



Learn English Through  
Stories  
C Series

C34

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## **Content**

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# 1. The Reluctant Princess

*When we drive past places near the coast, we sometimes see large areas shining white in the sun. These are salt pans, where sea water is collected and then allowed to evaporate so that salt is left behind. This is not the only way salt is obtained, however. It is also mined from inside the earth – and this is the story of how one of the most famous salt mines in the world came to be ...*

There were tears in the lovely 15-year-old girl's eyes as she said softly, with her head down, 'I don't want to go, Father. Please don't make me do that!'

Her father sighed. He too didn't want to send his eldest child, his beloved Kinga, away. Not so soon. But she was a princess – and he was a king. And when the eyes of someone worthy had fallen on her, it was only right that he should let her go. It was time for Kinga to leave her home in Hungary. It was time to say goodbye to the kingdom where she had grown up. It was time for her to marry and go to her new home.

'All I've ever wanted was to be with you and Mother and serve the people here. These are the people I know and love,' said Kinga. She looked in the direction of her mother, the queen.

But Queen Maria remained silent. What was there to say? All of them knew that this day had to come sometime. Kinga had to marry and leave them. And if it was not this prince, it would be someone else.

'Let me stay, please,' begged Kinga. 'I don't want to be married.'

Queen Maria rose at last and went to her daughter's side. She took her hands. 'He is a good man,' she said. 'He has seen you but once and he declares that he will marry no other. He wants to share his life with you and you alone. He has recognized the beauty of your soul.'

The queen lifted Kinga's chin gently with one hand. With the other, she brushed aside a lock of hair that had fallen onto Kinga's forehead. Kinga looked into her mother's eyes and saw that she too was suffering. There was pain there. But there was also something else. Honesty. The queen would not tell her own daughter a lie. 'All the reports we have of young Prince Boleslaw are favourable. He will treat you well, my child. And you will soon come to love him and his people as much as you love your own people.'

Kinga closed her eyes and bowed her head again. This time both the king and the queen knew what her lowered head meant. Kinga was a dutiful and caring girl. She knew her parents would not do anything that would make her unhappy. She nodded. She was accepting the proposal.

‘Yes,’ she whispered. ‘I will do as you say.’

King Bela jumped up. ‘We must celebrate!’ he said to his wife. He clapped his hands and called for his attendants. ‘Bring the children in!’ he said.

The queen smiled. Yes, it would be good to let the other children know that there would soon be a wedding in the family.

Then she and the king heard Kinga’s soft voice, ‘But I have a request, Father.’

King Bela was happy. ‘Ask what you will. I will shower you with gifts. Jewels and magnificent clothes and horses and carriages. You will show your new family that you have great wealth backing you ...’

‘I don’t want wealth and jewels and clothes, Father,’ said Kinga.

King Bela sat down again. Why was his daughter being such a trial for him today? Why wasn’t she like all other young girls of royal families who were soon to marry – looking forward excitedly to beautiful gowns and jewellery and things their fathers could give them?

He sighed again. ‘Ask what you will,’ he said, but this time his voice was softer and his tone was hesitant. What would Kinga ask for? And could he give her what she wanted?

‘I have to travel to a distant land, Father,’ said Kinga. ‘I will miss you and Mother and my sisters and brother. And I will miss the taste of home.’

They say that Poland has a scarcity of salt with which to flavour and preserve food. Let me take some salt with me for my husband and his people.’

King Bela stared at his daughter. Salt? That was all? It’s true that salt was precious in this land – and a big lump of rock salt could buy an entire village and all its people. But could salt replace gold and jewels?

Kinga saw the uncertain look on his face and said, ‘Father, I have no use for gold and jewels. They only bring trouble and misfortune with them. But I do have use for salt. It will help my new people.’

King Bela sat up straight and said firmly. ‘Done! I give you the salt mine of Marmaros. It is yours. Consider it the dowry that you take to your husband.’

Kinga smiled. Her father was so generous. She had not wanted a salt mine. She had just wanted a few cartloads of salt that she could carry with her to her new home. How would she carry a whole salt mine with her? But Kinga didn't say anything. She bowed her head again in grateful acceptance.

