



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H35

**Adapted and modified by
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1. A Killer in Kailash: Part 1

By Satyajit Ray

One

It was the middle of June. I had finished my school final exams and was waiting for the results to come out. Feluda and I were supposed to have gone to a film today, but ten minutes before we were to leave, it began raining so heavily that we had to drop the idea. I was now sitting in our living room, immersed in a Tintin comic (Tintin in Tibet). Feluda and I were both very fond of these comics which had mystery, adventure and humour, all in full measure. I already had three of these. This one was new. I had promised to pass it on to Feluda when I finished with it. Feluda was stretched out on the divan, reading a book called Chariots of the Gods? He had nearly finished it.

After a while, he shut the book, placed it on his chest and lay still, staring at the whirring ceiling fan. Then he said, 'Do you know how many stone blocks there are in the pyramid of Giza? Two hundred thousand.'

Why was he suddenly interested in pyramids? He went on, 'Each block weighs nearly fifteen tonnes. From what is known of ancient engineering, the Egyptians could not have polished to perfection and placed together more than ten blocks every day. Besides, the stone it's made of had to be brought from the other side of the Nile. A rough calculation shows that it must have taken them at least six hundred years to build that one single pyramid.'

'Is that what your book says?'

'Yes, but that isn't all. This book mentions many other wonders that cannot be explained by archaeologists and historians. Take our own country, for instance. There is an iron pillar at the Qutab Minar in Delhi. It is two thousand years old, but it hasn't rusted. No one knows why. Have you heard of Easter Island? It's a small island in the South Pacific Ocean. There are huge rocks facing the sea, on which human faces were carved thousands of years ago. These rocks were dragged from the middle of the island, taken to its edge and arranged in such a way that they were visible from the sea. Each weighs almost fifty tonnes. Who did this? How did the ancient tribal people get hold of adequate technology to do this? They didn't have things like lorries, tractors, cranes or bulldozers.'

Feluda stopped, then sat up and lit a Charminar. The book had clearly stirred him in a big way. 'In Peru,' he went on, 'there is an area which has geometric patterns drawn on the ground. Everyone knows about these patterns, they are visible from the air, but no one can tell when and how they came to be there. It is such a big mystery that scientists do not often talk about it.'

'Has the author of your book talked about it?'

'Oh yes, and he's come up with a very interesting theory. According to him, creatures from a different planet came to earth more than twenty-five thousand years ago. Their technological expertise was much higher than man's. They shared their knowledge with humans, and built structures like the pyramids—which, one must admit, modern man has not been able to match despite all his technical know-how. It is only a theory, mind you, and of course it need not necessarily be true. But it makes you think, doesn't it? The weapons described in our Mahabharata bear resemblances to atomic weapons. So maybe . . .'

' . . . The battle of Kurukshetra was fought by creatures from another planet?'

Feluda opened his mouth to reply, but was interrupted. Someone had braved the rain and arrived at our door, pressing the bell three times in a row. I ran and opened it. Uncle Sidhu rushed in, together with sprays of water. Then he shook his umbrella and shut it, sending more droplets flying everywhere.

Uncle Sidhu was not really a relation. He and my father used to be neighbours many years ago.

Since my father treated him like an elder brother, we called him Uncle.

'What a miserable day get me a cup of tea quick the best you've got,' he said in one breath. I ran back inside, woke Srinath and told him to make three cups of tea. When I returned to the living room, Uncle Sidhu was seated on a sofa, frowning darkly and staring at a porcelain ashtray.

'Why didn't you take a rickshaw? In this weather, really, you shouldn't have—' Feluda began. 'People get murdered every day. Do you know there's a different type of murder that's much worse?' Uncle Sidhu asked, as if Feluda hadn't spoken at all. We remained silent, knowing that he was going to answer his own question.

'I think most people would agree that our present downfall notwithstanding, we have a past of which every Indian can be justly proud,' Uncle Sidhu went

on. 'And, today, what do we see of this glorious past? Isn't it our art, chiefly paintings and sculptures? Tell me, Felu, isn't that right?'

'Of course,' Feluda nodded.

'The best examples of these—particularly sculptures— are to be found on the walls of old temples, right?'

'Right.'

Uncle Sidhu appeared to know about most things in life, but his knowledge of art was probably the deepest, for two out of his three bookcases were full of books on Indian art. But what was all this about a murder?

He stopped for a minute to light a cheroot. Then he coughed twice, filling the whole room with smoke, and continued, 'Several rulers in the past destroyed many of our temples. Kalapahar alone was responsible for the destruction of dozens of temples in Bengal. You knew that, didn't you? But did you know that a new Kalapahar has emerged today? I mean, now, in 1973?'

'Are you talking of people stealing statues from temples to sell them abroad?' Feluda asked.

'Exactly!' Uncle Sidhu almost shouted in excitement. 'Can you imagine what a huge crime it is? And it's not even done in the name of religion, it's just plain commerce. Our own art, our own heritage is making its way to wealthy Americans, but it's being done so cleverly that it's impossible to catch anyone. Do you know what I saw today? The head of a yakshi from the Raja-Rani temple in Bhubaneshwar. It was with an American tourist in the Grand Hotel.'

'You don't say!'

I had been to Bhubaneshwar when I was a child. My father had shown me the Raja-Rani temple. It was made of terracotta and its walls were covered by beautiful statues and carvings.

Uncle Sidhu continued with his story. 'I had a few old Rajput paintings which I had bought in Varanasi in 1934. I took those to Nagarmal to sell. I have known him for years. He has a shop in the Grand Hotel arcade. Just as I was placing my paintings on the counter, this American arrived. It seemed he had bought a few things from Nagarmal before. In his hand was something wrapped in a newspaper. It seemed heavy. Then he unwrapped it, and—oh God!—my heart jumped into my mouth. It was the head of a yakshi, made of red stone. I had

seen it before, more than once. But I had seen the whole body. Now the head had been severed.

‘Nagarmal didn’t know where it had come from, but could tell that it was genuine, not a fake. The American said he had paid two thousand dollars for it. If you added two more zeros after it, I said to myself, even then you couldn’t say it was the right value. Anyway, that man went up to his room. I was so amazed that I didn’t even ask him who had sold it to him. I rushed back home and consulted a few of my books just to make sure. Now I am absolutely positive it was from a statue on the wall of Raja- Rani. I don’t know how it was done—possibly by bribing the chowkidar at night. Anything is possible these days. I have written to the Bhubaneswar Archaeological Department and sent it by express delivery, but what good is that going to do? The damage is already done!’

