



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H29

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. The Golden Fortress

Seven

I woke for a few moments in the middle of the night—God knows what time it was—and saw Feluda scribbling something in his blue notebook, by the light of the bedside lamp. I don't know how long he stayed awake, but when I woke at half past six, he had showered, had a shave and was dressed to go out.

According to him, when your brain works at high speed, you tend to sleep a lot less, but that does not affect your health. At least, that's what he believes. In the last ten years, I have not known him to be ill, even for a single day. Even here in Jodhpur, he was doing yoga every day. By the time I left my bed, he had finished his exercises.

When we went to the dining room for breakfast, we met everyone else. Lalmohan Babu had moved to the Circuit House the previous night. He had been given a room only two doors away Mandar Bose. We found him eating an omelette. He had thought of a wonderful plot, he told us. Dr Hajra still seemed upset. He had not slept well. Only Mukul seemed totally unperturbed.

Mandar Bose decided to be direct with Dr Hajra. 'Please don't mind my saying this,' he began, 'but you're dealing with such a weird subject that you're bound to invite trouble. In a country where superstition runs rife, isn't it better not to meddle with such things? One day, you'll find little boys in every household claiming to be jatismars! If you look closely, you'll find that their parents want a little publicity—that's all there is to it. But what are you going to do if that happens? How many kids will you take with you and travel all over the country?'

Dr Hajra made no comment. Lalmohan Babu simply cast puzzled glances from one to the other, for no one had told him about Mukul being able to recall his past life.

Feluda had already told me that after breakfast, he wanted to go to the main market. I knew he had some other motive; it could not be just to see more of the city, or to shop. We left at a quarter to eight, accompanied by Lalmohan Babu. I tried a couple of times to imagine him as a ferocious foe, but the mere idea was so laughable that I had to wipe it from my mind.

The area round the Circuit House was quiet, but the main city turned out to be noisy and congested. The old wall was visible from virtually every corner. Along that wall stood rows of shops, tongas, houses and much else. Remnants of a five-hundred-year-old city were now inextricably tangled with the modern Jodhpur.

We walked through the bazaar, looking at various shops. I could tell Feluda was looking for something specific, but had no idea what it was. Suddenly, Lalmohan Babu asked, 'What is Dr Hajra's subject? I mean, what is he a doctor of? This morning, Mr Trotter was saying something . . .?'

'Hajra is a parapsychologist,' Feluda replied. 'Parapsychologist?' Lalmohan Babu frowned, 'I didn't know you could add "para" before "psychologist"! I know you can do that to "typhoid". So does it mean it's half-psychology, just as paratyphoid is half-typhoid?'

'No, in this case "para" means "abnormal", not "half". Psychology is a complex subject, in any case. Parapsychology deals with its more obscure aspects.'

'I see. And what was all that about a jatismar?'

'Mukul is a jatismar. At least, that's what he's been called.' Lalmohan Babu's jaw fell open.

'You'll get plenty of material for a plot,' Feluda continued. 'That young boy talks of a golden fortress he saw in a previous life. And the house where he lived had hidden treasure, buried under the ground.'

'Are we . . . are we going to look for those things?' Lalmohan Babu's voice grew hoarse.

'I don't know about you. We certainly are.'

Lalmohan Babu stopped, bang in the middle of the road, and grasped Feluda's hand with both his own. 'Mr Mitter! This is the chance of a lifetime! Please don't disappear anywhere without taking me with you. That's my only request.'

'But I don't know where we're going next. Nothing's decided.' Lalmohan Babu paused for a while, deep in thought. Then he said, 'Will Mr Trotter go with you?'

'Why? Would you mind if he did?'

‘That man is powerfully suspicious!’

There was a stall by the roadside, selling naagras. Most people in Rajasthan wear these shoes.

Feluda stopped at the stall.

‘Powerful he might be. Why suspicious?’ he asked.

‘When we were travelling to Bikaner yesterday, he was bragging a lot in the car. Said he had shot a wolf in Tanganyika. Yet I know that there are no wolves anywhere in Africa. I have read books by Martin Johnson. No one can fool me that easily!’

‘So what did you say?’

