



Learn English Through Stories

H Series

H36

**Adapted and modified by
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1. A Killer in Kailash: Part 2

By Satyajit Ray

Six

I waited for another ten minutes to see if Feluda turned up. When he didn't, I went in and knocked on Lalmohan Babu's door. He opened it at once and said with large, round eyes, 'I've seen it all from the lobby! Don't both those characters look highly suspicious? I wonder if they'll go to Ellora. One of them—you know, the bearded one—might well be into ganja and other drugs.'

I nodded. 'Jayant Mallik has also arrived and checked in,' I told him.

'Really? I didn't see him. I came back to my room as soon as that hippie walked in. What does Mallik look like?'

When I described him, Lalmohan Babu grew even more excited. 'Oh, I think he's been given the room next to mine. I saw him arrive and something struck me as very odd. A bearer was carrying his suitcase, but it was obviously extremely heavy. The poor man could hardly move. And no wonder. Isn't the yakshi's head supposed to be in it?'

I could think of nothing except Feluda's disappearance, so I said, 'What is much more important now is finding Feluda. Never mind about Mallik's suitcase. We've made no arrangements to go to Ellora. Mallik, I am sure, hasn't come here simply to see the sights of Aurangabad. If he reaches Ellora before us, he might damage more—'

'What's that?' Lalmohan Babu interrupted me, staring at the door. I had shut it after coming into the room. Someone had slipped a piece of paper under it. I leapt and grabbed it quickly. It was another note, written by Feluda:

'Collect all our luggage and wait outside the hotel at one-thirty. Look out for a black Ambassador taxi, number 530. Have your lunch before you leave. All hotel bills have been paid in advance.'

I ran my eyes over these few lines and opened the door. There was no one in sight. A second later, however, Jayant Mallik came out of his room and went busily towards the reception desk. He caught my eye briefly, but did not seem to recognize me.

‘He didn’t lock his room,’ Lalmohan Babu whispered. ‘There’s no one about. Shall I go in and have a look? Think of the stolen statue—!’

‘No! We mustn’t do anything like that without telling Feluda. It’s nearly one o’clock now. I think we should both be getting ready to leave.’

Sometimes, Lalmohan Babu’s enthusiasm caused serious problems. Luckily, he agreed to restrain himself.

We had a quick lunch and came out with our luggage—including Feluda’s—at one twenty-five. An empty taxi arrived in a few minutes, but it was green and had a different number. Its driver stopped it a few feet away from us. I saw him raise his arms and stretch lazily.

Three minutes later, another taxi drove up to us. A black Ambassador, number 530. Its driver peered out of the window and said, ‘Mr Mitter’s party?’

‘Yes, yes,’ Lalmohan Babu replied with an important air. The driver got out and opened the boot for us. I put the three suitcases in it.

Two men came out of the hotel: Shubhankar Bose and Jayant Mallik. I had seen them having lunch together. They got into the green taxi. It roared to life and shot off down Adalat Road, which headed west. Ellora lay in the same direction.

All this suspense is going to kill me, I thought. Where were we going to go? Why wasn’t Feluda with us? I couldn’t help feeling annoyed with him for having vanished, although I knew very well he never did anything without a good reason.

Another man emerged from the hotel. It was the tall hippie, carrying his canvas bag. He came straight to us, stopped and said, ‘Get in, Topshe. Quick, Lalmohan Babu!’

Before I knew it, I was sitting in the back of the taxi. The hippie opened the front door, pushed the bemused Lalmohan Babu in, and then got in beside me. ‘Chaliye, Deendayalji,’ he said to the driver.

I knew Feluda was good at putting on make-up and disguises, but had no idea he could change his voice, his walk, even the look in his eyes so completely. Lalmohan Babu appeared to be speechless, but he did turn around and shake Feluda’s hand. My heart was still speeding like a race horse, and I was dying to know why Feluda was in disguise.

Feluda opened his mouth only when we had left the main town and reached the open country. 'The disguise was necessary,' he explained, 'because Mallik might have recognized me, although we had exchanged only a few words in that garage in Barasat. Naturally, his suspicions would have been aroused if he saw that the same man who had asked him awkward questions was also going to Ellora. I didn't tell you about my plan, for I wanted to see if my make-up was good enough. When neither of you recognized me, I knew I didn't have to worry about Mallik . . . I had these clothes and everything else in my shoulder bag this morning. When I said I was going off to take photos, I actually walked ahead and disappeared into cave number six. Not many people go in there, since it's far from the others and one has to climb higher to get there. When I finished, I climbed down and walked back to town. First I arranged this taxi, then went to the station to see if Mallik got off the train. When he did, I followed his taxi, having collected another passenger who also wanted to go to our hotel. This helped me as I could then share the taxi fare with him. Now, if Shubhankar Bose asks you anything about me, tell him I've sent you a message saying I had to go to Bombay on some urgent business. I cannot remove my disguise until I go to bed. In fact, we shouldn't even let Mallik see that you and I know each other. You and Lalmohan Babu will share a room. I will be in a separate room wherever we stay.'

'But who are you?'

'You don't have to bother with a name. I am a photographer. I'm here to take photos for the Asia magazine of Hong Kong.'

'OK. What about Lalmohan Babu and myself?'

'You are his nephew. He teaches history in the City College. You are a student in the City School. You are interested in painting, but you want to join your uncle's college next year to study history. Your name is Tapes Mukherjee. Lalmohan Babu need not change his name, but please read up on Ellora. Basically, all you need to remember is that the Kailash temple was built during the reign of Raja Krishna of the Rashtrakut dynasty, in the eighth century.'

Lalmohan Babu repeated these words to himself, then took out his little red notebook and noted them down, although writing wasn't easy in the moving car. Now I could see why Feluda had asked him to come with us. He must have known he'd have to be in disguise and pretend he didn't know me. Lalmohan Babu's presence ensured that there was an extra pair of eyes to check on

Mallik's movements, and I had an adult to accompany me. I didn't mind having to call Lalmohan Babu 'Uncle', but pretending Feluda was a total stranger was going to be most difficult. Well—I had no choice.

I looked out of the window. There were hills in the distance, and the land on either side of the road was dry and barren. Cactus grew here and there, but it was a different kind of cactus, not the familiar prickly pear I had seen elsewhere. These bushes were larger and taller by several feet.

Another car behind us had been honking for some time. Our driver slowed down slightly to let it pass. It had the bald American we had seen this morning, and the stout man who had travelled with Feluda in the same taxi.

Half an hour later, we found ourselves getting closer to the distant hills. To our left stretched a small town, called Khuldabad. We were going to stay in the dak bungalow here. At any other time, it would have been impossible to find rooms at such short notice. Thank goodness it was not the regular tourist season. However, the absence of tourists also meant that the thieves and vandals could have a field day.

A little later, to our right, the first of the many caves of Ellora came into view.

'To the dak bungalow?' our driver asked. 'Or would you like to see the caves first?'

'No, let's go straight to the dak bungalow,' Feluda replied.

Our car made a left turn where the road curved towards Khuldabad. I was still staring at the rows of caves in the hills. Which one of them was Kailash?

There were two major places to stay in Khuldabad. One was the dak bungalow where we were booked, and the other was the more expensive and posh Tourist Guest House. The two stood side by side, separated by a strong fence. I spotted the green taxi standing outside the guest house, which meant that was where Jayant Mallik had checked in. Our bungalow was smaller, but neat and compact. Feluda paid the driver, then asked him to wait for fifteen minutes. We would leave our things in our rooms, and go to Kailash. The driver could drop us there, and return to Aurangabad.

There were four rooms in the bungalow. Each had three beds. Feluda could have remained with us, but decided to take a separate room. 'Remember,' he whispered before he left us, 'your surname is Mukherjee. Lalmohan Babu is your uncle . . . Rashtrakut dynasty . . . eighth century . . . Raja Krishna . .

. 'I'll join you in ten minutes.' Then he went into his own room and shouted, 'Chowkidar!' in a voice that was entirely different from his own.

Lalmohan Babu and I had a quick wash and went into the dining hall, where we were supposed to wait for Feluda. We found another gentleman in it, the same man we had just seen travelling with the American. Clearly, he was going to stay in the bungalow with us. At first, he had struck me as a boxer or a wrestler. Now I noticed his eyes: they were bright and intelligent, which suggested he was educated and, in fact, might well be a writer or an artist, for all I knew. His eyes twinkled as they caught mine.

'Off to Kailash, are you?' he asked with a smile.

'Yes, yes,' Lalmohan Babu replied eagerly, 'we are from Calcutta. I am a . . . what d'you call it . . . professor of history in the City College; and this is my nephew, you see.'

There was no need to tell him anything else. But, possibly because he was nervous about playing a new role, Lalmohan Babu went on speaking, 'I thought . . . you know . . . that we must see this amazing creation of the Rashtraput—I mean kut—dynasty. My nephew is . . . you know . . . very interested in art. He wants to get into an art college. He paints quite well, you know. Bhuto, don't forget to take your drawing book.'

