



# Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E39

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# The Island of Statues

By Sudha Murty

One day, early in the morning, the children heard a loud voice booming outside. 'Where are your grandchildren? I have come to take them to my place.' They went running out to see a very tall man with twinkling eyes and a grey beard sipping coffee with their grandparents. He wore a crisp white dhoti and shirt and a black cap. His smile was so charming that the children instantly warmed to him. Grandma was shaking her head and saying, 'Rehmat, there's no way Peerambhi can manage four children. Take them out for the day, why do you want to have them over for the night?' But the man called Rehmat shook his head. 'No no, I will take them for a night's stay. My Usman is a great cook and will look after everything. Peerambhi will not be troubled at all.'

Grandma saw the questioning look on the children's faces and explained, 'This is Rehmat. A long time back when your Grandpa was a schoolteacher, he was your Grandpa's student. He lives a little far away now. He has a mango grove there, and a large house. All his children live abroad. In his house there's a large library of books and what can be called a mini zoo with goats, cows, peacocks, pigeons and parrots. He wants to have you all over for the night. I'm sure you'll have a good time, but do you want to go?'

'He also tells very beautiful stories,' added Grandpa.

Rehmat grinned and said, 'Masterji, don't exaggerate. I started reading children's storybooks only after my grandchildren were born. Then I remembered the stories you used to tell us in school and passed off some of them as my own.' He turned to the children and said, 'So what do you think, kids, will you come with me? I will show you a different part of the village.'

Everyone was thinking, when Raghu spoke up, 'Can we bring our friends with us?'

'Oh, you mean Vishnu Kaka's grandchildren? Of course they can come. The more the merrier. Peerambhi will love having so many children in the house.'

Raghu ran to Sharan's house to give the news.

Rehmat Chacha, as everyone called him, had brought a jeep and soon all seven had packed a change and their toothbrushes and piled into it. Rehmat Chacha's house was far, about thirty kilometres away, and on the way they had to go through a forest. The road cutting through the forest was narrow and winding.

Tall trees stood on both sides. It was a dark, scary place. Suma looked around nervously and said, 'Will anyone ever cut down these trees and widen the road?'

Rehamt Chacha shook his head. 'Oh no, the villagers will never allow it. We love our trees and try to see as few are cut down as possible. Trees must never be cut unnecessarily. Do you want to listen to a story about a kingdom that cut down all its trees?'

Of course the children did, so Rehmat Chacha began his story.



Once there was a beautiful verdant green island. It had forests filled with huge trees, waterfalls gushing with clear blue water and mountains where there was a quarry of a unique kind of stone. This stone was valued for its attractive white colour. It was also easy to turn into sculptures.

The island had been ruled for years by a king who was now old. He looked after his people well and loved the natural beauty of his land above all. His closest friend was a sculptor called Amar. Amar too loved the land more than anything else. He had a school where students from far and wide came to learn the art of creating sculptures out of stone. But Amar had one odd condition for the students who studied in his school. He insisted they bring their own supply of stone! Only for their final sculpture were they allowed to use a piece of stone from the island's quarry. Many grumbled at this rule. After all, dragging tons of stone to an island in the middle of a sea was difficult, but Amar was adamant.

Once his king asked him the reason for this condition, and this is what wise old Amar had to say: 'This stone and indeed everything on this remarkable land of ours is a gift which we need to preserve. Unless we use it wisely how will we be able to save this quarry for our children? If we start using the stones and woods from trees without a thought they will soon finish and then we will be left with an empty, barren land. This is why I insist that students learning the craft of sculpting bring their own material, and only when they make their final piece of art can they use this unique stone from our land.'

The king applauded this thought in his mind and let Amar run his school the way he wanted. But then a day came when the king, now very old, died, and his son took over the throne. Rajdip, the new king, wanted to do everything differently from his father. He started changing many laws. One day he remembered the art school and went to visit it. There he saw the students working on their sculptures. But his ministers whispered to him the complaints

that other students, who had not wanted to bring their own material, had made about Amar's rule.

Rajdip realized that if he lifted the rule then many more people would come to study in the school. Their fees would add to the prosperity of the island and in addition they would create lovely works of art that could be used to beautify the towns. He ordered Amar to step down as the teacher and brought someone else to run the school.

Soon the island was full of students chipping away on the stone. Their demands increased the mining at the quarry. They created large sculptures which now needed to get transported back to the town. Trees were cut down to make carts and to clear roads. Without trees to provide wood for their boats the fishermen of the island could not go out to sea. They started fishing near the land and got into fights frequently with one another. New houses were not strong as both wood and stone were scarce. It was difficult for farmers to make good ploughs and so farming suffered. All the mining created so much of pollution that plants started dying out, diseases spread, and the tinkling waterfalls fell silent as water became scarce. The climate changed, it became hotter and drier.

