



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E28

**Adapted and modified by
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Kheer for a Bear

By Sudha Murthy

Granddad and Vishnu Kaka were planning something! They could be spotted grinning and nodding and whispering. The children were dying to know what it was.

Then one evening, they finally broke the news. They were all going on a picnic! It would be a picnic at the nearby falls. These waterfalls were really beautiful, with the river meandering close by and the forest just across. The children got even more excited when the two grandpas revealed the rest of the plan.

Tomorrow would be a rest day for Grandma and Sharan's mother, because all the cooking would be done by them and the children! And they would do it the traditional way, by gathering firewood and then cooking the meal from scratch.

The children were so excited they could hardly sleep that night. All they could talk about was the picnic and what they would cook. Before nodding off they had decided the menu—pulao and kheer! Kheer or kheer is so easy to make, and who doesn't love it?

The next day, even the usual late risers were up and about and ready to set out for the picnic by seven o'clock. Oh, what a beautiful spot it was! They all ran around exclaiming over everything and getting ready with their cricket bats and balls for a game. Grandma sat comfortably under a big tree. Then it was time to get lunch ready. Everyone started looking for twigs to use as firewood. Grandma spotted Divya straying towards the dense thicket of trees and called out, 'Divya, come back, don't go there. Who knows what animal is there, and on top of that you all are going to cook kheer. . .'

Minu's ears pricked up immediately. 'Why, Grandma, what does kheer have to do with animals?'

Grandma grinned, 'But bears love kheer! Don't you know?'

Everyone declared they had never known this piece of information. So cooking and games forgotten, young and old gathered around her to hear the story of a bear who wanted to eat kheer.

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Did you know that you must never ever anger a bear? It is true; an angry bear can do some really awful things, so it is always safer to keep your word to him. Poor Mohan and Basanti did not know this, and tried to trick a bear, and see what happened to them!

Mohan had a banana plantation, where he grew delicious bananas. He also had a huge mango tree that provided him with baskets of juicy mangoes every summer. He would sell these fruits in the market and lived happily enough with his wife, Basanti.

Once, his trees yielded an exceptionally large crop of bananas and mangoes, and he decided to sell them in the market in the city, where he would get a higher price for them. So off he went with his sacks and baskets to the city. There he sat in the market, sold everything that he had brought, and made quite a bit of money. At the market, he ran into an old friend, Amar. Mohan and Amar were overjoyed to see each other after many years.

‘Come to my house, dear friend,’ insisted Amar. ‘Let us enjoy a good meal and talk about our childhood days.’

Mohan thought this was a wonderful idea, and went with Amar to his house. There the two friends ate huge quantities of rice, dal, lovely vegetables and all kinds of sweets. Then, finally, out came the best part of the meal—the kheer!

Kheer is known by many names all over India. Some call it payasam, some payesh, and others, kheer. It is made with milk, rice and jaggery and many other ingredients, and it is always yummy! So was the kheer that Amar served his friend. It was made with fragrant rice, creamy milk, sweet-as-sugar jaggery, and strewn with nuts, cardamoms, saffron and all kinds of wonderful, mouth-watering things. Mohan ate and ate bowl after bowl of this dessert, till he was ready to burst.

Then the two friends chatted and rested, till it was time for Mohan to head back home. When he reached his house, he told his wife about the scrumptious meal, particularly the kheer he had eaten. Oh, how Basanti sighed and longed to have tasted this dish too! Seeing her face Mohan suggested, ‘See, I have earned plenty of money by selling the fruits. Why don’t I buy the things required to make kheer, which you can cook and both of us will enjoy it together?’

Basanti thought this was a wonderful idea. But first Mohan needed to go to the forest to collect some firewood. Then he could go to the shop and get all that was required to make the dessert. So off Mohan went, swinging his axe and whistling a tune. Now who would be sitting dozing under a tree in the forest but a big black bear. He had just had some nice berries for lunch and was enjoying his snooze, when Mohan walked by. First the bear opened one eye, then another, and watched as Mohan cut a few branches of a nearby tree and collected twigs for firewood. Just as Mohan was tying it all up in a neat bundle, the bear spoke up.

‘Hi there, friend. Where are you off to in such a happy mood, and why are you collecting so much firewood? Tell me, are you cooking a feast tonight?’

Mohan was astonished and a little scared to be addressed like this by a bear. ‘Y-yes, your honour, I mean, dear bear, ss-sir,’ he mumbled and stammered.

The bear was happy after his meal, so he decided to chat some more with Mohan.

‘So tell me, what are you going to cook tonight?’ he asked, patting his tummy.

‘P-p-kheer,’ answered Mohan.

‘Paya . . . what?’ The bear was puzzled.

‘Khe..kheer,’ Mohan said slowly. ‘It’s a sweet dish.’

