



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H20

**Adapted and modified by
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The Anubis Mystery

By Satyajit

Part 2

At a quarter to six the next morning, the phone rang just as I heard our newspaper land on our balcony with a thud. I picked up the receiver quickly and said 'hello', but before I could hear anything from the other side, Feluda rushed in and snatched it from me. I heard him say 'I see' three times, then he said, 'Yes, all right,' and put the phone down.

'Anubis disappeared last night,' he told me, his voice sounding hoarse. 'We've got to go there, at once!'

Since there was a lot less traffic so early in the morning, it took us only seven minutes to reach Nilmoni Babu's house. He was waiting for us outside his gate, looking thoroughly bemused. 'What a nightmare I've been through!' he exclaimed as we jumped out of our taxi. 'I've never had such a horrible experience.'

We went into the living room. Nilmoni Babu sank into a sofa before either of us could sit down, and showed us his wrists. It was obvious that his hands had been tied. The rope had left red marks on his skin.

'Tell me what happened,' said Feluda.

Nilmoni Babu took a deep breath and began, 'I took your advice and kept that Egyptian statue with me last night, right under my pillow. Now I feel it might have been simpler if I'd left it where it was. At least I might have been spared this physical pain. Anyway, I was sleeping peacefully enough, when suddenly I woke—no, I couldn't tell you the time—feeling quite breathless. I realized instantly that I had been gagged. I tried to resist my assailant with my arms, but he was far too strong for me. He tied my hands behind my back, took the statue of Anubis from under my pillow and disappeared—in just a few minutes! I didn't get to see his face at all.' Nilmoni Babu stopped for breath. After a brief pause, he resumed, 'When my bearer came in with my morning tea, he found me in my room, my hands still tied behind my back, my mouth gagged. By that time I had pins and needles all over my body. Anyway, he untied me, and I rang you immediately.'

Feluda heard him in silence, looking rather grim. Then he said, 'I'd like to inspect your bedroom, and then take some photographs of your house, if I may.' Photography was another passion he had developed recently.

Nilmoni Babu took us upstairs to see his bedroom. 'What!' exclaimed Feluda the minute he stepped into the room. 'You didn't put grills on your window?'

'No, I'm afraid not,' Nilmoni Babu shook his head regretfully. 'This house was built on the same pattern as foreign bungalows. So the windows were left without grills. And sadly, I have never been able to sleep with the windows closed.' Feluda took a quick look out of the window and said, 'It must have been very simple. There's a parapet, and a pipe. Any able-bodied man could climb into the room with perfect ease.'

Feluda took out his camera and began taking pictures. Then he said, 'May I see the rest of your house?'

'Yes, of course.' Nilmoni Babu took us to the next room. Here we found a bundle lying on the bed, completely wrapped in a blanket. A small boy's face emerged as he removed part of the blanket and peered at us through eyes that seemed unnaturally large. The boy was obviously unwell.

'This is my nephew, Jhuntu,' said Nilmoni Babu. 'I had to call Dr Bose last night. He gave him a sleeping pill. So Jhuntu slept right through, without seeing or hearing anything at all.'

We glanced briefly into the other rooms on the first and the ground floor, and then we came down to look at the garden and its surrounding areas. There were three flower-pots just below the window of Nilmoni Babu's bedroom. Feluda began peering into these. The first two yielded nothing. In the third, he found an empty tin. 'Does anyone in this house take snuff?' he asked, lifting its lid. Nilmoni Babu shook his head. Feluda put the tin away in his pocket.

'Look, Mr Mitter,' said Nilmoni Babu, sounding openly desperate, 'I don't mind losing that statue so much. Maybe one day I'll be able to buy another. But what I can't stand is that an intruder should get into my house so easily and subject me to such . . . such . . . trauma! You've got to do something about this. If you can catch the thief I'll . . . I'll . . . give you . . . I mean . . .'

'A reward?' 'Yes, yes!'

'Thank you, Mr Sanyal, that is very kind of you. But I was going to make further investigations, anyway, not because I expected to be rewarded, but because I

find this case both interesting and challenging.’ Now he was talking like famous detectives in well-known crime stories. I felt very pleased.

After this, Feluda spent the next ten minutes talking to Nilmoni Babu’s driver, Govind, his servants (Nandalal and Panchu) and his mali, Natabar. Sadly, none of them could tell us anything useful. The only outsider who had come to the house, they said, was Dr Bose. He had come at around 9 p.m. to see Jhuntu. After he had gone, Nilmoni Babu had gone out to buy some medicines from the local chemist. That was all.

We left soon after this. On our way back, I suddenly noticed that our taxi was not going in the direction of home. Where was Feluda taking me? But he was looking so grave that I didn’t dare ask him.

