



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H31

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1. The Golden Fortress

Eleven

The first thing we did on getting off the train in Jaisalmer was to stop at a tea stall and have a cup of tea and some sweets. It was a new kind of sweet, one that we hadn't had before. Feluda said it would do us good as it had glucose in it. A lot of activity lay ahead, the glucose would provide extra energy.

We emerged from the station to find that there was not a single vehicle we could hire—no tongas, ekkas, cycle-rickshaws, or taxis. There was a jeep waiting, but it was obviously not meant for hire. When we got off the train, I had noticed a black Ambassador standing outside. But now even that had gone.

'It's a small town,' Feluda said. 'I don't think a place is all that far from another. My guide book says there's a dak bungalow. Let's go and find it.'

We set off, carrying our luggage. Soon enough, we found a petrol station, where a man gave us directions. In order to get to the dak bungalow, we would not have to climb the hill, he said. The bungalow was located on the plains, to the south of the hill. As we began walking again, Feluda looked at the tyre marks on the sand and said, 'That Ambassador must have come this way!'

About fifteen minutes later, we came upon a bungalow. A wooden board fixed to its gate told us that we had come to the right place. The black Ambassador was parked in front of it.

An old man wearing a khaki shirt and a short dhoti came out of an outhouse. On his head was a turban. Perhaps he had seen us arrive. Feluda asked him in Hindi if he was the chowkidar. The man nodded. It appeared from the way he was looking at us that our arrival was unexpected, and he didn't altogether approve of our sudden appearance, as no one was allowed to stay in the bungalow without prior permission.

Feluda said nothing about staying there. All we wanted to do, he told the man, was leave our luggage in the bungalow. Then we'd try to get the necessary permission. 'You'll have to see the Raja's secretary for that,' said the chowkidar and pointed us in the right direction. The palace, also made of yellow

sandstone, was at some distance; but certain portions of it were visible, rising above the trees.

The chowkidar raised no objection to our luggage being left there, He showed us into a small room, where we dumped our suitcases and holdalls. Then we filled our flasks with fresh water, slung them on our shoulders and asked him the way to the fort.

‘You want to go to the fort?’

The question came from the far end of a passage. A gentleman had just come out of a room. He appeared no more than forty, had a clear complexion, and a sharp nose, under which was a thin moustache, very carefully trimmed. A second later, he was joined by an older man, who was clutching a stick—the kind that we had seen in the market in Jodhpur—and was wearing an odd, somewhat ill-fitting black suit. I could not tell which part of the country they might be from. The second man was limping slightly, which explained the need for the stick.

‘Yes, a look at the fort might be interesting,’ said Feluda. ‘Come along with us, we are going that way.’

Feluda thought for a few moments, then agreed. ‘Thank you very much, it is very kind of you,’ he said

As we made our way to the car, Lalmohan Babu whispered into my ear: ‘I hope these men won’t try to throw us out of a moving car!’

The car began its journey to the fort. The man with the stick asked us, ‘Are you from Calcutta?’ ‘Yes,’ Feluda replied.

To our left, in the distance, rising from the sand, were stone pillars. We had seen something similar in Devikund. Feluda said such structures were quite common in Rajasthan.

Our car started going uphill. About a minute later, we heard another car. It was tooting urgently. That was a bit surprising, since we were not driving all that slowly and getting in its way. Feluda was sitting at the back with the two gentlemen. He turned round, peered through the glass and suddenly said to our driver, ‘Stop! Please stop!’

Our car pulled up by the side of the road. At once, a taxi came along and stopped on our right.

Holding its steering wheel was Gurbachan Singh, greeting us with a smile.

The three of us climbed out. Feluda said to the two men, 'Thank you so much for your help. But this is our own taxi. It had broken down on the way to Jaisalmer, but now it's caught up with us.'

When we were back in his car, Gurbachan told us how, at half past six that morning, he had spotted another taxi going back from Jaisalmer. He knew its driver, and managed to get a spare tyre from him. Then he covered ninety miles in two hours. When he reached Jaisalmer, he simply waited at the petrol station, until he spotted us inside the black Ambassador.

A little later, we found ourselves going through a market. There were shops everywhere, a loudspeaker was playing a Hindi song and, outside a small cinema, was a poster advertising a Hindi film.

'You want to see the fort?' Gurbachan asked.

'Yes,' Feluda told him. Gurbachan stopped the taxi and said, 'This is its gate.'

