



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H30

**Adapted and modified by
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1. The Golden Fortress

Nine

It turned out that the station was in the process of being built. All it had at the moment was a platform and that structure, which was really a ticket window. Heaven knew when the building work would be completed. We selected a spot close to the ticket window and sat on our holdalls, preparing ourselves for a long wait. A kerosene lamp hung from a wooden post nearby, so when it got dark, we would at least be able to see one another.

There appeared to be signs of habitation not all that far from the station. Feluda went to have a look, then returned and said that although he had seen houses, there were no shops and nowhere to eat. All we had with us was a little water in our flasks, and Lalmohan Babu had a tin of goja (deep-fried pastry dipped in syrup). Perhaps we would have to spend the whole night on the strength of those.

The sun had set about ten minutes ago. It would soon be dark. Gurbachan Singh's arrival did not seem likely, as in the last three hours, we had not seen a single car go past, either towards Jodhpur or Jaisalmer. There was nothing to do but wait on the platform until the next train came at three o'clock.

Feluda was sitting on his suitcase and gazing steadily at the track. I watched him cracking the fingers of his right hand with his left. Obviously, he was anxious or agitated about something, which was why he wasn't saying much.

Lalmohan Babu opened his tin, bit into a goja and said, 'Who knew this would happen? If I didn't travel with you in the same compartment on the way from Agra, the entire nature of my holiday would not have changed like this, would it?'

'Why, do you mind?' Feluda asked.

'No, of course not!' Lalmohan Babu laughed. 'But it would certainly help if a few things were a bit clearer.'

'Which things in particular?'

'I don't really know what's going on, do I? I feel a bit like a shuttlecock—slapped from one side to the other, and back again. I mean, I don't even know who you are. Are you the hero, or the villain? Ha ha!'

‘Why do you want to know? What would you do, anyway, if you knew?’ Feluda asked with a smile. ‘When you write a novel, do you reveal everything at the outset? Why don’t you treat this entire Rajasthani experience as a novel? When it comes to an end, every mystery will be cleared up.’

‘And I? Will I still be alive, and in one piece?’

‘Well, you’ve already proved that you can run faster than a rabbit, if you have to. Isn’t that reassuring enough?’

I hadn’t realized it before, but someone had come and lit the kerosene lamp while we were talking. In its light, I suddenly saw two men, clad in local Rajasthani garb with turbans on their heads, making their way towards us. In their hands were stout sticks, which they were tapping on the ground. They stopped a few feet away, squatted and began a conversation in a completely incomprehensible language.

One thing about those men made my jaw fall open. Both were sporting huge moustaches. They didn’t just turn upward, but had, in fact, coiled at least four times on either side of the men’s faces. The final effect was like the spring fitted inside a clock. If they were pulled straight, each side would probably measure eighteen inches. Lalmohan Babu, too, seemed totally dumbstruck by the sight.

‘Bandits!’ muttered Feluda under his breath.

‘Really?’ Lalmohan Babu quickly poured himself some water from the flask and gulped it down.

‘Undoubtedly.’

Lalmohan Babu tried to replace the lid on his tin, but dropped it on the platform with a loud clang.

The noise made him jump, and he became more nervous.

I looked at the two men closely. Their skin was as dark and shiny as a freshly polished shoe. One of them took out a cigarette, placed it between his lips, and slapped all his pockets until he found a matchbox in one of them. But it turned out to be empty, so he threw it away on the track.

A sudden noise made me glance at Feluda. He had flicked his lighter on and was offering it to the man. The man looked taken aback at first, then leant forward to light his cigarette. After that, he took the lighter from Feluda and examined it closely, pressing it here and there before finding the right spot and lighting it once more. Lalmohan Babu tried to speak, but his voice sounded choked.

The man switched the lighter on and off a few times, before returning it to Feluda. Lalmohan Babu began stuffing his tin back into his suitcase, but it slipped from his hand and, this time, the whole tin fell on the ground, making a racket that was ten times worse than the previous one. Feluda paid him no attention. He simply took out his blue notebook from his shoulder bag and began leafing through its pages in the dim light from the kerosene lamp.

Suddenly, my eyes fell on a thorny bush a little way beyond the ticket window. A light was falling on it. Where was it coming from?

It was growing brighter. Then I heard a car. It was coming from the direction of Jaisalmer. Oh good. Perhaps Gurbachan Singh would now be able to borrow a spare tyre.

The car came into view, then whooshed past the little station and vanished towards Jodhpur. My watch showed half past seven.

