



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G72

Adapted and modified by

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Contents

- 1. The Elder Sister**
- 2. Comprehension**
- 3. Grammar Page**

1. The Elder Sister

Adapted from premchand

1

One evening in Village Shivganj, a group of women gathered beneath a neem tree, their tongues wagging about local gossip. When the talk turned to a husband who had beaten his wife with a stick for bathing in the Ganga without his say-so, Tara's temper flared. "May such men burn their bridges and face the music!" she spat angrily.

The women gasped, taken aback by her fiery words. One clutched her bosom as if the air had been knocked out of her; another bit her tongue, shocked at Tara's boldness—it was improper for her to curse so openly.

Kundan, knitting her brows, scolded, "Tara Behen, you're barking up the wrong tree! Think before you let your tongue run away with you. He was her husband—what's wrong if he laid down the law?"

Kundan was married to Jai Gopal Chaudhuri, a man who had it made in the shade. He savoured fine meals twice a day without lifting a finger, stepping out only once a year to collect rent. The rest of the time, he lounged in his courtyard room, chewing the fat with neighbours. This village wasn't his birth-right, though—his ancestral wealth had gone up in smoke during his father's time. His father-in-law, seeing him down on his luck, had gifted him this village and sent monthly aid to keep him afloat. Jai Gopal lived high on the hog, with nary a care for tomorrow. His old father-in-law, childless until late in life, held a fortune yielding twenty thousand rupees a year, and Jai Gopal was next in line. He didn't exactly pray for the old man's demise, but two or three times a year, he'd have the tale of Satya Narayan recited, keeping his fingers crossed for that golden day.

For ten years, Jai Gopal lived on easy street. His belly grew round as a barrel, and his thinning crown seemed a sign that fortune was paving the way. But then, life threw him a curveball. At sixty, his father-in-law welcomed a son, and Jai Gopal's dreams went up in flames. He could only beat his chest in despair. Kundan, beside herself, cursed her father to high heaven and wished the newborn's days were numbered.

“That old goat’s past sixty and still chasing skirts!” she fumed. “Now he’s saddled with this millstone round his neck. Here I was, the apple of his eye, and he pulls this selfish stunt!”

This child turned Jai Gopal’s world upside down, snatching the wind from his sails. His in-laws invited him to a family gathering, but he was too busy licking his wounds to attend. He packed his bags for Assam, landing a job in a tea factory—a first in his pampered life. Far from home, he struggled to find his feet. At first, thoughts of his wife and three children kept him tethered, but as time wore on, they faded like a distant memory. A new fire lit in his chest—ambition for a better life. Love took a backseat. Weekly letters dwindled to fortnightly, then barely one a month by the second year.

Kundan, however, was cut from a different cloth. She loved Jai Gopal with the steady devotion of a dutiful wife, serving him heart and soul. She’d never known the heart-wrenching passion that sets your soul ablaze, the kind that separation ignites. Their bond, though real, was loosely tied. But absence makes the heart grow fonder, and this separation fanned the flames of her love. A fierce longing took root in Kundan’s heart. She grew quiet, her days heavy with solitude. Sometimes, she’d cry alone, her letters to Jai Gopal brimming with newfound ardour.

“What’s a bit of coarse cloth?” she’d muse. “I’ll wear it. Hardship? I’ll grin and bear it.” Though a mother of three, she felt the heady rush of a young girl drunk on love’s sweet wine. Memories of her sharp words and petty quarrels with Jai Gopal haunted her, and she’d weep, vowing never to hurt him again. She’d live on his terms, come hell or high water.

2

A child born in old age is a treasure beyond measure. Nauri Chandra, the newborn, was his parents’ pride and joy, the answer to their lifelong prayers. But fate played a cruel hand. In his third year, his mother fell gravely ill. Knowing her days were numbered, she sent for Kundan. Though Kundan’s heart had turned cold toward her parents, a plague ravaging Shivganj left her no choice but to answer their call.

Her mother, overjoyed to see her, wept buckets. Her father showered her with blessings, but the household servants and young girls eyed her with green-eyed jealousy, treating her like a fish out of water. The maid grumbled, "I'm worn to a frazzle fetching water all day!" The cook sneered, "Her boys are starving wolves, storming the kitchen before the fire's even lit!"

Kundan swallowed her pride, her heart softening at her mother's suffering. When her mother's health took a turn for the worse, she clasped Nauri's hand, placed it in Kundan's, and, with tears streaming, passed away.