To our right was a massive gate, beyond which rose a road, paved with stone, which led to a second gate. That, I realized, was the real entrance to the fort, the first one acted as the front gate. Behind the entrance, rising steeply, was the golden fortress of Jaisalmer.

A guard was standing outside the front gate. Feluda went and asked him if he had seen a man with a small boy that morning. He indicated Mukul's height.

'Yes, sir, they were here. But they've now left,' replied the guard. 'When did they leave?' 'About half an hour ago.'

'Did they come by car?' 'Yes, sir. In a taxi.'

'Which way did they go? Can you remember?'

The guard nodded and pointed at the road that went further west. We got back to the car and followed it, passing through little alleys and more shops. Lalmohan Babu was sitting next to Gurbachan. Feluda and I were in the back seat. After a few minutes, Feluda suddenly asked, 'You didn't bring your weapon with you, did you?'

Startled by such a question, Lalmohan Babu said, 'The dodger? No, sorry, I mean that Nepali dagger?'

'Yes, sir. Your dagger.' 'That's in my suitcase.'

‘In that case, take out Mandar Bose’s revolver from your Japan Airlines bag and tuck it into your belt. Make sure it isn’t visible.’

From Lalmohan Babu’s movements, it became clear that he was following Feluda’s instruction. I was dying to see his face, but couldn’t.

‘Don’t worry,’ Feluda said reassuringly, ‘If things get sticky, all you have to do is take that gun out and point it in front of you.’

‘What if b-b-behind me, there’s . . .?’

‘If you hear a noise behind you, then just turn around. Then your “behind” will become your “front”, see?’

‘And you? Are you I mean, today, are you going to be non-violent?’ ‘That depends.’

Our taxi left the market behind and came to an open space. We had already asked a couple of men on the way, and learnt that the other taxi had been seen coming this way. Besides, we had also seen tyre-marks in the sand from time to time, which told us that we were following the same route that Dr Hemanga Hajra had taken.

Gurbachan Singh came up with more information. ‘This is the way to Mohangarh,’ he said. ‘I could drive for another mile, but after that the road gets really rough. Only jeeps can travel on that road, nothing else.’

But we didn’t have to go another mile. Only a little later, we saw a taxi standing on one side of the road. To our right, at some distance, were a number of old, abandoned stone houses. All the roofs had caved in. Clearly, it had once been a village. We had seen similar villages elsewhere. People had moved out of them a long time ago. The walls of these houses were still standing only because they were made of stone.

We told Gurbachan to wait, and made our way to the houses. I saw Gurbachan get out of his car and go towards the other one, perhaps to chat with its driver.

Everything was eerily silent. If I turned my head, I could see the fort behind me, on top of the hill. Opposite the road, another hill rose steeply. At its foot, spread over a wide, open area were rows of yellow stones, embedded in the ground. They looked like giant spice-grinders. ‘Graves of warriors,’ whispered Feluda.

Lalmohan Babu spoke, in a hoarse yet squeaky voice, 'I . . . I . . . have low blood pressure!'

'Don't you worry,' Feluda replied. 'It will soon rise higher, I promise you, and stop exactly where it should.'

We were now quite close to the houses. A path ran straight through them. I realized this village was different from the ones I had seen in Bengal. It had a simple, geometric plan.

But where were the people who had travelled in the other taxi? Where was Mukul? And Dr Hajra? Had something happened to Mukul?

Suddenly, I became aware of a noise. It was faint, but audible if I strained my ears: thud, thud, thud, thud!

We walked on, very carefully and very silently. Then we reached a crossroad where two lanes intersected. The noise was coming from the right. Ten or twelve houses stood by the road. There were yawning gaps between their walls and where once there must have been doors.

We turned right and resumed walking stealthily.

Feluda uttered one word through his teeth, almost inaudibly, 'Revolver!' I saw that his hand had disappeared under his jacket. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a revolver in Lalmohan Babu's hand, which was trembling violently.

A sudden crunching noise made us come to a halt. In the next instant, through the door of a house at the far end on our left, appeared Mukul, running fast. Then he saw us, ran even faster, and flung himself on Feluda's chest. He was gasping, his face was deathly pale.

I opened my mouth to ask him what had happened, but Feluda placed a finger on his lips and stopped me from speaking aloud.

'Please look after him until I return!' he whispered to Lalmohan Babu, and left Mukul in his charge. Then he proceeded towards the house from which we had just seen Mukul emerge. I followed Feluda.

