



# Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H26

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# 1. The Golden Fortress

## One

Feluda stopped reading and shut his book with a bang. Then he snapped his fingers twice, yawned heavily and said, 'Geometry.'

I asked, 'Were you reading a book on geometry all this while?' The book was covered with newspaper, so I could not see its title. All I knew was that Feluda had borrowed it from Uncle Sidhu, who was passionate about books. He bought quite a few, and took great care of them. In fact, he did not like lending his books to anyone, but Feluda was an exception. Feluda knew it, so he always put a protective cover on any book that he brought from Uncle Sidhu's house.

Feluda lit a Charminar and blew out two smoke rings, one after the other. 'There is no such thing as a book on geometry,' he told me. 'Any book may be seen as one because everything around us is related to geometry. Did you see those smoke rings? When they left my mouth, they were perfect circles. Now just think. There are circles everywhere. Look at your own body. The iris in your eye is a circle. With the help of the iris, you can look at the sun and the moon. If you think of them as flat objects, they are circles, but of course they are actually spheres—each a solid bubble. That's geometry. The planets in the solar system are orbiting the sun in elliptic curves. There's geometry again. When you spat out of the window a little while ago—you shouldn't have done that, it's most unhygienic and if you do it again, you'll get a sharp rap on the head, but anyway—that spit went out in a parabolic curve. Geometry, see? Have you ever looked at a spider's web in any detail? It starts with a simple square. Then two diagonal lines run through it and the square is divided into four triangles. After that, the spider starts weaving a spiral web from the intersecting point of those diagonal lines. That keeps growing in size, until it covers the entire square. If you think about it, your head will start reeling . . . it's something so amazing!'

It was a Sunday morning. The two of us were sitting in our living room on the ground floor. Baba had gone to visit his childhood friend, Subimal, as he did every Sunday. Feluda was seated on a sofa, his feet resting on a low table.

I was on a divan, leaning on a cushion placed against the wall. In my hand was a game. It was a maze, made of plastic. Inside the maze were tiny metal balls.

Over the last half hour, I had been trying to make those metal balls slip through the various lanes in the maze and go straight to its centre. Now I realized that the game was a matter of complex geometry, too.

A Durga Puja was being held in Nihar and Pintu's house, which was near ours. Someone was playing a song over a loudspeaker— Yeh jo muhabbat hai from the film Kati Patang. Fine spiral grooves on a circular record. More geometry!

'Geometry applies not just to objects you can see,' Feluda continued. 'The human mind often follows geometric patterns. A simple man's mind will run along a straight line. Others who are not so simple may have minds that twist and wriggle like a snake. And the mind of a lunatic? No one can tell how that's going to run. It's a matter of the most convoluted geometry!'

Thanks to Feluda, I had come across plenty of people from every category. What kind of geometric pattern did he fall into? When I asked him, Feluda said, 'You might call me a many-pointed star.'

'And I? Am I a satellite of that star?'

'You are merely a point, something that indicates a position, but has no significance of its own.'

I like to think of myself as a satellite. The only problem is that I cannot play that role all the time. I managed to be with Feluda when we had trouble in Gangtok because that was during school holidays. Two cases had followed—one was a murder in Dhalbhoomgarh, and the other was to do with a forged will in Patna—which I missed altogether. Now my school was closed once again for Puja. I was wondering if a new case would come along. Who knew whether it really would? But then, Feluda did tell me that if one badly wants something to happen, and if one's will is strong enough, then a particular wish may well come true, more or less automatically. I quite like to think what happened that Sunday morning was simply a result of my willing it.

A song from the film Johnny Mera Naam had just started on the loudspeaker; Feluda had flicked a quantity of ash into an ashtray and picked up the Hindustan Standard; I was toying with the idea of going out, when someone rattled the knocker on our door very loudly. Baba, I knew, would not be back before twelve o'clock. This had to be someone else. I opened the door and found a simple, mild looking man, wearing a dhoti and a blue shirt.

‘Does a Pradosh Mitter live in this house?’ he asked, raising his voice to make himself heard. The loudspeaker was making quite a racket.

Feluda rose from the sofa and came to the door on hearing his name. ‘Where have you come from?’ he asked.

‘All the way from Shyambazar,’ the man replied. ‘Please come in.’

