



**Learn English Through  
Stories**  
E Series

**E26**

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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

## **Contents**

- 1. Sorrow's Reward.**
- 2. Grammar Page.**

## 2. Sorrow's Reward

By Premchand

Three years had passed. It was evening, and I was returning from the University Hall in a cheerful mood. Many of my friends were congratulating me and I was in a state of euphoria. My greatest desire was to pass the MA examination. This was fulfilled in a way that I had never expected. I had topped my class and the vice chancellor had shaken hands with me and said smilingly, "May God give you the talent to achieve higher goals in life." I was overjoyed. I was young, handsome and boasted of good health. As far as money was concerned, I had no lack or craving for it. My parents had left me enough property. Whatever was required to get worldly happiness in this world, I had it all. More importantly, I was overflowing with energy and was impatient to earn a good name.

I came home, where my friends followed me. They wanted a treat. The party continued till the middle of the night. When I went to bed, I was suddenly reminded of Miss Lilawati who was my neighbour and who had passed her BA along with me.

"He who marries Lila must be a lucky fellow," I thought.

She was very beautiful and had a sweet voice and a pleasant temperament. Sometimes, I went over to her place to seek help from Professor Sahib for my philosophy paper. I would consider myself lucky if Professor Sahib wasn't home. Miss Lila treated me with great warmth. I felt in my heart that she would have no problem in accepting me as her husband if only I accepted Christ as my Saviour. She loved Shelley, Byron and Keats. I, too, had similar literary tastes. When alone, we would often talk of love and its philosophy. My spirit was lifted when I listened to her emotionally charged words. But alas! I was not the master of my destiny. I was already married into a respectable family.

*'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'*

*John Keats*

I had not yet seen my wife, but I somehow knew that I wouldn't experience the same pleasure in her company that I did when I was with Lila. It was two years that we had been married but my wife had never written me a letter. I

had written twice or thrice but there was no reply. This made me wonder whether she was properly educated.

“Oh God! Am I to live the rest of my life with this woman?” This question shattered all my dreams. “Is Lila lost to me forever? Impossible! I shall leave Kumudini. I shall sever all ties with my family, I shall earn a bad name, live in distress, but I shall definitely possess Lila.”

I wrote my diary while these thoughts ran in my mind. Then I lay down, leaving the diary open. Wrapped up in my thoughts, I dozed off.

In the morning, as I opened my eyes, I found Babu Niranjana Das sitting in a chair in front of me. He was Kumudini’s brother, and was very healthy, handsome and witty. A few years older than me, he held a high position in his office and had recently been transferred to this town. We had become close friends. What a pity I wouldn’t see this angel of a man again since the cruel hands of death would snatch him away from us.

I saw him holding my diary in his hand. He was reading intently. Upon seeing him, I warmly embraced him. “Have you read my diary?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“But don’t say anything to Kumudini.”

“Okay, I won’t.”

“I’m planning something. Have you seen my diploma?”

“I’ve received a letter from home. Father is ill. I’ll be leaving in two or three days.”

“Yes, you must go. May God restore his health!”

“Would you like to come with me? I don’t know what might happen.”

“No, no, not this time.”

After Niranjana Das left, I did my hair, changed my clothes, and went out thinking of meeting Miss Lilawati. But when I reached there I found her house locked. I was told that she had been unwell for the past two or three days and had left for Nainital for a change of climate. I turned back, helpless and dispirited.

“Was Lila unhappy with me?” I wondered. “Why didn’t she inform me? Lila, are you unfaithful? I didn’t expect this from you.”

I immediately decided to leave for Nainital, but when I reached home, I got Lila’s letter. I opened it with trembling hands.

She had written, "I'm ill, fatally ill. The doctors have diagnosed plague. I'll be dead by the time you reach here. Don't forget me. I'm terribly sorry I could not see you before leaving. Forgive me and don't forget your unfortunate Lila."

The letter dropped from my hands. My world darkened. My heart heaved a sigh of grief. Without losing a moment, I got ready to leave for Nainital. Just as I left home, I ran into Professor Bose who was coming from college. He looked sad. As soon as he saw me, he took out a telegram from his pocket and thrust it before me. My heart sank. Everything clouded over. I dropped to the ground. "Lila, you parted from me so soon."

I reached home. Sitting on the cot I wept bitterly. I cancelled my trip to Nainital. I kept on wandering about aimlessly for ten to twelve days. Friends advised me to go somewhere for a change of scene. I liked the idea. I left home and wandered about in the mountains of Vindhya and Parasnath for two months. New scenes and places brought me some relief. I was in Abu when I received a telegram informing me that I had been appointed assistant professor in the local college. I did not feel like going back to the same town but the principal's letter made me do so. I returned reluctantly and began discharging my duties. There was no zest for life left in me. I avoided the company of friends and hated jokes and humour.

