



Learn English Through  
Stories

H Series

H1

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**Adventures of Feluda:  
Danger in Darjeeling Part 1**

# Danger in Darjeeling Part 1

By Satyajit Ray

I saw Rajen Babu come to the Mall every day. He struck me as an amiable old man. All his hair had turned grey, and his face always wore a cheerful expression. He generally spent a few minutes in the corner shop that sold old Nepali and Tibetan things; then he came and sat on a bench in the Mall for about half-an-hour, until it started to get dark. After that he went straight home. One day, I followed him quietly to see where he lived. He turned around just as we reached his front gate and asked, 'Who are you? Why have you been following me?'

'My name is Tapesch Ranjan,' I replied quickly.

'Well then, here is a lozenge for you,' he said, offering me a lemon drop. 'Come to my house one day. I'll show you my collection of masks,' he added.

Who knew that this friendly old soul would get into such trouble? Why, he seemed totally incapable of getting involved with anything even remotely sinister!

Feluda snapped at me when I mentioned this. 'How can you tell just by looking at someone what he might get mixed up with?' he demanded.

This annoyed me. 'What do you know of Rajen Babu?' I said. 'He's a good man —a very kind man. He has done a lot for the poor Nepali people who live in slums. There's no reason why he should be in trouble. I know. I see him every day. You haven't seen him even once. In fact, I've hardly seen you go out at all since we came to Darjeeling.'

'All right, all right. Let's have all the details then. What would a little boy like you know of danger, anyway?'

Now, this wasn't fair. I was not a little boy any more. I was thirteen and a half. Feluda was twenty- seven.

To tell you the truth, I came to know about the trouble Rajen Babu was in purely by accident. I was sitting on a bench in the Mall today, waiting for the band to start playing. On my left was Tinkori Babu, reading a newspaper. He had recently arrived from Calcutta to spend the summer in Darjeeling, and had taken a room on rent in Rajen Babu's house. I was trying to lean over his shoulder and look at the sports page, when Rajen Babu arrived panting and

collapsed on the empty portion of our bench, next to Tinkori Babu. He looked visibly shaken.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Tinkori Babu, folding his newspaper. ‘Did you just run up a hill?’

‘No, no,’ Rajen Babu replied cautiously, wiping his face with one corner of his scarf. ‘Something incredible has happened.’

I knew what ‘incredible’ meant. Feluda was quite partial to the word.

‘What do you mean?’ Tinkori Babu asked.

‘Look, here it is,’ Rajen Babu passed a piece of folded blue paper to Tinkori Babu. I could tell it was a letter, but made no attempt to read it when Tinkori Babu unfolded it. I looked away instead, humming under my breath to indicate a complete lack of interest in what the two old men were discussing. But I heard Tinkori Babu remark, ‘You’re right, it is incredible! Who could possibly write such a threatening letter to you?’

‘I don’t know. That’s what’s so puzzling. I don’t remember having deliberately caused anyone any harm. As far as I know, I have no enemies.’

Tinkori Babu leant towards his neighbour. ‘We had better not talk about this in public,’ he whispered. ‘Let’s go home.’

The two gentlemen left.

Feluda remained silent for a while after I had finished my story. Then he frowned and said, ‘You mean you think we need to investigate?’

‘Why, didn’t you tell me you were looking for a mystery? And you said you had read so many detective novels that you could work as a sleuth yourself!’

‘Yes, that’s true. I could prove it, too. I didn’t go to the Mall today, did I? But I could tell you which side you sat on.’

‘All right, which side was it?’

‘You chose a bench on the right side of the Radha restaurant, didn’t you?’ ‘That’s terrific. How did you guess?’

'The sun came out this evening. Your left cheek looks sunburnt but the right one is all right. This could happen only if you sat on that side of the Mall. That's the bit that catches the evening sunshine.'

'Incredible!'

'Yes. Anyway, I think we should go and visit Mr Rajen Majumdar.'

'Another seventy-seven steps.'

