



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H21

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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The Anubis Mystery

By Satyajit

Part 3

When the phone rang the next morning, I was brushing my teeth. So it was Feluda who answered it. When I came out of the bathroom, he told me that Nilmoni Babu had just called to say that Pratul Datta's house had been burgled last night. All the cash had been left untouched. What was missing was a number of old and precious statues and other objects of art, the total value of which would be in the region of fifty thousand rupees. The theft had been reported by the press, and the police had started their investigations.

By the time we reached Pratul Datta's house, it was past 7 o'clock. Needless to say, this time we went without wearing any make-up. Just as we stepped in, a man of rather generous proportions, wearing a policeman's uniform, emerged from the house. It turned out that he knew Feluda. 'Good morning, Felu Babu,' he greeted us, grinning broadly and thumping Feluda on the back, 'I can see that it didn't take you long to find your way here!'

Feluda smiled politely, 'Well, I had to come, you see, since it's my job.'

'No, don't say it's your job. The job is ours. For you, it's no more than a pastime, isn't it?'

Feluda chose to ignore this. He said instead, 'Have you been able to work anything out? Is it simply a case of burglary?'

'Yes, yes, what else could it be? But Mr Datta is very upset. He told us something about an old man and his nephew who came to visit him yesterday. He thinks they're responsible.'

My throat suddenly felt dry. Perhaps Feluda had been a bit too reckless this time. What if—? But Feluda remained quite unperturbed. 'Well then, all you need to do is catch this old man and his nephew. Simple!' he said.

'Well said!' returned the plump police officer. 'That's exactly the kind of remark an amateur detective in a novel might have made.'

'Can we go into the house?' Feluda asked, determined not to take any notice of the jibes made by the officer.

‘Yes, yes, go ahead.’

Pratul Datta was sitting on the same veranda. But he was clearly far too preoccupied to pay any attention to us. ‘Do you want to see the room where all the action took place?’ asked our friend from the police.

‘Yes, please.’

We were taken to the drawing room upstairs. Feluda went straight to the balcony and leant over its railing. ‘Look, there’s a pipe. So gaining access was not a problem at all.’

‘True. In any case, the door couldn’t be closed because the paint was still wet. So really it was something like an open invitation.’

‘What time did this happen?’ ‘At 9.45 p.m.’

‘Who was the first to realize—?’

‘There is an old servant. He was making the bed in that other room over there. He heard a noise, apparently, and came here to have a look. The room was totally dark. But someone knocked him out even before he could switch on the light. By the time he recovered sufficiently to raise an alarm, the thief had vanished.’

Feluda frowned. I had come to recognize this frown pretty well. It usually meant a new idea had occurred to him. ‘I’d like to speak to this servant,’ he said crisply.

‘Very well.’

Mr Datta’s servant was called Bangshalochan. He still appeared to be in a state of shock. ‘Where does it hurt?’ Feluda asked him, for he was obviously in pain.

‘In the stomach,’ he croaked.

‘Stomach? The thief hit you in the stomach?’

‘Yes, sir. And what a powerful blow it was—I felt as though a bomb had come and hit my body.’

Then everything went dark.’

‘When did you hear the noise? What were you doing?’

'I couldn't tell you the exact time, Babu. I was making the bed in Ma's room. She was in the next room, doing her puja. There were two beggar boys singing in the street. Ma told me to give them some money. I was about to go, when there was a strange noise in this room. It sounded as though something heavy was knocked over. So I came to see what was going on, and . . .' Bangshalochan couldn't say anything more. It seemed that the thief had broken into the house only a couple of hours after we had gone. Feluda said, 'Thank you' both to Bangshalochan and the officer, and we left.

Feluda began walking without saying a word. His face was set, his eyes had taken on a glint that meant he was definitely on to something.

But I knew he wasn't yet prepared to talk about it. So I walked by his side silently, trying to think things through myself. Sadly, though, I got nowhere. It was obvious that Mr Datta was not the burglar who had attacked Nilmoni Babu. He seemed strong enough—and he had a deep voice—but somehow I couldn't imagine him climbing a pipe. A much younger man must have done it. But who could it be? And what was Feluda thinking about?