That night as she knelt down beside her bed to say her prayers, she thought about the salt mine – and suddenly she knew what she must do. She would go to Marmaros. She would go there and pray that somehow the salt from there would reach her new home in Poland.

The next few weeks were busy for Kinga and her family and the entire royal court. Her engagement was celebrated. She was feted and honoured. When she asked her father to allow her to make a trip to the Marmaros salt mine before she left for Poland, he agreed.



Her younger sister and several ladies-in-waiting accompanied her on her journey to the south-east. It took several days, but Kinga did not mind the discomforts of the trip. She listened patiently to her sister's chatter and smiled when she said, 'Oh, I cannot wait to get married too! I will have the most beautiful wedding gown and jewels like Mother wears ...!'

When at last they reached the salt mine, Kinga's attendants were worried that she may ask to go down into the mine. Could they take a princess into the dark and harsh conditions of a mine?

But Kinga did not ask to go into the mine. Instead, she knelt near one of the shafts of the mine and closed her eyes in prayer. Everyone watched her. 'She'll soon stand up and say she wants to wash and eat – and then we can all wash and eat,' her attendants thought.

Kinga kept kneeling there, however. Her eyes were closed and her face was peaceful and calm. Looking at her, the other ladies in her group began to kneel, one by one. They didn't know what she was praying for, but they would join their prayers to hers.

At last, Kinga opened her eyes and stood up. She looked at the deep, deep pit in front of her. She had prayed for salt in her new homeland but she had not brought along any offering to accompany her prayers. She felt her wrists and her neck. She wore no jewellery other than the ring that had been given to her by her fiancé. For a moment she hesitated. Then she pulled her engagement ring from her finger and threw it inside the pit.

One of the coachmen who was near Princess Kinga tried to catch the ring, as he would a ball, but it was tiny and it flew into the pit in a matter of seconds.

‘What have you done?’ cried her sister. The ladies-in-waiting were shocked too, but they could not question their princess.

‘It’s okay,’ said Kinga softly to her sister as they went back to their coach. ‘It’s okay.’

‘It’s not!’ hissed her sister, looking around to see whether anyone could hear them. ‘What will Prince Boleslaw say when he hears that you’ve thrown away his ring? He may be insulted. He may decide he doesn’t want to marry you!’

Kinga didn’t reply for a moment. Then she said, ‘If all the reports that Mother and Father have received about the Prince being a good, kind young man are true, then he will understand. I do this for him and for the people of Poland.’

Her sister made a face. They were back in the coach and would soon stop for a meal. She was confused. ‘How?’ she asked. ‘How does throwing away a ring help anyone?’

Kinga closed her eyes and lay back on the seat – and fell asleep. She felt like a huge burden had been lifted off her shoulders and she could now rest. A few weeks later, Kinga bade farewell to her family and left for her new home in Poland. She knew she would miss her parents and siblings but she was looking forward to the life that awaited her. There would surely be people there who would need her help and time. Maybe she could do well for them there, as she had here, in her home in Hungary.

It was mid-afternoon when they neared Krakow. ‘Only a few hours left, my lady,’ said her attendant after she had spoken with the coachman. ‘Would you like to stop and refresh yourself?’

Kinga shook her head. ‘I’m fine,’ she said.

They drove on – and then suddenly, one of the wheels of the coach went over a bump and then into a deep rut and they ground to a halt.

Kinga stepped down from the coach. She took a deep breath and looked around at the countryside. There was something in the air here that made her take another deep breath. She bent and picked up one of the stones from the path. She held it in her hand for some time. Then she summoned several of the men who had accompanied her.

‘Dig,’ she said. ‘Dig.’

The men thought that she meant they should dig the coach out of the rut. They ran for their shovels and hoes and pick-axes and came towards the coach.

‘Not here,’ said Kinga. She pointed to a small mound a little way from the coach. ‘Dig there.’

The men were puzzled, but they didn’t argue. They loved their kind and gentle princess who was always considerate and concerned about others. If she said, ‘Dig,’ they would dig.

Soon, mud was flying and a deep pit had formed. The heads of the men who were digging disappeared from sight. Suddenly, there was a loud cry and one of the men jumped out of the pit, holding a half-broken rock in his hand.

‘It’s a miracle!’ he cried. ‘A miracle!’