Our taxi stopped outside a shop in Free School Street. ‘Aratoon Brothers—Auctioneers’, said its signboard, each letter painted in gleaming silver. I had never seen an auction house before. The sight of this one astounded me. Who knew so many different things could be collected under one roof? Somewhere among these various objects, Nilmoni Sanyal had found his Anubis. Feluda finished his work in just two minutes. The auction house gave him Pratul Datta’s address—7/1 Lovelock Street. Were we going to go there now? No, Feluda told the driver to take us home.

When we sat down to have lunch later in the afternoon, I was still trying to work things out, and getting nowhere. Please God, I prayed silently, let Feluda find a clue or something, so that he had something concrete to work on. Otherwise, he might well have to accept defeat, which I would find totally unbearable.

‘What next, Feluda?’ I asked him.

‘Fish curry,’ he replied, mixing his rice with dal, ‘and then I shall have vegetables, followed by chutney and dahi.’

‘And then?’

‘Then I shall wash my hands, rinse my mouth and have a paan.’

‘After that?’

‘I shall make a phone call and then I intend having a siesta.’

I saw no point in asking anything further. All I could do was wait patiently for him to make the phone call. I knew he would call Pratul Datta, so I had already taken his number from the directory.

When Feluda finally made the call, I could hear only his side of the conversation. This is how it went:

Feluda (changing his voice and sounding like an old man): 'Hello, I am speaking from Naktola.' 'My name is Joynarayan Bagchi. I am interested in antiques and ancient arts. In fact, I am writing a book on this subject.'

'Yes. Yes, I've heard of your collection, you see. So I wondered if I might go and see what you've got?'

'No, no, of course not!'

'Yes, thank you. Thank you very much indeed!'

Feluda put the receiver down and turned to me. 'He's having his house whitewashed, so he's had to move things around. But he's agreed to let us have a look this evening.'

'But,' I couldn't help asking, 'if he's really stolen the statue of Anubis, he's not going to show it to us, is he?'

'I don't know. If he's an idiot like you, he may. However, I am not going to visit him just to look for a stolen object. I simply want to meet the man.'

True to his word, Feluda went to his room after this to have a nap. He had this wonderful knack of catching a few minutes' sleep whenever necessary. Apparently, Napoleon had had this knack, too. He could go to sleep even on horseback, and wake a few moments later, much refreshed. Or so I had heard. I decided to pass the afternoon by leafing through one of Feluda's books on Egyptian art. Only a few minutes later, however, the phone rang. I ran to the living room to answer it.

'Hello!' I said.

There was no immediate response from the other side, though I could make out that there was someone holding a receiver to his ear. I began to feel uneasy. 'Can I speak to Pradosh Mitter?' asked a harsh voice after a few moments.

'He is resting,' I replied, swallowing once. May I know who's calling?'

The man fell silent again. Then he said, 'All right. Just tell him that the Egyptian god is where he should be. Mr Mitter needn't concern himself with the movements of Anubis. If he continues to meddle in this matter, the consequences may well be disastrous.' With a click, the line went dead.

I sat foolishly—heaven knows for how long—still holding the receiver in my hand. I finally had the sense to replace it only when Feluda walked into the room. 'Who was on the phone?' he asked. I repeated what I had been told by the strange voice. Feluda frowned and clicked his tongue in annoyance.

'You should have called me.'

'How could I? You always get cross if I disturb your siesta.' 'Hm. What did this man's voice sound like?'

'Harsh and gruff.'

'I see. Anyway, it's time now to get ready for Pratul Datta. I was beginning to see light, but now things have got complicated again.'

We got out of a taxi in front of Pratul Datta's house at five minutes to six that evening. We were both dressed for our parts—so cleverly disguised that I bet even Baba could not have recognized us. Feluda looked like an old man, about sixty years of age, sporting a wide moustache (liberally sprinkled with grey), with thick glasses perched on his nose. He was wearing a black jacket with a high neck, a white dhoti, long socks and brown tennis shoes. It took him about half-an-hour to get ready. Then he called me to his room and said, 'I have a few things for you. Put these on quickly.'

'What! Do I have to wear make-up as well?'

'Of course.' In two minutes, I had a wig on to cover my real hair and, like Feluda, a pair of glasses to hide my eyes. Then he took out an eyebrow pencil and worked on my neatly trimmed side-burns until they began to look untidy and overgrown. Finally, he said, 'You are my nephew. Your name is Subodh. Your only aim in life is to keep your mouth shut. Just remember that.'

We found Pratul Datta sitting in the veranda as we went in through the gate. His house must have been built thirty years ago, but the walls and doors and windows were gleaming after a new coat of paint.