We continued to walk, ignoring every empty taxi that sailed by. After sometime, I suddenly realized we were standing quite close to the boundary wall of Nilmoni Babu's house. Feluda began walking straight, with the wall on his left. After a few seconds, we realized the wall curved to the left. We made a left turn to follow it. About twenty steps later, Feluda stopped abruptly, and began inspecting a certain portion of the wall. Then he took out his small Japanese camera and took a photograph of that particular section. This time, I, too, peered closer and saw that there was a brown imprint of a hand. All that was visible was really two fingers and a portion of the palm, but it was clear that it was a child's hand that had left the mark.

We retraced our steps, making our way this time to the main gate. We pushed it open and went in. Nilmoni Babu rushed down to meet us. 'This may sound awful,' he told us when we were all seated in his living room, 'but I must confess today my heart is feeling a lot lighter. Yes, I do feel better knowing that my biggest rival has met with the same fate. But . . . where did my Anubis go? Who took him? You are a well-known detective, Mr Mitter. Are you still totally in the dark, even after two cases of burglary?'

Instead of replying, Feluda asked a seemingly irrelevant question. 'How is your nephew?' 'Who, Jhuntu? He's much better today, thanks. His temperature's gone down.'

'Do you know if he has any friends? I mean, is there a child who might climb over that boundary wall to come in here and play with Jhuntu?'

'Climb over the wall? Why do you say that?'

'I found the impression of a child's hand on the other side of the wall.' 'Was it a fresh mark?'

'That's difficult to say, but it can't be very old.'

'Well, I have never seen a child in this house. The only child who visits us occasionally is a small beggar boy. But he comes in through the gate, usually singing Shyamasangeet. He does have a good voice, I must say. However, there is a guava tree in my garden. So maybe that attracts little boys from time to time—I really couldn't say.'

'Hmm.'

Nilmoni Babu changed the subject. 'Did you learn anything new about the thief?'

'The man has extraordinary strength. Pratul Datta's servant was knocked unconscious with just one blow.'

'Then it must have been the same man who attacked me.'

'Perhaps. But I am concerned not so much with his physical strength but with the way his mind functions. He seems to have remarkable cunning.'

Nilmoni Babu began to look sort of helpless. 'I hope your own intelligence can match his cunning, Mr Mitter. Or else I must give up all hope of ever finding my Anubis again,' he said.

'Give me two more days. Felu Mitter has never been defeated. No, sir, not yet.'

We left soon after this. As we were walking down the driveway towards the front gate, we both heard a strange noise, as though someone was tapping on a glass pane. I turned around and saw a small boy standing at a window on the first floor. It was he who was tapping on the window pane. 'Jhuntu!' I said.

'Yes, I've seen him, too,' Feluda replied.

Feluda spent the afternoon scribbling in his famous blue notebook. I had learnt by now not to worry about what he was writing, for I knew whatever he wrote in his notebook was written in English, using Greek letters. I couldn't read it even if I tried; and certainly Feluda wouldn't tell me if I asked. In fact, he had stopped talking to me completely. I did not disturb him. He needed time to think. But he was humming a song under his breath. It was the same song that we had heard the beggar boy sing.

At about 5 p.m. Feluda broke his silence. 'I am going out for a few minutes,' he said. 'I have to collect the enlargements of my photograph from the studio.'

I was left all alone. Days were growing shorter. It grew fairly dark in less than an hour after Feluda left. The studio wasn't far from where we lived. Why was Feluda taking so long to come back? I did hope he hadn't gone somewhere else without telling me. Maybe his photos weren't ready, and he was being made to wait at the shop.

The sound of a khanjani reached my ears, which was followed immediately by a familiar song:

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

The same boys were now singing in our street. I went and stood near the window. Now I could see both boys. One of them was playing the khanjani and the other was singing. He really did sing well. They were now standing in front of our house. The one who was singing stopped and raised his face. 'Ma, please give us some money, Ma!' he cried. I took out a fifty-paisa coin from my wallet and threw it out of the window. The boy picked it up just as it landed at his feet with a faint chink. Then he put it in his shoulder bag, and walked on, picking up the song where he had left it.

I stared after him, profoundly puzzled. Our street wasn't particularly well-lit. But when the boy had raised his face to beg for money, I had seen it quite clearly. There was an uncanny resemblance between his face and Jhuntu's. No, I must have made a mistake, I told myself. Even so, this was something I had to tell Feluda the minute he got back.

