



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G70

**Adapted and modified by
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1. The Four Feathers

Adapted from Ruskin Bond

Our school dormitory was a sprawling room, stretched out like a long arm with thirty beds, fifteen hugging each side. It was the perfect battlefield for pillow fights. Class V would square off against Class VI, the two senior classes in our Prep school, and the place would turn into a circus—small boys leaping like cats, pillows flying, feathers floating like snowflakes, until someone shouted, “Here comes Fishy!” or “Here comes Olly!” That’s when Mr. Fisher, the Headmaster, or Mr. Oliver, the Senior Master, would storm in, cane in hand, ready to rain on our parade and put an end to the glorious chaos. Pillow fights were allowed, within reason; no one got hurt. But some parents raised a stink when their boy came home at term’s end with a pillow as empty as a politician’s promise, stripped of its cotton-wool or feathers.

In that final year at Prep school in Shimla, four of us were thick as thieves—Bimal, hailing from Bombay; Riaz, from Lahore; Bran, from Vellore; and yours truly, the narrator, drifting wherever my father, an Air Force man, was posted. We dubbed ourselves the “Four Feathers,” the feathers symbolizing our bond as companions in adventure, comrades-in-arms, and knights ready to tilt at windmills. Bimal, ever the peacock, chose a peacock’s feather to strut his stuff. Riaz picked a falcon’s feather—though we never found one, so he was left chasing shadows. Bran and I balked at the crow or murghi feathers offered to us, kicking up a fuss and threatening to jump ship. In the end, I settled for a parrot’s feather, plucked from Mrs. Fisher’s pet parrot, while Bran nabbed a woodpecker’s, fitting for a boy who was always banging around like a bull in a china shop.

Bimal was all legs and arms, so light on his feet he seemed to float on cloud nine. We nicknamed him “Bambi” after the sprightly deer in the Disney film. Riaz, sturdy as an ox, was a star at games but no bookworm; always grinning, he was the kind to roll with the punches. Bran, dark and handsome from the South, was a bit spoiled—throw a tantrum if given out in cricket, refusing to budge from the crease like a mule digging in its heels. Still, he was loyal and warm-hearted. As for me, the scribe, I could spin a yarn to wriggle out of trouble but was all thumbs with sums, my best score a measly twenty-two out of a hundred.

On Sunday afternoons, when classes and games took a backseat, we were free to roam the hillside below the school. The Four Feathers would lounge on the summer grass, sharing food parcels from home, flipping through comics (or the odd book), and hatching plans for the winter holidays. My father, a collector of everything from stamps to seashells to butterflies, had given me a butterfly net, urging me to hunt for a rare gem—a large purple butterfly with yellow and black borders, a Purple Emperor, he called it. I was no butterfly whisperer, so I chased anything that fluttered by, usually landing Common Red Admirals or Cabbage Whites. That Purple Emperor, the holy grail for collectors, remained as elusive as a needle in a haystack. I'd have to make my mark elsewhere.

One day, scrambling through rocks and thorny bushes below the school, I nearly tripped over a small bundle tucked in the shade of a young spruce. On closer inspection, I saw it was a baby, wrapped in a tattered blanket, sleeping like a log.

"Feathers, feathers!" I hollered. "Come quick—there's a baby down here!"

The Feathers rushed over, and we gawked at the tiny thing, still out cold. "Who'd leave a baby on the hillside?" Bimal wondered aloud, scratching his head.

"Someone who wanted to wash their hands of it," Bran said matter-of-factly.

"And hoped some kind soul would take it under their wing," Riaz added.

"A panther might've taken it first," I said. "We can't leave it here to fend for itself."

"We'll adopt it!" Bimal declared, his eyes lighting up like a kid in a candy store.

"Adopt a baby?" Bran scoffed. "We're not exactly grown-ups with deep pockets."

"Who says we need to be?" Bimal shot back. "We can't just sit on our hands."

"We don't even know if it's a boy or girl," Riaz pointed out.

"Doesn't matter," I said. "A baby's a baby. Let's take it back to school."