One day, while I was lying on my bed, lost in thought, I heard someone singing from the opposite house. Ah! What a voice it was! It pierced my heart. The tone was steeped in sadness. I realized at that moment the deep impact music could have on human beings. My hair stood on end. I felt a big lump inside and a strange longing overwhelmed me. Tears streamed down my eyes as I remembered that this was one of Lila's favourite songs:

*'Piya milan hai kathin baawari...'*

'Meeting you is so very hard, O my crazy love!'

I couldn't bear it any more. In a state of frenzy, I went over to the house and knocked on the door. I didn't have the sense at that moment to realize that it was against social etiquette to invade someone's privacy and knock at his door at an odd hour.

An old woman opened the door. Seeing me there, she stepped back inside. I followed her in and having crossed the corridor reached a large room. There was a mattress covered with a white sheet and bolsters were placed on it. Beautiful pictures adorned the walls. A young man of about sixteen or seventeen sat on the mattress and was singing while playing the harmonium. I can swear that I had never seen such a handsome young man. He had the

strong physical features of a Sikh. As he saw me he got up with a start, leaving the harmonium. He hung his head in embarrassment and looked nervous.

'I'm sorry to bother you. You sing like a true master. I greatly liked what you were singing now'. The young man stared at me with his large eyes and hung his head. He muttered something about his lack of practice in singing. I asked him how long he had been there.

'For about three months now.'

'Your name, please?'

'I'm Mehar Singh.'

I sat down, held Mehar Singh's hand most cordially, and sat him down. Our conversation revealed that he was from Punjab and had come there to receive his education. Probably, the doctors had advised that the climate of Punjab would not suit him. I felt somewhat embarrassed that I was talking with such cordiality to a school student, but my love for music overrode any such feeling. After chatting for a few moments, I requested him to sing the same song once more.

Mehar Singh lowered his gaze and said that he was still an amateur.

'Not at all', I said, egging him on.

'Why don't you sing something, here's the harmonium?' Mehar Singh requested me shyly.

'I'm a stranger to this art; otherwise, I would've certainly honoured your request.'

I repeated my request a couple of times but Mehar Singh didn't agree. I do not like excessive formality. Even if he didn't oblige, I had no right to be annoyed.

However, I said rather curtly, 'Okay, let it be. I'm sorry I've wasted so much of your time.' I stood up.

Looking at my sad face, Mehar Singh changed his mind. He held my hand with humility and said, 'Oh, you're annoyed with me.'

'I've no right to be annoyed with you.'

'All right, please sit down. I will sing for you. But let me tell you I'm still learning.'

I sat down. Mehar Singh started singing the same song on his harmonium:

*'Piya Milan hai kathin baawari...'*

What melodious tunes! What a sweet voice, and how very moving the emotions! The sweetness of his voice was beyond words. I saw tears welling in his eyes as he sang. I was spellbound. It left a sweet, delicate and aching sensation in my heart that could not be described in words. In my mind, I pictured a lush green field with Lila, my dearest Lila, sitting there and gazing at me wistfully. I sighed deeply and stood up without saying a word. Mehar Singh looked at me; I saw teardrops sparkling like pearls in his eyes.

'Please come over sometimes,' he said.

I could only say, 'I'm greatly obliged to you.'

As days went by it so happened that I could not live without listening to Mehar Singh. Come evening, I would be there in his house. He would sing for me for a while and then I would help him in his school lessons. I enjoyed teaching this intelligent and clever boy. He would easily absorb what I said. He paid utmost attention while I taught him. Whenever I met him I found him busy in his studies. Within a year, he had acquired a good knowledge of English. He could even write simple letters in English. By the end of the second year, he surpassed all the other students in his school. His teachers spoke highly of his intelligence. He was so simple and good-natured that no one ever had a bad word for him. He was the life and soul of the entire school and everyone had high hopes from him. Even though he was a Sikh, he had no liking for sports. I never saw him in the cricket field. He would head straight for home in the evening and be absorbed in his studies.

Gradually, I became so close to him that instead of treating him as a pupil, I took him for a friend. Given his age, his intelligence was astounding. He looked no more than sixteen or seventeen, but while teaching him I sometimes resorted to explaining the most complex of poetic thoughts and the subtlest of emotions, all of which he seemed to understand perfectly. One day I asked him, 'Mehar Singh, are you married?'

'Not yet,' he replied shyly.

'What kind of woman do you fancy?'

'I won't marry.'

'Why?'

'No woman would like to marry a fool like me.'

'What are you saying? There are very few young men who are as accomplished and intelligent as you are.'

'You must be joking.' Mehar Singh looked surprised by my compliment.

'No, I'm not kidding. It's the simple truth. It's amazing to see how quickly you have gained competence in your lessons. It's not yet been three years that you've studied English.'

'Can I keep an educated lady happy?'

'Undoubtedly,' I said emphatically.

It was summer. I had gone to Shimla for a change of air. Mehar Singh was with me. There, I fell ill. I had smallpox and my whole body was covered with blisters. I lay on my cot. I'll always remember how Mehar Singh took care of me during those days. The doctors had strictly prohibited him from entering my room but he didn't listen to them and stayed by my side all the time. He fed me and helped me get up from my bed. He kept awake beside my bed all night. My own brother could not have looked after me better.

