



Learn English Through
Stories

H Series

H14

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The Emperor's Ring: Part 12

Twelve

'Your ring?'

I could tell that Feluda was quite taken aback by the question. Bonobihari Babu did not reply. He only stared at Feluda, the pipe hanging from one corner of his mouth, a little smile on his lips. The crickets outside were silent.

'Besides,' Feluda continued, 'what makes you think I have got it?'

Bonobihari Babu spoke this time. 'I had my suspicions throughout. I knew it couldn't have been stolen by an outsider. No one could have simply walked into the house and taken something from Dhiru Babu's bedroom without anyone having seen or heard anything. I found that impossible to believe. But although I suspected you, I didn't have any evidence to prove my theory. Now I do.'

'And what is that evidence?'

Silently, Bonobihari Babu picked up his tape-recorder and, placing it once more on his lap, switched it on. It froze my blood to hear what I did.

'It was that ring, wasn't it?' spoke my own voice from the machine.

'Since you have guessed it already, there is no point in hiding things from you...'

Bonobihari Babu turned the machine off with a click. 'I had left it under your bed last night before you returned to your room,' he said. 'I couldn't, of course, be sure that you would indeed talk about the ring. But since you did, I couldn't miss such an opportunity to get what I wanted. What better evidence would you need, eh, Felu Babu?'

'But how can you claim that the ring is yours?'

Bonobihari Babu put the recorder on the table, crossed his legs and leant back in his chair.

'In 1948,' he said, 'that is, exactly eighteen years ago, I bought that ring from the Naulakha Company in Calcutta. It cost me two hundred thousand rupees. I got to know Pyarelal soon after this. He didn't tell me he was interested in antiques, but I did show him the ring. The look on his face on seeing it made me instantly wary. Two days later, it disappeared from my house. The police were informed, but they couldn't catch the thief. Then I came to Lucknow, and so did Pyarelal. I learnt that he had had the ring all these years only when

Srivastava showed it to me. I don't suppose Pyarelal thought he would survive his first heart attack. So he got rid of what he had stolen many years ago. But then he recovered, and I went to see him. What I had thought was that if he admitted to the theft, I could perhaps get the ring back from Srivastava. I'm sure he would have agreed, and I was even prepared to offer him some compensation. But do you know what happened? Pyarelal simply denied the whole thing. In fact, he went so far as to say he had never seen the ring in my house in Calcutta!

Feluda broke in at this point, not a trace of fear in his voice, 'I would like to ask you something, Bonobihari Babu, and I hope you'll give me an answer.'

'No, you tell me first if you've got the ring with you now, or have you left it somewhere? I want to recover myself what is my own!'

'Oh?' said Feluda, speaking with undisguised scorn. 'How come then that you didn't hesitate to get other people to steal the ring for you, or even have me followed and threatened? That henchman of yours—Ganesh Guha, isn't it?—is dressed like a Sikh taxi driver today. I believe he was the fake sannyasi, wasn't he? You got him to break into Srivastava's house and follow his car the next day. But then he was told to keep an eye on me. Throwing stones at me at the Residency, trying to chloroform both of us, showering threats on me—all these were his doings, weren't they?'

Bonobihari Babu smiled, 'One cannot possibly do every little thing oneself, can one? An assistant can be very useful, you know. Besides, Ganesh is strong and healthy and has spent years handling wild animals. So I knew he'd be good at this reckless game. And I have to say this—if he has done anything wrong, it is only because I asked him to. What you have done, Felu Babu, is far worse. You are hanging on to something that doesn't belong to you. It is mine, I tell you, and I want it back. Today! Now!'

He practically shouted the last few words. I was still trying hard to stay calm, but my hands began to feel clammy.

Feluda's voice sounded cold as steel when he spoke.

'What use will that ring be to you, Bonobihari Babu, when you are charged with murder?'

Bonobihari Babu rose from his chair, trembling with rage. 'What ... what impudence! You don't know what you're saying. How dare you!'

'I dare because I believe I see a murderer before me. Now will you tell me a bit more about the spy Pyarelal had mentioned? You appeared to know something about it.'

Bonobihari Babu smiled drily and said, 'There's nothing to explain. It's all quite simple. I had set a few men to follow him around to find out more about the ring. I'm sure that's what he meant.'

