



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F47

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1. A Strange Revenge

By Premchand

One

Nearly twenty years ago, in a district of Bundelkhand, there lived a Khangar named Shivnath. He was very poor but honest and adept in wrestling. He worked as a chowkidar in the nearby police station on a monthly salary of three rupees.

That was his only means of livelihood. But things were not very expensive in those days and he could maintain his family comfortably.

A man named Lalsingh lived in the same ward. He was a *lambardar*, belonging to a privileged landowning family. He was also a man of wild and licentious habits. The decent women of the village wished that he would lose his sight so he would stop casting sinful glances towards the daughters and daughters-in-law of the village. One day, while wandering in the village, he reached Shivnath's doorstep and decided to lay a trap to ensnare the Khangar's wife. So, as Shivnath would leave for the police station Lalsingh would set about playing his tricks. Eventually, Shivnath's wife was caught in Lalsingh's net of love.

For some days it remained a secret, but a sin can never be concealed. People in the village began to whisper among themselves. Shivnath also got wind of it. Seeing his wife's changed temperament he was quite upset for some time. Now he became suspicious. He went to Lalsingh and said, 'Thakur Sahib, I'm a poor man. My honour is in your hands. The people of the village are speaking ill of you and me. Do something so I may continue to live in the village and you are also saved from calumny.' But Lalsingh was blinded by his power. He gave Shivnath a piece of his mind and had him pushed out of his house.

Shivnath felt angry but restrained himself. He went to the police inspector and told him the whole story. Lalsingh was summoned to the police station, but in the evening people saw him returning, confidently twirling his moustache. He was acquitted without a stain on his character. He must have given the inspector fifty to hundred rupees which settled everything. Poor Shivnath was sorely disappointed. Eventually he resolved to do what is usually a last resort in such a situation.

Some more days passed. Shivnath came to his house as a stranger and lived like a guest. That house was no longer his and that woman was no more his wife. It was now Lalsingh's house and the woman his wife.

One day Shivnath told his wife, 'I'm going to Maudha for some official work. It might take four or five days. You take care of yourself!' The illiterate woman had little insight into human character. She was overjoyed to hear the news and her lips wore a smile which pierced Shivnath with the force of a lance

When he packed wheat and lentils and left the house, Lalsingh thanked his stars. He was just so happy. He thought now he could take things easy for four or five days.

It was midnight. Shivnath was hidden in the jungle formed by shady *dhak* trees. He sharpened his club to a fine point. When the saras bird wailed to announce midnight, he made for his house holding the sword in his hand. Seeing the door closed he leapt on to the thatched roof with the agility of a monkey and jumped into the courtyard. As he went in he saw Thakur Sahib and his beloved lost in their dreams. Who could bear to witness such a scene?

Shivnath challenged Lalsingh, 'Beware! The angel of death is standing before you.'

Puzzled, Lalsingh got up in a dishevelled state when Shivnath's sword fell on his neck with full force and severed his head. Shivnath's wife fell at his feet. He did not hit her and said, 'If you have any shame left you should drown yourself.'

Somehow the night passed. At dawn Shivnath held the severed head in one hand and his blood-smeared club in the other and reached the police station. He laid down the head right before the inspector and said, 'The justice that you couldn't offer has been achieved by this sword. Take this head. From today Shivnath has turned a sworn enemy of the police. If anyone has the courage, he can face me. Shivnath is throwing down this challenge before leaving the police station. Don't say later that I slunk away quietly.'

There were at least twenty policemen who heard this challenge but no one could muster the courage to stop that raging Khangar.

Two

Shivnath began to create trouble all around. If he kindled a fire at one village, he mounted a robbery in another. He didn't have a lust for money but he was thirsty for the blood of lambardars. The families of many a lambardar were left without heirs. Slowly he formed a band. People began to tremble at the name of Shivnath. A single individual had spread terror through the entire district. People closed their doors early in the evening. It was difficult to walk freely as Shivnath seemed to be present everywhere. If he led a dacoity at one place today, the next day he would plunder some village fifty miles off. The high and mighty were all humbled. He would send word in broad daylight about his rendezvous for the day and ask them to send whatever he demanded. If anyone refused to abide by his command they paid for it with death. People marvelled at the stories of his courage and strength. It was child's play for him to sit on an elephant's head, holding his sword between his teeth. He did not hide himself like a common thief. He would organize musical assemblies at night and the hills reverberated with songs. A chowkidar who used to work for a monthly salary of three rupees began to collect revenue from big zamindars now.

One day Shivnath mounted a dacoity on the house of a rich herdsman.

