



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H2

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Contents

**Adventures of Feluda:
Danger in Darjeeling Part 2**

Danger in Darjeeling Part 2

By Satyajit Ray

Feluda started to say something as we came out of the shop, but stopped abruptly. I found him staring at a man once again. Was it the same man he had seen last night? He was a man in his early forties, expensively dressed in a well-cut suit. He had stopped in the middle of the Mall to light his pipe. His eyes were hidden behind dark glasses. Somehow he looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn't recall ever having met him before.

Feluda stepped forward and approached him. 'Excuse me,' he said, 'are you Mr Chatterjee?'

'No,' replied the man, biting the end of his pipe, 'I am not.' Feluda appeared to be completely taken aback. 'Strange! Aren't you staying at the Central Hotel?'

The man smiled a little contemptuously. 'No, I am at the Mount Everest; and I don't have a twin,' he said and strode off in the direction of Observatory Hill.

I noticed he was carrying a brown parcel, on which were printed the words 'Nepal Curio Shop'.

'Feluda!' I said softly. 'Do you think he bought a mask like mine?'

'Yes, he may well have done that. After all, those masks weren't all meant for your own exclusive use, were they? Anyway, let's go and have a cup of coffee.' We turned towards a coffee shop. 'Did you recognize that man?' asked Feluda.

'How could I,' I replied, 'when you yourself failed to recognize him?'

'Who said I had failed?'

'Of course you did! You got his name wrong, didn't you?'

'Why are you so stupid? I did that deliberately, just to get him to tell me where he was staying. Do you know what his real name is?'

'No. What is it?'

'Prabeer Majumdar.'

‘Yes, yes, you’re right! Rajen Babul’s son, isn’t he? We saw his photograph yesterday. No wonder he seemed familiar. But of course now he’s a lot older.’

‘Even so, there are a lot of similarities between father and son. But did you notice his clothes? His suit must have been from London, his tie from Paris and shoes from Italy. In short, there’s no doubt that he’s recently returned from abroad.’

‘But does that mean Rajen Babu doesn’t know his own son is in town?’

‘Perhaps his son doesn’t even know that his father lives here. We should try to find out more.’

The plot thickens, I told myself, going up on the open terrace of the coffee shop. I loved sitting here. One could get such a superb view of the town and the market from here.

Tinkori Babu was sitting at a corner table, drinking coffee. He waved at us, inviting us to join him. ‘As a reward for your powerful observation and expertise in detection, I would like to treat you to two cups of hot chocolate. You wouldn’t mind, I hope?’ he said with a twinkle in his eye. My mouth began to water at the prospect of a cup of hot chocolate. Tinkori Babu called a waiter and placed his order. Then he took out a book from his jacket pocket and offered it to Feluda. ‘This is for you. I had just one copy left. It’s my latest book.’

Feluda stared at the cover. ‘Your book? You mean... you write under the pseudonym Secret Agent?’ Tinkori Babul’s eyes drooped. He smiled slightly and nodded. Feluda grew more excited. ‘But you’re my favourite writer! I’ve read all your books. No other writer can write mystery stories the way you do.’

‘Thank you, thank you. To tell you the truth, I had come to Darjeeling to chalk out a plot for my next novel. But I’ve now spent most of my time trying to sort out a real life mystery.’

‘I do consider myself very fortunate. I had no idea I’d get to meet you like this!’

‘The only sad thing is that I have to go back to Calcutta. I’m returning tomorrow. But I think I may be of some help to you before I leave.’

'I'm very pleased to hear that. By the way, we saw Rajen Babul's son today.' 'What!'

'Only ten minutes ago.'

'Are you sure? Did you see him properly?'

'Yes, I am almost a hundred per cent sure. All we need to do is check with the Mount Everest Hotel, and then there won't be any doubt left.'

Suddenly, Tinkori Babu sighed. 'Did Rajen Babu talk to you about his son?' he asked.

'No, not much.'

'I have heard quite a lot. Apparently, his son had fallen into bad company. He was caught stealing money from his father's cupboard. Rajen Babu told him to get out of his house. Prabeer did leave his home after that and disappeared without a trace. He was twenty-four at the time. A few years later, Rajen Babu began to regret what he'd done and tried to track his son down. But there was no sign of Prabeer anywhere. About ten years ago, a friend of Rajen Babu came and told him he'd spotted Prabeer somewhere in England. But that was all.'

'That means Rajen Babu doesn't know his son is here in Darjeeling.'

'I'm sure he doesn't. And I don't think he should be told. After all, he's already had one shock. Another one might...' Tinkori Babu stopped. Then he looked straight at Feluda and shook his head. 'I think I am going mad. Really, I should give up writing mystery stories.'

Feluda laughed. 'You mean it's only just occurred to you that the letter might have been sent by Prabeer Majumdar himself?'

