



# Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H33

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

## **Contents**

### **Incident on the Kalka Train:**

- 1. 4, 5 and 6.**
- 2. Grammar Page.**

# 1. Incident on the Kalka Train: Part 2

By Satyajit Ray

## Four.

Jatayu was the pseudonym of Lalmohan Ganguli, the famous writer of best-selling crime thrillers. We had first met him on our way to the golden fortress in Rajasthan. There are some men who appear strangely comical without any apparent reason. Lalmohan Babu was one of them. He was short—the top of his head barely reached Feluda's shoulder; he wore size five shoes, was painfully thin, and yet would occasionally fold one of his arms absentmindedly and feel his biceps with the other. The next instant, he would give a violent start if anyone so much as sneezed loudly in the next room.

'I brought my latest book for you and Tapeshe,' he said, offering the brown parcel to Feluda. He had started coming to our house fairly regularly ever since our adventure in Rajasthan.

'Which country did you choose this time?' Feluda asked, unwrapping the parcel. The spine-chilling escapades of Lalmohan Babu's hero involved moving through different countries.

'Oh, I have covered practically the whole world this time,' Lalmohan Babu replied proudly, 'from the Nilgiris to the North Pole.'

'I hope there are no factual errors this time?' Feluda said quizzically, passing the book to me. Feluda had had to correct a mistake in his last book, *The Sahara Shivers*, regarding a camel's water supply.

'No, sir,' Lalmohan Babu grinned. 'One of my neighbours has a full set of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica". I checked every detail.'

'I'd have felt more reassured, Lalmohan Babu, if you had consulted the Britannica rather than the Britannia.'

But Jatayu ignored this remark and went on, 'The climax comes— you've got to read it—with my hero, Prakhar Rudra, having a fight with a hippopotamus.'

'A hippo?'

'Yes, it's really a thrilling affair.' 'Where does this fight take place?'

‘Why, in the North Pole, of course. A hippo, didn’t I say?’ ‘A hippopotamus in the North Pole?’

‘Yes, yes. Haven’t you seen pictures of this animal? It has whiskers like the bristles of a garden broom, fangs that stick out like a pair of white radishes, it pads softly on the snow . . .’

‘That’s a walrus, surely? A hippopotamus lives in Africa!’ Jatayu turned a deep shade of pink and bit his lip in profound embarrassment. ‘Eh heh heh heh!’ he said. ‘Bad mistake, that! Tell you what, from now on I’ll show you my manuscript before giving it to the publisher.’

Feluda made no reply to this. ‘Excuse me,’ he said and disappeared into his room.

‘Your cousin appears a little quiet,’ Lalmohan Babu said to me. ‘Has he got a new case?’

‘No, it’s nothing important,’ I told him. ‘But we have to go to Simla in the next couple of days.’

‘A long tour?’

‘No, just about four days.’

‘Hmm . . . I’ve never been to that part of the country . . .’ Lalmohan Babu grew preoccupied. But he began to show signs of animation the minute Feluda returned.

‘Tapesh tells me you’re going to Simla. Is it something to do with an investigation?’

‘No, not exactly. It’s just that Tom’s case has got exchanged with Dick’s. So we have to return Dick’s case to him and collect Tom’s.’

‘Good lord, the mystery of the missing case? Or, simply, a mysterious case?’

‘Look, I have no idea if there is any real mystery involved. But one or two things make me wonder

. . . just a little . . .’

‘Felu Babu,’ Jatayu interrupted, ‘I have come to know you pretty well in these few months. I’m convinced you wouldn’t have taken the case unless you felt there was . . . well, something in it. Do tell me what it is.’

I could sense Feluda was reluctant to reveal too much at this stage. 'It's difficult to say anything,' he said guardedly, 'without knowing for sure who is telling lies, and who is telling the truth, or who is simply trying to conceal the truth. All I know is that there is something wrong somewhere.'

'All right, that's enough!' Jatayu's eyes began to shine. 'Just say the word, and I'll tag along with you.'

'Can you bear the cold?'

'Cold? I went to Darjeeling last year.'

'When?'

'In May.'

'It's snowing in Simla now.'

'What!' Lalmohan Babu rose from his chair in excitement. 'Snow? You don't say! It was the desert the last time and now it's going to be snow? From the frying pan into the frigidaire? Oh, I can't imagine it!'

'It's going to be an expensive business.'

I knew Feluda was trying gently to discourage him, but Jatayu paid no attention to his words.