The strange noise was getting louder. It sounded as if someone was lifting stones. Thud! Bang!

Clang! It went on.

Feluda flattened himself against the wall as we got close to the house. A couple of steps later, we were able to peer through the gap left by the missing door. With his back to us, crouching over a huge pile of rubble, was Dr Hajra. Like a madman, he was removing stone after stone from that heap, and casting each one aside. He had no idea that we were standing so close.

Feluda took another step, pointing his revolver at Dr Hajra. Suddenly, we heard a flutter above our heads.

A peacock swooped down from the compound wall. It sped towards Dr Hajra the instant it landed, and attacked him, pecking hard just under his left ear. Dr Hajra, who was still crouching over the stones, could only scream in agony and press his hand over that spot. At once, the white cuff of his shirt turned red.

But the peacock hadn't finished. It continued to attack him, pecking wherever it could. Dr Hajra turned, took a step towards the door in an attempt to escape, and saw us. He started as if he'd seen a pair of ghosts. We stepped aside. The peacock chased him out through the door.

'You did not imagine, did you, that a peacock would have built its nest—and that nest would contain its eggs—in the same spot where the treasure was buried?'

Feluda's voice sounded as cold as steel. His revolver was pointed at Dr Hajra. It was clear to me now that the real culprit in this whole affair was Dr Hajra—and he had been suitably punished already—but there were so many other things that still seemed hazy that my head started reeling.

Then we heard a car.

Dr Hajra fell to the ground. He was lying on his stomach. He lifted his head and turned it slowly towards Feluda. His left hand, clutching a bloodstained handkerchief, was still pressed against his wound.

'There is absolutely no hope left for you. I hope you realize that? Every route of escape is closed, and . . .'

Before Feluda could finish speaking, Dr Hajra sprang to his feet and began running blindly in the opposite direction, away from the derelict house. Feluda lowered his gun because there really was no way that Dr Hajra could now escape. Two men, whom I recognized, were walking towards us. The one who was not hampered by a stick caught Dr Hajra neatly in his arms, as if he were a cricket ball.

The other man clutching the stick approached Feluda. I saw Feluda transfer his revolver to his left hand and offer the man his right hand. 'Hello, Dr Hajra!' he said.

What! That man was Dr Hajra?

He shook hands with Feluda. 'And you are Pradosh Mitter?'

'Yes. Those new naagras caused blisters on your feet, didn't they? Are they still bothering you?'

The real Dr Hajra smiled. 'I rang Mr Dhar the day before yesterday. He told me you were here. I had no problem in recognizing you from his description. Allow me to introduce you—this is Inspector Rathor.'

'And what about him?' Feluda pointed at the other man, whom until now we had known as Dr Hajra. He was now handcuffed and hanging his head, 'Is that Bhavananda?'

'Yes,' Dr Hajra replied, 'alias Amiyanath Burmun, alias the Great Bar-man—Wizard of the East!'

Twelve

Bhavananda was handed over to the local police. The charges against him were many. They included an attempt to murder Hemanga Hajra, disappearing with his belongings, and trying to pass himself off as Dr Hajra.

We were back in the dak bungalow, having coffee (made with camel's milk) on the veranda. Mukul was romping happily on the lawn in front of us. He knew he would leave for Calcutta the same night. Having seen the golden fortress, he had no wish to remain in Rajasthan any longer.

Feluda turned to the real Dr Hajra and said, 'Bhavananda was truly a fraud, wasn't he? I mean, what he did in Chicago, and all that I read in the press reports . . . was all of it true?'

'Yes. One hundred per cent. Bhavananda and his accomplice cheated and swindled others in various countries, not just one. Besides, back in Chicago, they were doing something else. Not only were they out to deceive everyone, but they were also spreading evil tales and rumours about me, which was affecting my work. So, in the end, I was forced to take certain steps. But all that happened four years ago. I do not know when they returned to India. I came back only three months ago. One day, I happened to be in Mr Dhar's shop, when I heard about his son. So I went to meet him. You know the rest. When I decided to travel to Rajasthan with Mukul, I had no idea I'd be followed!'

'Who wouldn't want to kill two birds with one stone?' Feluda asked. 'There was the chance to grab that hidden treasure, plus settle scores with you . . . But didn't you see them anywhere in Calcutta?'

'No, not once. The first time I met them was in the refreshment room in the station at Bandikui. The two men came up to me and began chatting.'

'You didn't recognize them?'