"In the dormitory?" Bran asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No way," I said. "Who's got milk to feed it? We'll hand it to Mrs. Fisher—she's got no kids and might want to take a shine to it."

“But it’s starting to wail,” Riaz said. “We’d better move like greased lightning!”

Riaz scooped up the now-squawking baby and passed it to Bimal, who passed it to Bran, who handed it to me. The Four Feathers marched up the hill, toting a baby screaming loud enough to wake the dead.

“It’s done a number in the blanket,” I grumbled. “And some’s on my shirt!”

“Take one for the team,” Bimal teased. “You’re a Boy Scout—helping’s your bread and butter.”

At the school, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher were in their drawing room, sipping tea and nibbling cakes. We barged in, and Bimal announced, “Mrs. Fisher, we’ve got a surprise up our sleeve for you!”

Mrs. Fisher took one look at the bundle in my arms and let out a scream that could curdle milk. “What on earth have you brought, Bond?”

“A baby, ma’am,” I said. “Think it’s a girl. Want to adopt it?”

Mrs. Fisher threw her hands up, beside herself. “Frank, what are we to do? These boys are off their rockers—they’ve picked up someone’s child!”

“We’ll have to call the police,” Mr. Fisher said, reaching for the phone. “We can’t have stray babies turning up like bad pennies.”

Just then, a commotion erupted outside. A frantic woman, clothes in disarray, burst in with several village men, crying, “My baby, my baby! Mera bachcha! You’ve stolen it!”

“We found it on the hillside,” I stammered, feeling like a deer in headlights.

“Finder’s keepers!” Bran piped up.

“Quiet, Adams,” Mr. Fisher snapped, raising a hand for calm. He turned to the villagers, smooth as silk. “These boys found the baby alone and brought it here before...”

“Before the hyenas made a meal of it,” I cut in.

“Quite right, Bond,” Mr. Fisher said. “Why was your child left alone?” he asked the woman.

“I set her down for five minutes to climb a plum tree for fruit,” she said, tears streaming. “When I came down, she was gone! I heard her crying up the hill and called the men to help.”

“Here’s your baby,” I said, thrusting it into her arms, happy to pass the hot potato. “Look after it better from now on.”

“Kidnapper!” she shrieked at me.

Mr. Fisher calmed the villagers, saying, “These boys are good Scouts. It’s in their blood to lend a hand.”

“Scout Law Number Three, sir,” I added. “To be useful and helpful.”

Then Mr. Fisher turned the tables. “By the way, those plum trees belong to the school. So do the peaches and apricots. Now I know why they’ve been vanishing like hotcakes!”

The villagers, caught red-handed, slunk away.

Mr. Fisher gripped his cane, eyeing us like a hawk, clearly itching to give us a taste of it. “No, Frank,” Mrs. Fisher said, stepping in. “It was sweet of them to look after that baby. Look at Bond—he’s covered in baby-goo!”

“So he is,” Mr. Fisher said. “Go scrub up, all of you. And what’s so funny, Bond?”

“Scout Law Number Eight, sir,” I said, grinning ear to ear. “A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties.”

And so ended the first adventure of the Four Feathers, proving we could handle whatever curveballs came our way.

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: What was the dormitory like, and what activity did the boys enjoy there?

Question 2: Who were the “Four Feathers,” and what did their name symbolize?

Question 3: Why did the boys nickname Bimal “Bambi”?

Question 4: What idiom describes Bran’s behaviour when he refused to leave the cricket crease?

Question 5: What was the narrator’s father trying to get him to catch, and why was it difficult?

Question 6: What did the Four Feathers find on the hillside, and what was their initial reaction?

Question 7: What idiom did Bimal use to describe the narrator’s role in helping with the baby?

Question 8: How did Mrs. Fisher react when the boys brought the baby to her?

Question 9: What did Mr. Fisher discover about the villagers during the incident?

Question 10: Which Scout Law did the narrator mention at the end, and what idiom did it relate to?

Answers

Answer 1: The dormitory was a long room with thirty beds, fifteen on each side, and the boys enjoyed pillow fights, where Class V and Class VI would battle, with pillows and feathers flying.