I said nothing in reply, for I had not brought my drawing book. Thankfully, Feluda came out at this moment and glanced casually at us.

'If any of you want to go to the caves, you may come with me. I've still got my taxi,' he said in his new voice.

'Oh, thank you, that's very kind,' Lalmohan Babu turned to him, looking relieved. Then courtesy made him turn back to the other gentleman. 'Would you like to come with us?' he asked.

'No, thank you. I'll go later. I must have a bath first.' We went out of the bungalow.

'Tell me a bit more about the history of this place, Felu Babu,' Lalmohan Babu pleaded in a low voice. 'I can't manage unless I have a few more details.'

'Do you know the names of different periods in Indian history?'

'Such as?'

‘Such as Maurya, Sunga, Gupta, Kushan, Chola . . . things like that?’

Lalmohan Babu turned pale. Then, getting into the taxi, he said, ‘Tell you what, why don’t I pretend to be deaf? Then, if anyone asks me anything about the history of the caves, or anything else I might find difficult to answer, I can simply ignore them. Isn’t that a good idea?’

‘All right. I have no objection to that, but remember your acting must be consistent at all times.’

‘No problem with that. Anything would be better than trying to remember historical facts. Didn’t you see how I messed things up just now? I mean, saying “put” instead of “kut” was hardly the right thing to do, was it?’

We were passing the guest house. Jayant Mallik was standing outside, his hands in his pockets, staring at our bungalow. The green Ambassador was still parked by the road. On seeing Mr Mallik, Feluda took out a small comb from his bag and passed it to me. ‘Change your parting,’ he said, ‘make a right parting.’ I looked at myself in the rearview mirror and quickly changed the parting in my hair as Feluda suggested. Who knew a little thing like that would make such a lot of difference? Even to my own eyes, my face looked different.

We reached the main road. Another road rose up the hill from here, curved around and finally brought us to the famous Kailash temple. We got out here, and the taxi returned to Aurangabad.

At first, I didn’t realize what the temple was like. However, as soon as I had passed through its huge entrance, my head began reeling. For a few moments, I forgot all about the yakshi’s head, the gang of crooks, Mr Mallik, Shubhankar Bose, everything. All I was aware of was a feeling of complete bewilderment. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine a group of men, carving the whole temple out of the hill twelve hundred years ago, using no other tools but hammers and chisels. But I could not. It seemed as if the temple had always been there. It couldn’t be manmade at all. Or maybe it had been created by magic; or perhaps—as Feluda’s book had suggested—creatures from a different planet had come and built it.

The temple had hills rising on three sides. A narrow passage went around it. On both sides of the temple were a number of caves—that looked like cells—which had more statues in them. We started walking down the passage to go around the temple. Feluda kept up a running commentary: ‘This place is three

hundred feet in length, one hundred and fifty feet in width and the height of the temple is a hundred feet. Two hundred thousand tonnes of rock must have been excavated to build it . . . they built the top first, then worked their way down to the base . . . the statues include gods and goddesses, men and women, animals, events from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the lot. Just think of their skill, the precision of their calculations, their knowledge of engineering, quite apart from the aesthetics . . .' he stopped. There were footsteps coming towards us. Feluda fell behind deliberately and began inspecting the statue of Ravana shaking Kailash.

Shubhankar Bose emerged from behind the temple. In his hand was a notebook, and a bag hung from his shoulder. He seemed engrossed in looking at the carvings. Then his eyes fell on us. He smiled, then seemed to remember something and asked anxiously, 'Any news of your cousin?'

'Yes,' I replied, trying to sound casual, 'he sent a message. He had to go to Bombay on some urgent work. He'll be back soon.'

'Oh, good.' Mr Bose went back to gazing at the statues. A faint click behind us told me Feluda had taken a picture. His camera was hanging from his neck. If he was to pass himself off as a photographer, the camera naturally had to stay with him whenever he went out.

I turned my head slightly and saw that Feluda was following us. We finished walking around the temple, and had almost reached the main entrance again when we saw someone else. Blue shirt, white trousers. Mr Jayant Mallik. He had probably just arrived. He was standing quietly, but moved towards the statue of an elephant as soon as he saw us. In his hand was the same bag I had seen him carrying before. He had travelled from Barasat to Calcutta with it. I had seen him walk into Queen's Mansion, clutching it. Feluda had now almost caught up with us. I was dying to know what that bag contained. Why didn't Feluda go up to the man, grab him by his collar and challenge him straightaway? Why didn't he say, 'Where's that broken head? Take it out at once!'

But no, I knew Feluda would not do that. He could not, without sufficient evidence. It was true that Mallik had gone to Sidikpur where that plane had crashed; it was true that he had travelled all the way to Ellora, and had been heard speaking to someone in Bombay, talking about a daughter having

returned to her father. But that was not really enough. Feluda would have to wait a bit longer before speaking to him.

There was, however, one way of finding out if Mallik's bag contained anything heavy. I saw Feluda walk past us, go up to Mallik and give him a push. 'Oh, sorry!' he said quickly, and began focusing his camera on a statue. I saw the bag swing from side to side with the push. Its contents did not appear to be very heavy.

We left the temple. On our way out, we saw two other men. One of them was the stout gentleman Lalmohan Babu had recently tried to impress, and the other was the bald American.

The former was explaining something with elaborate gestures; the latter was nodding in agreement.

For some strange reason, I suddenly began to think everyone around us was a suspicious character.

Each one of them should be watched closely.

Was Feluda thinking the same thing?

Seven

Feluda wanted to stop at the guest house on our way back. 'I want to see what newspapers they get,' he said by way of an explanation.

Lalmohan Babu and I returned to the bungalow. We were both feeling hungry, so Lalmohan Babu called out to the chowkidar and asked him to bring us tea and biscuits. The dining room faced the small lobby. The room to its right—number one—was ours. Number two was empty. Opposite these two were rooms three and four. The stout gentleman was in one of them, and Feluda had the other.

Lalmohan Babu was still in a mood to snoop. 'Listen, Tapesh,' he said, sipping his tea, 'I think we can leave the American out of this, at least for the moment. That leaves us with three other people: Bose, Mallik and that man who's staying here. We know something about Bose and Mallik—true or false, God only knows—but we know absolutely nothing about the third man, not even his name. We could peep into his room now, it doesn't appear to be locked.'

I did not like the idea, so I said, 'What if the chowkidar sees us?'

'He cannot see us if I go in, and you stay here to look out for him. If you see the chowkidar coming this way, start coughing. I will get out of that room at once. I think your cousin will appreciate a helping hand. This man's suitcase also struck me as quite heavy.'

The whole world was suddenly full of heavy suitcases. But I could not stop him. To be honest, although I had never done anything like this before for anyone except Feluda, there was a scent of adventure in the suggestion, so I found myself agreeing.

I went to the back veranda. There was a small courtyard facing the veranda, across which was the kitchen and, next to it, the chowkidar's room. A cycle stood outside this room. A boy of about twelve

—presumably his son—was cleaning it with great concentration. I turned my head as I heard a faint creaking noise and saw Lalmohan Babu sneak into room number three. A couple of minutes later, it was he who coughed loudly to indicate that he had finished his job. I returned to our room.

‘There was nothing much in there,’ Lalmohan Babu said. ‘His suitcase seemed pretty old, but it was locked and it did not open even when I pulled the handle. On the table was an empty spectacle-case with “Stephens Company, Calcutta” stamped on it, a bottle of indigestion pills and a tube of Odomos. Apart from these things, there was nothing that I . . .’

‘Whose possessions are you talking about?’ asked Feluda. We looked up with a start. He had walked into our room silently, almost like a ghost.

This called for an honest confession. Much to my surprise, he did not get cross with either of us.

All he said was, ‘Was there any particular reason for doing this?’

‘No, it’s just that we don’t know anything about the man, do we?’ Lalmohan Babu tried to explain. ‘I mean, he hasn’t even told us his name. And he looks kind of hefty, doesn’t he? Didn’t you say there was a whole gang involved in this? So I thought . . .’

‘So you thought he must be one of them? There was no need to search his room just to get his name. He’s called R.N. Raxit. His name’s written on one side of his suitcase. I don’t think we need to know any more about him at this moment. Please don’t go into his room again. It simply means taking unnecessary risks. After all, we haven’t got any concrete reason to suspect him.’

‘Very well. That just leaves the American.’

‘He’s called Lewison, Sam Lewison. Another Jew, and also very wealthy. He owns an art gallery in New York.’

‘How do you know all this?’ I asked, surprised.

‘The manager of the guest house told me. We got talking. He’s a very nice man, passionately fond of detective novels. In fact, he’s been waiting for thieves and crooks to arrive here ever since he read about the thefts in other temples.’

