



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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A Story of Love and Betrayal

“You have taken my love away!
What gods do you want me to follow?
Your Three-in-One God? No!
I will return to my own gods.
They may give me peace,
Unlike your cold Christ and confusing beliefs.”

—The Convert.

Lispeth was the daughter of Sonoo, a man from the hills, and Jadeh, his wife. They lived in Kotgarh near the Sutlej Valley in India. One year, their maize crop failed, and bears destroyed their poppy field. With little food, they decided to become Christians to get help from the Mission. They took their baby to the Kotgarh Chaplain, who baptized her Elizabeth. The hill people called her “Lispeth,” their way of saying her name.

When Lispeth was young, a terrible disease called cholera swept through the valley. It killed Sonoo and Jadeh, leaving Lispeth an orphan. The Chaplain’s wife took her in, and Lispeth became half-servant, half-companion. This was after the Moravian missionaries left Kotgarh, but the area was still known as the “Mistress of the Northern Hills.”

Did Christianity make Lispeth a better person? Or would her own gods have guided her just as well? No one can say. But one thing was clear: Lispeth grew exquisitely beautiful. Hill girls who are beautiful are rare, like treasures worth traveling far to see. Lispeth had a face like a Greek goddess, with pale, ivory skin and captivating eyes. She was tall for her people, almost six feet. If she hadn’t worn the plain clothes the Mission gave her, you might have seen her on a hillside and thought she was Diana, the Roman goddess of hunting.

Lispeth accepted Christianity easily and stayed faithful even as an adult, unlike some hill girls who return to their old ways. Her own people didn’t like her because she acted like a memsahib—a European lady—and bathed every day. The Chaplain’s wife wasn’t sure what to do with her. Lispeth was too graceful

and proud to wash dishes like a servant. Instead, she played with the Chaplain's children, taught Sunday School, and read every book in the house. She grew more beautiful, like a princess from a fairy tale.

The Chaplain's wife thought Lispeth should work in Simla, a nearby town, as a nurse or in a "proper" job. But Lispeth didn't want to leave. She was happy in Kotgarh. When travellers visited—there weren't many in those days—Lispeth hid in her room. She was afraid they might take her away to Simla or somewhere unknown.

One day, when Lispeth was seventeen, she went for a long walk. She didn't stroll like English ladies, who walk a short distance and ride back. Lispeth walked twenty or thirty miles through the hills between Kotgarh and Narkunda. That evening, she returned at dusk, carrying something heavy. The Chaplain's wife was resting in the drawing-room when Lispeth entered, breathing heavily. She placed her burden on the sofa and said, "This is my husband. I found him on the Bagi Road. He is hurt. We will care for him, and when he is well, your husband will marry us."

This was the first time Lispeth spoke of marriage. The Chaplain's wife was shocked. But the man needed help first. He was a young Englishman with a deep cut on his head. Lispeth said she found him at the bottom of a steep hill, so she carried him home. He was unconscious and breathing strangely.

The Chaplain, who knew some medicine, put the man to bed and cared for him. Lispeth stayed outside the door, ready to help. She told the Chaplain this was the man she wanted to marry. The Chaplain and his wife scolded her, saying her behaviour was improper. But Lispeth didn't understand. She had fallen head over heels in love, a strong feeling rooted in her hill culture. Christianity couldn't erase that. She wanted to nurse the Englishman until he was strong enough to marry her. That was her plan.

After two weeks, the Englishman began to recover. He thanked the Chaplain, his wife, and especially Lispeth for their kindness. He said he was a traveller from Dehra Dun, exploring the Simla hills to collect plants and butterflies. He didn't know anyone in Simla. He thought he had fallen off a cliff while looking for a fern and that his workers had stolen his things and run away. He planned to return to Simla when he was stronger. He had no interest in climbing more hills.

The Englishman didn't rush to leave. He regained his strength slowly. The Chaplain's wife told him about Lispeth's feelings. He laughed, calling it a charming, romantic story, like a Himalayan fairy tale. But he was engaged to a woman in England, so nothing could happen. He promised to be careful. He enjoyed talking and walking with Lispeth, saying kind words and giving her nicknames. To him, it meant nothing. To Lispeth, it meant everything. She was happy because she had found someone to love.

As a hill girl, Lispeth didn't hide her feelings. The Englishman found this amusing. When he was ready to leave, Lispeth walked with him to Narkunda, feeling sad and worried. The Chaplain's wife, who disliked drama, had told the Englishman to say he would return to marry Lispeth. "She's like a child and still a heathen at heart," the wife said. So, for twelve miles up the hill, the Englishman, with his arm around Lispeth, promised he would come back. Lispeth made him repeat it many times. She cried on the Narkunda Ridge until he disappeared down the path.