‘What could I say? I could hardly call him a liar to his face. I was sitting sandwiched between those two men. You’ve seen how broad his chest is, haven’t you? At least forty-five inches. Both sides of the road were lined with huge cactus bushes and prickly pear. If I dared to contradict him, he’d have picked me up and thrown me behind one of those bushes—and then, in no time, I’d have turned into fodder for vultures. Great squadrons of vultures would have landed on me and had a feast!’

‘You think so? How many vultures could possibly feed on your corpse?’ ‘Ha ha ha ha!’

Feluda had, in the mean time, taken off his sandals and put on a pair of naagras. He was walking back and forth in front of the stall.

‘Very powerful shoes. Are you going to buy those?’ Lalmohan Babu asked.

‘Why don’t you try on a pair yourself?’ Feluda suggested.

None of the shoes were small enough to fit Lalmohan Babu, but he did slip his feet into the smallest pair that could be found, and gave a shudder. ‘Oh my God! This was made from the hide of a rhino. You’d have to be a rhino yourself to wear such shoes.’

‘In that case, you must assume that ninety per cent of Rajasthanis are rhinos.’

Both men took the naagras off and wore their own shoes again. Even the shopkeeper began laughing, having realized that the Babus from the city were having a little joke.

We left the stall and walked on. From a paan shop, a film song was being played very loudly on a radio. That reminded me of Durga Puja in Calcutta. Over here, people celebrated not Durga Puja, but Dussehra. But that was a long way away.

A few minutes later, Feluda suddenly stopped at a shop selling stoneware. It was a prosperous looking shop called Solanki Stores. Displayed in the showcase were beautiful pots, bowls, plates and glasses, all made of stone. Feluda was staring at those fixedly. The shopkeeper saw us, came to the door and invited us into his shop.

Feluda pointed at a bowl in the glass case, and said, 'May I see it, please?'

The shopkeeper did not pick up the bowl that was displayed. Instead, he took out an identical one from a cupboard. It was beautiful, made of yellow stone. I couldn't remember having seen anything like it before.

'Was this made here?' Feluda asked.

'It was made in Rajasthan, but not in Jodhpur.' 'No? Where was it made then?'

'Jaisalmer. This yellow stone can be found only in Jaisalmer.' 'I see.'

I had heard of Jaisalmer, but only vaguely. I didn't know where exactly in Rajasthan it was. Feluda bought the bowl. Then we took a tonga back to the Circuit House. It was half past nine by the time we returned, after a most bumpy ride. But it did mean that, after such a journey, our breakfast was certainly digested.

Mandar Bose was sitting outside in the corridor, reading a newspaper. 'What did you buy?' he asked, looking at the packet in Feluda's hand.

'A bowl. After all, I must have a Rajasthani memento.'

'I saw your friend go out.'

'Who, Dr Hajra?'

'Yes. I saw him leave in a taxi, at around nine o'clock.'

'And Mukul?'

'He went with him. Perhaps they've gone to talk to the police. After what happened yesterday, Hajra must still be quite shaken.'

Lalmohan Babu returned to his room, on the grounds that he had to work on his new plot and change it a little. We went to ours.

‘Why did you suddenly buy that bowl, Feluda?’ I asked.

Feluda sat down on the sofa, unwrapped the bowl and placed it on the table, ‘There is something special about it,’ he said.

‘What’s so special?’

‘Here is a bowl made of stone. Yet if I were to say it was a golden bowl, I wouldn’t be far wrong! I have never seen anything like this in my life.’

After this, he lapsed into silence and began turning the pages of a railway timetable. There was little that I could do. I knew Feluda wouldn’t open his mouth, at least for an hour. Even if I asked him questions, he wouldn’t answer. So I left the room.

The corridor was now empty. Mandar Bose had gone. So had the European lady, who had been sitting at the far end earlier on. The sound of a drum reached my ears. Then someone started singing. I looked at the gate and found a boy and a girl, who looked like beggars. The boy was beating the drum and the girl was singing. They were walking towards the corridor. I went forward.

When I reached the open space, suddenly I felt like going upstairs. I had been walking past the staircase every day. I knew there was a terrace upstairs, but hadn’t yet seen it. So I climbed up the steps.

There were four rooms upstairs. To the east and west of these was an open terrace. The rooms appeared to be unoccupied. Or it could be that the occupants had all gone out.

I went to the western side. The fort was clearly visible from here, looking quite majestic.

