



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H9

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Contents

Adventures of Feluda:

- 1. The Emperor's Ring: Part 7.**
- 2. Grammar Page: on time and in time — at the end and in the end.**

The Emperor's Ring: Part 7

Seven

We had to take the Doon Express to get to Haridwar. It left Lucknow in the evening and reached Haridwar at 4.30 a.m.

When Baba had mentioned a possible visit to Haridwar before we left Calcutta, I had been pleased. Puri was the only holy place I had seen. So the thought of seeing another was quite exciting. But now, after all this hullabaloo over the stolen ring, I did not feel like leaving Lucknow.

Feluda, however, had not lost his enthusiasm. 'You'll see how interesting it is to go from Haridwar to Hrishikesh and then to Laxmanjhoola. The river is different in each place. The further north you go, the stronger it gets. In Laxmanjhoola, it gushes with such powerful turbulence that it's practically impossible to have a conversation by its side.'

'Have you been to all these places?'

'Yes, I went to all three after my last visit to Lucknow.'

Dhiru Kaka himself drove us to the station. Almost as soon as we had moved into our coach with our baggage, Dr Srivastava turned up. Nice of him to have come to see us off. But no, a coolie was carrying his suitcase! We stared at him. 'I had asked Dhiru Babu not to tell,' Dr Srivastava laughed, as the coolie put the suitcase down. 'He knew I wanted to go with you. Gave you a surprise, didn't I?'

Baba seemed very pleased.

'Good,' he said. 'I didn't think you'd be able to come away, or I'd have asked you myself.'

Srivastava dusted one corner of a seat and sat down. 'To tell you the truth,' he said, 'I've tried not to show it, but I have been upset by the loss of Pyarelal's gift. So I thought, getting away from it all might do me some good.'

Bonobihari Babu arrived within five minutes, with rather a lot of luggage. He greeted everyone with a smile and said, 'Stand by now for a spectacular event. Pavitrananda Swami is travelling in this train. His followers are coming to bid him farewell. Witness their devotion!'

A plump, saffron-clad figure arrived a little later, long hair flowing down his shoulders. He was accompanied by dozens of people with garlands in their

hands. He got into the first-class coach next to ours. A few others crowded round the doorway. Presumably, all these were his devotees.

There were just five minutes left before the train's departure. We had all climbed into our own carriage. Dhiru Kaka was standing on the platform, chatting with Baba through an open window, when one of the men in saffron detached himself from the group and came walking towards Dhiru Kaka, a big smile on his face, his arm outstretched.

'Dhiru? Do you remember me?'

Dhiru Kaka stared dumbly for a few seconds, then with a shout of joy strode forward and nearly hugged the other man.

'Ambika! Is it really you? Goodness—why are you wearing these clothes?'

'Why, I've been in saffron now for seven years!'

Dhiru Kaka introduced him.

'Ambika and I were classmates in school. We last met each other about fifteen years ago.'

The guard blew his whistle. The wheels creaked into motion and we heard Ambika Babu tell his friend, 'I went to your house the other day. You weren't in, so I waited for nearly half-an-hour. Didn't your bearer tell you?'

We couldn't hear what Dhiru Kaka said in reply, for the train had gathered speed.

Amazed, I looked first at Feluda, and then at Baba. Feluda's brows were knitted in a deep frown.

'Very strange!' Baba said.

'Had you been suspecting that gentleman of having stolen the ring?' asked Bonobihari Babu.

'Yes, but obviously that must now be ruled out. But then who took the ring? Where did it go?'

The train clanked out of the platform. I stared with unseeing eyes at the minarets on top of the station. They were beautiful, but I was in no mood to admire them. All my thoughts were confused. What was Feluda thinking? Was he feeling a little embarrassed? After all, he had run all the way to the station to trace the sadhubaba.

