



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
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Three And—an Extra

A Saying from Punjab: "When the rope is off, don't chase with a stick, but with kindness."

After people get married, they often face a moment when things feel different. Sometimes it's a big change, sometimes small. But it always comes, and both husband and wife must work together to keep their life moving smoothly.

For Mr. and Mrs. Cusack-Bremmil, this moment came three years after their wedding. Tom Bremmil was not an easy man to understand, but he was a loving husband—until their baby died. Mrs. Bremmil wore black clothes, lost weight, and cried a lot. She felt like her world had crumbled. Tom tried to comfort her, but the more he tried, the sadder she became. This made Tom feel uncomfortable. Both of them needed something to lift their spirits. And soon, they found it. Now Mrs. Bremmil can laugh about it, but at the time, it was no laughing matter.

A woman named Mrs. Hauksbee arrived in their town, Simla. Where she went, trouble often followed. People called her the "Stormy Petrel," a name she earned because she caused problems wherever she went. She was small, thin, with big blue eyes and a charming way of speaking. Everyone noticed her. She was smart, funny, and full of energy, but she could also be unkind and loved to stir the pot. At tea parties, when her name came up, other women would get angry and say bad things about her. Still, she could be kind, even to other women, when she wanted to be.

After the baby's death, Tom felt lost. Mrs. Hauksbee noticed this and started spending time with him. She didn't hide it—she wanted everyone to see them together. They rode horses, walked, talked, and went to picnics. They even ate lunch together at a popular place called Peliti's. People in town started to talk, saying, "That's shocking!" Meanwhile, Mrs. Bremmil stayed home, looking at the baby's old clothes and crying by the empty cradle. She didn't want to do anything else. Some of her friends, trying to be helpful, told her about Tom and Mrs. Hauksbee. They explained everything in detail, thinking she might not know. Mrs. Bremmil listened quietly and thanked them. She wasn't as clever as Mrs. Hauksbee, but she was smart in her own way. She didn't talk to Tom about what she heard, which was a wise choice. Talking or crying to a husband doesn't always help.

When Tom was home, which wasn't often, he acted more loving than usual. But his kindness felt forced, as if he was trying to clear his conscience or calm Mrs. Bremmil. It didn't work for either of them.

Then, an invitation arrived from Lord and Lady Lytton, important people in Simla. They invited Mr. and Mrs. Cusack-Bremmil to a dance at their home, Peterhoff, on July 26th at 9:30 p.m. The invitation said "Dancing" in the corner.

"I can't go," Mrs. Bremmil said. "It's too soon after our baby's death. But you can go, Tom."

She meant it, but Tom said he would only go for a short time, just to show his face. He wasn't telling the truth, and Mrs. Bremmil knew it. She guessed—correctly—that he wanted to go with Mrs. Hauksbee. A woman's guess is often better than a man's promise. Mrs. Bremmil sat down to think. She decided that the memory of her baby was important, but keeping her husband's love was worth more. She made a plan and put all her effort into it. In that moment, she realized she understood Tom very well, and she used that knowledge.

"Tom," she said, "I'll be having dinner at the Longmores' house on the 26th. You should eat at the club."

This was clever. It stopped Tom from making an excuse to go out with Mrs. Hauksbee. He felt grateful but also a little guilty, which was good for him. That afternoon, Tom left the house at five for a horse ride.

Around 5:30 p.m., a large basket arrived for Mrs. Bremmil from a shop called Phelps'. Inside was a beautiful dress she had ordered. Mrs. Bremmil knew how to choose clothes. She had spent a week planning this dress, with careful details like stitching and folds. It was a stunning dress, perfect for someone in mourning but still elegant. She didn't feel excited about her plan, but when she looked in the mirror, she saw she had never looked so beautiful. She was tall, blonde, and carried herself with confidence when she wanted to.

After dinner at the Longmores' house, Mrs. Bremmil went to the dance, arriving a little late. There, she saw Tom with Mrs. Hauksbee on his arm. Her face turned red, but she looked amazing. Men crowded around her, asking her to dance. She filled her dance card, leaving only three dances empty. Mrs. Hauksbee looked at her once, and Mrs. Bremmil knew it was a battle between them. Mrs. Hauksbee had a small advantage because she had been too bossy

with Tom, and he was starting to dislike it. Also, Tom had never seen his wife look so radiant.

