



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G48

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1. Wife's Holiday

By R K Narayan

Kannan sat at the door of his hut and watched the village go its way. Sami the oil-monger was coming up the street driving his ox before him. He remarked while passing, 'This is your idling day, is it? Why don't you come to the Mantapam this afternoon?' Some more people passed, but Kannan hardly noticed anyone. The oil-monger's words had thrown him into a dream. The Mantapam was an ancient pillared structure, with all its masonry cracking and crumbling down on the tank bund. It served as a clubhouse for Kannan and his friends, who gathered there on an afternoon and pursued the game of dice with considerable intensity and fury. Kannan loved not only the game but also the muddy smell of the place, the sky seen through the cracking arches and the far-off hillocks. He hummed a little tune to himself at the thought of the Mantapam.

He knew people would call him an idler for sitting there at his door and sunning himself. But he didn't care. He would not go to work; there was no one to goad him out of the house—his wife being still away. It was with a quiet joy that he put her into a bullock cart and saw her off a few days ago. He hoped her parents would insist on her staying on at least ten days more, though it meant a wrench for him to be parted from his little son. But Kannan accepted it as an inevitable price to pay for his wife's absence. He reflected, 'If she were here, would she let me rest like this?' He would have to be climbing coconut trees, clearing their tops of beetles and other pests, plucking down coconuts, haggling with miserly tree-owners, and earning his rupee a day. Now he celebrated his wife's absence by staying at home most of the day. But the worst of it was that he had not a quarter of an anna anywhere about him and he wouldn't see a coin unless he climbed some trees for it today. He stretched his legs and arms and brooded how it would feel to go up a tree now. Of course the ten trees in the back yard of that big house needed attention: that work awaited him anytime he cared to go there. But it was impossible. His limbs felt stiff and unwieldy and seemed good only for the visit to the Mantapam. But what was the use of going there empty-handed? If only he had four annas on hand, he could probably return home with a rupee in the evening. But that woman! He felt indignant at the thought of his wife, who did not seem to think that he deserved to keep an anna of his hard-earned cash about him. Without four annas to call one's own! He had been drudging and earning for years now, ever since . . . He gave up the attempt to think it out, since it took him into the realm of numbers, and numbers were complex and elusive except when one rolled the dice and counted cash.

An idea struck him and he suddenly rose to his feet and turned in. In a corner there was a large tin trunk, painted black years ago—the most substantial possession of that household. It was his wife's. He sat down before it and stared at the lock hopelessly. It was a cast-iron lock with sharp edges. He took hold of it and tugged at it, and, much to his surprise, it came off. 'God is kind to me,' he told himself, and threw open the lid. He beheld his wife's prized possessions there: a few jackets and two or three saris, one of which he had bought her as a young bridegroom. He was surprised that she should still preserve it though it was . . . it was . . . he checked himself at the threshold of numbers once again. 'She can preserve it because she is too niggardly to wear it, I suppose!' he remarked and laughed, pleased at this malicious conclusion. He threw aside the clothes impatiently and searched for a little wooden box in which she usually kept her cash. He found it empty but for a smooth worn-out copper just left there for luck. 'Where is all the cash gone?' he asked angrily. He brooded, 'She must have taken every anna for her brother or someone there. Here I slave all the day, only to benefit her brother, is it? . . . Next time I see her brother, I will wring his neck,' he said to himself with considerable satisfaction. Rummaging further he caught sight of a cigarette tin in a corner of the box. He shook it. It jingled satisfactorily with coins. He felt tender at the sight of it. It was his little son's, a red cigarette tin. He remembered how the little fellow had picked it from the rubbish dump behind the travellers' bungalow and come running, clutching it to his bosom. The boy had played with the red tin a whole day in the street, filling it with dust and emptying it. And then Kannan had suggested he make a money-box of it, the young fellow protesting against it vigorously. But Kannan argued with him elaborately; and became so persuasive that his son presently accepted the proposition with enthusiasm. 'When the box is full I will buy a motorcar like that boy in the big house. I must also have a mouth-harmonium and a green pencil.' Kannan laughed uproariously on hearing his son's plans. He took the tin to the blacksmith, sealed its lid with lead and had a slit cut on it—just wide enough to admit a coin. It became a treasure for the young fellow, and he often held it aloft to his father for him to drop a copper in. The boy quite often asked with a puckered brow, 'Father, is it full? When can I open it?' He always kept it in his mother's trunk, safely tucked away amidst the folds of her saris, and would not rest till he saw the trunk properly locked up again. Watching him, Kannan often remarked proudly, 'Very careful boy. He will do big things. We must send him to a school in the town.'

