



# Learn English Through Stories

I Series

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## 1. Chapter Six: A drunk Man Tells All

18 years of age, Mumbai.

I got the job at Jimmy's Bar two months after I arrived in Mumbai from Agra. I worked long hours and thought about Nita, who I had left behind in a hospital in Agra. She filled my head, night and day. She was still in hospital, and I knew that her brother Shyam would not let me see her.

Now, I was living in a dirty, cheap hut in the Dharavi slum. Memories were all around me as I walked on the streets of Mumbai: of Shantaram, the failed astronomer, Neelima Kumari, the actor, and my friend Salim. I missed Salim, but had decided not to contact him. I did not want to put him in danger with my crazy life and the plans I had.

I waited to hear if I had been chosen to be a contestant on Who Will Win a Billion? But no letter came. All I wanted was to get on to that show. It was why I had come to Mumbai.

One night, a man in his thirties came to the bar. He was wearing a dark suit, and he seemed sad. He had been at the bar drinking for a long time. It was late, and he was my only customer. He seemed to be rich, so I offered him another whisky, although he had already had far too many. "That's one hundred rupees, please," I told him.

As he sat at the bar, he kept saying, "My dear brother. Forgive me, forgive me." "What happened, sir?" I asked at last.

He stared at me and then said: "Do you know who I am? I am Prakash Rao. I own the Surya Company, the biggest button factory in India."

"Buttons?" I say.

"Yes, buttons on shirts, trousers, coats. We make them." "Oh. And what's your brother's name?"

"My brother. My poor brother. His name was Arvind Rao." Tears come to his eyes. "He used to be the owner of the Surya Company before me, but he went mad. It's such a sad story."

"Tell me," I say, putting the most expensive nuts in front of him. "I have all night."

"I'm drunk. So I will tell you. He was a good businessman. He made Surya great, from nothing. I wasn't very clever, but he let me work in the business. He sent me to work in the office in New York. It was a hard job, but I had a good time in New York. I met Julie there."

"Julie?"

"Yes. She was from Haiti, and she was very beautiful and interesting. She was working illegally as a cleaner, and I fell in love with her. We got married in Haiti, in Port-au-Prince, where she was from. And then we went on an amazing honeymoon to Port Louis in Mauritius. But after that she changed. I found out many strange new things about her. And she wanted money, lots of it. She pushed me harder and harder, and made me steal money from the company.

"Of course, my brother found out. He made me come back to Mumbai. And, because he didn't trust me, he then put me in a small office in the city of Hyderabad. Julie was very angry about this. She said that, because we were brothers, I should have half of the family business and money.

"Of course, she slowly made me believe what she was saying. I started to hate my brother for giving me a terrible job. One day, she asked me, "Are you ready to take what is rightly yours?" She told me to get her a button from my brother's shirt and a bit of his hair. I thought she was crazy, but I did what she asked to keep her quiet.

"What she did next was really strange. She made a little doll that looked like my brother, and she sewed the button and the hair on to it.

She said to me, "Imagine that this is your brother. Here is a pin. If you push the pin into the doll's head, your brother will have a terrible headache. And if you push the pin into his chest, he'll have awful chest pain. Here, try it." I thought she was joking, so I laughed and pushed the pin into the doll's chest. Two hours later, I had a phone call to say that Arvind was having heart pains and had been taken into hospital."

"What?" I cry. "That's amazing!"

"I know," he replied. "But soon I was attacking the doll in anger, and attacking my brother. I knew it was bad, but it was strangely fun. One day, we were both at a business meeting. At the most important moment, I left the room and pushed the pin into the doll's head. I heard him suddenly cry out in terrible pain, 'OWWWW!' Of course, the other men at the meeting were confused and left. People thought that Arvind was going mad. He was locked up in a special hospital, but the doctors treated him badly, and two weeks ago he died."

"No! I'm so sorry," I said.

"But then I realized what I had done. What Julie had made me do. Now that Arvind is dead, I own the company, and I'm rich. That's what she wanted! I hate her. I'm going to leave her, or kill her. I haven't decided which yet." At this moment, he took out a small revolver. But, as soon as he did this, he suddenly cried out in pain and put his hands to his chest, 'OWWWW!' He then fell on to the bar, knocking his whisky glass to the floor.

An ambulance arrived after half an hour. A doctor examined Prakash Rao and announced that he was dead. Then the police came and checked his pockets. They found a lot of money, but they did not find a gun. Dead men do not need guns.

Smita is looking at me and smiling. "You don't expect me to believe that doll story, do you?"

"I've only told you what happened. I haven't told you what I think about it," I say.

"But his story can't be true, can it?"

"Well, the truth is sometimes stranger than lies."