'No, how could I? I had only seen them in Chicago, where they had long hair, flowing beards and fat moustaches!'

'What happened next?'

‘They sat at the same table and had a meal with us. They told Mukul they knew magic and even pulled some tricks. Then they got into the same compartment with us. I got off at Kisangarh to show Mukul the fort there, but didn’t realize that those two characters had followed me. They reached the fort soon after us, and hid somewhere until the coast was clear. It was a deserted place, in any case. There was no one in sight. When they found an opportunity, they pushed me down a slope. I rolled down, perhaps a hundred feet. Luckily, my fall was broken by a clump of bushes. If I take my shirt off, you’ll see that my body is still covered with bruises. Anyway, I remained by the side of that bush for a whole hour. I wanted them to think that they had managed to get rid of me, and leave with Mukul. At least, Mukul would then be safe. By the time I got up and walked to the station, the eight o’clock train to Marwar had gone. Those two criminals had left by the same train, with Mukul and my luggage. All my papers were in my suitcase, so there was no way I could prove to anyone who I really was.’

‘Didn’t Mukul mind going with them?’

Dr Hajra smiled. ‘Mukul was in a totally distracted state of mind. Didn’t you realize that? He had no problem leaving his own parents and setting off with me. So why should he make a distinction between one strange man and another? Bhavananda told him he would take him to the golden fortress. That was enough to entice Mukul. Anyway, I didn’t give up. If anything, I was more determined now to get to the bottom of this business. Fortunately, I still had my wallet with me. So I could buy new clothes—local Rajasthani ones. I packed my old torn ones into a bundle. I wasn’t used to wearing naagras, you see, so I got blisters on my feet.

‘The next day, I boarded the train at Kisangarh and got into your compartment. Then I took the same train as you from Marwar to Jodhpur. I went to stay in a place called Raghunath Sarai. I knew someone in Jodhpur—one Professor Trivedi. But, at first, I told him nothing. If the matter came to be known, the two men might have tried to run away, or Mukul himself might have felt scared and refused to cooperate. By then I had guessed that the fort in Jaisalmer was where Mukul should be taken. All I had to do was wait until Bhavananda had the same idea and left with Mukul. Until then, my job was to keep an eye on the pair.’

‘We saw someone hanging around the Circuit House on the very first day. It was you, wasn’t it?’ ‘Yes, and that caused another problem. Mukul saw me,

and seemed to recognize me! At least, that's how it appeared from the way he came out of the gate and began walking straight towards me.' 'So, later, you followed Bhavananda and got into the same train that was going to Pokhran?' 'Yes. The strangest thing was that I saw you from the train, trying to stop it!'

'Bhavananda must have seen me, too. He would then have realized we would try to catch the early morning train from Ramdeora.'

Dr Hajra continued with his story. 'Before I caught that train, I told Trivedi to inform the police in Jaisalmer. Before that, I had spoken to Mr Dhar from Trivedi's house; and then I borrowed one of his suits to dress normally.'

'And when you got to Pokhran, you saw that Bhavananda's assistant was already there with a taxi, is that right?' Feluda wanted to know.

'That's where things went wrong. I lost them. Then I had to wait another ten hours and catch that early morning train. I had no idea that you were on the same train. I saw you here in the dak bungalow. Now, what I would like to know is, when did you first start suspecting Bhavananda?'

Feluda smiled. 'It would be wrong to say that I suspected Bhavananda. It was the character of Dr Hajra that made me suspicious. Not in Jodhpur, but in Bikaner. When we went to Devikund, we found him with his hands tied, his mouth gagged. Just before that, I'd found a matchbox with an ace printed on it. I knew that particular brand isn't sold in Rajasthan. Then, when we saw Dr Hajra lying on the ground so helplessly, at first I thought that matchbox was dropped by whoever had attacked him. But then I noticed that there was something wrong with the way he was tied up. I mean, if a man's hands and legs are tied, that may make him perfectly immobile; but if only his hands are tied behind his back, any intelligent man will fold his legs, slip his hands below them and loosen his ties. Then he can set himself free. It became clear to me that Dr Hajra had tied himself up. But even so, it did not occur to me at the time that that man was not the real Dr Hajra. The scales fell from my eyes this morning, in the train to Jaisalmer, when I happened to be staring at a note Bhavananda had written to me. He had used a sheet of your letterhead.'

'So? How was that significant?'

