



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H15

**Adapted and modified by
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Kailash Chowdhary's Jewel

By Satyajit Ray

Part 1

'See how you like my card.'

Feluda fished out a visiting card from his wallet and held it before me. It said: PRADOSH C. MITTER, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR. Feluda was clearly trying to publicize what he did for a living. And why not? After his success over the missing diamond ring that had once belonged to Emperor Aurangzeb, he was fully entitled to tell everyone how clever he had been. But, of course, he didn't really have to worry about publicity. A lot of people had come to know about the case, anyway. In fact, Feluda had received a couple of offers 'already, but he didn't accept them as they were not challenging enough. He put the card back in his wallet, and stretched his legs on the low table in front of him. 'It looks like I shall get the chance to exercise my brain during this Christmas break,' he said casually.

'Why? Have you found a new mystery?' I asked. Feluda's words had made me quite excited, but I didn't show it. He took out a small box from a side pocket and helped himself to some supari (Betel Nut) from it. 'You appear greatly excited,' he observed.



Betel Nut Tree

What? How did he guess? Feluda explained even before I could ask. 'Are you wondering how I knew? It isn't always possible to hide your feelings, you know, even if you try. Little things often give one away. When I made that remark about working during this Christmas break, you were about to yawn. My words made you close your mouth abruptly. If you were truly indifferent to what I said, you'd have finished your yawn in the usual way, without breaking it off.'

Once again I was startled by his powers of observation. 'Without being able to observe and take in even the minutest detail, no one can claim to be a

detective,' Feluda had often said to me. 'Sherlock Holmes has shown us the way. All we need to do is follow him.'

'You didn't tell me why you will need to exercise your brain,' I reminded him. 'Have you heard of Kailash Chowdhury of Shyampukur?'

'No. There are so many famous people in our city. I cannot have heard of all of them. I am only fifteen!'

Feluda lit a cigarette. 'His family owned a lot of land in Rajshahi. They were zamindars. But they also had property in Calcutta, so they moved here after Partition. Kailash Chowdhury is a lawyer. He used to go on shikar (hunting) and, in fact, became quite well-known as a shikari (hunter). He even wrote two books on the subject. Sometime ago, an elephant went mad in the Jaldapara Reserve Forest and began creating such havoc that Kailash Babu was called in to kill it. His name was mentioned in almost every paper.'

'I see. What has all this to do with your brain? Is there a mystery regarding Kailash Chowdhury?'

Instead of giving me an answer, Feluda took out a letter from the front pocket of his jacket and passed it to me. 'Read it,' he said. I unfolded the letter and read what it said:

Dear Mr Mitter,

I decided to write to you after seeing your advertisement in the Amrita Bazar Patrika. I should be much obliged if you could come and meet me at the above address. I am sending this letter by express delivery. It should, therefore, reach you tomorrow. I shall expect you the day after, i.e. on Saturday, at 10 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

Kailash Chowdhury.

'But it's Saturday today!' I exclaimed. 'And nine o'clock already!'

'You're improving every day. I am very glad to note that you remember days and dates so well.'

A sudden doubt raised its head in my mind. 'This letter speaks only of meeting you. What if he objects to an extra person?'

Feluda took the letter back from me, and folded it carefully before replacing it in his pocket.

‘He should not, as you’re a young boy. He might not see you as sufficiently important to object to. But if he does, we’ll pack you off to another room. You can wait there while we finish our talk.’

My heart began beating faster. I had been wondering what to do in the Christmas holidays. Now it seemed as if I was in for a very interesting time.

We got off a tram near Shyampukur Street at five minutes to ten. Feluda had stopped on the way to buy a book written by Kailash Chowdhury. It was called *The Passion of Shikar*. He leafed through it in the tram, and said, as we got down, ‘God knows why a brave man like him needs to see a private detective!’

Kailash Chowdhury’s house, 51 Shyampukur Street, turned out to be a huge old mansion. A long drive led to the main house. There were gardens on both sides, marble statues and a fountain. We passed these and made our way to the front door. There were footsteps on the other side within thirty seconds of pressing the bell. One look at the man who opened the door told me it was not Kailash Chowdhury. No brave shikari could have such a mouse-like appearance. He was a man of medium height, rather plump, possibly no more than thirty years old. His eyes held a look of childlike innocence. In his hand was a magnifying glass.