He returned at half past six, looking cross. I had been right in thinking he'd had to wait in the shop. 'I'll make a dark room of my own and develop my own prints from now on,' he declared. 'These studios simply cannot be trusted to deliver on time.'

He spread out all his enlarged prints on his bed and began studying them. I could wait no longer, so I told him about the beggar boy. Feluda's face did not register any surprise. 'There's nothing odd about that,' he said.

'Isn't there?'

'No.'

'In that case, this whole business is more complicated than I thought.' 'Yes, that's true.'

'But do you actually believe that that young boy is involved in the burglaries?' 'He may well be.'

'But how can a boy of his age and his size be strong enough to knock people out?' 'Who said it was a young boy who attacked Nilmoni Babu and Bangshalochan?' 'Wasn't it?'

Feluda did not answer me. He went back to examining his photos. I found him looking carefully at the enlarged version of the photograph he had taken only this morning of the imprint of a hand on Nilmoni Babu's boundary wall.

'You told me once you could read palms,' I said jokingly. 'Can you tell me how long the owner of that hand will live?'

Feluda didn't laugh, or make a retort. He was frowning again, deep in thought. 'What do you make of this?' he asked suddenly. His question startled me.

'What do I make of what?'

'What you saw this morning, and what you're seeing now.' 'In the morning? You mean when you took that photo?' 'Yes.'

'It was the impression of a child's hand. What else was there to see?' 'Didn't its colour tell you anything?'

'Colour? It was brown, wasn't it?' 'Yes, but what did that mean?'

'That the boy had something smeared on his hand?' 'Something? Try to think, try to be more specific' 'Well, it might have been paint, mightn't it?'

'All right, but where could it have come from?'

'Brown paint? How should I know—no. wait, wait. I remember now. The doors and windows of Mr Datta's house were all painted brown!'

‘Exactly. You caught some of it on your sleeve that day. If you look at your shirt, you’ll probably still find it there.’

‘But . . .’ I began to feel a bit dazed, ‘does that mean the person who got paint on his hand was the burglar who stole into Pratul Datta’s house?’

‘Yes, there’s a possibility. But look at the photo again. Can you spot anything else?’

I tried to think very hard, but had to shake my head in the end. ‘It’s all right,’ Feluda comforted me, ‘I knew you wouldn’t be able to spot it. If you had, I would’ve been very surprised—no, in fact, I would have been shocked.’

‘Why?’

‘Because that would have proved that you are no less clever-than me.’

‘Oh? And what have you spotted, Mr Clever?’

‘That this is more than just a complicated case. There is a sinister angle to it, which I have realized only recently. It is as horrific as Anubis himself!’

Feluda rang Nilmoni Babu the next day.

‘Hello? Mr Sanyal? . . . Your mystery has been solved . . . No, I haven’t actually got that statue, but I think I know where it is . . . Are you free this morning? . . . What? . . . He’s worse, is he? . . . Which hospital? . . . All right. We’ll meet later. Thank you.’

Feluda replaced the receiver and quickly dialled another number. I couldn’t hear what he said for he lowered his voice and practically whispered into the telephone. But I could tell that he was speaking to someone in the police. Then he turned to me and said, ‘Get ready quickly. We’re going out. Yes, now.’ Luckily there wasn’t much traffic on the roads since it was still fairly early. Besides, Feluda had told the driver to drive as fast as he could. It took us only a few minutes to reach Nilmoni Babu’s street. Just as we reached his gate, we saw him driving out in his black Ambassador. There didn’t seem to be anyone else in the car apart from Nilmoni Babu himself and his driver. ‘Follow that car!’ shouted Feluda. Excited, our driver placed his foot on the accelerator. I saw Nilmoni Babu’s car take a right turn. At this moment, Feluda did something completely unexpected. He took out his revolver from the inside pocket of his jacket, leant out of the window and shot at the rear tyres of the Ambassador.

The noise from the revolver and the bursting of tyres was absolutely deafening. Then I saw the Ambassador lurch awkwardly, bump against a lamp-post and come to a standstill. Our taxi pulled up just behind it. From the opposite end came a police jeep and blocked the other side.

Nilmoni Sanyal climbed out his car and stood glancing around, looking furious. Feluda and I got out of our taxi and began walking towards him. From the police jeep, the same plump officer jumped out.