'Exactly. But... I don't know...' Tinkori Babu broke off absent-mindedly.

The waiter came back and placed our hot chocolate before us. This seemed to cheer him up. 'How did you find Dr Phoni Mitra?' he asked.

'Good heavens, how do you know I went there?' 'I paid him a visit shortly after you left.'

'Did you see me coming out of his house?'

‘No. I found a cigarette stub on his floor. I knew he didn’t smoke, so I asked him if he’d already had a patient. He said yes, and from his description I could guess that it was you. However, I didn’t know then that you smoked. Now, looking at your slightly yellowish fingertips, I can be totally sure.’

‘You really are a most clever man. But tell me, did you suspect Dr Mitra as well?’ ‘Yes. He doesn’t exactly inspire confidence, does he?’

‘You’re right. I’m surprised Rajen Babu consults him rather than anyone else.’

‘There’s a reason for it. Soon after he arrived in Darjeeling, Rajen Babu had suddenly turned religious. It was Dr Mitra who had found him a guru at that time. As followers of the same guru, they are now like brothers.’

‘I see. But did Dr Mitra say anything useful? What did you talk about?’

‘Oh, just this and that. I went there really to take a look at the books on his shelves. There weren’t many. Those that I saw were all old.’

‘Yes, I noticed it, too.’

‘Mind you, he might well have got hold of different books from elsewhere, just to get the right printed words. But I’m pretty certain that is not the case. That man seemed far too lazy to go to such trouble.’

‘Well, that takes care of Dr Mitra. What do you think of Mr Ghoshal?’

‘I don’t trust him either. He’s a crook. He pretends to be interested in art and antiques, but I think what he really wants to do is sell to foreign buyers at a much higher price what he can buy relatively cheaply here.’

‘But do you think he might have a motive in sending a threatening letter to Rajen Babu?’

‘I haven’t really thought about it.’

‘I think I might have stumbled onto something.’

I looked at Feluda in surprise. His eyes were shining with excitement. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I learnt today,’ Feluda said, lowering his voice, ‘that the shop they both go to is going to get some fresh supplies this evening.’

Tinkori Babu perked up immediately. 'I see, I see!' he exclaimed. 'A letter like that would naturally frighten Rajen Babu into staying at home for a few days. In the meantime, Abani Ghoshal would go in and make a clean sweep.'

'Exactly.'

Tinkori Babu paid for the chocolate and rose. We went out together. My heart was beating fast. Abani Ghoshal, Prabeer Majumdar and Dr Phoni Mitra. As many as three suspects. Who was the real culprit?

Tinkori Babu went home. Feluda and I walked over to the Mount Everest Hotel. They confirmed that a man called Prabeer Majumdar had checked in five days ago.

We were supposed to visit Rajen Babu in the evening. But it began to rain so heavily at around 4 p.m. that we were forced to stay in. Feluda spent that whole evening scribbling in a notebook. I was dying to find out what he was writing, but didn't dare ask. In the end, I picked up the book Tinkori Babu had given Feluda and began reading it. It was so thrilling that in a matter of minutes, all thoughts of Rajen Babu went out of my mind.

The rain stopped at 8 p.m. But by then it was very cold outside. Father, for once, stood firm and refused to allow us to go out.

Feluda shook me awake the next morning. 'Get up, Topshe. Quick!' 'What—what is it?' I sat up.

Feluda whispered into my ear, speaking through clenched teeth. 'Rajen Babul's Nepali servant was here a few moments ago. He said Rajen Babu wants to see us, and it's urgent. Do you want to come with me?'

'Of course!'

We got ready and were in Rajen Babul's house in less than twenty minutes. We found him lying in his bed, looking pale and haggard. Dr Mitra was by his side, feeling his pulse; and Tinkori Babu was standing before him, fanning him with a hand-held fan, despite the cold.

Dr Mitra released his hand as we came in. Rajen Babu spoke with some difficulty. 'Last night... after midnight... I woke suddenly and there it was... in this room... I saw a masked face!' Rajen Babu continued, 'I can't tell you... how I spent the night!'

‘Has anything been stolen?’

‘No. But I’m sure he bent over me... only to take the keys from under my pillow. Oh, it was horrible... horrible!’

‘Take it easy,’ said the doctor. ‘I’m going to give you something to help you sleep. You need complete rest.’ He stood up.

‘Dr Mitra,’ said Feluda suddenly, ‘did you go to see a patient last night? Your jacket’s got a streak of mud on it.’

‘Oh yes,’ Dr Mitra replied readily enough. ‘I did have to go out last night. Since I have chosen to dedicate my life to my patients, I can hardly refuse to go out when I’m needed, come rain or shine.’

He collected his fee and left. Rajen Babu sat up in his bed. ‘I feel a lot better now that you’re here,’ he admitted. ‘I did feel considerably shaken, I must say. But now I think I might be able to go and sit in the living room.’ Feluda and Tinkori Babu helped him to his feet. We made our way to the living room.