‘Tell me more!’ The bear was intrigued.

So Mohan described kheer and how it was made. As he talked about milk and rice and nuts and jaggery, the bear’s eyes started gleaming, his stomach started rumbling, and he realized he absolutely, totally needed to taste this wonderful human food.

‘Oh Mohan, my friend, do let me come and share your kheer tonight,’ the bear begged.

Mohan was astonished. A bear as a guest for dinner! Who knows how much he would eat! But neither could he say no—that seemed so rude, and the bear was looking at him hopefully.

He sighed and replied, ‘All right. You can come. But to cook so much kheer I will need much more firewood. Can you bring that with you?’

Cunning Mohan thought he would make the bear do his work for him, so he would not need to come to the forest for the next few days.

‘Yes, yes!’ The bear jumped up. ‘Just tell me how much firewood you need.

Ten? Twenty? Thirty bundles?’

‘Umm, fifty would be enough,’ decided Mohan. Then he slung his bundle of firewood over his shoulder and went back home. On the way he bought lots of milk, rice and everything else they would need to make the kheer.

When he reached home he told Basanti about the unusual guest who would come to share their dessert. So Basanti cooked a huge quantity of kheer. She added lovely nuts, aromatic saffron, sweet cardamoms and many wonderful things into it as she cooked. Oh, how marvellous the kheer smelt. Unable to wait any longer, the two started eating helping after helping of the dish, without waiting for their guest to turn up. They ate and ate and ate, till they realized they had eaten up everything! There was not a grain of rice, nor half a nut left for him!

They sat around wondering what to do. What would they say to the bear when he came expecting to eat kheer? Then, a devious plan entered Mohan’s head. What if they made kheer with all kinds of other ingredients? After all, it was only a bear, and he had never tasted this dish earlier, so how would he know what it really tasted like?

The cunning man and his wife then took a little bit of milk, added lots of water to it, threw in a handful of rice, and instead of jaggery and nuts and spices they added pebbles and sand and cardamom husks and stirred and stirred the mixture till it looked somewhat like kheer. They placed the brass pot filled with this in front of the house and went and hid in the bushes somewhere at the back.

As soon as night fell, a huge dark figure appeared down the road. On its back it carried fifty bundles of firewood. It was the bear, come to dinner!

He reached Mohan’s house and looked around. There was no one. Then, right in front of the house, he spotted the pot full of kheer. Unable to wait any longer, he flung down the bundles he had carried and fell upon the kheer.

Only after he had eaten more than half the potful did he realize something was wrong. The milk was watery, the rice was half cooked and there was horrible grit and pebbles between his teeth! Ugh!

Oh, how angry he was now! Furious, he shouted out for Mohan. But Mohan was cowering behind the bushes and did not reply. Now angrier than ever, the bear spotted the mango tree and rubbed his back against it. The mangoes came raining down, he shook the tree so hard. The bear continued to stamp and shake the tree, till it fell with a huge crash right on to the banana field and crushed the best banana plants. Seeing the firewood he had carried all the way from the forest lying around, the bear started throwing them around. One fell into the oven in the kitchen and set fire to the house. Soon Mohan and Basanti's house was in flames, his field in ruins and his prized mango tree destroyed.

Finally satisfied that he had taken his revenge the bear stormed back into the forest. When Mohan and his wife crawled out of their hiding place and came back home they saw everything was in ruins. How they wailed and wept and wished they hadn't been so greedy and left the bear his share of kheer.

But what was the use of lamenting now? The damage was done, and the greedy couple had learnt what I told you earlier—never anger a bear! And if you make a promise to one, keep it!

2. Grammar Page

Irregular Verbs

Many common verbs have unusual present and past tense forms. These are called **irregular verbs**.

Remember that the simple past tense of most verbs is made by adding **ed** at the end: **look** becomes **looked**. Notice that the simple past tense of these common **irregular verbs** is quite different.

irregular verb	simple past tense	irregular verb	simple past tense
break	broke	keep	kept
bring	brought	kneel	knelt
buy	bought	know	knew
catch	caught	leave	left
come	came	lose	lost
do	did	meet	met
fall	fell	ring	rang
feed	fed	run	ran
feel	felt	see	saw
fly	flew	sell	sold
get	got	sleep	slept
go	went	speak	spoke
have	had	write	wrote

The simple past tense of other **irregular verbs** does not change at all.

verb	simple past tense	example
cost	cost	I bought a new CD. It cost twenty dollars.
cut	cut	My brother cut his finger this morning.
hit	hit	She hit the ball into a neighbor's garden.
hurt	hurt	I hurt my leg when I jumped off the wall.
let	let	Mom opened the door and let us in.
put	put	The tea tasted horrible because I put too much sugar in it.
read	read	Dad read us a story last night.