



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F32

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1. The Hundred and One Dalmatians

By Dobie Smith

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Little Blue Cart

Pongo was dreaming he was back in Regent's Park running after a stick thrown by Mr Dearly, when Lieutenant Willow woke him: "The Colonel's compliments and would you and your lady please come to him?"

Pongo woke Missis gently, but she sprang up at once. "All well," said the cat soothingly. "Food and shelter are arranged for two days ahead. Reception for the Midnight Barking was excellent. Please follow me now."

They left the barn and crossed the farmyard to the back door of a large farmhouse. In the nursery the Sheepdog stood beside a little painted bed in which was a two-year-old boy. "This is my pet, Tommy," said the Colonel. "He wants to meet you." Pongo and Missis went to the little boy and he patted them both. Then he made some odd noises. They did not sound like Human nor did they sound like Dog. But the Sheepdog seemed to understand them. "Tommy wishes to lend you something. See, here it is," he said.

Pongo and Missis then saw a little wooden cart, painted blue. "You can choose two pups," said the Colonel, "and they can pull the cart forward. Pups at the back can push it with their noses. Your smallest daughter can travel comfortably in the hay, and any puppy who is tired can sit beside her and take a rest." "If we ever get home," said Pongo, "I feel sure Mr Dearly will return it. Please tell Tommy how very grateful we are."

The Sheepdog translated this to Tommy, and they said good-bye to him. They went back to the barn and woke the pups. They tried the cart and the Cadpig was pleased.

Pongo was told the plans made by Midnight Barking. The Colonel hoped to get them to London in twelve or ten days. Missis felt her heart sink. "When is Christmas Day?" she said. "It's tomorrow, because it's Christmas Eve already," said the Colonel. Pongo guessed his wife's thoughts. "Never mind, Missis," he said. "We'll be home next Christmas."

It was time to start. The Colonel took them to the crossroads. "I wish I could come with you, but I've got a job to do," he said. Then he and the cat, who was riding on his back, said good-bye and went off so fast that Pongo had to bark his thanks after them.

The Colonel had just been informed by Lieutenant Willow that the Baddun brothers were now on the outskirts of the village, less than half a mile behind the Dalmatians. He could think of only one thing to do and he set out to do it - with great pleasure. He bit both brothers in both legs. Seldom could four legs have been bitten so fast by one dog.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Christmas Eve

Meanwhile, the Dalmatian army was moving along the road. But progress was not really fast. Every half-mile the whole army had a rest. There was a hint of dawn in the sky now, but Pongo felt sure they could reach the village before it was dangerously light. Suddenly the Cadpig called out: "Look! Little painted houses on wheels!" Pongo knew they were not houses. They were caravans. Gipsies lived in caravans and Gipsies sometimes stole valuable dogs. "Halt!" said Pongo, instantly.

Between them and the nearest caravan was an open gate. He would lead the puppies through it. The owner of the keenest brains in Dogdom made one of his few mistakes. For in the caravan nearest to them, an old Gipsy woman was awake and looking out of the little window. She saw the Dalmatians and woke her husband.

The old Gipsy woman never read newspapers. But she knew that here were many valuable dogs. There is a connection between Dalmatians and Gipsies. Many people believe that it was the Gipsies who first brought Dalmatians to England, long, long ago. Gipsies travelled round England with Dalmatians trained to do tricks. Dogs earned money for the Gipsies. The old woman thought how splendid it would be if all these Dalmatians could be trained as money earners.

"Quick! Close the gate!" she said to her husband. "I will rouse the camp and we will catch the dogs." In less than two minutes, all the gipsies were awake and with sticks. When the puppies reached the gate, it was closed. Pongo barked loudly, hoping that some Gipsy dog might help him. But the Gipsy dogs had all been shut up in the caravans and could not help them.

But someone else did. Horses are nearly always friendly to Dalmatians - perhaps because of those old days when Dalmatians were trained to follow carriages. A Horse took an instant liking to Pongo, Missis, and all the pups. He opened the gate with his long, strong teeth and swung it back. Out poured the puppies. "What a very large family you and your wife have," said the Horse. "My wife and I have never had more than one. Well, good luck to you."