But if the man we just saw talking with Dhiru Kaka was a perfectly genuine sannyasi, who was that other man with an attaché case? Had he been loitering outside Dhiru Kaka's house the same evening? If so, was it because he knew

about the ring, or was there a different reason? And who had thrown that piece of paper at Feluda with 'Watch Out!' written on it?

Was Feluda asking himself the same questions? I looked at him again and found him deeply engrossed in reading his blue notebook with the Greek scribbles and, occasionally, making further notes.

Bonobihari Babu suddenly turned to Dr Srivastava and asked, 'Tell me, Doctor, were you the last person to see Pyarelal alive?'

Dr Srivastava was in the process of taking out oranges from a bag. 'Yes,' he replied, offering them to everyone, 'I was certainly by his bedside when he died. So were his widowed sister, his bearer and another servant.'

'Hm,' Bonobihari Babu said gravely. 'Were you informed after he suffered the attack?'

'Yes.'

'Do you treat ailments of the heart as well?'

'There is no reason why an osteopath cannot look at a heart patient, if need be. Besides, his own doctor—Dr Graham—was out of town that day. So they called me.'

'Who did?'

'His bearer.'

'Bearer?' Bonobihari Babu raised his eyebrows.

'Yes. Pritam Singh. He's been with the family for years. A very sensible and trustworthy man.'

Bonobihari Babu took the pipe out of his mouth and popped a piece of orange into it.

'You told us Pyarelal gave you that ring after his first attack. When he had his second, you were called, but he died.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Was anyone else present in the room when you were given that ring?'

'How could that be, Bonobihari Babu? One doesn't give away precious and valuable things in front of an audience. Besides, you know what kind of a man Pyarelal was. He would never have wanted to publicize a noble deed. Do you know how many charities he supported secretly? He donated very heavily to hospitals and orphanages, yet it was never reported in the press. He wouldn't allow it!'

'Hm.'

Srivastava stared at Bonobihari Babu.

'Do you have . . . reservations about what I've just said?' he asked. 'The thing is, you see,' said Bonobihari Babu, 'I do think it would've been sensible if you had got someone to witness the event. Such a valuable object changed hands, and yet no one can testify . . .'

Srivastava was still staring, speechless. Then he burst out laughing.

'Tremendous!' he exclaimed. 'This really takes the cake. What you're implying is that I stole the ring from Pyarelal, then I gave it to Dhiru Babu, and then I went along and stole it back! Wonderful!'

The expression on Bonobihari Babu's face did not change. 'You acted sensibly,' he said coolly, 'I would've done the same. You took the ring over to Dhiru Babu to keep it safe from the burglar who had broken into your house. Then you took it back and thought the burglars wouldn't attack your house again. Tell me, Felu Babu, I am not too bad at detection, am I?'

Feluda shut his notebook and began peeling an orange.

'Surely,' he asked, 'there are plenty of witnesses to testify that Dr Srivastava did indeed save Mahabir's life?'

'Yes, there probably are,' Bonobihari Babu had to admit.

'In that case, it is my belief that no matter how valuable that ring was, its value could not have been more than that of a child's life. If Dr Srivastava did steal that ring, he is certainly an offender. But those who are now after it are real criminals; and dangerous ones, at that.'

'I see,' Bonobihari Babu said gravely, 'you don't believe that Srivastava has still got the ring, do you?'

'No, I don't, because I have evidence to the contrary.'

Everyone in the coach was silent. I stared at Feluda. Bonobihari Babu was the first to speak.

'May I ask what evidence it is?'

'Yes, you certainly may, but you won't get an answer, for the right time to discuss it hasn't yet come.'

I had never heard Feluda speak with such authority. Bonobihari Babu spoke again, with a hint of sarcasm in his voice, 'Let's hope I live to see the day!'

'It shouldn't take long,' Feluda said. 'There is only that matter of the spy to be cleared up.'

‘Spy?’ asked Bonobihari Babu, surprised. ‘What spy?’

Dr Srivastava spoke this time.

