



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E61

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

Contents

- 1. The Sisters**
- 2. Comprehension**
- 3. Grammar Page.**

The Sisters

Adapted from James Joyce

My old friend, Father Flynn, was dying. I knew it was serious this time because it was his third stroke. A stroke is when something goes wrong in the brain, and it can make a person very sick or even die. Every night during my school holidays, I walked past his house. I always looked at the window of his room. The light was always soft and steady, never changing. I thought, "If he's dead, I'll see candles in the window. People put two candles by the head of a dead person in Ireland." Father Flynn used to say, "I won't live much longer," but I thought he was just pulling my leg—joking, not being serious. Now I knew his words were true.

Every night, I whispered the word "paralysis" to myself. Paralysis means not being able to move, like Father Flynn's body after his strokes. The word sounded strange to me, like something dark and frightening. It reminded me of other strange words, like "gnomon" from my math book—a shape with a missing part—or "simony" from my religion lessons, which means buying or selling holy things, a big sin in the Catholic Church. The word "paralysis" scared me, but I also wanted to get to the bottom of it—to understand it fully—and see what it had done to Father Flynn.

That evening, I went downstairs for dinner. Old Cotter, a family friend, was sitting by the fire, smoking his pipe. He was an old man who worked in a distillery, where they make whiskey. He used to tell interesting stories about his job, but now I found him boring. As my aunt served me porridge, Old Cotter spoke, as if continuing an earlier thought.

"I wouldn't say Father Flynn was... normal," he said slowly. "There was something strange about him. I have my own ideas about it."

He puffed on his pipe, looking serious, but he didn't explain. I thought he was talking through his hat—saying nonsense without proof. My uncle noticed me staring and said, "Your old friend Father Flynn is gone, lad. I'm sorry to hear it."

"Who?" I asked, pretending I didn't care.

"Father Flynn," my uncle said. "Old Cotter just told us. He passed by the house and heard the news."

I kept eating my porridge, acting calm, even though I felt everyone watching me. My uncle turned to Old Cotter. "The boy and Father Flynn were close," he said. "The priest taught him a lot. They say he thought highly of the boy."

"May God rest his soul," my aunt said quietly, crossing herself. In Ireland, people say this to pray for someone who has died.

Old Cotter stared at me with his small, dark eyes. I didn't look up from my plate. I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me upset. He puffed his pipe again and spat into the fireplace, which I thought was rude.

"I wouldn't want my children spending too much time with a man like that," Old Cotter said.

"What do you mean?" my aunt asked, confused.

"It's not good for children," Old Cotter said. "Their minds are so open. When they see strange things, it affects them. Don't you agree, Jack?"

"That's right," my uncle said. "Boys should play with other boys their age, not hang around with old priests. I always tell this one to exercise more, like I did when I was young. I took cold baths every morning, winter or summer. That's what keeps me strong. Education is good, but health matters too." He turned to my aunt. "Does Old Cotter want some lamb?"

"No, thank you," Old Cotter said.

My aunt brought the meat to the table anyway. "But why isn't it good for children, Mr. Cotter?" she asked.

"Because young minds are easily influenced," he said. "Seeing strange behaviour can leave a mark."

I was so angry I wanted to shout at him, but I stuffed my mouth with porridge instead. I hated how he called me a child and spoke about Father Flynn like he was bad. Old Cotter was getting on my nerves—annoying me terribly.

That night, I went to bed late. I was upset with Old Cotter for treating me like a kid. I lay in the dark, trying to make sense of his words. I thought about Father Flynn's face, grey and heavy from his illness. I pulled the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas to feel better. But his face followed me in my mind. In a dream, I saw him trying to confess something to me, his voice soft and his lips wet. He smiled strangely, and I smiled back, as if forgiving him for something. Then I remembered he had died of paralysis, and I woke up, feeling uneasy.

The next morning, after breakfast, I walked to Father Flynn's house on Great Britain Street. It was a small shop run by his sisters, selling children's shoes and umbrellas. They called it a "drapery" shop, a place that sells cloth or small items. Usually, there was a sign saying, "Umbrellas Repaired," but today the shutters were closed. A black ribbon with flowers was tied to the door, a sign of mourning. Two women and a boy delivering telegrams were reading a card on the door. I read it too:

July 1st, 1895

The Rev. James Flynn (formerly of S. Catherine's Church, Meath Street), aged sixty-five years.

Rest in Peace.