Srinath came in with the tea. Uncle Sidhu picked up a cup, took a sip, and said, ‘This has to be stopped, Felu. I am now too old to do anything myself, but you are an investigator, it is your job to find criminals. What could be worse than destroying and disfiguring our ancient art, tell me? Shouldn’t these criminals be caught? I could, of course, write to newspapers and try to attract the attention of the police, but do you know what the problem is? Not everyone understands the true value of art. I mean, an old statue on a temple wall isn’t the same as gold or diamonds, is it? You cannot put a market price on it.’

Feluda was quiet all this while. Now he said, ‘Did you manage to learn the name of that American?’

‘Yes. I did speak to him very briefly. He gave me his card. Here it is.’ Uncle Sidhu took out a small white card from his pocket and gave it to Feluda. Saul Silverstein, it said. His address was printed below his name.

‘A Jew,’ Uncle Sidhu remarked. ‘Most undoubtedly very wealthy. The watch he was wearing was probably worth a thousand dollars. I had never seen such an expensive watch before.’

‘Did he tell you how long he’s going to stay here?’

‘He’s going to Kathmandu tomorrow morning. But if you ring him now, you might get him.’ Feluda got up and began dialling. The telephone number of the Grand Hotel was one of the many important numbers he had memorized.

The receptionist said Mr Silverstein was not in his room. No one knew when he might be back. Feluda replaced the receiver, looking disappointed. 'If we could get even a description of the man who sold that statue to him, we might do something about it.'

'I know. That's what I should have asked him,' Uncle Sidhu sighed, 'but I simply couldn't think straight. He was looking at my paintings. He said he was interested in Tantric art, so if I had anything to sell I should contact him. Then he gave me that card. But I honestly don't see how you'll proceed in this matter.'

'Well, let's just wait and see. The press may report the theft. After all, Raja-Rani is a very famous temple in Bhubaneswar.'

Uncle Sidhu finished his tea and rose. 'This has been going on for years,' he said, collecting his umbrella. 'So far, the target seems to have been smaller and lesser known temples. But now, whoever's involved has become much bolder. Perhaps a group of reckless and very powerful people are behind this. Felu, if you can do something about it, the entire nation is going to appreciate it. I am positive about that.'

Uncle Sidhu left. Feluda then spent all day trying to get hold of Saul Silverstein, but he did not return to his room. At 11 p.m., Feluda gave up. 'If what Uncle Sidhu said is true,' he said, frowning, 'whoever is responsible is a criminal of the first order. What is most frustrating is that there's no way I can track him down. No way at all.'

A way opened the very next day, in such a totally unexpected manner that, even now, my head reels when I think about it.

Two

What happened was a terrible accident. But, before I speak about it, there's something else I must mention. There was a small report in the newspaper the next day, which confirmed Uncle Sidhu's suspicions:

The Headless Yakshi

The head from the statue of a yakshi has been stolen from the wall of the Raja-Rani temple in Bhubaneshwar. This temple serves as one of the best examples of old Indian architecture. The chowkidar of the temple is said to be missing. The Archaeological Department of Orissa has asked for a police investigation.

I read this report aloud, and asked, 'Would that mean the chowkidar is the thief?'

Feluda finished squeezing out toothpaste from a tube of Forhans and placed it carefully on his toothbrush. Then he said, 'No, I don't think stealing the head was just the chowkidar's idea. A poor man like him would not have the nerve. Someone else is responsible, someone big enough and strong enough to think he is never going to be caught. Presumably, he—or they—simply paid the chowkidar to get him out of the way for a few days.'

Uncle Sidhu must have seen the report too. He would probably turn up at our house again to tell us proudly that he was right.

He did arrive, but not before half past ten. Today being Thursday, our area had been hit by its regular power cut since nine o'clock. Feluda and I were sitting in our living room, staring occasionally at the overcast sky, when someone knocked loudly at the door. Uncle Sidhu rushed in a minute later, demanding a cup of tea once more. Feluda began talking of the headless yakshi, but was told to shut up.

'That's stale news, young man,' Uncle Sidhu barked. 'Did you hear the last news bulletin?'

'No, I'm afraid not. Our radio is not working. Today is . . .'

'I know, it's Thursday, and you've got a long power cut. That is why, Felu, I keep asking you to buy a transistor. Anyway, I came as soon as I heard. You'll

never believe this. That flight to Kathmandu crashed, not far from Calcutta. It took off at seven-thirty, but crashed only fifteen minutes later. There was a storm, so perhaps it was trying to come back. There were fifty-eight passengers. All of them died, including Saul Silverstein. Yes, his name was mentioned on the radio.'

For a few moments, neither of us could speak. Then Feluda said, 'Where did it crash? Did they mention the place?'

'Yes, near a village called Sidikpur, on the way to Hasnabad. Felu, I had been praying very hard for that statue not to leave the country. Who knew my prayer would be answered through such a terrible tragedy?'

Feluda glanced at his watch. Was he thinking of going to Sidikpur?

Uncle Sidhu looked at him sharply. 'I know what you're thinking. There must have been an explosion and everything the plane contained must have been scattered over miles. Suppose, among the belongings of the passengers, there is—?'

Feluda decided in two minutes that he'd take a taxi and go to Sidikpur to look for the head of the yakshi. The crash had occurred three hours ago. It would take us an hour and a half to get there. By this time, the police and the fire brigade would have got there and started their investigation. No one could tell whether we'd succeed in our mission, but we could not miss this chance to retrieve what was lost.

'Those paintings I sold to Nagarmal fetched me a tidy little sum,' Uncle Sidhu told Feluda. 'I would like to give you some of it. After all, you are going to get involved only because of me, aren't you?'

'No,' Feluda replied firmly. 'It is true that you gave me all the details. But, believe me, I wouldn't have taken any action if I didn't feel strongly about it myself. I have thought a great deal about this, and—like you—I have come to the conclusion that those who think they can sell our ancient heritage to fill their own pockets should be caught and punished severely.'

'Bravo!' Uncle Sidhu beamed. 'Please remember one thing, Felu. Even if you don't need any money, you may need information on art and sculpture. I can always help you with that.'

'Yes, I know. Thank you.'

We decided that if we could find what we were looking for, we would take it straight to the office of the Archaeological Survey of India. The thief might still be at large, but at least the stolen object would go back to the authorities.

We quickly got ready, and got into a yellow taxi. It was 10.55 when we set off. 'I've no idea how long this is going to take,' Feluda said. 'We can stop for lunch at a dhaba on Jessore Road on our way back.'