The man stepped into the living room. ‘Please sit down. I am Pradosh Mitter.’

‘Oh. Oh, I see. I didn’t know . . . I mean, I didn’t realize you were so young!’ The man sat down on a chair next to the sofa, looking visibly impressed. But the smile on his face disappeared almost at once.

‘What can I do for you?’ Feluda asked.

The man cleared his throat. ‘I have heard a lot about you from Kailash Chowdhury. He seems to think very highly of you. He . . . he is one of my customers, you see. My name is Sudhir Dhar. I have a book shop in College Street—Dhar & Co. You may have seen it.’

Feluda nodded briefly, before saying to me, ‘Topshe, please shut that window.’

I shut the window that overlooked the street. That reduced the noise, and Mr Dhar could then speak normally.

‘About a week ago, there was a press report about my son. Did you . . .?’ ‘Press report? What did it say?’

‘About his being a jatismar . . . I mean . . .’ ‘About a boy called Mukul?’

‘Yes.’

‘So the report’s true?’

‘You see, from the way he speaks, the kind of things he says, it does seem as if . . .’ Mr Dhar broke off.

I knew what the word jatismar meant. A person who can recall events from a previous life is called a jatismar. Apparently, there are people who get periodic flashes of memory related to a life that they had lived long before they were born in their present incarnation. Mind you, even Feluda does not know whether or not there is any truth behind this whole business.

Feluda picked up the packet of Charminar and offered it to Mr Dhar, who smiled and shook his head. Then he said, ‘Perhaps you remember what my son

told the reporter? He's only eight, but he described a place which he is supposed to have seen. Yet I am sure nobody from ray family—not even my forefathers—has been there, let alone my son. We are very ordinary people, you see. I only have that shop, and the book trade these days is . . .'

'Doesn't your son talk of a fortress?' Feluda interrupted him. 'Yes, that's right. A golden fortress. There was a cannon on its roof, a lot of fighting, and several people were killed . . . my son says he has seen it all. He used to wear a turban and ride a camel on the sand. He mentions sand quite frequently. And animals—camels, elephants and horses. Oh, and peacocks. There is a mark near his elbow. We always thought it was a birthmark, but he says he was once attacked by a peacock, and the mark shows where the bird pecked him.'

'Has he ever mentioned exactly where he used to live?'

'No, but he does say that he could see this golden fortress from his house. Sometimes he draws funny squiggles with a pencil and says, "Look, that's my house!" If you look at it, well yes, it does appear to be a house.'

'Could he not have seen all that in a book? I mean, you have a book shop, don't you? So maybe he saw pictures of this place in a book?'

'Yes, that's a possibility. But other children also look at pictures in books; they don't talk incessantly about what they've seen, do they? If you'd seen my son, you'd know what I mean. To tell you the truth, his mind seems to be elsewhere. His own family—his parents, brothers and sisters, other relatives—no one seems to matter to him. In fact, he doesn't even look at us when he talks.'

'When did this whole thing start?'

'About two months ago. It started with those pictures, you see. One day, when I got back home from the shop—it had rained a lot that day—my son began showing me the pictures he had drawn. At first, I paid him no attention. Every child likes talking about imaginary lands, and he was chattering away. So I ignored him. It was my wife who first noticed that there was something odd. Then we listened more carefully to his words, and watched his behaviour over the next few weeks . . . then, one of my other customers, Dr Hemanga Hajra . . . have you heard of him?'

'Yes, yes. He's a parapsychologist, isn't he? I've certainly heard of him. But didn't that press report say he was going to travel somewhere with your son?'

‘Not going to. Has gone. They’ve already left. Dr Hajra came to my house three times. He thought Mukul was talking of Rajasthan. So I said, yes, that could be true. Then, in the end, Dr Hajra told me he was doing research on this whole business of recalling a previous life. He wanted to take Mukul to Rajputana. He thought that if Mukul could actually go back to the same place, he might remember several other things, and that would help his research. So he said he’d pay for everything, and take great care of my son, I wouldn’t have to worry.’

‘And then?’ Feluda leant forward. His voice had changed. Clearly, he was finding all this quite interesting.

‘Then they left, that’s all.’

‘Didn’t Mukul mind leaving home?’