The two beggars downstairs were still singing. The tune of their song sounded familiar. Where had I heard it before? Suddenly I realized it was very similar to the tune I had heard Mukul hum at times. The same tune was being repeated every now and then, but it did not sound monotonous.

I went closer to the low wall that surrounded the terrace. It overlooked the rear portion of the Circuit House.

There was a garden at the back as well. I was considerably surprised to see it. All I had seen from one of the windows in our room was a single juniper tree standing at the back, but that gave no indication that there were so many trees spread over such a large area.

What was that bright blue object glittering behind a tree? Oh, it was a peacock. Most of its body was hidden behind the tree, so at first I couldn't see it properly. Now it emerged, and was pecking the ground. Was it looking for worms? As far as I knew, peacocks ate insects. Suddenly something I'd once read about peacocks came back to me. It is always difficult to find a peacock's nest. Apparently, they manage to choose the most inaccessible spots to lay their eggs and raise their young.

The peacock was moving forward, taking slow, measured steps, craning its neck and occasionally looking around. Its long tail followed the movement of its body.

Suddenly, the peacock stopped. It craned its neck to the right. What had it seen? Or had it heard something?

The peacock moved away. Something had disturbed it.

It was a man, standing right below the spot where I was. I could see him through the gaps in the trees. The man had a turban on his head. It wasn't very large. He had wrapped a white shawl around himself. As I was standing above him, I could not see his face. All I could see were his turban and his shoulders. His arms were hidden under the shawl.

He began walking stealthily, moving from the western side of the building. I was on the terrace facing the west. Our room was on the ground floor, in the opposite direction.

I wanted to see where the man was going. So I ran past the rooms in the middle of the terrace, and leant over the wall on the eastern side.

The man was standing below me once again. If he looked up, he would see me. But he didn't. He was creeping closer to our room, to one of its windows. Then one of his hands slipped out from under the shawl. What was that, close to his wrist, glinting in the sun?

The man stopped. My throat felt dry. Then he took another step forward.

Suddenly, a loud, harsh sound broke the silence. The peacock had cried from somewhere. The man gave a violent start and, at the same moment, I screamed, 'Feluda!'

The man in the turban turned and ran in the same direction from which he had come. He disappeared in a matter of seconds. I sprinted down the stairs, taking two steps at a time, ran along the corridor without stopping, crashed straight into Feluda at the door to our room, and stood there, stunned.

Feluda pulled me inside and asked, 'What's the matter? What happened?'

'I saw from the roof . . . a man . . . wearing a turban . . . walking towards your window!' 'What did he look like? Tall?'

'Don't know. Saw him from a height, you see. On his hand . . . was a . . . a . . .'.
'A what?'

'Watch . . .!'

I thought Feluda would either laugh the whole thing off, or tease me by calling me an idiot and a coward. He did neither. Looking a little grim, he simply peered out of the window and looked around.

Someone knocked on our door. 'Come in!'

A bearer came in with coffee.

'Salaam, saab!' He placed the tray on the table and took out a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

He handed it to Feluda, saying, 'Manager saab asked me to give it to you.'

He left. Feluda read the note quickly, then flopped down on the sofa, with an air of resignation. 'Whose letter is that, Feluda?'

'Read it.'

It was a short note from Dr Hajra, written on a sheet of paper that had his name printed in a corner.

It said:

I believe it is no longer safe for me to remain in Jodhpur. I am going somewhere else, where I hope to have better success. I see no reason to drag you and your cousin into further danger. So I am leaving without saying goodbye. I wish you both all the very best.

Yours, H.M. Hazra

'He has acted most hastily,' Feluda spoke through clenched teeth. Then he made for the reception desk without even drinking his coffee. Today, we found a different man at the desk. 'Did Dr Hajra say when he was going to be back?' Feluda asked.

'No, sir. He paid all his bills. Said nothing about coming back.' 'Do you know where he has gone?'

'To the railway station. That's all I know.'

Feluda thought for a moment. Then he said, 'It's possible to go to Jaisalmer by train from here, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir. We've had a direct line for two years.'

'When is the train?'

'It leaves at ten o'clock at night.'

'Is there a train in the morning?'