This pleased me no end. The food in dhabas—which were usually frequented by lorry drivers— was always delicious. Roti, daal, meat curry . . . my mouth began to water. Feluda could eat anything anywhere. I tried to follow his example.

There was a shower as soon as we left the main city and reached VIP Road. But the sun came out as we got close to Barasat. Hasnabad was forty miles from Calcutta. 'If the road wasn't wet and slippery, I could have got there in an hour,' said our driver. 'There's been a plane crash there, sir, did you know? I heard about it on the radio.'

On being told that that was where we were going, he became very excited. 'Why, sir, was any of your relatives in that plane?' he asked.

'No, no.'

Feluda could hardly tell him the whole story, but his curiosity was aroused and he went on asking questions.

'I believe everything's been reduced to ashes. What will you get to see, anyway?' 'I don't know.'

'Are you a reporter?'

'I . . . well, I write stories.'

'Oh, I see. You'll get all the details and then use it in a story? Very good, very good.'

We had left Barasat behind us. Now we had to stop every now and then to ask people if they knew where Sidikpur was. Finally, a group of young men standing near a cycle repair shop gave us the right directions. 'Two miles from here, you'll see an unpaved road on your left,' said one of them. 'This road will take you to Sidikpur. It's only a mile from there.' From the way he spoke, it seemed obvious that he and his friends had already given the same directions to many others.

The unpaved road turned out to be little more than a dirt track. It was muddy after the recent rain and bore several sets of tyre marks. Thank goodness it was only June. A month later, this road would become impossible to drive through. Three other Ambassadors passed us. Several people were going on foot, and some others were returning from the site of the crash.

A number of people were gathered under a banyan tree. Three cars and a jeep were parked near it. Our taxi pulled up behind these. There was no sign of the crash anywhere, but it became clear that we couldn't drive any further. To our right was an open area, full of large trees. Beyond these, in the distance, a few small houses could be seen.

'Yes, that's Sidikpur,' one of the men told us. 'There's a little wood where the village ends. That's where the plane crashed.'

By this time, our driver had introduced himself to us. His name was Balaram Ghosh. He locked his car and came with us. As it turned out, the wood wasn't large. There were more banana trees than anything else. Only half a dozen mango and jackfruit trees stood amongst them. Each of them was badly charred. There were virtually no leaves left on their branches, and some of the branches looked as if they had been deliberately chopped off. The whole area was now teeming with men in uniform, and some others who were probably from the airline. There was a very strong pungent smell, which made me cover my face with a handkerchief. The ground was littered with endless pieces of broken, burnt and half-burnt objects, some damaged beyond recognition, others more or less usable. Feluda clicked his tongue in annoyance and said, 'If only we could have got here an hour ago!'

The main site had been cordoned off. There was no way we could get any closer. So we started walking around the cordon. Some of the policemen were picking up objects from the ground and inspecting them: a portion of a stethoscope, a briefcase, a flask, a small mirror that glinted brightly in the sun. The site was on our right. We were slowly moving in that direction, when suddenly Feluda saw something on a mango tree on our left and stopped.

A little boy was sitting on a low branch, clutching a half-burnt leather shoe. He must have found it among the debris. Feluda glanced up and asked, 'You found a lot of things, didn't you?' The boy did not reply, but stared solemnly at Feluda. 'What's the matter? Can't you speak?' Feluda asked again. Still he got

no reply. 'Hopeless!' he exclaimed and walked on, away from the debris and towards the village. Balaram Ghosh became curious once more.

'Are you looking for something special, sir?' he asked.

'Yes. The head of a statue, made of red stone.'

'I see. Just the head? OK.' He started searching in the grass. There was a peepul tree about a hundred yards away, under which a group of old men were sitting, smoking hookahs. The oldest among them asked Feluda, 'Where are you from?'

'Calcutta. Your village hasn't come to any harm, has it?'

'No, babu. Allah saved us. There was a fire as soon as the plane came down—it made such a big noise that we all thought a bomb had gone off—and then the whole village was filled with smoke. We could see the fire in the wood, but none of us knew what to do . . . but soon it started to rain, and then the fire brigade arrived.'

'Did any of you go near the plane when the fire went out?'

'No, babu. We're old men, we were simply glad to have been spared.'

'What about the young boys? Didn't they go and collect things before the police got here?'

The old men fell silent. By this time, several other people had gathered to listen to this exchange. Feluda spotted a boy and beckoned him. 'What's your name?' he asked as the boy came closer. His tone was gentle and friendly.

'Ali.'

Feluda placed a hand on his shoulder and lowered his voice. 'A lot of things scattered everywhere when the plane crashed. You've seen that for yourself, haven't you? Now, there should have been the head of a statue among those things. Just the head of a statue of a woman. Do you know if anyone saw it?'

'Ask him!' Ali replied, pointing at another boy. Feluda had to repeat the whole process once more.

'What's your name?'

'Panu.'

'Did you see the head of a statue? Did you take it?'

Silence. 'Look, Panu,' Feluda said even more gently, 'it's all right. No one's going to get angry with you. But if you can give me that head, I'll pay you for it. Have you got it with you?'

More silence. This time, one of the old men shouted at him, 'Go on, Panu, answer the gentleman. He hasn't got all day.'

Panu finally opened his mouth. 'I haven't got it with me now.'

'What do you mean?'

'I found it, babu. I swear I did. But I gave it to someone else, only a few minutes ago.'

What! Could this really be true? My heart started hammering in my chest.

'Who was it?' Feluda asked sharply.

'I don't know. He was a man from the city, like you. He came in a car, a blue car.'

'What did he look like? Was he tall? Short? Thin? Fat? Did he wear glasses?'

This prompted many of Panu's friends to join the conversation. From the description they gave, it seemed that a man of medium height, who was neither thin nor fat, neither fair nor dark, and whose age was between thirty and fifty, had arrived half an hour before us and had made similar enquiries. Panu had shown him the yakshi's head, and he had bought it from him for a nominal sum. Then he had driven off in a blue car.

When we were driving to Sidikpur, a blue Ambassador had come from the opposite direction, passed us and gone towards the main road. All of us remembered having seen it.

'OK. Come on, Topshe. Let's go, Mr Ghosh.'

If Feluda was disappointed by what we had just learnt, he did not show it. On the contrary, he seemed to have found new energy. He ran all the way back to the taxi, with the driver and me in tow.

God knew what lay in store.

Three

We were now going back the same way we had come. It was past one-thirty, but neither of us was thinking of lunch. Balaram Ghosh did suggest stopping for a cup of tea when we reached Jessore Road, but Feluda paid no attention. Perhaps our driver smelt an adventure in all this, so he, too, did not raise the subject of food again.