‘Whom would you like to see?’ he asked. His voice was as mild as his appearance.

Feluda took out one of his cards and handed it to the gentleman. ‘I have an appointment with Mr Chowdhury. He asked me to come here.’

The man cast a quick glance at the card, and said, ‘Please come in.’ We followed him down the hall, up a flight of stairs and were ushered into what looked like a small office.

‘Please have a seat. I’ll go and inform my uncle,’ he said and disappeared.

We took two old chairs with arms that faced an equally old table, painted black. Three sides of the room were lined with glass cases filled with books. On the table I noticed something interesting. Three fat stamp albums were stacked one on top of the other, and a fourth was lying open. Rows of stamps had been carefully pasted in it. A few loose stamps lay in a cellophane packet, together with the usual paraphernalia of stamp collectors: hinges, a pair of tweezers and a stamp catalogue. Now it was clear why the man who met us at the door was carrying a magnifying glass. He was obviously the collector of these stamps.

Feluda, too, was looking at these objects, but before either of us could make a remark, the same man returned and said, 'Uncle asked you to wait in the drawing room. He'll join you shortly.'

We were taken to the drawing room. It was a large room, with a chandelier, oil paintings, marble statues and a great number of vases that were strewn all over. Everything in it bore the mark of life during the Raj, at least life in an affluent household. On the floor was the skin of a Royal Bengal tiger, and from the walls stared four heads of deer, two cheetahs and a wild buffalo.

Nearly ten minutes later, a middle-aged man entered the room. He seemed pretty strong and agile for his age. His features were sharp, and he sported a thin moustache. He was wearing a red silk dressing gown over a pyjama-kurta.

We rose to our feet and said, 'Namaskar.' Mr Chowdhury returned our greeting, but raised his eyebrows slightly on seeing me.

'This is my cousin,' Feluda explained. Mr Chowdhury took the smaller sofa next to ours, and asked, 'Do you carry out your investigations together?'

Feluda laughed, 'No, not really. But Tapesch happened to be involved in all the cases I have handled so far. He's never caused any trouble.'

'Very well. Abanish, you may go now; and see if you can arrange a cup of tea for these people.' The stamp-collector was standing near the door. At these words, he disappeared inside. Kailash Chowdhury looked at Feluda, and said, 'I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to see the letter I wrote to you. Did you bring it?'

Feluda smiled. 'Is this to make sure I am the right person? Here's your letter, sir.'

Mr Chowdhury glanced briefly at the letter, said 'Thank you', and returned it to Feluda.

'One has to be careful in these matters, I'm sure you understand. Anyway, I assume you know a little bit about my work. I am known as a shikari.'

'Yes, sir. I did know that.'

Mr Chowdhury pointed at the heads of various animals on the walls and said, 'I killed all those. I learnt to use a rifle at the age of seventeen. Before that, as a child, I had used airguns and killed small birds. I am not afraid to fight anyone—or anything—if I can face my opponent, if I can see him. But if the adversary is a secret one . . . if he doesn't come out in the open . . . what does one do?'

He paused. I could feel my heart thudding faster again. The details of a mystery were about to be revealed, but Mr Chowdhury was beating about the bush so much that the suspense was getting higher every minute. A few seconds later, he resumed speaking. 'I didn't expect you to be so young,' he said. 'How old are you?'

'Twenty-eight.'

'I see. Well, I could have gone to the police. But I don't really have a lot of faith in them. Instead of helping, they usually make a total nuisance of themselves. Besides, I respect the young. So you may well be the right person for the job. I think an old head on young shoulders can achieve a lot more than an entire police force.'

He paused again. Feluda seized this opportunity to ask quickly, 'If you could tell me what the problem is . . .?'

Silently, Mr Chowdhury took out a piece of paper from his pocket and passed it to Feluda. 'See what you can make of it,' he said. Feluda unfolded it. I leant across and read what was written on it:

Do not make things worse for yourself. You must return what does not belong to you. Go to Victoria Memorial on Monday, and leave it under the first plant of the first row of lilies that faces the south gate. This must be done by 4 p.m. Do not try to inform the police, or go to a detective. If you do, you will end up exactly like the animals you killed on your shikar.