Feluda raised his eyes from his notebook and looked at Lalmohan Babu. 'Lalmohan Babu,' he said, 'you write novels, don't you? You must know a lot of things. Can you tell me what a blister is, and what causes it?'

'Blister? . . . Blister?' Lalmohan Babu sounded completely taken aback. 'Why does one get blisters, you mean? But one could, quite easily. I mean, suppose you burnt your finger while lighting your cigarette . . .'

'Yes. But why should that cause a blister?'

'Oh. I see. Why? You want to know the reason?'

'All right, never mind. Tell me something else. If you look at a man from a height, why does he appear short?'

Lalmohan Babu simply stared without a word. Even in that dim light, I could see him rubbing his hands uncertainly. The two Rajasthani men were still talking in that same language, using the same tone. Feluda's eyes were fixed on Lalmohan Babu's face.

Lalmohan Babu licked his lips and found his voice. 'Why are you . . . I mean, all these questions . . .?'

'I have one more. And I'm sure you know the answer to this one.'

Lalmohan Babu said nothing. It was as if Feluda had hypnotized him.

'This morning, what were you doing among the trees behind the Circuit House, creeping up to my window?'

Just for a moment, Lalmohan Babu remained motionless. Then life returned to his limbs, and he burst into speech. 'But I was going to see you!' he declared, gesticulating wildly. 'Believe me, Mr Mitter, it was you I wanted to see. But that peacock made such a racket, and then I heard someone scream . . . so I got all startled and nervous and so ...!'

'Was that the only way to get to my room? And was it necessary to wear a turban and a shawl to come and see me?'

'Look, that shawl was only a bed sheet. I took it from my room. And the turban? That was a towel from the Circuit House. I had to have some sort of a disguise, don't you see? Or how could I spy on that man?'

'Which man?'

'Mr Trotter. Very suspicious, that man. But thank goodness I did go there. See what I found, lying on the grass outside his window. It's a secret code. I was going to pass it on to you, when that peacock cried out and spoilt everything!'

I was looking carefully at Lalmohan Babu's watch. Yes, it was the same watch I had seen from the terrace in the Circuit House.

Lalmohan Babu opened his suitcase and groped in it. He fished out a crumpled piece of paper and handed it to Feluda. I could see that it had been screwed into a ball, but straightened later.

I peered over Feluda's shoulder to see what was written on it with a pencil. It said:

IP 1625+U

U – M

Feluda frowned darkly at the piece of paper. Was it algebra? I couldn't make head or tail of it.

Lalmohan Babu whispered a couple of times, 'Highly suspicious!'

Feluda was muttering to himself, '1625 . . . 1625 . . . where have I seen that number recently?' 'Could it be the number of a taxi?' I asked.

'No. 1625 . . . sixteen twenty-fi—!' Feluda left his sentence incomplete and pounced upon his shoulder bag. Then he took out the railway timetable and opened it at the page that was folded. He ran a finger quickly down the page, and stopped abruptly.

'Yes, here it is. 1625 is the arrival.' 'Where?'

'Pokhran.'

'In that case,' I remarked, 'the "P" might mean "Pokhran". 1625 in Pokhran. What about the rest?' 'The rest is . . . "IP" and then "+U" . . . what could it be?'

'I don't like that "M" in the second line,' Lalmohan Babu told us. 'The letter M always reminds me of the word "murder".'

'Wait, dear sir, let me first deal with the top line!'

Lalmohan Babu continued to mutter under his breath, 'Murder. . . mystery . . . massacre . . . monster . . .!'

Feluda sat with the piece of paper on his lap, lost in thought. Lalmohan Babu took out his tin of goja and offered it to me again. When I'd taken one, he turned to Feluda and said, 'By the way, how did you know I'd crept up to your window? Did you see me?'

Feluda helped himself to a goja. 'You took your turban off, but did not brush your hair. When I met you shortly after the incident, the state of your hair made me quite suspicious.'

Lalmohan Babu smiled. 'I hope you won't mind my saying it, sir, but you strike me as a detective. A hundred per cent, full-fledged detective!'

Without saying anything, Feluda handed him one of his cards. Lalmohan Babu's eyes began glinting.

'Oh. Pradosh C. Mitter! Is that your real name?'

'Yes. Why, is there something wrong with it?'

'No, no. But isn't it strange?'

‘What is?’

‘Your name. Look, it matches your profession. P-r-a-d-o-s-h, pronounced pro-dosh. “Pro” stands for “professional”; and “dosh” is the Bengali word for “crime”. The “C” is “to see”, that is “to investigate”. So the whole thing works out as Pradosh C = Professional Crime Investigator!’

