Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H32

Adapted and modified by

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1. Incident on the Kalka Train: Part 1

By Satyajit Ray

One.

I had only just finished reading a hair-raising account of an expedition by Captain Scott. Who knew I would have to travel to the land of mist and snow so soon after this? Well no, I don't mean the North or the South Pole. I don't think Feluda would ever be required to help solve mysteries in such remote corners. The place I am talking about is in our own country. Here I saw snowflakes floating down from the sky like cotton fluff. It spread on the ground like a carpet, dazzling my eyes as the sun fell on it; yet it stayed soft enough to be scooped and gathered into a ball.

This particular adventure started last March, on a Thursday morning. By this time, Feluda had become fairly well known as a detective, so his number of clients had grown. But he didn't accept a case unless it was one that gave him the chance to sharpen his remarkable brain. When I first heard about this case, it did not strike me as anything extraordinary. But Feluda must have sensed a great challenge, which was why he agreed so readily. The only other factor that might have influenced his decision was that the client seemed to be pretty well off, so perhaps he was expecting a fat fee. However, when I mentioned this to Feluda, he gave me such a glare that I had to shut up immediately.

The client was called Dinanath Lahiri. He rang us in the evening on Wednesday and made an appointment for eight o' clock the following morning. On the dot of eight on Thursday, we heard a car stop and blow its horn outside our house in Tara Road. The horn sounded strangely different from other cars. I sprang to my feet and moved towards the door, but Feluda stopped me with a gesture.

'You must learn,' he said, 'to play it cool. At least wait till the bell rings.'

It rang in a few seconds. When I opened the door, the first thing I saw was a huge car. Never before had I seen such a big car, except for a Rolls-Royce. The gentleman who emerged from it was equally impressive, though that had nothing to do with his size. A man in his mid-fifties, he had a remarkably fair complexion and was wearing a fine dhoti and kurta. On his feet were white nagras with an upturned front. In his left hand was a walking-stick with an ivory handle; and in his right hand he held a blue square attaché case, of a type

which I had seen many times before. There were two in our own house—one was Baba's, the other belonged to Feluda. They were handed out by Air-India as free gifts to their passengers.

Feluda offered the gentleman the most comfortable armchair in the living-room and took an ordinary chair himself to sit opposite him.

'I rang last night,' said our visitor. 'My name is Dinanath Lahiri.' Feluda cleared his throat and said, 'Before you say anything further, may I ask you a couple of questions?'

'Of course.'

'First of all, would you mind having a cup of tea?'

Mr Lahiri folded his hands, bent his head politely and replied, 'You must forgive me, Mr Mitter, I am not used to having anything except at certain hours. But please don't let me stop you from having a cup of tea, if you so wish.'

'All right. My second question is—is your car a Hispano Suiza?'

'Yes, that's right. There aren't too many of those in this country. My father bought it in 1934. Are you interested in cars?'

Feluda smiled, 'Yes, among other things. But my interests are chiefly related to my profession.'

'I see. Allow me now to tell you why I'm here. You may find the whole thing totally insignificant. I am aware of your reputation, so there's no way I can insist that you take the case. I can only make a request.'

There was a certain polish and sophistication in his voice and the way he spoke, but not even the slightest trace of arrogance. On the contrary, Mr Lahiri spoke gently and quietly.

'Let's hear the details of your case,' said Feluda.

'You may call it my case,' said Mr Lahiri with a smile, pointing at the blue object in his hand, 'or the tale of my attaché case . . . ha ha. You see, my story revolves round this attaché case.'

Feluda glanced at the case and said, 'It seems to have gone abroad few times. The tags are torn but I can see the elastic bands on the handle—one, two, three, four . . .'

‘Yes, the handle of my own case also has elastic bands hanging from it.’ ‘Your own case? You mean this one isn’t yours?’

‘No. This belongs to someone else. It got exchanged with mine.’ ‘I see. Where did this happen? In a plane, or was it a train?’

‘It was a train. Kalka Mail. I was coming back from Delhi. There were four passengers in a first class compartment, including myself. My attaché case must have got mixed up with one of the other three.’

‘I assume you do not know whose it was . . . ?’ ‘No. If I did, I don’t suppose I’d need your help.’ ‘And you don’t know the names of the others?’

‘There was another Bengali. His name was Pakrashi. He travelled from Delhi, like me.’ ‘How did you get to know his name?’

‘One of the other passengers happened to recognize him. I heard this other man say, “Hello, Mr Pakrashi!” and then they got talking. I think both were businessmen. I kept hearing words like contract and tender.’

‘You didn’t learn the name of this other man?’

‘No. He was not a Bengali, though he was speaking the language quite well. I gathered he came from Simla.’

‘And the fourth passenger?’

‘He stayed on one of the upper berths most of the time. I saw him climb down only during lunch and dinner. He was not a Bengali, either. He offered me an apple soon after we left Delhi and said it was from his own orchard. So perhaps he was from Simla, too.’