Answer 2: The Four Feathers were Bimal, Riaz, Bran, and the narrator, and their name symbolized their bond as companions in adventure, comrades-in-arms, and knights ready to tilt at windmills.

Answer 3: Bimal was nicknamed “Bambi” because he was light and frisky, moving as if on cloud nine, like the delicate deer in the Disney film.

Answer 4: The idiom “digging in its heels” describes Bran’s stubborn refusal to leave the cricket crease when given out.

Answer 5: The narrator’s father wanted him to catch a Purple Emperor butterfly, which was difficult because it was as elusive as a needle in a haystack.

Answer 6: They found a baby wrapped in a tattered blanket, and they were shocked, wondering who would leave it there and deciding they couldn’t leave it to fend for itself.

Answer 7: Bimal used the idiom “take one for the team” to describe the narrator’s effort in carrying the crying baby despite the mess.

Answer 8: Mrs. Fisher let out a scream that could curdle milk and said the boys were off their rockers for bringing her someone’s child.

Answer 9: Mr. Fisher discovered that the villagers were stealing plums, peaches, and apricots from the school’s trees, which were vanishing like hotcakes.

Answer 10: The narrator mentioned Scout Law Number Eight, “A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties,” relating to the idiom “grinning ear to ear” to show his cheerful attitude.

3. Grammar Page

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Countable and uncountable 2

A Many nouns are sometimes countable, and sometimes uncountable. Usually there is a difference in meaning. Compare:

Countable

- ☐ Did you hear **a noise** just now?
(= a specific noise)
- ☐ I bought **a paper** to read.
(= a newspaper)
- ☐ There's **a hair** in my soup!
(= one single hair)
- ☐ This is **a nice room**.
(= a room in a house)
- ☐ I had some interesting **experiences**
while I was travelling.
(= things that happened to me)
- ☐ Enjoy your trip. Have **a great time**!

Uncountable

- ☐ I can't work here. There's too much **noise**. (= noise in general)
- ☐ I need **some paper** to write on.
(= material for writing on)
- ☐ You've got very long **hair**. (*not* hairs)
(= all the hair on your head)
- ☐ You can't sit here. There isn't **room**.
(= space)
- ☐ I was offered the job because I had a lot of **experience**. (*not* experiences)
(= experience of that type of job)
- ☐ I can't wait. I don't have **time**.

Coffee/tea/juice/beer etc. (drinks) are normally uncountable:

- ☐ I don't like **coffee** very much.

But you can say **a coffee** (= a cup of coffee), **two coffees** (= two cups) etc.:

- ☐ **Two coffees** and **an orange juice**, please.

B These nouns are usually uncountable:

accommodation	behaviour	damage	luck	permission	traffic
advice	bread	furniture	luggage	progress	weather
baggage	chaos	information	news	scenery	work

We do not normally use **a/an** with these nouns:

- ☐ I'm going to buy **some bread**. *or ... a loaf of bread.* (*not* a bread)
- ☐ Enjoy your holiday! I hope you have good **weather**. (*not* a good weather)

These nouns are not usually plural (so we do not say 'breads', 'furnitures' etc.):

- ☐ Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* furnitures)
- ☐ Let me know if you need more **information**. (*not* informations)

News is uncountable, not plural:

- ☐ The **news was** unexpected. (*not* The news were)

Travel (*noun*) means 'travelling in general' (uncountable). We do not say 'a travel' to mean **a trip** or **a journey**:

- ☐ They spend a lot of money on **travel**.
- ☐ We had a very good **trip/journey**. (*not* a good travel)

Compare these countable and uncountable nouns:

Countable

- ☐ I'm looking for **a job**.
- ☐ What **a beautiful view**!
- ☐ It's **a nice day** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **bags**.
- ☐ **These chairs** are mine.
- ☐ That's **a good suggestion**.
- ☐ There were a lot of **cars**.

Uncountable

- ☐ I'm looking for **work**. (*not* a work)
- ☐ What beautiful **scenery**!
- ☐ It's nice **weather** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **baggage/luggage**.
- ☐ **This furniture** is mine.
- ☐ That's good **advice**.
- ☐ There **was** a lot of **traffic**.