'Yes, but it goes only up to Pokhran. It should have left half an hour ago. One can go to Jaisalmer by this train, if one can arrange a car from Pokhran.'

'How far is it from Pokhran?'

'Seventy miles.'

'What other trains go from Jodhpur in the morning? I mean, to other destinations?'

The man consulted a book, leafing through a few pages. 'A train leaves for Barmer at eight o'clock. And at nine, there's the Rewari Passenger. That's all.'

Feluda's fingers beat an impatient tattoo on the counter. 'Jaisalmer is about 200 miles from here, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Could you please arrange a taxi for us? We would like to leave for Jaisalmer at half past eleven.' 'Certainly, sir.' The receptionist picked up a telephone.

'Where are you off to?' asked a voice. It was Mandar Bose, coming out of his room with a suitcase in his hand. He had just had a shower and was smartly dressed.

'I'd like to see the Thar desert,' Feluda replied.

'Oh. So you're going to the northwest? I'm off to the east.' 'You are leaving Jodhpur, too?'

'My taxi should be here any minute. I don't like spending a very long time in any one place.

Besides, if you leave as well, the Circuit House will become empty, in any case.'

The receptionist finished talking into the phone and turned to us. 'It's arranged,' he said.

'Topshe,' Feluda said to me, 'go and see if you can find Lalmohan Babu. Tell him we are going to Jaisalmer. If he wants to come with us, he should get ready immediately.'

I ran towards room number 10. It was not clear to me why we were suddenly going to Jaisalmer. Why did Feluda choose Jaisalmer, of all places? Was it because it was close to the desert? Had Dr Hajra and Mukul also gone there? Did this mean that we were no longer in any danger? Or were we going to walk straight into it?

Eight

Pokhran was 120 miles from Jodhpur. Jaisalmer was another seventy. It should not take more than six or seven hours to cover 190 miles. Or, at least, that was what our driver, Gurbachan Singh, told us. He was a plump and cheerful Sikh. I saw him taking his hands off the steering wheel at times, and clasping them behind his head. Then he would lean back in his seat and take a little rest. But the car stayed on course because Gurbachan rested the steering wheel on his fat paunch, even moving it when necessary, without putting his hands back on it. This action was actually not as difficult as it may sound, for there was virtually no traffic on the road. Besides, the road ran straight, without curves or bends, for as much as five or six miles in many places. Unless something went wrong, we would reach Jaisalmer by six o'clock in the evening.

The scenery started to change when we were only ten miles out of Jodhpur. I had never seen anything like it. Jodhpur had a number of hills around it. The fort there was made of red sandstone that came from those hills. But now, those hills disappeared, and were replaced by an undulating terrain that stretched right up to the horizon. It was a mixture of grass, red earth, sand and loose stones. Ordinary trees and plants had disappeared, too. Now all I could see were acacia, cacti and similar plants whose names I didn't know.

The other thing I noticed was wild camels. They were roaming freely, like cattle and sheep. Some were light brown, like milky tea; others had darker coats, closer to black coffee. I saw one of them munching on a thorny plant. Feluda said that the thorns frequently injured a camel's mouth; but since those bushes were its only source of food, the camel put up with the discomfort.

Feluda also told me a little about Jaisalmer. It was built in the twelfth century, and became the capital of the Bhati Rajputs. Only sixty-four miles from there was the border between India and Pakistan. Even ten years ago, going to Jaisalmer was quite difficult. There were no trains, and what roads there were often disappeared under the sand. The place was so dry that if it rained just for a day in a whole year, people thought they were lucky. When I asked him about battles, Feluda said Alauddin Khilji had once attacked Jaisalmer.

We had travelled for nearly ninety kilometres (fifty-six miles), when purely out of the blue, we got a puncture, which made the car give an unpleasant shriek, lurch and come to a halt by the side of the road. I felt quite cross with Gurbachan Singh. He had assured us that he had checked the pressure in each tyre and all was well. As a matter of fact, the car appeared to be new and in good condition.

We got out with Gurbachan. It would take at least fifteen minutes to change the tyre.

As soon as our eyes fell on the flat tyre, we realized what had caused the puncture. Strewn over a large area on the road were hundreds of nails. It was obvious that they were new and had been bought recently.