‘I rang the railway station to change my ticket,’ said Tinkori Babu. ‘I don’t want to leave today. But they said if I cancelled my ticket now, they couldn’t give me a booking for another ten days. So I fear I’ve got to go.’ This pleased me. I wanted Feluda to solve the mystery single-handedly.

‘My servant was supposed to stay in yesterday,’ Rajen Babu explained, ‘but I myself told him to take some time off. His father is very ill, you see. He went home last night.’

‘What did the mask look like?’ Feluda asked.

‘It was a perfectly ordinary mask, the kind you can get anywhere in Darjeeling. There are at least five of those in this room. There’s one, look!’ The mask he pointed out was almost an exact replica of the one Feluda had bought me yesterday.

Tinkori Babu spoke again. ‘I think we ought to inform the police. We can no longer call this a joke. Rajen Babu may need protection. Felu Babu, you can continue with your investigation, nobody will object to that. But having thought things over, I do feel the police should know what’s happened. I’ll go

myself to the police station right away. I don't think your life is in any danger, Rajen Babu, but please keep an eye on that Tibetan bell.'

We decided to take our leave. But before we left, Feluda said, 'Since Tinkori Babu is leaving today, you're going to be left with a vacant room, aren't you? Would you mind if we came and spent the night in it?'

'No, no, why should I mind? You're like a son to me. I'd be delighted. To tell you the truth, I'm beginning to lose my nerve. Those who are reckless in their youth generally tend to grow rather feeble in their old age. At least, that's what has happened to me.'

'I'll come and see you off at the station,' Feluda said to Tinkori Babu.

We passed the curio shop on our way back. Neither of us could help look inside. We saw two men looking around and talking. From the easy familiarity with which they were talking, it seemed as if they had known each other for a long time. One of them was Abani Ghoshal. The other was Prabeer Majumdar. I glanced at Feluda. He didn't seem surprised at all.

We went to the station at half-past ten to say goodbye to Tinkori Babu. He arrived in five minutes. 'My feet ache from having walked uphill,' he said. I noticed he was walking with a slight limp. 'Besides,' he added, 'it took me a while to buy this. I know Rajen Babu couldn't go to the curio shop but they really did get a lot of good stuff yesterday. So I chose something for him this morning. Will you please give it to him with my good wishes?'

'Certainly,' said Feluda, taking a brown packet from Tinkori Babu. 'There's one thing I meant to ask you. If I solve this mystery, I'd like to tell you about it. Will you give me your address, please?'

'You'll find the address of my publisher in my book. He'll forward all letters addressed to me.'

Goodbye... good luck!'

He climbed into a blue first-class carriage. The train left.

'That man would have made a lot of money and quite a name for himself if he had lived abroad. He has a real talent for writing crime stories,' Feluda remarked.

We returned to our hotel from the station. But Feluda went out again and, this time, refused to take me with him. When he finally came back, it was time to go to Rajen Babul's house to stay the night. As we set off, I said to him, 'You might at least tell me where you were during the day.'

'I went to various places. Twice to the Mount Everest Hotel, once to Dr Mitre's house, then to the curio shop, the library and one or two other places.'

'I see.'

'Is there anything else you'd like to know?'

'Have you been able to figure out who is the real cul—?' 'The time hasn't come to disclose that. No, not yet.'

'But who do you suspect the most?' 'I suspect everybody, including you.'

'Me?'

'Yes. Anyone who has a mask is a suspect.'

'Really? In that case, why don't you include yourself in your list?'

'Don't talk rubbish.'

'I'm not! You didn't tell me that you knew Rajen Babu, which means you were not totally honest with me. Besides, you could have easily used that mask. I did not hide it anywhere, did I?'

'Shut up, shut up!'

Rajen Babu seemed a lot better when we arrived at his house, although he still looked faintly uneasy. 'I felt fine during the day,' he told us, 'but I must say I'm beginning to feel nervous again now it's getting dark.'

Feluda gave him the packet from Tinkori Babu. Rajen Babu opened it quickly and took out a beautiful statue of the Buddha, the sight of which actually moved him to tears.

'Did the police come to make enquiries?' asked Feluda.

'Oh yes. They asked a thousand questions. God knows if they'll get anywhere, but at least they've agreed to post someone outside the house during the night. That's a relief, anyway. In fact, if you wish to go back to your hotel, it will be quite all right.'

'No, we'd rather stay here, if you don't mind. It's too noisy in our hotel. I need peace and quiet to think about this case.'

Rajen Babu smiled. 'Of course you can stay. You'll get your peace and quiet here, and I can promise you an excellent meal. That Nepali boy is a very good cook. I've asked him to make his special chicken curry. The food in your hotel could never be half as tasty, I'm sure.'