‘Did you tell him why you were here?’

‘Yes. He can help us a great deal. Don’t forget Mallik is staying in his guest house. Apparently, Mallik has already tried to ring someone in Bombay, but the call didn’t come through.’

That night, all four guests in the bungalow sat down to dinner together. Feluda did not speak a word. Mr Raxit turned to Lalmohan Babu and tried to make conversation by asking him if he specialized in any particular period of history. In answer to that, Lalmohan Babu said he didn't know very much about pyramids, except that they were in Egypt. Then he went back to dunking pieces of chapati into his bowl of daal. Mr Raxit cast me a puzzled glance. I placed a hand on my ear and shook my head to indicate that my 'uncle' was hard of hearing. Mr Raxit nodded vigorously and refrained from asking further questions.

After dinner, Feluda went straight to his room and Lalmohan Babu and I went out for a walk. It was quite windy outside. A pale moon shone between patches of dark clouds. From somewhere came the fragrance of hasnahana. Lalmohan Babu, inspired by all this, decided to start singing a classical raga. I suddenly felt quite lighthearted. Just at that moment, we saw a man walking towards us from the guest house. Lalmohan Babu stopped singing (which was a relief since he was singing perfectly out of tune) and stood still. As the man got closer, I recognized him. It was Shubhankar Bose. 'I wish your cousin was here!' Lalmohan Babu whispered.

'Out for a walk, eh?' Mr Bose asked. Then he cleared his throat, looked around a couple of times, lowered his voice and said, 'Er . . . do you happen to know that man in the blue shirt?'

This time, Lalmohan Babu couldn't pretend to be deaf. Mr Bose had spoken with him before.

'Why, did he say he knew us?' Lalmohan Babu asked.

Mr Bose looked over his shoulder again. 'That man is most peculiar,' he told us. 'He says he is interested in Indian art and this is his first visit to Ellora. Yet, when I met him at the temple, he didn't seem moved by any of it. I mean, not at all. I felt just as thrilled by everything, even though this is my second visit. Now, if the man does not care for art and sculpture, why is he here? Why is he pretending to be something he clearly isn't?'

We remained silent. What could we say?

'Have you read the papers recently?' Mr Bose went on.

'Why do you ask?'

'Pieces of our ancient art are being sold off. Statues from temples are disappearing overnight.'

'Really? No, I didn't know that. What a shame! It's a regular crime, isn't it?' Lalmohan Babu declared. His acting was not very convincing, but luckily Mr Bose did not seem to notice. He came closer and added, 'The man left the guest house a while ago.'

'Which man?'

'Mr Mallik.'

'What!' We both spoke together. Lalmohan Babu was right. Feluda ought to have been here.

'Why don't we go, too?' Mr Bose asked, his voice trembling with excitement.

'N-now? Wh-where to?' Lalmohan Babu stammered.

'To the caves.'

'But they must be closed now. Surely there are chowkidars?'

'Yes, but there are only two guards for thirty-four caves. So that shouldn't be a problem. I saw Mallik leave with a bag. He and that hippie in your bungalow keep going about with bags. In fact, that hippie also strikes me as suspicious. Do you know who he is?'

Lalmohan Babu nearly choked. 'He . . . he is a photographer. A very good one. He showed us some of his photos. He's here on an assignment.'

Someone came out of the bungalow. It was Mr Raxit, carrying a stout walking stick in one hand, and a torch in the other. He was wearing a dark, heavy raincoat. He stopped for a minute to shout into Lalmohan Babu's ear: 'After dinner, walk a mile!' Then he smiled and disappeared in the direction of the guest house. Mr Bose said, 'Good night!' and followed him. Lalmohan Babu frowned and said, 'Why did that man tell me to walk a mile?'

'That should help your digestion. Come on now, let's go and find Feluda. He must be told what we just heard. Everyone seems to have gone off to the caves. I don't like it. Let's see what Feluda thinks.'

It was dark inside the bungalow, except for a lantern in the chowkidar's room. This surprised us. Mr Raxit had naturally switched off his light before going out,

and so had we. But why was Feluda's door closed? Why couldn't I see any light under it? Had he already gone to sleep? It was only ten- thirty.

His room had a window that opened out on the veranda. At this moment, however, it was firmly shut and the curtains drawn. I walked up to it and softly called out Feluda's name. There was no reply. He must have gone out. But if he had used the main exit, we would certainly have seen him. Perhaps he had gone out of the little back door behind the chowkidar's room?

Rather foolishly, we went back to our own room and switched the light on. At once, our eyes fell on a piece of paper that was lying on the floor. 'Stay in your room,' it said in Feluda's handwriting.

'Tapesh, my boy,' Lalmohan Babu said with a sigh, 'do you know what is worrying me the most? It's your cousin's behaviour. That is what is most mystifying. Otherwise, frankly, I cannot see too many mysteries in this case.'

Feluda had told us to stay in, but had said nothing about when he might return. There was no question of going to bed. So I spent the next thirty minutes playing noughts-and-crosses with Lalmohan Babu. Then he said he'd tell me the plot of his next novel. 'This time,' he announced, 'I've introduced a new type of fight. My hero's hands and feet are going to be tied, but he'll still manage to defeat the villain, simply by using his head.'

I was about to ask whether by this he meant Prakhar Rudra's brain power, or was his hero simply going to butt his way to victory, when Feluda returned. We looked up expectantly, but he said nothing. By this time, we had both learnt that if Feluda did not wish to part with information, even a thousand questions couldn't make him open his mouth. On the other hand, he'd tell us everything, if he so wished.

What he finally said took us by surprise. 'Lalmohan Babu,' he asked solemnly, 'did you bring a weapon this time?'

Lalmohan Babu had a passion for collecting weapons. When we had gone to Rajasthan, he had taken a Nepali dagger with him. Then, when he went to Simla, he had a boomerang. At Feluda's question, his eyes started glinting. 'Yes, sir,' he said. 'This time, I've got a bomb.'

'A bomb?'

I could hardly believe him. Lalmohan Babu opened his suitcase and took out a heavy brown object, shaped a little like a torch. He passed it to Feluda, saying,

'My neighbour Mr Samaddar's son, Utpal, is in the army. He came to my house last March and gave it to me. "Look, Uncle, see what I brought for you!" he said, "This is a bomb. It is used in serious warfare." Utpal loves reading my novels.'

Feluda inspected it briefly before saying, 'Let me keep this. It's too dangerous to remain anywhere else.'

'Very well. How many megatons do you think it weighs?'

What he meant obviously was 'megaton', but Feluda ignored this last remark completely. He put the 'bomb' in his shoulder bag and said, 'Let's go out. Everyone else has gone, so why should we stay in?'

When we left the dak bungalow, it was half past eleven. The moon was now almost totally obliterated by clouds. It was still windy. One of the rooms in the guest house had a light on. It was the American's room, Feluda said. It was impossible to tell whether Bose and Mallik had returned.

By the time we reached the main road, the eastern sky was heavily overcast. A loud rumble in the sky made Lalmohan Babu exclaim, 'Good heavens, what if we get caught in the rain?'

'If we can get to the caves before it starts raining, we'll have plenty of places to seek shelter,' Feluda reassured us.

Fortunately, it remained dry for quite some time after this. We reached Kailash, but Feluda did not go in through the main entrance. He turned left instead. A little later, he left the path and began climbing up the hill. I was familiar enough with his techniques to realize that he was trying to see if there was another way to get into the temple, without using the main passage. There were bushes and loose stones everywhere, but the moonlight—fleeting though it was—helped us find our way.

Feluda turned right. We were now going back the way we came, but were walking several feet above the path that visitors normally used. A few minutes later, Feluda suddenly stopped. He was looking at something on his right. I followed his gaze.

In the distance, it seemed as if a long silk ribbon was spread on the ground. It was the road that led to the main town. A man was quickly walking down this road, either to the guest house or to the bungalow.

‘Not Raxit,’ Lalmohan Babu whispered. ‘How do you know?’

‘Raxit was wearing a raincoat.’

He was right.

The man turned a corner and vanished from sight. We resumed walking. Only a few moments later, however, we had to stop again. There was a strange noise—something like a cross between a scrape and a rustle. Where was it coming from?

Feluda sat down. So did we. A large cactus bush hid us from view. The noise continued for some time, then stopped abruptly.

We emerged cautiously. Huge, dark clouds had now spread all over the sky. We could hardly see our way. Nevertheless, Feluda kept going. Soon, we could vaguely see the temple again. Its spire was before us. Several feet below the spire, on the roof, stood four lions, facing the east, west, north and the south. Far below them were the two elephants that stood at the entrance.

We kept walking. The noise had come from this direction, but I couldn’t see anything suspicious. Feluda had a torch, but I knew he wouldn’t switch it on, in case it was seen by whoever happened to be in the vicinity.