When they were leaving with the booty the hefty herdsman stood before him and said, 'Guruji, you're taking away all my savings. How can I live? Take me along as well.' Shivnath looked closely at his physique and limbs and was amazed—here was not a man but a lion. If he had a lion's neck, he had the chest of a rhino. Every pore of his body exuded strength. He asked, 'Are you serious?'

'Yes,' said the herdsman.

'What's your name?' asked Shivnath. 'Dangal.'

'I name you Dangal Singh from today. It's up to you to maintain the honour of this name. You look a real man. I hope you won't betray me.'

'If I strike I do so openly. Real men don't betray.'

Shivnath returned Dangal Singh's goods. From that day they became loyal friends and this friendship lasted till they died. Where earlier there was one, now there were two. And both were war-like men. Shivnath had terrorized the district all by himself. Now they combined their strengths and raised a storm. The names of Shivnath and Dangal would spell terror in the minds of people.

Three

For three years there was total chaos in the district. Both the dacoits were extraordinarily daring. They slipped through crowds of people like flashes of lightning. The policemen could not sleep at night out of fear. In fact, the inspector of police and the sub-inspector would regularly send them gifts as tribute.

One day both were sitting on a hill. It was evening. They saw a man at a distance coming on horseback. His wife was following him in a palanquin. He was taking her back from her parents' house.

Dangal said, 'Boss, we've got a good prey today. We shouldn't allow it to slip through our fingers.'

With this intention they came down the hill and asked the horse rider, 'Thakur Sahib, from where are you coming? You should stop here. The road ahead is infested with dacoits. The roads here are closed early in the evening.'

The thakur's name was Dhani Singh. He said, 'I also want to stop. But I can't see any place where we can stay.'

Dangal said, 'There's a well by the tree over there. The tree provides shade.'

What more do you want? Why don't you pass the night here?' Dhani Singh asked, 'Who are you?'

Dangal replied, 'We're also travellers and wish to spend the night here.' 'That's good,' said Dhani Singh. 'But isn't there a village nearby?'

'Get off the horse. All arrangements for your comfort will be made. Your gun looks very impressive. Let me have a look.'

Dhani Singh was duped. He handed his gun to Dangal Singh. They were waiting for this moment. Shivnath pulled Dhani Singh off his horse and tied his hands and feet. Seeing this, the palanquin bearers ran for their lives. Lifting the screen of the palanquin, Thakur's wife peered out. Her eyes darkened and she jumped into the well. Dhani Singh's eyes looked blood red.

He said, 'Friends, you've betrayed me.'

Dangal said, 'As long as we can get our job done by word of mouth we don't bother the devil.'

'Are you leaving me alive?' Dhani Singh asked.

'Yes. Take as much rest as you want,' replied Dangal.

Dhani Singh said, 'You'll regret it. I'm also a thakur and I'll take revenge some day.'

At this Dungal retorted, 'Our enemies run into the hundreds and thousands. You'll be just one more.'

Dhani Singh warned, 'Just be careful. You've vanquished me through treachery. I'll also do the same.'

Four

One month after this incident, news got out that a new dacoit named Jagat Singh had emerged. Within the year he conducted so many daring robberies that the exploits of Shivnath and Dungal Singh paled before them. However, this new dacoit usually avoided murder and plunder. He would appear like a storm and surround the village. And then one would hear the sound of gunshots. Two or three old shacks would be set ablaze and then the vengeful storm would clear.

No one would lose his life or wealth. People would report that Jagat Singh had led a raid on some village but they wouldn't say what was lost. This new dacoit lusted neither for money nor for blood. He just wanted the fame of a dacoit.

One day Dungal said to Shivnath, 'Friend, another player seems to have emerged in the field.'

'Seems to be a daredevil, a hero.'

'It'll be good if we team up with him,' Dungal suggested. 'If we do so, we can loot the whole province.'

'If you wish, I can send him word right this moment,' said Dungal. 'Do it, but be careful,' warned Shivnath.

When Jagat received the offer his face lit up. He couldn't conceal his joy. His long-cherished desire was fulfilled. He told the messenger, 'Give my humble greetings to Guruji. I am his servant. He can come whenever he wishes. He's most welcome.'

On the third day the two dacoits met Jagat Singh on the bank of a river. The sight of him was so alarming that Dungal almost fainted. Shivnath was shocked but he restrained himself. Jagat Singh was none other than Dhani Singh.

Dhani Singh said, 'Boss, I suppose you recognize me.'

'Yes. Since when have you taken on this garb?' asked Shivnath. 'Since the day I met you,' answered Dhani Singh.

'I hope you don't hold anything against me anymore. We must forget the past,' said Shivnath.

'If you haven't forgotten the past we can't work together,' Dangal butted in. Dhani Singh said solemnly, 'Boss, those who are lion-hearted do not act mean.' 'We're brothers now,' declared Shivnath. 'I feel the same way. Let's hug and forget about the past.'