‘Did you eat that apple?’

‘Yes, certainly. It was a good, tasty apple.’

‘So you don’t mind eating things outside your regular hours when you’re in a train?’ Mr Lahiri burst out laughing.

‘My God! I’d never have thought you’d pick that up! But you’re right. In a moving train I am tempted to break my own rules.’

‘OK,’ said Feluda, ‘I now need to know exactly where who was sitting.’

‘I was on a lower berth. Mr Pakrashi was on the berth above mine. On the Other side, the man who gave me the apple sat on the upper berth and below him was the businessman who knew Mr Pakrashi.’

Feluda was silent for a few moments. Then he rubbed his hands together and said, ‘If you don’t mind. I am going to ask for some tea. Do have a cup if you want. Topshe, would you please go in?’

I ran in to tell our cook, Srinath, to bring the tea. When I returned, Feluda had opened the attaché case.

‘Wasn’t it locked?’ he asked.

‘No. Nor was mine. So whoever took it could easily have seen what was in it. This one is full of routine, ordinary stuff.’

True. It contained little besides two English dailies, a cake of soap, a comb, a hairbrush, a toothbrush, toothpaste, a shaving kit, a handkerchief and a paperback.

‘Did your case contain anything valuable?’ Feluda wanted to know.

‘No, nothing. In fact, what my case had was probably of less value than what you see here. The only interesting thing in it was a manuscript. It was a travelogue, about Tibet. I had taken it with me to read on the train. It made very good reading.’

‘A travelogue about Tibet?’ Feluda was now clearly curious. ‘Yes. It was written in 1917 by a Shambhucharan Bose. As far as I can make out, my uncle must have brought it, since it was dedicated to him. His name was Satinath Lahiri. He had lived in Kathmandu for many years, working as a private tutor in the household of the Ranas. He returned home about forty-five years ago, a sick old man. In fact, he died shortly after his return. Among his belongings was a Nepali box. It lay in a corner of our box room. We had all forgotten its existence until recently, when I called the Pest Control. The room had to be emptied for the men to work in. It was then that I found the box and, in it, the manuscript.’

‘When did this happen?’

‘The day before I left for Delhi.’

Feluda grew a little thoughtful. ‘Shambhucharan?’ he muttered to himself. ‘Shambhucharan . . .

Shambhucharan . . .'

'Anyway,' continued Mr Lahiri, 'that manuscript does not mean very much to me. To tell you the truth, I wasn't really interested in getting my attaché case back. Besides, there was no guarantee that I would find the owner of the one that got exchanged with mine. So I gave this case to my nephew. But since last night, I have been thinking. These articles that you see before you may not be expensive, but for their owner they might have a great deal of sentimental value. Look at this handkerchief, for instance. It's initialled "G". Someone had embroidered the letter with great care. Who could it be? His wife? Perhaps she is no more. Who knows? Shouldn't I try to return this attaché case to its rightful owner? I was getting worried, so I took it back from my nephew and came to you. Frankly, I don't care if my own case does not come back to me. I would simply feel a lot more comfortable if this one could be restored to whoever owns it.'

Srinath came in with the tea. Feluda, of late, had become rather fussy about his tea. What he was now going to drink had come from the Makaibari tea estate of Kurseong. Its fragrance filled the room the instant Srinath placed the cups before us. Feluda took a sip quietly and said, 'Did you have to open your case quite a few times in the train?'

'No, not at all. I opened it only twice. I took the manuscript out soon after the train left Delhi, and then I put it back before going to sleep.'

Feluda lit a Charminar and blew out a couple of smoke rings. 'So you'd like me to return this case to its owner and get yours back for you—right?'

'Yes. But does that disappoint you? Do you think it's all a bit too tame?'

Feluda ran his fingers through his hair. 'No,' he said, 'I understand your sentiments. And I must admit that your case is different from the ones I usually handle.'

Dinanath Babu looked visibly relieved. 'Your acceptance means a lot to me,' he said, letting out a deep breath.

'I shall, of course, do my best,' Feluda replied, 'but I cannot guarantee success. You must understand that. However, I should now like some information.'

'Yes?'

Feluda rose quickly and went into the next room. He returned with his famous blue notebook. Then, pencil in hand, he began asking questions.

‘When did you leave Delhi?’

‘On 5 March at 6.30 p.m. I reached Calcutta the next morning at nine-thirty.’ ‘Today is the 9th. So you arrived here three days ago, and you rang me yesterday.’

Feluda opened the attaché case and took out a yellow Kodak film container. As he unscrewed its lid, a few pieces of betel-nut fell out of it on the table. Feluda put one of these in his mouth and resumed speaking.

‘Was there anything in your case that might give one an idea of your name and address?’ ‘No, not as far as I can recall.’