We passed the temple and came to a cave. It was cave number fifteen. We moved on to the next. Feluda stopped again. I could see that his whole body was tense. ‘Torch,’ he whispered. ‘Someone in number fifteen has switched on a torch. Look at the courtyard in front of it. Doesn’t it seem brighter than the others?’

It was true. Neither Lalmohan Babu nor I had noticed it. Only Feluda’s sharp eyes had picked it up. We stood holding our breath for a couple of minutes. Then Feluda did something entirely unexpected. He picked up a small pebble and threw it in the direction of the courtyard. I heard it fall with a soft thud. A second later, the faint light coming from the cave went out. The torch was switched off. Then a man came out and slipped away, moving stealthily like a thief. ‘Could that be Raxit?’ Lalmohan Babu said softly. I couldn’t recognize the man, but could see that he was not wearing a raincoat.

What followed next took my breath away. Without a word of warning, Feluda began climbing down. He leapt, crawled, and scraped himself on the ground, then swinging from a branch like a monkey, disappeared from sight. I stared

speechlessly. Lalmohan Babu said, after a moment's silence, 'He'll do very well in a circus!'

Cave number fifteen was at a lower level. That was where Feluda had gone. Three minutes later (it felt like three hours), he climbed up again, more or less in a similar fashion. How he could do it with a torch in one hand, a bag hanging from his shoulder and a revolver tucked into his waist, I do not know.

'That one's the Das Avatar cave,' he told us, panting. 'It has two storeys, and some exquisite statues.'

'Did you . . . did you see who it was?' I asked breathlessly. Feluda did not reply immediately. Then he said, 'It's not as simple as I had thought. It'll take me a while to unravel this tangled mess.'

We found the main path again and climbed down to the bottom of the temple. But Feluda had not finished. He found one of the chowkidars and asked him if he had seen anyone going up.

'No, sir,' the chowkidar replied.

'Did you hear any noise? Anything suspicious at all?'

'No, sir. There's been a lot of thunder. I didn't hear anything else.'

'Can we go into the temple?'

I knew the man would refuse, and he did.

'No, sir. I have orders not to let anyone in at this time of night.' We made our way back to the bungalow. As we got closer, we saw something extremely strange. Two windows on the eastern side of the building overlooked the street. We could see these from outside. One of them was Feluda's, the other was Mr Raxit's. Feluda's room was in darkness, but a light flashed in Mr Raxit's room. It was the light from a torch, but it did not stay still. In fact, whoever was holding it seemed to have gone mad. The light danced all over the room, then came to the window, shone once in the direction of the guest house, fell and moved on the bushes by the road before going back to the room. We could not see who it was. 'Highly interesting!' Feluda muttered.

We returned to the bungalow. By now, it had started to drizzle, and was pitch dark outside.

Eight

I had noticed in the past that our adventures often took totally-unexpected turns. When this happened, Feluda seldom lost his equanimity. In fact, I had always marvelled at his ability to keep calm while dealing with unforeseen complications. This time, however, what happened made him very cross.

Before going to bed at night, we had decided to leave early in the morning to go back to the spot where we had heard that funny noise. It required investigation, Feluda said. So we rose at five o'clock and left the bungalow half an hour later after having a cup of tea. Feluda was up before us to replace his make-up. I remembered to maintain a right parting in my hair. Lalmohan Babu expressed the desire to make some change in his appearance as well, but Feluda said 'No!' so firmly that he had to desist.

The caves were going to open for visitors as soon as the sun rose. We wanted to be the first, so we got there at 6 a.m. To our complete astonishment, we found the place crawling with people. A large number of cars and vans were parked outside. It was the sight of a reflector that told me what was going on. This was a film unit. They had arrived from Bombay to shoot a Hindi film, we learnt. The actors hadn't yet arrived, but the rest of the crew were getting things ready. 'Oh no!' Feluda cried in dismay. 'Why couldn't they find some other place?'

A young man was bustling about, clutching a film magazine. Lalmohan Babu called him aside.

'What is the name of this film, do you know?' he asked.

'Oh yes. Krolepati.'

'Who's acting in it?'

'Three of the top stars. Today's shots will include Rupa, Arjun Mehrotra and Balwant Chopra. The heroine, hero and the villain.'

The mention of Arjun Mehrotra made Lalmohan Babu grow round-eyed. 'Will there be songs?' he asked.

'No, no. We've come to shoot fights. Stuntmen, doubles and the fight director are all here. The hero will chase the villain from a cave into the main temple.'

'And the heroine?'

'She'll stay in the cave. The villain has imprisoned her in there, you see. But now the hero's here, so the villain has to run for his life. The climax takes place on the spire.'

'The spire?'

'Yes.'

'Who's the director?'

'Mohan Sharma. But these shots today will be taken by the fight director, Appa Rao.'

'How long do you think the whole thing will take?'

'Well . . . that's difficult to say. We hope to start by ten o'clock. Then we should finish by one.'

That meant they would occupy the whole complex virtually the whole day.

'I don't believe this!' Feluda said through clenched teeth. 'How did they get permission to take the whole place over?'

Since we couldn't get into the temple, we decided to climb over it, just as we had done the previous night. But even the hills around the temple had men from the film unit setting up equipment. We learnt here that although the film crew were not letting ordinary visitors into the temple, they could not go in themselves, as the official letter giving them the necessary permission to shoot had not yet arrived. It was being brought in a different car. The chowkidar on duty had flatly refused to unlock the main door unless the letter was produced.

Feluda clicked his tongue in annoyance and said, 'Let's not waste any more time. Let's see if we can get into cave number fifteen. At least we can look at those beautiful statues, away from all this noise.'

We climbed down from the other side and were walking towards the cave when we saw a huge yellow American car making its way to the temple. The three major stars and the fight director had arrived.

Feluda had already told us the fifteenth cave was the Das Avatar cave. We ran into two modern avatars on our way. They were Lewison and Raxit. We had spotted them from a distance, standing near the entrance and speaking rather animatedly. As we got closer, we heard the American say angrily, 'I see no point in my staying here any longer.' Then he strode off in a huff. Mr Raxit

walked up to us, shrugged and smiled somewhat bitterly. 'He was complaining about the arrangements here. I mean, in the guest house. He said to me, "How can you expect me to spend my dollars here, when you don't even know how to fry an egg?" Just because he's rich, he thinks he owns the whole world.'

'That's strange!' Feluda remarked. 'Isn't he supposed to be a connoisseur of art? How can he talk of fried eggs, standing in a place like this, surrounded by the best specimens of Indian art?'

'How,' Lalmohan Babu wanted to know, 'do they fry eggs in America, anyway?'

Mr Raxit opened his mouth to speak, but had to shut it immediately. A loud scream from the temple made us all start violently. Lalmohan Babu was the first to recover. 'That must be the villain!' he exclaimed. 'They've started shooting. The villain's shouting and making his escape.'

But no. A babble had broken out. There were many other voices, also screaming and yelling. There was something wrong, obviously. Feluda had already begun walking in that direction. We followed him quickly. As we returned to the temple's entrance, we saw a man in a purple bush shirt being carried out. He appeared to be unconscious. He was taken to the yellow car. Then came the three stars. Rupa was walking slowly, leaning heavily on Arjun Mehrotra. Balwant was holding her hand, and murmuring into her ear, as if she were a frightened child, in need of comforting.

A second later, we saw the same young man we had spoken to earlier.

'What happened? What's wrong?' Lalmohan Babu asked him. 'There's a . . . there's a dead body lying behind the temple. It's horrible!'

'Oh my God! Who was that man they carried out to the car?'

'Appa Rao. He was the first to discover the body. One look, and he fainted.'

Feluda and Mr Raxit had gone into the temple. The film crew were all coming out. There was now no question of shooting a film here today.

Lalmohan Babu and I walked along the passage to our left. To our right, below us, were several statues of elephants and lions. They looked as though they were carrying the whole temple on their shoulders. We stopped as the passage turned right. There was a group of men, peering down into a gorge. Perhaps that was where the body was lying. Mr Raxit emerged from the crowd and stopped us. 'Don't go any further,' he said. 'It's not a pretty sight.' Quite

frankly, I had no wish to see the body, but I did feel curious about the dead man. Who was he? Feluda came out and answered this question even before I could ask it.

‘Shubhankar Bose,’ he said. ‘I think he fell off the edge of the cliff straight onto the rocks below.’

‘Strange, how strange!’ Lalmohan Babu muttered under his breath. ‘This is exactly how my own villain, Ghanashyam Karkat, is supposed to die!’

Feluda started walking away, so Lalmohan Babu and I had to move on. Mr Raxit was ahead of us, but he turned and stopped. ‘I saw him last night,’ he said, shaking his head, ‘I told him not to try climbing in the dark. But he paid no attention to me. How was I to know that he was planning to commit suicide?’