I do not think she believes me. But she moves forward and plays the DVD recording.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Prem Kumar says. "It's now time for question six, for one hundred thousand rupees. Let's hope that Mr Thomas knows about countries and capital cities. So, question six... What is the capital of Papua New Guinea? Is it: a) Port Louis, b) Port-au-Prince, c) Port Moresby, or d) Port Adelaide?"

The music plays as I think.

"Do you have any idea at all, Mr Thomas, about this question?"

"Yes," I say. "I know which are the incorrect answers." "You do?" says Prem Kumar and laughs.

"Yes. I know it is not Port-au-Prince, which is in Haiti, or Port Louis, which is in Mauritius. And it is also not Port Adelaide, because Adelaide is in Australia. So, it must be C. Port Moresby."

Prem Kumar accepts my answer, and the drum sound comes.

"You are correct! You have just won one hundred thousand rupees!" says Prem Kumar. The audience stands up and claps and shouts. Prem Kumar shakes his head. What is happening is definitely not what the producer has planned.

## Chapter Seven: Murder on the Sleeper Train

16 years of age, Agra.

When I left the Taylors' house, I felt good. I went to the train station in Delhi to buy a ticket for the sleeper train back to Mumbai.

I knew about what happens on trains - people wait until you are asleep, and then they steal your things. So, I was careful with the money I had been given. I used 2,000 rupees of it to buy a suitcase, some clothes and my train ticket. Then, the rest - 50,000 rupees in bank notes — I put in a brown envelope and pushed it down the front of my trousers.

I climbed on the train full of excitement because I was going back to see Salim. I soon found my narrow sleeping place — it was one of the bottom bunks in coach S7. I sat down on the bunk, which was next to the small door that led into the corridor. There were five other bunks — one above me, two opposite me and two to the side. Sitting on the bunk opposite mine was a family of four. The mother and father were middle-aged and looked very serious. Their son was tall and thin and looked friendly, but it was the girl sitting next to the window who I was interested in. She was very pretty. I could not stop looking at her.

Once the train was moving, I lay back on my bunk and began to read a magazine that I had brought with me. But sometimes, I glanced at the girl. She was staring out of the window and did not look at me even once. I began to imagine how my life could be different. I had some money now. Just enough to start a new, good life. I touched my trousers where the envelope was and smiled to myself. It was a long journey to Mumbai — maybe I would fall in love with this girl on the way.

Later, the boy got tired of reading his book, and he came and sat next to me. We talked, and he told me that he was Akshay and that his sister's name was Meenakshi. He excitedly told me about a computer that he had and asked me if I had one. I said yes, of course, and I told him that it was the 4000 model, not the 2000 model that he had. I also told him that I spoke English and I had seven girlfriends, and three of them were foreign. Akshay, who was younger than me but bright, laughed. "Ha!" he said. "I don't believe a word of that. There isn't a 4000 model. I got mine two months ago, and it was the latest one. You're lying!" His sister was glancing over at us.

"Oh, you think I'm lying, do you?" I said, quietly. "Well, let me tell you that I have fifty thousand rupees here with me now."

Akshay refused to believe me and asked to see it. I pulled the envelope out of my trousers and showed him all the bank notes. It was not a clever thing to do, but I wanted to prove myself to him. Akshay stared, wide-eyed. For the first time in my life, I saw something new in the eyes of someone who was looking at me. Respect. And it felt good.

At around 10 p.m., everyone lay down on their bunks to go to sleep. I lay on mine thinking about Meenakshi until I fell asleep.

The next thing I knew, I was being woken up by someone roughly pushing my arm. I saw a man standing by my bunk holding a gun in his hand. "All of you, wake up!" he said. He was young, with long hair and a moustache, and was holding a large bag in his other hand. "Right, I'm here for your money. Get down from your bunks. And do it slowly — then no one will get hurt." Terrified, everyone moved silently and sat on the bottom bunks.

"OK, put everything in this bag — your money, purses, watches, jewellery — everything. Do it now, or I will shoot and kill you all." Meenakshi's mother started crying when she heard that. The man went first to Meenakshi, who took off her gold bracelet. As she put it in the bag, the man said, "You're much more beautiful than that bracelet, my darling."

Meenakshi looked frightened as her mother dropped her own bracelets and purse into the bag. Then, her husband put in his watch and money. Then, it was my turn. I took out the few notes and coins I had in my front pocket and added them. The robber seemed to be happy with what we had given him and was about to leave when Akshay said, "Wait, you have forgotten something."

I watched as the man turned around again. Akshay pointed at me and said, "This boy has got fifty thousand rupees! It's down his trousers!" Time stood still. I felt sick. Then the man moved towards me.

"Is this true? Get it out now."