Our car was now going at 75 kmph. I was aware of only one thought that kept going over and over in my mind: how close we had got to retrieving the yakshi's head! If we hadn't had a power cut this morning, we would have heard the news on the radio, and then we would have reached Sidikpur much sooner and most certainly we would have got hold of Panu. If that had happened, by now we would have been making our way to the office of the Archaeological Survey of India. Who knows, Feluda might have been given a Padma Shree for recovering the country's lost heritage!

The sun had already dried the road. I was beginning to wonder why we couldn't go a little faster, when my eyes caught sight of something by the roadside that caused a sharp rise in my pulse rate.

A blue Ambassador was standing outside a small garage. 'Should I stop here, sir?' Balaram Ghosh asked, reducing his speed. He had obviously paid great attention to what those boys had told us.

'Yes, at that tea stall over there,' Feluda replied. Mr Ghosh swept up to the stall and pulled up by its side with a screech. We got out and Feluda ordered three cups of tea. I noticed that tea was being served in small glasses, there were no cups.

'What else have you got?' Feluda asked.

'Biscuits. Would you like some? They're fresh, sir, and very tasty.' Two glass jars stood on a counter, filled with large, round biscuits. Feluda asked for half-a-dozen of those.

My eyes kept darting back to the blue car. A mechanic was in the process of replacing a punctured tyre. A man—medium height, age around forty, thick bushy eyebrows, hair brushed back—was pacing up and down, inhaling every now and then from a half-finished cigarette.

Our tea was almost ready. Feluda took out a Charminar, then pretended he had lost his lighter. He patted his pocket twice, then shrugged and moved over to join the other man. The driver and I stayed near our taxi, but we could hear what was said.

‘Excuse me.’ Feluda began, ‘do you . . . ?’

The man took out a lighter and lit Feluda’s cigarette for him. ‘Thanks,’ Feluda inhaled. ‘A terrible business, wasn’t it?’

The man glanced at Feluda, then looked away without replying.

Feluda tried once more. ‘Weren’t you at the site where that plane crashed? I thought I saw your car there!’

This time, the man spoke. ‘What plane crash?’

‘Good heavens, haven’t you heard? A plane bound for Kathmandu crashed near Sidikpur.’

‘I am coming from Taki. No, I hadn’t heard of the crash.’

Taki was a town near Hasnabad. Could the man be telling the truth? If only we had noted the number of his car when he passed us!

‘How much longer will it take?’ he asked the mechanic impatiently.

‘A couple of minutes, sir, no more.’

Our tea had been served by this time. Feluda came back to pick up a glass. The three of us sat down on a bench in front of the stall. ‘He denied everything . . . the man’s a liar,’ Feluda muttered.

‘How can you be so sure, Feluda? There are millions of blue Ambassadors.’

‘His shoes are covered by ash. Have you looked at your own sandals?’

I glanced down quickly and realized the colour of my sandals had changed completely. The other man’s brown shoes were similarly covered with dark patches.

Feluda took his time to finish his tea. We waited until the blue car got a new tyre—this took another fifteen minutes instead of two—and went towards Jessore Road. Our own taxi left a minute later. There was quite a big gap between the two cars which, Feluda said, was no bad thing. ‘He mustn’t see that we’re following him,’ he told Mr Ghosh.

It began raining again as we reached Dum Dum. Everything went hazy for a few minutes and it became difficult to keep the blue car in view. Balaram Ghosh was therefore obliged to get a bit closer, which helped us in getting the number of the car. It was WMA 5349.

‘This is like a Hindi film, sir!’ Mr Ghosh enthused. ‘I saw a film only the other day—it had Shatrughan Sinha in it—which had a chase scene, exactly like this. But the second car went and crashed into a hill.’

‘We’ve already had a crash today, thank you.’

‘Oh, don’t worry, sir. I’ve been driving for thirteen years. I haven’t had a single accident. I mean, not yet.’

‘Good. Keep it that way.’

Balaram Ghosh was a good driver, I had to admit. We were now back in Calcutta, but he was weaving his way through the busy roads without once losing sight of the blue car. I wondered where it was going.

‘What do you think the man’s going to do with the statue?’ I asked Feluda after a while.

‘Well, he’s certainly not going to take it back to Bhubaneswar,’ Feluda replied. ‘What he might do is find another buyer. After all, it isn’t often that one gets the chance to sell the same thing twice!’

The blue car finally brought us to Park Street. We drove past the old cemetery, Lowdon Street, Camac Street, and then suddenly, it turned left and drove into a building called Queen’s Mansion.

‘Should I go in, sir?’ ‘Of course.’

Our taxi passed through the front gates. A huge open square faced us, surrounded by tall blocks of flats. A number of cars and a couple of scooters were parked before these. The blue car went to the far end and stopped. We waited in our taxi to see what happened next.

The man got out with a black bag, wound up the windows of his car, locked it and slipped into Queen’s Mansion through a large door. Feluda waited for another minute, then followed him.

By the time we reached the door, the old-fashioned lift in the lobby had already gone up, making a great deal of noise. It came back a few seconds

later. An old liftman emerged from behind its collapsible gate. Feluda went up to him.

‘Did I just miss Mr Sengupta?’ he asked anxiously.

‘Mr Sengupta?’

‘The man who just went up?’

‘That man was Mr Mallik of number five. There’s no Sengupta in this building.’

‘Oh. I must have made a mistake. Sorry.’

We came away. Mr Mallik, flat number five. I must remember these details.

Feluda paid Balaram Ghosh and said he was no longer needed. Before driving off, he gave us a piece of paper with a phone number scribbled on it. ‘That’s my neighbour’s number,’ he said. ‘If you ever need me, ring that number. My neighbour will call me. I’d love to be able to help, sir. You see, life’s usually so boring that something like this comes as a tremendous . . . I mean, it makes a change, doesn’t it?’

We made our way to the Park Street police station. Feluda knew its OC, Mr Haren Mutsuddi. Two years ago, they had worked together to trace the culprit who had poisoned a race horse called Happy- Go-Lucky. It turned out that Mr Mutsuddi was aware of the theft in Bhubaneshwar. Feluda told him briefly about our encounter with Mr Mallik and said, ‘Even if Mallik is not the real thief, he has clearly taken it upon himself to recover the stolen object and pass it on to someone else. I have come to make two requests, Mr Mutsuddi. Someone must keep an eye on his movements, and I need to know who he really is and where he works. He lives in flat number five, Queen’s Mansion, drives a blue Ambassador, WMA 5349.’

