



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H12

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The Emperor's Ring: Part 10

Ten

I didn't get the chance at all that day to speak to Feluda about his dazzling matchbox.

Baba wanted us to go to bed early since we had to be up at the crack of dawn the following morning; but by the time we finished dinner and were able to go to bed, it was past 10 p.m.

As I got into bed, I could hear someone snore very loudly through the communicating door between our room and the next.

'Bilash Babu,' said Feluda briefly.

'How do you know?'

'Why, he was snoring in the train yesterday. Didn't you hear him?' In the train? Was Bilash Babu in the train with us? Of course! One little piece of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place.

'Those big toes!'

Feluda gently patted my shoulder. 'Good!' he said.

Yes, that was right. Bilash Babu was the man who had lain on the upper berth, wrapped in a sheet from head to toe. But I had seen his toes.

It was now time to ask Feluda the question that had been bothering me all day. But I had to wait until Baba was asleep. I could tell by his movements that he was still awake.

The dharamshala was gradually falling silent, as was the whole town. It was the beginning of winter, so people would, in any case, retire early. It was dark inside our room, but a light from the courtyard outside fell on the threshold. What was that noise under the bed? A rat or a mouse, probably.

Baba was now asleep. I could hear his deep, regular breathing. Turning to Feluda, I whispered, 'It was the ring, wasn't it?'

Feluda said nothing for a few moments. Then he sighed and whispered back, 'All right. Since you have guessed it already, there's no point in hiding things from you. I have had the ring from the very first day. When all of you—including Dhiru Kaka—had gone to sleep, I saw that his trousers were hanging from a rack. I knew the keys of his almirah were in one of its pockets. So I took them out, opened the almirah and removed the ring. I didn't take the box deliberately, so that there would be no doubt that only the ring had gone.'

‘But why?’

‘Because I knew that would only provoke the real thief. And then it would be easier to catch him.’ ‘Does it mean that the sannyasi had turned up simply to steal the ring?’

‘Yes, but it wasn’t Ambika Babu. It was the other fake one, who had an attaché case in his hand. He must have had the shock of his life when he saw another sannyasi in the living-room! I bet that’s when he went to the station and changed his clothes.’

‘Who is this fake sannyasi?’

‘I have my suspicions, but not enough evidence—yet.’

‘You mean you’ve been carrying that ring in your pocket all these days?’

‘No.’

‘What did you do then?’

‘I kept it in a safe place.’

‘Where?’

‘In the Bhoorbhulaia. In one of those little niches.’

Good God! What a clever mind! Now I could see why he had disappeared in that maze for a few minutes.

‘But how could you have gone back to find it? You didn’t know how the maze had been built? I mean, its plan ...’

‘I had made an arrangement for that. You may have noticed that the little finger on my left hand has a long nail. I had scratched numbers with it on the walls of those passages. The ring was in the seventh passage. I went back before leaving Lucknow and took it out. I didn’t like the idea of the ring lying there while I went out of town.’

My heartbeat grew faster again.

‘What if those burglars suspect that you’ve got the ring?’

‘So what? They couldn’t prove it. Anyway, I don’t think they’re clever enough to guess where the ring is.’

‘In that case why are they threatening you?’

‘Because they haven’t given up hopes of getting hold of it. And they know very well that I am capable of ruining all their plans.’

‘But—’ my throat was so badly parched I could hardly speak, ‘you might be in great danger!’

‘Felu Mitter thrives on risks and danger.’

‘But—’

‘No more buts. Go to sleep.’

Feluda yawned and turned to his side.

The dharamshala was now totally quiet. A dog barked somewhere. The snoring in the next room continued non-stop. I could not get the matchbox and its content out of my mind. One had to marvel at the courage Feluda had shown. If it wasn't for what he had done, the ring would have been stolen and the thief would have got away with it.

‘Kir-r-r-r-r-r kit kit kit! Kir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r kit kit kit!’

From the next room came the faint noise of the rattle-snake; but it sounded as though it was coming from a distance. Bonobihari Babu must be listening to his favourite music. Strangely enough, this funny noise soon soothed me to sleep.

Baba had set the alarm on his travelling clock for 5 a.m. I woke a little before it went off. It did not take us long to get ready after a cup of tea. ‘We needn't worry about taking food,’ said Dr Srivastava, ‘there are shops at the foot of the bridge in Laxmanjhoola that sell very good puri-subzi.’

We were all wearing our woollens. Laxmanjhoola was further up in the hills and was bound to be cooler.

