



# Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H19

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# The Anubis Mystery

By Satyajit

## Part 1

‘Who rang you, Feluda?’ I asked, realizing instantly that I shouldn’t have, for Feluda was doing yoga. He never spoke until he had finished every exercise, including sheersh-asana. He had started this about six months ago. The result was already noticeable. Feluda seemed a lot fitter, and openly admitted that yoga had done him a world of good.

I glanced at the clock. Feluda’s reply came seven and a half minutes later. ‘You don’t know him,’ he said, rising from the floor. Really, Feluda could be most annoying at times. So what if I didn’t know the man? He could tell me his name, surely?

‘Do you know him?’ I asked impatiently. Feluda began chewing chick-peas which had been soaked overnight. This was a part of his keep-fit programme.

‘I didn’t know him before,’ he replied, ‘but I do now.’

Our Puja holidays had started a few days ago. Baba had gone to Jamshedpur on tour. Only Ma, Feluda and I were at home. We didn’t plan to go out of town this time. I didn’t mind staying at home as long as I could be with Feluda. He had become quite well known as an amateur detective. So it shouldn’t be surprising at all, I thought, if he got involved in another case. My only fear was that he might one day refuse to take me with him. But that hadn’t happened so far. Perhaps there was an advantage in being seen with a young boy. No one could guess easily that he was an investigator, if we travelled together.

‘I bet you’re dying to know who made that phone call,’ Feluda added. This was an old technique. If he knew I was anxious for information, he never came to the point without beating about the bush and creating a lot of suspense. I tried to be casual. ‘Well, if that phone call had anything to do with a mystery, naturally I’d be interested,’ I said lightly.

Feluda slipped on a striped shirt. ‘The man’s called Nilmoni Sanyal,’ he finally revealed, ‘He lives on Roland Road, and wants to see me urgently. He didn’t tell me why, but he sounded sort of nervous.’

‘When do you have to go?’

'I told him I'd be there by nine. It's going to take us at least ten minutes by taxi, so let's go!'

On our way to Roland Road, I said to Feluda, 'But suppose this Mr Sanyal is a crook? Suppose he's called you over to his house only to cause you some harm? You've never met him before, have you?' 'No,' said Feluda, looking out of the window. 'There is always a risk in going out on a case like this. But mind you, if his sole intention was to cause me bodily harm, he wouldn't invite me to his house. It would be far more risky for him if the police came to know. A hired goonda could do the job much more simply.'

Last year, Feluda had won the first prize in the All India Rifle Competition. It was amazing how accurate his aim had become after only three months of practice. Now he possessed a revolver, although he didn't carry it in his pocket all the time, unlike detectives in books.

'Do you know what Mr Sanyal does for a living?' I asked.

'No. All I know about the man is that he takes paan, is probably slightly deaf and tends to say "Er ..." before starting a sentence.' I asked no more questions after this.

We soon reached Nilmoni Sanyal's house. The meter showed one rupee and seventy paise. Feluda gave a two-rupee note to the driver and made a gesture indicating he could keep the change. We climbed out of the taxi and walked up to the front door. Feluda pressed the bell. The house had two storeys. It didn't appear to be very old. There was a front garden, but it looked a bit unkempt and neglected. A man who was probably the chowkidar opened the door and took Feluda's card from him. We were then ushered into the living room. I was surprised to see how well-furnished it was. It was obvious that a lot of money had been spent on acquiring the furniture and paintings, flower vases, and old artefacts displayed in a glass case. Someone had arranged these with a great deal of care.

Mr Sanyal entered the room a few minutes later. He was wearing a loose kurta over what must have been his sleeping-suit pyjamas. His fingers were loaded with rings. He was of medium height, clean-shaven and looked as if he had been sleeping. I tried to guess his age. He didn't seem to be more than fifty. 'You are Mr Pradosh Mitter?' he asked. 'I had no idea you were so young.'

Feluda smiled politely. Then he pointed at me and said, 'This is my cousin. He's a very intelligent boy, but if you'd rather speak to me alone, I can send him out.'

I cast an anxious glance at Mr Sanyal, but he said, 'No, no, I don't mind at all. Er . . . would you like some tea or coffee?'

