



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
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REGINALD

I did it—I who should have known better. I persuaded Reginald to go to the McKillops' garden-party against his will.

We all make mistakes occasionally.

"They know you're here, and they'll think it so funny if you don't go. And I want particularly to be in with Mrs. McKillop just now."

"I know, you want one of her smoke Persian kittens as a prospective wife for Wumples—or a husband, is it?" (Reginald has a magnificent scorn for details, other than sartorial.) "And I am expected to undergo social martyrdom to suit the connubial exigencies"—

"Reginald! It's nothing of the kind, only I'm sure Mrs. McKillop Would be pleased if I brought you. Young men of your brilliant attractions are rather at a premium at her garden-parties."

"Should be at a premium in heaven," remarked Reginald complacently.

"There will be very few of you there, if that is what you mean. But seriously, there won't be any great strain upon your powers of endurance; I promise you that you shan't have to play croquet, or talk to the Archdeacon's wife, or do anything that is likely to bring on physical prostration. You can just wear your sweetest clothes and moderately amiable expression, and eat chocolate-creams with the appetite of a blasé parrot. Nothing more is demanded of you."

Reginald shut his eyes. "There will be the exhaustingly up- to-date young women who will ask me if I have seen San Toy: a less progressive grade who will yearn to hear about the Diamond Jubilee—the historic event, not the horse. With a little encouragement, they will inquire if I saw the Allies march into Paris. Why are women so fond of raking up the past? They're as bad as tailors, who invariably remember what you owe them for a suit long after you've ceased to wear it."

"I'll order lunch for one o'clock; that will give you two and a half hours to dress in."

Reginald puckered his brow into a tortured frown, and I knew that my point was gained. He was debating what tie would go with which waistcoat.

Even then I had my misgivings.

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During the drive to the McKillops' Reginald was possessed with a great peace, which was not wholly to be accounted for by the fact that he had inveigled his feet into shoes a size too small for them. I misgave more than ever, and having once launched Reginald on to the McKillops' lawn, I established him near a seductive dish of marrons glacés, and as far from the Archdeacon's wife as possible; as I drifted away to a diplomatic distance I heard with painful distinctness the eldest Mawkby girl asking him if he had seen San Toy.

It must have been ten minutes later, not more, and I had been having quite an enjoyable chat with my hostess, and had promised to lend her *The Eternal City* and my recipe for rabbit mayonnaise, and was just about to offer a kind home for her third Persian kitten, when I perceived, out of the corner of my eye, that Reginald was not where I had left him, and that the marrons glacés were untasted. At the same moment I became aware that old Colonel Mendoza was essaying to tell his classic story of how he introduced golf into India, and that Reginald was in dangerous proximity. There are occasions when Reginald is caviare to the Colonel.

"When I was at Poona in '76"—

"My dear Colonel," purred Reginald, "fancy admitting such a thing! Such a give-away for one's age! I wouldn't admit being on this planet in '76." (Reginald in his wildest lapses into veracity never admits to being more than twenty-two.)

The Colonel went to the color of a fig that has attained great ripeness, and Reginald, ignoring my efforts to intercept him, glided away to another part of the lawn. I found him a few minutes later happily engaged in teaching the youngest Rampage boy the approved theory of mixing absinthe, within full earshot of his mother. Mrs. Rampage occupies a prominent place in local Temperance movements.

As soon as I had broken up this unpromising tête-à-tête and settled Reginald where he could watch the croquet players losing their tempers, I wandered off to find my hostess and renew the kitten negotiations at the point where they had been interrupted. I did not succeed in running her down at once, and eventually it was Mrs. McKillop who sought me out, and her conversation was not of kittens.

"Your cousin is discussing Zaza with the Archdeacon's wife; at least, he is discussing, she is ordering her carriage."

She spoke in the dry, staccato tone of one who repeats a French exercise, and I knew that as far as Millie McKillop was concerned, Wumples was devoted to a lifelong celibacy.

"If you don't mind," I said hurriedly, "I think we'd like our carriage ordered too," and I made a forced march in the direction of the croquet-ground.

I found everyone talking nervously and feverishly of the weather and the war in South Africa, except Reginald, who was reclining in a comfortable chair with the dreamy, far-away look that a volcano might wear just after it had desolated entire villages. The Archdeacon's wife was buttoning up her gloves with a concentrated deliberation that was fearful to behold. I shall have to treble my subscription to her Cheerful Sunday Evenings Fund before I dare set foot in her house again.