Mr Raxit left, having given us something to ponder on. The idea of a suicide had not occurred to me. I looked at Feluda, but he had started to climb the hill on the left of the temple. Mr Bose must have climbed the same hill.

The people gathered near the cliff had gone. Mr Base’s death had, in a way, made things easier for our investigation. Feluda went close to the edge of the cliff and examined the area carefully.

There was a small hole in the ground, only a few feet away from the edge. People had walked over it and around it, making it almost disappear. But when Feluda took out a steel tape from his bag and pushed it in, we realized it was a fairly deep hole. Now Feluda peered closely at the ground again. Lalmohan Babu and I both saw what had claimed his attention.

There was a deep crease on the ground, running from the edge of the cliff to the hole.

‘Do you know what this is?’ Feluda asked me. I couldn’t answer. Feluda went on, ‘This mark was left by a rope. Someone had tied a rope to a crowbar, dug the crowbar deep into the ground, and gone down—or tried to go down—the cliff, using that rope. Remember the noise we heard yesterday? It was the noise of the rope being pulled back. Since there was no way to get into the cave below from the front, someone found this way to reach it from the rear.’

‘But. . . what sort of a rope could it have been?’ Lalmohan Babu asked. ‘I mean . . . if you had to climb down a hundred feet, you’d need a remarkably strong rope, wouldn’t you?’

‘Yes. A nylon rope would do the trick. It would be light, but very, very strong.’

‘That means there was a second person here,’ I said slowly. ‘I mean, apart from Mr Bose.’

‘Right. This second person removed the rope, and the crowbar. We don’t yet know whether he was Bose’s friend or foe, but there is something that indicates he might have been the latter.’

I looked quickly at Feluda. What did he mean? In reply, he took out a small object from his pocket and placed it on his palm. It was a piece of blue cloth, torn presumably from a shirt. Who was wearing a blue shirt yesterday?

Mr Jayant Mallik!

‘Where did you find it?’ I asked. My voice shook.

‘Bose was lying on his stomach. His arms were spread wide. His right hand was closed around this piece of cloth, but a small bit was sticking out between two fingers. He and this other man must have struggled with each other by the cliff. Bose clutched at the shirt the other man was wearing. But then he fell, taking this little piece with him.’

‘You mean he was deliberately pushed off the cliff?’ Lalmohan Babu gasped, ‘You m-mean it was m-m-murder?’

Feluda did not give a direct answer. After a few seconds of silence, he simply said, ‘If the statues in the temple are still intact, we must thank Mr Bose for it. It was because of his presence here last night that the thief couldn’t get away with it.’

Nine

When we climbed down eventually and went back to the main entrance to the temple, the members of the film unit had all disappeared. There were knots of local people, curious and excited. The big American car had been replaced by a jeep. An intelligent and smart looking man—possibly in his mid-thirties—saw Feluda and came forward to greet him. It turned out to be Mr Kulkarni, the manager of the Tourist Guest House.

‘We realized only this morning that Mr Bose had not returned last night,’ he said, shaking his head regretfully. ‘I sent a bearer to look for him, but of course he couldn’t find him anywhere.’

‘What is going to happen now?’ Feluda asked.

‘The police in Aurangabad have been informed. They’re sending a van to collect the body. Mr Bose had a brother in Delhi. He’ll have to be informed, naturally. . . It is really very sad. The man was a true scholar. He came once before, in 1968. I believe he was writing a book on Ellora.’

‘Isn’t there a police station here?’

‘Yes, but it’s only a small outpost. An assistant sub-inspector is in charge, a man called Ghote. He’s inspecting the body at the moment.’

‘Could I meet him?’

‘Certainly. Oh, by the way—’ Mr Kulkarni stopped, looking doubtfully at Lalmohan Babu and me.

‘They are friends, you may speak freely before them,’ Feluda said quickly.

‘Oh. Oh, I see,’ Mr Kulkarni sounded relieved. ‘Well, someone rang Bombay this morning.’

‘Mallik?’

‘Yes.’

‘What did he say?’

Mr Kulkarni took out a piece of paper from his pocket and read from it: ‘The daughter’s fine.

Leaving today.’

‘Today? Did he tell you anything about leaving today?’

‘He did. He wanted to leave this morning. But I thought of you, Mr Mitter, and had a word with his driver. Mallik has been told there’s something wrong with his car, it’ll take a while to repair it. So he cannot leave immediately.’

‘Bravo! Thank you, Mr Kulkarni, you’ve been a great help.’

Mr Kulkarni looked pleased. Feluda lit a Charminar and asked, ‘Tell me, what kind of a man is this Ghote?’

‘A very good man, I should say. But he doesn’t like it here. He longs for a promotion and a posting in Aurangabad. Come with me, I will introduce you to him.’

Mr Ghote had emerged from the cave. Mr Kulkarni brought him over and introduced Feluda as ‘a very famous private detective’. Mr Ghote’s height was about five feet five inches. His width matched his height and, to top it all, he had a moustache like Charlie Chaplin. But his movements were surprisingly brisk and agile.

‘Why don’t you go back to the bungalow?’ Feluda said to me. ‘I’ll have a word with Mr Ghote, and then join you there.’

Neither of us had the slightest wish to return without Feluda, but there was no point in arguing. So we went back. On reaching the bungalow, we realized we were both quite hungry; so I stopped to tell the chowkidar to send us toast and eggs. Then I walked into our room, to find Lalmohan Babu sitting on his bed, looking a little foolish.

‘Tell me, Tapesh,’ he said on seeing me, ‘did we lock our room before going out this morning?’

‘Why, no! There was no need to. We have nothing worth stealing. Besides, the cleaners usually come in the morning, so I thought . . . why, has anything been taken?’

‘No. But someone has been through my things. Whoever did it sat on my bed and opened my suitcase. In fact, when I came in, the bed was still warm. See if he touched your suitcase as well?’

He had; I realized this the minute I opened the case. Nothing was in place. Not only that, one of my pillows was lying on the floor. Judging by the way my

chappals had been thrown in two different directions, the intruder had even looked under the bed.

‘I was most worried about my notebook,’ Lalmohan Babu confided, ‘but he didn’t take it, thank God.’

‘Did he take anything else?’

‘No, I don’t think so. What about you?’

‘The same. Whoever came in was looking for something specific, I think. He didn’t find it here.’ ‘Let’s ask the chowkidar if he saw anything.’

But the chowkidar could not help. He had gone out shopping for a while, so if anyone stole in while he was out, he couldn’t have seen him. Normally, theft was a rare occurrence in these parts. The chowkidar seemed most puzzled by the thought that anyone’s room should be broken into and their belongings searched.

Had Feluda’s room been similarly ransacked? I went to have a look, but saw that his room was locked. He had to be extra careful because of his disguise. ‘Should we try asking Raxit?’ Lalmohan Babu asked.

Having seen the flashing light in his room the night before, I was feeling rather curious about the man. So I agreed and we both went up to his room. I knocked softly. The door opened almost at once.

‘What is it? Come in.’

Mr Raxit did not seem very pleased to see us; but we went into his room, anyway.

‘Did anyone break into your room as well?’ Lalmohan Babu asked as soon as he had stepped in.

From the way Mr Raxit looked at Lalmohan Babu, it was obvious that he was not in a good mood.

He spoke in a low voice, but his tone was sharp. ‘What’s the use of speaking to you?’ he said. ‘You can’t hear a word, can you? Let me speak to your nephew. Not only did someone get into my room, but he actually removed something valuable.’

‘What. . . what was it?’ I asked timidly.

'My raincoat. I had bought it in England, and had been using it for the last twenty-five years.'

Lalmohan Babu looked at me silently. He wasn't supposed to have heard anything. I repeated the words to him, speaking loudly, trying not to laugh.

'Could it have been stolen last night?' Lalmohan Babu suggested. 'We saw you looking for something. I mean, we saw your torch . . .'

'No. A small bat had somehow got into my room last night. I switched the main lights off and used my torch to get rid of it. Nothing was stolen yesterday. It happened this morning. I believe the culprit is that young boy of the chowkidar's.'

I had to shout once more and repeat the whole thing to Lalmohan Babu.

'I am very sorry to hear this,' Lalmohan Babu said gravely. 'We must keep an eye on the boy.'

There didn't seem to be anything else to say. We apologized for disturbing him and came away. The chowkidar had served us breakfast in the dining hall. We began eating. I had no idea what American fried eggs tasted like, but what I had been given here was quite tasty. I kept wondering who might have broken into our room, but decided in the end that it must have been the chowkidar's son. I had seen him walking in the backyard and throwing curious glances in the direction of our rooms.

Feluda had told us to go back to the bungalow, but hadn't said that we had to stay in. So after breakfast, we locked our room, and went out in the street.