Now Kannan shook the box, held the slit up to light and tried to find out how much it contained. A dull resentment that he felt at the thought of his wife made him prey to a wicked idea.

He held the box upside down and shook it violently till he felt deaf with the clanging of coins. But not one came out of it. The blacksmith had made a good job of it—the slit was exactly the thickness of a coin, which could go one way through it. No power on earth could shake a coin out of it again. After a while Kannan paused to ask himself, 'Am I right in taking my youngster's money?' 'Why not?' whispered a voice within seductively. 'Son and father are the same. Moreover, you are going to double or treble the amount, and then you can put it all back into the box. That way it is really a benefit you are conferring on the son by opening this little box.' That settled it. He looked about for something with which to widen the slit. He got up and ransacked an odd assortment of useless things—strings, bottle-corks, cast-off ox-shoe, and so on. Not a single sharp instrument anywhere. What had happened to that knife? He felt annoyed at the thought of his wife, that woman's habit of secreting away everything on earth, or perhaps she had carried it away to her brother. He clutched the box and kept banging it against the floor for a while. It only lost shape and looked battered, but it would not yield its treasure. He looked about. There was a framed picture of a god hanging by a nail on the wall. He took down the picture and plucked out the nail. He threw a look at the god on the floor, felt uneasy and briefly pressed his eyes to its feet. He brought in a piece of stone, poised the nail over the box with one hand and brought the stone down on it with the other. The nail slipped sideways and the stone hit his thumb and crushed it to a blue. He yelled with pain and flung away the box. It lay in a corner and seemed to look back at him viciously. 'You dog!' he hissed at it. He sat nursing his thumb for a while, looked again at the red tin and said, 'I will deal with you now.' He went to the kitchen-corner and came out bearing a large stone pestle with both hands over his head. He held the pestle high above the box and dropped it vertically. It proved too much even for that box, which flattened and split sideways. He put his fingers in, scooped out the coins hungrily and counted: six annas in three-pie copper coins. He tucked up the coins at his waist in his dhoti, locked the door and started out.

At Mantapam luck deserted him, or rather never came near him. Within a short time he lost all his money. He continued on credit for a while till someone suggested he should give up his place to someone else more solvent. He rose abruptly and started homeward while the sun was still bright.

As he turned into his lane, he saw at the other end his wife coming up with a bundle in one hand and the youngster clinging to the other. Kannan stood stunned. 'May it be a dream!' he muttered to himself. She came nearer and said, 'A bus came this way and I returned home.'

She was going towards the door. He watched her in a sort of dull panic. Her box with all its contents scattered, the god's picture on the floor, the battered red tin—she would see them all at once the moment she stepped in. The situation was hopeless. He opened the door mechanically. 'Why do you look like that?' she asked, going in. His son held a couple of coins up to him. 'Uncle gave me these. Put them into the box.' A groan of misery escaped Kannan. 'Why do you do that, Father?' the boy asked. Kannan held up his thumb and mumbled, 'Nothing. I have crushed my thumb.' He followed them in, resigning himself to face an oncoming storm.

2. Gambling

People who gamble bet money on an event where the result is uncertain. They do so with the intention of winning money, hopefully a great deal. Gambling can take many different forms. It involves, for example, card games, horse racing, dog racing, and casino games. Also, many people bet on the results of sports events, such as football matches.

Gambling plays a significant part in many societies and it has brought both advantages and disadvantages. People in favour of gambling argue that it is the favourite form of entertainment of a great many people. Such people should be allowed to indulge in their chosen form of relaxation, as others do.

A common argument put forward to stress the benefits of gambling is an economic one. Many governments make a great deal of money out of gambling in the form of taxes on it. Then, there is the impact on local economies. The gambling industry provides employment for a considerable number of people in establishments relating to the practice, such as casinos and race courses.

Furthermore, there are people who are not directly employed in the gambling industry whose jobs depend on it. This is true of such people as horse breeders. Many of these breeders and their assistants provide horses for racing; so, they are reliant on gambling for their livelihood to a great extent.