‘What the hell is going on?’ demanded Nilmoni Babu when he saw us.

‘Who else is with you in the car apart from the driver, Mr Sanyal?’ Feluda asked coldly.

‘Who do you think?’ Nilmoni Babu shouted. ‘Didn’t I tell you I was taking my nephew to the hospital?’

Without a word, Feluda stepped forward and pulled the handle of one of the rear doors of the Ambassador. The door opened, and a small child shot out from the car, promptly attaching himself to Feluda’s throat.

Feluda might have been throttled to death. But he wasn’t just an expert in yoga. He had learnt ji-jitsu and karate, too. It took him only a few seconds to twist the child’s wrists, and swing him over his head, finally throwing him down on the road. The child screamed in pain, which made my heart jump into my mouth. The voice wasn’t a child’s voice at all. It belonged to a fully-grown adult. It sounded harsh and raucous. This was the voice I had heard on the telephone.

By this time, the police officer and his men had surrounded the car and arrested Nilmoni Babu, his driver and the ‘child’.

Feluda straightened his collar and said, ‘That imprint of his hand had made me wonder. It couldn’t be a child’s hand, for it had far too many lines on it. A child’s hand would have been much more smooth. However, since the size of the palm was small, there could be just one explanation for it. The so-called “child” was really a dwarf. How old is your assistant, Mr Sanyal?’

‘Forty,’ Nilmoni Babu whispered. His own voice sounded different.

‘You thought you were being very clever,’ Feluda went on. ‘Your plan was flawless, and your acting good enough to win an award. You told me a weird tale of warnings in hieroglyphics, then staged a robbery, just to remove

suspicion from yourself. Then you had Pratul Datta's house burgled, and some of his possessions became yours. Tell me, the boy we saw in your house was the other beggar boy, wasn't he? The one who used to sing?'

Nilmoni Babu nodded in silence. 'Yes, that boy used to sing,' Feluda continued, 'and the dwarf played the khanjani. You never had a nephew at all. That was another story you cooked up. You've kept that boy in your house by force, haven't you, to help you with your misdeeds? I know that now, but it took me a while to figure it out. The boy and the dwarf were sent out together. The dwarf disappeared into Pratul Datta's house, leaving the khanjani with the singer, who continued to play it. The dwarf was obviously powerful enough to tackle Bangshalochan. It was a wonderful plan, really. I've got to give you full marks for planning all the details, Mr Sanyal.'

Nilmoni Babu sighed. 'The truth is,' he said, 'that I had become obsessed with ancient Egypt. I have studied that period in some depth. I couldn't bear the thought of Pratul Datta hanging on to those pieces of Egyptian art. I had to have them, at any cost.'

'Well, Mr Sanyal, you have now seen where greed and temptation can lead you. There is just one more thing I need to ask you for.'

'What is it?' 'My reward.'

Nilmoni Babu stared at Feluda blankly. 'Reward?'

'Yes. That statue of Anubis is with you, isn't it?'

Nilmoni Babu slipped his hand into his pocket rather foolishly. Then he brought it out, clutching a four-thousand-year-old statue of Anubis, the Egyptian god of the dead. The stones it was studded with glittered in the sun.

Feluda stretched an arm and took the statue from Nilmoni Babu. 'Thank you,' he said.

Nilmoni Babu swallowed, quite unable to speak. The police officer pushed him gently in the direction of the jeep.

2. Grammar Page

Adjective + Prepositions (3)

adjective + of

afraid / scared / frightened / terrified OF...

'Are you **afraid of** spiders?' 'Yes, I'm **terrified of** them.'

fond / proud / ashamed / jealous / envious OF ...

Why is he so **jealous of** other people?

suspicious / critical / tolerant OF ...

They didn't trust him. They were **suspicious of** his motives.

aware / conscious OF ...

'Did you know he was married?' 'No, I wasn't **aware of** that.'

capable / incapable OF ...

I'm sure you are **capable of** doing the job well.

full / short OF ...

Amy is a very active person. She's always full of energy.

I'm a bit short of money. Can you lend me some?

typical OF ...

He's late again. It's **typical of** him to keep everybody waiting.

certain / sure OF or ABOUT ...

I think she's arriving this evening, but I'm not **sure of** that. or ... not **sure about** that.