'And what if it's not?'

'It has to be, Feluda. I counted the last time.'

'Remember you'll get knocked on the head if you're wrong.'

'OK, but not too hard. A sharp knock may damage my brain.' To my amazement, seventy-seven steps later, we were still at some distance from Rajen Babu's gate. Another twenty-three brought us right up to it. Feluda hit my head lightly, and asked, 'Did you count the steps on your way back?'

'Yes.'

'That explains it. You went down the hill on your way back, you idiot. You must have taken very big steps.'

'Well... yes, maybe.'

'I'm sure you did. You see, young people always tend to take big, long steps when going downhill. Older people have to be more cautious, so they take smaller, measured steps.'

We went in through the gate. Feluda pressed the calling bell. Someone in the distance was listening to a radio.

'Have you decided what you're going to say to him?' I asked. 'That's my business. You, my dear, will keep your mouth shut.'

'Even if they ask me something? You mean I shouldn't even make a reply?' 'Shut up.'

A Nepali servant opened the door. 'Andar aaiye,' he said.

We stepped into the living room. Made of wood, the house had a lovely old charm. All the furniture in the room was made of cane. The walls were

covered with strange masks, most showing large teeth and wearing rather unpleasant expressions. Some of them frightened me. Apart from these, the room was full of old weapons—shields and swords and daggers. Beside these hung pictures of the Buddha, painted on cloth. Heaven knew how old they were, but the golden colour that had been used had not faded at all.

We took two cane chairs. Feluda rose briefly to inspect the walls. Then he came back and said, 'All the nails are new. So Rajen Babu's passion for antiques must have developed only recently.'

Rajen Babu came into the room. Feluda sprang to his feet and said, 'Do you remember me? I am Joykrishna Mitter's son, Felu.'

Rajen Babu looked a little taken aback at first. Then his face broke into a smile. 'Felu? Of course I remember you. My word, you have become a young man! How is everyone at home? Is your father here?'

As Feluda answered these questions, I sat trying to hide my astonishment. How unfair the whole thing was—why hadn't Feluda told me that he knew Rajen Babu?

It turned out that Rajen Babu had worked in Calcutta for many years as a lawyer. He had once helped Feluda's father fight a case. He had come to Darjeeling and settled here ten years ago, soon after his retirement.

Feluda introduced me to him. He showed no sign of recognition. Perhaps the matter of offering me a lozenge a week ago had slipped his mind completely.

'You're fond of antiques, I see,' said Feluda conversationally. 'Yes. It's turned almost into an obsession.'

'How long...?'

'Over the last six months. But I've managed to collect quite a lot of things.'

Feluda cleared his throat. Then he told Rajen Babu what he had heard from me, and ended by saying, 'I still remember how you had helped my father. If I could do anything in return...'

Rajen Babu looked both pleased and relieved. But before he could say anything, Tinkori Babu walked into the room. From the way he was breathing, it appeared that he had just come back after his evening walk. Rajen Babu

made the introductions. 'Tinkori Babu happens to be a neighbour of Gyanesh, a friend of mine. When this friend heard that I was going to let one of my rooms, he suggested that I give it to Tinkori Babu. He would have gone to a hotel otherwise.'

Tinkori Babu laughed. 'I did hesitate to take up his offer, I must admit; chiefly because of my special weakness for cheroots. You see, Rajen Babu might well have objected to the smell. So I wrote to him first to let him know. He said he didn't mind, so here I am.'

'Are you here simply for a change of air?'

'Yes, but the air, I've noticed, isn't as cool and fresh as one might have expected.'

'Are you fond of music?' asked Feluda unexpectedly.

'Yes, but how did you guess?' Tinkori Babu gave a startled smile. 'Well, I noticed your finger,' Feluda explained. 'You were beating it on top of your walking-stick, in keeping with the rhythm of that song from the radio.'

'You're quite right,' Rajen Babu laughed, 'he sings Shyamasangeet.'