Feluda bowed, his hands folded in a 'namaskar', and said in his thin, old-man voice, 'Excuse me, are you Mr Pratul Datta?'

‘Yes,’ Mr Datta replied without smiling.

‘I am Joynarayan Bagchi, and this is my nephew Subodh.’

‘Why have you brought him? You said nothing about a nephew on the phone!’

‘N-no, but you see, he’s recently started to paint and is very interested in art, so . . .’ Mr Datta said nothing more. He rose to his feet.

‘I don’t mind you looking at things. But I had had to put everything away because of the whitewashing; and now every little piece has had to be dragged out. That wasn’t easy, I can tell you. As it is, I’ve been going berserk with the workmen pushing and shoving all my furniture all day. The smell of paint makes me sick. I’ll be glad when the whole thing’s over. Anyway, come inside, please.’

I didn’t like the brusque way in which he spoke, but once inside his drawing room on the first floor, my mouth fell open in amazement. His collection seemed larger than Nilmoni Babu’s.

‘You seemed to have gathered a lot of things from Egypt,’ remarked Feluda.

‘Yes. I bought some of these in Cairo. Others were bought locally.’

‘Look, Subodh, my boy,’ Feluda said, laying a hand on my back and giving me a sharp pinch quite unobtrusively. ‘See all these animals? The Egyptians used to worship these as gods. This owl here, and that hawk over there—even these birds were gods for them.’

Mr Datta sat down on a sofa and lit a cheroot. I don’t know what possessed me, but I suddenly found myself saying, ‘Uncle, didn’t they have a god that looked like a jackal?’

Mr Datta choked. ‘This cheroot,’ he said after a while, still coughing. ‘You can’t get good quality stuff anymore. It never used to be so strong.’

Feluda ignored this remark. ‘Heh heh,’ he said in his thin voice, ‘my nephew is talking of Anubis. I told him about Anubis only last night.’

Mr Datta flared up unexpectedly. ‘Anubis? Ha! Stupid fool!’ Feluda stared at him through his glasses. ‘I don’t understand,’ he complained. ‘Why are you calling an ancient Egyptian god a stupid fool?’

‘No, no, not Anubis. It’s that man. I’ve seen him before at auctions. He is an idiot. His bidding makes no sense at all. There was a lovely statue, you see. But

he quoted a figure so absurdly high that I had to withdraw. God knows where he gets that kind of money from.'

Feluda said nothing in reply. He glanced around the room once more, then said 'namaskar' again. 'Thank you very much,' he added, moving towards the door through which we had come. 'It was really very kind of you. It's given me a great deal of pleasure, and my nephew . . . heh heh . . . has learnt a lot.' On our way downstairs, Feluda asked one more question, very casually. 'Do you live alone in this house?'

'No,' came the reply. 'I live here with my wife. I have a son, but he doesn't live here.'

We came out of Mr Datta's house and began walking, in the hope of finding a taxi. It was remarkably quiet outside, although it was not even 7 p.m. There was no one in sight except two small boys who were out begging. One of them was singing Shyamasangeet; the other was playing a khanjani. As they came closer, Feluda began humming the same words:

Help me, Mother for I have no one to turn to . . .

A few minutes later, we reached Ballygunje Circular Road and spotted an empty taxi. Feluda stopped singing and shouted, 'Taxi!' so loudly that it screeched to a halt almost immediately. As we got in, I caught the driver give Feluda a puzzled look. He was probably wondering how a shrivelled old man like him could possibly have such powerful lungs!

2. Grammar Page

Adjective + Prepositions (2)

adjective + at / by / with / of

Examples

1. Everybody was **surprised at** the news.
2. Everybody was **surprised by** the news
3. I hope you weren't **shocked by** what I said.
4. I hope you weren't **shocked at** what I said.
5. I'm very **impressed with** her English. It's very good.
6. I'm very **impressed by** her English. It's very good.
7. I don't enjoy my job any more. I'm **fed up with** it.
8. I don't enjoy my job any more. I'm **bored with** it.
9. Come on, let's go! I'm **tired of** waiting.
10. We had a good holiday, but we were **disappointed with / by / in** the hotel.

adjective + for / about

1. I'm **sorry about** the mess. I'll clear it up later.
2. Sorry about last night.
3. I'm **sorry for** shouting at you yesterday. (or **sorry about** shouting)
4. **Sorry for** the delay. (or **Sorry about** the delay)
5. I'm **sorry** I shouted at you yesterday.
6. I **feel sorry for** Mark. He's had a lot of bad luck.
7. I **feel sorry about** Mark. He's had a lot of bad luck.