'And what if I tell you the word "spy" had nothing to do with your secret service?'

'What do you mean?'

'You went to visit Pyarelal the morning when he had his second attack, didn't you? You saw him before the attack came on.'

'So what? Are you implying that the very sight of me would give him a cardiac arrest? I had visited him often enough, even before that particular day.'

'Yes, but that day you were not empty-handed.'

'Empty-handed? What are you getting at?'

'You went armed with a box. In that box was an inmate of your zoo—that huge, poisonous African spider—the Black Widow. Isn't that right? What Pyarelal had tried to say was "spider", but he couldn't complete the word. So "a spider" became "a spy" . . .'

Bonobihari Babu suddenly went pale. He sat down again.

'But ... but what could I have gained from showing him the spider?' he asked.

'You were probably unaware that the sight of a cockroach gave him palpitations. Your intention was probably just to frighten him into handing the ring over to you. But the whole thing took a nasty turn, didn't it? Pyarelal's fright caused a heart attack, leading to his death. Now who is responsible for it but you? And you sit there and tell me you had bought the ring in Calcutta.

What if I tell you it was Pyarelal who had shown it to you eighteen years ago and, ever since then, you had wanted to get hold of it? In that room in your house—which you said you always kept locked—there are many more old and valuable objects stashed away. And the purpose of the zoo is to ward off burglars and robbers. Would you deny any of this?'

'May I,' Bonobihari Babu said gravely, 'ask you what else you happen to believe?'

'Yes, you certainly may,' Feluda replied, equally gravely. 'It is my belief that you will never again lay your eyes on the Emperor's ring, and your future will bring you your just desserts.'

'Ganesh!' Bonobihari Babu's shout rang through the air like a gunshot.

Ganesh Guha entered the room, carrying the packing crate. Bonobihari Babu collected his tape-recorder and began backing out of the room.

‘Cover your face!’ Feluda told me. I did not stop to question why, and did as I was told, using the handkerchief I had been given.

Feluda took out another handkerchief from his pocket and, with it, the little tin of toothpowder.

Ganesh Guha, by this time, had placed the crate on the floor and lifted its lid. Just as he was about to retrace his steps, Feluda opened the tin in his hand and threw a handful of powder at both Ganesh Guha and Bonobihari Babu. Then he quickly covered his own face.

Through my handkerchief, I got the faint smell of a familiar object: black pepper.

It is difficult to describe the effect it had on the other two. Their faces were distorted with pain, which was followed by incessant sneezing and screams of agony. Bonobihari Babu stumbled out of the room, rolled down the stairs and landed on the ground outside. Ganesh Guha didn’t fare any better, but he managed to pull the door shut behind him, thereby blocking our own escape.

Now my eyes went to the open crate on the floor. A snake was slowly raising its head from it, making the same terrifying noise I had heard before.

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

I began to feel strangely lightheaded. Unable to move my limbs, I could only feel Feluda help me stand up on the bench before climbing on it himself.

I realized for the first time what terror could do to one. My eyes refused to move from the snake. Or it could be that the snake really did have the power to hypnotize. Before my petrified eyes, it slid out of its box, shook its rattle and seemed to glance around. Then it fixed its gaze on us, and began to move steadily towards our bench, wriggling sideways on the door, making a constant rattling noise. I appeared to be its immediate target.

I could feel my vision getting blurred. The snake was coming closer, and all I could do was stand there, rooted to the spot. Then, when it was only about a couple of yards away, it suddenly felt as though the house we were in was struck by lightning. There was a loud explosion, a flash of light— and a smell of gunpowder.

And the snake?

The head of the snake was crushed and severed from its body. The rattle shook a couple of times and was still.

At this point, I passed into oblivion.

I regained consciousness to find myself lying on a durrie under a tree. My head and forehead felt cold and damp. Clearly, someone had sprinkled water on me. My eyes slowly focused first on Dr Srivastava and then on Baba.

‘How do you feel, Tapeshe Babu?’ said a vaguely familiar voice. Startled, I turned my head and saw Mahabir. But why was he wearing saffron clothes?

‘I travelled with you up to Bareilly,’ Mahabir grinned, ‘and yet you didn’t recognize me!’

He must be a talented actor. And he was wearing excellent make-up. In a long, flowing beard, he had truly been unrecognizable. Besides, he had changed both his voice and speech.