'I am not afraid of expenses,' he retorted, laughing like a film villain. 'I have published twenty-one thrillers, each one of which has seen at least five editions. I have bought three houses in Calcutta, by the grace of God. It's in my own interest that I travel as much as possible. The more places I see, the easier it is to think up new plots. And not everyone is clever like you, so most people can't see the difference between a walrus and a hippo, anyway. They'll happily swallow what I dish out, and that simply means that the cash keeps rolling in. Oh no, I am not bothered about the expenses. But if you give me a straight "no",' then obviously it's a different matter.'

Feluda gave in. Before taking his leave, Jatayu took the details of when and how we'd be leaving and for how long, jotted these down in his notebook and said, 'Woollen vests, a couple of pullovers, a woollen jacket and an overcoat . . . surely that should be enough even for Simla?'

‘Yes,’ said Feluda gravely, ‘but only if you add to it a pair of gloves, a Balaclava helmet, a pair of galoshes, woollen socks and something to fight frostbite. Then you may relax.’

I hate exams and tests in school, but I love the kind of tests Feluda sets for me. These are fun and they help clear my mind.

Feluda told me to come to his room after dinner. There he lay on his bed, flat on his stomach, and began throwing questions at me. The first was, ‘Name all the people we’ve got to know who are related to this case.’

‘Dinanath Lahiri.’

‘OK. What sort of a man do you think he is?’

‘All right, I guess. But he doesn’t know much about books and writers. And I’m slightly doubtful about the way he is spending such a lot of money to send us to Simla.’

‘A man who can maintain a couple of cars like that doesn’t have to worry about money. Besides, you mustn’t forget that employing Felu Mitter is a matter of prestige.’

‘Well, in that case there is nothing to be doubtful about. The second person we met was Naresh Chandra Pakrashi. Very ill-tempered.’

‘But plain spoken. That’s good. Not many have that quality.’

‘But does he always tell the truth? I mean, how do we know that Dinanath Lahiri really used to go to the races?’

‘Perhaps he still does. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that he’s a crook.’

‘Then we met Prabeer Lahiri, alias Amar Kumar. Didn’t seem to like his uncle.’

‘That’s perfectly natural. His uncle is a stumbling block in his way forward in films, he gives him an attaché case full of things one day, and then takes it back without telling him . . . so obviously he’s annoyed with his uncle.’

‘Prabeer Babu seemed pretty well built.’

‘Yes, he has strong and broad wrists. Perhaps that’s why his voice sounds so odd. It doesn’t match his manly figure at all. Now tell me the names of the other passengers who travelled with Dinanath Lahiri.’

‘One of them was Brijmohan. And his surname was . . . let me see . . .’ ‘Kedia. Marwari.’

‘Yes. He’s a moneylender. Nothing remarkable in his appearance, apparently. Knew Mr Pakrashi.’ ‘He really does have an office in Lenin Sarani. I looked it up in the telephone directory.’

‘I see. Well, the other was G. C. Dhameeja. He lives in Simla. Has an orchard.’ ‘So he said. We don’t know that for sure.’

‘But it is his attaché case that got exchanged with Mr Lahiri’s. Surely there is no doubt about that?’

The case in question was lying open next to Feluda’s bed. He stared absentmindedly at its contents and muttered, ‘Hm . . . yes, that is perhaps the only thing one can be . . .’ He broke off and picked up the two English newspapers that were in the case and glanced at them. ‘These,’ he continued to mutter, ‘are the only things that . . . you know . . . make me feel doubtful. They don’t fit in somehow.’

At this point, he had to stop muttering for the phone rang. Feluda had had an extension put in his own room.

‘Hello.’

‘Is that you, Mr Mitter?’

I could hear the words spoken from the other side, possibly because it was quiet outside.

‘Yes, Mr Lahiri.’

‘Listen, I have just received a message from Dhameeja.’

‘You mean he’s replied to your telegram? Already?’

‘No, no. I don’t think I’ll get a reply before tomorrow. I am talking about a phone call. Apparently, Dhameeja had gone to the railway reservation office and got my name and address from them. But because he had to leave very suddenly, he could not contact me himself. He left my attaché case with a friend here in Calcutta. It was this friend who rang me. He’ll return my case to me if I bring Dhameeja’s. So, you see . . .’

‘Did you ask him if the manuscript was still there?’ ‘Oh yes. Everything’s fine.’

'That's good news then. Your problem's solved.'

'Yes, most unexpectedly. I'm leaving in five minutes. I'll collect Dhameeja's case from you and then go to Pretoria Street.'

'May I make a request?' 'Certainly.'

'Why should you take the trouble of going out? We were going to go all the way to Simla, weren't we? So we'd quite happily go to Pretoria Street and collect your case for you. If you let me keep it tonight, I can skim through Shambhucharan's tale of Tibet. You may treat that as my fee. Tomorrow morning I shall return both the case and the manuscript to you.'