Mr Mutsuddi heard Feluda in silence. Then he removed a pencil that was tucked behind his ear and said, ‘Very well, Mr Mitter. If you want these things done, they will be done. A special constable will follow your man everywhere, and I’ll see if we have anything in our files on him. There’s no guarantee, mind you, that I’ll get anything, particularly if he hasn’t actually broken the law.’

‘Thank you. But please treat this matter as urgent. If that statue gets passed on to someone else, we’ll be in big trouble.’

‘Why?’ Mr Mutsuddi smiled, ‘Why should you be in big trouble, Mr Mitter? You’ll have me and the entire police force to help you. Doesn’t that count for

anything? We're not totally useless, you know. But there's just one thing I'd like to tell you. The people who are behind such rackets are usually quite powerful. I'm not talking of physical strength. I mean they often manage to do things far worse and much more vile than ordinary petty criminals. I am telling you all this, Mr Mitter, because you are young and talented, and I look upon you as a friend.'

'Thank you, Mr Mutsuddi. I appreciate your concern.'

We left the police station and went to the Chinese restaurant, Waldorf, to have lunch. Feluda went to the manager's room to make a call after we had placed our order.

'I rang Mallik,' he said when he came back. 'He was still in his room and he answered the phone himself. I rang off without saying anything.' He sounded a little relieved.

We returned home at three o'clock. Mr Mutsuddi called us a little after four. Feluda spoke for nearly five minutes, noting things down in his notebook. Then he put the phone down and told me everything even before I could ask.

'The man's called Jayant Mallik. He moved into that flat about two weeks ago. It actually belongs to a Mr Adhikari, who is away in Darjeeling at the moment. Perhaps he's a friend, and he's allowed Mallik to use his flat in his absence. That blue Ambassador is Adhikari's. Mallik took it to the Grand Hotel at three o'clock today. He went in for five minutes, then came out and was seen waiting in his car for twenty minutes. After that, he went in once more and emerged in ten minutes. Then he went to Dalhousie Square. Mutsuddi's man lost him for a while after this, but then found him in the railway booking office in Fairlie Place. He bought a ticket to Aurangabad, second class reserved. Mutsuddi's man will ring him again if there's more news.'

'Aurangabad?'

'Yes, that's where Mallik is going. And we are going immediately to Sardar Shankar Road, to visit Uncle Sidhu. I need to consult him urgently.'

Four

‘Aurangabad!’ Uncle Sidhu’s eyes nearly popped out. ‘Do you realize what this means? Aurangabad is only twenty miles from Ellora, which is a sort of depot for the best specimens of Indian art. There is the Kailash temple, carved out of a mountain. Then there are thirty-three caves—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain—that stretch for a mile and a half. Each is packed with beautiful statues, wonderful carvings . . . oh God, I can hardly think! But why is this man going by train when he can fly to Aurangabad?’

‘I think he wants to keep the yakshi’s head with him at all times. If he went by air, his baggage might be searched by security men. No one would bother to do that on a train, would they?’

Feluda stood up suddenly.

‘What did you decide?’ Uncle Sidhu asked anxiously. ‘We must go by air,’ Feluda replied.

The look Uncle Sidhu gave him at this was filled with pride and joy. But he said nothing. All he did was get up and select a slim book from one of his bookcases. ‘This may help you,’ he said. I glanced at its title. A Guide to the Caves of Ellora, it said.

Feluda rang his travel agent, Mr Bakshi, as soon as we got back home.

‘I need three tickets on the flight to Bombay tomorrow,’ I heard him say. This surprised me very much. Why did he need three tickets? Was Uncle Sidhu going to join us? When I asked him, however, Feluda only said, ‘The more the merrier. We may need an extra pair of hands.’

Mr Bakshi came back on the line. ‘I’ll have to put you on the waiting list,’ he said, ‘but it doesn’t look too bad, I think it’ll be OK.’

He also agreed to make our hotel bookings in Aurangabad and Ellora. The flight to Bombay would get us there by nine o’clock. Then we’d have to catch the flight to Aurangabad at half past twelve, reaching there an hour later. This meant we would arrive in Aurangabad on Saturday, and Mr Mallik would get there on Sunday.

Feluda rang off and began dialling another number. The doorbell rang before he could finish dialling. I opened it to find Lalmohan Babu. Feluda stared, as though he had seen a ghost, and exclaimed, 'My word, what a coincidence! I was just dialling your number.'

'Really? Now, that must mean I have got a telepathetic link with you, after all,' Lalmohan Babu laughed, looking pleased. Neither of us had the heart to tell him the correct word was 'telepathic'.

'It's so hot and stuffy . . . could you please ask your servant to make a lemon drink, with some ice from the fridge, if you don't mind?'

Feluda passed on his request to Srinath, then came straight to the point.

'Are you very busy these days? Have you started writing anything new?'

'No, no. I couldn't have come here for a chat if I had already started writing. All I've got is a plot. I think it would make a good Hindi film. There are five fights. My hero, Prakhar Rudra, goes to Baluchistan this time. Tell me, how do you think Arjun Mehrotra would handle the role of Prakhar Rudra? I think he'd fit the part very well—unless, of course, you agreed to do it, Felu Babu?'

'I cannot speak Hindi. Anyway, I suggest you come with us to Kailash for a few days. You can start thinking of Baluchistan when you get back.'

'Kailash? All the way to Tibet? Isn't that under the Chinese?'

'No. This Kailash has nothing to do with Tibet. Have you heard of Ellora?'

'Oh, I see, I see. You mean the temple? But isn't that full of statues and rocks and mountains? What have you to do with those, Felu Babu? Your business is human beings, isn't it?'

'Correct. A group of human beings has started a hideous racket involving those rocks and statues. I intend to put a stop to it.'

Lalmohan Babu stared. Feluda filled him in quickly, which made him grow even more round-eyed.

'What are you saying, Felu Babu? I had no idea stone statues could be so valuable. The only valuable stones I can think of are precious stones like rubies and emeralds and diamonds. But this—!'

'This is far more precious. You can get diamonds and rubies elsewhere in the world. But there is only one Kailash, one Sanchi and one Elephanta. If these are

destroyed, there would be no evidence left of the amazing heights our ancient art had risen to. Modern artists do not—they cannot—get anywhere near the skill and perfection these specimens show. Anyone who tries to disfigure any of them is a dangerous criminal. In my view, the man who took that head from the statue of the yakshi is no less than a murderer. He has got to be punished.’