A month passed. My condition worsened every day. One day I heard the doctor telling Mehar that my condition was critical. I was sure that I wasn't going to survive but Mehar Singh continued to nurse me with utmost dedication. It seemed as though he was determined to snatch me from the jaws of death. One day, as I lay in my room I heard someone crying. There was no one else but Mehar Singh. So I called out to him.

'Mehar Singh, are you crying?'

'No, why should I cry?' he said, restraining his emotions. But he was looking at me wistfully.

'But I heard you crying.'

'Oh, that was nothing; I was reminded of home.'

'Tell me the truth,' I said.

Mehar Singh's eyes misted with tears. He held up a mirror before me. 'Good God! I cannot recognize myself. My face has changed so much.' In place of a ruddy hue, my complexion had become pale. Ugly pock marks had disfigured my face. I could not bear this sight and tears welled up in my eyes. The good looks that I was so proud of had simply vanished.

I was preparing to return from Shimla. Mehar Singh bade me farewell and went home. I felt desolate. My baggage had been packed when I heard a



vehicle stopping at my door. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Miss Lila getting out of it. I kept staring at her in utter amazement. Miss Lilawati came forward and greeted me. She held out her hand for a handshake. I extended my hand mechanically, still wondering if I was dreaming. Lila's cheeks did not have the former glow nor did she have that playful look. She had turned serious and looked pale.

Seeing my shocked state, she tried to smile, and said, 'What kind of a gentlemen are you that you don't show a lady the simple courtesy of asking her to take a seat.'

I brought a chair for her from the house still thinking whether it was all a dream.

'You've probably forgotten me,' said Lilawati.

'I can't forget you in all my life. But I can't believe my eyes either.'

'It's difficult to recognize you.'

'The same is true of you. But what is this miracle? Have you descended from the heavens?'

'I was in Nainital with my maternal uncle,' Lila said.

'But who wrote that letter to me and who sent me that telegram?'

'Well, I did.'

'Why? Why did you betray me? You can't even imagine how much I've mourned you and suffered.'

I felt great resentment rising within me and I thought, 'Why did she resurface at all? If she were dead, it was better she stayed so.'

'I can explain my absence, but we'll talk about all that later. Let me introduce you to a lady friend of mine. She's eager to meet you.'

'Meet me?' I asked in surprise but Lila did not reply. She held my hand and took me to the car parked outside. There was a lady dressed in Indian attire sitting in the car. She stood up as she saw me and held out her hand. I looked sideways at Lila.

'Don't you recognize her?' Lila asked.

'I'm sorry. I don't recall seeing you earlier,' I said. 'Even if I'd seen you earlier, how can I recognize you now through your veil?'

'This is your wife, Kumudini,' said Lila.

'Kumudini! Here?' I was flummoxed.

‘Kumudini, unveil your face and welcome your dear husband.’

With trembling hands, Kumudini lifted her veil a little. Lila unveiled her entire face and it seemed as though the moon had appeared from behind the clouds. I remembered having seen this face somewhere. But where? She had the same mole on her nose, the same ring on her fingers!

‘What are you thinking? Can you recognize her now?’ asked Lila.

‘I can’t think straight. My friend Mehar Singh looks exactly like her!’

‘You always claimed you had sharp eyes. Don’t you recognize her even now?’ Lila asked, smiling.

My happiness knew no bounds. This was Kumudini in the guise of Mehar Singh. I took her into my arms instantly and held her in a tight embrace for a long time. These moments of supreme bliss surpassed any happiness I had ever experienced in my life. We were lost in each other. My beloved Kumudini couldn’t utter a word. Tears were streaming down her face.

Miss Lila was standing outside and watching this scene. I kissed her hands and said, ‘Dear Lila, you are truly a Devi, a goddess. We will be beholden to you as long as we live.’

The shadow of a smile crossed Lila’s face. She simply said, ‘I suppose, you’ve now been amply rewarded for your sorrow.’

## 2. Grammar Page

### The Simple Past Tense

Use the simple past tense to talk about **things that happened in the past**. The simple past tense is usually made by adding **ed** to the verb.

I opened the door and looked inside.

The plane landed ten minutes ago.

My cousin visited us last summer.

We walked to school yesterday.

She laughed when I told her the joke.



If a verb ends in **e**, just add **d** to make the simple past tense.

Who closed all the windows?

We lived in that house when I was a baby.

She smiled when she saw me.

We raced each other on our bikes.



If a verb ends in **y**, change the **y** to **i** before adding **ed**.

I carried my mom's shopping bag.

My brother cried when he fell off his bike.

We hurried to the station to catch the train.

Dad tried to help me with my homework.



With some **short verbs** that end in a consonant, you must double the consonant before adding **ed**.

I climbed over the fence and ripped my shirt.

The stranger grabbed my arm.

The dog wagged its tail when it saw the biscuits.

He slammed the door and walked off angrily.

