



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H7

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The Emperor's Ring: Part 5

Five

That night, after dinner, Feluda said suddenly, 'Topshe, what do you make of all this?'

'All what?'

'Everything that's happened so far.'

'Why, you should know! You're the detective! Besides, how can I draw any conclusions until we find out who that sannyasi was?'

'But surely certain things are quite clear? For instance, the fact that the sannyasi went into the bathroom and didn't come out. Now that is pretty revealing, isn't it?'

'What does it reveal?'

'Can't you figure that out?'

'Well, all it can mean is that the chowkidar wasn't paying enough attention.'

'No, no, you ass!'

'What, then?'

'If the sannyasi had indeed come out, that chowkidar would definitely have seen him.'

'You mean he never did?'

'Do you remember what he was carrying?'

'Look, I wasn't . . . oh yes, he had a small attaché case.'

'Have you ever seen a sannyasi with an attaché case?'

'No, can't say I have.'

'Well, I think that's distinctly suspicious.'

'What do you suspect?'

'That sannyasi was no more than a non-sannyasi just like you and me. And his normal clothes were in that attaché case. The saffron robe was a disguise. Possibly the beard was false, too.'

'Oh, I see. You mean he changed into different clothes, stuffed his robe into the case and came out looking totally different. No wonder the chowkidar couldn't recognize him!'

‘Yes, now you’re talking!’

‘But who threw that piece of paper at you?’

‘Either the fake sannyasi himself, or one of his men. He must have heard us making enquiries at the station, so he decided to give us a warning.’

‘All right. But are there any more mysteries?’

‘There is no end to them, my boy! Who followed Dr Srivastava in that black car? Who was watching us from the gate, smoking a Charminar and chewing a paan? Was it the same sannyasi, or was it someone else? What “spy” did Pyarelal talk about? Why does Bonobihari Babu keep wild animals in his house? Where had Mahabir seen Bonobihari Babu before? How much does he know about the ring?’

I lay awake that night, thinking these things over. Feluda was scribbling something in a blue notebook. Then he put it away and went to bed at half past ten. Soon, he was fast asleep.

Drums beat in the distance. Oh yes, Ram Lila. I heard an animal at some stage — it might have been a dog or a jackal, but it sounded like a hyena.

Why was Feluda puzzled by Bonobihari Babu’s wild animals? One didn’t always have to do things for a specific reason, did one? People had strange hobbies. So perhaps keeping wild animals was just a hobby for him?

It’s difficult to tell when I fell asleep; nor can I tell what woke me. It was still dark. And everything was very quiet. The drums were silent, as were the animals. All I could hear was Feluda breathing heavily in his sleep next to me and the alarm clock ticking behind my head. Then my eyes fell on the window.

Normally, I could see a fair bit of the starry sky through the open window. Tonight, something blocked most of it.

As the last remnants of sleep cleared from my eyes, I realized with a shock what it was. A man was standing outside at the window, holding its bars, and staring into our room.

My heart stood still. Yet, I couldn’t take my eyes off that figure. The room was utterly dark and the starlight outside was not good enough to see the man’s face. But I could make out that the lower half of his face was covered by a dark cloth.

Now he put a hand through the bars in the window. But no, it wasn’t just his hand. He was holding a rod.

A sweet, yet strong smell hit my nostrils. I was already breathless with fear. Now my limbs began to go numb.

I tried to muster all my will power. Then slowly, without moving my body, I stretched out my left arm towards Feluda. He was still asleep.

My eyes hadn't moved from the window. The man was still holding the rod and that smell was getting stronger. I began to feel giddy.

At this moment, my hand brushed against Feluda's waist. I gave him a nudge. Feluda moved slightly and his bed creaked noisily with the movement. In that instant, the man vanished from the window.

'Why are you poking at me?' asked Feluda sleepily. I swallowed and tried to speak. 'Window,' I managed.