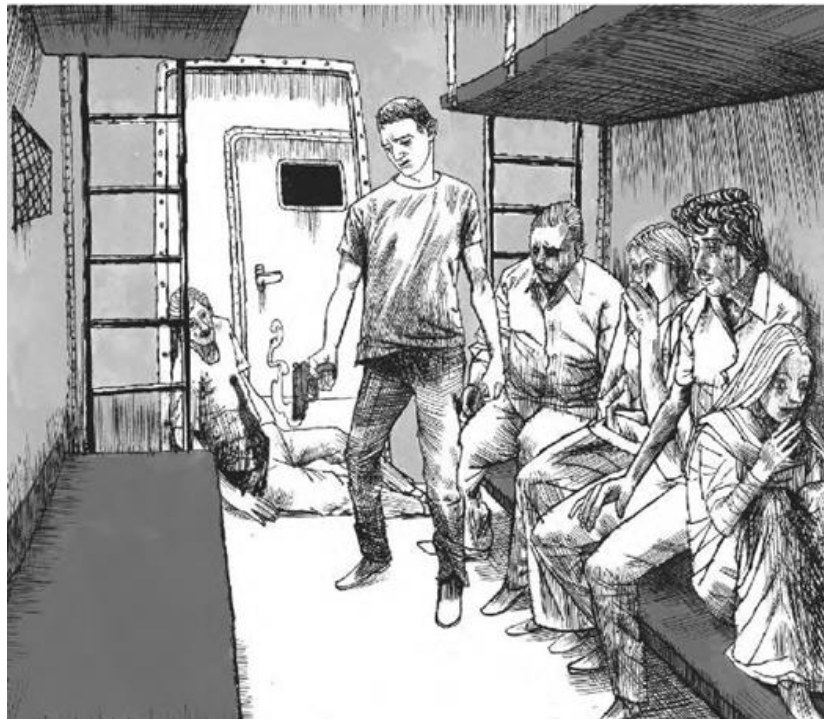
I was angry. It was my money. I had earned it with hard work. But I had no choice. I pulled out the envelope and put it in the bag. The robber picked it up and opened it. "Wow," he said. "Did you steal this? Anyway, I don't care." He dropped it back into the bag. "Now, all of you, stay quiet." He turned and opened the door, then passed the bag out to another man who was waiting in the corridor. I thought he was going to leave, but then he turned and stepped back inside again. He walked towards Meenakshi, the gun still in his hand, and said, "Hey, don't you want to give me a goodbye kiss?"

Meenakshi was terrified and tried to hide at the back of her bunk. The robber held her and pulled her forward roughly with one hand. He was holding her tightly and was hurting her.

“Or maybe you'd like to come with me?” he said. “I need a beautiful young woman like you.”

I suddenly became very angry. I stood up without thinking, and I do not really know what happened next. The next thing I remember was seeing the robber lying on the floor. He was not moving, and there was blood all over his shirt. There was a revolver in my hand, with a thin line of smoke coming up from the end of it. I was in shock. I sat back down on my bunk. There was talking all around me, but all I could do was sit and stare at the heavy gun in my hands. On one side it had some letters and numbers on it: “Conn USA” and “DR 24691”. On the other side it said “Colt” and had a picture of a jumping horse.

Meenakshi kept glancing at me. She was looking at me the way Salim looked at film stars. I knew that at that moment she was in love with me. But it was too late. Everything had changed. I had just killed a man. What would happen when the police arrived? Suddenly, Mr Taylor's words entered my head, “Confuse them to lose them.”





I noticed that the train was slowing down. As the train pulled into the next station, I ran and jumped out of the train with the revolver still in my hand. I ran across the train tracks and jumped into another train that was just about to leave the station. I stood near the door, and, as the train passed over a bridge, I threw the revolver into a dark river below. Then, when the train stopped at the next station, I jumped out and found another train going somewhere else. I did this all night, moving from station to station, train to train.

Cities and towns went by, and I did not know if I was travelling north, south, east or west. At nine o'clock in the morning, the train I was on stopped in a busy city. It seemed like a good place to live quietly for a while. I stepped down from the train, and as I walked out into the street I saw a sign that said, "Welcome to Agra."

Smita holds her hand over her mouth. "Oh, my God," she says. "So all these years you have been living with the guilt of having killed a man?"

"Two men," I say. "Don't forget that I pushed Shantaram down the stairs," I reply.

"Ah, yes. On the train, you were trying to protect the girl, and you were defending yourself."

"Yes, but I'm not sure the police would see it that way," I say. "Let's return to the show."

In the studio, the lights are low again. Prem Kumar turns to me. "This is question number seven, for two hundred thousand rupees. Who invented the revolver? Was it: a) Samuel Colt, b) Bruce Browning, c) Dan Wesson, or d) James Revolver?"

After a moment's thought, I say, "I think the answer is A. Colt."

Prem Kumar asks me if I am sure. I say I am. Then, I see the answer on the screen behind me.

"You are correct!" Prem Kumar cries. "You have just doubled your winnings to two hundred thousand rupees!"

I cannot believe it. I have now won back my 50,000 rupees four times, thanks to a robber on a train who had taken all my money from me.