



Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

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The Man
with
Three Names

The Man with Three Names

The man was tired. His eyes hurt after two hours of driving in the snow. It was a dark winter night with no moon, and the snow covered everything.

'I'll never get there tonight,' he thought.

He came to a hill and put his foot on the brake. But the car didn't stop. It went down the hill, and across the road.

'Oh, no!' he shouted, as the car went into the ditch and hit a tree.

The man hit his head and face on the car window and his nose began to bleed. He sat in the quiet car, too surprised to move. After a minute, he opened the car door and got out. Snow began to cover his clothes.

He looked at his watch. It was quarter past nine.

'What can I do?' he thought. 'I can't stay here. I have to talk to her. I must find a phone and tell her what's happened. She'll be worried. And I must get my car out of the ditch. Will a garage be open tonight?'

He looked around. He saw a light between the trees, down a narrow road, off to his right.

'That looks like a hotel,' he thought.

The man took a suitcase from the back seat of the car and began to walk towards the light.

Janey Foxwell walked from her car to the Grey Swan Hotel. She carried a suitcase in one hand.

'It's only a small hotel,' she thought. 'I hope it's not expensive.'

She opened the hotel door and went inside.

'Can I help you?' asked a boy behind a desk. He was about sixteen years old. 'My name is Stephen Morgan. It's my mother's hotel.'

'I need a room for tonight, please,' Janey said. 'I'm driving to Bristol to stay with a friend, but the weather is getting worse.'

Stephen Morgan smiled. 'Perhaps the weather will be better tomorrow.'

'I don't have much money,' Janey said. 'I'm an art student, at college.'

'You can have the small room on the top floor. Number twelve. It doesn't cost much, and it's a nice little room.' Stephen gave Janey a key. 'Will you put your name in the register, please?' He opened a book on the desk.

Janey wrote her name in the register. 'I'm really hungry. Can I get something to eat?' she asked.

'Dinner was two hours ago,' Stephen said. 'But you can get sandwiches in the hotel bar.'

'OK,' Janey said. 'Thank you.'

Janey carried her suitcase up the stairs to the top floor. She walked over to the door with '12' on it.

It was a small room with a bed under the window. Janey dropped the suitcase on the floor and sat on the side of the bed. She was tired.

'I'll phone Annie in a minute or two,' she thought, 'then I'll get something to eat.'

She was going to stay with her friend Annie in Bristol. The city of Bristol was sixty kilometres away.

There was a phone downstairs, near the desk. Janey phoned her friend.

'Annie? Hi, it's Janey... No, I can't get to Bristol tonight... That's right, the snow has made the roads dangerous... No, I'm staying at a hotel.'

Perhaps I can drive to Bristol tomorrow... Yes, I know... Don't worry, I'm OK. I'll phone you tomorrow morning... Bye!

Janey put the phone down and walked across to the lounge bar. Just then, the hotel door opened and a man came in, carrying a suitcase. His hat and coat were covered with snow, and there was blood on his face.

'I know that face,' Janey thought. 'But where have I seen him before? And what's his name?'

The man went across to the desk.

'I want a room,' he told Stephen Morgan.

'Just for tonight?' Stephen asked. 'Or will you be staying for the weekend?'

'Tonight. And my car is in the ditch, two kilometres up the road. I need a garage.'

'I'll get my mother,' Stephen said. The man was making him feel nervous.

Mrs Morgan came out of the little office a few moments later.

'There's a garage in Copperthorn, the next village,' Mrs Morgan told the man. 'I can phone it.'

'Please do,' the man said.

Mrs Morgan looked at a board behind her. Then she dialled a number. After a moment, she spoke to somebody.

'... and his car is in the ditch,' she said into the phone, explaining.

'Sorry? Oh, I see. Thanks, Harry. I'll tell him.' She put down the phone. 'Well?' said the man.

'The garage owner won't come out tonight, not in this weather,' Mrs Morgan said. 'It's too dangerous. I'll phone again in the morning for you.'

The man looked angry. 'Just give me a room then,' he said, taking off his coat. 'The best room you have.'

'Room nine,' Mrs Morgan said. 'It's a nice room, with a bath. Can you put your name in the register, please?'

The man wrote something in the register and Mrs Morgan looked at it. 'Thank you, Mr... Todd.' She gave him a key. 'The room is on the second floor.'

'Is there a phone in the room?' he asked.

'Room nine has a phone, yes.'