'The printed name showed "Hajra" with a "j". But Bhavananda, pretending to be you, had signed his name "Hazra", with a "z". That told me that the man I had met in Jodhpur and who had written that note was not the real Dr Hajra.'

But in that case, who was he? He had to be one of those men who had kidnapped Neelu. And the other man was Mandar Bose, who had one long nail on his right hand, who smoked cigars—Neelu had recognized the smell, and so had we. The question now was, who was the real Dr Hajra, and where was he? There could be only one answer to that—Hajra had to be that same man who had got into our compartment at Kisangarh, who had new naagras and blisters on his feet, who was seen loitering outside the Circuit House and the Bikaner fort, and who we saw this morning in the dak bungalow in Jaisalmer, limping with a stick in his hand!

Dr Hajra nodded. 'Mr Dhar did a most intelligent thing by asking you to come here. I don't think I could have managed entirely on my own. It was you who tackled Bhavananda's assistant. If he is arrested as well, we can then say that it all ended happily.'

Feluda pointed at Lalmohan Babu and said, 'He made a significant contribution towards raising the alarm against Mandar Bose.'

Lalmohan Babu was struggling all this while to get in a word. Now he blurted out, 'I say, what's going to happen to that hidden treasure?'

'Why don't you leave it to the peacock?' said Dr Hajra. 'It's guarding it quite admirably, isn't it?'

You saw what happens when you meddle with a peacock!'

'For the moment,' suggested Feluda, 'kindly return the treasure you have got hidden. Mind you, from the way your jacket is bulging near your waist, one can hardly call it "hidden"!''

Lalmohan Babu looked positively sad as he pulled out Mandar Bose's revolver and returned it to Feluda.

'Thank you,' said Feluda as he took it. Then his face suddenly grew grave. I saw him examine the revolver closely.

'I must hand it to you, Mr Trotter!' he muttered. 'Who knew you'd hoodwink Pradosh Mitter like this?'

'Why, what's happened?' we cried.

'This revolver's a fake! Made in Japan. Magicians use such guns on the stage!'

Just before everyone burst into laughter, Lalmohan Babu took the revolver back from Feluda, grinned and said, 'For my collection— and as a souvenir of our powerful adventure in Rajasthan. Thank you, sir!'

The End

2. Grammar Page

Unit
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Phrasal verbs 2 in/out

A Compare **in** and **out**:

in = into a room, a building, a car etc.

- How did the thieves **get in**?
- Here's a key, so you can **let yourself in**.
- Lisa walked up to the edge of the pool and **dived in**. (= into the water)
- I've got a new apartment. I'm **moving in** on Friday.
- As soon as I got to the airport, I **checked in**.

In the same way you can say **go in, come in, walk in, break in** etc.

Compare **in** and **into**:

- I'm moving **in** on Friday.
- I'm moving **into my new flat** on Friday

out = out of a room, a building, a car etc.

- Stay in the car. Don't **get out**.
- I had no key, so I was **locked out**.
- She swam up and down the pool, and then **climbed out**.
- Andy opened the window and **looked out**.
- We paid the hotel bill and **checked out**.

In the same way you can say **go out, get out, move out, let somebody out** etc.

Compare **out** and **out of**:

- She climbed **out**.
- She climbed **out of the pool**.

B Other verbs + **in**

drop in = visit somebody at home without arranging to do this

- I **dropped in** to see Chris on my way home.

join in = take part in something that is already going on

- They were playing cards, so I **joined in**.

plug in an electrical machine = connect it to the electricity supply

- The fridge isn't working because you haven't **plugged it in**.



take somebody **in** = deceive somebody

- The man said he was a policeman and I believed him. I was completely **taken in**.

fill in or **fill out** a form, a questionnaire etc. = write the necessary information on a form

- Please **fill in** the application form and send it to us by 28 February. or
Please **fill out** the application form ...

C Other verbs + **out**

eat out = eat at a restaurant, not at home

- There wasn't anything to eat at home, so we decided to **eat out**.

drop out of college / university / a course / a race = stop before you have completely finished

- Gary went to university but **dropped out** after a year.

get out of something that you arranged to do = avoid doing it

- I promised I'd go to the wedding. I don't want to go, but I can't **get out** of it now.

leave something **out** = omit it, not include it

- In the sentence 'She said that she was ill', you can **leave out** the word 'that'.

cross something **out** = write a line through something

- Some of the names on the list had been **crossed out**.

~~Sarah~~ CROSS OUT