The other men stopped working and surrounded him. Then they stepped back. What he held in his hand could only be given to the princess.

The man came forward and knelt before her. He held in his hand a broken rock. And inside the rock, twinkling and shining in the evening light, was Princess Kinga’s engagement ring!

The princess prised it out of the rock and put it back on her finger. She touched her finger to her lips and tasted. She could taste salt.

‘Salt has come with us to Krakow,’ she said.

Everyone fell on their knees, exclaiming in wonder. They too tasted. It was true. That pit was the beginning of the salt mine of Wieliczka.

*This legend belongs to the first part of the thirteenth century. There really lived a princess named Kinga, daughter of the Hungarian King Bela IV and Queen Maria. She was married to Prince Boleslaw of Poland who later became Boleslaw V.*

*Kinga is the patron saint of miners in Poland and the Wieliczka Salt Mine (pronounced Wileejka) near Krakow records this story in salt sculptures – a man holding out a ball of salt that contained the ring to Kinga.*

*The Wieliczka Salt Mine has been in operation for well over 700 years. Nowadays, not much salt is dug out from the mine. Much of it is obtained from the brine from the salt lakes within the mine. Most of the income from the mine comes from tourists who visit to see the wonderful sculptures that were made by the miners who worked here. There are many statues and many chapels, several places where sculpted reproductions show how salt was taken to the surface in the old days, and much else. The most magnificent work of all is the chapel to Saint Kinga, over 300 feet below the ground. This has floors of polished salt, an altar of salt, carved friezes in the walls cut from salt and even chandeliers made of salt.*

*Apart from the thick pine logs that support the sides of the mine and the many, many wooden stairs that take you down, down, down into the earth, everything is made of salt. Not the shining white salt that you get on your table, but greyish-green, almost black rock salt that is 95 per cent pure. And if you don't believe that it is all salt, you can always lick the walls – or the floor – to find out!*



## 2. Picture Dictionary Page

### dress

**dresses** *noun*  
a piece of clothing that has a top joined to a skirt.



### dried

*from the verb to dry*  
*He dried his clothes outside.*

### dried

*adjective*  
with water or liquid removed.

*dried*  
*apricots*



### drift

**drifts drifting drifted** *verb*  
1 to move slowly without control.  
*The boat drifted along.*  
2 to be carried along by water or air.

### drift

**drifts** *noun*  
a pile of snow or sand made by the wind.

### drill

**drills drilling drilled** *verb*  
to bore a hole in something using a drill.



### drill

**drills** *noun*  
1 a tool used to make holes.  
2 a practice.  
*Fire drill.*

### drink

**drinks drinking drank drunk** *verb*  
to swallow liquid.



**drink** *noun*

### drip

**drips dripping dripped** *verb*  
to fall slowly, drop by drop.  
*Water dripped from the faucet.*



**drip** *noun*  
**dripping** *adjective*

### drive

**drives driving drove driven** *verb*  
to make a car, train, or other vehicle move.  
*They drove along the country roads.*  
**drive** *noun*

### drizzle

**drizzles drizzling drizzled** *verb*  
to rain in small, fine drops, like a mist.  
**drizzle** *noun*

### droop

**droops drooping drooped** *verb*  
to hang down in a weak or tired way.



*The tulip drooped over the edge of the vase.*  
■ rhymes with **hoop**

### drop

**drops** *noun*  
1 a small amount of liquid.



2 a long way down.  
*It was a big drop from the bridge to the river below.*

### drop

**drops dropping dropped** *verb*  
to let something fall.



*He dropped his sunglasses.*

### drought

**droughts** *noun*  
a period of time when there is not enough rain.



*Many crops died during the drought.*  
■ say **drou**t

### drown

**drowns drowning drowned** *verb*  
to die because you have gone under water and have not been able to breathe.

### drowsy

*adjective*  
sleepy.

### drug

**drugs** *noun*  
1 a chemical substance used as a medicine to treat people who are sick or in pain.  
2 an illegal chemical substance that people take to make them feel different. Taking this kind of drug is dangerous and can kill you.

### drum

**drums** *noun*  
a hollow musical instrument that has a covering across one or both ends. You hit the drum with sticks, special wire brushes, or your hands to make different sounds.



*Japanese drum*