This was enough to convince Lalmohan Babu. He was fond of travelling, in any case. He agreed to accompany us at once, and began asking a lot of questions, including whether or not he should carry a mosquito net, and was there any danger of being bitten by snakes? Then he left, with a promise to meet us at the airport.

Neither of us knew how long we might have to stay in Aurangabad, but decided to pack enough clothes for a week. Since Feluda was often required to travel, he always had a suitcase packed with essentials such as a fifty-foot steel tape, an all-purpose knife, rail and air timetables, road maps, a long nylon rope, a pair of hunting boots, and several pieces of wire which came in handy to unlock doors and table-drawers if he didn’t have a key. None of this took up a lot of space, so he could pack his clothes in the same suitcase.

He also had guide books and tourist pamphlets on various parts of the country. I leafed through the ones I thought might be relevant for this visit. Feluda set the alarm clock at 4 a.m. before going to bed at ten o’clock, then rang 173 and asked for a wake-up call, in case the alarm did not go off for some reason.

Ten minutes later, Mr Mutsuddi rang again. ‘Mallik received a trunk call from Bombay,’ he said. ‘The words Mallik spoke were these: “The daughter has returned to her father from her in-laws. The father is taking her with him twenty-seventy-five.” The caller from Bombay said: “Carry on, best of luck.” That was all.’

Feluda thanked him and rang off. Mallik’s words made no sense to me. When I mentioned this to Feluda, he simply said, ‘Even the few grey cells you had seem to be disappearing, my boy. Stop worrying and go to sleep.’

The flight to Bombay was delayed by an hour. It finally left at half past seven. There were quite a few cancellations, so we got three seats pretty easily.

Lalmohan Babu had flown with us for the first time when we had gone to Delhi and Simla in connection with Mr Dhameeja’s case. This was possibly the second time he was travelling by air. I noticed that this time he did not pull

faces and grip the arms of his chair when we took off; but, a little later, when we ran into some rough weather, he leant across and said, 'Felu Babu, this is no different from travelling in a rickety old bus down Chitpur Road. How can I be sure the whole plane isn't coming apart?'

'It isn't, rest assured.'

After breakfast, he seemed to have recovered a little, for I saw him press a button and call the air hostess. 'Excuse please Miss, a toothpick,' he said smartly. Then he began reading a guide book on Bombay. None of us had been to Bombay before. Feluda had decided to spend a few days there with a friend on our way back—provided, of course, that our business in Ellora could be concluded satisfactorily.

When the 'fasten seat belts' sign came on just before landing, there was something I felt I had to ask Feluda. 'Will you please explain what Mr Mallik's words meant?'

Feluda looked amazed. 'What, you mean you really didn't understand it?'

'No.'

'The daughter has returned to her father from her in-laws. "The daughter" is the yakshi's head, the "in-laws" refers to Silverstein who had bought it, and the "father" is Mallik himself.'

'I see . . . What about "twenty-seventy-five"?''

'That refers to the latitude. If you look at a map, you'll see that's where Aurangabad is shown.'

We landed at Santa Cruz airport at ten. Since our flight to Aurangabad was at half past twelve, we saw no point in going into the town, although an aerial view of the city had impressed me very much. We remained in the airport, had chicken curry and rice for lunch at the airport restaurant, and boarded the plane to Aurangabad at quarter to one. There were only eleven passengers, since it was not the tourist season.

This time, Lalmohan Babu and I sat together. Feluda sat on the other side of the aisle, next to a middle-aged man with a parrot-like nose, thick wavy salt-and-pepper hair brushed back and wearing glasses with a heavy black frame. We got to know him after landing at the small airport at Aurangabad. He was

expecting to be met, he said, but no one had turned up. So he decided to join us to go to town in the bus provided by the airline.

‘Where will you be staying?’ he asked Feluda.

‘Hotel Aurangabad.’

‘Oh, that’s where I shall be staying as well. What brings you here? Holiday?’

‘Yes, you might call it that. And you?’

‘I am writing a book on Ellora. This is my second visit. I teach the history of Indian art in Michigan.’

‘I see. Are your students enthusiastic about this subject?’

‘Yes, much more now than they used to be. India seems to inspire young people more than anything else.’

‘I believe the Vaishnavas have got a strong hold over there?’ Feluda asked lightly. The other gentleman laughed. ‘Are you talking of the Hare Krishna people?’ he asked. ‘Yes, their presence cannot be ignored. They are, in fact, very serious about what they do and how they dress. Have you heard their keertan? Sometimes it is impossible to tell they are foreigners.’

It took us only fifteen minutes to reach our hotel. It was small, but neat and tidy. We checked in and were shown into room number 11. Lalmohan Babu went to room 14. Feluda had bought a newspaper at Bombay airport. I had seen him read it in the plane. Now he sat down on a chair in the middle of our room, spread it once more and said, ‘Do you know what “vandalism” means?’

I did, but only vaguely. Feluda explained, ‘The barbarian invaders who sacked Rome in the fifth century were called Vandals. Any act related to disfiguring, damaging or destroying a beautiful object has come to be known as vandalism.’ Then he passed the newspaper to me and said, ‘Read it.’

I saw a short report with the heading, ‘More Vandalism’. According to it, a statue of a woman had been broken and its head lifted from one of the walls of the temple of Kandaria Mahadev in Khajuraho. A group of art students from Baroda who were visiting the complex were the first to notice what had happened. This was the third case reported in the last four weeks. There could be no doubt that these statues and other pieces of sculpture were being sold abroad.

As I sat trying to grasp the full implications of the report, Feluda spoke. His tone was grim.

'As far as I can make out,' he said, 'there is only one octopus. It has spread its tentacles to various temples in different parts of the country. If even one tentacle can be caught and chopped off, it will make the whole body of the animal squirm and wriggle. It should be our aim here to spot that one tentacle and seize it.'

Five

Aurangabad was a historical city. An Abyssinian slave called Malik Ambar had been brought to India. In time, he became the Prime Minister of the King of Ahmednagar and built a city called Khadke. During the time of Aurangzeb, Khadke changed its name and came to be known as Aurangabad. In addition to Mughal buildings and structures, there were about ten Buddhist caves—thirteen hundred years old—that contained statues worth seeing.

The gentleman we had met at the airport—whose name was Shubhankar Bose—came to our room later in the evening for a chat. ‘You must see the caves here before going to Ellora,’ he told us. ‘If you do, you’ll be able to see that the two are similar in some ways.’