Mr Dhar smiled a little wanly. ‘Mind? Oh no. He was ready to go with Dr Hajra the minute he offered to show him the golden fortress. My son, you see, is not like other children. He’s very different. We find him awake at three in the morning sometimes. He’d be humming a song. Not any film song, mind you. Something like a folk song, like the kind of music you hear in villages—but certainly it doesn’t come from any village in Bengal. That much I can tell you. I know a little about music . . . I play the harmonium, you see.’

Mr Dhar had told us a lot about his son. But he had said nothing about why he had come to see Feluda, or why he needed to consult a detective. Feluda’s next question made the whole conversation take a different turn.

‘Didn’t your son say something about hidden treasure?’

Mr Dhar began to look even more depressed. ‘That is the biggest problem!’ he sighed. ‘He told me about it some time ago, but when he mentioned it to the reporter . . . well, that proved disastrous!’

‘Why do you say that?’ Feluda asked. Then he called out to our cook Srinath, and told him to bring tea.

‘Let me explain,’ Mr Dhar continued. ‘Dr Hajra left for Rajasthan with Mukul yesterday morning by the Toofan Express. And . . .’

‘Do you know where in Rajasthan he’ll go?’ Feluda interrupted. ‘Jodhpur, so he said. Since Mukul had mentioned sand, he said he’d start with the northwest.’

Anyway, what happened was that yesterday evening, someone kidnapped a boy from our area. He was about Mukul's age.'

'And you think that boy was kidnapped by mistake? Because they thought he was Mukul?'

'Yes, there is no question about that. My son and this other boy happen to look similar. The other boy is Shivratan Mukherjee's grandson. Mr Mukherjee is one of our neighbours, he's a solicitor. The boy is called Neelu. They were naturally most upset, had to call the police, and there was an enormous fuss, as you can imagine. But now that they've got him back, things have calmed down.'

'Got him back? Already?'

'Early this morning. But how does that make any difference, tell me? I am going mad with anxiety, I tell you. Those kidnappers obviously realized they got the wrong boy. And Neelu has told them that Mukul has gone to Jodhpur. Suppose they chase Mukul all the way to Jodhpur just to lay their hands on that treasure?'

Feluda did not reply. He was lost in thought; four deep lines had appeared on his forehead. My heart was beating faster. Could it mean that we'd go to Rajasthan during these Puja holidays? Jodhpur, Chittor, Udaipur . . . I had only heard these names and read about these places in history books—and, of course, in Raj Kahini by Abanindranath Tagore. Uncle Naresh had given me a copy on my birthday.

Srinath came in with the tea. He placed the tray on a table. Feluda offered a cup to Mr Dhar.

'From what I heard about you from Kailash Chowdhury,' Mr Dhar began hesitantly, 'it appears that you were most . . . er . . . I mean . . . anyway, I was just wondering if you might be able to go to Rajasthan. If you found that Dr Hajra and Mukul were safe, that's well and good. But suppose they were in danger? Suppose you saw something odd? I mean, I've heard that you're brave, you'd tackle criminals. I am only an ordinary man, Mr Mitter. Perhaps it is impertinent of me to have come to you. But . . . if you did decide to go, I would certainly pay for your travel.'

Feluda continued to frown. After a minute's silence, he said, 'I shall let you know tomorrow what I decide. I assume you have got a photo of your son in your house? The one printed in the newspaper was not very clear.'



Mr Dhar took a long sip of his tea. 'My cousin is fond of photography. He took some photos of Mukul. My wife will have them.'

'Very well.'

Mr Dhar finished his tea, put the cup down on a table and rose. 'I have a telephone in my shop, 345116. I am usually in the shop from ten o'clock.'

'Where do you live?'

'Mechhobazar. 7 Mechhobazar Street. My house is on the main road.'

I went with Mr Dhar to see him out. When he'd gone, I shut the front door and returned to the living room. 'There's one word that I didn't quite understand,' I said to Feluda.

'You mean parapsychologist?' 'Yes.'

