



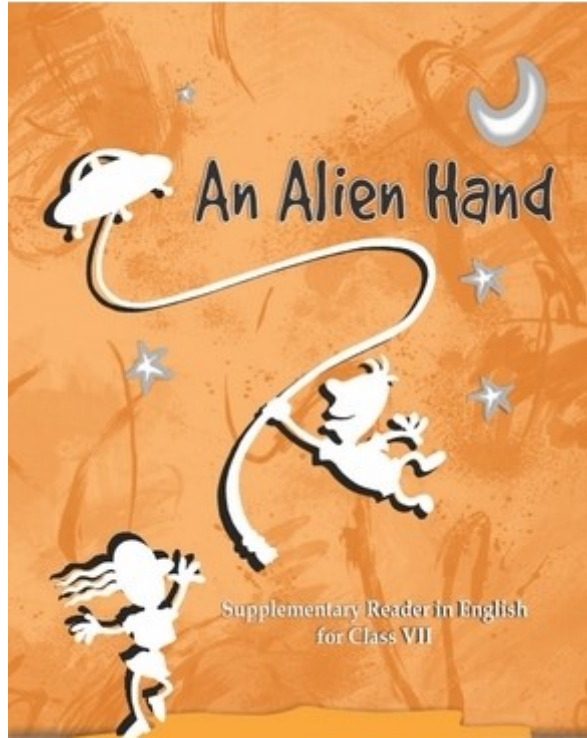
Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

**Adapted and modified by
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1. Chandni

By Zakir Husain

ONCE upon a time there lived an old man in Almora. He was popularly known as Abbu Khan. He lived all alone except for a few goats which he always kept as pets. He gave his goats funny names such as Kalua, Moongia or Gujri. He would take them out for grazing during the day and talk to them as one talks to one's own children; at night he would bring them back to his little hut and put a string round the neck of each goat.

Poor Abbu Khan was a little unlucky in the matter of his goats. Very often at night one of the goats would pull and pull at the string till it broke loose, and then would disappear in the hills beyond. Goats in hilly regions hate being tied to trees or poles. They love their freedom. Abbu Khan's goats were of the best hill breed. They too loved their freedom. So whenever they got the chance, they would run away only to get killed by an old wolf who lived in the hills.

Whenever one of his goats disappeared, Abbu Khan was very sad. He did not understand why even the juiciest grass and grains that he gave them, and all the love that he showered on them, would not stop these unfortunate goats from running straight into the jaws of death. Are these goats mad, he wondered! Or was it their love for freedom! But freedom meant struggle, hardship, even death. Abbu Khan couldn't solve the mystery.

One day, when all his goats had left him, Abbu Khan said to himself, "No more goats in my house ever again. I may yet live for a few more years but I'll live without goats." However, the poor old man was terribly lonely. He simply couldn't do without his pets. Very soon he bought a young goat. He thought, "A young goat will stay with me much longer. She will soon begin to love me as well as the food I give her every day. She will never want to go to the hills." And he laughed with joy.

The new goat was very pretty. She was white as snow, and had two little horns on her little head, and a pair of gleaming red eyes. She had a friendly temperament, and would listen to Abbu Khan's tales with a lot of interest and affection. Abbu Khan called her Chandni, which means 'moonlight'. He loved Chandni and would narrate to her stories of all his friends who were dead and gone.

Several years passed; Chandni was still there. Abbu Khan believed that Chandni would never leave his compound for the free and fresh air of the hills beyond. Alas! he was mistaken again.

Every morning Chandni watched the hilltops bathed in the sunlight. “How beautiful those hills are!” she thought. “How refreshing the breeze that blows through them! And how lovely to run across those green fields!” She ran towards the hills but had to stop with a jerk—the rope round her neck wouldn’t let her go any further. How she hated that rope!

She stopped eating the green grass Abbu Khan brought for her; nor did she listen to his stories with interest and affection. She lost her appetite, grew very thin and stared moodily at the hilltops bathed in sunlight. Abbu Khan did not understand Chandni’s anguish. At last, she decided to speak to him frankly. “Dear Abbu Khan,” she said, “let me go to the hills, please. If I stay on in your compound, I’ll die.” Now Abbu Khan understood Chandni’s problem, but it made him very unhappy. The earthen pot which contained Chandni’s breakfast fell from his hands and broke into a thousand pieces.

“Why do you want to leave me, Chandni?” Abbu Khan asked.

“I want to go to the hills,” Chandni answered.

“Don’t you like the food here? I’ll give you tastier food and a much longer rope.”

“No, thank you. Let me go to the hills.”

“Do you realise the risk you are running, you obstinate creature? There is a dangerous wolf in the hills. He’ll eat you up.” Abbu Khan did his best to warn her.

Chandni answered, “God has given me a pair of horns. I’ll fight the wolf.”

“Fight the wolf, indeed! Have you forgotten the story of your sister Kalua who was the size of a big deer. She fought the wolf through the night but was killed in the morning.” Abbu Khan narrated Kalua’s story for the fiftieth time.

To all this Chandni had only one thing to say: “I want to go to the hills.”

Abbu Khan got very annoyed. He thundered, "You are not going anywhere. From today you'll live in a small hut, and not move about freely in the compound. Ungrateful as you are, you must still be saved from the wolf." He pushed her into a small hut and shut the door. But he forgot to close the small window at the back. The same night Chandni made that window her passage to freedom.

Chandni reached the hills. It seemed to her that the old hills were standing in a row to welcome her. She felt like a child meeting her parents after years of separation. Wherever she went, the tall grass rose to embrace her, the flowers bloomed to amuse her and the wind sang an endless song of welcome. How different all this was from her past in the prison-house of Abbu Khan's compound! It was the happiest day in Chandni's life.