The two taxis arrived at a quarter to six and stopped by the front gate. Bilash Babu came out and joined us. It turned out that he, too, was going to Laxmanjhoola and would travel with us. As I stood debating on which car to get into, Bonobihari Babu said, ‘Three in each car, obviously. I could tell you some interesting stories about animals, Tapesh. Would you like to join me?’

‘Yes, why not? I'm sure Feluda would like to come along, too.’ Feluda didn't seem to mind. So Bonobihari Babu, Feluda and I got into one taxi and Baba got into the other with Dr Srivastava and Bilash Babu, who seemed to have struck up a friendship already.

Bonobihari Babu placed the wooden packing crate on the front seat beside the driver. ‘For my python, if I can find it,’ he said. Feluda sat in the middle in the back seat. I sat on his left and Bonobihari Babu went over to his right.

Both cars left at 6.15. Five minutes later, we were out of the main town and into the open countryside. The hills rose before us. If I looked out of the right window, I could catch an occasional glimpse of the Ganges. My heart suddenly felt light. Bonobihari Babu, too, appeared to be in a good mood, for he was humming under his breath, possibly at the thought of his python.

Feluda, however, did not utter a word. What was he thinking? Was the ring still in that matchbox in his pocket? There was no way of telling, for I knew he wouldn't smoke before Bonobihari Babu.

The other taxi was right in front of us. I could see Bilash Babu talking to Dr Srivastava. Perhaps the latter had seized this opportunity to have his palm read.

'The roads aren't dusty because of the early morning dew,' said Bonobihari Babu. 'But very soon, you'll see that other car throw up clouds of dust. I think we ought to let them go ahead. Driver, will you please slow down a bit?'

The bearded Sikh driver reduced the speed of our taxi and the distance between Baba's car and ours grew considerably.

I had wanted both cars to travel together, never mind about the dust. But I didn't dare say anything to Bonobihari Babu. When would he start on his stories?

There was a car behind ours, apparently in a hurry to overtake us. Annoyed by its honking, Bonobihari Babu said to the driver, 'This will drive me mad. Let it go, driver. Give way.'

The driver very obediently moved a little to the left and an old-fashioned Chevrolet taxi shot past us. Its passenger leant out of the window and gave us a quick look.

I recognized him instantly—it was the sannyasi from the train!

2. Grammar Page

In/at/on (position) 3

in hospital / at work etc.

We say that somebody is in bed / in hospital / in prison:

1. James isn't up yet. He's still in bed.
2. Anna's mother is in hospital.

We say that somebody is at home / at work / at school / at university / at college:

1. I'll be at work until 5.30.
2. My sister is at university. My brother is still at school.

We say be at home or be home (with or without at), but do something at home (with at):

1. I'll be home all evening. or I'll be at home all evening.
2. Shall we go to a restaurant or eat at home?

at a party / at a concert etc.

We say that somebody is at an event (at a party, at a conference etc.):

1. Were there many people at the party / at the meeting / at the wedding?
2. I saw Steve at a conference / at a concert on Saturday.

We use **in** when we are thinking about the building itself. Compare at and in:

1. I was at Teena's (house) last night.
2. It's always cold in Teena's house. The heating doesn't work well. (**not at Teena's house**)
3. We had dinner at the hotel.
4. All the rooms in the hotel have air conditioning. (**not at the hotel**)

We say at the station / at the airport:

1. There's no need to meet me at the station. I can get a taxi.

We usually say **on a bus / on a train / on a plane / on a ship** but **in a car / in a taxi**.

Exercise

Complete the sentences. Use in, at or on + the following:

the plane

the station

a taxi

the art gallery

Tokyo

school

prison

the sports centre

1. Some people are for crimes that they did not commit.
2. We can get coffee while we're waiting for our train.
3. We walked to the restaurant, but we went home
4. I play basketball on Friday evenings.
5. I enjoyed the flight, but the food was awful.
6. Vicky has gone to Japan. She's living
7. 'Does your sister have a job?' 'No, she's only 16. She's still
8. There's a new exhibition of paintings Let's go and see it.

Answers

Complete the sentences. Use in, at or on + the following:

the plane

the station

a taxi

the art gallery

Tokyo

school

prison

the sports centre

1. Some people are **in prison** for crimes that they did not commit.
2. We can get coffee **at the station** while we're waiting for our train.
3. We walked to the restaurant, but we went home **in a taxi**.
4. I play basketball **at the sports centre** on Friday evenings.
5. I enjoyed the flight, but the food **on the plane** was awful.
6. Vicky has gone to Japan. She's living **in Tokyo**.
7. 'Does your sister have a job?' 'No, she's only 16. She's still **at school**'
8. There's a new exhibition of paintings **at the art gallery** Let's go and see it.