Soon there were famines and the once beautiful green island was reduced to a wasteland of weeds and scrub.

Rajdip's wishes of lining his capital city and palace with giant sculptures was fulfilled. Each student in the art school made a beautiful huge statue and gifted it to him. Soon these statues filled up the entire kingdom. Where once there were deep forests and blue rivers and streams, the island was a barren land now. The forests were gone. The rivers had turned into dirty trickles of water. The climate had become hot and dusty as the rains no longer came on time. People started leaving the island. The houses, schools and palaces slowly fell silent as they were abandoned. With time, everyone forgot about this island. Many, many years later when explorers landed here, they found hundreds of statues strewn all over a bare island: a land destroyed by the king's greed.



How everyone enjoyed the story. The rest of the journey was spent in each one acting out a part from the story, with Rehmat Chacha taking on the role of the wise old king. Cheerful and at the same time very hungry, they soon reached

their new friend's house.

It was a huge rambling place. Peerambhi was waiting for them at the doorstep. She told Usman to make a sherbet of mango, and Shurukumbha (a kind of kheer) for lunch. There was also paratha, biriyani, and all kinds of mouth-watering dishes which Usman was more than happy to prepare. After lunch they roamed around the house, examined the books in the library and the many awards Rehmat Chacha had received for his innovative skills in agriculture.

## The Kingdom of Fools

'Rehmat Chacha, you must be very intelligent. You know so much about farming, fishing, stories and so many other things,' Meenu remarked that night as they sat outside, watching the fireflies twinkling all around them.

But Rehmat Chacha did not agree. 'No, not really. There is plenty I still don't know. In fact, one can never stop learning. Knowledge is the only thing it's good to be greedy about.'

It was a beautiful, clear night. The moon and stars shone in the black, unpolluted sky. Peerambhi was feeling very happy. Her own grandchildren lived so far away, and came to visit her only once in two or three years. After so long the house was filled with laughter and young voices. She was too frail to do much, and was enjoying sitting among them and talking to them.

Soon they started yawning and rubbing their eyes. But no one was going to bed till Rehmat Chacha told another story!



There once lived a king who was very intelligent. He looked down upon anyone he thought was dull. He was also very proud about the fact that in his kingdom there were no stupid people.

Some distance away from the capital city lived an old teacher. He had taught the young prince, who was a sweet-natured boy once but had turned into a proud, rude king. Many people told him about the king's boastful nature, and the teacher decided to teach his old pupil a lesson he would never forget. He called his three best and brightest students, Harish, Mahesh and Umesh, and said, 'We need to bring that proud king down a peg or two. I want the three of you to teach him a lesson and make him realize the foolishness of his pride.'

The three students set off for the capital. Harish walked to the city market.

There he met a man selling betel leaves.

'How much for these leaves?' he asked.

'Ten rupees for two hundred leaves,' the shopkeeper replied.

‘Here are ten rupees. Give me only twenty-five leaves. My servant will come and collect the balance one hundred and seventy-five leaves.’

The betel-leaf seller agreed and gave Harish twenty-five leaves.

Harish now strolled into another shop where beautiful shawls were being sold.

‘How much for this?’ he asked, fingering the best shawl in the shop.

‘Two hundred rupees,’ answered the shopkeeper.

‘Here are twenty-five rupees. You can collect the remaining hundred and seventy-five rupees from the paan shop there,’ Harish said, handing the shopkeeper a note.

‘Please give the person who brings this note the remaining one hundred and seventy-five,’ the note read. The shawl shop owner sent his servant with the note to the paan shop to verify if indeed this was true. The paan shopkeeper glanced at the note and said, ‘Yes, it’s true. I have to give him one hundred and seventy-five more. Come back in half an hour—I will count and keep them ready.’

The servant returned and whispered to his master: indeed, the betel-leaf seller was going to give them the remaining one hundred and seventy-five. Harish walked out with the shawl. After half an hour, when the servant went to collect the money, he found the shopkeeper busy counting out leaves. ‘Hundred seventy-three, hundred seventy-four, hundred seventy-five . . . There you go, here are the rest of the leaves.’

The servant was amazed at being handed a sheaf of paan leaves instead of money. He called his master and the two shopkeepers started arguing loudly. Slowly they realized that someone had made fools of them. They rushed to complain to the king.

The king was surprised to hear how a stranger had tricked the clever shopkeepers of his kingdom. He decided to keep a lookout for this man.