'Those who study certain hazy aspects of the human mind are called parapsychologists. Take telepathy, for instance. You can actually get into the mind of another person and read their thoughts. Or, if your own mind is strong enough, you can influence other people's thoughts, even change them totally. Strange things happen sometimes. Suppose you were sitting here, thinking of an old friend. Suddenly, out of the blue, the same friend rang you. A parapsychologist would tell you that there was nothing sudden or unexpected about it. If your friend rang you, it was because of strong telepathy. But there is more—like extra-sensory perception, or ESP for short. It can warn you about future events. Or, for that matter, take this business of recalling a previous life. All these could be subjects a parapsychologist might wish to study.'

'Is this Hemanga Hajra a famous parapsychologist?'

'Yes, one of the best known. He's been abroad, given lectures, and I think even formed a society.' 'Do you believe in such things?'

'What I believe is simply that it is foolish to accept or reject anything without sufficient evidence. If you don't keep an open mind, you're a fool. One look at history would show you plenty of examples of such stupidity. There was a time when some people thought that the earth was flat. Did you know that? They also thought that the earth came to an end at one particular point, and you couldn't travel beyond that. But when the navigator Magellan began his journey round the world from one place and returned to the same spot, all those who thought the earth was flat began scratching their heads. Then there

have been people who thought the earth was fixed, and other planets, even the sun, moved around it. Some thought the sky was like a huge bowl turned upside down. All the stars were fixed on it like jewels, they thought. It was Copernicus who proved that the sun remained stationary, and the earth and other planets in the solar system orbited the sun. But Copernicus thought this movement followed a circular motion. Then Kepler came along and proved that everything moved in elliptic curves. After that, Galileo . . . but anyway, there's no point in talking about all that. Your mind is too young, and too immature to grasp such things!'

Clever detective though he was, Feluda did not seem to realize one simple thing. None of his jibes and jeers was going to spoil my excitement because my heart was already telling me that the holidays were going to be spent in Rajasthan. We would see a new place, and unravel a new mystery. What remained to be tested was the strength of my own telepathy.

## Two

Feluda had told Mr Dhar that he would take a day to make up his mind. But within an hour of Mr Dhar's departure, he decided that he would go to Rajasthan. When he told me about it, I asked, 'I am going with you, aren't I?'

'If you can name five places in Rajasthan that have forts—all within a minute—then you might stand a chance.'

'Jodhpur, Jaipur, Chittor, Bikaner and . . . and . . . Bundi!' Feluda glanced at his watch and sprang to his feet. It took him exactly three and a half minutes to change from a kurta pyjama into a shirt and trousers. 'It's Sunday, so Fairlie Place will stay open till twelve o'clock. Let me go quickly and make our reservations,' he said.

It was one o'clock by the time Feluda returned. The first thing he did upon his return was to look up Hemanga Hajra's phone number in the directory and ring him. When I asked him why he was calling someone who was out of town, Feluda said, 'I needed proof that what Mr Dhar told us was true.'

'And did you get it?' 'Yes.'

After lunch, Feluda spent the whole afternoon stretched on his bed, a pillow tucked under his chest, going through five different books. Two of them were Pelican books on parapsychology. Feluda said he had borrowed them from a friend. Of the others, one was Todd's book on Rajasthan, the second was called *A Guide to India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon*, and the third was a book on Indian history, but I can't remember who wrote it.

In the evening, when we'd had our tea, Feluda said, 'Get ready, we're going out. We need to visit Mr Dhar.'

By this time, I had told Baba about our plans. He was very pleased to hear that we were going to Rajasthan. He had been there twice in his childhood with my grandfather. 'Don't miss Chittor,' he told me. 'The fort in Chittor is quite awe-inspiring. It's easy enough to guess what made the Rajputs such brave warriors.'

We arrived at Mr Dhar's house at around half past six. When he heard that Feluda was prepared to go to Rajasthan, Mr Dhar looked both relieved and grateful. 'I do not know how to thank you!' he exclaimed.

‘It isn’t yet time to start thanking me, Mr Dhar. You must assume that we are going purely as tourists, not because you asked us to. Anyway, we have very little time. There are two things we need. One is a photo of your son. The other is a chat with Neelu, that boy who was kidnapped.’

‘Let me see what I can do. Usually, Neelu is never at home in the evenings, especially now that Puja is round the corner. But I don’t think that today he’ll be allowed to go out on his own. Wait, I’ll get that photo.’

