



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
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Thrown Away

Some horses are moody, others will jump wildly.

[Easy now! Stand still!]

Some need a gentle touch, others a firm pull.

[There, there! No one's hurting you!]

Some, sadly, will never adapt—

Their hearts break before they're tamed,

Fighting fiercely as the rope tightens,

And dying silently in the training yard.

—Toolungala Stockyard Song.

Raising a child in a very protected way, often called a “sheltered life,” can cause problems later. If a boy grows up under someone's thumb and then must face the world alone, he may struggle unnecessarily. He might even face serious trouble because he doesn't understand how things work.

Think of a puppy. If it chews soap or bites a polished boot, it learns these things make it sick. An older dog might teach it not to bite bigger dogs' ears. By six months, the puppy is well-behaved because it learned early. But if you keep a puppy away from soap, boots, and other dogs until it's grown, it might get very sick or hurt when it finally meets them. The same idea applies to a sheltered life. It's not ideal, but it's better than leaving someone bereft of real-world knowledge.

There was a Boy raised this way, and it led to his downfall. He stayed with his family from birth until he joined Sandhurst, a military academy, where he excelled in exams. A private tutor taught him everything to score high marks, and his parents were proud because he never caused them worry. At Sandhurst, he learned military skills, but nothing prepared him for real life. He graduated, though not as highly as he entered.

Afterwards, his family, who had high expectations, gave him a piece of their mind. He spent a year in a quiet army unit with young, inexperienced soldiers

and older, cautious officers. Then he was sent to India, far from his family, with no one to rely on but himself.

India is a place where you must not take things too seriously—except the hot midday sun, which can be dangerous. Working too hard or being too energetic can harm you, just like bad habits or drinking too much. Flirting doesn't matter because people move stations often, so relationships end quickly. Good work isn't valued much because someone else often takes credit. Bad work isn't a big deal either, as others do worse, and mistakes are common. Fun activities, like games or sports, lose their charm because you repeat them endlessly, often just to win someone else's money.

Even illness isn't a big concern—it's part of life. If you die, someone else takes your job within hours. Nothing feels important except leave to go home or extra pay, which are rare. India, in this story, is a relaxed place where people use imperfect tools and systems. The wisest choice is to avoid caring too much and leave for a place where fun is real and reputations matter.

But this Boy took everything seriously. He was handsome and well-liked, and he enjoyed the attention. He worried deeply about women who weren't worth his time. He thought life in India was exciting—full of horses, dances, and new friends. He tasted it like a puppy chewing soap, but he was too old to learn easily. He didn't understand why people didn't treat him as kindly as his family had, and this hurt him deeply.

He argued with other young officers and, being very sensitive, remembered every disagreement. He enjoyed card games and horse races, meant for fun after work, but took them too seriously. He drank too much and suffered headaches, yet treated these as major problems. He lost money in card games and races because he was new to them. One race, for small ponies, cost him as much worry as if it were a famous competition. Half of this came from inexperience, like a puppy chewing a rug, and half from being overwhelmed by his new, busy life.

No one warned him about the dangers of taking things too seriously. Most people assume others know to be careful. Watching the Boy struggle was sad, like seeing a young horse stumble and fall when let loose.

For six months, during the cooler season, he lived wildly, spending money and energy on things that weren't worth it. We hoped the hot weather, along with his losses, would calm him down. Usually, this works—most young officers

learn to relax. But the Boy was different. He was too sensitive and took everything to heart. We didn't know how deeply he felt his mistakes.

His behaviour wasn't unusual—just overspending and overdoing things. He might have faced money troubles or needed rest, but nothing permanent. Yet he seemed to think he was ruined forever. His Colonel scolded him when the cool season ended, which made him even more upset. It was just a normal warning, but to him, it was devastating.