We exchanged glances. Gurbachan let out an expletive through clenched teeth that I shall not repeat here. Feluda said nothing. He simply stood there, arms akimbo, and stared at the road, deep in thought. His brows were drawn together in a frown. Lalmohan Babu took out a green notebook—it looked like a diary—from an old Japan Airlines bag, and scribbled something in it with a pencil.

By the time we finished changing the tyre, removed all the nails from the road and were ready to leave, it was a quarter to two. Feluda said to Gurbachan, ‘Sardarji, please keep an eye on the road. You can see that our enemies are trying to make things difficult for us!’

However, it wouldn’t do to go too slowly, if we were to reach Jaisalmer before nightfall. So Gurbachan Singh reduced his speed from sixty to forty. If he were to keep his eye on the road all the time, he could hardly move faster than ten or fifteen miles an hour.

About forty miles later, when we had covered almost a hundred miles, the second disaster hit us. It simply could not be avoided.

This time, instead of nails, thousands of drawing pins had been strewn over at least twenty feet of the road. Obviously, whoever wanted us to have a flat tyre was not taking any chances.

What was also obvious was that Gurbachan Singh did not have another spare tyre.

We all climbed out again. If Gurbachan had not been wearing a turban, he would probably have scratched his head. Feluda asked him, 'Is Pokhran a town or a village?'

'It is a town, Babu.' 'How far is it?'

'About twenty-five miles.'

'Oh God. What are we going to do?'

Gurbachan tried to be reassuring. Every taxi that plied on that route, he said, was known to him. If we waited until another taxi came along, he would borrow a spare from its driver. Then we could go to Pokhran and have our own punctured tyres mended. The question was, would a taxi come along? If so, when? How long were we supposed to wait in the middle of nowhere?

A group of three men passed us by, leading five camels. They were going in the direction of Jodhpur. Each man had such dark skin that it looked almost black. One of them sported a snowy white beard and sideburns. I saw Lalmohan Babu move closer to Feluda, possibly because he had caught the men casting curious glances at us.

'Which is the nearest railway station from here?' Feluda asked, removing the pins from the road. We had all joined him in this good deed, to save other cars from a similar fate.

'Ramdeora. It is seven or eight miles from here.'

'Ramdeora . . .!'

When all the pins had been removed, Feluda took out a Bradshaw timetable from his shoulder bag. One particular page was folded. Feluda opened the timetable at that page, ran his eye over it and said, 'It's no use. The morning train that leaves Jodhpur reaches Ramdeora at 3.45. It must have left Ramdeora by now.'

‘But isn’t there another train to Jaisalmer at night?’ I asked. ‘Yes, but that will reach Ramdeora very early in the morning, at 3.53. If we began walking now, we’d take at least two hours to get to Ramdeora. There might have been a point in walking all that way, if there was any chance of catching the morning train. We could then have travelled to Pokhran, if nothing else. Now in this godforsaken .

. .’ Feluda broke off.

Even under such difficult circumstances, Lalmohan Babu smiled and said in a somewhat unsteady voice, ‘Well, you must admit such a situation would be easier to find in a novel. Who knew even in real life . . .?’

Rather unexpectedly, Feluda raised a hand and stopped him. Our surroundings were completely silent, as if the entire world here had turned mute. In that silence, a faint noise reached our ears. There could be no mistake: chug-chug, chug-chug, chug-chug!

It was a train, the train to Pokhran. But where was the track?

I stared in the direction from which the noise was coming, and suddenly noticed a column of smoke. Almost immediately, I spotted a telegraph pole. I hadn’t seen it before because the ground sloped down and the red pole practically merged with the reddish brown earth. Had it been standing on higher ground, outlined against the sky, it would have been far more easily visible.

‘Run!’ shouted Feluda and began running towards the smoke. I followed suit. Lalmohan Babu followed me. To my amazement, he ran so fast—despite his thin and scraggy appearance—that he nearly caught up with Feluda, leaving me behind.

I could see grass under my feet, but instead of being green, it was as white as cotton wool. We scrambled down the slope, still moving as fast as we could, and reached the railway track. The train was now within a hundred yards.

Without a second’s hesitation, Feluda jumped into the middle of the track and began waving madly, both his arms raised high. The train began whistling loudly, but drowning the sound of the whistle rose Lalmohan Babu’s voice: ‘Stop! Stop! Halt, I say!’