The card made it real: Father Flynn was dead. I felt confused. If he was alive, I would have gone inside to see him sitting by the fire in his big coat. I used to bring him snuff—powdered tobacco he sniffed through his nose. His hands shook so much that I had to pour it into his snuff-box for him. He often spilled it, and his clothes were stained green and black from trying to clean it with a dirty handkerchief. I wanted to go inside and see him, but I was too afraid to knock. I walked away, reading shop signs to distract myself. I felt strange—almost free, as if his death had lifted a weight off my shoulders—taken away a heavy burden. But why? Father Flynn had taught me so much. He studied in Rome and taught me how to say Latin correctly. He told me stories about the catacombs—underground tombs in Rome—and about Napoleon. He explained the Mass, the priest's clothes, and hard questions about sins. His lessons made the Church seem mysterious and serious. Sometimes he tested me with questions about what to do in tricky situations, and I often couldn't answer. He would smile and nod, taking big pinches of snuff. His smile showed his big, yellow teeth, which made me nervous at first.

As I walked in the sun, I thought about Old Cotter's words and my dream. I remembered velvet curtains and an old lamp in the dream, like I was in a faraway place, maybe Persia. But I couldn't recall the end of it.

That evening, my aunt took me to Father Flynn's house to pay our respects. The sun had set, and the sky was golden. Nannie, one of Father Flynn's sisters, met us at the door. She was old and couldn't hear well, so my aunt shook her hand quietly. Nannie pointed upstairs, asking if we wanted to see Father Flynn. My aunt nodded, and Nannie climbed the narrow stairs slowly, her head low. At the top, she stopped and waved us toward the open door of the room where Father Flynn lay.

I hesitated, but my aunt went in, so I followed on tiptoe. The room was dim, with soft golden light coming through the window's lace curtain. Two candles burned at the head of the bed, just as I had imagined. Father Flynn was in a coffin, dressed in his priest's clothes, holding a chalice—a special cup used in the Mass. We knelt at the foot of the bed. I tried to pray, but Nannie's quiet muttering distracted me. I noticed her skirt was hooked wrong and her boots were worn out. I thought Father Flynn might be smiling in his coffin, but when I looked, his face was stern and grey, with deep shadows around his nose. The room smelled of flowers.

We left the room and went downstairs. Eliza, Father Flynn's other sister, sat in his armchair. Nannie brought out sherry—a sweet wine—and glasses. She offered me crackers, but I said no, afraid of making noise while eating. Eliza seemed disappointed but sat quietly. No one spoke. We all stared at the empty fireplace.

Finally, my aunt said, "Well, he's gone to a better place."

Eliza sighed and nodded. "He died peacefully," she said. "You couldn't tell when he stopped breathing. It was a beautiful death, thank God."

"Was everything done properly?" my aunt asked.

"Yes," Eliza said. "Father O'Rourke came on Tuesday, gave him the last rites, and prepared everything. He knew he was dying and was calm about it."

"He looks peaceful," my aunt said.

"The woman who prepared his body said the same," Eliza said. "She said he looked like he was sleeping. No one expected him to look so calm."

My aunt sipped her wine. "It must comfort you, Miss Flynn, to know you did everything for him. You and Nannie were so kind."

Eliza smoothed her dress. "We did our best," she said. "We're poor, but we made sure he had what he needed."

Nannie leaned back, almost asleep. "Poor Nannie is worn out," Eliza said. "We worked hard—getting the woman to wash him, laying him out, ordering the coffin, and arranging the Mass. Father O'Rourke helped with the flowers, candles, and newspaper notice. He even handled the cemetery papers and insurance."

"That was kind of him," my aunt said.

Eliza nodded. "Old friends are the best," she said. "Now that he's gone, he'll remember our kindness in heaven."

"Poor James," Eliza said. "He was never any trouble. So quiet. But I'll miss bringing him his tea, and you'll miss giving him his snuff."

"You'll feel it most when it's all over," my aunt said.

"I know," Eliza said. She paused, then added, "I noticed he was acting strange lately. I'd find his prayer book on the floor, and he'd be sitting with his mouth open, like he wasn't himself."

She touched her nose and frowned. "He kept talking about taking a drive to our old house in Irishtown, where we grew up. He wanted to go in one of those new carriages with quiet wheels—Father O'Rourke told him about them. He planned to take me and Nannie. He had his heart set on it—really wanted it badly."

"May God rest his soul," my aunt said.