'Very well. I have no objection to that at all. The man who rang me is a Mr Puri and his address is 4/2 Pretoria Street.'

'Thank you. All's well that ends well.'

Feluda replaced the receiver and sat frowning. I, too, sat silently, fighting a wave of disappointment. I did so want to go to Simla and see it snow. Now I had missed the chance and would have to rot in Calcutta where it was already uncomfortably hot, even in March. Well, I suppose I ought to be with Feluda in this last chapter of the story.

'Let me go and get changed, Feluda,' I said. 'I won't be a minute.'

'All right. Hurry up.'

Twenty minutes later, we were in a taxi, cruising up and down Pretoria Street. It was a quiet street and, it being nearly half past eleven at night, not a soul was to be seen. We drove from one end of the street to the other, but it was impossible to see the numbers on the houses from the car. 'Please wait here, Sardarji,' Feluda said to the driver. 'We'll find the house and come back. We simply have to drop this case. It won't take long.'

An amiable man, the driver agreed to wait. We got out of the taxi at one end of the road and began walking. Beyond the wall on our left stood the tall and silent Birla building, dwarfing every other building in its vicinity with all its twenty-two floors. I had often heard Feluda remark that the creepiest things in a city after nightfall were its skyscrapers. 'Have you ever seen a corpse standing up?' he had asked me once. 'These buildings are just that in the dark—just a body without life or soul!'



A few minutes later, we found a house with '4' written on its gate. The next house, which was at some distance, turned out to be number 5. So 4/2 was probably in the little lane that ran between numbers 4 and 5. It was very difficult to see anything clearly. The few dim streetlights did nothing to help. We stepped into the lane, walking cautiously. How quiet it was!

Here was another gate. This must be 4/1. Where was 4/2? Somewhere further down, hidden in the dark? There didn't seem to be another house in the lane and, even if there was, it certainly did not have a light on. There were walls on both sides of the lane. Overgrown branches of trees on the other side hung over these. A very faint noise of traffic came from the main road. A clock struck in the distance. It must be the clock in St Paul's Church. It was now exactly half past eleven. But these noises did nothing to improve the eerie silence in Pretoria Street. A dog barked nearby. And, in that instant—

'Taxi! Sardarji, Sardarji!' I screamed, quite involuntarily.

A man had jumped over the wall on our right and fallen over Feluda. He was followed by another. The attaché case Feluda was carrying was no longer in his hand. He had dropped it on the ground and was trying to tackle the first man. I could feel the two men struggling with each other, but could see nothing. The blue case was lying on the road, right in front of me. I stretched my hand to pick it up, but the second man turned around at this moment and knocked me aside. Then he snatched the case and rushed to the entrance of the lane, through which we had just stepped. On my left, Feluda and the other man were still grappling with each other, but I could not figure out what the problem was. Feluda, by this time, should have been able to overpower his opponent.

'God!'

This exclamation came from our driver. He had heard me scream and rushed out to help. But the man who was making off with the case knocked him down and vanished. I could see the poor driver lying flat on the ground under a streetlight. In the meantime, the first man managed to wriggle free from Feluda's grasp and climbed over the wall.

Feluda took out his handkerchief and began wiping his hands. 'That man,' he observed, 'had oiled himself rather well. Must have rubbed at least a kilo of mustard oil on his body, making him slippery as an eel. I believe it's an old trick with thieves.'

True. I had smelt the oil as soon as the two men arrived, but had not been able to guess where it was coming from.

‘Thank God!’

For the life of me, I could not understand why Feluda said this. How could he, even after such a disaster? ‘What do you mean?’ I asked, puzzled. Feluda did not reply at once. He helped the driver, who appeared unhurt, to his feet. Then he said, as the three of us began walking towards the taxi, ‘You don’t think what those scoundrels got away with was Dhameeja’s property, do you?’

‘Wasn’t it?’ I was even more mystified.

‘What they took was the property of Pradosh C. Mitter. And what it contained were three torn vests, five threadbare handkerchiefs, several pieces of rag and a few old newspapers, torn to shreds. I rang telephone enquiries when you went to change. They told me there was no telephone at 4/2 Pretoria Street. But, of course, I didn’t know that even the address was a fake one.’

My heart started pounding once more. Something told me the visit to Simla was now imperative.

## Five.

We rang Dinanath Babu as soon as we got home. He was completely nonplussed. ‘Goodness me!’ he exclaimed, ‘I had no idea a thing like this could happen! One possible explanation is, of course, that those two men were just ordinary thieves without any particular motive to steal Dhameeja’s attaché case. But even so, the fact remains that both this man called Puri and the address he gave, were totally fictitious. That means Mr Dhameeja never really went to the railway reservation office. Who, then, made the phone call?’