Since it was drizzling outside, we decided not to go out immediately. Tomorrow, if the day was fine, we would see the caves and the mausoleum built in the memory of Aurangzeb’s wife, called Bibi ka Makbara. We would have to remain in Aurangabad until the next afternoon, anyway, since Jayant Mallik was supposed to get here at eleven o’clock. He would probably go to Ellora the same day, and we would then follow him.

After dinner, Feluda sat down with his guide book on Ellora. I was wondering what to do, when Lalmohan Babu turned up.

‘Have you looked out of the window, Tapes?’ he asked. ‘The moon has come out now. Would you like to go for a walk?’

‘Sure.’

We came out of the hotel to find everything bathed in moonlight. In the distance was a range of hills. Perhaps that was where the Buddhist caves were located. A paan shop close by had a transistor on, playing a Hindi song. Two men were sitting on a bench, having a loud argument. They were probably speaking in Marathi, for I couldn’t understand a word. The road outside had been full of people and traffic during the day, but was now very quiet. A train blew its whistle somewhere far away, and a man wearing a turban went past, riding a cycle. I felt a little strange in this new place— there seemed to be a hint of mystery in whatever I saw, some excitement and even a little fear. At this moment, Lalmohan Babu suddenly brought his face close to my ear and whispered, ‘Doesn’t Shubhankar Bose strike you as a bit suspicious?’

‘Why?’ I asked, considerably startled.

‘What do you think his suitcase contains? Why does it weigh 35 kgs?’

‘Thirty-five?’ I was very surprised.

‘Yes. He was before me in the queue in Bombay, when we were told to check in. I saw how much his suitcase weighed. His was thirty-five, your cousin’s was twenty-two, yours was fourteen and mine was sixteen kilograms. Bose had to pay for excess baggage.’

This was news to me. I had seen Mr Bose’s suitcase. It wasn’t very large. What could have made it so heavy?

Lalmohan Babu provided the answer.

‘Rocks,’ he said, still whispering, ‘or tools to break something made of stone. Didn’t your cousin tell us there was a large gang working behind this whole business? I believe Bose is one of them. Did you see his nose? It’s exactly like Ghanashyam Karkat’s.’

‘Who is Ghanashyam Karkat?’

‘Oh ho, didn’t I tell you? He is the villain in my next book. Do you know how I’m going to describe his nose? “It was like a shark’s fin, rising above the water.”’

I paid no attention to this last bit, but couldn’t ignore his remarks about Mr Bose. I would not have suspected him at all. How could a man who knew so much about art be a criminal? But then, those who go about stealing art must know something about the subject. Besides, there really was something sharp about his appearance.

‘I only wanted to warn you,’ Lalmohan Babu went on speaking, ‘just keep an eye on him. He offered me a toffee, but I didn’t take it. What if it was poisoned? Tell your cousin not to let on that he is a detective. If he does, his life may be at risk.’

The next day, we left in a taxi at half past six in the morning and went to see Bibi ka Makbara (also known as the ‘second Taj Mahal’). Then we went to the Buddhist caves. The taxi dropped us at the bottom of a hill. A series of steps led to the caves. Mr Bose had accompanied us, and was talking constantly about ancient art, most of which went over my head. I still couldn’t think of him as a criminal, but caught Lalmohan Babu giving him sidelong glances. This often made him stumble, but he did not stop.

Two other men had already gone into the caves. I had seen them climbing the steps before us. One of them was a bald American tourist, dressed in a colourful bush shirt and shorts; the other was a guide from the tourist department.

Feluda took out his Pentax camera from his shoulder bag and began taking photos of the hills, the view and, occasionally, of us. Each time he peered at us through the camera, Lalmohan Babu stopped and smiled, looking somewhat self-conscious. After a while, I was obliged to tell him that he didn't necessarily have to stop walking and, in fact, photos often came out quite well even if one didn't smile.

When we reached the caves, Feluda suddenly said, 'You two carry on, I'll join you in a minute. I must take a few photos from the other side.'

'Don't miss the second and the seventh cave,' Mr Bose called out to us. 'The first five are all in this area, but numbers six to nine are half a mile away, on the eastern side. A road runs round the edge of the hill.'

The bright sun outside was making me feel uncomfortably hot, but once I stepped into the first cave, I realized it was refreshingly cool inside. But there wasn't much to see. It was obvious that it had been left incomplete, and what little work had been done had started to crumble. Even so, Mr Bose began inspecting the ceiling and the pillars with great interest, jotting things down in his notebook. Lalmohan Babu and I went into the second cave. Feluda had given us a torch. We now had to switch it on. We were in a large hall, at the end of which was a huge statue of the Buddha. I shone the torch on the walls, to find that beautiful figures had been carved on these. Lalmohan Babu was silent for a few moments, taking it all in. Then he remarked, 'Did you realize, Tapesh, how physically strong these ancient artists must have been? I mean, a knowledge of art and a creative imagination alone wasn't enough, was it? They had to pick up hammers and chisels and knock through such hard rock . . . makes the mind boggle, doesn't it?'

The third cave was even larger, but the guide was speaking so loudly and rapidly that we couldn't stay in it for more than a few seconds. 'Where did your cousin go?' Lalmohan Babu asked as we emerged. 'I can't see him anywhere.'

This was true. I had assumed Feluda would catch up with us, but he was nowhere to be seen. Nor was Mr Bose. 'Let's check the other caves,' Lalmohan Babu suggested.

The fourth and the fifth caves were not far, but something told me Feluda had not gone there. I began to feel faintly uneasy. We started walking towards cave number six, which was half a mile away. This side of the hill was barren and rocky, there were few plants apart from the occasional small bush. I glanced at my watch. It was only a quarter past eight, but we could not afford to stay here beyond ten o'clock, for Mr Mallik was going to arrive at eleven.

Fifteen minutes later, we looked up and saw another cave. It was probably cave number six. There was no way of telling whether Feluda had come this way. Lalmohan Babu kept peering at the ground in the hope of finding footprints. It was a futile exercise, really, since the ground was absolutely dry.

Was there any point in going any further? Might it help if we called his name? 'Feluda! Feluda!' I started shouting.

'Pradosh Babu! Felu Babu! Mr Mit-te-er!' Lalmohan Babu joined me.

There was no answer. I began to get a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Had he climbed up the hill and gone to the other side? Had he seen or heard something that made him forget all about us?

After a while, Lalmohan Babu gave up. 'He's obviously nowhere here,' he said, shaking his head, 'or he'd have heard us. Let's go back. I'm sure we'll find him this time. He couldn't have left us without a word. He would not do an irresponsible thing like that, would he?'