That day she played for hours on the grassy slopes of the hills. She met a herd of wild goats who asked her to join their group. But Chandni politely refused. She wanted to enjoy her new freedom all by herself.

The sun disappeared behind the hills, and soon darkness enveloped the grass, the flowers and the trees. The wind stopped blowing, and there was stillness all around except for a strange sound which was coming from the bushes. The sound was like a grunt. What was it? It wasn't Abbu Khan's voice calling her back to the compound; nor was it the voice of another goat. Then Chandni thought of the dangerous wolf who lived in the hills. She felt scared. Should she go back to the safety of Abbu Khan's hut? "No," she said to herself, "death in an open field is far better than life in a small hut". The wolf had come out of the bushes, and was staring greedily at Chandni. His eyes were shining like burning coals in the darkness. He seemed in no hurry. He knew the new goat was his.

The wolf and the goat sized up each other. The wolf was big and ferocious whereas the goat, though healthy, was small. But small is not weak. Chandni stood firm on her legs, head slightly bent and horns jutting out. She was a picture of courage. She looked like a brave soldier ready to fight a treacherous enemy. "I must put up a good fight," Chandni thought; "success or failure is a matter of luck or chance."

The fight began. It went on through the night. The moon, which had been watching the fight, began to grow pale and suddenly hid behind the clouds. The stars also began to disappear one by one. A faint light appeared in the east and the morning call for prayer came from a distant mosque.

The first rays of the sun saw Chandni lying on the ground. She was completely soaked in blood. The wolf, tired and sleepy, was getting ready to devour her. An assembly of birds perched on top of a tree nearby was debating the result of the fight. "Who is the winner?" one of them asked. "The wolf, of course," most of them said. A wise old bird declaimed with confidence, "Chandni is the winner."

2. The Bear Story

By Axel Munthe

THERE was once a lady who lived in an old manor-house on the border of a big forest. This lady had a pet bear she was very fond of. It had been found in the forest, half dead of hunger, so small and helpless that it had to be brought up on the bottle by the lady and the old cook. This was several years ago and now it had grown up to a big bear, so big and strong that he could have slain a cow and carried it away between his two paws if he had wanted to. But he did not want to; he was a most amiable bear who did not dream of harming anybody, man or beast. He used to sit outside his kennel and look with his small intelligent eyes most amicably at the cattle grazing in the field nearby. The three shaggy mountain ponies in the stable knew him well and did not mind in the least when he shuffled into the stable with his mistress. The children used to ride on his back and had more than once been found asleep in his kennel between his two paws. The three dogs loved to play all sorts of games with him, pull his ears and his stump of a tail and tease him in every way, but he did not mind it in the least. He had never tasted meat; he ate the same food as the dogs and often out of the same plate—bread, porridge, potato, cabbage, turnip. He had a fine appetite, and his friend, the cook, saw to it that he got his fill. Bears are vegetarians if they have a chance, and fruit is what they like best. In the autumn he used to sit and look with wistful eyes at the ripening apples in the orchard, and in his young days he had been sometimes unable to resist the temptation to climb the tree and help himself to a handful of them. Bears look clumsy and slow in their movements, but try a bear with an apple tree and you will soon find out that he can easily beat any school boy at that game. Now he had learnt that it was against the law, but he kept his small eyes wide open for any apples that fell to the ground. There had also been some difficulties about the beehives; he had been punished for this by being put on the chain for two days with a bleeding nose and he had never done it again. Otherwise he was never put on the chain except for the night and quite rightly so, for a bear, like a dog, is apt to get somewhat ill-tempered if kept on the chain, and no wonder.

He was also put on the chain on Sundays when his mistress went to spend the afternoon with her married sister who lived in a solitary house on the other side of the mountain-lake, a good hour's walk through the dense forest. It was not supposed to be good for him to wander about in the forest with all its temptations; it was better to be on the safe side. He was also a bad sailor and had once taken such a fright at a sudden gust of wind that he had upset the boat and he and his mistress had to swim to the shore. Now he knew quite well what it meant when his mistress put him on the chain on Sundays, with a friendly tap on his head and the promise of an apple on her return if he had been good during her absence. He was sorry but resigned, like a good dog, when his mistress tells him he cannot come with her for a walk.

One Sunday when the lady had chained him up as usual and was about half-way through the forest, she suddenly thought she heard the cracking of a tree-branch on the winding footpath behind her. She looked back and was horrified to see the bear coming along full speed. Bears look as if they move along quite slowly but they shuffle along much faster than a trotting horse. In a minute he had joined her, panting and sniffing, to take up his usual place, dog-fashion, at her heels. The lady was very angry, she was already late for lunch, there was no time to take him back home, she did not want him to come with her, and, besides, it was very naughty of him to have disobeyed her. She told him in her severest voice to go back at once, menacing him with her parasol. He stopped a moment and looked at her with his cunning eyes, but did not want to go back and kept on sniffing at her. When the lady saw that he had even lost his new collar, she got still more angry and hit him on the nose with her parasol so hard that it broke in two. He stopped again, shook his head and opened his big mouth several times as if he wanted to say something. Then he turned round and began to shuffle back the way he had come stopping now and then to look at the lady till at last she lost sight of him.

When the lady came home in the evening, the bear was sitting in his usual place outside his kennel looking very sorry for himself. The lady was still very angry. She went up to him and began to scold him most severely and said he would have to be chained for two more days. The old cook who loved the bear as if he had been her son rushed out from the kitchen very angry.

“What are you scolding him for, missus,” said the cook; “he has been as good as gold the whole day, bless him! He has been sitting here quite still on his haunches as meek as an angel, looking the whole time towards the gate for you to come back.”