



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E33

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1. Five Spoons of Salt

By Sudha Murty

One morning, Grandma told Grandpa, 'Today is a Santhe (a village market day which happens once in a week). Why don't you take the children and show them the Santhe and buy vegetables and other things for the house?' Grandpa, who normally would have said yes, was hesitant. 'How will I manage all the children, that too at the Santhe? Remember what happened at the jatre—the fair? At least there they had a temporary police assistance booth. There will be nothing of the sort at the Santhe.' Grandma agreed. This was a problem. Then she had an idea. 'Why don't we ask Vishnu if he can spare Damu for a few hours? Damu can accompany you and help see that the children are all right.'

Damu was Vishnu Kaka's right-hand man. Everyone called him 'Mr Dependable'. He drove the car, cooked, looked after the fields, the accounts and made sure Vishnu Kaka was well cared for. Without him, Vishnu Kaka could not run the house or do anything in the fields. Vishnu Kaka's son lived with his family in Delhi and came only for holidays, so Damu was his real companion.

So it was that all seven children and Damu and Grandpa were now ready to visit the Santhe. Damu had a plan. 'The Santhe is only two kilometres away. Why don't we walk, and let your Grandpa go in the auto?' The children were horrified. Walk for two kilometres in the heat! 'It would be so boring too!' added Raghu. But Damu had made up his mind. 'Walk with me. I will tell you such wonderful stories that you will forget everything, even the heat!'

The children agreed. Then Meenu had a condition. 'It has to be a true story, Damu Anna!'

Damu was unfazed. 'I'll tell you a story about my sister. Do you know how I came to be "Mr Dependable"? I saw what happened to her once because she was forgetful and decided never to let that happen to me.'

So he started his story.



'Gita, where are you? I need you to run down to the store and get these medicines for me!' Gita's grandfather called out for her. Where was Gita? She was lying in bed, reading a book! For a long time she pretended not to have heard what her grandfather was saying. The book was just too exciting, and it was so hot outside, she really did not feel like stirring out of bed.

'Gita!' This time her mother's voice also called out to her. With a sigh, the girl got out of bed and went to see what needed to be done. Her grandfather handed her some money and said, 'I have a really bad headache since morning. Will you get these medicines for me?'

Gita took the money and set off for the store. On the way she passed by a sweet shop. Oh, what lovely gulab jamoons and laddoos and jalebis were displayed! She had to have some. Forgetting all about her errand she entered the shop and started tucking into sweets. Soon a friend came by and joined her. The two girls ate and chatted for a really long time. Gita had forgotten all about her poor grandfather with his headache! Afternoon turned to evening, the medicine store shut for the day, when Gita remembered why she had stepped out of her house. When she hurried back home, how upset her grandfather was. 'When will you grow up, Gita, and become responsible?' he sighed and asked.

Gita felt really bad, but did she mend her ways? No, she remained the same forgetful person. When her mother told her to collect the clothes from the washing line outside, she remembered to do so only the next morning! By then, the clothes were soaked through all over again because of the overnight rains.

Another day, she had to take her sister's lunchbox to the school. On the way she saw a circus was in town. All morning Gita spent wandering around the circus tents, watching the animals eating and training for their acts. It was only when she felt hungry herself did she look down at the lunchbox in her hand and realized her sister must have gone home by then, after spending a day in school without her lunch.

Another time her father, while rushing to get ready for work, asked if she could quickly iron his shirt. Gita picked up the shirt and placed it on the ironing table next to the window. Just then the fruit vendor passed by with big, fat, juicy mangoes in his basket! Of course Gita forgot all about the hot iron sitting on the shirt and got engrossed in choosing the best mangoes to buy. Only when smoke started billowing out and the shirt had burnt as crisp as a toast did she look around and see what had happened. Her father was very upset indeed that day.

Some days after this incident, Gita came home from school and announced that the whole class was being taken for a picnic the next day. The teacher had asked each student to bring one food item from home which would be shared by all the children. Gita had chosen to bring sambar. She was very proud of her mother's tasty, tangy sambar and was eager to share it with her friends so they could taste it too. Gita's mother agreed to make a big pot of sambar for her to take to the picnic the next day, and that night Gita went to bed feeling very happy, dreaming about the exciting day ahead.

The next morning, her mother woke up early and started making the sambar. She boiled the dal, added the vegetables, coconut and all the spices, and set the pot boiling on the stove. Soon a delicious aroma wafted out from the pot and tickled Gita's nose as she lay sleeping in bed. Seeing her stir, her mother told her, 'Gita wake up now, dear. See the sambar is nearly done. I am going to the temple, so after some time just add five teaspoons of salt to it. Don't forget now, and wake up and get ready quickly!'

So saying she bustled off. Gita's grandmother, who was in the kitchen, heard all this and muttered to herself, 'When will my daughter-in-law learn that Gita can never remember anything. I'm sure the girl will forget to add the salt. Then she will be teased by all her friends. Better be careful.' So saying she went and added the salt in the pot.