‘Hm. Could you now please describe your fellow passengers?’ Dinanath Babu tilted his head and stared at the ceiling, frowning a little.

‘Pakrashi would have been about the same age as me. Between sixty and sixty-five. He had salt-and- pepper hair, brushed back. He wore glasses and his voice was rather harsh.’

‘Good.’

‘The man who offered me the apple had a fair complexion. He was tall and slim, had a sharp nose, wore gold-framed glasses and was quite bald except for a few strands of black hair around his ears. He spoke to me only in English, with a flawless accent. And he had a cold. He kept blowing his nose into a tissue.’

‘A pukka sahib, I see! And the third gentleman?’

‘His appearance was really quite ordinary—there was nothing that one might have noticed in particular. But he was the only one who ordered a vegetarian thali.’

Feluda jotted all this down in his notebook. Then he looked up and asked, ‘Anything else?’

‘No, I can’t recall anything else worth reporting. You see, I spent most of the day reading. And I fell asleep soon after dinner. I don’t usually sleep very well in a train. But this time I slept like a baby until we arrived at Howrah. In fact, it was Mr Pakrashi who woke me up.’

‘In that case, presumably you were the last person to leave the coach?’ ‘Yes.’

‘By which time one of the other three had walked out with your attaché case?’ ‘Yes.’

‘Hm,’ Feluda said, shutting his notebook, ‘I’ll see what I can do.’ Dinanath Babu rose.

‘I will, of course, pay your fee. But you will naturally need something to begin your investigation. I brought some cash today for this purpose.’ He took out a white envelope from his pocket and offered it to Feluda, who took it coolly with a casual ‘Oh, thanks’ and stuffed it into his own pocket, together with his pencil.

Dinanath Babu came out and began walking towards his car. ‘You will get my telephone number from the directory,’ he said, ‘please let me know if you hear anything. As a matter of fact, you can come straight to my house if need be. I am usually home in the evening.’

The yellow Hispano Suiza disappeared in the direction of Rashbehari Avenue, blowing its horn like a conch shell, startling all passers-by. We returned to the living-room. Feluda took the chair Dinanath Babu had occupied. Then he crossed his legs, stretched lazily and said, ‘Another twenty-five years . . . and people with such an aristocratic style will have vanished.’

The blue case was still lying on the table. Feluda took its contents out one by one. Each object was really quite ordinary. Whoever bought them could not have spent more than fifty rupees.

‘Let’s make a list,’ said Feluda. This was soon ready, and it contained the following:

Two English dailies from Delhi, neatly folded. One was the Sunday Statesman, the other the Sunday Hindustan Times.

A half-used tube of Binaca toothpaste. The empty portion had been rolled up. A green Binaca toothbrush.

A Gillette safety razor.

Three thin Gillette blades in a packet.

An old and used Old Spice shaving cream. It was nearly finished. A shaving brush.

A nail cutter—pretty old.

Three tablets of Aspro wrapped in a cellophane sheet.

A folded map of Calcutta. It measured 4’ x5’ when opened. A Kodak film container with chopped betel-nuts in it.

A matchbox, brand new.

A Venus red-and-blue pencil.

A white handkerchief, with the letter ‘G’ embroidered in one corner. A pen-knife, possibly from Moradabad.

A small face-towel.

A rusted old safety-pin.

Three equally rusted paper clips. A shirt button.

A detective novel—Ellery Queen’s The Door Between.

Feluda picked up the book and turned a few pages.

‘No, there’s no mention of the owner’s name,’ he said, ‘but he clearly had the habit of marking a page by folding its corner. There are 236 pages in this book. The last sign of folding is at page 212. I assume he finished reading it.’

Feluda now turned his attention to the handkerchief.

‘The first letter of his name or surname must be “G”. No, it must be his first name, that’s far more natural.’

Then he opened the map of Calcutta and spread it on the table. ‘Red marks,’ he said, looking closely at it, ‘someone marked it with a red pencil . . . hmm . . . one, two, three, four, five . . . hm . . . Chowringhee . . . Park Street . . . I see. Topshe, get the telephone directory.’

Feluda put the map back into the case. Then he began turning the pages of the telephone directory. ‘P . . . here we are,’ he said. ‘There are only sixteen Pakrashis listed here. Two of them are doctors , so we can easily leave them out.’

‘Why?’

‘The man who recognized him in the train called him Mr Pakrashi, not Doctor, remember?’ ‘Oh yes, that’s right.’

Feluda picked up the telephone and began dialling. Each time he got through, I heard him say, ‘Has Mr Pakrashi returned from Delhi? . . . Oh, sorry!’

This happened five times in a row. But the sixth number he dialled apparently got him the right man for, this time, he spoke for much longer. Then he said ‘Thanks’ and put the phone down.

‘I think I’ve got him,’ he said to me. ‘N.C. Pakrashi. He answered the phone himself. He returned from Delhi by Kalka Mail the day before yesterday. Everything tallies, except that his luggage didn’t get exchanged.’