Nothing worked. It was a small train, but not like the ones that Martin & Co. once used to run. If one stood by the tracks and raised a hand, those trains would stop, just like buses. This train, however, did nothing to reduce its speed. Whistling mightily, it came dangerously close, at which point Feluda was obliged to spring to safety. We simply stood and watched as the train coolly passed us by, clanging on its way, hiding the bright sun momentarily behind thick, black smoke. Even at a time like that, I couldn't help thinking that I might have seen such a scene only in a Hollywood western. Not once did I ever imagine I'd get to witness a scene like that in my own country!

'Such arrogance!' remarked Lalmohan Babu when the train had gone. 'It didn't look bigger than a caterpillar, did it?'

'Bad luck!' muttered Feluda, 'That train was running late, yet we couldn't take advantage of that. If we could have somehow got to Pokhran, we might have found another taxi.'

Gurbachan Singh, with great thoughtfulness, had collected our luggage and was carrying it over, but now there was no need for it. I glanced briefly at the track. All that could be seen was smoke.

Suddenly, Lalmohan Babu spoke excitedly. 'What about camels?' he said.

'Camels?'

'Over there—look!'

Yes. Another group with camels was coming our way, this time from the direction of Jodhpur. 'Good idea, let's go!'

At Feluda's words, we began running again. 'When a camel really gets going, I've heard that it can cover twenty miles in an hour!' Lalmohan Babu told me as he ran.

We managed to stop the group. This time, there were two men and seven camels. 'We need three camels, and we want to go to Ramdeora. How much would that be?' asked Feluda in Hindi. Then it turned out that the men spoke some local dialect. However, they could understand a little Hindi, and speak it, too, albeit haltingly. Gurbachan spoke on our behalf. In the end, they agreed to lend us their camels for ten rupees.

'Can your camels run fast?' Lalmohan Babu wanted to know, 'We have a train to catch!'

Feluda laughed. 'Don't worry about running. Get on the camel first.'

'Get on . . . on its back?'

Perhaps for the first time, face to face with a camel, Lalmohan Babu realized the complexities involved in climbing on to its back. I was looking carefully at the animals. They looked perfectly weird, but had been saddled with care. On their backs were the kind of sheets with fringes and tassels that I'd seen earlier on elephants. On top of this sheet was a wooden seat. The sheet was covered with red, blue, yellow and green geometric patterns. Each camel had its long neck wrapped with a length of red fabric decorated with cowrie shells. It was clear that, in spite of their strange appearance, their owners loved and cared for them.

Three camels were now kneeling on the ground. Gurbachan Singh, by this time, had fetched every piece of our luggage, which consisted of two suitcases, two holdalls and a few smaller items. Gurbachan told us to wait for him in Pokhran, if we could catch the train in Ramdeora. He would definitely get to Pokhran that night. Our luggage was tied securely on to two of the other camels.

The first three camels were still waiting for us.

'You saw how they sat down, didn't you?' Feluda asked Lalmohan Babu. 'A camel folds its forelegs first, and the front part of its body comes down before its rear. When it gets up, expect just the opposite. It will raise its hind legs first. If you can remember that and lean backwards and forwards accordingly, you can avoid a great deal of embarrassment.'

'Emb-embarrassment?' Lalmohan Babu croaked.

'Here, watch me!'

Feluda jumped on to the back of the first camel. One of the men made a funny noise through his teeth. At once, the camel raised itself—quickly but awkwardly—in exactly the same manner that Feluda had just described. But he managed very well, there was no awkwardness.

'Come on, Topshe! You two are smaller and lighter than me, it should be easier for you,' Feluda called.

Both the Rajasthani men were grinning at our antics. I gathered all my courage and got on the second camel, which stood up immediately. Now I could tell where the real problem lay. When the hind legs were raised, the rider on the camel's back was likely to slide forward in one swift motion. If one could lean back and remain in that position as the camel rose to its feet, it would be easier to maintain one's balance. If I ever had to ride a camel again, I must remember that, I told myself.

'Dear G-ya-aa-d!' said Lalmohan Babu.

'God' became 'Gyad' for the simple reason that, even as he was uttering those words, the rear portion of the camel's body jerked into motion and Lalmohan Babu slid forward on its back. In the next instant, he was thrown back in the opposite direction. I heard him gulp noisily, as he lay horizontal on the camel's back, cast into an undignified heap.