Tom watched Mrs. Bremmil from across the room, staring as she danced with other men. The more he looked, the more he was amazed. He could hardly believe this was the same woman who cried at home in a black dress. Mrs. Hauksbee tried to keep his attention, but after two dances, Tom walked over to his wife and asked for a dance.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Bremmil, you’re too late,” she said with a smile.

He begged for a dance, and she kindly gave him the fifth waltz, which was free. They danced together, and people in the room noticed. Tom remembered that his wife could dance, but he didn’t know she was so graceful. At the end of the waltz, he asked for another dance, not as a husband but as someone asking for a favor. Mrs. Bremmil said, “Show me your dance card, dear.” He showed it to her, like a child showing something he shouldn’t have. The card had several “H” marks for Mrs. Hauksbee, including at supper.

Mrs. Bremmil didn’t say anything, but she smiled and crossed out two “H” marks for dances 7 and 9. She wrote her own name instead—a special name only she and Tom used. Then she shook her finger at him and laughed, “Oh, you silly, silly boy!”

Mrs. Hauksbee overheard this and later admitted she felt defeated. Tom happily danced the seventh dance with his wife and sat with her during the ninth in a quiet tent. What they said to each other is private.

When the music played a song called “The Roast Beef of Old England,” Tom and Mrs. Bremmil went outside. Mrs. Bremmil went to the cloakroom, and Tom looked for her carriage. Mrs. Hauksbee approached him and said, “You’re taking me to supper, right, Mr. Bremmil?” Tom’s face turned red, and he looked embarrassed. “Um, no, I’m going home with my wife,” he said. “I think there’s been a mix-up.” He spoke as if Mrs. Hauksbee had caused the confusion.

Mrs. Bremmil came out of the cloakroom, wearing a white cloak that made her look glowing. She had every reason to feel proud. She and Tom left together in the dark, with Tom riding close to her carriage.

Later, Mrs. Hauksbee spoke to me. She looked tired in the lamplight. "Believe me," she said, "even a foolish woman can control a clever man. But it takes a very clever woman to manage a foolish one."

Then we went to eat supper.

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Question: Why did Mrs. Bremmil feel sad at the beginning of the story?
2. Question: Who was Mrs. Hauksbee, and why did people call her the "Stormy Petrel"?
3. Question: What did Mrs. Bremmil's friends tell her about Tom?
4. Question: Why did Mrs. Bremmil decide not to talk to Tom about Mrs. Hauksbee?
5. Question: What was the invitation from Lord and Lady Lytton for?
6. Question: How did Mrs. Bremmil's plan involve her dress?
7. Question: What happened when Tom asked Mrs. Bremmil for a dance at the ball?
8. Question: What did Mrs. Bremmil do with Tom's dance card?
9. Question: Why did Tom tell Mrs. Hauksbee there was a "mix-up"?
10. Question: What did Mrs. Hauksbee mean when she said, "It takes a very clever woman to manage a foolish one"?

Answers

1. Answer: She was sad because her baby died, and she spent her time crying and looking at the baby's clothes.
2. Answer: Mrs. Hauksbee was a charming but troublemaking woman in Simla. People called her the "Stormy Petrel" because she often caused problems wherever she went.
3. Answer: They told her that Tom was spending a lot of time with Mrs. Hauksbee, riding, walking, and eating with her.
4. Answer: She thought talking or crying to her husband wouldn't help, so she kept quiet and made a plan instead.
5. Answer: It was for a dance at their home, Peterhoff, on July 26th at 9:30 p.m.
6. Answer: She ordered a beautiful dress to wear to the dance, knowing it would make her look stunning and catch Tom's attention.
7. Answer: She said he was too late but gave him the fifth waltz as a favour, and they danced together.
8. Answer: She crossed out two dances marked for Mrs. Hauksbee (7 and 9), wrote her own special name instead, and laughed at Tom.
9. Answer: He told her he was going home with his wife instead of taking Mrs. Hauksbee to supper, suggesting she had misunderstood.
10. Answer: She meant that while any woman can influence a smart man, only a very clever woman can successfully handle a foolish man like Tom.