The guest house was not clearly visible from the main gate of our bungalow, the view being partially obstructed by a large tree. The sudden noise of a car starting made us go forward quickly. Now the guest house was fully visible. The taxi that had brought Mr Raxit and Lewison from Aurangabad was now ready to leave. The luggage-rack on its roof was loaded. Mr Sam Lewison, the American millionaire, was giving a tip to one of the bearers.

But who was that?

Another man had come out of the guest house and was speaking to Lewison. Lewison nodded twice, which clearly meant that he had agreed to do something for the other man. The latter went back to the guest house and reappeared with a suitcase. The driver opened the boot of the car, and placed

the suitcase in it. My heart began beating faster. Lalmohan Babu clutched my sleeve. There could be no doubt about the implication of what we had just seen. Mr Jayant Mallik was not going to wait for his own car to be repaired. He was trying to escape with Sam Lewison.

The driver took his seat.

‘The cycle!’ I cried. ‘The chowkidar’s cycle!’

The car started. I ran back to the bungalow and managed to drag the cycle out. Luckily, no one saw me.

‘Come on!’ I said to Lalmohan Babu. He stood there looking as though he had never ridden on the crossbar of a cycle before. But there was no time to argue, our culprit was running away. He jumped up a second later, and I began pedalling as fast as I could. Feluda had taught me to cycle when I was seven. Now I could put it to good use.

If we had walked, it would have taken us twenty minutes to get back to the temple. I covered that distance in five. There was Feluda, and Ghote, and Kulkarni!

‘Feluda!’ I panted. ‘Mr Mallik went off . . . in that American’s car . . . five minutes ago!’

Just that one remark from me set so many things in motion that the whole thing now seems almost like a blur. Mr Ghote jumped into his jeep, with Feluda beside him, and Lalmohan Babu and myself at the back. I had no idea even a jeep could travel at 60 kmph. Very soon, we saw Lewison’s taxi, overtook it and made it stop. Lewison got out, looking furious and giving vent to his anger by uttering a range of specially chosen American swear words. These had no effect on Mr Ghote. He ignored Lewison completely and approached Mallik, who turned visibly pale. Mr Ghote then opened his suitcase, quelling an abortive attempt by Mallik to stop him, and took out an object wrapped heavily in a large Turkish towel. With one swift movement, he removed the towel and revealed the yakshi’s head. Sam Lewison shut up immediately, gaped in horror and stammered, ‘B-b-but . . . b-but I

. . . I . . . !’ Lalmohan Babu heaved a sigh of relief and proclaimed, ‘End’s well that all’s well!’ Finally Lewison was allowed to travel back to Aurangabad. We returned to Khuldabad with the culprit, caught red-handed.

Mr Ghote took Mallik away, to keep him somewhere in the police outpost. He went quietly, too dazed to say anything.

We were dropped at the guest house, for Mr Kulkarni was waiting anxiously for our return. He appeared very pleased on being told that our mission had been entirely successful. However, Feluda seemed to pour cold water over his enthusiasm by saying, 'We haven't yet finished our job, Mr Kulkarni. There's plenty more to be done. Don't forget to make enquiries about that number in Bombay, and let me know as soon as you hear anything.'

I didn't understand what this last instruction meant, but thought no more about it.

Mr Kulkarni had ordered coffee for all of us. When it arrived, I suddenly remembered we had not told Feluda about our room being searched. He sipped his coffee quietly as I quickly explained what had happened. Then he frowned and asked Mr Kulkarni, 'What sort of a man is that chowkidar?'

'Who, Mohanlal? A very good man, most trustworthy. He's been doing this job for the last seventeen years. I have never heard anyone complain against him.'

Feluda thought for a second, then turned to me. 'Are you sure nothing was stolen?'

'Yes. We are both absolutely sure. Mr Raxit thinks it was the chowkidar's boy who did it.'

'Very well. Let's go and have a look, especially since Lalmohan Babu says the intruder actually sat on his bed and kept it warm for him. See you soon, Mr Kulkarni; perhaps you had better keep this with you.' He passed the yakshi's head—still wrapped in the towel—to Mr Kulkarni, who put it in a safe in his office and locked it.

We returned to the bungalow. Feluda came into our room with us, bolted the door and then went through our belongings with meticulous care. Apart from his clothes, Lalmohan Babu's suitcase contained a small box of homoeopathic pills, two books on criminology, one on Baluchistan and his own notebook. For some reason, Feluda spent a long time going through this notebook, but did not tell us what was so intriguing about it. Finally, he put everything away and said, 'If my guesses turn out to be correct, this whole business is going to be settled tonight, one way or the other. If that happens, you will both have to play an important role. Please remember, at all times, that I am with you,

keeping an eye on you, even if you cannot see me. Don't tell anyone about Mallik's arrest. And don't leave your room. In any case, I don't think you can, for it looks like it's going to rain.'

Feluda peered out of the window as he spoke, then got up silently and went and stood by it. I followed him. We were looking out of the western side. There was a lawn, across which stood a number of tall trees. I could recognize eucalyptus amongst them. A man came out of the trees, crossed the lawn and went to the front of the bungalow. A minute later, he entered the dining hall. This was followed by the sound of a room being unlocked, and then locked again from inside.

Feluda nodded and muttered 'Yes, yes!' almost to himself. The man who had come in was Mr Raxit.

'Wait until you hear from me,' Feluda said, 'and then simply do as you're told. Don't be afraid.'

He opened the door and went out.

We remained in our room. Thunder rumbled outside. The sky was overcast.

Staring at the walls, thinking things over, it suddenly occurred to me that the man who was probably the most mysterious was Mr Raxit. We did not know anything about him.

And Mallik? How much had we learnt about Jayant Mallik? Not much. Not enough. Suddenly, it seemed to me that we had made no progress at all.

Ten

It began pouring soon after twelve o'clock. The rain was accompanied by frequent thunder. Lalmohan Babu and I sat in our room trying—in vain—to work out what possible role we might have to play later in the day. Mallik had been arrested, the yakshi's head was safely locked away. As far as we were concerned, that was the end of the story. What else could Feluda be thinking of?

The chowkidar told us at one o'clock that lunch was ready. We went into the dining hall without Feluda. He was probably having lunch with Mr Kulkarni in the guest house.

Mr Raxit joined us. He had seemed extremely cross this morning when we had spoken to him, but now he appeared cheerful once more. 'On a day like this,' he said, 'a Bengali ought to have kedgerree, pakoras and fried hilsa. I have lived out of Bengal for many years, but haven't forgotten Bengali habits.'

The meal we were served here was different, but no less tasty. I finished my bowl of daal, and had just helped myself to the meat curry, when a car drew up outside the front door and a thin, squeaky voice cried: 'Chowkidar!' The chowkidar rushed out, clutching an umbrella. Mr Raxit soaked a piece of his chapati in the curry, put it in his mouth and said, 'A tourist? In this weather?'

A tall man walked in, taking off his raincoat. Most of his hair was grey. He had a short moustache and goatee, and he wore glasses. 'I've already had my lunch,' he told the chowkidar, who was carrying his aged leather suitcase. Then he turned to us and asked, 'Who has been arrested?'

Feluda had told us not to say anything about Mallik's arrest, so we simply stared foolishly. Mr Raxit gave a start and said, 'Arrested?'

'Yes. Some vandal. He was apparently trying to steal a statue from one of the caves, and was caught. At least, that's what I've just heard. I only hope they won't decide to close the caves because of this. I've travelled quite far simply to see the statues here. Why, haven't you heard anything?'

'No.'

'Anyway, I'm glad the fellow was caught. I must say the police here are quite efficient.'

The man was given the third empty room. He disappeared into it, but we could hear him talking to himself. Perhaps he was slightly mad.

The rain stopped at around two-thirty. Half an hour later, I saw the new arrival walking towards the eucalyptus trees. He came back in five minutes.

The chowkidar brought us our tea at four-thirty. I noticed a small piece of paper on the floor as he left. It turned out to be another message from Feluda: 'Go to cave number fifteen at seven o'clock. Wait in the south-eastern corner on the first floor.'

He was still running a campaign, totally unseen. This had never happened before.

Fortunately, it did not rain again. When we left the bungalow at six-thirty, both Mr Raxit and the man with the goatee appeared to be in their rooms, for their lights were on. Lalmohan Babu muttered a short prayer as we set out. My own feelings were so confused that I am not even going to try to describe them. My hands felt cold. I thrust them into my pockets.

We reached Kailash ten minutes before seven. The western sky was still quite bright since the sun did not set here at this time of year until after six-thirty. The caves and hills seemed darker, but the sky had cleared.

We turned right after reaching Kailash. The next cave was number fifteen, the Das Avatar cave. It was at this one that Feluda had thrown a pebble last night.