‘If we knew that, there would be no need for further investigations, Mr Lahiri.’  
‘But tell me, what made you suspicious in the first place?’

The fact that the man rang you so late in the night. Mr Dhameeja went back yesterday. So why didn’t Mr Puri give you a call yesterday or during the day today?’

'I see. Well, it looks as though we have to go back to our original plan of sending you to Simla. But considering the turn this whole business is taking, frankly I am now scared to send you anywhere.'

Feluda laughed, 'Don't worry, Mr Lahiri. I can't call your case tame and insipid any more. It's definitely got a taste of excitement. And I am glad, for I would have felt ashamed to take your money otherwise. Anyway, I would now like you to do something for me, please.'

'Yes?'

'Let me have a list of the contents of your case. It would make it easier for me to check when Dhameeja returns it.'

'That's easy since there wasn't anything much, anyway. But I'll let you have the list when I send you your tickets.'

Feluda left home early the next morning. His whole demeanour had changed in just a few hours. I could tell by the way he kept cracking his knuckles that he was feeling restless and disturbed. Like me, he had not been able to work out why anyone should try to steal a case that contained nothing of value. He had examined each item carefully once more, going so far as squeezing some of the toothpaste out and feeling the shaving cream by pressing the tube gently. He even took out the blades from their container and unfolded the newspapers. Still, he found nothing suspicious. Feluda left at about 8 a.m. 'I will return at eleven,' he said before leaving. 'If anyone rings the calling bell in the next three hours, don't open the door yourself. Get Srinath to do it.'

I resigned myself to wait patiently for his return. Baba had gone out of town. So I wrote a letter for him, explaining why Feluda and I had to go to Simla before he got back. Having done this, I settled down on the settee in the living-room with a book. But I could not read. The more I thought about Feluda's new case, the more confused I felt. Dinanath Babu, his nephew who acted in films, the irascible Mr Pakrashi, Mr Dhameeja of Simla, the moneylender called Brijmohan . . . everyone seemed unreal, as though each was wearing a mask. Even the contents of the Air-India case seemed false. And, on top of everything else, was last night's frightening experience . . .

No, I must stop thinking. I picked up a magazine. It was a film magazine called Sparkling Stars. Ah yes, here was the photograph of Amar Kumar I had seen before. 'The newcomer, Amar Kumar, in the latest film being made by Sri Guru

Pictures’, said the caption. Amar Kumar was staring straight into the camera, wearing a cap very much in the style of Dev Anand in Jewel Thief, a scarf around his throat, a cruel smile under a pencil-thin moustache. There was a pistol in his hand, very obviously a fake, possibly made of wood.

Something made me suddenly jump up and turn to the telephone directory. Here it was—Sri Guru Pictures, 53 Bentinck Street. 24554.

I dialled the number quickly. It rang several times before someone answered at the other end. ‘Hello.’

‘Is that Sri Guru Pictures?’

My voice had recently started to break. So I was sure whoever I was speaking to would never guess I was really no more than fifteen-and-a-half.

‘Yes, this is Sri Guru Pictures.’

‘This is about Amar Kumar, you know . . . the newcomer in your latest film—’

‘Please speak to Mr Mallik.’ The telephone was passed to another man.

‘Yes?’

‘Mr Mallik?’ ‘Speaking.’

‘Is there someone called Amar Kumar working in your latest film? The Ghost, I think it’s called?’ ‘Amar Kumar has been dropped.’

‘Dropped?’

‘Who am I speaking to, please?’ ‘I . . . well, I . . .’

Like a fool, I could think of nothing to say and put the receiver down hurriedly.

So Amar Kumar was no longer in the cast! It must have been because of his voice. How unfair, though, to reject him after his picture had been published in a magazine. But didn’t the man know, or did he simply pretend to us that he was still acting in the film?

I was lost in thought when the telephone rang, startling me considerably.

‘Hello!’ I gasped.

There was no response for a few seconds. Then I heard a faint click. Oh, I knew. Someone was calling from a public pay phone.

'Hello?' I said again. This time, I heard a voice, soft but distinct. 'Going to Simla, are you?'

This was the last thing I'd have expected to hear from a strange voice. Rendered speechless, I could only swallow in silence.

The voice spoke again. It sounded harsh and the words it uttered chilled my blood. 'Danger. Do you hear? You are both going to be in great danger if you go to Simla.' This was followed by another click. The line was disconnected. But I didn't need to hear any more. Those few words were enough.

Like the Nepali Rana in Uncle Sidhu's story, whose hand shook while shooting at a tiger, I replaced the receiver with a trembling hand.

