



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

D58

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1. Exciting Encounters

By Ruskin Bond

The following day, Mehmood was making lamb chops. I liked lamb chops. Mehmood knew I liked them, and he had an extra chop ready for me, just in case I felt like a pre-lunch snack.

‘What was Jim Corbett’s favourite dish?’ I asked, while dealing with the succulent chop.

‘Oh, he liked roast duck. Used to shoot them as they flew up from the jheel.’
‘What’s a jheel, Mehmood?’

‘A shallow sort of lake. In places you could walk about in the water. Different types of birds would come there in the winter—ducks and geese and all kinds of baglas—herons, you call them. The baglas are not good to eat, but the ducks make a fine roast.

‘So we camped beside the jheel and lived on roast duck for a week until everyone was sick of it.’

‘Did you go swimming in the jheel?’

‘No, it was full of muggers—those long-nosed crocodiles—they’ll snap you up if you come within their range! Nasty creatures, those muggermuch. One of them nearly got me.’

‘How did that happen, Mehmood-bhai?’

‘Oh, baba, just the memory of it makes me shudder! I’d given everyone their dinner and retired to my tent. It was a hot night and we couldn’t sleep. Swarms of mosquitoes rose from the jheel, invaded the tent, and attacked me on the face and arms and feet. I dragged my camp cot outside the tent, hoping the breeze would keep the mosquitoes away. After some time they moved on, and I fell asleep, wrapped up in my bedsheet. Towards dawn, I felt my cot quivering, shaking. Was it an earthquake? But no one else was awake. And then the cot started moving! I sat up, looked about me. The cot was moving steadily forward in the direction of the water. And beneath it, holding us up, was a beastly crocodile!

‘It gave me the fright of my life, baba. A muggermuch beneath my bed, and I upon it! I cried out for help. Carpet-sahib woke up, rushed out of his tent, his

gun in his hands. But it was still dark, and all he could see was my bed moving rapidly towards the jheel.

‘Just before we struck the water, I leapt from the cot, and ran up the bank, calling for help. Carpet-sahib saw me then. He ran down the slope, firing at the moving cot. I don’t know if he hit the horrible creature, but there was a big splash, and it disappeared into the jheel.’

‘And did you recover the cot?’

‘No, it floated away and then sank. We did not go after it.’ ‘And what did Corbett say afterwards?’

‘He said I had shown great presence of mind. He said he’d never seen anyone make such a leap for safety!’

‘You were a hero, Mehmood!’

‘Thank you, baba. There’s time for another lamb chop, if you’re hungry.’

‘I’m hungry,’ I said. ‘There’s still an hour left to lunchtime. But tell me more about your time with Jim Corbett. Did he like your cooking?’

‘Oh, *he* liked it well enough, but his sister was very fussy.’ ‘He had his sister with him?’

‘That’s right. He never married, so his sister looked after the household and the shopping and everything connected to the kitchen—except when we were in camp. Then I had a free hand. Carpet-sahib wasn’t too fussy about his food, especially when he was out hunting. A sandwich or paratha would keep him going. But if he had guests, he felt he had to give them the best, and then it was hard work for me.

‘For instance, there was the Raja of Janakpur, a big, fat man who was very fond of eating—between meals, during meals and after meals. I don’t know why he bothered to come on these shikar trips when he could have stayed at home in his palace and feasted day and night. But he needed trophies to hang on the walls of his palace. You were not considered a great king unless your walls were decorated with the stuffed heads of tigers, lions, antelopes, bears—anything that looked dangerous. The Raja could eat and drink all day, but he couldn’t go home without a trophy. So he would be hoisted onto an elephant, and sit there in state, firing away at anything that moved in the jungle. He

seldom shot anything, but Carpet-sahib would help him out by bringing down a stag or a leopard, and congratulating the Raja on his skill and accuracy.

‘They weren’t all like that, but some of the Rajas were stupid or even mad. And the Angrej-sahibs—the English—were no better. They, too, had to prove their manliness by shooting a tiger or a leopard. Carpet-sahib was always in demand, because he lived at the edge of the jungle and knew where to look for different animals.

‘The Raja of Janakpur was safe on an elephant, but one day he made the mistake of walking into the jungle on foot. He hadn’t gone far when he met a wild boar running at him. A wild boar may not look very dangerous, but it has deadly tusks and is quick to use them. Before the Raja could raise the gun to his shoulder, the pig charged at him. The Raja dropped his gun, turned and ran for his life. But he couldn’t run very fast or very far. He tripped and fell, and the boar was almost upon him when I happened along, looking for twigs to make a fire. Luckily, I had a small axe in my hand. I struck the boar over the head. It turned and rammed one of its tusks into my thigh. I struck at it again and again, till it fell dead at my feet. The Raja was nowhere in sight.

‘As soon as he got into camp, he sent for his servants and made a hurried departure. Didn’t even thank me for saving his life.’

‘Were you hurt badly, Mehmood?’

‘I was out of action for a few days. The wound took time to heal. My new masalchi did all the cooking, and the food was so bad that most of the guests left in a hurry. I still have the scar. See, baba!’

Mehmood drew up his pyjamas and showed me a deep scar on his right thigh.

‘You were a hero, Mehmood,’ I said. ‘You deserved a reward.’

‘My reward is here, baba, preparing these lamb chops for you. Come on, have another. Your parents won’t notice if they run short at lunch.’

2. Grammar page

May and Might

May and **might** are **helping** or **auxiliary verbs**, too.

- Use **may** to ask if you are allowed to do something, or to give someone permission to do something.



May I watch television now?
Yes, you **may**.

May I borrow your pen?
You **may** come in.
You **may** go now.

- **May** is also used to talk about things that are likely to happen.



Take an umbrella. It **may** rain.

If it continues to rain, there **may be** a flood.

I **may go** to Sue's birthday party if I'm free.

You **may fall** down if you aren't careful.

- **Might** is used as the past tense of **may**.

He realized he **might catch** the earlier train if he hurried.
I knew my teacher **might find** out.



You can also use **might** to talk about things that are possible. For example:

Put your purse away or it **might get** stolen.
You **might slip**, so hold on to the railing.