Shivratan Mukherjee, the solicitor, lived only three houses away, on the same side of the road. We found him at home, having a cup of tea in his living room with another gentleman. Mr Mukherjee’s visitor seemed to have a skin disease—there were white patches on his face. When Mr Dhar explained why we were there, Mr Mukherjee remarked, ‘My grandson seems to have become quite famous, thanks to your son! Please sit down. Manohar!’

Manohar turned out to be his servant. ‘Bring more tea,’ Mr Mukherjee told him, ‘and see if you can find Neelu. Tell him I’ve sent for him.’

We found ourselves three chairs placed by the side of a large table. The walls on both sides were covered by very tall bookcases, almost reaching the ceiling. They were crammed with fat tomes. Feluda had once told me that no one needed to consult books as much as a lawyer.

While we were waiting for Neelu, I had a look at Mukul’s photo. It had been taken on their roof. The little boy was standing in the sun, frowning straight at the camera. There was no smile on his face.

Mr Mukherjee said, ‘We asked Neelu a lot of questions, too. At first, he was in such a state of shock that he wasn’t talking at all. Now he appears more normal.’

‘Have the police been told?’ Feluda asked.

‘Yes, we told the police when he went missing. But he came back before the police could do anything.’

The servant returned with Neelu. Mr Dhar was right. Neelu did bear a strong resemblance to the boy in the photo. He looked at us suspiciously. Clearly, he had not yet got over his ordeal.

Suddenly, Feluda asked him, ‘Did you hurt your hand, Neelu?’ Mr Mukherjee opened his mouth to say something, but Feluda made a gesture and stopped

him. Neelu answered the question himself. 'When they pulled my hand, it burned a lot.'

There was a cut over his wrist, clearly visible. 'They? You mean there was more than one person?'

'One man covered my eyes and my mouth. Then he picked me up and put me in a car. Another man drove the car. I felt very scared.'

'So would I,' Feluda told him. 'In fact, I would have felt much more scared than you. You are very brave. When they caught you, what were you doing?'

'I was going to Moti's house. They have a Durga Puja in their house. I wanted to see the idol. Moti is in my class.'

'Was it very quiet in the streets? Not many people about?'

'The day before yesterday,' Mr Mukherjee informed us, 'we had some trouble here. A bomb went off. So, since last evening, there have been fewer people out in the streets.'

Feluda nodded and said, 'Hmm.' Then he turned to Neelu once more. 'Where did they take you?' 'I don't know. They tied a cloth over my eyes. The car drove on and on.'

'And then?'

'Then they made me sit in a chair. One of them said, "Which school do you go to?" I told him. Then he said, "We're going to ask you a few questions. Tell us exactly what you know. If you do, we'll drop you in front of your school. Can you go home from there?" So I said, "Yes." Then I said, "You must hurry, my mother will scold me if I get late!" Then he said, "Where is the golden fortress?" I said, "I don't know, and nor does Mukul. He only knows there's a fort, that's all." Then the two men began talking with each other in English. I heard them say, "Mistake!" One man said to me, "What's your name?" I said, "Mukul's my friend, but he's gone to Rajasthan." He said, "Do you know where in Rajasthan he's gone?" I told him, "Jaipur!"'

'You said Jaipur?' Feluda asked him.

'N-no, no. Jodhpur. Yes, that's what I said. Jodhpur.'

Neelu stopped. All of us remained silent. The servant had placed tea and sweets before us, but no one seemed interested in them.

‘Can you think of anything else?’ Feluda prompted Neelu. Neelu thought for a minute. Then he said, ‘One of them was smoking a cigarette. No, no, it was a cigar.’

‘Do you know how a cigar smells?’ ‘Yes, my uncle smokes them.’

‘All right. Where did you sleep at night?’ ‘I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know? What do you mean?’

‘Well, they said, “Here’s some milk. Drink it.” Then someone handed me a very heavy glass. I drank the milk, then fell asleep. I was still sitting in the chair!’

‘And then? When you woke up?’

Neelu looked uncertainly at his grandfather. Mr Mukherjee smiled. ‘He woke up only after he was brought home,’ he explained. ‘They left him outside his school, possibly very early this morning. He was still asleep. The man who delivers our newspaper every day happened to be passing by a little later, and saw him. It was he who came and told us. Then I went with my son and brought him back. Our doctor has seen him. He said Neelu was given a sleeping draught—probably a heavier dose than what might normally be given to a child.’