'No, thanks.'

'Very well then, allow me to tell you why I asked you to come here. But before I do so, I think I ought to tell you something about myself. I'm sure you've already noticed that I am reasonably wealthy, and am fond of antiques and other beautiful things. What you may find difficult to believe is that I wasn't born rich. I did not inherit any money; nor have I got a job, or a business.'

Nilmoni Babu stopped, and looked at us expectantly. 'Lottery?' said Feluda.

'Pardon?'

'I said, did you win a lottery?'

'Exactly, exactly!' Nilmoni Babu shouted like an excited child. 'I won two hundred and fifty thousand rupees in the Rangers Lottery eleven years ago. I have managed—pretty well, I must admit

—all these years on the strength of that. I built this house eight years ago. Now you may wonder how I fill my time, do I not have an occupation at all? The thing is, you see, I have only one main occupation. I spend most of my time going to auction houses and buying the kind of things this room is filled with.' He waved his arms about to indicate what he meant. Then he continued, 'What happened recently may not have a direct connection with these objects of art in my collection, but I cannot be sure about that. Look—' he took out a few pieces of paper from his pocket and spread them out. There were three pieces in all, with something scribbled on them. A closer look showed me that instead of words, there were rows of little pictures. Some of them I could recognize—there were pictures of owls, snakes, the sun and the human eye. Others were more difficult to figure out. But the whole thing seemed familiar somehow. Where had I seen something like this before? In a book?

'These look like hieroglyphics,' said Feluda. 'What?' Nilmoni Babu sounded amazed.

'The form of writing used in ancient Egypt. That's what it looks like.' 'Really?'

‘Yes, but it is extremely doubtful that we can find someone in Calcutta who might be able to tell us what it means.’

Nilmoni Babu’s face fell. ‘In that case, what shall I do? Someone has been mailing a note like that to me fairly regularly over the last few days. If I cannot have these read or decoded, it’s going to be really worrying . . . what if these are warnings? What if it’s someone threatening to kill me?’

Feluda thought for a while. Then he said, ‘Is there anything from Egypt in your collection?’

Nilmoni Babu smiled slightly. ‘I wouldn’t know, and that’s the truth. I bought these things only because they were beautiful, rare and expensive. I have very little idea of where they originally came from before they reached the auction house.’

‘But all these things appear to be perfectly genuine. Nobody’ll believe you’re not a true connoisseur!’

‘Er . . . that is simple enough. Most auction houses do their homework properly and have every item valued by an expert. So if something is expensive, you can safely assume that it is genuine. My greatest pleasure lies in outbidding my rivals, and why not, since I do have the means? If, in the process, I happen to collect something really valuable, so much the better.’

‘But you wouldn’t know if any of this stuff is Egyptian?’ Nilmoni Babu rose and walked over to the glass case. He brought out a statuette from the top shelf and gave it to Feluda. It was about six inches long. Made of some strange green stone, it was studded with several other colourful stones. What was most striking was that although its body had a human shape, its head was that of a jackal.

‘I bought this only ten days ago at an auction. Could this be Egyptian?’ Feluda glanced briefly at the statuette, and said, ‘Anubis.’

‘Pardon?’

‘Anubis. The ancient Egyptian god of the dead. It’s a beautiful piece.’

‘But,’ Nilmoni Babu sounded apprehensive, ‘do you think there’s a connection between this. . . this Anubis and those notes I’ve been receiving? Did I make a mistake by buying it? Is someone threatening to snatch it away from me?’

Feluda shook his head, returning the statuette to Nilmoni Babu. 'That is difficult to say. When did the first letter arrive?'

'Last Monday.'

'You mean just after you bought it?'

'Yes.'

'Did you keep the envelopes?'

'No, I'm afraid not. Perhaps I should have kept them, but they were ordinary envelopes and the address was typewritten. The post mark said Elgin Road. That I did notice.'

'All right,' Feluda rose. 'I don't think we need do anything right now. But just to be on the safe side, I suggest you keep that statue somewhere else. Someone I know got burgled recently. Let's not take any chances.'