At that particular moment the croquet players finished their game, which had been going on without a symptom of finality during the whole afternoon. Why, I ask, should it have stopped precisely when a counter-attraction was so necessary? Everyone seemed to drift towards the area of disturbance, of which the chairs of the Archdeacon's wife and Reginald formed the storm-centre. Conversation flagged, and there settled upon the company that expectant hush that precedes the dawn— when your neighbors don't happen to keep poultry.

"What did the Caspian Sea?" asked Reginald, with appalling suddenness. There were symptoms of a stampede. The Archdeacon's wife looked at me. Kipling or someone has described somewhere the look a foundered camel gives when the caravan moves on and leaves it to its fate. The peptonized reproach in the good lady's eyes brought the passage vividly to my mind.

I played my last card.

"Reginald, it's getting late, and a sea-mist is coming on." I knew that the elaborate curl over his right eyebrow was not guaranteed to survive a sea-mist. "Never, never again, will I take you to a garden-party. Never . . . You behaved abominably . . . What did the Caspian see?"

A shade of genuine regret for misused opportunities passed over Reginald's face.

"After all," he said, "I believe an apricot tie would have gone better with the lilac waistcoat."

Reginald at the Garden-Party: Version 2

I made a mistake. I convinced my cousin Reginald to go to the McKillops' garden-party, even though he didn't want to. Sometimes, we all do silly things.

"They know you're in town, Reginald," I said. "If you don't go, they'll think it's strange. Also, I really want to be friends with Mrs. McKillop right now."

Reginald smiled. "Oh, I see. You want one of her Persian kittens for your cat, Wumples, don't you?" (Reginald doesn't care about details, except for his clothes.) "And I have to suffer at this boring party to help you?"

"No, Reginald!" I said. "It's not like that. Mrs. McKillop will be happy if you come. Young men like you are popular at her parties."

"Popular in heaven, maybe," Reginald said, laughing.

"Listen," I said. "It won't be hard. You don't have to play games or talk to boring people. Just wear your best clothes, smile a little, and eat some chocolates. That's all."

Reginald closed his eyes. "Ugh, the young women will ask me about new plays. The older ones will talk about old events, like the Queen's Jubilee. Why do people love talking about the past?"

"I'll order lunch for one o'clock," I said. "That gives you two hours to get dressed."

Reginald frowned, thinking hard. I knew he was choosing his tie and shirt. I won! But I was still worried.

On the way to the McKillops' house, Reginald seemed calm. Maybe too calm. When we arrived, I placed him near a plate of sweet candies and far from Mrs. Jones, the Archdeacon's wife. Then I went to talk to Mrs. McKillop. We discussed books, recipes, and her Persian kittens. I was about to ask for one of her kittens when I noticed Reginald was gone. The candies were untouched.

Then I saw him. He was near Colonel Mendoza, who was telling his old story about bringing golf to India.

"When I was in Poona in 1876—" the Colonel began.

“Colonel!” Reginald interrupted. “You admit you were alive in 1876? That’s so old!” (Reginald never says he’s older than twenty-two.)

The Colonel’s face turned red. I tried to stop Reginald, but he walked away. Soon, I found him teaching a young boy how to mix a strong drink, right in front of the boy’s mother, who hates alcohol.

I quickly moved Reginald to a safer spot near the croquet game, where he could watch people play. I went to find Mrs. McKillop to talk about the kitten again. But she found me first.

“Your cousin is talking about a rude play with Mrs. Jones,” she said coldly. “She’s leaving.”

I panicked. “Please, call our carriage too,” I said. I rushed to the croquet area. Everyone was nervous, talking about the weather or news. Reginald sat in a chair, looking relaxed, like nothing was wrong. Mrs. Jones was putting on her gloves, looking angry.

Suddenly, Reginald asked loudly, “What did the Caspian Sea?”

People gasped. Mrs. Jones stared at me with sad, angry eyes. I felt terrible.

“Reginald,” I said, “it’s late, and it’s getting foggy. Let’s go.” I knew he’d worry about his hair in the fog.

“Never again!” I told him. “I’ll never take you to a garden-party. You were awful! What did the Caspian Sea? What does that even mean?”

Reginald looked a little sorry. “You know,” he said, “I think an orange tie would’ve looked better with my purple shirt.”