The next day, Mahesh walked into the royal carpenter’s shop. It was the middle of the afternoon and the carpenter was in his shop tinkering with some strange-looking instruments. Mahesh was well dressed, so the carpenter thought he was rich. Enthusiastically he started showing off his various creations. He picked up a large wooden lock and said, ‘See this? Will you believe that with this you can even lock a man? Place the person’s head between the lock and a pillar and turn the key, and there, the man cannot escape.’



Mahesh pretended to be sceptical. 'Go on now. How can a simple wooden lock do such a thing? I don't believe you.' The carpenter got very agitated. 'But it's true, sir. I am the king's carpenter after all. I create many complicated instruments for the state. Here, let me show you.' Saying this, he put the lock around his neck and the nearest pillar and turned the key. 'Now, see? I cannot even move my neck! Are you convinced? Now just turn the key the other way to set me free.'

But Mahesh would not turn the key. He just stood there laughing. Then he coolly picked up the key and walked out of the shop. The carpenter could only shout at Mahesh's retreating back. 'You villain! Come back! Set me free!' But it was in vain. Mahesh had fooled him.

Later that evening the king came to know of this other stranger who had duped his clever carpenter. He was worried. Who were these men, making the brightest people of his kingdom look stupid? He decided to go around the city in disguise to try and catch them.

As he walked near the city gates, he found a man sitting there with a heap of mangoes, waiting for someone to buy them. The fruit seller had chosen the loneliest spot, so the king was suspicious.

'Why are you selling your fruits here?' he asked.

The fruit seller was actually Umesh. He pretended to look nervously around and answered in a whisper, 'Sir, I have heard there are some clever cheats roaming around the kingdom wanting to cheat us and our clever king. I have heard one will be walking by this way soon, so I am waiting here hoping to catch him and deliver him to the king.'

The king was surprised that this person knew all about the clever gang of cheats.

'Have you seen him before?'

'Yes, sir. I know the gang. The person who is coming today is a chief.'

'What does he look like?'

'He is tall, hefty and very cruel.'

'Is there any way I can see him?' the king asked excitedly.

'Sir, the best way is to hide. As soon as he comes, I will whistle, and you can see him.'

But at that spot there was neither a tree nor any rock behind which the king could hide. Then the fruit seller held out a sack. 'Hide in this, sir,' he suggested. 'I will keep you next to me, and anyone will think it is a sack of mangoes.'



The king agreed and hopped into the sack. Quickly Umesh tied it and walked away, laughing. The king soon realized he had been tricked. But he was tied in the sack and could do nothing. Many hours later, when his soldiers came looking for him, he managed to wriggle around in the sack and attract their attention.

How embarrassed he was, to be set free by them! He also knew now that he and the people of his kingdom were not as clever as he loved to boast. He realized his mistake.

The king's old teacher came to the court and explained how his three students had tricked everyone. Harish, Mahesh and Umesh apologized for their actions. And the king promised to rule his kingdom with wisdom and humility.

## The Story of Silk

No sooner had the children gotten over their excitement of the visit to Rehmat Chacha's house than Grandma sprung another surprise. There was a wedding in the village! Having attended some village weddings earlier, the children knew what to expect. Here, it was not like the city where you went at a certain time printed on the card, gave your present, ate and came back. In the village, everyone was invited, whether your name was on a card or not. And not only were you expected to come as early as possible, you were also expected to pitch in and help the host! So Damu was seen rushing off in the jeep to pick up guests from the railway station. Rehmat Chacha was in charge of providing fresh vegetables from his farm. Grandma was herding a group of women into the kitchen and telling them what to do. Grandpa was supervising the cleanliness and had stocked up on big bottles of phenyl and other cleansers. And Vishnu Kaka was dressed in his best, most spotless dhoti and kurta and was looking after the guests.

Grandma told the children to wear their nicest clothes and come to the venue. Krishna, always careful of the way she looked, wore her pretty blue silk frock. Grandma noticed and said, 'Krishna, remember to be careful. There will be a lot of people and food there. Don't get your clothes dirty.'

Krishna promised to be careful. Soon Grandma disappeared into the kitchen which was lined with people chopping and stirring and cooking. Outside, guests were pouring in and Vishnu Kaka was making sure everyone was served breakfast.

Grandpa was seen hurrying about with a bottle of phenyl in his hand. Rehmat Chacha was taking care of the flower decorations while Peerambhi Chachi was stringing piles of garlands. Children were playing all over the place, film songs played on the mike and there was a happy chaos everywhere.