‘Now you’ve seen how good my aim is. Actually, I began to feel doubtful about Bonobihari Babu the day we met at the Bhoobhulaia and he denied ever having seen me before. The truth was that he had often visited our house in Calcutta and spoken to me a number of times. Once he and my father had a row over that ring. I recalled that event only a few days ago.’

‘When we couldn’t spot your car,’ Baba added, ‘we reversed ours and followed the tyre marks into the jungle. But it was Mahabir’s idea.’

‘And what happened to those two?’

‘They have been adequately punished. Felu’s powdered thunder had the most remarkable effect on both. Now they’re being looked after by the police.’

‘Police? How did the police get involved?’

‘Why, they came with us! Bilash Babu is actually Inspector Gargari, you see.’

How very strange! Who would have thought that that palmist was really a police inspector? I had no idea the mystery of the Emperor’s ring would end like this.

But where was Feluda?

A light flashed in my eyes again. But there was no loud noise this time. I saw Feluda standing at some distance, wearing the ring on his finger. He was turning it around in the sunlight that seeped through the leaves, and reflecting the light straight into my eyes.

I thought quietly to myself: if anyone had emerged a winner in this whole business truly like an emperor, it was none other than Feluda.

The end.

2. Grammar Page

in/on/at (other uses)

in

in the rain / **in the sun** / in the shade / **in the dark** / in bad weather
etc.

1. We sat **in the shade**. It was too hot to sit **in the sun**.
2. Don't go out **in the rain**. Wait until it stops.

in a language / in a currency etc.

1. How do you say 'thank you' **in Russian**?
2. How much is a hundred pounds **in dollars**?

(be/fall) in love (with somebody)

1. They're very happy together. They're in love.

in a (good/bad) mood

1. You seem to be **in a bad mood**. What's the matter?

in (my) opinion

1. **In my opinion** the movie wasn't very good.

on

on TV / on television: I didn't see the news **on TV**.

on the radio: heard the weather forecast **on the radio**.

on the phone: I've never met her, but I've spoken to her **on the phone**.

on fire: Look! That bus is **on fire**.

on purpose (= intentionally): I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't do it **on purpose**.

on the whole (= in general): Sometimes I have problems at work, but **on the whole** I enjoy my job.

(be/go) on holiday / **on vacation**; (be/go) **on a trip** / on a tour / on a cruise
etc.

(be/go to a place) **on business**; (be/go) on strike; (be/go) **on a diet**

at the age of ... etc.

at the age of 16 / at 90 miles an hour /at 100 degrees etc. :

Tracy left school at 16. Or Tracy left school at the age of 16.

The train was travelling at 120 miles an hour.

Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.

Exercise

Complete the sentences with in, on or at.

1. Water boils 100 degrees Celsius.
2. When I was 14, I went a trip to France organised by my school.
3. Julia's grandmother died recently the age of 90.
4. Can you turn the light on, please? I don't want to sit the dark.
5. We didn't go holiday last year. We stayed at home.
6. I hate driving fog. You can't see anything.
7. Technology has developed great speed.
8. David got married 19, which is rather young to get married.
9. I listened to an interesting programme the radio this morning.
10. I wouldn't like to go a cruise. I think I'd get bored.
11. The earth travels round the sun 107,000 kilometres an hour.
12. I shouldn't eat too much. I'm supposed to be a diet.
13. A lot of houses were damaged the storm last week.
14. I won't be here next week. I'll be holiday.
15. I wouldn't like his job. He spends most of his time talking the phone.
16. 'Did you enjoy your holiday?' 'Not every minute, but the whole, yes.'
17. your opinion, what should I do?
18. Ben is a happy sort of person. He always seems to be a good mood.
19. I don't think violent films should be shown TV.
20. The museum guidebook is available several languages.

Answers

Complete the sentences with **in**, **on** or **at**.

1. Water boils **at** 100 degrees Celsius.
2. When I was 14, I went **on** a trip to France organised by my school.
3. Julia's grandmother died recently **at** the age of 90.
4. Can you turn the light on, please? I don't want to sit **in** the dark.
5. We didn't **on** go holiday last year. We stayed at home.
6. I hate driving **in** fog. You can't see anything.
7. Technology has developed **at** great speed.
8. David got **at** married 19, which is rather young to get married.
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