Then something small but cruel changed everything. A woman made a thoughtless comment while he spoke to her. It was a sharp, unkind remark that embarrassed him deeply. He kept to himself for three days, then asked for two days' leave to go hunting near a rest house by a canal, about thirty miles away. He got permission and, that night at dinner, was louder and ruder than usual. He boasted about hunting "big game" and left in a small cart at half-past ten.

The rest house only had partridges, small birds, not big animals, so everyone laughed at his grand words.

The next morning, a Major returned from leave and heard about the Boy's hunting trip. The Major had tried to guide the Boy before, worried about his reckless ways. He raised his eyebrows and went to the Boy's room, where he looked through his things.

Soon, he found me in the mess hall. No one else was around. He said, "The Boy's gone hunting. Why would he take a revolver and a writing case to hunt?"

I said, "That's nonsense, Major!" because I guessed what he feared.

He replied, "Nonsense or not, I'm going to the canal now. I'm worried."

He paused, then asked, "Can you keep a secret?"

"You know I can," I said. "It's part of my job."

"Good," he said. "Come with me to the canal to hunt. Put on hunting clothes quickly and bring a gun."

The Major was a strong leader, and I knew he had a reason. I followed his orders. When I returned, he was ready in a cart with guns and food. He drove himself, dismissing the driver. We moved slowly through the station, but on the open road, he pushed the pony to go fast. We covered thirty miles in less than three hours, though the pony was exhausted.

I asked, "Why the rush, Major?"

He said quietly, "The Boy has been alone for fourteen hours. I'm worried."

His fear spread to me, and I helped urge the pony on. At the rest house, we called for the Boy's servant, but no one answered. We shouted the Boy's name, but it was silent.

"He's probably hunting," I said.

Then I saw a small lamp burning inside, though it was only four in the afternoon. We stopped on the verandah, listening carefully. Inside, we heard the buzzing of many flies. The Major took off his helmet, and we entered quietly.

The Boy was dead on a simple bed in the bare room. He had shot himself with his revolver, leaving a terrible wound. His gun cases and bedding were untouched, and his writing case, with photos, was on the table. He had died alone, like an animal hiding away.

The Major whispered, "Poor Boy! Poor devil!" He turned away and said, "I need your help."

I understood what he meant. The Boy had taken his own life, and we couldn't let his family know the truth. I sat at the table, lit a cigar, and looked through the writing case while the Major stood beside me, repeating, "We were too late! Like a rat in a hole! Poor devil!"

The Boy had written letters all night—to his parents, his Colonel, and a girl back home. He must have shot himself soon after finishing, as he had been dead for hours. His letters spoke of "disgrace" and "shame" he couldn't bear, calling his life "wasted." Some parts, especially to his parents, were too personal to share. The letter to the girl was heart-breaking, and I struggled to read it. The Major cried openly, not hiding his tears. The letters were so sad that we forgot the Boy's mistakes and only felt pity for him.

We knew we couldn't send the letters home. They would destroy his parents' hearts and faith in their son.

The Major wiped his eyes and said, "What a terrible thing for his family! What should we do?"

I replied, "We'll say he died of cholera. We were with him. We must stick to this story. Let's start."

We began a difficult task—creating a false story to protect the Boy’s family. I wrote a letter saying the Boy was a perfect soldier, loved by all, with a bright future. I said we helped him through a sudden illness, and he died peacefully. The Major burned the Boy’s real letters in the fireplace. It was a hot evening, and the lamp flickered. I felt choked writing such lies, thinking of the Boy’s parents reading them.

We laughed at how absurd it was, but the laughter mixed with sadness. The Major suggested we have a drink. We drank whiskey—more than I care to admit—but it didn’t affect us. We took the Boy’s watch, locket, and rings. The Major said, “We should send a lock of hair. Women value that.”

But the Boy’s hair was damaged, so I cut a piece from the Major’s head, as it was similar. We laughed and choked again, knowing the hardest part was coming. We sealed the packet with the Boy’s wax and stamp, including the letter, photos, locket, rings, and hair.