The threesome hugged one another and their union was celebrated throughout the night.

Five

Another year passed. The three dacoits laid waste to the whole district. It made no difference to them whether it was day or night, dark or sunny. They would loot in broad daylight and would send a warning earlier. It was as though an evil and dark plague had brought about doomsday and cloud and storm had combined their strength with lightning.

It was the day of Holi. The robbers raided a seth's house. The poor people were singing songs and making merry. Their merry-making was disrupted by the raid. The dacoits gathered a lot of wealth.

Dangal Singh said, 'Boss, we must have a party today. We'll also celebrate Holi.'

Two nautch girls were sent for. A wine goblet was brought. They began to imbibe as the tabla began to beat in rhythm. The nautch girls held the wine glasses in their hands. They drank to their hearts' content. Dangal began to doze.

He said groggily, 'I'm going to sleep. Let me see if anyone can catch me.' Shivnath was still in his senses, but his eyes were rolling.

He said to Dhani Singh, 'Brother, Dangal is out, he'll wake up only in the morning. You also seem to be on a high. We can't trust others. Why don't you take rest for some time? When you wake up later then I'll go to sleep.'

Saying this he picked up the gun in his hand and began to make rounds near the hill. However, as the breeze began to blow gently he stood leaning against a rock and began to snore. Dhani Singh got up. He was true to his word and went about his job single-mindedly.

He loaded the gun, went up to Dangal Singh and challenged him, 'Beware, you thief. Your death is standing before you.'

Dangal Singh was staggering to his feet when the bullet pierced through his chest and his body began to writhe on the rock. Shivnath heard the gunshot.

He peered to see Dhani Singh walking towards him. He stood behind the rock and said, 'So you betrayed us, finally.'

'One must answer betrayal with betrayal,' answered Dhani Singh. 'I could understand your plan,' said Shivnath.

'If you had understood, you wouldn't have been betrayed.'

Both aimed their guns at each other, but both missed their targets. Hearing the ruckus, people gathered from all sides. Dhani Singh wanted to arrest Shivnath but he escaped unscathed.

Thus, Dhani Singh fulfilled his duty of avenging the crime committed against him and, thus, rid the country of a terrible scourge. For several years after this incident, constables continued to guard Dhani Singh's house. They also accompanied him wherever he went. Nevertheless, Shivnath would pass by his house at least once either during the day or at night and fire a couple of shots, but he could never hit his target.

Dhani Singh was given a *jagir* as an endowment by the government. His sons still own the land. No one knows what happened to Shivnath in the end. It seems that he had given up robbing from that day onwards. Some people said that he had gone on a pilgrimage, while others said he had committed suicide. But no one could say anything with certainty.

A *chabutara* was built in the name of Lalsingh Lambardar. In the village, people still worshipped him. He who couldn't do anything while he was alive was now considered the treasurer of all bounties and happiness after his death.

2. Grammar Page



GRAMMAR STUDY: Various Structures of Conditional Sentences

➤ Positive conditions

He'll do it if you pay him.
If she asked me, I would help her.
If you like it, you can keep it.
If she knew the answer, she would tell us.

➤ Negative conditions

I wouldn't eat that food unless I was really hungry.
She would be here by now unless she was stuck in the traffic.
If you don't water plants, they die.
Unless you buy a ticket, you won't be allowed in.

➤ Interrogative conditions

Does Homer get angry if you forget to feed him?
Would it hurt the car if you put apple juice in the gas tank?
What happens to your computer if you leave it on all night?
What would happen if you put apple juice in the gas tank?
What will you do if he refuses to give you a rise?

➤ Had + subject + past participle (Third Type)

Had the rescue crew found him earlier, they could have saved his life.
Had you told me about your problems, this disaster would not have happened.
Had I saved my money, I would have bought a house.
Had they caught the first bus, they would not have been late.



Speaking Practice: Ask and answer the following questions.

What would you do ... ?
.....if you had a headache?
.....if you had a 100 degree fever?
.....if you were in Pokhara now?
.....if you won the lottery?
.....if a dog bit your friend?
.....if you lost the key to your room?



Grammar Practice: Write the sentences with the 'If' clause. (second type)

- Anita likes toys but she doesn't have one. She doesn't have enough money.
If she had the money,
- Puran wants to go out but it's raining. He doesn't have an umbrella.
If he had an umbrella,
- Geeta is hungry. She doesn't have money.
If she had money,
- Suman wants to take photos but he doesn't have a camera.
If he had a camera,
- Atul wants to type his letter but he doesn't have a computer.
If he had a computer,
- Bipen wants go out but he is sick.
If he were not sick,