Her mother's death turned Kundan's world topsy-turvy. The bitterness she'd harboured for Nauri melted away. Seeing the frail, motherless boy, her heart went out to him. When her sons bullied him, and he ran to his jiji, clutching her sari with tearful eyes, Kundan's heart broke. She scooped him up, hugging him tightly, her love as fierce as a mother's. Perhaps her mother's final act had softened her, or maybe Nauri's helplessness had won her over. Either way, Kundan's affection for her brother now ran deeper than for her own children. Nauri's complaints were no longer water off a duck's back. His tantrums didn't ruffle her feathers; his tears cut her to the quick

. The boy clung to her, his own mother a fading memory.

Three months later, her father followed his wife to the grave, naming Jai Gopal as Nauri's guardian and bequeathing him a village to live on. Kundan became mistress of the house, and Nauri the apple of her eye. Jai Gopal, hearing the news, returned from Assam to take up the reins as zamindar.

3

Jai Gopal was no longer the carefree soul he'd once been. Life in Assam had turned him into a sly fox, his heart set on chasing the almighty rupee. The tea gardens had opened doors to forbidden pleasures, and he'd jumped in with both feet, his character now tarnished. Kundan, a simple woman who barely raised her eyes, could no longer hold his heart. She poured her soul into caring for him after their long separation, but the more she tried to close the gap, the more he kept her at arm's length.

From day one, Jai Gopal treated Nauni like a thorn in his side. His glances dripped with venom, his words sharp as a knife. Kundan longed for him to share her love for her brother, but if she held Nauni close, Jai Gopal turned his nose up in disgust. She tried to clear the air, but soon saw he'd never forgive Nauni for simply being born.

Before, Kundan had always taken Nauni's side when he clashed with her sons, keeping them in check. But now, the tables had turned. Jai Gopal, the new judge in town, laid down the law in favour of his boys. When he beat Nauni, and the boy crept to Kundan with tear-filled eyes, she'd whisk him away to a quiet corner, her heart breaking as she wept until Nauni, in his innocence, comforted her. The colder Jai Gopal grew, the tighter Kundan held her brother.

Jai Gopal's temper flared at the sound of Nauni's voice or cries. If the boy spoke while he slept, it was like pouring oil on a fire. After Jai Gopal retired for the night, Kundan would carry Nauni to the rooftop, sing lullabies under the stars, and pat him to sleep. Sometimes, this sparked harsh words from her husband.

During Durga Puja, he dressed his sons in silken finery but left Nauni with not even a stitch of new cloth. Kundan's heart bled at this cruelty, but she was powerless. Nauni and she were now two peas in a pod, their bond unbreakable. Her respect for Jai Gopal withered day by day, replaced by suspicion. She never left Nauni alone with him, her trust in her husband hanging by a thread. Jai Gopal, in turn, saw Kundan as a snake in the grass, blaming her for standing in the way of his grand ambitions. The love they once shared was now a riddle she couldn't unravel.

4

On Bhaiya Dooj, Kundan fasted for Nauni's well-being, her heart full. She'd prepared a pink silk coat, a blue-bordered dhoti, and a gold silk scarf for him. She bathed him, dressed him, and marked his brow with a tika of curd and rice, as custom dictated. Nauni pranced about the village, a burst of colour. Tara, never one to mince words, arrived with gossip hot off the press.

"Behen!" she stormed, "What game are you playing? You're showering Nauni with love, but your household's out for his blood. You're handing him poison in a golden cup!"

Kundan's eyes flashed. "Tara, hold your horses! Don't spout such nonsense on a day like this!"

"I'm not spinning yarns," Tara shot back. "The village is buzzing. You're paving a thorny path for the boy who's your ticket to happiness. Your nephew Khurud Gopal snatched the Sheikhpura land for a song—eight annas! And there's more scheming afoot. Mark my words, ill-gotten gains never sit well. The heavens are watching!"

Kundan broke down, her tears flowing like a river. When Jai Gopal returned, she confronted him.

He shrugged, cool as a cucumber. "I didn't want you to get wind of this. I was played for a fool myself. I entrusted Sheikhpura to Khurud, but he skipped the land revenue, and when it went to auction, he snapped it up in his own name. I only found out yesterday."

"Then take it to court!" Kundan urged.

"No use crying over spilled milk," Jai Gopal replied. "Besides, suing my own nephew? The village would have a field day laughing at me."

Kundan wasn't buying it. She saw through his smoke and mirrors—plots to rob Nauni blind. Her mind reeled. How could a simple woman navigate such treachery? How could she shield Nauni? Was there no one to lend a hand? She resolved to take her case to the collector, or even the Viceroy himself, come what may.

5

Days later, Nauni fell ill, caught in the grip of monsoon malaria. For three days, his fever raged, his eyes shut tight. The village vaidya came twice daily, but his remedies were like water off a duck's back. On the fourth day, Kundan pleaded with Jai Gopal, "Please fetch Sarda Babu from town. Nauni's burning up."

Jai Gopal, cold as ice, replied, "Who knows if Sarda Babu's even there? Stick with the vaidya's medicine a bit longer."