‘Then why did you make an appointment with him this evening?’

‘Why, he can give us some information about the other passengers, can’t he? He appears to be an ill-tempered fellow, but it would take more than ill-temper to put Felu Mitter off. Come, Topshe, let’s go out.’

‘Now? I thought we were meeting Mr Pakrashi in the evening?’

‘Yes, but before calling on Pakrashi I think we need to visit your Uncle Sidhu. Now.’

Two.

Uncle Sidhu was no relation. He used to be Baba’s next door neighbour when he lived in our old ancestral home, long before I was born. Baba treated him like a brother, and we all called him Uncle. Uncle Sidhu’s knowledge about most things was extraordinary and his memory remarkably powerful. Feluda and I both admired and respected him enormously.

But why did Feluda want to see him at this time? The first question Feluda asked made that clear. ‘Have you heard of a travel writer called Shambhucharan Bose? He used to write in English, about sixty years ago.’

Uncle Sidhu’s eyes widened.

‘Good heavens, Felu, haven’t you read his book on the Terai?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Feluda, ‘now I do remember. The man’s name sounded familiar, but no, I haven’t read the book.’

‘It was called The Terrors of Terai. A British publisher in London published it in 1915. Shambhucharan was both a traveller and a shikari. But by profession he was a doctor. He used to practise in Kathmandu. This was long before the present royal family came into power. The powerful people in Nepal then were the Ranas. Shambhucharan treated and cured a lot of ailments among the Ranas. He mentioned one of them in his book. Vijayendra Shamsher Jung Bahadur. The man was keen on hunting, but he drank very heavily. Apparently, he used to climb a machan with a bottle in one hand and a rifle in the other. But both his hands stayed steady when it came to pressing the trigger. Except once. Only once did he miss, and the tiger jumped up on the machan. It was Shambhucharan who shot the tiger from the next machan and saved the Rana’s life. The Rana expressed his gratitude by giving him a priceless jewel. A most thrilling story. Try and get a copy from the National Library. I don’t think you’ll get it easily anywhere else.’

‘Did he ever go to Tibet?’

‘Yes, certainly. He died in 1921, soon after I finished college. I saw an obituary on him, I remember. It said he had gone to Tibet after his retirement, although he died in Kathmandu.’

‘I see.’

Feluda remained silent for a few moments. Then he said, in a clear, distinct tone, ‘Supposing an unpublished manuscript was discovered today, written after his visit to Tibet, would that be a valuable document?’

‘My goodness!’ Uncle Sidhu’s bald dome glistened with excitement. ‘You don’t know what you’re saying, Felu! Valuable? I still remember the very high praise Terai had received from the London Times. It wasn’t just the stories he told, Shambhucharan’s language was easy, lucid and clear as crystal. Why, have you found such a manuscript?’

‘No, but there might be one in existence.’

‘If you can lay your hands on it, please don’t forget to show it to me, Felu. And in case it gets auctioned, let me know. I’d be prepared to bid up to five thousand rupees . . .’

We left soon after this, but not before two cups of cocoa had been pressed upon us.

‘Mr Lahiri doesn’t even know his attache case contains such hot stuff,’ I said as we came out. ‘Aren’t you going to tell him?’

‘Wait. There’s no need to rush things. Let’s see where all this leads to. In any case, I have taken the job, haven’t I? It’s just that now I feel a lot more enthusiastic.’

Naresh Chandra Pakrashi lived in Lansdowne Road. It was obvious that his house had been built at least forty years ago. Feluda had taught me how to assess the age of a house. For instance, houses built fifty years ago had a certain type of window, which was different from those built ten years later. The railings on verandas and terraces, patterns on gates, pillars at porticos—all bore evidence of the period a building was made. This particular house must have been built in the 1920s.

The first thing I noticed as we climbed out of our taxi was a notice outside the main gate: ‘Beware of the Dog’.

‘It would have made better sense,’ remarked Feluda, ‘if it had said, “Beware of the Owner of the Dog”.’

We passed through the gate and found a chowkidar standing near the porch. Feluda gave him his visiting card, which bore the legend: ‘Pradosh C. Mitter, Private Investigator’. The chowkidar disappeared with the card and reappeared a few minutes later.

‘Please go in,’ he said.

We had to cross a wide marble landing before we got to the door of the living-room. It must have been about ten feet high. We lifted the curtain and walked in, to be greeted by rows and rows of books, all stashed in huge almirahs. There was quite a lot of other furniture, a wall-to-wall carpet, pictures on the walls, and even a chandelier. But the whole place had an unkempt air. Apparently, no one cared to clean it regularly.