'What about the window? Who's . . . God, what's that smell?' Fully awake, Feluda jumped up and ran to the window. He stared out of it for a few moments, then turned back to me.

'Tell me exactly what you saw.'

I was still finding it difficult to talk. 'A man...' I croaked, 'with a rod... inside...'

'Did he stretch the rod out into our room?'

'Yes.'

'I see. He must have had chloroform dabbed on that rod. He wanted us to faint.'

'But why?'

'It could be a different thief. May be he thought the ring was still in our house. Never mind. Go back to sleep now, and please don't tell you father or Dhuru Kaka about this. They'll only get nervous and spoil all my work.'

The next morning, both Baba and Dhuru Kaka appeared more relaxed. The police had been informed and Inspector Gargari had already started working on the case. So it wasn't likely that there would be any further problem.

I sent up a silent prayer for Feluda. Dear God, don't let the police win. Let it be Feluda who finds the ring. May the full credit go to him, not the police.

Baba said, 'I'm thinking of taking you out today to a few other places.'

We decided to leave after lunch. But before a final decision could be taken on where we should go, Bonobihari Babu turned up at the house. It was he who eventually settled the matter.

'I had to come when I heard of the daylight robbery,' he said. 'If only you had a hound, Dhuru Babu, this wouldn't have happened. A well-trained pedigree hound would have taken just five seconds to figure out what the sadhu's intentions were. But what's the use of offering you advice now? The damage is

done! Never mind. Have one of these,' he added, unwrapping the small packet he was carrying, 'these are the best paan in Lucknow. Banaras is the only other place where you can find such good quality paan.'

I began to feel slightly uneasy. If Bonobihari Babu stayed for too long, our plans for the afternoon would be spoilt. But he asked at this point, 'Are you planning to go out or will you stay in?'

Baba said, 'Well, these fellows haven't seen anything except the Imambara. So I was thinking of taking them somewhere else.'

'Haven't you seen the Residency?' Bonobihari Babu asked me. I shook my head.

'Then allow me to show it to you. You won't find a guide like me. I have a thorough knowledge of the Mutiny.'

Then he turned to Dhiru Kaka and said, 'There is only one thing I'm feeling curious about. Where did you keep the ring? In a chest?'

'No, I haven't got one in my house. The thief took it from my Godrej almirah. The key, of course, was in my pocket. He must have used a duplicate.'

'I believe he left the box behind?'

'Yes.'

'Very strange! Was the box in a drawer?'

'Yes.'

'And you searched the drawer thoroughly, I presume?'

'Every inch of it.'

'You could check for fingerprints, couldn't you? I mean, on the handle of the almirah and that little box . . . ?'

'That wouldn't help. Both are full of my own fingerprints.'

Bonobihari Babu shook his head and said, 'Pyarelal was a strange man. He didn't even bother to have the ring insured. And the person he gave it to was just as foolish. However, I hope he's now learnt a lesson.'

We didn't get the chance to take a tonga this time. All of us got into Bonobihari Babu's car. Feluda and I sat in the front.

As we were passing through Clive Road, Bonobihari Babu asked us, 'Did you ever think you'd get involved in such a mysterious event in Lucknow?'

I shook my head. Feluda chuckled.

Baba spoke for him. 'Felu is thrilled to be here,' he said, 'because he's very interested in such things. He's an amateur sleuth, you see.'

'Indeed?' Bonobihari Babu sounded both surprised and pleased, 'It's an excellent way of exercising the brain. Well, Felu Babu, how far have you got?'

'I've only just started.'

'I don't know what you'd call a mystery. But certainly I am mystified by many things.'

'What do you mean?' asked Dhiru Kaka.

'Well, how do you suppose that sannyasi got hold of a duplicate key? Besides, your house wasn't totally empty. How could he go into your bedroom knowing that the bearer and the cook were in the house? In any case, one little thing has always worried me.'

'What is that?'

'Did Pyarelal really give that ring to Dr Srivastava, or did Sri—?'

