



Learn English Through Stories

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Cupid's Arrows (Adapted)

Introduction: A Dangerous Hunt

In the wild lands of India, there was a place where buffalo once cooled themselves in water. The hot sun dried it up, leaving a dusty pit. Hidden in the tall grass was a log, alone and unnoticed. Nearby, small hills of earth marked the homes of ground rats. A quiet stream flowed through a cave in the riverbank, and sharp aloe plants grew, ready to prick anyone who stepped too close. It was a place where you had to be careful. If you rode a wild horse there, you risked danger. The wise choice was to stay away—go wide, as the hunters shouted: “Pull to the side, boys! Stay safe! Go wide!”¹

This story, though, isn't about hunting animals. It's about a different kind of hunt—a hunt for love and status in a town called Simla.

A Beautiful Girl in Simla

Once upon a time in Simla, a hill station in British India, lived a very pretty young woman named Kitty Beighton. Her father was a kind but poor judge, respected for his honesty. Kitty was a good person, but she knew she was beautiful and could charm people. Her mother, Mrs. Beighton, worried about Kitty's future, as all caring mothers do. She wanted her daughter to marry well and live a comfortable life.

In Simla, there was a man named Anthony Barr-Saggott. He was a Commissioner, a powerful official in the British government. He was single, wealthy, and had the right to wear fancy gold and enamel jewelry on his clothes. In the strict social rules of British India, he could enter a room before almost everyone, except the highest officials like a Lieutenant-Governor or Viceroy. This made him a very desirable husband—at least, that's what the women of Simla thought.

Barr-Saggott was not handsome. In fact, people called him the ugliest man in Asia, except for two others. His face was so striking that you might dream about it or want to carve it on a pipe. Socially, he was awkward, like a gorilla trying to act charming. But in his job, he was excellent—one of the best men in the Government of India. He was rich, threw grand parties, owned fine horses, and was a powerful figure in Simla.

When Barr-Saggott started paying attention to Kitty, Mrs. Beighton was overjoyed. She saw it as a gift from fate for her old age. Mr. Beighton, a calm and easy-going man, said nothing. Kitty, however, wasn't so sure. She enjoyed the attention from such an important man, but she found him very unattractive. People in Simla even nicknamed him "The Langur," after a type of grey monkey, because of his looks.

Kitty's Other Suitor

Kitty had another admirer: a young man named Cubbon, a soldier in a Dragoon Regiment stationed in Umballa. Cubbon was handsome but had no wealth or high status. He was honest and openly in love with Kitty, which she liked. She often escaped Barr-Saggott's serious courtship to spend time with Cubbon, riding horses or talking. Her mother disapproved, scolding her for choosing a man with no prospects over a Commissioner.

"But, Mother," Kitty said, "Mr. Barr-Saggott is so... so terribly ugly!"

"My dear," Mrs. Beighton replied, "we can't change how God made him. Besides, if you marry him, you'll be more important than your own mother! Think about that and be sensible."⁵

Kitty lifted her chin and spoke boldly. "I don't care about importance or Commissioners or marriage!" she said. Mr. Beighton just rubbed his head, staying quiet as usual.

The Archery Tournament

This story happened long ago, before lawn tennis became popular in India. Back then, people played croquet, and even earlier, archery was the fashionable sport. Archery was so popular that people talked about it the way we discuss sports today, using terms like "holding," "loosing," "reflexed bows," and "56-pound bows." Kitty was an expert archer, the best woman in Simla. People called her "Diana of Tara-Devi," after the Roman goddess of hunting, because she shot so well at the women's distance of 60 yards.

Croquet: A game played with mallets and balls on a lawn, popular in the 19th century.

Reflexed bows/56-pound bows: Technical archery terms referring to the shape and strength of bows.

Barr-Saggott saw a chance to win Kitty's heart. He organized a ladies' archery tournament with a beautiful prize: a diamond-studded bracelet. Everyone in Simla could see that the tournament was designed for Kitty to win the bracelet—and, with it, Barr-Saggott's proposal. The rules were simple: a St. Leonard's Round, with 36 shots at 60 yards, following the Simla Archery Club's guidelines.

On the day of the tournament, all of Simla went to Annandale, where the event was held under tall cedar trees. Tea tables were set up, and the sparkling bracelet sat in a blue velvet case, shining in the sun. Kitty arrived on horseback with Cubbon, looking nervous. Cubbon seemed worried too, but he wasn't to blame for what happened next. Barr-Saggott, dressed in fancy clothes, was even more nervous—and, sadly, even uglier than usual.

Mrs. Beighton smiled proudly, acting as if Kitty was already the Commissioner's fiancée. The shooting began, with the women taking turns. It was a long, slow competition, and the crowd waited eagerly for Kitty, the last shooter. Everyone expected her to win, as the other women's scores were low. The bracelet—and Barr-Saggott—seemed certain to be hers.

