



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F25

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1. Such Perfection

A sense of great relief filled Soma as he realized that his five years of labour were coming to an end. He had turned out scores of images in his lifetime, but he had never done any work to equal this. He often said to himself that long after the Deluge had swept the earth this Nataraja would still be standing on His pedestal.

No other human being had seen the image yet. Soma shut himself in and bolted all the doors and windows and plied his chisel by the still flame of a mud lamp, even when there was a bright sun outside. It made him perspire unbearably, but he did not mind it so long as it helped him to keep out prying eyes. He worked with a fierce concentration and never encouraged anyone to talk about it.

After all, his labours had come to an end. He sat back, wiped the perspiration off his face and surveyed his handiwork with great satisfaction. As he looked on he was overwhelmed by the majesty of this image. He fell prostrate before it, praying, 'I have taken five years to make you. May you reside in our temple and bless all human beings!' The dim mud flame cast subtle shadows on the image and gave it an undertone of rippling life. The sculptor stood lost in this vision. A voice said, 'My friend, never take this image out of this room. It is too perfect . . .' Soma trembled with fear. He looked round. He saw a figure crouching in a dark corner of the room—it was a man. Soma dashed forward and clutched him by the throat. 'Why did you come here?' The other writhed under the grip and replied, 'Out of admiration for you. I have always loved your work. I have waited for five years . . .'

'How did you come in?'

'With another key while you were eating inside . . .'

Soma gnashed his teeth. 'Shall I strangle you before this God and offer you as sacrifice?' 'By all means,' replied the other, 'if it will help you in any way . . . but I doubt it. Even with a sacrifice you cannot take it out. It is too perfect. Such perfection is not for mortals.' The sculptor wept. 'Oh, do not say that. I worked in secrecy only for this perfection. It is for our people. It is a God coming into their midst. Don't deny them that.' The other prostrated before the image and prayed aloud, 'God give us the strength to bear your presence . . .'

This man spoke to people and the great secret was out. A kind of dread seized the people of the village. On an auspicious day, Soma went to the temple priest and asked, 'At the coming full moon my Nataraja must be consecrated.

Have you made a place for him in the temple?’

The priest answered, ‘Let me see the image first . . .’ He went over to the sculptor’s house, gazed on the image and said, ‘This perfection, this God, is not for mortal eyes. He will blind us. At the first chant of prayer before him, he will dance . . . and we shall be wiped out . . .’ The sculptor looked so unhappy that the priest added, ‘Take your chisel and break a little toe or some other part of the image, and it will be safe . . .’

The sculptor replied that he would sooner crack the skull of his visitor. The leading citizens of the village came over and said, ‘Don’t mistake us. We cannot give your image a place in our temple. Don’t be angry with us. We have to think of the safety of all the people in the village . . . Even now if you are prepared to break a small finger . . .’

‘Get out, all of you,’ Soma shouted. ‘I don’t care to bring this Nataraja to your temple. I will make a temple for him where he is. You will see that it becomes the greatest temple on earth . . .’

Next day he pulled down a portion of the wall of the room and constructed a large doorway opening on the street. He called Rama, the tom-tom beater, and said, ‘I will give you a silver coin for your trouble. Go and proclaim in all nearby villages that this Nataraja will be consecrated at the full moon. If a large crowd turns up, I will present you with a lace shawl.’

At the full moon, men, women and children poured in from the surrounding villages. There was hardly an inch of space vacant anywhere. The streets were crammed with people. Vendors of sweets and toys and flowers shouted their wares, moving about in the crowd. Pipers and drummers, groups of persons chanting hymns, children shouting in joy, men greeting each other—all this created a mighty din. Fragrance of flowers and incense hung over the place. Presiding over all this there was the brightest moon that ever shone on earth.

The screen which had covered the image parted. A great flame of camphor was waved in front of the image, and bronze bells rang. A silence fell upon the crowd. Every eye was fixed upon the image. In the flame of the circling camphor Nataraja’s eyes lit up. His limbs moved, his anklets jingled. The crowd was awe-stricken. The God pressed one foot on earth and raised the other in dance. He destroyed the universe under his heel, and smeared the ashes over his body, and the same God rattled the drum in his hand and by its rhythm set life in motion again . . . Creation, Dissolution and God attained a meaning now; this image brought it out . . . the bells rang louder every second. The crowd stood stunned by this vision vouchsafed to them.