Feluda looked grave. He picked up his cup of tea and muttered under his breath, ‘Scoundrels!’ Then, he patted Neelu’s back and said, ‘Thank you, Neelu Babu. You may go now.’

When we had said goodbye to Mr Mukherjee and were out in the street once more, Mr Dhar asked, ‘Do you think there’s reason for concern?’

‘What I can see is that some greedy and reckless people have become unduly curious about your son. What’s difficult to say is whether they’ll really go all the way to Rajasthan. By the way, I think you should write to Dr Hajra, just to introduce me. After all, he doesn’t know me. So if I can show him your letter, it will help.’

Mr Dhar wrote the letter, handed it to Feluda and offered to pay for our travel once more. Feluda paid no attention. As we approached our bus stop, Mr Dhar said, ‘Please let me know, sir, when you get there and find them. I’ll be ever so worried. Dr Hajra has promised to write as well. But even if he doesn’t, you must . . . at least one letter . . .!’

On reaching home, Feluda took out his famous blue notebook (volume six) before either of us began packing. Then he sat down on his bed and said, 'Let's get some dates sorted out. When did Dr Hajra leave with Mukul to go to Rajasthan?'

'Yesterday, 9 October.'

'When was Neelu kidnapped?'

'Yesterday, in the evening.'

'And he returned this morning, that's 10 October. We are leaving tomorrow morning, the 11th. We'll reach Agra on the 12th. Then we'll have to change trains there, and catch one in the evening that goes to Bandikui. Leave Bandikui at midnight, and reach Marwar the same day . . . that'll be the 13th evening . . . 13th . . . 13th . . .'

Feluda continued to mutter and did some funny calculations. Then he said, 'Geometry. Even here you'll find geometry. A single point . . . and there are various lines converging to meet that point. Geometry!'

## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
133

### Verb + preposition 2 **about/for/of/after**

#### A verb + **about**

**talk / read / know ABOUT ...**

- We **talked about** a lot of things at the meeting.

**have a discussion ABOUT** something

- We had **a discussion about** what we should do.

But we say '**discuss** something' (no preposition):

- We **discussed** what we should do. (*not* discussed about)

**do** something/nothing **ABOUT** something = *do something/nothing to improve a situation*

- If you're worried about the problem, you should **do** something **about** it.

#### B verb + **for**

**ask** (somebody) **FOR ...**

- I sent an email to the company **asking** them **for** more information about the job.

But we say 'ask somebody **the way / the time**' etc. (no preposition):

- I **asked** somebody **the way to the station**.

**apply** (**TO** a company etc.) **FOR** a job etc.

- I think you could do this job. Why don't you **apply for** it?

**wait FOR** somebody, **wait FOR** something (to happen)

- Don't **wait for** me. I'll join you later.  
 I'm not going out yet. I'm **waiting for** the rain to stop.

**search** (a person / a place / a bag etc.) **FOR ...**

- I've **searched** the house **for** my keys, but I still can't find them.

**leave** (a place) **FOR** another place

- I haven't seen her since she **left** (home) **for** work. (*not* left to work)

#### C **take care of, care for** and **care about**

**take care OF ...** = *look after, keep safe, take responsibility for*

- Don't worry about me. I can **take care of** myself.  
 I'll **take care of** the travel arrangements. You don't need to do anything.

**care FOR** somebody = *take care of them, keep them safe*

- Alan is 85 and lives alone. He needs somebody to **care for** him.

I don't **care FOR** something = *I don't like it*

- I don't **care for** hot weather. (= I don't like ...)

**care ABOUT ...** = *think that somebody/something is important*

- He's very selfish. He doesn't **care about** other people.

**care what/where/how ...** etc. (*without about*)

- You can do what you like. I don't **care what** you do.

#### D **look for** and **look after**

**look FOR ...** = *search for, try to find*

- I've lost my keys. Can you help me to **look for** them?

**look AFTER ...** = *take care of, keep safe or in good condition*

- Alan is 85 and lives alone. He needs somebody to **look after** him. (*not* look for)  
 You can borrow this book, but please **look after** it.