There was no one around. We walked on. The courtyard before the cave was large. There was a small shrine in the middle of it. We crossed it quickly and climbed a few steps to go through the main entrance that took us into the cave. We had been told to find the first floor. I could dimly see a flight of steps going up. God knew if there was anyone already hiding in the dark. We went up the steps, trying not to make any noise at all.

The stairs led us to a huge hall. Rows of carved pillars stood supporting the roof, as though they were carrying it on their heads. There were scenes from Indian mythology, beautifully carved on the northern and the southern walls.

We found the south-eastern corner. It was too dark inside to see clearly. I had taken off my sandals before climbing the stairs, but now the rocky floor felt so cold that I had to put them on again. As neither of us knew how long we might have to wait, we sat down, leaning against the wall. Who knew what was going

to happen next in this cave, built twelve hundred years ago, and filled with amazing specimens of ancient art?

Something happened almost immediately. As soon as we had sat down, my eyes fell on something that made me give an involuntary gasp. Only a few feet away from where we were sitting, barely visible in the dark, was a solid round object lying on the floor. Sticking out from under it was a white square object. Neither was a part of the temple decorations. Someone had placed them there deliberately. What could they be? Who had kept them there, and for whom?

‘P-paper?’ Lalmohan Babu whispered, pointing at the white object.

We rose and went closer. What we saw made us stare in utter disbelief. It was indeed a piece of paper, but what had been used as a paperweight was the yakshi’s head! There could be no mistake. We had seen it only this morning—first in Mr Ghote’s hand, and then in Mr Kulkarni’s, who had locked it away in his safe.

I shone the torch on the piece of paper. It was another message from Feluda, this time addressed to Lalmohan Babu. ‘Keep the head with you,’ it said. ‘If anyone demands it, hand it over to him.’

What could this mean? But there was no time to think. Lalmohan Babu said, ‘Jai Guru!’ and picked up the head. I put Feluda’s message into my pocket, and we returned to our positions.

Our eyes were now getting used to the dark. There appeared to be a faint moonlight outside. We could see a portion of the western sky through the pillars. It had turned a deep purple. Gradually, it changed its hue. Perhaps the moon had risen higher. It didn’t seem as dark inside the cave as before.

‘Eight o’clock!’ Lalmohan Babu muttered, letting go of a long sigh.

Suddenly, a faint noise reached my ears. Someone was coming up the stairs, placing each foot with extreme caution. Then the noise stopped. A second later, the footsteps continued. The man was now walking on flat ground, among the pillars. There, now he was visible through a couple of pillars. He stopped, and looked around. Then, with a click, he lit a lighter. The small flame went out almost as soon as it had appeared, but it was enough to illuminate his face. We recognized him instantly.

Jayant Mallik!

How could he be here? He was supposed to be in police custody. My head began reeling. After this, I thought, if the dead Shubhankar Bose turned up in person, I should not be surprised.

Mr Mallik resumed walking, but did not come toward us. He made his way to the north-eastern corner. That part of the hall was in total darkness. He disappeared from sight.

My throat felt dry. I could hardly think clearly. Only one thing kept going round and round in my head. Where was Feluda - Where was Feluda? Where was Feluda? Lalmohan Babu had once declared he would give up writing crime stories because his real-life experiences were so much stranger. What would he say after today?

The moonlight grew stronger as we waited. A dog barked somewhere in the distance. Then it was quiet once more.

But not for long. A second man was climbing up the steps. Like Mr Mallik, he stopped for a moment on reaching the flat surface where the stairs ended. Then we could see him walking, but could not tell who he was. He did not stop to use a lighter.

He was coming towards us, getting closer and closer, walking with slow, measured steps. Then, without the slightest warning, our eyes were dazzled by a powerful light. The man was shining a torch directly into our eyes. The footsteps came even closer, and a voice spoke, softly, but with biting sarcasm.

‘Dreaming of the moon, weren’t you, you puny little dwarf? Who taught you to write threatening letters? “Come to the Das Avatar cave at 8 p.m. . . . then you’ll get back what you’ve lost, or else . . .” where did you learn all this, Professor? A professor of history, didn’t you say? Can you hear me now? Or are you still pretending to be deaf? How did you get involved in this, anyway? You had noted everything down in your notebook, hadn’t you? I saw it myself—“a Fokker Friendship crashes”, “a yakshi from Bhubaneswar gets stolen”, “the Kailash temple in Ellora”, even plane timings . . . ! Why have you got a child with you? Is he your bodyguard? Can you see what I’ve got in my right hand?’

I had recognized the voice as soon as it had started to speak. It was Mr Raxit. In his left hand was a torch. In his right was a pistol.

‘I . . . I . . .’ Lalmohan Babu stammered.

‘Stop whimpering!’ Mr Raxit’s voice boomed out. ‘Where’s the real thing?’

‘Here it is. I kept it for you,’ Lalmohan Babu offered him the yakshi’s head.

Mr Raxit took it with his left hand, making sure his right hand did not waver.

‘Not everyone can play this game, do you understand?’ he went on, still sounding furious. ‘It’s not for the likes of you, you stupid little—’ he broke off.

A strange thing had started to happen. Great clouds of smoke were coming into the cave, spiralling up and slowly enveloping everything—the pillars, the carvings, the statues. As we stood gaping in absolute amazement at this thick sheet of haze, another voice rang out, almost like a bullet. It was Feluda.

‘Mr Raxit!’ he called, his voice as cold and hard as the stony floor we were standing on. ‘Not one, but two revolvers are pointing at you at this very moment. Put your gun down. Go on, throw it down.’

‘What . . . what’s the meaning of this?’ Mr Raxit cried, his voice suddenly uncertain.

‘Let me explain,’ Feluda replied. ‘We are here to punish you for your crime, and it isn’t just one crime, either. First, you destroyed and damaged a part of India’s history. Second, you sold bits of your—and our—own heritage to foreigners. Third, you killed Shubhankar Bose.’

‘No! Lies, these are all lies!’ Mr Raxit shrieked. ‘Bose slipped and fell into the gorge. It was an accident.’

‘If anyone is lying, it is you. The crowbar you had used has been found behind a cactus bush fifty yards from where Bose’s body was found. It is heavily stained with blood. Had Mr Bose slipped and fallen by accident, he would certainly have screamed for help. None of the guards here heard a scream. Besides, you had hidden a blue shirt among the plants behind the bungalow where we were all staying. A portion of this shirt is torn. I found it. The piece of blue fabric Bose was found clutching is the same—’

Mr Raxit did not stop to hear any more. He leapt up and tried to dash out of the smoky curtain, only to find himself being embraced by three different men. To our right, Jayant Mallik lit his torch. Now I could see Feluda, who had taken off his make-up. Next to him was Mr Ghote and a constable. At a nod from him, the constable put handcuffs on Mr Raxit.

Feluda turned to Mr Mallik. 'I must ask you to do something for me,' he said. 'See that other cave over there? You'll find Mr Raxit's raincoat in it, tucked away in the left-hand corner. Could you get it for me, please? Well, we mustn't stay in this smoke any longer. Come along, Topshe. Are you all right, Lalmohan Babu? This way, please.'

Feluda explained everything to us over dinner that night. We had dinner at the guest house. With us were Mr Kulkarni, Mr Ghote and Mr Mallik.

'The first thing I should tell you,' Feluda began, 'is that Raxit isn't his real name. His real name is Chatteraj. He is a member of a gang of criminals, who operate from Delhi. Their main aim is to steal valuable statues, or even parts of statues, from old temples, and sell them to foreign buyers, thereby filling their own pockets with tidy little sums. There must be many other gangs like this one, but at least we have managed to get hold of one. Chatteraj was made to come clean, and he gave us all the details we needed. It was he who had stolen that head, brought it to Calcutta and sold it to Silverstein. Then, when he heard of the plane crash, he rushed to the spot, bought it back from that boy called Panu for just ten rupees, and then chased Lewison all the way to Ellora. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone. The yakshi's head could be sold to Lewison, and Chatteraj could steal another statue from Kailash. Sadly for him, he didn't manage to do either of these things. Lewison agreed to buy the stolen statue, but Chatteraj lost it before he could pass it on to Lewison. As a result, Lewison got very cross with him and left. He might have succeeded in removing a statue from Kailash, but two things stopped him. One was the sudden appearance of Shubhankar Bose. The other was a small pebble, thrown on the courtyard before cave number fifteen.'

Feluda stopped for breath. I started feeling most confused. 'What about Mr Mallik?' I blurted out.

Feluda smiled. 'The presence of Jayant Mallik can be very easily explained. In fact, it was so simple that even I could not figure it out at first. Mr Mallik was simply following Chatteraj.'

'Why?'

'For the same reason that I was chasing him! He wanted to retrieve the statue, like me. But that isn't all. He and I do the same job. Yes, he's a private detective, just like me.'

I cast a startled glance at Mr Mallik. He said nothing, but I saw that he was grinning, looking at Feluda and waiting for him to explain further.