'Good, thank you,' he answered.

As Janey went into the hotel lounge, the angry man was walking past. There was a television on in the corner of the lounge and a woman was reading the news. The man stopped by the door of the lounge and listened to the news. When the news finished, the man took his suitcase up the stairs to find his room. As he walked up the stairs, something fell from the pocket of his coat.

'Excuse me,' said Janey, but the man did not hear her. She went over to the stairs and picked up what he had dropped.

It was a road map. Janey looked at it, then called out to the man, more loudly, 'You've dropped your map!'

He turned round quickly and came down the stairs again.

'Thank you,' he said, taking the map from her. Then, without another word, he hurried up to his room.

Janey went and sat at the bar in the lounge. The barman put some sandwiches and a glass of orange juice in front of her. She thought about the stranger. 'Who is he?' she thought. 'I'm sure I've seen him before. But where?'

And then she remembered.

'He was a teacher at college!' she thought. 'It was more than a year ago. He was one of the art teachers, but he doesn't remember me.'

Ben Todd picked up the phone in room nine. He could not make the phone call himself; he had to ask Mrs Morgan or Stephen.

'What number?' asked Stephen Morgan, downstairs.

It wasn't a local call. The code was 0272. A minute later, he was talking to a woman.

'I can't get there tonight,' he told her.

'But you must!' she said. 'It's dangerous for you -'

'I know that! But what can I do? The weather is bad and my car is in a ditch.'

'Where are you?' she asked.

'I'm in a hotel, near Copperthorn. About sixty kilometres away.'

'What about -?'

'Everything is all right,' he told her. 'There's nothing about it on the television news. Now, don't worry. Nobody knows I'm here.'

'Do you know where to come?' she said.

'Yes,' he said, 'I wrote it down.'

'Somebody may see it!'

'I wrote it so that nobody will understand it. Now, don't worry. I'll get there tomorrow, somehow.' He put the phone down and walked across to the window. He thought about the woman waiting for him.

'Don't worry,' he told her, but he was worried. Very worried.

Janey woke up early the next morning, and looked out of the window. The snow was deep on the road and in the hotel car park.

'Oh no! I won't get to Bristol today,' she thought. 'But I can't stay here for another night. I don't have enough money.'

Janey always needed money. She wasn't sure if she could stay at her art college because she needed more money. Her father had troubles with his business so he couldn't help.

She dressed and went downstairs to the dining-room.

Stephen Morgan came across to Janey's table with some coffee. 'Did you sleep well?' he asked.

'Very well, thank you,' Janey said.

'What would you like to eat? There's fruit, toast, or eggs.'

'Eggs would be nice, please.'

There were people at most of the tables in the dining-room. Two women were sitting at the table next to Janey's.

'I have some important papers which must arrive at my office in London today,' one of the women told Stephen. 'But what can I do? I'll never get there in all this snow.'

'We have a fax machine that can send a copy of your papers to your office,' said Stephen.

'Have you? Did you hear that, Judith?' Miss Tate said to her friend. She looked very pleased. 'That's wonderful. Thank you, Stephen.'

Just then, Mr Todd came into the dining-room. He looked around for an empty table, found one, and went and sat down. He took a piece of paper from his pocket and looked at it.

Stephen Morgan went across to him.

The man folded the piece of paper quickly, but not before Stephen saw the writing on it. But he did not understand what he saw.

'My mother phoned Harry Selby about your car, Mr Todd,' he said. 'He'll get it out of the ditch later this morning.'

'I need to go as soon as possible,' the man said. 'I have a long way to drive.'

'The roads are still bad because of the weather,' Stephen said.

'Yes, of course,' Mr Todd said. 'Could you bring my coffee to the lounge, please. I want to hear the news on TV. Perhaps I can find out about the roads.'

'Where are you going?' Stephen asked.

Mr Todd looked up quickly. 'Why do you ask?'

Stephen's face went red. 'I heard the weather report about the snow on the roads.'

'I'm going to... to Manchester,' he said. He was angry.

'That's not true,' Janey thought as she watched the man's face. 'I can see he's telling me a lie. Stephen knows he's telling a lie, too. But why is Mr Todd lying?'

Janey watched Mr Todd leave the room. She was sure that he was the college teacher. But the man's name wasn't Todd. What was it?

She finished eating her eggs, then she went into the lounge and sat in a chair by the window.

On the TV a man was reading the news. Mr Todd was sitting in a chair, listening carefully. Miss Tate was also watching TV with her friend Judith.

