What's up, Brother Milkman?" asked a tiny voice. To his astonishment the man saw a mouse with bright eyes peeping up at him.

Sadly he shook his head some more, then said, “The storm scared my cows and they are refusing to give me milk. What will I sell today and what will my family eat?”

“Spicy pumpkin curry—if you want!”

“Surely you are joking, my friend. I have ten people at home. Where will I get a pumpkin large enough to feed everyone?”

“Just walk back the way I came. You will reach a potter’s house. Right beside that I have left a pumpkin. That’s mine, and you can have it. But what’s in it for me, Brother?”

The milkman shrugged and said, “Whatever you want.” Like the potter he thought, what can a mouse want?

Moosa said, “Then give me a cow.”

“Are you mad? A pumpkin for a cow? Whoever has heard such a thing?”

“It’s that or nothing, my friend,” replied Moosa firmly. So the milkman went and got the large pumpkin and gave one cow to the mouse.

A big cow with large horns that listened to what he commanded! Moosa the mouse could not believe his luck. Off he went, seated on the cow, whistling another happy tune, when he stopped in front of a marriage hall. Why were people standing around looking sad and worried? They should be busy preparing for the marriage feast! Even the bride and groom were standing, with long faces.

“What’s up, Brother Groom?” called Moosa, sitting atop his cow.

The groom replied gloomily, “There’s no milk to prepare the wedding kheer. How will the wedding feast be complete without the dessert?”

Moosa grinned. “Worry not. Here, take this cow, she is now happy and will give you milk. But what’s in it for me, Brother?”

The groom was very happy and said, “Why, you can have whatever you want! You can eat your fill of the feast—sweets, pulao, fruits, whatever your heart desires.” The mouse kept quiet and gave the cow to the wedding party. They milked the cow and had plenty of milk. There was a great wedding feast. After the party was over, the mouse replied in a flash, “Give me your bride!”

The groom and everyone in the marriage party were astonished at the mouse’s cheek. The groom was about to give him a good whack, when his newly wedded bride stopped him. “You had given him your word that he could have whatever he wants. Let me go with him. I’ll teach him such a lesson that he will never try to carry off another human bride again!”

Her husband agreed, so off she went with the mouse.

Moosa scampered ahead, eager to show the bride his home. But what was this, why was she walking so slowly?

“Hurry up, Bride,” he called. “It’s about to rain again.”

The bride replied, “I am a human, I can’t run as fast as you.”

So Moosa had to slow down. By the time they reached his home, which was a little hole under a tree, he was very hungry.

“Cook me a nice meal with lots of grain,” he commanded.

The bride nodded and said, “Of course, but where the kitchen, the spices, the oil and the vessels is? I am a human after all. I can’t cook only grains.”

The mouse realized he was in a real fix having got this useless human back with him. “Never mind,” he sighed. “At least come inside the house.”

“Oh, but how will I do that?” wailed the bride. “I cannot set even a toe inside that hole, it is so small. Where will I sleep tonight?”

“Err, how about under that tree?” Moosa suggested, pointing to another big tree nearby.

“No way,” sniffed the bride. “It will rain and I will get wet and I will catch a cold, then a fever, and I will need a doctor, who will give me bitter medicines...”

Now she started wailing even louder.

“Shush shush,” Moosa comforted her, thinking he should have agreed to eat his fill of the wedding feast instead of bringing this strange whiny woman back home with him. “How about you stay in that temple veranda for the night?” he suggested, pointing to a big temple across the road.

“Oh, but thieves and robbers will come there, and try to snatch away my lovely jewels,” cried the woman. Then suddenly she dried her tears and said, “What if I call my friends Ram and Shyam to protect me?”

Before Moosa could say anything, she whistled loudly and called, “Ramu, Shyamu!”

From nowhere a big dog and cat appeared next to her and made as if to eat up Moosa. Oh, how he ran and saved his life by jumping into the safety of his hole.

The bride grinned and went back to her wedding feast with her faithful pets.

As for Moosa, he had to go to sleep on an empty stomach that night.

“Tomorrow,” he sighed, “perhaps there will be another storm,” and went off to sleep.

2. The Cunning Fruit

Udanka was a rich merchant with a vast business in north India. He had travelled all over the country and had seen many amazing sights during his travels. One day, his son Bhanu said to him, "Father, you have seen so many new places. I have seen nothing. I am very keen to see the sea you described to me. Please let me go to the seaside."

Udanka thought it was a good idea too and made arrangements for his son to travel to a south Indian town by the seashore, where he could stay with one of Udanka's friends. Thus Bhanu ended up in a town by the sea. His father's friend greeted him warmly and gave him a nice room in their house.

The next day, Bhanu set off to see the town. As he walked in the bazaar, he saw a man selling jackfruit. Now Bhanu had seen apples, oranges, mangoes, even jamuns, but jackfruit was something he had never set eyes upon. What a strange shape it had, and what a sweet smell! "How do you eat this?" he asked the man selling it. "Cut it, eat the fruit, and throw away the seed," replied the man. When Bhanu heard that one big fruit cost only two annas, he was delighted and bought one. He carried it up to his room and proceeded to cut it open.

He ate and ate the sweet fruit. It was like honey. Finally when he was done, he realized that the gum from the fruit had made his hands all sticky. To get rid of the sticky gum, he wiped his hands on his dress, but that only made his dress sticky. He then tried washing his hands with water, but the gum remained. He slapped his head in despair and now his face too became sticky. Then he remembered there was a sack of cotton kept outside his door. He crept out quietly and tried to wipe his hands and face with the cotton. But he only managed to cover himself with cotton which now stuck fast on to his hands and face. The more cotton he used, the more it stuck to him.