Kitty's Rebellion

Barr-Saggott himself strung Kitty's bow, a grand gesture that made everyone watch closely. Kitty stepped forward, glanced at the bracelet, and shot her first arrow. It hit the center of the target—the "gold"—scoring nine points. The crowd cheered, and Barr-Saggott smiled, though his smile made some people uncomfortable.

Then, something strange happened. Kitty looked toward Cubbon, who stood at one end of the crowd, and gave a tiny nod. She began shooting again, but not at the gold. With great care, she aimed at the wooden legs of the target, hitting them four times in a row. The crowd grew quiet. She shot at the top of the target once, then at the white ring, which scores only one point, five times. Everyone was confused—Kitty was the best archer, so why was she missing the gold?

Barr-Saggott's face turned pale, almost green. Kitty continued, shooting over the target twice, then wide to the left twice, always slowly and deliberately. The crowd was silent now, and Mrs. Beighton pulled out a handkerchief, sensing something was wrong. Kitty then shot at the ground, breaking several arrows, and hit a red ring—worth seven points—just to show she could aim well if she wanted. Finally, she fired a few more shots at the target's supports, showing off her skill in a mocking way.

Her final score was terrible: one gold (9 points), one red (7 points), five whites (5 points), for a total of 21 points. A young, less skilled girl in the crowd shouted, "Then I've won!" She had scored higher and claimed the bracelet. Mrs. Beighton was heartbroken and cried in front of everyone, despite trying to stay strong. Kitty unstrung her bow sharply and walked away. Barr-Saggott, embarrassed, had to put the bracelet on the young girl's wrist, pretending to be happy. It was an awkward moment, and the crowd quickly left, leaving Kitty to face her mother's anger.

But Cubbon stepped in. He took Kitty away, and what happened next was private—too personal to share.

The Meaning of Kitty's Actions

Kitty's performance was no accident. She was a perfect archer, but she chose to lose on purpose. By aiming at the wrong parts of the target, she rejected Barr-Saggott's proposal and her mother's dreams of wealth and status. Her nod to Cubbon showed they shared a secret plan. Kitty wanted to choose her own path, and she preferred Cubbon's love over Barr-Saggott's power.

In Simla's society, where rank and appearances mattered, Kitty's actions were bold. She didn't want to be "bought" with a bracelet or a title. Her mother cared about social status, but Kitty cared about her heart. By losing the tournament, she won her freedom to choose Cubbon, a man who loved her for who she was, not for what she could bring him.

Conclusion

Cupid's Arrows is a story about love, choice, and standing up to expectations. Kitty Beighton, a skilled and clever young woman, used her archery skills not to win a prize, but to say no to a life she didn't want. In the beautiful hills of Simla, under the cedar trees, she showed that true love is worth more than wealth or status. Her story reminds us to be brave and follow our hearts, even when others pressure us to choose differently.

2. Comprehension Questions

Question 1: Where is the story set, and what kind of place is it?

Question 2: Who is Kitty Beighton, and what is her family like?

Question 3: Why does Mrs. Beighton want Kitty to marry Barr-Saggott?

Question 4: How is Anthony Barr-Saggott described in the story?

Question 5: Who is Cubbon, and how does he differ from Barr-Saggott?

Question 6: What sport is central to the story, and why is Kitty good at it?

Question 7: What is the prize for the archery tournament, and what does it symbolize?

Question 8: Why does Kitty deliberately lose the archery tournament?

Question 9: What does Kitty's nod to Cubbon before her performance suggest?

Question 10: What is the main message of the story?

Answers

Answer 1: The story is set in Simla, a hill station in British India, known as a place where British colonial society gathered for social events and leisure.

Answer 2: Kitty Beighton is a beautiful young woman, the daughter of a poor but honest judge. Her mother is ambitious and wants her to marry well, while her father is calm and quiet.

Answer 3: Mrs. Beighton wants Kitty to marry Barr-Saggott because he is a wealthy, powerful Commissioner, and the marriage would give Kitty high social status and precedence over others, including her mother.

Answer 4: Anthony Barr-Saggott is described as a wealthy, powerful, but very unattractive Commissioner, nicknamed "The Langur" (gray monkey) because of his looks. He is excellent at his job but socially awkward.

Answer 5: Cubbon is a young, handsome soldier in a Dragoon Regiment with no wealth or high status. Unlike Barr-Saggott, he is honest, openly loves Kitty, and has no social ambitions.

Answer 6: Archery is the central sport. Kitty is good at it, earning the nickname "Diana of Tara-Devi" because she shoots accurately at the 60-yard women's distance.

Answer 7: The prize is a diamond-studded bracelet, which symbolizes Barr-Saggott's attempt to win Kitty's hand in marriage and her mother's hopes for social advancement.

Answer 8: Kitty deliberately loses the tournament to reject Barr-Saggott's proposal and her mother's ambitions, choosing her own path and love for Cubbon instead.

Answer 9: Kitty's nod to Cubbon suggests they share a secret plan or understanding, indicating her intention to defy expectations and choose him over Barr-Saggott.

Answer 10: The main message is that true love and personal choice are more important than wealth, or societal expectations, as shown by Kitty's bold decision to follow her heart.