We found Mr Pakrashi in his study, hidden behind the living-room. The sound of typing had already reached our ears. Now we saw a man sitting behind an ancient typewriter, which rested on a massive table, covered with green rexine. The table was placed on the right. On our left, as we stepped in, we saw three couches and a small round table. On this one stood a chess board with all the chessmen in place, and a book on the game. The last thing my eyes fell on was a large dog, curled up and asleep in one corner of the room.

The man fitted Dinanath Babu's description. A pipe hung from his mouth. He stopped typing upon our entry, and his eyes swept over us both. 'Which one of you is Mr Mitter?' he finally asked.

Perhaps it was his idea of a joke, but Feluda did not laugh. He answered civilly enough, 'I am Pradosh Mitter. This is my cousin.'

'How was I to know?' said Mr Pakrashi. 'Little boys have gone into so many different things . . . music, acting, painting; why, some have even become religious gurus! So your cousin here might well have been the great sleuth himself. But anyway, tell me why you're here. What do you want from a man who's never done anything other than mind his own business?'

Feluda was right. If ever a competition was held in irascibility, this man would have been a world champion.

'Who did you say sent you here?' he wanted to know.

'Mr Lahiri mentioned your name. He arrived from Delhi three days ago. You and he travelled in the same compartment.'

'I see. And is he the one whose attaché case got lost?' 'Not lost. Merely mistaken for someone else's.'

'Careless fool. But why did he have to employ you to retrieve it? What precious object did it contain?'

'There was nothing much, really, except an old manuscript. There is no other copy.'

I could tell why Feluda mentioned the manuscript. If he told Mr Pakrashi the real reason why he had been employed, no doubt Mr Pakrashi would have laughed in derision.

'Manuscript?' he asked somewhat suspiciously.

'Yes. A travelogue written by Shambhucharan Bose. Mr Lahiri had read it on the train, then put it back in the case.'

'Well, the man is not just a fool, he seems to be a liar, too. You see, although I had an upper berth, I spent most of the day sitting right next to him. He never read anything other than a newspaper and a Bengali magazine.'

Feluda did not say anything. Mr Pakrashi paused for breath, then continued, 'I don't know what you'd make of it as a sleuth. I find the whole thing distinctly

suspicious. Anyway, if you wish to go on a wild-goose chase, suit yourself. I cannot offer any help. I told you on the phone I have about three of those Air-India bags, but on this trip I didn't take any with me.'

'One of the other passengers knew you, didn't he?'

'Who, Brijmohan? Yes. He is a moneylender. I've had a few dealings with him.'
'Could he have had a blue case?'

'How on earth should I know?' Mr Pakrashi frowned darkly. 'Could you give me Brijmohan's telephone number?'

'Look it up in the directory. S. M. Kedia & Co. SM was Brijmohan's father. Their office is in Lenin Sarani. And one more thing—you're wrong in thinking I knew only one of the other passengers. As a matter of fact, I knew two of them.'

'Who's the second one?' Feluda sounded surprised.

'Dinanath Lahiri. I had seen him before at the races. He used to be quite a lad. Now I believe he's changed his lifestyle and even found himself a guru in Delhi. Heaven knows if any of this is true.'

'What about the fourth man in your coach?' asked Feluda. He was obviously trying to gain as much information as he could.

'What's going on?' shouted Mr Pakrashi, pulling a face, in spite of the pipe still hanging from his mouth. 'Are you here simply to ask questions? Am I an accused standing trial or what?'

'No, sir,' said Feluda calmly. 'I am asking these questions only because you play chess all by yourself, you clearly have a sharp brain, a good memory, and . . .'

Mr Pakrashi thawed a little. He cleared his throat and said, 'Chess has become an addiction. The partner I used to play with is no more. So now I play alone.'

'Every day?'

'Yes. Another reason for that is my insomnia. I play until about three in the morning.'

'Do you never take a pill to help you sleep?'

'I do sometimes. But it doesn't always help. Not that it matters. I go to bed at three, and rise at eight.

Five hours is good enough at my age.'

‘Is typing also . . . one of your addictions?’ Feluda asked with his lopsided smile.

‘No, but there are times when I do like to do my own typing. I have a secretary, who’s pretty useless. Anyway, you were talking about the fourth passenger, weren’t you? He had sharp features, was quite bald, a non-Bengali, spoke very good English and offered me an apple. I didn’t eat it. What else would you like to know? I am fifty-three and my dog is three-and-a-half. He’s a boxer and doesn’t like visitors to stay for more than half an hour. So . . .’

‘An interesting man,’ Feluda remarked. We were out in the street, but not walking in the direction of home. Why Feluda chose to go in the opposite direction, I could not tell; nor did he make any attempt at hailing either of the two empty taxis that sailed by.

One little thing was bothering me. I had to mention it to Feluda. ‘Didn’t Dinanath Babu say he thought Pakrashi was about sixty? But Mr Pakrashi himself said he was fifty-three and, quite frankly, he didn’t seem older than that. Isn’t that funny?’