'What do you think?' Mr Chowdhury asked gravely.

Feluda stared at the note for a few moments. Then he said, 'The writer tried to mask his handwriting, for the same letters have been written in different ways. And he wrote on the top sheet of a new pad.'

'How can you tell?'

'If you write on a pad, the leaves below the top one always carry a faint impression of what is written on the upper sheet. It may not be legible, but it is there. This sheet is absolutely smooth.'

'Very good. Can you tell anything else?'

'No, it's impossible to say anything more simply by looking at it. Did this arrive by post?'

‘Yes. The postmark said Park Street Post Office. I got this note three days ago. Today is Saturday, the 20th.’

Feluda returned the note to Mr Chowdhury and said, ‘I would now like to ask you a few questions, if I may. You see, I know nothing about your life, except the tales of shikar that you wrote.’

‘Very well. Go ahead with your questions. But please help yourself to the sweets before you begin.’ A bearer had come in a few minutes earlier and placed a silver plate before us, loaded with sweets.

Feluda did not have to be told a second time. He picked up a rasgulla and popped it into his mouth. ‘What,’ he asked after a while, ‘is this object that doesn’t belong to you?’

‘Frankly, Mr Mitter, I cannot think of anything like that at all. Everything I possess in this world, including things in this house, were either inherited or bought by me. Everything . . . except. . .’ he stopped abruptly.

‘Except what?’

‘Well, there is something that’s both valuable and tempting.’

‘What is it?’

‘A stone.’

‘A precious stone?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you buy it?’

‘No.’

‘Did it belong to your forefathers?’

‘No, I found it in a jungle in Madhya Pradesh. There were four of us. We chased a tiger into the jungle and finally killed it. Then we found this ancient and abandoned temple. The stone was fixed on the forehead of the statue of the deity. I don’t think anyone even knew of its existence.’

‘Were you the first to see it?’

‘Everyone else saw the temple, but yes, I was the first to notice the stone.’

‘Who else was with you?’

‘An American called Wright, a Punjabi called Kishorilal and my brother, Kedar.’

‘Is your brother also a shikari?’

‘He used to go on shikar with me sometimes, but now I don’t know what he does. He went abroad four years ago.’

'Abroad?'

'Switzerland. Something to do with making watches.'

'When you found the stone, what happened? Didn't any of the others want to take it?'

'No, because none of us realized its value then. I came to know only when I had it assessed by a jeweller in Calcutta.'

'Who else got to know?'

'Not many people. I haven't got many relations. A couple of friends know about it, I told Kedar, and I think my nephew Abanish is aware of its value.'

'Do you keep the stone here in your house?'

'Yes, in my bedroom.'

'Why don't you keep it in a bank locker?'

'I did once. The very next day, I was almost run over by a car. Oh, I had a narrow escape, I can tell you. That made me think if I was separated from the stone it would bring me bad luck. Yes, I know it's superstition. Nevertheless, I brought it back from the bank.'

Feluda had finished eating. I could tell from the way he was frowning that he had started to think.

He wiped his mouth, drank some water and said, 'Who else lives in this house?'

'My nephew, Abanish, and three old servants. Then there's my father, but he's very old and almost totally senile. One of the servants spends all his time looking after him.'

'What does your nephew do?'

'Nothing much, really. His passion is philately. He's talking of starting a shop to sell stamps.' Feluda was quiet for a few moments, as if he was trying to come to a decision about something.

Then he said slowly, 'Would you like me to find out who wrote that note?'

Mr Chowdhury seemed to force a smile. 'I am getting old, Mr Mitter. I can do without anxiety and tension. And it isn't just that note. Last night this man rang me. I couldn't recognize his voice. He said if I didn't place that object at the specified time and place, he'd come into my house and cause me bodily harm. But even so, I am not willing to part with that stone. Besides, this man cannot possibly have a legitimate claim on it. He's just hoping to frighten me by his threats. A crook like him ought to be punished. You must work out how.'