‘When I made enquiries about him,’ Feluda went on, ‘I discovered that he worked for an agency in Bombay. They sent him to Calcutta recently, in connection with a case. He stayed in a friend’s flat in Queen’s Mansion, and used his car while the friend was away on holiday. Normally, the kind of cases these agencies handle are all ordinary and pretty insignificant. Mr Mallik was getting bored with his job. He wanted to do something exciting, much more worthwhile and become famous. Is that right?’

‘Yes.’ Mr Mallik admitted. ‘I got the chance to work on such a case, most unexpectedly. My old job took me to the Grand Hotel last Thursday, and I happened to be in Nagarmal’s shop when an American visitor showed that yakshi’s head to him. At that time, I paid no attention. All that I grasped was that the man was immensely wealthy, and his name was Silverstein. But, when I heard about the plane crash the next morning and they said he had been on that flight, it suddenly struck me that it might be possible to retrieve that statue. I have a little knowledge of ancient art, and I knew that what I had seen Silverstein carrying was extremely valuable. So I thought if I could get it back, it might be reported in the press, which would be a good thing for the agency as well. So I rang my boss in Bombay and told him what I wanted to do. He agreed, and asked me to keep him posted. I left for Sidikpur immediately, but it was too late. I missed Chatteraj by just five minutes. He got there first and bought the head back. There didn’t seem to be anything I could do, but—’

‘Do you remember the colour of his car?’ Feluda interrupted him. ‘Oh yes. It was a blue Fiat. I decided to follow Chatteraj. But I ran into some more problems. A burst tyre meant an unnecessary delay . . . so I lost him for the moment. However, by then I was absolutely determined not to give up. I knew he’d want to sell the statue again. So I went back to the Grand Hotel. It meant waiting for a while, but eventually I found him and followed him to the Railway Booking Office. He bought a ticket to Aurangabad. So did I. He was still carrying a heavy bag, so it was clear that he had not been able to get rid of the statue. I came back to my flat, rang my office in Bombay and told them what had happened.’

‘Yes, we know about that. You had said, “The daughter has returned to her father”. What we did not know was that by “father” you meant Chatteraj, not yourself.’

Mr Mallik smiled, then continued, 'I kept waiting for a suitable opportunity to remove the stolen object. I knew if I could catch the thief at the same time, it would be even better. But that proved much too difficult. Anyway, last night I went and hid near Kailash. When I saw that everyone from the bungalow had gone out in the direction of the caves, I returned quickly, slipped into the bungalow through the side door that only the cleaners use, and removed the statue from Chatteraj's room.'

'I see. Did you have any idea you were being watched by a detective?'

'Oh no. That's why I couldn't speak a word when you arrested me! I must have looked very foolish.'

Mr Ghote burst out laughing. Feluda took up the tale, 'When I saw that you had travelled with Lewison in the same car for many miles, but had done nothing to sell him the statue, I realized you were innocent. Until then, although I'd come to know you were a detective, I could not drop you from my list of suspects.'

'But Chatteraj was also on this list, wasn't he?'

'Yes. Mind you, initially it was no more than a slight doubt. When I saw that this his name had been freshly painted on an old suitcase, I began to wonder if the name wasn't fake. Then, Lalmohan Babu told us yesterday that he had gone out wearing a raincoat. When we were passing cave number fifteen, I noticed someone was in it, and threw a pebble in the courtyard. That made the man run away. I then went into the cave and began searching the surrounding area. In a smaller cave behind the big one, I found the raincoat. It had a specially large pocket, in which was a hammer, a chisel and a nylon rope. I left everything there. It became obvious that Raxit—or Chatteraj—was the real culprit. As we returned to the bungalow, we saw him desperately searching for something in his room. In fact, he seemed to have gone mad, which is understandable since he had come back to his room to find that his precious statue had gone. This morning, Mr Kulkarni told me you had called Bombay and said, "The daughter is fine". That meant you had the stolen statue with you. So you had to be arrested.'

Feluda stopped. No one said anything. After a short pause, he went on, 'While we were worrying about statues and thieves, Shubhankar Bose got killed. On examining his dead body, we found a piece of blue cloth in one of his hands. You were wearing a blue-shirt yesterday. But I didn't think of you, since my

suspicions had already fallen on Chatteraj. What really happened was that he reached Bose's body before me and, pretending that he was trying to feel his pulse, pushed in that torn piece into the dead man's hand. It had become essential for Chatteraj to throw suspicion on someone else for Bose's death. The torn piece had, of course, come from Chatteraj's own shirt. He had cut out a piece and hidden the shirt amongst the plants and bushes behind the bungalow. I found it myself.

'However, although I had gathered some evidence against Chatteraj, it was not enough to actually accuse him of murder and theft. As I was wondering what to do, Tapes and Lalmohan Babu told me that someone had been through their belongings. This had to be Chatteraj, for he had lost something valuable and was naturally looking for it everywhere. In Lalmohan Babu's suitcase was his notebook, which mentioned the theft of the statue from Bhubaneswar, Silverstein and the plane crash. I knew at once that Chatteraj had read every detail and was feeling threatened, thinking it was Lalmohan Babu who had stumbled on the truth. So I sent him a little note, pretending it had been written by Lalmohan Babu, asking Chatteraj to meet him in the Das Avatar cave at 8 p.m. Before that, however, I told Chatteraj that whoever had tried to steal a statue from Kailash the night before had been arrested. I knew this would set his mind at rest, and he would stop being on his guard.'

'That man with the goatee!' Lalmohan Babu and I cried together, 'Was that you?'

'Yes,' Feluda laughed. 'That was my disguise number two. I felt I had to stay close to you, since we were dealing with a dangerous man. Anyway, he swallowed my bait at once. He thought a few sharp words from him would really make Lalmohan Babu return the head to him, and he could get away with it once again. Well, we all know what happened next.'

'There is only one thing left for me to say: Mr Mallik and his agency will get full credit for their share in catching this gang. And I will pray for a promotion for Mr Ghote. I must also thank Mr Kulkarni for the important role he played, but if a medal for courage and bravery could be given to anyone, it should go jointly to Tapeshranjan Mitter and Lalmohan Ganguli.'

'Hear, hear!' said Mr Mallik, and the others clapped enthusiastically.

When the applause died down, Lalmohan Babu turned to Feluda and said a little hesitantly, 'Does that mean . . . this time my weapon didn't come into any use at all?'

Feluda looked perfectly amazed. 'Not come into use? What are you talking about? Where do you think all that smoke came from? It was no ordinary bomb, sir. Do you know what it was? A three hundred and fifty-six megaton special military smoke bomb!'

2. Grammar Page

Unit
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Phrasal verbs 7 up (1)

A

go up, come up, walk up (to ...) = *approach*

- A man **came up to** me in the street and asked me for money.

catch up (with somebody), catch somebody up = *move faster than people in front of you so that you reach them*

- I'm not ready to go yet. You go on and I'll **catch up with** you / I'll **catch** you **up**.

keep up (with somebody) = *continue at the same speed or level*

- You're walking too fast. I can't **keep up (with)** you.
 You're doing well. **Keep it up!**

B

set up an organisation, a company, a business, a system, a website etc. = *start it*

- The government has **set up** a committee to investigate the problem.

take up a hobby, a sport, an activity etc. = *start doing it*

- Laura **took up** photography a few years ago. She takes really good pictures.

fix up a meeting etc. = *arrange it*

- We've **fixed up** a meeting for next Monday.

C

grow up = *become an adult*

- Amy was born in Hong Kong but **grew up** in Australia.

bring up a child = *raise, look after a child*

- Her parents died when she was a child and she was **brought up** by her grandparents.

D

clean up, clear up, tidy up = *make something clean, tidy etc.*

- Look at this mess! Who's going to **tidy up**? (or ... to **tidy it up**)

wash up = *wash the plates, dishes etc. after a meal*

- I hate **washing up**. (or I hate **doing the washing-up**.)

E

end up somewhere, **end up** doing something etc.

- There was a fight in the street and three men **ended up** in hospital.
(= that's what happened to these men in the end)
 I couldn't find a hotel and **ended up** sleeping on a bench at the station.
(= that's what happened to me in the end)

give up = *stop trying*, **give something up** = *stop doing it*

- Don't **give up**. Keep trying!
 Sue got bored with her job and decided to **give it up**. (= stop doing it)

make up something, be **made up of** something

- Children under 16 **make up** half the population of the city.
(= half the population are children under 16)
 Air is **made up** mainly **of** nitrogen and oxygen. (= Air consists of ...)

take up space or time = *use space or time*

- Most of the space in the room was **taken up** by a large table.

turn up, show up = *arrive, appear*

- We arranged to meet David last night, but he didn't **turn up**.

use something up = *use all of it so that nothing is left*

- I'm going to make soup. We have a lot of vegetables and I want to **use them up**.