‘All it proves is that Dinanath Babu’s power of observation is not what it should be,’ said Feluda.

A couple of minutes later, we reached Lower Circular Road. Feluda turned left. ‘Are you going to look at that case of robbery?’ I asked. Only three days ago, the papers had reported a case of a daylight robbery. Apparently, three masked men had walked into a jeweller’s shop on Lower Circular Road and got away with a lot of valuable jewellery and precious stones, firing recklessly in the air as they made their escape in a black Ambassador car. ‘It might be fun tracing those daredevils,’ Feluda had said. But sadly, no one had come forward to ask him to investigate. So I thought perhaps he was going to ask a few questions on his own. But Feluda paid no attention to me. It seemed as though his sole purpose in life, certainly at that moment, was to get some exercise and so he would do nothing but continue to walk.

A little later, he turned left again rather abruptly, and walked briskly into the Hindustan International Hotel. I followed him quickly.

‘Did anyone from Simla check in at your hotel on 6 March?’ Feluda asked the receptionist, ‘His first name starts with a “G” . . . I’m afraid I can’t recall his full name.’

Neither Brijmohan nor Naresh Pakrashi had names that started with a ‘G’. So this had to the applewalla.

The receptionist looked at his book.

‘There are two foreigners listed here on 6 March,’ he said, ‘Gerald Pratley and G. R. Holmes. Both came from abroad.’

‘Thank you,’ said Feluda and left.

We took a taxi as we came out. ‘Park Hotel,’ Feluda said to the driver and lit a Charminar.

‘If you had looked carefully at those red marks on the map,’ he said to me, ‘you’d have seen they were markers for hotels. It’s natural that the man would want to stay at a good hotel. At present, there are five well-known hotels in Calcutta—Grand, Hindustan International, Park, Great Eastern and Ritz Continental. And those red marks had been placed on, these. The Park Hotel would be our next port of call.’

As it turned out, no one with a name starting with ‘G’ had checked in at the Park on 6 March. But the Grand offered some good news. Feluda happened to know one of its Bengali receptionists called Dasgupta. He showed us their visitors’ book. Only one Indian had checked in on the 6th. He did arrive from Simla and his name was G. C. Dhameeja.

‘Is he still here?’

‘No, sir. He checked out yesterday.’

The little flicker of hope in my mind was snuffed out immediately. Feluda, too, was frowning. But he didn’t stop asking questions. ‘Which room was he in?’

‘Room 216.’

‘Is it empty now?’

‘Yes. We’re expecting a guest this evening, but right now it’s vacant.’ ‘Can I speak to the room boy?’

‘Certainly. I’ll get someone to show you the way.’

We took the lift up to the second floor. A walk down a long corridor finally brought us to room 216. The room boy appeared at this point. We went into

the room with him. Feluda began pacing. ‘Can you remember the man who left yesterday? He was staying in this room.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Now try to remember carefully. What luggage did he have?’ ‘A large suitcase, and a smaller one.’

‘Was it blue?’

‘Yes. When I came back to the room after filling his flask, I found him taking things out of the blue case. He seemed to be looking for something.’

‘Very good. Can you remember if this man had a few apples— perhaps in a paper bag?’ ‘Yes. There were three apples. He took them out and kept them on a plate.’

‘What did this man look like?’

But the description the room boy gave did not help. At least a hundred thousand men in Calcutta would have fitted that description.

However, there was reason to feel pleased. We now had the name and address of the man whose attaché case had got exchanged with Mr Lahiri’s. Mr Dasgupta gave us a piece of paper as we went out. I glanced over Feluda’s shoulder and saw what was written on it:

G. C. Dhameeja ‘The Nook’

Wild Flower Hall Simla.

Three.

‘Kaka has gone out. He’ll return around seven,’ we were told.

So this was Dinanath Babu’s nephew. We had come straight from the Grand Hotel to Dinanath Babu’s house to report our progress, stopping on our way only to buy some meetha paan from a shop outside the New Empire.

Lined on one side of the gate of Mr Lahiri’s house were four garages. Three of these were empty.

The fourth contained an old, strange looking car. ‘Italian,’ said Feluda. ‘It’s a Lagonda.’

The chowkidar took our card in, but, instead of Dinanath Babu, a younger man emerged from the house. He couldn’t have been more than thirty. Of medium height, he had fair skin like his uncle; his hair was long and tousled; and running down from his ears were broad sideburns, the kind that seemed to be all the rage among fashionable men. The man was staring hard at Feluda.

‘Could we please wait until he returns?’ asked Feluda. ‘We have something rather important to discuss, you see.’

‘Please come this way.’

We were taken into the living-room. The walls and the floor were littered with tiger and bear skins; a huge head of a buffalo graced the wall over the main door. Perhaps Dinanath Babu’s uncle had been a shikari, too. May be that was why he and Shambhucharan had been so close?