'What are you saying, Bonobihari Babu? Surely you don't suspect poor Dr Srivastava!'

'Why not? Everyone is under suspicion until this matter gets cleared up. And that includes you and me. Isn't that right, Felu Babu?'

'Certainly. We mustn't forget that Dr Srivastava and that sadhu had both gone to our house that evening,' said Feluda.

'Exactly!' Bonobihari Babu seemed to grow positively excited. Baba spoke a little haltingly. 'But... if Srivastava had indeed used unfair means to get hold of that ring, why should he give it to us for safe keeping? And then why should he steal it again?'

Bonobihari Babu laughed out loud. 'That's simple! His house was burgled. So he got frightened and passed the ring on to you. But temptation didn't leave him, so he stole it back, fooled the real thief and killed two birds with one stone!'

I began to feel quite confused. How could an amiable gentleman like Srivastava be a thief? Was Feluda in agreement with what had just been said? Or had his suspicion fallen on Dr Srivastava only after Bonobihari Babu began speaking?

In fact, he hadn't finished. 'Srivastava is a nice enough man, I agree,' Bonobihari Babu went on. 'But just think for a minute — he's built his own house, stuffed it with expensive furniture and he certainly lives in style. Now,

how could he have done that? I mean, how much does he earn as an osteopath in a small town like Lucknow?’

Dhiru Kaka said, ‘Who knows, perhaps his father left him some money?’

‘No. His father was just a clerk in a post office in Allahabad.’

At this point, Feluda suddenly asked something completely irrelevant. ‘Have you ever been bitten by any of your animals?’

‘No, never.’

‘What is that mark on your right wrist?’

‘Oh ho — you do have sharp eyes, I must say! That mark normally stays hidden under my sleeve. It’s the result of fencing. My opponent’s sword scratched my wrist.’

The Residency was really worth seeing. It was a beautiful place — there were trees everywhere and, amidst them, a few broken old British houses, all built in the mid-nineteenth century. On the trees sat large groups of monkeys. Lucknow, I had heard, was well known for its monkeys. Now I could see for myself what these creatures could get up to.

A few street-urchins were firing stones at the monkeys from their catapults. Bonobihari Babu went across and gave them a nasty earful. Then he returned to us and said, ‘I cannot stand cruelty to animals. Unfortunately, there’s plenty of it to be seen in our country.’

I had read about the Sepoy Mutiny. Going through the Residency made those events pass through my mind like pictures on a screen. Bonobihari Babu, in the meantime, had begun his commentary.

‘During the time of the Mutiny, Lucknow was ruled by the Nawab. The British forces were all stationed in the Residency here. Henry Lawrence was their Commander-in-Chief. When trouble started, most of the other British men and women in Lucknow went and took refuge in a hospital. Sir Henry fought bravely, but was eventually killed by the sepoys. What happened to the British after that is obvious from the state of this building. If Sir Colin Campbell hadn’t arrived with reinforcements, heaven knows what greater horrors the British in Lucknow would have had to endure... This was their billiard room. Just look what those cannon balls did to it!’

Baba and Dhiru Kaka had gone for a walk since they had both seen the Residency before. Only Feluda and I were inside, totally engrossed in what Bonobihari Babu was saying, and looking at the remains of the broken buildings, all built two hundred years ago. Suddenly, through a hole in the wall,

something came flying in. It shot past Feluda's ear, bumped against the opposite wall and fell on the ground with a thud. It turned out to be a stone.

In the next instant, I saw Bonobihari Babu pull Feluda sharply to one side, just as another stone came in and fell on the floor. There was no doubt that both had been thrown with a catapult.

Bonobihari Babu, despite his age, moved with remarkable agility. He jumped through a bigger gap in the wall and landed on the grass outside. Feluda and I joined him almost immediately. We all saw a bearded man running away. He was wearing a black coat and a red fez cap. Feluda rose to his feet without a word and ran after him. I was about to follow, but Bonobihari Babu pulled me back, saying: 'You are still only a schoolboy, Tapesh. It's better that you stay out of this.'