Feluda changed the subject. 'Do you have the letter here?' he asked.

'Oh yes. Right next to my heart,' said Rajen Babu and took it out of the inside pocket of his jacket.

Feluda spread it out.

It was not handwritten. A few printed words had been cut out of books or newspapers and pasted on a sheet of paper. 'Be prepared to pay for your sins,' it read.

'Did this come by post?'

'Yes. It was posted in Darjeeling, but I'm afraid I threw the envelope away.'

'Have you reason to suspect anyone?'

'No. For the life of me, I cannot recall ever having harmed anyone.'

'Do certain people visit you regularly?'

‘Well, I don’t get too many visitors. Dr Phoni Mitra comes occasionally if I happen to be ill.’

‘Is he a good doctor?’

‘About average, I should say. But then, my complaints have always been quite ordinary—I mean, no more than the usual coughs and colds. So I haven’t had to look for a really good doctor.’

‘Does he charge a fee?’

‘Of course, but that’s hardly a problem. I’ve got plenty of money, thank God.’

‘Who else visits you?’

‘A Mr Ghoshal has recently started coming to my house — look, here he is!’ A man of medium height wearing a dark suit was shown into the room.

‘Did I hear my name?’ he asked with a smile.

‘Yes, I was just about to tell these people that you share my interest in antiques. Allow me to introduce them.’

After exchanging greetings, Mr Ghoshal — whose full name was Abanimohan Ghosha — said to Rajen Babu, ‘I thought I’d drop by since you didn’t come to the shop today.’

‘No, no, I wasn’t feeling very well, so I decided to stay in.’

It was clear that Rajen Babu did not want to tell Mr Ghoshal about the letter. Feluda had hidden it the minute Mr Ghoshal had walked in.

‘All right, if you’re busy today, I’ll come back another time — actually, I wanted to take a look at that Tibetan bell,’ said Mr Ghoshal.

‘Oh, that’s not a problem at all. I’ll get it for you.’ Rajen Babu disappeared into the house to fetch the bell.

‘Do you live here in Darjeeling?’ Feluda asked Mr Ghoshal, who had picked up a dagger and was looking at it closely. ‘No,’ he replied, turning the dagger in his hand. ‘I don’t stay in any one place for very long. I have to travel a lot. But I like collecting curios.’ Feluda told me afterwards that a curio was a rare and ancient object of art.



Rajen Babu returned with the bell. It was really striking to look at. Its base was made of silver, the handle was a mixture of brass and copper, which was studded with colourful stones. Mr Ghoshal took a long time to examine it carefully. Then he put it down on a table and said, 'You got yourself a very good deal there. It's absolutely genuine.'

'Ah, that's a relief. You're the expert, of course. The man at the shop told me it came straight out of the household of the Dalai Lama.'

'That may well be true. But I don't suppose you'd want to part with it? I mean — suppose you got a handsome offer?'

Rajen Babu shook his head, smiling sweetly.

'No. You see, I bought that bell simply because I liked it, I have no wish to sell it only to make money.'

'Very well,' Mr Ghoshal rose. 'I hope you'll be out and about tomorrow.'

'Thank you. I hope so, too''

When Mr Ghoshal had gone, Feluda said to Rajen Babu, 'Don't you think it might be wise not to go out of the house for the next few days?'

'Yes, you're probably right. But this business of an anonymous letter is so incredible that I cannot really bring myself to take it seriously. It just seems like a foolish practical joke!'

'Well, why don't you stay in until we can be definite about that? How long have you had that Nepali servant?'

'Right from the start. He is completely reliable.'

Feluda now turned to Tinkori Babu. 'Do you stay at home most of the time?'

'Yes, but I go for morning and evening walks, so I'm out of the house for a couple of hours every day. In any case, should there be any real danger, I doubt if I could do anything to help. I am sixty- four, younger than Rajen Babu by only a year.'

'Don't involve poor Tinkori Babu in this, please,' Rajen Babu said. 'After all, he's come here to relax, so let him enjoy himself. I'll stay in if you insist,

together with my servant. You two can come and visit me every day, if you so wish.'