‘My uncle goes out for a walk every evening. He’ll be back soon.’ Dinanath Babu’s nephew had an exceptionally thin voice. I wondered if it was he who had been given Mr Dhameeja’s attaché case.

‘Are you,’ he asked, ‘the same Felu Mitter who solved the mystery of the Golden Fortress?’ ‘Yes,’ said Feluda briefly, and leant back in his chair, crossing his legs, perfectly relaxed.

I kept looking at the other man. His face seemed familiar. Where had I seen him before? Then something seemed to jog my memory.

‘Have you ever acted in a film?’ I asked. The man cleared his throat.

‘Yes, in The Ghost. It’s a thriller. I play the villain. But it hasn’t yet been released.’ ‘Your name . . . ?’

‘My real name is Prabeer Lahiri. But my screen name is Amar Kumar.’

‘Oh yes, now I remember. I have seen your photograph in a film magazine.’ Heavens, what kind of a villain would he make with a voice like that?

‘Are you a professional actor?’ asked Feluda. For some strange reason, Prabeer Babu was still standing.

‘I have to help my uncle in his business,’ he replied, ‘which means going to his plastic factory. But my real interest is in acting.’

‘What does your uncle think?’

‘Uncle isn’t . . . very enthusiastic about it.’

‘Why not?’

‘That’s the way he is.’

Amar Kumar’s face grew grave. Clearly, he had had arguments with his uncle over his career in films.

‘I have to ask you something,’ Feluda said politely, possibly because Amar Kumar was beginning to look belligerent.

‘I don’t mind answering your questions,’ he said. ‘What I can’t stand is my uncle’s constant digs at my—’

‘Did your uncle recently give you an Air-India attaché case?’

‘Yes, but someone pinched it. We’ve got a new servant, you see . . .’ Feluda raised a reassuring hand and smiled.

‘No, no one stole that case, I assure you. It’s with me.’

‘With you?’ Prabeer Babu seemed perfectly taken aback.

‘Yes. Your uncle decided to return the case to its owner. He hired me for this purpose. What I want to know is whether you removed anything from it.’

‘I did, naturally. Here it is.’

Prabeer Babu took out a ballpoint pen from his pocket. ‘I wanted to use the blades and the shaving cream,’ he added, ‘but of course I never got the chance.’

‘You do realize, don’t you, that the case must go back to the owner with every item intact?’

‘Yes, yes, naturally.’

He handed the pen over to Feluda. But he was obviously still greatly annoyed with his uncle. ‘At least,’ he muttered, ‘I should have been told the case was going back. After all, he did give . . .’

He couldn’t finish his sentence. Dinanath Babu’s car sounded its horn at this moment, thereby causing the film villain to beat a quick retreat.

‘Oh no, have you been waiting long?’ Dinanath Babu walked into the room, looking slightly rueful, his hands folded in a namaskar. We stood up to greet him. ‘No, no, please sit down,’ he said hurriedly. ‘You wouldn’t mind a cup of tea, would you?’

His servant appeared almost immediately and left with an order to bring us tea. Dinanath Babu sat down on the settee next to ours.

‘So . . . tell me . . . ?’ he invited.

‘Your case got exchanged with the man who gave you the apple. His name is G. C. Dhameeja.’

Dinanath Babu grew round-eyed. ‘You found that out in just a day? What is this—magic?’

Feluda gave his famous lopsided smile and continued, ‘He lives in Simla and I’ve got his address.

He was supposed to spend three days at the Grand, but he left a day early.’

‘Has he left already?’ Dinanath Babu asked, a little regretfully.

‘Yes. He left the hotel, but we don’t know whether he returned to Simla. One telegram to his house in Simla, and you shall get an answer to that.’

Dinanath Babu seemed to ponder for a few moments. Then he said, ‘All right. I will send a cable today. But if I discover he has indeed gone back to Simla, I still have to return his case to him, don’t I?’

‘Yes, of course. And yours has to come back to you. I am quite curious about that travelogue.’

‘Very good. Allow me to make a proposal, Mr Mitter. Why don’t you go to Simla with your cousin? I shall, of course, pay all your expenses. It’s snowing in Simla, I hear. Have you ever seen it snow, Khoka?’

At any other time, I would have been affronted at being called a child. But now it did not seem to matter at all. Go to Simla? Oh, how exciting! My heart started to race faster.

But Feluda’s next words were most annoying. ‘You must think this one through, Mr Lahiri,’ he said. ‘It’s just a matter of taking an attaché case to Simla, and bringing one back, isn’t it? So anyone can do the job. It doesn’t necessarily have to be me.’

‘No, no, no,’ Dinanath Babu protested rather vehemently, ‘where will I find anyone as reliable as you? And since you began the investigation, I think you should end it.’

‘Why, you have a nephew, don’t you?’

A shadow passed over Dinanath Babu’s face.