We turned back and retraced our steps. In a few minutes, we saw the foreigner and his guide making their way to the sixth cave. I could see that the American was finding it difficult to cope with the guide and his endless patter. 'Look, here's Mr Bose!' Lalmohan Babu cried. Mr Bose was walking towards us with a preoccupied air. He raised his eyes as he heard his name. I went to him quickly and asked, 'Have you seen my cousin?'

'No. Didn't he say he was going off to take pictures?'

'Yes, but that was a long time ago. Maybe he's in one of these caves?'

‘No. I have been to each one of them. If he was there, I would certainly have seen him.’

Perhaps my face registered my anxiety, for his tone softened. ‘He may have climbed a little higher. There is, in fact, a fantastic view of the whole city of Aurangabad if you can get to the top of the hill. Why don’t you walk on and keep calling his name? He’s bound to hear you sooner or later,’ Mr Bose said reassuringly, and went off in the direction of cave number six.

Lalmohan Babu lowered his voice. ‘I don’t like this, Tapesh,’ he said. ‘I never thought there would be cause for anxiety even before we got to Ellora.’

I pulled myself together and kept walking. My speed had automatically become faster. All I could think of was that we were running out of time, we had to get back to the hotel by eleven to find out if Mr Mallik had arrived, but what were we to do if we couldn’t find Feluda?

Without him . . .

‘Charminar!’ Lalmohan Babu cried suddenly, making me jump. We were standing near the pillars of the fifth cave. A yellow packet of Charminar was lying under a bush a few feet away from the pillars. It had either not been there when we were here earlier, or we had somehow missed it. Had it dropped out of Feluda’s pocket? I picked it up quickly and opened its top. It was empty. Just as I was about to throw it away, Lalmohan Babu said, ‘Let me see, let me see!’ and took it from me. Then he opened it fully, and a small piece of paper slipped out. There was a brief message scribbled on it in Feluda’s handwriting.

‘Go back to the hotel’, it said.

Considerably relieved, we debated on what to do next. I couldn’t think very clearly as Feluda’s message said nothing about where he was or why he was asking us to go back. The empty feeling in my stomach continued to linger.

‘How can we go back?’ Lalmohan Babu said. ‘Mr Bose is with us, and he has four more caves to see.’

‘Why don’t we return to the hotel,’ I said slowly, forcing myself to think, ‘and send the taxi back to fetch him?’

‘Ye-es, we could do that, but shouldn’t we stay here to watch his movements?’

'No. I don't think so, Lalmohan Babu. Feluda said nothing about Mr Bose. He just wanted us to go back, and that's what we ought to do.'

'Very well. So be it,' Lalmohan Babu replied, sounding a little disappointed.

Since he wrote mystery stories, Lalmohan Babu occasionally took it into his head to act like a professional sleuth. I could see that he wanted to follow Mr Bose, but I felt obliged to stop him. Our taxi dropped us at the hotel, then went back to the caves. It was nine o'clock. God knew how long we'd have to wait for Feluda.

Neither of us could remain in our room, so we came out of the hotel and began strolling on the road outside. The sky had started to cloud over. If it rained, it might cool down a bit, I thought.

Mr Bose returned at nine forty-five and looked rather puzzled when we told him Feluda had not returned. Naturally, we could not tell him the real reason why we were worried. After all, we did not know him well and Lalmohan Babu was still convinced he was one of the criminals involved. In order to stop him from asking further questions, I said quickly, 'I'm afraid my cousin often does things without telling others. He's done this before—I mean, he's gone off like this, but has returned later. I'm sure he'll be back soon.'

We stayed out for nearly an hour, then I went back to my room and began reading Tintin in Tibet. Just after eleven, I thought I heard a train whistle, and at quarter to twelve, a car drew up outside in the porch. Unable to contain myself, I went out to have a look.

Two men got out of the taxi. One of them was of medium height and pretty stout. His broad shoulders seemed to start just below his jaws; his neck was almost non-existent. For some reason, he seemed as if he might easily fly into a temper. The other man was just the opposite: tall, lanky, wearing bell-bottoms and a loose, cotton embroidered shirt. His face was covered by an unkempt beard and his hair rippled down to his shoulders. He looked like a hippie. The stout man had an old leather suitcase; the hippie had a new canvas bag. Both walked into the hotel. Another taxi arrived as soon as these men had gone in.

Jayant Mallik got out of it.

A sudden surge of relief swept over me. At least, this meant that we were on the right track. Our journey from Calcutta had not simply been a wild-goose chase.

But where on earth was Feluda?

2. Grammar Page

Unit
142

Phrasal verbs 6 up/down

A Compare **up** and **down**:

put something **up** (on a wall etc.)

- I **put** a picture **up** on the wall.

pick something **up**

- There was a letter on the floor. I **picked** it **up** and looked at it.

stand up

- Alan **stood up** and walked out.

turn something **up**

- I can't hear the TV. Can you **turn** it **up** a bit?



take something **down** (from a wall etc.)

- I didn't like the picture, so I **took** it **down**.

put something **down**

- I stopped writing and **put down** my pen.

sit down / bend down / lie down

- I **bent down** to tie my shoelace.

turn something **down**

- The oven is too hot. **Turn** it **down** to 150 degrees.



B **knock down, cut down** etc.

knock down a building / **blow** something **down** / **cut** something **down** etc.

- Some old houses were **knocked down** to make way for the new shopping centre.
- Why did you **cut down** the tree in your garden?

be **knocked down** (by a car etc.)

- A man was **knocked down** by a car and taken to hospital.

burn down = *be destroyed by fire*

- They were able to put out the fire before the house **burnt down**.

C **down** = getting less

slow down = *go more slowly*

- You're driving too fast. **Slow down**.

calm (somebody) **down** = *become calmer, make somebody calmer*

- Calm down**. There's no point in getting angry.

cut down (on something) = *eat, drink or do something less often*

- I'm trying to **cut down on** coffee. I drink too much of it.

D Other verbs + **down**

break down = *stop working (for machines, cars, relationships etc.)*

- The car **broke down** and I had to phone for help.
- Their marriage **broke down** after only a few months.

close down / shut down = *stop doing business*

- There used to be a shop at the end of the street. It **closed down** a few years ago.

let somebody **down** = *disappoint them because you didn't do what they hoped*

- You can always rely on Paul. He'll never **let** you **down**.

turn somebody/something **down** = *refuse an application, an offer etc.*

- I applied for several jobs, but I was **turned down** for all of them.
- Rachel was offered the job, but she decided to **turn** it **down**.

write something **down** = *write something on paper because you may need the information later*

- I can't remember Ben's address. I **wrote** it **down**, but I can't find it.