‘Great. Well done. But what about “Mitter”?’

‘Mitter? Oh, that . . . I’ll have to think about it,’ said Lalmohan Babu, scratching his head.

‘There’s no need. I can solve it for you. You have seen meters on taxis, haven’t you? It’s the same thing—that is to say, it’s an indicator. So it doesn’t just investigate, it also indicates. It picks out the criminal after an investigation and points a finger at him. Would you go along with that?’

‘Bravo!’ said Lalmohan Babu, clapping. But Feluda grew serious again. He glanced at the code, transferred it to his shirt pocket and took out a cigarette.

‘The “I” and the “U” can be easily explained,’ he said, ‘that “I” is probably the fellow who wrote the code. And “U” is “you”. But that plus sign doesn’t make sense. And the second line is totally obscure .

. . Look, Topshe, why don’t you spread your holdall on the platform here and try to get some sleep? You, too, Lalmohan Babu. The train won’t be here for another seven and a half hours. I will wake you up at the right time.’

It was not a bad idea. I unstrapped our holdall and spread it out.

As soon as I lay flat on my back, my eyes went to the sky and I realized I had never seen so many stars in my life. Was the sky so clear because we were close to a desert? Perhaps.

Soon, my eyes grew heavy with sleep. Once, I heard Lalmohan Babu say, ‘I say, riding a camel has made my joints ache!’ Then I thought I heard him mutter, ‘M is murder.’ After that I fell asleep.

The next thing I knew, Feluda was trying to shake me awake. ‘Topshe! Get up, here comes the train!’

I scrambled to my feet and began rolling my holdall. By the time the straps had been fastened, the headlight on the train had come into view.

Ten

It was a passenger train running on meter gauge. Its compartments were therefore quite small. There were not many passengers, either; hence when we found an empty first-class compartment, it did not surprise me.

Inside the coach, it was dark. We groped for a switch, found it and pressed it—to no avail. Lalmohan Babu said, ‘Bulbs in railway compartments tend to vanish even in civilized areas. In this land of bandits, one shouldn’t even expect to find any!’

‘The two of you can take the benches. I will spread a durrie on the floor and manage. We have six whole hours in hand—time enough for a nice, long nap!’ said Feluda.

Lalmohan Babu raised a mild objection to this plan, ‘Why should you be on the floor? Let me . . .!’ But Feluda said, ‘Certainly not!’ so sternly that he said nothing more. I saw him spread his holdall on one of the benches, not merely because of Feluda’s words, but perhaps also out of concern for his aching joints.

The train began pulling out of the platform. Within a minute of leaving the station, suddenly a figure jumped on to the footboard of our carriage. Lalmohan Babu said with a laugh, ‘Hey, this is a reserved compartment. Ladies only!’

Then the door swung open quickly, and a bright light from a torch dazzled our eyes for a few seconds. We saw a hand coming towards us. The point of a gun shone in that light. All of us raised our arms high above our heads.

‘Get up, dear hearts! The door’s open, get out of the train. All of you!’ It was the voice of Mandar Bose.

‘But . . . but the train’s still running!’ said Lalmohan Babu in a trembling voice.

‘Shut up!’ roared Mandar Bose and inched a little closer. The torchlight was playing on our faces constantly, never standing still for more than a few moments.

‘You trying to be funny?’ Mr Bose went on. ‘What do you do in Calcutta? Don’t you climb in and out running buses? Get up, I tell you!’

Just as he finished speaking, something happened so totally unexpectedly that it took my breath away. I shall never forget it as long as I live. Feluda's right arm came down in a flash. He grasped a corner of the durrie and yanked it off the floor. As a result, Mandar Bose lost his balance. His feet slipped, then rose in the air for a second, before he fell, the top half of his body hitting the wall of the carriage with a bang. At the same time, the revolver was knocked out of his hand. It fell on Lalmohan Babu's bench, and the torch dropped from his left hand on to the floor.

All that happened in a split second. Even before Mandar Bose crashed down on the floor, Feluda had sprung up, clutching his own revolver, which had come out of his jacket pocket.

'Get up!' This time it was Feluda who ordered Mandar Bose. The meter gauge train was swinging and swaying across the desert, making a lot of noise. Lalmohan Babu had, in the meantime, grabbed Mr Bose's revolver and stuffed it into his own Japan Airlines bag.

'Get up!' Feluda shouted again.

The torch was rolling on the floor. I could see that it should really be focussed on Mr Bose, or the fellow might take advantage of the darkness and try to trick us. Some such thought made me bend down to pick it up—which led to disaster. Even now, my blood runs cold when I think about it.

