



**Learn English Through Stories**

**F Series**

**F53**

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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# 1. After Twenty Years

By O. Henry

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye adown the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands— 'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarf pin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time

between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."

"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good-night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dimly and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

*Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plainclothesman to do the job.*

JIMMY.

## After Twenty Years: Version 2

The cop moved along the street, looking strong and important. This was the way he always moved. He was not thinking of how he looked. There were few people on the street to see him. It was only about ten at night, but it was cold. And there was a wind with a little rain in it.

He stopped at doors as he walked along, trying each door to be sure that it was closed for the night. Now and then he turned and looked up and down the street. He was a fine-looking cop, watchful, guarding the peace.

People in this part of the city went home early. Now and then you might see the lights of a shop or of a small restaurant. But most of the doors belonged to business places that had been closed hours ago.

Then the cop suddenly slowed his walk. Near the door of a dark-ened shop a man was standing. As the cop walked toward him, the man spoke quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said. "I'm waiting for a friend. Twenty years ago we agreed to meet here tonight. It sounds strange to you, doesn't it? I'll explain if you want to be sure that everything's all right. About twenty years ago there was a restaurant where this shop stands. 'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"It was here until five years ago," said the cop.

The man near the door had a colorless square face with bright eyes, and a little white mark near his right eye. He had a large jewel in his necktie.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I had dinner here with Jimmy Wells. He was my best friend and the best fellow in the world. He and I grew up together here in New York, like two brothers. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West. I was going to find a job and make a great success. You couldn't have pulled Jimmy out of New York. He thought it was the only place on earth.

"We agreed that night that we would meet here again in twenty years. We thought that in twenty years we would know what kind of men we were, and what future waited for us."

"It sounds interesting," said the cop. "A long time between meetings, it seems to me. Have you heard from your friend since you went West?"

"Yes, for a time we did write to each other," said the man. "But after a year or two, we stopped. The West is big. I moved around every-where, and I moved quickly. But I know that Jimmy will meet me here if he can. He was as true as any man in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand

here tonight. But I'll be glad about that, if my old friend comes too."

The waiting man took out a fine watch, covered with small jewels. "Three minutes before ten," he said. "It was ten that night when we said goodbye here at the restaurant door."

"You were successful in the West, weren't you?" asked the cop.

"I surely was! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a slow mover. I've had to fight for my success. In New York a man doesn't change much. In the West you learn how to fight for what you get."

The cop took a step or two.

"I'll go on my way," he said. "I hope your friend comes all right.

If he isn't here at ten, are you going to leave?"

"I am not!" said the other. "I'll wait half an hour, at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth, he'll be here by that time. Good night, officer."

"Good night," said the cop, and walked away, trying doors as he went.

There was now a cold rain falling and the wind was stronger. The few people walking along that street were hurrying, trying to keep warm. And at the door of the shop stood the man who had come a thousand miles to meet a friend. Such a meeting could not be certain. But he waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long coat came hurrying across the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man at the door.

The new man took the other man's hands in his. "It's Bob! It sure- ly is. I was certain I would find you here if you were still alive. Twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant is gone, Bob. I wish it were here, so that we could have another dinner in it. Has the West been good to you?"

"It gave me everything I asked for. You've changed, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall."

"Oh, I grew a little after I was twenty." "Are you doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Well enough. I work for the city. Come on, Bob, We'll go to a place I know, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started along the street, arm in arm. The man from the West was beginning to tell the story of his life. The other, with his coat up to his

ears, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a shop bright with electric lights. When they came near, each turned to look at the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and pulled his arm away. "You're not Jimmy Wells," he said. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change the shape of a man's nose."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, Bob. Chicago cops thought you might be coming to New York. They told us to watch for you. Are you coming with me quietly? That's wise. But first here is something I was asked to give you. You may read it here at the window. It's from a cop named Wells."

The man from the West opened the little piece of paper. His hand began to shake a little as he read.

"Bob: I was at the place on time. I saw the face of the man wanted by Chicago cops. I didn't want to arrest you myself. So I went and got another cop and sent him to do the job.

JIMMY."



## 2. SUMMARY

In this short story by O. Henry, the two main characters are policeman Jimmy Wells and outlaw 'Silky' Bob. At one time, the two had been as close as brothers. However, once Bob left to pursue his fortunes in the West, the two eventually lost touch. Nevertheless, they had promised to meet each other in 20 years, to the hour, after their last dinner together at the same spot in New York City. Twenty years later, Bob is waiting outside where the restaurant once stood when he and Jimmy parted ways; the latter, who is now a policeman, comes upon him while he is walking his beat. After hearing Bob's story about the friends' pledge to meet up again and watching him light up a cigar, Jimmy recognizes it is Bob. He also realizes his old friend is a fugitive from Chicago, whom he had seen earlier on a police bulletin. At that point, Bob is not aware that the policeman is Jimmy, who goes about on his patrol, leaving the outlaw to wait for his friend. After a few moments, another man appears. At first, Bob thinks he is Jimmy. Although Bob cannot see the man too well in the dark, he notices that some things are off about him. Eventually, the man reveals that he is a plainclothes officer taking Bob under arrest. Before he does so, he hands Bob a note from the patrolman, who turns out to be his former best friend and betrayer, Jimmy Wells.

## 4. Grammar Page

### Prepositions continued:

out of	<i>leaving something:</i> The cat jumped out of the window. <i>to the outside of:</i> She went out of the room. <i>from among:</i> We won two games out of three. <i>material:</i> The bridge is made out of steel. <i>beyond:</i> The child is not out of danger.
past	<i>up to and beyond:</i> I walked past the post office. <i>after (in time):</i> It was half past three when I reached there.
round	<i>in a circle:</i> We're sitting round the campfire.
through	<i>going from one point to the other point:</i> You shouldn't walk through the forest. <i>for the whole of a period:</i> We slept through the night. <i>by means of:</i> Skill improves through practice.
towards	<i>in the direction of:</i> We ran towards the hut.
up	<i>from low to high:</i> He went up the hill.
down	<i>from high to low:</i> He came down the hill. The ball rolled down the stairs.
beyond	<i>further than; exceeding:</i> That was beyond my expectations.
during	<i>throughout a period:</i> She works during the night.
except	<i>not including:</i> I invited all except Jenny.
per	<i>for each:</i> He drove around 60 kilometres per hour.
since	<i>from a specific time in the past:</i> I had been waiting since two o'clock. <i>from a past time until now:</i> I have been waiting here since noon.
throughout	<i>in every part of:</i> This custom is found throughout the world. <i>for the whole of a period:</i> I faced that problem throughout the winter.
till/until	<i>up to a certain time:</i> They will stay here until Friday.
up to	<i>as far as:</i> I have read up to page 100. <i>depending on:</i> The decision is up to you.
within	<i>inside of:</i> I will be there within ten minutes. Mark within the circle.
without	<i>not having:</i> Do not leave without eating breakfast. He came here without his camera.