'All right.'

Feluda stood up. So did I. It was time to go.

There was a fireplace in front of us. Over it, on a mantelshelf, were three framed photographs. Feluda moved closer to the fireplace to look at these. 'My wife,' said Rajen Babu, pointing at the first photograph. 'She died barely five years after our marriage.'

The second photo was of a young boy, who must have been about my own age when the photo was taken. A handsome boy indeed. 'Who is this?' Feluda asked.

Rajen Babu began laughing. 'That photo is there simply to show how time can change everything. Would you believe that that is my own photograph, taken when I was a child? I used to go to a missionary school in Bankura in those days. My father was the magistrate there. But don't let those angelic looks deceive you. I might have been a good-looking child, but I was extremely naughty. My teachers were all fed up with me. In fact, I didn't spare the students, either. I remember having kicked the best runner in our school in a hundred-yards race to stop him from winning.'

The third photo was of a young man in his late twenties. It turned out to be Rajen Babu's only child, Prabeer Majumdar.

'Where is he now?' Feluda asked.

Rajen Babu cleared his throat. 'I don't know,' he said after a pause. 'He left home sixteen years ago. There is virtually no contact between us.'

Feluda started walking towards the front door. 'A very interesting case,' he muttered. Now he was talking like the detectives one read about.

We came out of the house. It was already dark outside. Lights had been switched on in every house nestling in the hills. A mist was rising from the Rangeet valley down below. Rajen Babu and Tinkori Babu both walked up to the gate to see us off. Rajen Babu lowered his voice and said to Feluda, 'Actually, I have to confess that despite everything, I do feel faintly nervous. After all, something like this in this peaceful atmosphere was so totally unexpected...'

‘Don’t worry,’ said Feluda firmly. ‘I’ll definitely get to the bottom of this case.’

‘Thank you. Goodbye!’ said Rajen Babu and went back into the house. Tinkori Babu lingered. ‘I am truly impressed by your power of observation,’ he said. ‘I, too, have read a large number of detective novels. Maybe I can help you with this case.’

‘Really? How?’

‘Look at the letter in your hand. Take the various printed words. Do they tell you anything?’ Feluda thought for a few seconds. ‘The words were cut out with a blade, not scissors,’ he said.

‘Very good.’

‘Second, each word has come from a different source — the typeface and the quality of paper vary from each other.’

‘Yes. Can you guess what those different sources might be?’

‘These two words: “prepared” and “pay” — appear to be a newspaper.’

‘Right. Ananda Bazar.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘Only Ananda Bazar uses that typeface. And the other words were taken out of books, I think. Not very old books, mind you, for those different typefaces have been in use over the last twenty years, and no more. Apart from this, does the smell of the glue tell you anything?’

‘I think the sender used Grippex glue.’

‘Brilliant!’

‘I might say the same for you.’

Tinkori Babu smiled. ‘I try, but at your age, my dear fellow, I doubt if I knew what the word ‘detective’ meant.’

We said namaskar after this and went on our way. ‘I don’t yet know whether I can solve this mystery,’ said Feluda on the way back to our hotel, ‘but getting to know Tinkori Babu would be an added bonus.’

‘If he is so good at crime detection, why don’t you let him do all the hard work? Why waste your own time making enquiries?’

‘Ah well, Tinkori Babu might know a lot about printing and typefaces, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he’d know everything!’

Feluda’s answer pleased me. I bet Tinkori Babu isn’t as clever as Feluda, I thought. Aloud, I said, ‘Who do you suppose is the culprit?’

‘The culprit...’ Feluda broke off. I saw him turn around and glance at a man who had come from the opposite direction and had just passed us.

‘Did you see him?’

‘No, I didn’t see his face.’

‘The light from that street lamp fell on his face for only a second, and I thought...’

‘What?’

‘No, never mind. Let’s go, I feel quite hungry.’