Janey looked out of the window at the snow. The hotel garden looked beautiful, so Janey took a pencil and some paper from her handbag and began to draw.

She listened to the news on the TV.

'... a fire at the Hampshire home of Guy Ghristy, near the New Forest village of Kelstock. A man's body was found in the study. The police think it is Tom Wood, Mr Christy's assistant. Money and diamonds

are missing. Mrs Linda Christy was not at the house. The police want to talk to Mrs Christy, and to Alex Hodder, who is an artist and lives in the village. He has a beard, dark hair, and brown eyes, and is about forty years old.'

'He's gone to meet Mrs Christy,' Miss Tate said to her friend. 'Don't you think so, Judith?'

'Yes,' Judith said.

'Do you think Alex Hodder took the money and diamonds, and killed Tom Wood?' Miss Tate said.

'It sounds as if he did, doesn't it?' Judith said. 'But where do you think they are now?'

'They can't have left the country, because the police look at all the passports.'

'I think that they must still be in Britain. I wonder where they are hiding?'

Just then, Stephen walked into the room. He watched the news for a minute, and said, 'Kelstock isn't very far from here. Look at the map.' He pointed to the map on the wall.

Janey was watching Mr Todd. He was listening to the two women, and he looked worried. 'Why?' Janey thought.

She thought about Alex Hodder - an artist. Then she thought about Mr Todd. If he was the college teacher, then he was an artist, too. He taught art at the college until a year ago.

'The police say Alex Hodder has a beard,' Janey thought. 'Mr Todd doesn't have a beard, but perhaps he shaved it off. It doesn't take long to shave off a beard. And Mr Todd's hair is dark, and he looks about forty years old.'

Mr Todd was watching the television again. Janey began to draw a picture on her piece of paper.

'That's good. It looks just like him,' somebody said from behind Janey.

It was Stephen Morgan, looking at her picture.

'Shh!' Janey said, smiling. 'I don't want him to know what I'm doing.'

Janey quickly finished her drawing as Mr Todd got up from his chair and went out of the lounge.

Just then, Janey saw something. 'Now I'm sure he started that fire,' she thought.

'Do you know Mr Todd?' Janey asked Stephen. She followed the boy out of the lounge. They saw Mr Todd go upstairs.

'I never saw him before yesterday,' Stephen said. 'Why?'

'I... I don't think his name is Todd,' Janey said.

Stephen looked surprised. 'What is it, then?'

'I don't know,' Janey said. 'It might be... Alex Hodder.'

'Alex -?' Stephen stopped. 'But that's the man the police are looking for. It was on the television news...'

'I know,' Janey said. 'He watches the news carefully, and he looks worried. He was worried when Miss Tate and her friend talked about the fire at Guy Christy's house. And he dropped a map from his coat pocket, yesterday. I picked it up and it showed the road to Bristol from the New Forest. Guy Christy lives in the New Forest.'

Stephen thought for a minute. 'He phoned somebody in Bristol last night,' he said. 'It... It was a woman.'

'Who?' Janey asked.

'I don't know. But remember, nobody has seen Guy Christy's wife for a week. That's what the TV news said. She could be in Bristol.'

'And perhaps he was phoning her!' Janey said. 'He may be going to Bristol to meet her.'

'He said he was going to Manchester,' Stephen said. 'But I'm sure that was a lie.'

'So am I,' Janey said. 'And, I may be wrong, but I'm sure Mr Todd was a teacher at my college, until last year. Then he left, suddenly.'

'Alex Hodder is an artist, it said on the television,' Stephen said.

'Yes,' Janey said, 'and the teacher at my college was an artist.'

'Shall we phone the police?' Stephen said.

'I don't know,' Janey said. 'We may be wrong.'

Just then, Miss Tate came out of the lounge.

'Can I use your fax machine for my papers, Stephen?' she asked.

'Yes,' Stephen said. 'Come into the office.'

Janey watched them go into the office behind the hotel desk. She saw Miss Tate using the fax machine. She looked at the sketchpad in her hand. The face of Mr Todd looked up at her. But was it Mr Todd, or was it Alex Hodder? 'One person would know,' she thought.

Then she smiled slowly.

Ben Todd looked out of the window in his room. 'How long before I can leave here?' he thought.