Mandar Bose was facing my bench. Just as I bent down, he suddenly lunged forward, grabbed me and got to his feet, holding me firmly in front of himself. As a result, I became a protective shield for him. Even at such a critical moment, I couldn't help admiring his cunning. It was clear that although round one had gone to Feluda most unexpectedly, he was certainly in a difficult position in the second round. And I was wholly to blame.

Mandar Bose kept a tight hold on me as he began moving towards the open door. I could feel something sharp hurting my shoulder. Then I realized it was one of his nails. Suddenly, I remembered little Neelu complaining that his hand hurt.

We were now standing very close to the door. I could feel the biting cold night air. It was brushing against my left shoulder.

Mandar Bose took another step. Feluda's gun was pointed at him, but now Feluda couldn't really do anything. The torch was still rolling on the floor as the train swayed from side to side.

Suddenly, I was flung forward, with considerable force. It made me collide with Feluda. The sound that came a second later told me that Mandar Bose had jumped out of the moving train. What I could not tell was whether he had survived or not.

Feluda went to the door and peered out. He came back a couple of minutes later, replaced his revolver and said, 'I hope he breaks a few bones, or it will be a matter of great regret.'

Lalmohan Babu laughed—a trifle loudly—and said, 'Didn't I tell you the man was suspicious?'

I gulped some water from the flask. My heartbeat was gradually returning to normal, as was my breathing. I was still finding it difficult to grasp the enormity of what had just happened, in a matter of minutes.

'He got away this time only because of dear Topesh,' said Feluda, 'or I'd have used my gun to drag a full confession out of him. However . . .' he stopped. After a brief pause, he said, 'When I come face to face with danger, my brain starts working much more efficiently. I've noticed it before. Now I can see what that code meant.'

'Really?' Lalmohan Babu sounded amazed.

'It's actually quite simple. "I" is the man writing the note, "P" is Pokhran, "U" is "you", and "M" is "Mitter". Pradosh Mitter.'

'And the plus and minus signs?'

'IP 1625 + U. That means "I am arriving at Pokhran at 4.25. You must join me."'

'And U – M? What does that mean?'

'That's even simpler. It means "you get rid of Mitter".'

'Get rid . . .?' Lalmohan Babu could barely speak. 'You mean the minus sign stands for murder?'

‘No, not necessarily. If you were forced to jump out of a moving train, chances are you’d be injured. And, in any case, you’d have to wait another twenty-four hours for the next train. The crooks would have finished their business in that time. What they really needed to do was stop us from going to Jaisalmer. That’s why they littered the road with nails and pins. But when they realized that hadn’t worked, Bose tried to get us off the train.’

Suddenly, I became aware of a smell. ‘I can smell a cigar, Feluda!’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes, I got that smell as soon as the fellow jumped into the compartment. It was obvious even in the Circuit House that someone was smoking cigars. Remember that golden foil Mukul found? Cigars are wrapped in that kind of foil.’

‘And there’s something else. One of his nails is much longer than others. My shoulder must be as badly scratched as Neelu’s hand.’

‘All right, but who is the “I” who is giving all the instructions?’ Lalmohan Babu wanted to know. Feluda’s voice sounded solemn when he spoke. ‘That warning someone had left for me in the Circuit House, and this handwritten code both point to one person.’

‘Who?’ Lalmohan Babu and I cried together.

‘Dr Hemanga Mohan Hajra.’

The rest of the night passed without further excitement. I slept for about three hours. When I woke, it was bright and sunny outside. Feluda was no longer lying on the floor. He was seated in one corner of my bench and staring out of the window. On his lap was his blue notebook, and in his hands were two notes. One was the warning, and the other was the letter Dr Hajra had left for us before leaving Jodhpur. I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter to seven. Lalmohan Babu was still fast asleep. I felt very hungry, but had no wish to eat another goja. We would reach Jaisalmer at nine. Somehow, I must put up with the pangs of hunger until then.

The scenery outside was really strange. For mile after mile stretched an undulating landscape— there was not a single house in sight, not a single human being, not even a tree. Yet I could not call it a desert because, although there was a little sand, most of it consisted of dry, pale grass, reddish earth and blackish-red chips of stone. It seemed incredible that, after such a landscape, we would find a whole town again.

The train stopped at a station called Jetha-chandan. I opened the railway timetable and discovered that the next station was called Thaiyat Hamira, and the one after that was Jaisalmer. At Jetha-chandan, there were no shops or stalls on the platform, no hawkers, no porters, no passengers. It was as if our train had somehow arrived at a place that had not yet been discovered by man. It was no different from a rocket landing on moon.