People employed in the hotel industry, the restaurant business and tourism generally may also be affected by gambling. A hotel with a house casino may do more business and require more staff. When this catches on, some areas and some cities become tourist attractions because of their gambling facilities. Given that the tourist industry is a very profitable one, this is good news for both local and national economies.

Many countries organize national lotteries. The lottery is a gambling system, often set up to raise money for public causes or charities. A great many people buy lottery tickets regularly, thus providing much money for charitable organizations or projects that might otherwise struggle to survive for lack of funds.

Gambling, then, can be seen to have benefited society a good deal. However, it is not without its disadvantages. Many families know this only too well.

Most people keep their gambling at a sensible and affordable level. They may have a flutter on the major horse races in the year. They may fill in a football coupon each week, paying a relatively small sum of money. They may visit a casino occasionally, but spend no more than the amount they decided on beforehand.

Problems arise when gambling becomes an addiction. Just as people become addicted to drugs or alcohol, so people become addicted to gambling, something they are unable to stop themselves from doing. This can have just as much of a damaging effect on the individuals and their families as drug addiction and alcohol addiction.

However, gambling addiction may not be quite so easy to spot. People tend to drift into the gambling habit. They may start gambling in a small way and then gradually increase their involvement. Eventually, they become completely obsessed with gambling, convinced that they will, one day, hit the jackpot and become wealthy. Meanwhile they get into debt and neglect both their family and job. They may even steal to feed their gambling habit.

There is no doubt that gambling brings economic benefits to society in general. However, we must not forget the human cost, nor the likelihood that it will increase. Online gambling is making it easier for people to risk their money in the hope of winning more. It is very likely to cause ever more people to become addicted. Society must not ignore the harmful effects of gambling, but must find ways of dealing with and preventing them.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
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Reported speech 2

A

We do not always change the verb in reported speech. If the situation *is still the same*, it is not necessary to change the verb to the past. For example:

- ☐ *direct* Paul said, 'My new job **is** boring.'
- ☐ *reported* Paul said that **his** new job **is** boring.
(The situation is still the same. His job is still boring now.)
- ☐ *direct* Helen said, 'I **want** to go to Canada next year.'
- ☐ *reported* Helen told me that **she wants** to go to Canada next year.
(Helen still wants to go to Canada next year.)

You can also change the verb to the past:

- ☐ Paul said that his new job **was** boring.
- ☐ Helen told me that she **wanted** to go to Canada next year.

But if the situation has *changed* or *finished*, you need to use a past verb. Compare:

- ☐ Paul left the room suddenly. He said 'I **have to go**.' (*direct speech*)
- ☐ Paul left the room suddenly. He said (that) **he had to go**. (*not has to go*)

B

You need to use the past in reported speech when what was said is different from what is really true. For example:

You met Rachel a few days ago. She said:

- ☐ Have you heard? **Joe is in hospital**.

Later that day you meet Joe in the street. You say:

- ☐ Joe, this is a surprise. Rachel said you **were** in hospital.
(*not 'you are in hospital' – it's clear that he isn't*)



C

say and tell

If you say *who* somebody is talking to, use **tell**:

- ☐ Rachel **told me** that you were in hospital. (*not Rachel said me*)
- ☐ What did you **tell the police**? (*not say the police*)

Otherwise use **say**:

- ☐ Rachel **said** that you were in hospital.
(*not Rachel told that ...*)
- ☐ What did you **say**?

You can '**say** something **to** somebody':

- ☐ Anna **said** goodbye **to** me and left. (*not Anna said me goodbye*)
- ☐ What did you **say to** the police?



D

We say '**tell** somebody **to** ...' and '**ask** somebody **to** ...'.

Compare direct and reported speech:

- ☐ *direct* 'Drink plenty of water,' the doctor said to me.
- ☐ *reported* The doctor **told me to drink** plenty of water.
- ☐ *direct* 'Don't work too hard,' I said to Joe.
- ☐ *reported* I **told Joe not to work** too hard.
- ☐ *direct* 'Can you help me, please,' Jackie said to me.
- ☐ *reported* Jackie **asked me to help** her.

You can also say 'Somebody **said (not) to** do something':

- ☐ Paul **said not to worry** about him. (*but not Paul said me*)