'There is only one thing that I can possibly do. I must go to Victoria Memorial on Monday and keep an eye on the lilies. This man has got to turn up.'

'He may not come himself.'

'That shouldn't matter. If we can catch whoever comes hoping to collect the stone, it won't be difficult to find out who is really behind the scene.'

'But the man might be dangerous. When he turns up at Victoria Memorial and discovers I have not placed the stone under that plant, God knows what he might do. Can't you do anything to find out who he is before Monday? I mean, there's that note and the phone call. Isn't that enough?'

Feluda got up and began pacing. 'Look, Mr Chowdhury,' he said, 'this man has said you'd get into trouble if you went to a private detective. Now, whether or not I take any action, you might be in trouble already. So really, you must decide whether you want me to go ahead.' Mr Chowdhury wiped his face with a handkerchief, although it was quite cold inside the room. 'You, and this young cousin of yours . . . well, you don't appear to be investigators. This is an advantage. I mean, people may have heard your name, but how many know what you look like? No, I don't think there's much chance of you being recognized as the detective I have hired. If you are still prepared to take this job, I will certainly pay you your fee.'

'Thank you. But before I go, I would like to see that stone.'

'Sure.'

2. Grammar Page

By (1)

You can say that something happens **by mistake / by accident / by chance**:

We hadn't arranged to meet. We met by chance.

But we say 'do something on purpose' (= you mean to do it):

I didn't do it on purpose. It was an accident.

Note that we say by chance, by accident etc.

(not by the chance / by an accident).

In these expressions we use **by + noun** without **the** or **a**.

We use by — to say how somebody travels. For example, you can travel:

by car — by train — by plane — by boat — by ship — by bus — by bike etc.

Banta usually goes to work by bus / by bike / by car / by train / by air etc.

We do not use by if we say my car / the train / a taxi etc. We say:

Hello Banta, How did you come? I came by car or I came in my car.

Hell Santa, how did you come? I came by train or I came on the train.

We use in for cars and taxis:

They didn't come in their car. They came in a taxi.

We use on for bikes and public transport (buses, trains etc.):

We travelled on the 7.45 train, which arrived at 9.30.

Note that we usually say on foot (not usually by foot):

Did you come here by car or on foot?

We also use by to say how we do other things. For example, you can:

send something by post pay by card / by cheque or do something by hand

Can I pay by cheque? No, you have to pay cash or you have to pay in cash.

Exercise

1. Complete the sentences. Choose expressions from the box.

by mistake by hand by credit card by chance by email
on purpose

1. We don't need cash. We can pay
2. Banta and Santi keep in touch with one another mainly
3. I didn't intend to take your umbrella. I took it
4. I think he arrived late . He wanted to keep us waiting
5. Some things are planned. Other things happen
6. Don't put my sweater in the washing machine. It has to be washed

2. Put in by, in or on.

1. Jess usually goes to work bus.
2. I saw Jane this morning. She was the bus.
3. How did you get here? Did you come train?
4. I couldn't find a seat the train. It was full.
5. How much will it cost to the airport taxi?
6. Did you come here Sarah's car or yours?
7. The injured man was taken to hospital ambulance.
8. How long does it take to cross the Atlantic ship?
9. He doesn't drive much. He goes everywhere bike or foot.

Answers

1. Complete the sentences.

1. We don't need cash. We can pay **by credit card**.
2. Banta and Santi keep in touch with one another mainly **by email**.
3. I didn't intend to take your umbrella. I took it **by mistake**.
4. I think he arrived late . He wanted to keep us waiting **on purpose**.
5. Some things are planned. Other things happen **by chance**.
6. Don't put my sweater in the washing machine. It has to be washed **by hand**.

2. Put in **by**, **in** or **on**.

1. Jess usually goes to work **by** bus.
2. I saw Jane this morning. She was **on** the bus.
3. How did you get here? Did you come **by** train?
4. I couldn't find a seat **on** the train. It was full.
5. How much will it cost to the airport **by** taxi?
6. Did you come here **in** Sarah's car or yours?
7. The injured man was taken to hospital **by** ambulance.
8. How long does it take to cross the Atlantic **by** ship?
9. He doesn't drive much. He goes everywhere **on / by** bike or **on** foot.