Lalmohan Babu woke soon after the train started moving again. He yawned and said, 'I had the most fantastic dream, you know. There was this gang of bandits, each with a moustache that looked like the horns of a ram. I had hypnotized them, and was leading them through a castle. There was a tunnel. We went through the tunnel and reached an underground chamber. I knew there was some treasure buried in that chamber, but all I could see was a camel sitting on the floor, chewing gojas!'

'How do you know that?' Feluda asked. 'Did the camel open its mouth and show you what it was chewing?'

'No, no. But I saw my tin—there it was, lying in front of the camel!'

Soon after we left Thaiyat Hamira, in the distance, the hazy outline of a hill came into view. It was a Rajasthani table mountain with a flat top. Our train appeared to be going in that direction.

Around eight o'clock, we could dimly see some sort of structure on top of that hill. Slowly, it became clear that it was a fortress. It stood like a crown atop the hill, spread all around its flattened top. It was bathed in the bright light of the early morning sun, which was falling directly upon it from a dazzling sky. Quite involuntarily, three words slipped out of my mouth: 'The golden fortress!'

'That's right,' Feluda told me. 'This is the only golden fortress in Rajasthan. That bowl in that shop in Jodhpur raised my suspicions. Then I looked it up in the guide book, and my suspicions were confirmed. The fort and the bowl were both made with the same stone—yellow sandstone. If Mukul is truly a jatismar, and if there is truly something like a previous life, then I think he was born somewhere in this region.'

'But does Dr Hajra know that?' I asked.

Feluda did not reply. He was still staring at the fort. 'You know something Topshe?' he said finally. 'There is something special about that golden light. It has helped me see the whole pattern of the spider's web, very clearly!'

2. Grammar Page

Unit
137

Phrasal verbs 1 Introduction

A We often use verbs with:

in	on	up	away	by	about	over	round or around
out	off	down	back	through	along	forward	

So you can say **look out** / **get on** / **take off** / **run away** etc. These are *phrasal verbs*.

We often use **on/off/out** etc. with verbs of movement. For example:

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| get on | <input type="checkbox"/> | The bus was full. We couldn't get on . |
| drive off | <input type="checkbox"/> | A woman got into the car and drove off . |
| come back | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sarah is leaving tomorrow and coming back on Saturday. |
| turn round | <input type="checkbox"/> | When I touched him on the shoulder, he turned round . |

B Often the second word (**on/off/out** etc.) gives a special meaning to the verb. For example:

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--|
| break down | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sorry I'm late. The car broke down . (= the engine stopped working) |
| find out | <input type="checkbox"/> | I never found out who sent me the flowers. (= I never discovered) |
| take off | <input type="checkbox"/> | It was my first flight. I was nervous as the plane took off . (= went into the air) |
| give up | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tried many times to contact her. In the end I gave up . (= stopped trying) |
| get on | <input type="checkbox"/> | How was the exam? How did you get on ? (= How did you do?) |
| get by | <input type="checkbox"/> | My French isn't good, but it's enough to get by . (= enough to manage) |

For more phrasal verbs, see Units 138–145.

C Sometimes a phrasal verb is followed by a *preposition*. For example:

- | <i>phrasal verb</i> | <i>preposition</i> | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--|
| look up | at | <input type="checkbox"/> We looked up at the plane as it flew above us. |
| run away | from | <input type="checkbox"/> Why did you run away from me? |
| keep up | with | <input type="checkbox"/> You're walking too fast. I can't keep up with you. |
| look forward | to | <input type="checkbox"/> Are you looking forward to your trip? |

D Sometimes a phrasal verb has an *object*. For example:

- I turned on **the light**. (**the light** is the *object*)

Usually there are two possible positions for the object. You can say:

- I **turned on** the light. *object* or I **turned** the light **on**. *object*

But if the object is a *pronoun* (**it/them/me/him** etc.), only one position is possible:

- I turned **it** on. (*not* I turned on it)

In the same way, you can say:

- I'm going to { **take off** my shoes.
take my shoes **off**.

but These shoes are uncomfortable. I'm going to **take them off**. (*not* take off them)

- Don't { **wake up** the baby.
wake the baby **up**.

but The baby is asleep. Don't **wake her up**. (*not* wake up her)

- Don't { **throw away** this box.
throw this box **away**.

but I want to keep this box, so don't **throw it away**. (*not* throw away it)