"His medicines are useless, and Nauni's getting worse!" she cried.

"It's only been three days," he said, brushing her off.

"Just look at him—he's yellow as a lemon!"

"Fine, I'll go tomorrow," he grumbled.

Jai Gopal left at dawn but returned at night, claiming the doctor was off in some village. Kundan didn't believe a word. That night, with the household asleep, she scooped up Nauni, trudged to the Sarad riverbank, hired a boat, and reached Sarda Babu's house at midnight. The family doctor recognized her at once, his heart sinking at her plight. He cleared two rooms, arranged a maid, and began Nauni's treatment.

At dawn, Jai Gopal stormed in, fit to be tied. "If you know what's good for you, you'll come home now!" he barked.

Kundan stood her ground. "I'm not budging, even if you cut me to ribbons."

"Fine! Don't you dare set foot in my house again!" he roared.

"Your house?" Kundan shot back. "That house belongs to my brother!"

Jai Gopal clenched his fists and left in a huff, promptly signing the house and orchard over to his son. The next day, he had the deeds registered.

Kundan stayed at the doctor's for a week as Nauni recuperated. She planned to stay longer, but news of the property transfer hit like a ton of bricks. A fortune worth fifteen hundred to two thousand rupees was slipping through her fingers. In that moment, her own son felt like a stranger, while Nauni was dearer than life itself.

6

The collector sahib was on his autumn tour, camped in Sheikhpura. That morning, he sat before his tent, surrounded by zamindars and village bigwigs paying their respects. Jai Gopal, decked out in a black alpaca coat and white turban, basked in the sahib's favour, even scoring a chair—a feather in his cap. He puffed up with pride, thinking, "Could anyone else hit the jackpot like this?" The local banias and labourers gaped at his honour, wishing their rivals could see him shining.

Suddenly, a woman draped in a shawl, clutching a five-year-old boy, appeared. The sahib asked, "Who are you?"

Kundan replied, "Huzoor, I'm a wretched woman from this village, here with a plea."

"Come to the courtroom later," he said.

"No, huzoor, my grievance must be aired here."

Jai Gopal's face paled; he glared at Kundan like a cornered beast. If not for the sahib, he'd have flown off the handle.

Kundan began, "Huzoor, this boy is my brother, Nauni. I'm the daughter of Babu Madhusudan, who passed two years ago. This babu sahib before you is my husband. My father named him Nauni's guardian and left him two annas of the estate to live on. But he's turned coat, scheming to snatch my brother's property for himself and his sons. I'm his wife, bound by his rule, unable to speak out. Under your watch, an orphan risks ruin. I've come to you, entrusting Nauni to your care. Please ensure justice is done."

Her words hung heavy. Jai Gopal, itching to interrupt, held back under the sahib's stern gaze.

"Is this true?" the sahib asked him.

Jai Gopal stammered, "Huzoor, what can I say? Babu Madhusudan left debts. Some land was mortgaged to clear them."

"Bring me the papers," the sahib ordered.

"Certainly, huzoor," Jai Gopal replied, sweating bullets.

To Kundan, the sahib said, "You may go. I'll see to it that your brother's property is safe. Your courage does you credit."

Kundan bowed low, kissed the ground, and placed Nauni before the sahib. The boy whimpered, but the sahib gifted him a tennis ball to soothe him. When Kundan turned to leave, the sahib asked, "Why leave him? Are you afraid?"

"Huzoor, he's in your hands now. He can't stay with me."

"And you? Where will you go?"

"With my husband," she replied, kissing Nauni goodbye, tears streaming.

A week later, the estate was placed under the Court of Wards, and a tutor was appointed for Nauni. Jai Gopal slunk back to Assam. Kundan vanished from sight. Word spread she'd caught cholera the day she returned from the camp, but the villagers, led by plain-speaking Tara, wouldn't buy it. "Cholera? Hogwash!" Tara declared. "Kundan was done in by foul play."

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: What event caused Jai Gopal's carefree life to "go up in flames," and how did it impact his relationship with his family?

Question 2: How does Kundan's love for Nauri evolve throughout the story, and what role does the idiom "two peas in a pod" play in illustrating their bond?

Question 3: How does the idiom "sowing thorns" used by Tara reflect the central conflict between Kundan's loyalty to her brother and her husband's actions?

Question 4: Why does Kundan decide to take Nauri to the collector sahib, and how does the idiom "come hell or high water" illustrate her determination in this decision?

Question 5: At the end of the story, Tara claims Kundan's death by cholera is "hogwash." What does this suggest about the villagers' perspective on Kundan's fate, and what alternative explanation might they believe?