Lispeth dried her tears and returned to Kotgarh. She told the Chaplain's wife, "He will come back to marry me. He has gone to tell his people." The wife comforted her, saying, "He will return." After two months, Lispeth grew restless. She was told the Englishman had gone to England, across the sea. Lispeth knew where England was from her geography books, but she didn't understand the sea or how far it was.

In the Mission house, there was an old puzzle-map of the world. Lispeth found it and put it together in the evenings, crying and trying to imagine where her Englishman was. Her ideas were confused because she didn't know about ships or distances. But it wouldn't have mattered if she did. The Englishman had no plan to return. He forgot Lispeth while hunting butterflies in Assam. Later, he wrote a book about his travels, but Lispeth's name wasn't in it.

For three months, Lispeth walked to Narkunda every day, hoping to see the Englishman. It comforted her. The Chaplain's wife noticed Lispeth seemed happier and thought she was getting over her foolish love. But soon, the walks stopped helping, and Lispeth became angry. The Chaplain's wife decided to tell her the truth: the Englishman had lied to keep her calm. He never meant to marry her. It was wrong for Lispeth to think of marrying an Englishman, who was "superior" and already engaged to an English woman.

Lispeth was stunned. "He said he loved me, and you said he would return. How can that be a lie?" she asked.

"We said it to keep you quiet," the Chaplain's wife admitted.

"Then you and he lied to me," Lispeth said.

The Chaplain's wife looked down and said nothing. Lispeth was quiet for a moment. Then she left the house and returned wearing the dirty clothes of a hill girl, her hair braided like her mother's. She had no jewellery.

"I am going back to my people," she said. "You have killed Lispeth. I am only Jadeh's daughter now, a hill girl and servant of Tarka Devi. You English are all liars."

Before the Chaplain's wife could respond, Lispeth was gone. She never returned.

Lispeth joined her people with a fierce spirit, as if making up for the years she spent with the Mission. She married a woodcutter who treated her harshly, as some hill men do. Her beauty faded quickly, and she lived a life of adversity.

"There's no way to understand the ways of heathens," the Chaplain's wife said. "Lispeth was always an infidel at heart." This was unfair, since Lispeth had been baptized as a baby. The Chaplain's wife's words showed her own prejudice.

Lispeth lived to be very old. She spoke perfect English, and when she drank too much, she sometimes told the story of her first love. It was hard to believe the haggard, wrinkled woman was once the beautiful Lispeth of the Kotgarh Mission. Her life was a lesson: sometimes, trusting others can break your heart.

Comprehension Questions and Answers:

1. Why did Sonoo and Jadeh become Christians?
2. What happened to Lispeth's parents when she was young?
3. How did Lispeth's appearance make her stand out?
4. Why did Lispeth hide when travellers came to Kotgarh?
5. What does the idiom "head over heels" mean in the story?
6. Why did the Englishman lie to Lispeth about returning to marry her?
7. What does the harder word "adversity" mean in the context of Lispeth's later life?
8. Why did Lispeth return to her hill people?
9. What does the Chaplain's wife's comment about Lispeth being a "heathen" reveal about her?
10. How does the story use the idiom "break your heart" to describe Lispeth's experience?

Answers

1. Answer: Their maize crop failed, and bears destroyed their poppy field, so they became Christians to get help from the Mission.
2. Answer: They died from cholera, a disease that spread through the valley.
3. Answer: She was very beautiful, with a Greek goddess-like face, pale skin, captivating eyes, and tall height, which was unusual for hill girls.
4. Answer: She was afraid they might take her away to Simla or somewhere unknown.
5. Answer: It means Lispeth fell completely in love with the Englishman at first sight.
6. Answer: The Chaplain's wife told him to say it to keep Lispeth calm, and he was already engaged to someone else, so he didn't mean it.
7. Answer: It refers to the difficulties and hardships she faced, like her harsh marriage and fading beauty.
8. Answer: She felt betrayed by the Englishman and the Chaplain's wife, who lied to her, so she rejected Christianity and returned to her original culture.
9. Answer: It shows her prejudice, as she unfairly judges Lispeth's character despite Lispeth being baptized as a Christian.
10. Answer: It describes the deep emotional pain Lispeth felt when she learned the Englishman lied and would not return to marry her.