Then I flopped down on a chair and sat very still. About half an hour later, I heard another ring. This nearly made me fall off the chair, but this time I realized it was the door bell, not the telephone. It was past eleven, so I opened the door myself and Feluda walked in. The huge packets in his hands meant that he had been to the laundry to collect our warm clothes.

Feluda gave me a sidelong glance and said, 'Why are you licking your lips? Has there been a strange phone call?'

'How did you guess?' I asked, astonished.

'From the way you've kept the receiver. Besides, the whole thing's become so complicated that I'd have been surprised if we didn't get a few weird calls. Who was it? What did he say?'

'Don't know who it was. He said going to Simla meant danger for both of us.'

Feluda pushed the regulator of the fan to its maximum speed and sat casually down on the divan. 'What did you say to him?'

'Nothing.'

'Idiot! You should have said going to Simla cannot possibly be more dangerous than going out in the street in Calcutta. A regular battlefield is probably the only place that can claim to be more full of danger than the streets in this city.'

Feluda's nonchalance calmed my nerves. I decided to change the subject.

'Where did you go?' I asked. 'Apart from the laundry, I mean.'

'To the office of S. M. Kedia.' 'Did you learn anything new?'

'Brijmohan seemed a friendly enough fellow. His family has lived in Calcutta for three generations. And yes, he knows Mr Pakrashi. I got the impression that Pakrashi still owes him some money. Brijmohan, too, had eaten the apple Dhameeja had offered him. But no, he doesn't have a blue Air-India attaché case; and he had spent most of his time on the train either sleeping or just lying with his eyes closed.'

I told Feluda about Amar Kumar.

'If he knows he has been dropped but is pretending he isn't,' remarked Feluda, 'then the man is truly a fine actor.'

We finished our packing in the late afternoon. Since we were going for less than a week, I didn't take too many clothes. At six-thirty in the evening, Jatayurang us.

'I am taking a new weapon,' he informed us. 'I'll show it to you when we get to Delhi.'

We knew he was interested in collecting weapons of various kind. He had taken a Nepali dagger on our journey through Rajasthan, although he did not get the chance to use it.

'I have bought my ticket,' he added. 'I'll see you tomorrow at the airport.'

Our tickets arrived a couple of hours later, together with a note from Dinanath Babu. It said:

Dear Mr Mitter,

I am enclosing your air tickets to Delhi and train tickets to Simla. I have made reservations for you for a day in Delhi at the Janpath Hotel; and you are booked at the Clarkes in Simla for four days. I have just received a reply from Mr Dhameeja. He says he has my attaché case safe. He expects you to call on him the day after tomorrow at 4 p.m. You have got his address, so I will not repeat it here. I have not made a list of the items in my case because, thinking things over, it struck me that there is only one thing in it that is of any value to me. It is a bottle of enterovioform tablets. These are made in England and definitely more effective than those produced here. I should be happy simply to get these back. I hope you have a safe and successful visit.

Yours sincerely, Dinanath Lahiri.

We were planning to have an early night and go to bed by ten o' clock, but at a quarter to ten, the door-bell rang. Who could it be at this hour? I opened the door and was immediately struck dumb to find a man who I never dreamt would ever pay us a visit. If Feluda was similarly surprised, he did not show it.

'Good evening, Mr Pakrashi,' he said coolly, 'please come in.' Mr Pakrashi came in, a slightly embarrassed look on his face, a smile hovering on his lips. His ill-tempered air was gone. What had happened in a day to bring about this miraculous change? And what had he come to tell us so late in the evening?

He sat down on a chair and said, 'Sorry to trouble you. I know it's late. I did try to ring you, but couldn't get through. So I thought it was best to call personally. Please don't mind.'

'We don't. Do tell us what brings you here.'

'I have come to make a request. It is a very special request. In fact, it may strike you as positively strange.'

'Really?'

'You said something about a manuscript in Dinanath Lahiri's attaché case. Was it . . . something written by Shambhucharan Bose? You know, the same man who wrote about the Terai?'

'Yes, indeed. An account of his visit to Tibet.'

'My God!'

Feluda did not say anything. Naresh Pakrashi, too, was quiet for a few moments. Then he said, 'Are you aware that my collection of travelogues is the largest and the best in Calcutta?'

'I am fully prepared to believe that. I did happen to glance at those almirahs in your room; and I caught the names of quite a few very well-known travel writers.'

'Your powers of observation must be very good.' 'That is what I live by, Mr Pakrashi.'

Mr Pakrashi now took the pipe out of his mouth, looked straight at Feluda and said, 'You are going to Simla, aren't you.'

It was Feluda's turn to be surprised. He did not actually ask, 'How do you know.' But his eyes held a quizzical look.