Eliza wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. "He was too serious about his priestly duties," she said. "It was too much for him. His life was hard."

"Yes," my aunt said. "You could see he was a disappointed man."

The room went quiet. I sipped my sherry and sat back in my chair. Eliza seemed lost in thought. After a long pause, she spoke slowly.

“It started with that chalice,” she said. “He broke it, you know. They said it was empty, so it wasn’t a big sin. But it upset him terribly. He started staying alone, not talking, wandering by himself. One night, they needed him for a sick person, but they couldn’t find him. They looked everywhere. Finally, the clerk suggested checking the chapel. They got the keys, went in with a light, and there he was—sitting in the confession-box, awake, laughing softly to himself.”

Eliza stopped, as if listening for something. I listened too, but the house was silent. I knew Father Flynn was lying still in his coffin, with the chalice on his chest, no longer laughing.

“They thought something was wrong with him,” Eliza said. “After that, he wasn’t the same.”

We left soon after. As we walked home, I thought about Father Flynn’s life and death. His lessons had opened my mind, but his strange end left me confused. I wondered what had broken him—his duties, the chalice, or something deeper. His death was a wake-up call—a moment that made me think harder about life and what it all meant.

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: Who is Father Flynn, and what happens to him at the start of the story?

Question 2: What does the boy notice about the window of Father Flynn's house every night?

Question 3: What does the word "paralysis" mean to the boy, and why does it scare him?

Question 4: What does Old Cotter say about Father Flynn that makes the boy angry?

Question 5: What does the idiom "pulling my leg" mean in the story?

Question 6: What does the boy see on the door of Father Flynn's house the next morning?

Question 7: What did Father Flynn teach the boy about?

Question 8: What does the idiom "lifted a weight off my shoulders" mean when the boy feels free after Father Flynn's death?

Question 9: What strange behaviour does Eliza notice in Father Flynn before he dies?

Question 10: What does Eliza say caused Father Flynn's mental decline, and what was he doing in the confession-box?

Answers

Answer 1: Father Flynn is an old priest and the boy's friend. He dies after his third stroke.

Answer 2: The window has a soft, steady light, which stays the same every night.

Answer 3: Paralysis means not being able to move, like Father Flynn's condition. It scares the boy because it seems dark and frightening, like a dangerous force.

Answer 4: Old Cotter says Father Flynn was strange and that it's bad for children to spend time with him, which angers the boy because he respects the priest.

Answer 5: It means joking or teasing. The boy thought Father Flynn was joking when he said he wouldn't live long.

Answer 6: He sees a black ribbon with flowers and a card saying Father Flynn died on July 1st, 1895, aged sixty-five.

Answer 7: He taught the boy Latin, stories about the catacombs and Napoleon, and explained the Mass, priest's clothes, and sins.

Answer 8: It means feeling relieved, like a heavy burden is gone. The boy feels this unexpectedly after Father Flynn's death.

Answer 9: She finds his prayer book on the floor and sees him sitting with his mouth open, acting unlike himself.

Answer 10: Breaking a chalice upset him and started his decline. He was found in the confession-box, awake and laughing softly to himself.

3. Grammar Page

The word **or** is often used with **not** and other negative words.

She does **not** like apple juice **or** orange juice.

I **didn't** see **or** hear anything strange.

He **can't** sing **or** dance.

They've **never** been to Europe **or** Asia.

Conjunctions Linking Phrases

Use the conjunctions **and**, **but** and **or** to link phrases. The phrases in these examples are printed in color.

We like **going shopping and visiting museums**.

I tell **my parents and my best friend** all my secrets.

Some of my toys are **dirty and a bit broken**.

The car is **very old but still very reliable**.

The weather was **very sunny but rather cold**.

I'm **older than Anna but younger than Jack**.

Is it quicker to go **by train or by car**?

You could call it **a thin book or a thick magazine**.

She couldn't decide whether to **stay in bed or get up** and take a shower.

Conjunctions with Lists

Use the conjunctions **and** and **or** with lists of words. Remember to put a **comma** between the words. Then use **and** or **or** between the last two words.

We bought milk, eggs, cheese **and** butter.

My favorite teachers are Mr. Lee, Mrs. Carter **and** Mr. Park.

In the morning I get up, take a shower, eat breakfast **and** brush my teeth.

Kathleen didn't have any paper, pens **or** pencils.

People travel to work by car, bus **or** train.

I haven't eaten breakfast, lunch **or** dinner.