We came out of the living room and stood on the landing. 'Can you think of anyone who might wish to play a practical joke on you?' Feluda wanted to know.

Nilmoni Babu shook his head. 'No. I've lost touch with all my friends.' 'What about enemies?'

'Well . . . most wealthy people have enemies, but of course it's difficult to identify them. Everybody behaves so well in my presence. What they might do behind my back, I cannot tell.'

'Didn't you say you bought that piece at an auction?'

'Yes. At Aratoon Brothers.'

'Was anyone else interested in it?'

Nilmoni Babu suddenly grew agitated at this question. 'Mr Mitter,' he said excitedly, 'you have just opened a whole new aspect to this case. You see, I have a particular rival with whom I clash at most auctions. He was bidding for this Anubis, too.'

'Who is he?'

'A man called Pratul Datta.'

'What does he do?'

'I think he was a lawyer. Now he's retired. He and I were the only ones bidding for that statue. He stopped when I said twelve thousand. When I was getting into my car afterwards, I happened to catch his eye. I did not like the look in it, I can tell you!'

'I see.'

By this time, we had come out of the house and were walking towards the gate. 'Do a lot of people live in this house?' Feluda asked.

'Oh no. I am quite alone in this world. I live here with my driver, mali and two old and trusted servants, that's all.'

'Isn't there a small child in this house?' Feluda asked totally unexpectedly.

Nilmoni Babu stared for a few seconds, then burst out laughing. 'Just look at me! I forgot all about my nephew. Actually, I was thinking only of adults in this house. Yes, my nephew Jhuntu happens to be visiting me. His parents are away in Japan. His father runs a business. Jhuntu has been left in my charge. But the poor child has been suffering from influenza ever since he arrived. But what made you think there might be a child in my house?'

'I noticed a kite peeping out from behind a cupboard in your living room.'

A taxi arrived for us at this moment, crunching gravel under its tyres. It was thoughtful of Nilmoni Babu to have sent his servant out to fetch it. 'Thank you,' said Feluda, as we got in. 'Please let me know if anything suspicious occurs. But at this moment there's nothing to be done.'

On our way back, I said, 'There's something rather sinister about that statue of Anubis, isn't there?' 'If you replace a human head with the head of an animal, any statue would look sinister.'

'It's dangerous to keep statues of old Egyptian gods and goddesses.'

'Who told you that?'

'Why, you did! A long time ago.'

'No, never. All I told you was that some of the archaeologists who dug up old Egyptian statues ran into a lot of trouble afterwards.'

'Yes, yes, I remember now . . . there was a British gentleman, wasn't there . . . what was his name?' 'Lord Carnarvon.'



'And his dog?'

'The dog wasn't with him. Lord Carnarvon was in Egypt. His dog was in England. Soon after he helped dig the tomb of Tutankhamen, he fell ill and died. It was discovered later that his dog, who was thousands of miles away, died mysteriously at the same time as his master. He had been in perfect health, and no one could ever figure out the cause of his death.'

Any mention of Egypt always reminded me of this strange story I had heard from Feluda. That figure of Anubis might well have come from the tomb of some Egyptian pharaoh. Didn't Nilmoni Babu realize this? Why did he have to take such a big risk?

## 2. Grammar Page

### Adjective + Prepositions (1)

#### Adjective + of and Adjective + to

nice / kind / good / generous / polite / honest / stupid / silly etc. OF somebody (to do something).

#### Examples:

1. Thank you. It was very **nice of** you to help me.
2. It was **stupid of** me to go out without a coat in such cold weather.

(be) nice / kind / good / generous / polite / rude / friendly / cruel etc. TO somebody.

#### Examples:

1. They have always been very **nice to** me. (not with me)
2. Why were you so **unfriendly to** Lucy?

#### adjective + about / with

angry / annoyed / furious / upset **about something**.

angry / annoyed / furious / upset **with somebody for doing something**.

#### Examples:

1. There's no point in getting **angry about** things that don't matter.
2. Are you **annoyed with** me for being late?
3. Banta is **upset about** not being invited to the party.
4. Are you **nervous about** the exam?
5. They were **delighted with** the present I gave them.
6. Were you **happy with** your exam results?