Feluda returned in a few minutes.

'Did you catch him?' asked Bonobihari Babu.

'No,' said Feluda, 'I was too far behind. He got into a black Standard car and fled.'

'Scoundrel!' Bonobihari Babu muttered. 'Come on now, we'd better get out of here.'

A little later, we met Baba and Dhuru Kaka. 'Why are you panting, Felu?' Baba asked.

'Perhaps he should give up being a sleuth,' said Bonobihari Babu, 'I think a goonda's after him!'

Both Baba and Dhuru Kaka began to look rather alarmed when they heard our story. But, in the end, Bonobihari Babu laughed. 'Don't look so worried,' he said, 'I was only joking. Those stones were actually meant for me, not Felu. Didn't you see me yell at those boys? It was simply their way of paying me back.' Then he turned to Feluda and said, 'Even so, Felu Babu, I would say that you really must be more careful. After all, you are young and new to this place. Why get involved in something that doesn't concern you?'

Feluda remained silent. We began walking back to the car.

'Was it really him they were trying to hit? Or was it you?' I whispered to Feluda.

'Do you think he'd have taken it so quietly if he was their target? Wouldn't he have screamed the roof down—or what's left of it?'

'I agree with you.'

'But I've got hold of one little thing. That man dropped it.' Feluda took out a small black object from his pocket. It was a false moustache. One side still showed traces of gum. He put it back in his pocket and said, 'Bonobihari Babu knows very well those stones had been thrown at me.'

'Then why didn't he say so?'

'Well, either because he didn't want us to get worried, or ...'

'Or what?'

Feluda didn't reply. Instead, he inclined his head, snapped his fingers and said, 'The plot gets thicker and thicker, Topshe! You're not to disturb me at all!'

He did not speak to me again that day. On returning home, he spent most of his time either pacing up and down in the garden or scribbling in his blue notebook. I took a quick look at what he'd written when he went out into the garden; but I couldn't read a single word, for the script used was something I had never seen before.

2. Grammar page

By: not later than

I sent the documents today, so they should **arrive by Friday**.

(= on or before Friday not later than Friday)

We'd better hurry. We have to be home **by 4 o'clock**.

(= at or before 4 o'clock, not later than 4 o'clock)

Where's Seema? She should be here by now.

(= now or before now – so she should already be here)



This bread has to be used by 15 August.

We use until (or till) to say how long a situation continues:

A: Shall we go now?

B: No, let's wait **until it stops raining**. or ... **till it stops raining**.

I was very tired this morning. I stayed in bed **until half past ten**.

I was very tired this morning. I didn't get up **until half past ten**.

Something continues until a time in the future:

Banta will be away **until Monday**. (So he'll be back on Monday)

I'll be working **until 11.30**. (So I'll stop working at 11.30)

Something happens by a time in the future:

Seema will be back **by Monday**. (= not later than Monday)

I'll have finished my work **by 11.30**. (= I'll finish it not later than 11.30)

You can say 'by the time something happens':

It's too late to go to the bank now. **By the time** we get there, it will be closed.
(= it will close between now and the time we get there)

You'll need plenty of time at the airport. **By the time** you check in and go through security, it will be time for your flight.
(= check-in and security will take a long time)

Hurry up! **By the time** we get to the cinema, the film will already have started.

You can say 'by the time something happened' (for the past):

Karen's car broke down on the way to the party last night. **By the time** she arrived, most of the other guests had left.
(= it took her a long time to get there and most of the guests left during this time)

I had a lot of work to do yesterday evening. I was very tired **by the time** I finished.
(= it took me a long time to do the work, and I became more and more tired)

We went to the cinema last night. It took us a long time to find somewhere to park the car. **By the time** we got to the cinema, the film had already started.

You can say by then or by that time:

Karen finally got to the party at midnight, but **by then** most of the other guests had left. or ... but **by that time**, most of the other guests had left .