Helter-skelter along the road went Missis, the puppies and, finally, Pongo. The shut-in Gipsy dogs heard them and shook the caravans in their efforts to get

out. "The caravans bark but the dogs move on," remarked Pongo, when he felt they were out of danger.

A few minutes later they reached the village where they were to sleep. The Sheepdog's friend, a handsome Collie, was waiting to welcome them. The baker, the butcher and the sweep had already gone to spend Christmas with their married daughters. Soon every pup was safely in and enjoying a splendid sausage roll. The Collie shook his head worriedly when he heard about the Gipsies. "A narrow escape," he said. "The trouble is that Dalmatians are such noticeable dogs. You'd be so much safer if you were black."

"Like that little nice pup over there," said Missis. "What pup?" the Collie said. "That pup doesn't belong in this village. Who are you, my lad? Where have you come from?" The pup came running to Missis and she said: "Goodness! It is Roly Poly!" The fat puppy who was always getting into mischief had had a fight with a bag of soot.

"Roly Poly," said Pongo, "was there a lot of soot at the sweep's?"

"Bags and bags," said Roly Poly.

"Then we are all going to be black dogs," said Pongo. "Ten dogs forward at a time!" commanded Pongo. "Pups roll! Pups rub noses!" In a short time there were ninety-seven pitch black pups.

"And now, my love," said Pongo to Missis. "Let us take a roll in the soot." Frankly, Missis did not fancy it. She hated soiling her white hair and losing its contrast with her beautiful black spots. She felt much better only when Pongo had helped her with the final touches and said: "Why, Missis, as a black dog, you are slimmer than ever." Then Pongo said: "How does soot suit me?"

"Suit soots you beautifully," said Missis, and all the pups roared with laughter at her mistake. Now they had five miles to go to another bakery. The moon was rising and the stars were out. There was one specially large, bright star. "The Collie said straight ahead and that star is straight ahead," said Pongo. "So we'll steer by it."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Miracle Needed

They went on for nearly two miles, then Pongo saw a long row of cottage roofs ahead across the fields. They saw a very bright glow over the village. Pongo did not feel it would be safe to go any nearer until some dog came to meet them. He called a halt and barked news of their arrival. He was answered at once, by a bark that said: "Wait where you are. I am coming." There was something odd about this bark, there were no words of welcome. Soon a graceful red Setter came dashing towards them. They guessed, even before she spoke, that something was very wrong.

The poor Setter was hysterical: "The bakery's on fire! There's nothing for you to eat and nowhere for you to sleep. And the village street's full of people." The strange thing was that Missis felt quite calm. She tried to comfort the Setter, saying they would go to some barn. "But no arrangements are made. And there's no spare food anywhere. All the village dogs brought what they could to the bakery," said the Setter. Just then came a whistle. "My pet is calling me," said the Setter. "He's the doctor here. There's no dog at the bakery, so I was chosen to arrange everything - because I took first prize in a Dog Show. And now I've failed you." "Go back to your pet and don't worry," said Missis. "We shall simply go to the next village." The whistle came again and the Setter ran off. "Featherbrained as well as feather-tailed," said Pongo. "Just very young. Well, on to the next village," said Missis.

They started. The pace was certainly good for a couple of miles, then it got slower and slower. "The puppies will have to rest," said Missis. The moment Pongo called a halt the pups sank down on the frosty grass. Many of them at once fell asleep. They could no longer hear any sounds from the village. The world seemed frozen into a silvery, silent stillness.

Something soft and fluffy touched Pongo's head. Missis whispered: "Look, Pongo! Look at the puppies!" Tiny white dots were appearing on the sooty black coats. Snow had begun to fall. Missis said, smiling: "Instead of being white pups with black spots they are turning into black pups with white spots. How soft and gentle the snow is!"

Pongo was not smiling. He cried: "If they sleep they will never wake - they will freeze to death beneath that soft, gentle snow! Wake up, pups! Wake up!" The

poor pups begged to be left to sleep. Then, from the village behind them, came the blare of the loudest motor-horn in England.

The pups sprang up. "To the woods!" cried Pongo. Then he saw that the woods were protected by wire netting. But he also could see that the woods ended, not very far ahead. "We must go on," he cried. "There may be fields."