At this moment a wind blew from the east. The moon’s disc gradually dimmed.

The wind gathered force, clouds blotted out the moon; people looked up and saw only pitch like darkness above. Lightning flashed, thunder roared and fire poured down from the sky. It was a thunderbolt striking a haystack and setting it ablaze. Its glare illuminated the whole village. People ran about in panic, searching for shelter. The population of ten villages crammed in that village. Another thunderbolt hit a house. Women and children shrieked and wailed. The fires descended with a tremendous hiss as a mighty rain came down. It rained as it had never rained before. The two lakes, over which the village road ran, filled, swelled and joined over the road. Water flowed along the streets. The wind screamed and shook the trees and the homes. 'This is the end of the world!' wailed the people through the storm.

The whole of the next day it was still drizzling. Soma sat before the image, with his head bowed in thought. Trays and flowers and offerings lay scattered under the image, dampened by rain. Some of his friends came wading in water, stood before him and asked, 'Are you satisfied?' They stood over him like executioners and repeated the question and added, 'Do you want to know how many lives have been lost, how many homes washed out and how many were crushed by the storm?'

'No, no, I don't want to know anything,' Soma replied. 'Go away. Don't stand here and talk.'

'God has shown us only a slight sign of his power. Don't tempt Him again. Do something. Our lives are in your hands. Save us, the image is too perfect.'

After they were gone he sat for hours in the same position, ruminating. Their words still troubled him. 'Our lives are in your hands.' He knew what they meant. Tears gathered in his eyes. 'How can I mutilate this image? Let the whole world burn, I don't care. I can't touch this image.' He lit a lamp before the God and sat watching. Far off the sky rumbled. 'It is starting again. Poor human beings, they will all perish this time.' He looked at the toe of the image. 'Just one neat stroke with the chisel, and all troubles will end.' He watched the toe, his hands trembled. 'How can I?' Outside, the wind began to howl. People were gathering in front of his house and were appealing to him for help.

Soma prostrated before the God and went out. He stood looking at the road over which the two lakes had joined. Over the eastern horizon a dark mass of cloud was rolling up. 'When that cloud comes over, it will wash out the world. Nataraja! I cannot mutilate your figure, but I can offer myself as a sacrifice if it will be any use . . .' He shut his eyes and decided to jump into the lake. He checked himself. 'I must take a last look at the God before I die.' He battled his way through the oncoming storm. The wind shrieked. Trees shook and trembled. Men and cattle ran about in panic.

He was back just in time to see a tree crash on the roof of his house. 'My home,' he cried, and ran in. He picked up his Nataraja from amidst splintered tiles and rafters. The image was unhurt except for a little toe which was found a couple of yards off, severed by a falling splinter.

'God himself has done this to save us!' people cried.

The image was installed with due ceremonies at the temple on the next full moon. Wealth and honours were showered on Soma. He lived to be ninety-five, but he never touched his mallet and chisel again.

2. Grammar Page - Tenses

Uses of Present Simple:

1. To express universal, general truths.

1. The sun rises in the east.
2. Water boils at 100 °C.
3. The earth moves around the sun.
4. The moon moves around the earth
5. Two and two makes four.
6. The sun sets early in the winter.
7. Wood floats on water.
8. Water freezes at 0 degrees Celsius.
9. Earth is a planet.
10. Pandas feed on bamboo shoots.
11. Every twelve months, the Earth circles the Sun.
12. Water is one of the necessities of life.
- 13 Rivers flow into the sea.
14. Gas expands when heated.
15. Canada lies north of the United States.
16. Blood is red regardless of what colour your skin is.

2. To express English proverbs and quotations.

1. Man is mortal.
2. Honesty is the best policy.
3. All that glitters is not gold.
4. Slow and steady wins the race.

3. To express habitual actions, regular actions.

1. She takes a glass of milk every morning.
2. I always go to temple.
3. He never drinks wine or beer. What does he drink then? He drinks whisky with soda.
4. She always takes tea without sugar.
5. Munga always gets up early.
6. I usually work till 7.
7. Banta has a shower every morning.
8. Santa take a shower every morning.
9. We often buy cheese at this store.
10. Atul likes warm weather.
11. He doesn't often go to the cinema.
12. Priya walks to school every day.
13. Do you water your plants once a week?
14. When do they usually have lunch?