Mr Pakrashi smiled. 'A clever man like you,' he said, 'would naturally not find it too difficult to discover that Dinu Lahiri's attaché case had got exchanged with Dhameeja's. I had seen Dhameeja's name written on his suitcase. He did, in fact, take out his shaving things from the blue Air-India case, so I knew it was his.'

'Why didn't you say so yesterday?'

'Isn't it a greater joy to have worked things out for yourself? It is your case, after all. You will work on it and get paid for your pains. Why should I voluntarily offer any help?'

Feluda appeared to be in agreement. All he said was, 'But you haven't yet told me what your strange request is.'

'I am coming to that. You will—no doubt—manage to retrieve Dinanath's case. And the manuscript with it. I would request you not to give it back to him.'

'What!' This time Feluda could not conceal his surprise. Nor could I. 'I suggest you pass the manuscript to me.'

'To you?' Feluda raised his voice.

'I told you it would sound odd. But you must listen to me,' Mr Pakrashi continued, leaning forward a little, his elbows resting on his knees. 'Dinanath Lahiri cannot appreciate the value of that book. Did you see a single good book in his house? No, I know you did not. Besides, don't think I'm not going to compensate you for this. I have got—'

Here he stopped and took out a long blue envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. Then he opened it and offered it to Feluda. It was stuffed with new, crisp, sweet-smelling hundred-rupee notes. 'I have two thousand here,' he said, 'and this is only an advance payment. I will give you another two thousand when you hand over the manuscript to me.'

Feluda did not even glance at the envelope. He took out a cigarette from his pocket, lit it casually and said, 'I don't think it's of any relevance whether Dinanath Lahiri appreciates the value of the manuscript or not. I have promised to collect his case from Dhameeja in Simla and return it to him, with all its contents intact. And that is what I am going to do.'

Mr Pakrashi appeared to be at a loss to find a suitable answer to this. After a few moments, he simply said, 'All right. Let's forget about your payment. All I



am asking you to do is give me the manuscript. Tell Lahiri it was missing. Say Dhameeja said he didn't see it.'

'How,' asked Feluda, 'can I put Mr Dhameeja in a position like that? Can you think of the consequences? You can't seriously expect me to tell lies about a totally innocent man? No, Mr Pakrashi, I cannot do as you ask.'

Feluda rose and added, perfectly civilly, 'Good-night, Mr Pakrashi. I hope you will not misunderstand me.'

Mr Pakrashi continued to sit, staring into space. Then he replaced the envelope into his pocket, stood up, gave Feluda a dry smile and went out without a word. It was impossible to tell from his face whether he felt angry, disappointed or humiliated.

Would any other sleuth have been able to resist such temptation and behave the way Feluda had done? Perhaps not.

## Six.

Feluda, Jatayu and I were sitting in Indian Airlines flight number 263, on our way to Delhi. The plane left at 7.30 a.m. Feluda had explained to Jatayu, while we were waiting in the departure lounge, about our visit to Pretoria Street and the ensuing events. Jatayu listened, round-eyed, occasionally breaking into exclamations like 'thrilling!' and 'highly suspicious!' Then he jotted down in his notebook the little matter of the thief and the mustard oil.

'Have you flown before?' I asked him.

'If,' he replied sagely, 'a man's imagination is lively enough, he can savour an experience without actually doing anything. No, I've never travelled by air. But if you asked me whether I'm feeling nervous, my answer would be "not a bit" because in my imagination, I have travelled not just in an aeroplane but also in a rocket. Yes, I have been to the moon!'

Despite these brave words, when the plane began to speed across the runway just before take-off, I saw Lalmohan Babu clutching the armrests of his seat so tightly that his knuckles turned white. When the plane actually shot up in the air, his colour turned a rather unhealthy shade of yellow and his face broke into a terrible grimace.

‘What happened to you?’ I asked him afterwards.

‘But that was natural!’ he said. ‘When a rocket leaves for outer space, even the faces of astronauts get distorted. The thing is, you see, as you’re leaving the ground, the laws of gravity pull you back. In that conflict, the facial muscles contract, and hence the distortion of the whole face.’

I wanted to ask if that was indeed the case, why should Lalmohan Babu be the only person to be singled out by the laws of gravity, why didn’t everyone else get similarly affected; but seeing that he had recovered his composure and was, in fact, looking quite cheerful, I said nothing more.

Breakfast arrived soon, with the cutlery wrapped in a cellophane sheet. Lalmohan Babu attacked his omelette with the coffee spoon, used the knife like a spoon to scoop out the marmalade from its little pot, putting it straight into his mouth without bothering to spread it on a piece of bread; then he tried to peel the orange with his fork, but gave up soon and used his fingers instead.

Finally, he leant forward and said to Feluda, ‘I saw you chewing betel-nut a while ago. Do you have any left?’

