



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H4

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

Contents

**Adventures of Feluda:
The Emperor's Ring: Part 2.**

The Emperor's Ring: Part 2

Two

The next day, we left for the Imambara after an early lunch. Baba and Dhiru Kaka went in the car. Feluda and I both chose to ride in a tonga.

It was great fun. I had never ridden in a horse-drawn carriage before. Feluda had, of course. It was his view that a bumpy ride in a tonga was very good for one's digestion.

'Dhiru Kaka has such an excellent cook that I can see it's going to be difficult not to indulge myself,' he said, 'so I think an occasional ride in a tonga is a good idea.'

Bumping through new and unfamiliar streets, we finally reached a place that the tongay-walla said was called 'Kaiser Bagh'.

'See how they've mixed Urdu with German?' Feluda remarked. Most of the well-known Mughal buildings were around Kaiser Bagh. The tongay-walla began pointing them out: 'There's Badshah Manzil... and that's Chandiwali Barradari... and that's called Lakhu Phatak...'

The path led through a huge gate. 'This is Rumi Darwaza,' we were told. Beyond the Rumi Darwaza was 'Machchli Bhawan', which is where the Burra Imambara stood.

I gaped, speechless, at its sheer size. I had no idea a palace could be so massive.

We had spotted Dhiru Kaka's car from our tonga. We paid the tongay-walla and went to join the others. Baba and Dhiru Kaka were talking to a tall, middle-aged man.

Feluda laid a hand on my shoulder and spoke under his breath:

'Black Standard Herald!'

True enough, there was a black Standard Herald parked next to Dhiru Kaka's car. 'Look at that fresh mark on the mudguard!'

'How do you know it's fresh?'

'It's white paint, can't you see? That car must have brushed against a newly painted wall or a gate. If the car wasn't washed this morning, that mark could well have got there last night.'

Dhiru Kaka greeted us, 'Come and meet Bonobihari Babu, the man with a zoo in his house.'

Surprised, I raised my hands in a namaskaar. Was this indeed that strange man? He was fair, about six feet tall, sported a thin moustache and a pointed beard and wore gold-framed glasses. The whole effect was quite impressive.

He thumped me on the back and said, 'How do you find the capital of Laxman? You do know, don't you, that in the ancient times Lucknow was known as Laxmanavati?'

His voice matched his personality. 'Bonobihari Babu was going to Chowk Bazar,' said Dhiru Kaka, 'he stopped here only because he saw our car.'

'Yes,' said the gentleman, 'I usually go out in the afternoon. Most of my mornings and evenings have to be devoted to the animals.'

'In fact,' said Dhiru Kaka, 'we were planning to descend on you. These two are very interested in seeing your zoo.'

'Good. You're welcome any time. Why don't you come today? I am always happy to receive visitors, but most people are too scared to step into my house. They think the cages I've put my animals in are not as strong as those in a regular zoo. If that was the case, how do you suppose I have survived all these years?'

Everyone laughed at this little joke, with the only exception of Feluda. He leant closer to me and muttered, 'The man's reeking with attar. Attempting to hide the smell of animals, probably, I think.'

The Standard, as it turned out, did not belong to Bonobihari Babu, for I saw him call his driver from a blue Ambassador and give him a couple of letters to post. Then he said to us: 'You'll see the Imambara, won't you? We can go back to my place afterwards.'

'Are you coming in with us?'

'Yes, why not? I've been in it just once before. That was in 1963, two days after I arrived in Lucknow. Time I see again what these nawabs can get up to.'

We passed through the gate and began walking across a large courtyard towards the main building. 'Two hundred years ago,' said Bonobihari Babu, walking by my side, 'Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula built this palace. He wanted it to outshine all the buildings in Agra and Delhi. So a competition was held among the most well-known designers and architects. The best design was selected—and you can see the final result. It may not be as beautiful as some of the other Mughal buildings, but it is certainly the number one as far as the size of a palace goes. No other palace in the world has such a large audience hall.'

A whole football stadium could fit into this, I thought, staring at the hall. But that wasn't all. Outside, there was a massive well. The nawab had clearly thought big. The guide told us the well was used for punishing criminals. They were simply thrown into it, and no one ever saw them again.

But what took my breath away was the Bhoorbhulaia. Little passages ran in all possible directions. No matter where I went or what corners I turned, it always seemed as though I was back where I'd begun. All passages were identical—walls on both sides, a low ceiling and, in the middle of the wall, a tiny niche. The guide said that when the nawabs played hide-and-seek with their queens, oil lamps used to burn in those little niches. The thought of flickering lamps in those spooky little passages gave me goose-pimples.

Feluda, I noticed, kept very close to the wall. But I couldn't understand why he was lagging behind all of us. Then I got totally absorbed in the excitement of going through the winding maze and had forgotten all about him, until I heard Baba exclaim: 'Oh, where is Felu?'

I turned around quickly. Feluda was nowhere to be seen. My heart missed a beat. However, only a few seconds later, he reappeared after Baba called out to him. 'If I were to walk so fast,' he said, 'I couldn't possibly get an idea of how the maze is designed.'

The door at the end of the last passage in the maze opened onto the huge roof of the Imambara. It had a wonderful view. One could see practically the whole of Lucknow from it. There were a few other people already on the roof. One of them—a young man—came walking towards Dhiru Kaka, smiling.

'Mahabir!' Dhiru Kaka exclaimed, 'When did you arrive?'

'Three days ago. I always return to Lucknow at this time of the year. I'll go back after Diwali. I have two friends with me, so we're out sightseeing.'

'This is Pyarelal's son,' said Dhiru Kaka, 'he lives in Bombay. He's an actor.'

I looked at Mahabir. He was staring at Bonobihari Babu as though he had seen him before. 'Have we met before?' asked Bonobihari Babu, echoing my thoughts.

'Yes, I think so,' Mahabir replied, 'but for the life of me I can't remember where.' 'I met your father once. But you were not here then.'

'Oh. I see,' said Mahabir, embarrassed, 'I must have made a mistake. Sorry. Well, I must get back to my friends. Namaskaar.'

He left. He must be younger than Feluda, I thought. A good-looking man, and very well built.

Perhaps he was interested in sports.

Bonobihari Babu said, 'It might be a good idea to go to my place now. If you must see the animals, it's best to do so in daylight. I haven't yet been able to arrange lights in their cages.'

We paid the guide and went down. A staircase ran from the roof straight to the ground floor. Just as we came out of the gate, I saw Mahabir and his friends get into the black Standard.