We were shown to our room. Feluda stretched out on his bed and lit a cigarette. I saw him blow out five smoke rings in a row. His eyes were half-closed. After a few seconds of silence, he said, 'Dr Mitra did go out to see a patient last night. I found that out this morning. A rich businessman who lives in Cart Road. He was with his patient from eleven-thirty to half-past twelve.'

'Does that rule him out completely?'

Feluda did not answer my question. Instead, he said, 'Prabeer Majumdar has lived abroad for so long and has such a lot of money that I can't see why he should suddenly arrive here and start threatening his father. He stands to gain very little, actually. Why, I learnt that he recently made a packet at the local races!'

I sat holding my breath. It was obvious that Feluda hadn't finished. I was right. Feluda stubbed out his cigarette and continued, 'Mr Gilmour has come to Darjeeling from his tea estate. I met him at the Planters' Club. He told me there was only one Tibetan bell that had come out of the palace of the Dalai Lama, and it is with him. The one Rajen Babu has is a fake. Abani Ghoshal is aware of it.'

'You mean the bell that we saw here isn't all that valuable?'

'No. Besides, both Abani Ghoshal and Prabeer Majumdar were at a party last night, from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. They got totally drunk, I believe.'

'That man wearing a mask came here soon after midnight, didn't he?'

'Yes.'

I began to feel rather strange. 'Well then, who does that leave us with?'

Feluda did not reply. He sighed and rose to his feet. 'I'm going to sit in the living room for a minute,' he said. 'Do not disturb me.'

I took his place on the bed when he left. It was getting dark, but I felt too lazy to get up and switch on the lights. Through the open window I could see lights in the distance, on Observatory Hill. The noise from the Mall had died down. I heard the sound of hooves after a while. They got louder and louder, then slowly faded away.

It soon grew almost totally dark. The hill and the houses on it were now practically invisible. Perhaps a mist was rising again. I began to feel sleepy. Just as my eyes started to close, I suddenly sensed the presence of someone else in the room. My blood froze. Too terrified to look in the direction of the door, I kept my eyes fixed on the window. But I could feel the man move closer to the bed. There, he was now standing right next to me, and was leaning over my face. Transfixed, I watched his face come closer... oh, how horrible it was... a mask! He was wearing a mask!

I opened my mouth to scream, but an unseen hand pulled the mask away, and my scream became a nervous gasp. 'Feluda! Oh my God, it's you!'

'Had you dozed off? Of course it's me. Who did you think...?' Feluda started to laugh, but suddenly grew grave. Then he sat down next to me, and said, 'I was simply trying on all those masks in the living room. Why don't you wear this one for a second?' He passed me his mask. I put it on.

'Can you sense something unusual?'

'Why, no! It's a size too large for me, that's all.'

'Think carefully. Isn't there anything else that might strike you as odd?'

'Well... there's a faint smell, I think.'

'Of what?'

'Cheroot?'

'Exactly.'

Feluda took the mask off. My heart started to beat faster again. 'T-t-t-inkori Babu?' I stammered.

Feluda sighed. 'Yes, I'm afraid so. It must have been extremely easy for him. He had access to all kinds of printed material; and you must have noticed he was limping this morning. That might have been the result of jumping out of a window last night. But what I totally fail to understand is his motive. He

appeared to respect Rajen Babu a lot. Why then did he do something like this? What for? Perhaps we shall never know.'

The night passed peacefully and without any further excitement. In the morning, just as we sat down to have breakfast with our host, his Nepali servant came in with a letter for him. It was once again a blue envelope with a Darjeeling post-mark.

Rajen Babu went white. He took out the letter with a trembling hand and passed it to Feluda. 'You read it,' he said in a low voice.

Feluda read it aloud. This is what it said:

Dear Raju,

When I first wrote to you from Calcutta after Gyanesh told me you had a house in Darjeeling, I had no idea who you really were. But that photograph of yours on your mantelshelf told me instantly that you were none other than the boy who had once been my classmate in the missionary school in Bankura fifty years ago.

I did not know that the desire for revenge would raise its head even after so many years. You see, I was the boy you kicked at that hundred-yard race on our sports day. Not only did I miss out on winning a medal and setting a new record, but you also managed to injure me pretty seriously. Unfortunately, my father got transferred to a different town only a few days after this incident, which was why I never got the chance to have a showdown with you then; nor did you ever learn just how badly you had hurt me, both mentally and physically. I had to spend three months in a hospital with my leg in a cast.

When I saw you here in Darjeeling, leading such a comfortable and peaceful life, I suddenly thought of doing something that would cause you a great deal of anxiety and ruin your peace of mind, at least for a short time. This was my way of settling scores, and punishing you for your past sins.

With good wishes, yours sincerely,

Tinu

(Tinkori Mukhopadhyay)