Feluda took out the Kodak container from the blue attaché case and passed it to Lalmohan Babu. I couldn’t help glancing again at Mr Dhameeja’s case. Did it know that we were going to travel twelve hundred miles to a snow-laden place situated at a height of seven thousand feet, simply to return it to its owner and pick up an identical one? The thought suddenly made me shiver.

Feluda had said virtually nothing after we took off. He had taken out his famous blue notebook (volume seven) and was scribbling in it, occasionally looking up to stare out of the window at the fluffy white clouds, biting the end of his pen. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. I, for my part, had given up trying to think at all. It was all too complex.

We soon landed in Delhi and came out of the airport. There was a noticeable nip in the air. ‘This probably means there has been a fresh snowfall in Simla,’ Feluda observed. He was still clutching the blue case. Not for a second had he allowed himself to be separated from it.

‘I think I can get a room at the Agra Hotel,’ said Lalmohan Babu. ‘I will join you at the Janpath by noon. Then we can have lunch together and have a little roam around. The train to Simla doesn’t leave until eight this evening, does it?’

The Janpath was a fairly large hotel. We were given room 532 on the fifth floor. Feluda put our luggage on the luggage-rack and threw himself on the bed. I decided to take this opportunity to ask him something that I had been feeling curious about.

‘Feluda,’ I said, ‘in this whole business of blue cases and jumping hooligans, what strikes you as most suspicious?’

‘The newspapers.’

‘Er . . . would you care to elaborate?’ I asked hesitantly.

‘I cannot figure out why Mr Dhameeja folded the two newspapers so neatly and put them in his case with such care. A newspaper, once read, especially on a train, is useless. Most people would leave it behind without a second thought. Then why . . . ?’

This was Feluda’s technique. He would begin to worry about a seemingly completely irrelevant point that would escape everyone else. Certainly I couldn’t make head or tail of it.

In the remaining hours that we spent in Delhi, two things happened. The first was nothing remarkable, but the other was horrifying.

Lalmohan Babu turned up at about half past twelve. We decided to go to the Jantar Mantar, which was not far from our hotel. Jatayu and I were both keen to see this observatory built two hundred and fifty years ago by Sawai Jai Singh. Feluda said he’d much rather stay in the hotel, both to keep an eye on Dhameeja’s attaché case and to think more about the mystery.

The first incident took place within ten minutes of our arrival at the Jantar Mantar. We were strolling along peacefully, when suddenly Lalmohan Babu clutched at my sleeve and whispered, ‘I think . . . I think a rather suspicious character is trying to follow us!’

I looked at the man he indicated. It was an old man, a Nepali cap on his head, cotton wool plugged in his ears, his eyes hidden behind a pair of dark glasses. It did appear as though he was interested in our movements. How very strange!

‘I know that man!’ said Jatayu.

‘What!’

'He sat next to me on the plane. Helped me fasten my seat belt.' 'Did he speak to you?'

'No. I thanked him, but he said nothing. Most suspicious, I tell you!'

Perhaps the man could guess we were talking about him. He disappeared only a few minutes later.

By the time we returned to the hotel, it was almost half past three. I asked for our key at the reception, but the receptionist said he didn't have it. This alarmed me somewhat, but then I remembered I had not handed it in at all. It was still in my pocket. Besides, it was rather foolish to worry about the key when Feluda was in the room to let us in. 'Just goes to show you're not used to staying in hotels,' I told myself.

Our room was on the right, about thirty yards down the corridor. I knocked on the door. There was no response.

'Perhaps your cousin is having a nap,' remarked Lalmohan Babu. I knocked again. Nothing happened.

Then I turned the handle and discovered that the door was open. But I knew Feluda had locked it from inside when we left.

I pushed the door, but it refused to open more than a little. Something pretty heavy must be lying behind it. What could it be?

I peered in through the little gap, and my blood froze.

Feluda was lying on the floor, face down. His right elbow was what the door was knocking against.

I could hardly breathe, but knew that I must not panic. Together with Lalmohan Babu, I pushed the door harder and eventually we both managed to slide in.

Feluda was unconscious. But, possibly as a result of our pushing and heaving, he was beginning to stir and groan. Lalmohan Babu, it turned out, could keep a calm head in a crisis. It was he who splashed cold water on Feluda's face and fanned him furiously until he opened his eyes.

Then he raised a hand gingerly and felt the centre of his head, making a face. 'It's gone, I assume?' he asked. I had already checked.

‘Yes, Feluda,’ I had to tell him, ‘that attaché case has vanished.’ Feluda staggered to his feet, declining our offer of assistance. ‘It’s all right,’ he insisted, ‘I can manage. I’ve got a bump on my head, but I think that’s all. It might have been worse.’