Having said goodbye to Gurbachan Singh, we three Bedouins began our journey to Ramdeora.

'We must get to Ramdeora in half an hour. It's eight miles from here, isn't it? We have a train to catch!' Feluda yelled to the two men. At these words, one of them jumped up on his camel and marched forward briskly to take the lead. The second man shouted, 'Hei! Hei!' and every camel broke into a run.

As it was, the animals were ungainly and not exactly easy to sit on. When they lurched forward, my whole body swung and shook from side to side; but I didn't mind. We were running across a sandy terrain, covered with dry, scorched grass, and the place was Rajasthan—so, all in all, it was a thrilling experience.

Feluda was ahead of me, and Lalmohan Babu's camel was behind me. Feluda turned his head and called out, 'How do you find the ship of the desert, Mr Ganguli?'

I, too, looked back to see what Lalmohan Babu was doing. I found him making an awful grimace, as if he was in a freezing cold climate. His lips had parted, his teeth were clenched, and the veins on his neck were all standing out.

'What's the matter?' Feluda went on. 'Why don't you say something?'

Six words emerged from Lalmohan Babu, in five instalments: 'Ship . . . all right. . . but. . . talking . . . impossible!'

Laughter began bubbling up inside me once again, but I quelled it and focussed on the journey. We were now running alongside the railway track. In the distance, a column of smoke seemed to rise for a minute; then it disappeared. The sun was going down in the western horizon, and the landscape was changing. A hazy range of hills was visible in the far distance. On our right was a huge sand dune, unmarked by human feet. It was covered with wavy lines from top to bottom.

Perhaps the camels were not used to running fast for any length of time, so their speed faltered every now and then. When that happened, one of the men barked, 'Hei! Hei!' again, and the animals ran faster.

Around a quarter past four, a square structure came into view. It appeared to be a building, right next to the railway track. What could it be, if it wasn't a railway station?

As we got closer, it became clear that we were right. There was a signal, too. So it had to be a station, and the place had to be Ramdeora.

The camels had slowed down again. But now there was no need to shout at them. The train we were hoping to catch had come and gone. We couldn't tell when it had left, but there could be no doubt that we had missed it.

It meant only one thing. Until three o'clock in the morning, we would have to wait in this unknown place, in the middle of nowhere, by the side of the tiny structure that was trying to pass itself off as a station. And there was not a soul in sight.

2. Grammar Page

Unit
136

Verb + preposition 5 in/into/with/to/on

A verb + in

believe IN ... = believe that something exists, believe that it's good to do something

- Do you **believe in** God? (= do you believe that God exists?)
- I **believe in** saying what I think. (= I believe it is right to say what I think)

but '**believe** something' (= believe that it is true), '**believe** somebody' (= believe what they say):

- The story can't be true. I don't **believe it**. (*not believe in it*)

specialise IN ...

- Helen is a lawyer. She **specialises in** company law.

succeed IN ...

- I hope you **succeed in** finding the job you want.

B verb + into

break INTO ...

- Our house was **broken into** a few days ago, but nothing was stolen.

crash / drive / bump / run INTO ...

- He lost control of the car and **crashed into** a wall.

divide / cut / split something **INTO** two or more parts

- The book is **divided into** three parts.

translate a book etc. **FROM** one language **INTO** another

- She's a famous writer. Her books have been **translated into** many languages.

C verb + with

collide WITH ...

- There was an accident this morning. A bus **collided with** a car.

fill something **WITH** ... (*but full of* – see Unit 131A)

- Take this saucepan and **fill it with** water.

provide / supply somebody **WITH** ...

- The school **provides** all its students **with** books.

D verb + to

happen TO ...

- What **happened to** that gold watch you used to have? (= where is it now?)

invite somebody **TO** a party / a wedding etc.

- They only **invited** a few people **to** their wedding.

prefer one thing **TO** another

- I **prefer** tea **to** coffee.

E verb + on

concentrate ON ...

- I tried to **concentrate on** my work, but I kept thinking about other things.

insist ON ...

- I wanted to go alone, but some friends of mine **insisted on** coming with me.

spend (money) **ON** ...

- How much do you **spend on** food each week?