It was snowing again. 'The roads will be dangerous,' he thought. He wanted to phone Bristol again but he was worried about Stephen Morgan. He thought he might listen to the phone call down in the office.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket and dropped it on the bed. It was the same piece of paper that Stephen saw at breakfast.

'The police are looking for Alex Hodder now,' he thought. 'The snow will make it difficult for them. They won't come here.'

He sat in a chair by the window and closed his eyes. He was very tired. After a few minutes, he was asleep.

He woke up an hour later. What was that noise? It was somebody knocking loudly on his bedroom door. Mr Todd opened the door and saw a man. Behind him was a boy and a girl. He knew the boy was the son of the owner. He wasn't sure about the girl.

'Wh... What do you want?' he asked the men.

'I'm Detective Sharpe,' the man said, pushing his way into the room. He looked round, quickly. 'And I have some questions I want you to answer. Do you know Guy Christy? What do you know about the fire at Guy Christy's house? How did it start? Who was the man killed in the fire? And I know the diamonds and money are in this room. Where are they?'

'I... I don't know what you're talking about!' Mr Todd said.

Janey and Stephen followed the policeman into Mr Todd's room.

'We know who you are,' the policeman said. He looked back at Janey. 'This young person drew a picture of your face. Her name is Janey. Do you remember her? She was a student of yours.'

Mr Todd looked at Janey. 'I don't know her,' he said.

'She thought you might be Alex Hodder,' the policeman said. 'So she used the fax machine to send a copy of her picture to Mr Christy. Mr Christy saw the picture and knew who the man was, so he phoned the police. That's why we're here.'

'I... I'm not Alex Hodder,' Mr Todd said.

The policeman smiled. 'We know that now. Alex Hodder is dead. He was the person killed in the fire, not Tom Wood. You are Tom Wood.'

You want everybody to think that Tom Wood was killed in the fire. You want us to look for Alex Hodder, not Tom Wood. But Mr Christy saw Janey's picture. Now he knows it is Tom Wood who is running away. He knows it is Tom Wood who has the money and diamonds, and who killed somebody in the fire at his house. And he thinks that Tom Wood may be going to meet Mrs Christy.'

'Look!' said Stephen. 'There are the diamonds and the money. They're in his coat pocket!'

'Aha!' said the detective. 'These diamonds and the money belong to Mr Christy. Where is Mrs Christy?'

'I... I don't know,' Tom Wood said.

'You're lying,' Detective Sharpe said. 'Tell me where she is.'

Tom Wood said nothing.

'Wait!' Stephen said. He saw the piece of paper on the bed and picked it up. 'He looked at this at breakfast and I saw it. I couldn't understand what it said then, but now I can. If you want to find Mrs Christy, you should read it.'

Detective Sharpe looked surprised, but he read the piece of paper. After a minute or two, he smiled. 'Very clever,' he said.

Later, the detective came back to talk to Janey.

'Tom Wood isn't his real name,' he told Janey, Stephen, and Mrs Morgan. 'We found his passport in his suitcase. The name on the passport is Tim Baron.'

'That was the name of the teacher!' Janey said. 'Now I remember!'

Detective Sharpe smiled. 'It was a clever idea to send his picture over the fax machine to Mr Christy. Tim Baron lost his job at the college because he stole some money,' he explained. 'So he changed his name to Tom Wood. Mr Christy gave him a job.'

'Was Tim Baron going to meet Mrs Christy?' Janey asked.

'Yes,' the detective said. 'Mrs Christy is in Bristol, at the address on the piece of paper. Baron phoned her last night. She's waiting for him there. She thinks he's coming with the money and diamonds, but it will be a policeman who calls on her.'

'Why did Tim Baron kill Alex Hodder?' Janey asked.

'He went into the study, and saw Mr Baron taking the diamonds and money from the safe. So Baron killed him and decided to make Hodder look like Tom Wood. Baron was wearing a ring. He put it on Hodder's finger. Then he started a fire in the study. After the fire, Mr Christy saw the ring and thought the dead man was Tom Wood. So we began looking for Alex Hodder.'

'Then Mr Christy got Janey's picture,' Stephen said.

'Yes,' Sharpe said, smiling at the two young people. 'He thinks you're a good artist, Janey.'

'I may be, one day,' Janey said, 'if I can get enough money to stay at college.'

'You'll have lots of money soon,' he said. 'Mr Christy's decided to give you a reward.'

'A reward!' Janey said. 'How exciting! And all because of a picture.'

'A very important picture!' the detective said, smiling.

- THE END -