The Major said, “Let’s get out of this room and think.”

We walked by the canal for an hour, eating and drinking, until the moon rose. I felt like a criminal. Back in the room, we burned the bed and matting, dropping the ashes in the canal. I borrowed tools (big hoes) from a village to dig a grave, while the Major handled other details. It took four hours of hard work. We said the Lord’s Prayer and a quiet prayer for the Boy’s soul, then filled the grave.

Exhausted, we slept on the verandah, not inside. The next morning, the Major said, “We can’t return yet. We’ll say he died early today to make it seem natural.” He had been awake, planning.

I asked, “Why not bring the body back?”

He said, “The villagers fled because of cholera rumours, and the cart is gone.”

We were alone all day, checking our story for flaws. A villager came, but we said a Sahib died of cholera, and he ran off. As night fell, the Major shared stories of others who had struggled like the Boy, including himself when young. He said young people often feel their mistakes are worse than they are. We rehearsed our story again.

When the moon rose, we walked back to the station, arriving at six in the morning. Though exhausted, we returned the Boy’s revolver and writing case to his room. We reported his death to the Colonel, feeling guilty. Then we slept for a full day.

The story was believed for as long as needed. Within two weeks, people forgot the Boy. Some criticised the Major for not bringing the body back for a military funeral. The saddest part was a letter from the Boy's mother, full of gratitude for our kindness. She said she'd be indebted to us forever.

She was right, in a way, but not as she thought. We had swept the truth under the rug to spare her pain.

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. What does the “sheltered life” mean in the story, and why is it seen as a problem?
2. How does the puppy analogy explain the Boy’s situation?
3. Why did the Boy take life in India so seriously, unlike others?
4. What role does the woman’s remark play in the Boy’s actions?
5. Why does the Major suspect something is wrong with the Boy’s hunting trip?
6. What do the Major and narrator do to hide the truth about the Boy’s death?
7. Why do they choose to say the Boy died of cholera?
8. How does the Major’s personal experience relate to the Boy’s situation?
9. What is the significance of the mother’s letter at the end of the story?
10. What does the story suggest about the dangers of sensitivity and inexperience?

Answers

1. Answer: A “sheltered life” means raising someone with too much protection, keeping them from real-world challenges. It’s a problem because it leaves them unprepared for difficulties, like the Boy, who struggled in India due to his lack of experience.

2. Answer: The puppy learns from early mistakes, like chewing soap, to become well-behaved. The Boy, raised in a sheltered way, faces life’s challenges too late, like a grown puppy, and cannot cope, leading to his struggles.

3. Answer: The Boy was sensitive and inexperienced, expecting the same kindness he received at home. Unlike others, who saw India’s challenges as normal, he felt every mistake deeply, thinking they were major failures.

4. Answer: The woman’s cruel, thoughtless comment embarrasses the Boy deeply, worsening his feelings of shame. It leads him to isolate himself and request leave, setting the stage for his tragic decision.

5. Answer: The Major finds it strange that the Boy took a revolver and writing case to hunt, items not needed for hunting partridges. His concern for the Boy’s reckless behaviour makes him fear something serious.

6. Answer: They write a false letter saying the Boy died of cholera, burn his real letters, destroy the bed and matting, bury his body in a secret grave, and send his family fake items like a lock of hair.

7. Answer: Cholera was a common, believable cause of death in India at the time. Saying he died of it protects his family from the painful truth of his suicide and avoids disgrace.

8. Answer: The Major shares that he once felt similar despair when young in India, understanding the Boy’s overwhelming sense of failure. This makes him empathetic and determined to protect the Boy’s family.

9. Answer: The mother’s letter shows her gratitude for the false story of her son’s death, believing he died honourably. It highlights the success of the Major and narrator’s lie but also their guilt.

10. Answer: The story suggests that being too sensitive and inexperienced, like the Boy, can make small problems feel insurmountable. Without guidance or resilience, this can lead to tragic outcomes.