‘I think Felu Babu is referring to Pyarelal’s last words. Just before he died, he did say the word “spy”. In fact, he said it twice.’

Bonobihari Babu’s frown went deeper.

‘Strange! A spy in Lucknow?’ Then, pipe in hand, he stared at the floor. ‘Yes, it could be . . . I did suspect . . .’ he muttered.

‘What?’

‘No, never mind. I may be wrong.’

Clearly he did not wish to talk about it. In any case, we had reached Hardoi, so our conversation came to a halt.

‘A cup of tea might be a good idea,’ said Feluda and went down on to the platform. I joined him for I couldn’t see the point in sitting inside a train when it was standing at a station.

Just as I climbed down from our coach, another man in saffron clothes turned up from somewhere and got in.

‘This is reserved,’ said Bonobihari Babu quickly, ‘there’s no room.’

‘Please, sir,’ pleaded the man, ‘allow me to travel up to Bareilly. Then I’ll go elsewhere. I won’t disturb you at night.’

Rather reluctantly, Bonobihari Babu made room for him to sit. ‘These sannyasis will drive me mad,’ said Feluda, waving at the chaiwalla.

The man with the tea came running. ‘Would you like some?’

‘Yes, why not?’

Feluda asked the others, but they all declined.

I was soon handed an earthen pot, filled with hot, steaming tea. I shifted it from one hand to the other, waiting for it to cool, and said, ‘If Dr Srivastava turns out to be the thief, I shall be very upset.’

‘Why?’ Feluda asked, casually sipping the hot tea.

‘Because I like him—he seems such a nice man!’

‘You’re a fathead! Haven’t you read “who-dun-it”? The person who appears to be the least suspicious always turns out to be the culprit.’

‘But this is not a story.’

‘So what? Don’t writers base their stories on what they see in real life?’

This annoyed me very much.

‘In that case,’ I asked, ‘when Dr Srivastava came to our house with the ring, who was watching him from the gate and smoking a Charminar?’

‘That might have been the burglar—or his accomplice.’

‘You mean to say, Srivastava is a criminal and so are the burglars, which would make everyone a villain because Ganesh Guha said Bonobihari Babu wasn’t simple, either!’

Feluda took another sip. But before he could reply, another screwed up piece of paper came flying, hit him on the forehead and fell into his earthen pot.

Feluda retrieved it instantly, scanned it and glanced at the crowd on the platform. Then we heard the guard’s whistle. There was no time now to look for the person who threw it.

Before getting back to our compartment, Feluda looked once more at what was written on the paper and showed it to me before screwing it up again and throwing it away on the track.

It said: ‘Watch Out!’ and the words were written with the same red juice of a paan.

The thrilling and mysterious affair of the Emperor’s ring had not been left behind in Lucknow at all. It was travelling with us.

2. Grammar Page

On time and in time — at the end and in the end

A. Compare on time and in time

If something happens on time, it happens at the time that was planned:

1. The 11.45 train left on time. (= it left at 11.45)
2. Please be on time. Don't be late.
3. The conference was well-organised. Everything began and finished on time.

In time (for something / to do something) = soon enough:

1. Will you be home in time for dinner? (= soon enough for dinner)
2. I sent Banta a birthday present. I hope it arrives in time.
(= on or before his birthday.)
3. I'm in a hurry. I want to get home in time to watch the game on TV.

The **opposite** of in time is too late:

1. I got home too late to watch the game.

B. At the end and in the end:

At the end (of something) = at the time when something ends

For example:

at the end of the month at the end of January at the end of the
game
at the end of the film at the end of the course at the end of the
concert

We use **in the end** when we say what the final result of a situation was:

1. We had a lot of problems with our car. We sold it in the end. (= finally we sold it)
2. He got more and more angry. In the end he just walked out of the room.
3. Alan couldn't decide where to go for his holidays. He didn't go anywhere in the end.