‘He is no good, really. I’m afraid my nephew’s sense of responsibility is virtually nonexistent. Do you know what he has done? He’s gone into films! No, I cannot rely on him at all. I’d rather the two of you went. I’ll tell my travel agents to make all arrangements. You can fly up to Delhi and then catch a train. When you’ve done your job, you can even have a holiday in Simla for a few days. It would give me a lot of pleasure to be of service to a man like you. What you’ve done in just a few hours is truly remarkable!’

The tea arrived, together with cakes and sandwiches. Feluda picked up a piece of chocolate cake and said, ‘Thank you. There is one little thing I am still feeling curious about. The Nepali box in which you found the manuscript. Is it possible to see it?’

‘Of course. That’s not a problem at all. I’ll get my bearer to bring it.’

The box appeared in a few moments. About two feet in length and ten inches in height, its wooden surface was covered by a sheet of copper. Red, blue and yellow stones were set on the lid. The smell that greeted my nostrils as soon as the lid was lifted was the same as that in Naresh Pakrashi’s study. Dust-covered old furniture and threadbare curtains gave out the same musty smell.

Dinanath Babu said, ‘As you can see, there are two compartments in the box. The manuscript was in the first one, wrapped in a Nepali newspaper.’

‘Good heavens, it’s stuffed with so many different things!’ exclaimed Feluda.

‘Yes,’ Dinanath Babu smiled. ‘You might call it a mini curio shop. But it’s so filthy I haven’t felt tempted to handle anything.’

It turned out that the compartments could be removed. Feluda brought out the second one and inspected the objects it contained. There were stone necklaces, little engraved discs made of copper and brass, two candles, a small bell, a couple of little bowls, a bone of some unknown animal, a few dried herbs and flowers, reduced to dust—truly a little junk shop.

‘Did this box belong to your uncle?’ ‘It came with him, so I assume it did.’

‘When did he return from Kathmandu?’

‘In 1923. He died the same year. I was seven.’

‘Very interesting,’ said Feluda. Then he took a last sip from his cup and stood up. ‘I accept your proposal, Mr Lahiri,’ he said, ‘but we cannot leave tomorrow. We’ll have to collect our warm clothes from the dry-cleaner’s. The day after tomorrow might be a better idea. And please don’t forget to cable Dhameeja.’

We returned home at around half-past-eight to find Jatayu waiting for us in the living-room, a brown parcel on his lap.

‘Have you been to the pictures?’ he asked with a smile.

2. Grammar Page

Unit 139 Phrasal verbs 3 **out**

A

out = not burning, not shining

go out
put out a fire / a cigarette / a light
turn out a light
blow out a candle

- Suddenly all the lights in the building **went out**.
- I **put** the fire **out** with a fire extinguisher.
- I **turned** the lights **out** before leaving.
- We don't need the candle. You can **blow** it **out**.

B

work out

work out = *do physical exercises*
- Rachel **works out** at the gym three times a week.

work out = *develop, progress*
- Good luck for the future. I hope everything **works out** well for you.
- A: Why did James leave the company?
  B: Things didn't **work out**. (= things didn't work out well)

work out (for calculations):
- The total bill for three people is £97.35. That **works out** at £32.45 each.

work (something) **out** = *calculate*
- 345 × 76? I need a calculator. I can't **work** it **out** in my head.

work out *or* **figure out** = *understand, think about a problem and find an answer*
- Investigators are trying to **work out** what caused the accident. *or*
  Investigators are trying to **figure out** what caused the accident.

C

Other verbs + **out**

carry out an order / an experiment / a survey / an investigation / a plan etc.
- Soldiers are expected to **carry out** orders.
- An investigation into the accident will be **carried out**.

find out that/what/when (etc.) . . . , **find out about** . . . = *get information about*
- The police never **found out** who committed the crime.
- I just **found out** that it's Helen's birthday today.
- I checked a few websites to **find out** about hotels in the town.

give/**hand** things **out** = *give to each person*
- At the end of the lecture, the speaker **gave out** information sheets to the audience.

point something **out** (**to** somebody) = *draw attention to it*
- As we drove through the city, the tour guide **pointed out** all the sights.
- I didn't realise I'd made a mistake until somebody **pointed** it **out to** me.

run out (of something)
- We **ran out of** petrol on the motorway. (= we used all our petrol)

sort something **out** = *find a solution to, put in order*
- There are a few problems we need to **sort out**.
- All these papers are mixed up. I'll have to **sort** them **out**.

turn out to be . . . / **turn out** good/nice etc. / **turn out** that . . .
- Nobody believed Paul at first, but he **turned out** to be right. (= it became clear in the end that he was right)
- The weather wasn't so good in the morning, but it **turned out** nice later.
- I thought they knew each other, but it **turned out** that they'd never met.

try out a machine, a system, a new idea etc. = *test it to see if it is OK*
- The company is **trying out** some new software at the moment.

Unit 138

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**.

PLUG 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