Gita's grandfather was sitting on the veranda reading his newspaper. He remembered only too well the day he had spent with a headache waiting for Gita to return with the medicines which never came. 'Gita and remember something? That'll be the day!' he muttered, and went into the kitchen and added the salt in the sambar himself.

Gita's sister was combing her hair, ready to go off to school. She too recalled the day she had spent feeling hungry in school waiting for Gita to turn up with her lunchbox. Sure that Gita would forget about the salt and be laughed at by her friends, she quickly went into the kitchen and added five spoons of salt.

Gita's brother was brushing his teeth and hearing his mother's words to his sister, guessed she would forget about the salt. He dropped in a few spoons of salt into the pot and went off.

Gita's father was carefully ironing his own shirt. Like the others he too slipped into the kitchen and added salt to the pot of sambar.

By now Gita had woken up and wonder of wonders, remembered she needed

to add the salt! So she too went and added five teaspoons as her mother had told her to do. By now her mother had returned and quickly poured the sambar into a big container and sent her daughter off for her picnic.

At the picnic spot the children had a wonderful time, roaming around and playing. Soon they were too hungry to do anything else. Out came the plates and spoons and all the containers filled to the brim with food. Plates were piled up with rice, chutneys, vegetables, pooris and all kinds of goodies. Everyone took large helpings of the sambar as Gita served it out. But no sooner than they put the first spoonful in their mouths, 'Blaagh! Horrible! Water!' everybody started shouting. Astonished, Gita wondered what was wrong, then gingerly tasted the rice and sambar on her own plate. It was disgusting! It was as if her mother had dredged out all the salt in the sea and added it to the sambar! Then Gita remembered, her mother had not added the salt, she had! So what had gone wrong?

That day everyone in Gita's house waited eagerly for her to get back from school and tell them about her wonderful outing. But what was this? She came trudging back, her face sad and tear-stained. What had happened? Gita burst out at them, 'Did anyone else add salt in the sambar?'

'I did!' said her grandmother.

'I did too!' said Grandfather.

'So did I!' said Father.

'Me too!' said her brother.

'And I!' said her sister.

They all looked at each other in dismay. No wonder Gita looked so sad. Her friends would have made her feel miserable about the salty sambar!

'Why did you all do it? Amma had told only me to do so!' Gita wept.

'Oh dear, you forget everything you are told to do, so we thought... perhaps... you wouldn't remember this time too,' all of them said sadly.

Now her mother pulled her close, wiped away her tears and said, 'See, all this happened because no one could believe you could do anything without being reminded many times about it. Promise you will be a careful, responsible girl from now on, and we will all trust you to do your work.'

Gita sniffed and nodded her head. She did become much more careful with her chores after that. And it took a lot of convincing, but her friends did come to her house for lunch one day to taste her mother's delicious

cooking, especially her tasty, tangy sambar, and everyone agreed it was the best sambar they had ever eaten!



When the story was over, the children realized they were already at the Santhe. There were heaps of vegetables, sweets, flowers all around. There were goats, cows, buffaloes, fish, chicken and eggs for sale. The smell of nuts, cardamom and other spices hung in the air. It was unlike the fair where people had come to have a good time. Here a lot of business was taking place and everyone was buying and selling busily. The fruits and vegetables were very fresh. The flowers looked as if they had just been plucked. Everyone was friendly.

The fruit vendor saw Grandpa and said, 'Namaste Masterji. Oh! You have come with your grandchildren. It is nice to see everyone like this.' Then he gave each one a mango. When Grandpa offered money, he wouldn't take it. He said, 'After all you were my masterji, my teacher. Can't I give seven mangoes as gifts to your grandchildren? They are from my garden, not that I purchased them.' The children were delighted at his warmth and kindness and returned home very happy that day.

2. Grammar Page

Here are more examples of **irregular past participles**.

irregular verb	simple past tense	past participle	example
keep	kept	kept	I have kept the letter you sent me.
catch	caught	caught	The police have caught the thieves.
bring	brought	brought	Maggie has brought her favorite CD to school.
make	made	made	The children have made a birthday card for their mom.
sell	sold	sold	They've sold their car and now they
buy	bought	bought	have bought motorcycles.

Some common **irregular verbs** have a past participle that is **different** from the simple past tense.

irregular verb	simple past form	past participle	example
be	was	been	Anna has been my best friend for years.
break	broke	broken	I'm sorry, I've broken your pencil.
do	did	done	Jack has already done his homework.
draw	drew	drawn	We've drawn a picture for you, Mom.
drink	drank	drunk	Have you drunk all your orange juice?
eat	ate	eaten	Someone has eaten all the chocolates.
fall	fell	fallen	One of the pictures has fallen off the wall.
go	went	gone	I'm sorry, but your train has already gone .
know	knew	known	I've known Michael for two years.
see	saw	seen	Kathleen has already seen that movie.
speak	spoke	spoken	Miss Hill has spoken to the principal about the problem.