Pongo knew that the great striped car could travel two miles in less than two minutes. "To the fields!" cried Pongo. "Faster, faster!" The pups ran, then fell back. Though the woods ended, the wire netting still continued, on both sides of them. And the horn sounded again - louder and nearer. "Nothing but a miracle can save us now," said Pongo. "Then we must find a miracle," said Missis. "Pongo, what is a miracle?" It was at that moment that they suddenly saw a very large van drawn up on the road ahead of them. The tailboard was down and the inside of the van was lit by electric light. And sitting there on a newspaper, was a Staffordshire Terrier. He stared in astonishment at the army of pups running towards him.

"Help, help, help!" barked Pongo. "You'd better hide in my van," barked back the Staffordshire. "The miracle!" said Pongo to Missis. "Quickly, pups! Jump into the nice miracle," said Missis.

Up went the Cadpig's cart, pulled from the front and pushed from behind. Then more and more pups jumped up until the entire army was in.

The horn sounded again and now two strong headlights could be seen in the distance. "I'd better put the lights off," said the Staffordshire. Quickly Pongo gave the command: "Pups, close your eyes - or they will reflect the car's headlights and shine like jewels in the darkness. Close them and do not open them until I give the word."

The horn blared again and again, as if telling the van to get out of the way. Louder and louder grew the noise from the engine. Then with a roar, the great striped car was on them - and past them.

"You may open your eyes now, my brave pups," cried Pongo.

"That was quite a car, mate," said the Staffordshire to Pongo. "You must have quite an enemy. Who are you, anyway? Well, you are the missing Dalmatians! Want a lift back to London?" A lift? A lift all the way in this wonderful van! Pongo and Missis could hardly believe it.

"But why are there so many pups? The newspapers don't know the half of it. They think there are only fifteen missing," said the Staffordshire.

Pongo started to explain but the Staffordshire said they would talk during the drive to London. "How many days will the journey to London take?" asked Missis. "Days?" said the Staffordshire. "It won't take much more than a couple of hours, if I know my pets. They want to get home to finish decorating their kids' Christmas trees. Ssssh, now!"

A large man in a rough apron was coming out of a nearby house. The Staffordshire, wagging his tail enthusiastically, hurled himself at the man's chest, nearly knocking him down. "Get down, you Self-launched Bomb," the man shouted with great affection. The Staffordshire jumped inside the van. The man put the tailboard up and shouted: "Next stop, St. John's Wood."

St. John's Wood! That was where the Splendid Vet lived - quite close to Regent's Park! What wonderful luck! Pongo heard a clock strike. It was still only eight o'clock. "Missis!" he cried. "We shall get home tonight! We shall be home for Christmas!"

"Yes, Pongo," said Missis, gaily. But she did not feel as gay as she sounded. Suppose the Dearlys did not recognize them now they were black dogs? She kept her fears to herself. Why should she frighten Pongo with them?

Meanwhile, Pongo had his own worries. He remembered that Cruella intended to wait until people had forgotten about the stolen puppies, and then to start her Dalmatian fur farm again. He asked the Staffordshire's advice. "Why not kill this Cruella?" said the Staffordshire. "And I'll help you." Pongo shook his head. He had come to believe that Cruella was not an ordinary human but some kind of devil. And he didn't want his pups to have a killer-dog for a father.

On and on through the dark went the mile-eating miracle.

2. Grammar Page - Tenses

Uses of Present Perfect 2:

B. Our experiences.

1. I have been to London but never been to New York.
2. I think I have seen that movie before but I could be wrong.
3. He has never travelled by plane. His mum has never travelled by train. His dad has never travelled by bus.
4. I have seen a one-horned rhino in jungle.
5. I have spent two months in South Korea and loved every moment.
6. I have read Harry Porter three times and I may read it again.

C. Changes that have happened over a period of time.

1. You have grown a lot since the last time I saw you.
3. Mum, I have shrunk a lot since the last time I saw you — I know it was twelve years ago.
3. The government has become more interested in arts education and sport.
4. My English has really improved since I moved to England. What a surprise!

D. For a new information or recent happening.

1. They have just arrived from the party and they look knackered.
2. The prime minister has refused to resign. He thinks the voting was rigged against him.