After the wedding, during lunch time, while eating sweet pancakes of chiroti with badam milk, someone jostled Krishna and a big puddle of milk fell on her dress. She was grief-stricken. Grandma consoled her. 'Don't cry. Silk can be washed and made to look just like new. That is the wonderful thing about it.' Seeing Krishna's tear-stained face she said, 'Today when we go home I will tell you the story of how silk was made for the first time.' That made Krishna happy. That night, though Grandma was tired, she still told the children the story of silk.



Did you know that silk was discovered in China?

A long time ago, in a tiny village in China, there lived a poor girl belonging to a weaver's family. One day, the emperor was passing through the village and saw her working in the fields. He noticed her red cheeks and rosebud-like mouth, her proud bearing and her rough, work-worn hands, which meant she worked very hard through the year. He immediately fell in love with her and though he was much older, decided to marry her.

The girl married the ruler of the land and went to live in his palace as his beloved queen. But she was unhappy. She had grown up in the wide open spaces of the countryside, and now she was confined to a palace, magnificent though it was. She was used to working from dawn to night without a moment's rest, but now she had many servants to take care of her needs and did not know how to fill her time. In the village she had been surrounded by family and friends who exchanged news and gossip as they worked, but in the palace it was quiet and no one spoke out of turn. The emperor noticed his new wife was sad and tried his best to make her happy. He bought her grand clothes, jewels and artefacts, threw elaborate parties, hired the best musicians of the land to amuse her. Yet she was sad.

One afternoon, the empress sat under a mulberry bush in her garden, lost in her thoughts about her village. She slowly sipped hot water from a cup. Staring up at the blue sky, the girl remembered the birds that flew over her village. Then, sighing softly to herself, she picked up her cup to take another sip. But what was this! A cocoon from the mulberry bush had dropped into the hot water! Her first thought was to throw away the water and the cocoon. But then she took a closer look, and she saw some threads peeping out from the cocoon. Where had they come from? She pulled the threads. They were thin, strong and shiny. She kept pulling and a long line of thread came out. Now the empress had a great idea. She would take the thread from many cocoons and weave soft, strong cloth from it!



She called her servants and everyone got to work. They took cocoons out of the mulberry tree, dropped them in hot water, and removed the thread. They gathered a fair amount of yarn. Then the queen ordered a special weaving machine and wove the first piece of cloth using this new thread. Thus silk, the best and brightest form of cloth, was weaved.

The manufacture of silk spread throughout China. It was the cloth that only royalty could wear, and was much in demand in lands as far away as Rome. The route through which silk was traded between China and Europe through Asia was called the Silk Route.

Now that the Chinese had learnt how to make silk cloth, they did not want to share this knowledge with anyone in the world. Generations of Chinese royalty were sworn never to reveal the secret to anyone. When princesses got married and went away to far-off lands, they were not allowed to tell anyone in their new home how silk was made.

Many, many years later, when a clever princess was leaving her house on getting married, as was the custom, her bags were searched carefully to check that she did not carry anything that would help her make silk. This princess had been weaving silk from a young age and wanted to continue to do so wherever she went. She had hidden the cocoons in her long, elaborate hairdo. No one thought of looking there! When she went to her husband's house, she took out these cocoons from her hair and started gathering silk thread! In this way, legend goes, the knowledge of how to make silk left China.

## 4. Grammar Page

### The Future Tense

To show future action use the verbs **shall** and **will** with another verb that describes the action.

- You can use either **shall** or **will** with the pronouns **I** and **we**.
- Use **will** with the pronouns **you**, **he**, **she**, **it** and **they**.
- **Will** is also used with **singular nouns** like 'my dad' and with **plural nouns** like 'all the boys in my class'.

**I shall do** my homework after dinner.

**I will miss** you when you leave.

**We shall take** the dog for a walk later.

**We will visit** Grandma this weekend.

**He will be** home later.

**She will help** us cook the food for the party.

**It will soon be** dark outside.

I think **it will be** sunny tomorrow.

I expect **they will give** you a present.

**Mom will be** very pleased with you.

**Your plant will die** without water.

**The school will soon need** a lot of repairs.

**John and I shall be** glad when the exams are over.

**Bill and Kim will be** late for school if they don't hurry.

#### Notes

You can shorten **shall** and **will** as 'll when you use these words with pronouns:

full form	contraction
I shall, I will	I'll
we shall, we will	we'll
you will	you'll
he will	he'll
she will	she'll
it will	it'll
they will	they'll

To make the negative form, use **will** and **shall** with **not**. The contraction for **will not** is **won't**.

I **will not** help you unless you help me first.

It **won't** be very sunny again until next summer.

You **won't** like this food. It's horrible!

We **shall not** go to the party without you.