Feeling ashamed, he went to the backyard, where he knew a pot of hot water was kept. By then it was evening and his host was calling him in for dinner. Not wanting to appear before him in that state, Bhanu hid behind a tree. The people of the house called out for him for some time, then thinking he must still be out somewhere, they took the vessel of hot water inside and shut the door. Bhanu looked this way and that. There was only the sheep-shed now for him to sleep in. He went there and lay down among the sheep.

That night, some thieves came to steal the sheep. When they saw Bhanu covered in cotton, they thought he was the biggest sheep of all and carried him

away. Poor Bhanu dared not open his mouth to shout. At last, when they reached the outskirts of the town, they put him down. One close look at him and they screamed, taking him to be a ghost.

Bhanu stood by the roadside, wondering what to do. A milkmaid who was walking by saw the young man covered in cotton and asked him what had happened. When he told her, she laughed for a long time. Then she said, "You must always rub oil on your hands before you eat jackfruit. Otherwise the gum will stick to your hands and neither water nor cotton will take it off."

She was very kind and took him to her house, where she gently removed all the cotton and the gum. Then Bhanu set off back to town.

After some weeks, when he came home, Udanka asked him, "So what did you see? And what did you learn?"

Bhanu sighed and said, "Father, I saw many strange sights, learnt many new things, but the biggest lesson I learnt was, whatever you do, never eat a jackfruit. It is the most cunning fruit of all!"

3. Friendship

Friendship is the feeling or relationship that friends share. It is an association which involves mutual affection, respect and support. There is no place for envy or **egotism** in true friendship. A real friend is one who stands by his friend in his hour of need and rejoices in his success. If two persons simply know each other, they cannot be called friends. It is difficult to find a true friend in this world.

Man lives in a society. He cannot live without family and friends. A friend is a **part and parcel** of one's life. One can talk to one's friend with as much confidence as to one's own self. When one feels alone or finds it difficult to deal with a situation on one's own, one can seek the help of friends. A friend strengthens one's self-confidence in times of need. He acts as a shield when one is faced with difficulties. A good friend can well be called a second self.

There have been several examples of true friendship in this world. The exemplary friendship between Karl Marx (1818-83) and Friedrich Engels (1820-95) is known all over the world. Karl Marx was a great philosopher but was very poor. His friend Engels was a rich mill owner. Engels always helped his friend Marx with money. They wrote books together. The friendship of the Hindu mythological god Lord Krishna and Sudama is another perfect example of good friendship. They studied together and maintained an ideal friendship. Shakespeare devoted several of his compositions to his friend, the Earl of Southampton, who is believed to have held an important position in his life.

One should always be able to distinguish between good and bad friends. A person who is honest and sincere can prove to be a good friend. A good friend shares not only our joys but also our sorrows. He is a source of happiness. He gives attention to his friend's problems and offers unconditional love and support.

A rich student can help his poor friend with money. A student who is brilliant in studies, can help his friend who is weak in studies. Friendship grows on mutual trust and help.

It is easy to make friends. But, it is difficult to maintain it during the different stages of one's life. True friendship stands the test of time. One cannot enjoy true and permanent friendship if one does not value it. One ought to spare some time for one's friend. People of similar tastes, likings, hobbies, nature etc., become friends. This friendship becomes close and lasts long. It is also seen that people come close to one another due to some circumstances, call themselves friends but forget one another as soon as circumstances change.

A true friend inspires the other to improve himself. He does not **indulge** in **flattery**. He always counsels his friend if the latter is prone to straying on the wrong track. He always protects his friend's interest. He does not hate him for his weaknesses but tries to improve him. He may annoy his friend temporarily, but he does that for a good cause.

One should always try to avoid bad company. A group of friends may indulge in undesirable activities like smoking, drinking, taking drugs, eve-teasing, fighting, quarrelling, etc. Nevertheless, one should not hate friends who may have acquired bad habits. One should try to reform such friends. In this way, one can be of help to the society as a whole, too.

Friendship has no boundaries of age, time, place or relations. Practically, friendship is made between persons of similar age group. But even one's brother, sister, husband, father or mother can become one's good friend.

Life is full of uncertainties. The steady affection of a friend is a great support in one's life. A friend **mitigates** one's misery and suffering by his sympathy and help. At the same time, he can increase the **intensity** of one's joy by sharing it.

Misunderstanding should never be allowed to come in the way of friendship. Friends should stand by each other through thick and thin. A true friend is the extension of one's own self. He is a source of enrichment of one's being.

Vocabulary

1. Egotism — meanness, selfishness
2. Part and parcel — an essential part
3. Indulge — to become involved
4. Flattery — praise that is excessive or insincere
5. Mitigate — make less intense or severe
6. Intensity — strength of something

4. Grammar Page

The Simple Present Tense

Verbs have forms called **tenses** that tell you *when* the action happens. If the **action happens regularly, sometimes or never**, use the **simple present tense**.

We always wash our hands before meals.

Joe sometimes lends me his bike.

Dad jogs in the park every day.

We often go to the movies on Saturday.

Mr. Ross takes a train to work.

The simple present tense is also used to state **facts**.

The sun rises every morning.

Penguins live in the Antarctica.

Dogs love playing in water.

The earth goes around the sun.

Australia is an island.

Use the simple present tense to tell the events of **a story that is happening now**.

I arrive at school. I see another girl crying. I ask her why she is sad. She says she hasn't got any friends to play with. I tell her that she can play with me.

Use the simple present tense to talk about **things that will happen in the future**.

My little sister starts school tomorrow.

The new supermarket opens this Friday.

Next week I go on holiday to Japan.

We fly to London on Sunday.

The train leaves in five minutes.

My family moves to a new house next month.