Answers

Answer 1: The birth of Nauri Chandra, Kundan's brother, at the age of sixty to Jai Gopal's father-in-law caused Jai Gopal's carefree life to "go up in flames" by shattering his expectation of inheriting his father-in-law's fortune of twenty thousand rupees annually. This event forced Jai Gopal to seek work in a tea factory in Assam, marking the first time he lived apart from his family. The separation strained his relationship with Kundan, as his letters home dwindled from weekly to barely monthly, reflecting how ambition replaced love, while Kundan's devotion grew stronger, as described by the idiom "absence makes the heart grow fonder."

Answer 2: Initially, Kundan resents Nauri, cursing his birth for ruining her and Jai Gopal's prospects. However, after her mother's death and entrusting Nauri to her care, Kundan's hatred melts, and she develops a deep maternal affection for him, prioritizing him over her own sons. The idiom "two peas in a pod" captures their inseparable bond by the story's later stages, emphasizing how Nauri becomes the centre of her world, sharing an emotional unity where Kundan feels his pain as her own and protects him fiercely against Jai Gopal's cruelty.

Answer 3: The idiom “sowing thorns,” spoken by Tara, reflects the central conflict by illustrating how Jai Gopal’s schemes, such as allowing his nephew Khurud to seize Nauni’s land, create a painful and treacherous path for Nauni’s future. Tara’s warning highlights Kundan’s internal struggle: her loyalty to Nauni, whom she loves as her own, clashes with her husband’s efforts to strip Nauni of his inheritance. This conflict drives Kundan to confront Jai Gopal and ultimately take Nauni’s case to the collector, prioritizing her brother’s welfare over her marital duties.

Answer 4: Kundan takes Nauni to the collector sahib to seek justice against Jai Gopal’s schemes to transfer Nauni’s property to himself and his sons, as revealed by Tara’s warning about the Sheikhpura land and the house and orchard. Feeling powerless as a woman in a patriarchal household, she sees the collector as her last hope to protect Nauni’s rights. The idiom “come hell or high water” illustrates her unyielding determination, showing that despite the risks—defying her husband, facing public scrutiny, and potential repercussions—she is resolute in ensuring Nauni’s future, even at great personal cost.

Answer 5: Tara’s claim that Kundan’s death by cholera is “hogwash” suggests that the villagers, led by the outspoken Tara, are sceptical of the official story and suspect foul play, likely implicating Jai Gopal or his allies. This reflects their distrust of Jai Gopal, given his history of scheming against Nauni and his harsh treatment of Kundan. The villagers might believe that Kundan was harmed or driven to her death due to the emotional and social toll of her defiance, possibly hinting at a deliberate act by Jai Gopal to remove her as an obstacle, aligning with his pattern of prioritizing wealth over family.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
72

a/an and the

A Study this example:

I had **a sandwich** and **an apple** for lunch.

The sandwich wasn't very good, but **the apple** was nice.



Joe says '**a** sandwich', '**an** apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

Joe now says '**the** sandwich', '**the** apple' because we know which sandwich and which apple he means – **the** sandwich and **the** apple he had for lunch.

Compare **a** and **the** in these examples:

- A man** and **a woman** were sitting opposite me. **The man** was American, but I think **the woman** was British.
- When we were on holiday, we stayed at **a hotel**. Sometimes we ate at **the hotel** and sometimes we went to **a restaurant**.

B We use **the** when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compare **a/an** and **the**:

- Tim sat down on **a chair**. (maybe one of many chairs in the room)
- Tim sat down on **the chair nearest the door**. (a specific chair)
- Do you have **a car**? (not a specific car)
- I cleaned **the car** yesterday. (= my car)

We use **a/an** when we say what kind of thing or person we mean. Compare:

- We stayed at **a very cheap hotel**. (a type of hotel)
- The hotel where we stayed** was very cheap. (a specific hotel)

C We use **the** when it is clear which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about **the light / the floor / the ceiling / the door / the carpet** etc.:

- Can you turn off **the light**, please? (= the light in this room)
- I took a taxi to **the station**. (= the station in that town)
- (*in a shop*) I'd like to speak to **the manager**, please. (= the manager of this shop)

We also say '(go to) **the bank / the post office**':

- I have to go to **the bank** and then I'm going to **the post office**.
(The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

and '(go to) **the doctor / the dentist**':

- Clare isn't well. She's gone to **the doctor**.
- I don't like going to **the dentist**.

Compare **the** and **a**:

- I have to go to **the bank** today.
Is there **a bank** near here?
- I don't like going to **the dentist**.
My sister is **a dentist**.

D We say 'once **a week** / three times **a day** / £1.50 **a kilo**' etc.:

- I go to the cinema about once **a month**.
- 'How much are those potatoes?' '£1.50 **a kilo**'
- Helen works eight hours **a day**, six days **a week**.