Feluda is my cousin. He and I were in Darjeeling with my father for a holiday. Father had got to know some of the other guests in our hotel fairly well, and was spending most of his time with them. He didn’t stop us from going wherever we wished, nor did he ask too many questions.

I woke a little later than usual the next day. Father was in the room, but there was no sign of Feluda. ‘Felu left early this morning,’ Father explained. ‘He said he’d try to catch a glimpse of Kanchenjunga.’

I knew this couldn’t be true. Feluda must have gone out to investigate, which was most annoying because he wasn’t supposed to go out without me. Anyway, I had a quick cup of tea, and then I went out myself.

I spotted Feluda near a taxi stand. ‘This is not fair!’ I complained. ‘Why did you go out alone?’

‘I was feeling a bit feverish, so I went to see a doctor.’

‘Dr Phoni Mitra?’

‘Aha, you’re beginning to use your brain, too!’

‘What did he say?’

‘He charged me four rupees and wrote out a prescription.’

‘Is he a good doctor?’

‘Do you think a good doctor would write a prescription for someone in perfect health? Besides, his house looked old and decrepit. I don’t think he has a good practice.’

‘Then he couldn’t have sent that letter.’

‘Why not?’

‘A poor man wouldn’t dare.’

‘Yes, he would, if he was desperate for money.’

‘But that letter said nothing about money.’

‘There was no need to ask openly.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘How did Rajen Babu strike you yesterday?’

‘He seemed a little frightened.’

‘Fear can make anyone ill.’

‘Oh?’

‘Yes, seriously ill. And if that happened, he’d naturally turn to his doctor. What might happen then is something even a fathead like you can figure out, I’m sure.’

How clever Feluda was! But if Dr Mitra had really planned the whole thing the way Feluda described, he must be extraordinarily crafty, too.

By this time, we had reached the Mall. As we came near the fountain, Feluda suddenly said, ‘I feel a bit curious about curios.’ We were, in fact, standing quite close to the Nepal Curio Shop. Rajen Babu and Mr Ghoshal visited this shop every day. Feluda and I walked into the shop. Its owner came forward to greet us. He had a light grey jacket on, a muffler round his neck, and wore a black cap with golden embroidery. He beamed at us genially.

The shop was cluttered with old and ancient objects. A strange musty smell came from them. It was quiet inside. Feluda looked around for a while,

then said, sounding important, 'Do you have good tankhas (Tibetan paintings)?'

'Come into the next room, sir. We've sold what was really good. But we're expecting some fresh stock soon.'

'What is a tankha?' I whispered.

'You'll know when you see one,' Feluda whispered back.

The next room was even smaller and darker. The owner of the shop brought out a painting of the Buddha, done on a piece of silk. 'This is the last piece left, but it's a little damaged,' he said. So this was a tankha! Rajen Babu had heaps of these in his house. Feluda examined the tankha like an expert, peering at it closely, and then looking at it from various angles. Three minutes later, he said, 'This doesn't appear to be more than seventy years old. I am looking for something much older than that, at least three hundred years, you see.'

'We're getting some new things this evening, sir. You might find what you're looking for if you came back later today.'

'This evening, did you say?' 'Yes, sir.'

'Oh, I must inform Rajen Babu.'

'Mr Majumdar? He knows about it already. All my regular customers are coming in the evening to look at the fresh arrivals.'

'Does Mr Ghoshal know?'

'Of course.'

'Who else is a regular buyer?'

'There's Mr Gilmour, the manager of a tea estate. He visits my shop twice a week. Then there's Mr Naulakha. But he's away in Sikkim at present.'

'All right, I'll try to drop in in the evening ... Topshe, would you like a mask?' I couldn't resist the offer. Feluda selected one himself and paid for it. 'This was the most horrendous of them all,' he remarked, passing it to me. He had once told me there was no such word as 'horrendous'. It was really a mixture of 'tremendous' and 'horrible'. But I must say it was rather an appropriate word for the mask.