It might indeed. Feluda took a few minutes to rest and to make sure nothing was broken. Then he rang room service, ordered tea for us all and told us what had happened.

‘I studied the entries in my notebook for about half an hour after you had gone. Then I began to feel tired. I hadn’t slept for more than a couple of hours last night, you see. So I thought I’d have a little rest, but just at that moment the telephone rang.’

‘The telephone?’

‘Who was it?’

‘Wait, let me finish. It was the receptionist. He said, Mr Mitter, there’s a gentleman here who has recognized you. He says he’d like to take the autograph of such a brilliant sleuth as yourself. Shall I send him up?’

Feluda paused here, turned to me and continued, ‘I realized one thing today, Topshe, and I don’t mind admitting it—to give an autograph is as tempting as taking it. I shall, of course, be more careful in future. But I needed this lesson.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘I felt so pleased that I told the receptionist to send the man up. He came, knocked on the door, I opened it, felt a sharp knock on my own head, and . . . everything went black. The man had covered his face with a large handkerchief, so I don’t even know what he looked like.’

‘Since we are in Delhi,’ suggested Jatayu, ‘wouldn’t it be a good idea to inform the Prime Minister?’

Feluda smiled wryly at this. ‘God knows what that man gained by stealing that blue case,’ he remarked, ‘but he has certainly put us in an impossible situation. What a reckless devil!’

For the next few minutes, no one spoke. All that could be heard in the room was the sound of sighs. At last, Feluda uttered a few significant words. ‘There is

a way,' he said slowly. 'Not, I admit, a simple way. But it's the only one I can think of, and we've got to take it because we cannot go to Simla empty-handed.'

He reached for his blue notebook, and ran his eyes through the list of contents in Dhameeja's case. 'There is nothing in this list,' he said, 'that we can't get here in Delhi. We've got to get every item. I remember what each one looked like and what condition it was in. So that's one thing we needn't worry about. I could make the toothpaste and the shaving cream look old and used. And it should be possible to get hold of a white handkerchief and have it embroidered. I remember the pattern. The newspapers will, of course, have a different date, but I don't think Mr Dhameeja will notice it. The only expensive thing would be a roll of Kodak film . . .'

'Hey!' Lalmohan Babu interrupted. 'Hey, look, I completely forgot to give this back to you. You passed it to me on the plane, remember?' He returned the Kodak container to Feluda.

'Good, that's one problem solved . . . but what is that sticking out of your pocket?'

A piece of paper had slipped out with the little box of betel-nuts. We could all see what was written on it:

'Do not go to Simla if you value your life.'

## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
140

### Phrasal verbs 4 on/off (1)

**A** on and off for lights, machines etc.

We say:  
the light **is on** / **put** the light **on** / **leave** the light **on** etc.  
**turn** the light **on/off** or **switch** the light **on/off**

- Shall I **leave** the lights **on** or **turn** them **off**?
- 'Is the heating **on**?' 'No, I **switched** it **off**.'

also

**put** (music, a song) **on**, **put** the kettle **on**:

- Let's **put** some music **on**. What would you like to hear?
- We need boiling water, so I'll **put** the kettle **on**.

**B** on and off for events etc.

**go on** = *happen*

- What's all that noise? What's **going on**? (= what's happening)

**call** something **off** = *cancel it*

- The concert in the park had to be **called off** because of the weather.

**put** something **off**, **put off** doing something = *delay it*

- The election has been **put off** until January.
- We can't **put off** making a decision. We have to decide now.

**C** on and off for clothes etc.

**put on** clothes, glasses, make-up, a seat belt etc.

- My hands were cold, so I **put** my gloves **on**.

**put on** weight = *get heavier*

- I've **put on** two kilos in the last month.

**try on** clothes (to see if they fit)

- I **tried on** a jacket in the shop, but it didn't look right.

**take off** clothes, glasses etc.

- It was warm, so I **took off** my coat.

**D** off = away from a person or place

**be off** (to a place)

- Tomorrow I'm **off** to Paris. / I'm **off** on holiday.  
(= I'm going to Paris / I'm going on holiday)

**walk off** / **run off** / **drive off** / **ride off** / **go off** (similar to **walk away** / **run away** etc.)

- Anna got on her bike and **rode off**.
- Mark left home at the age of eighteen and **went off** to Canada.

**set off** = *start a journey*

- We **set off** early to avoid the traffic. (= We left early)

**take off** = *leave the ground (for planes)*

- After a long delay, the plane finally **took off**.

**see** somebody **off** = *go with them to the airport/station to say goodbye*

- Helen was going away. We went to the station with her to **see her off**.