



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G73

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu

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

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1. Mother and Son

Adapted from R K Narayan

Ramu's mother waited till he was halfway through dinner before she brought up the topic of marriage, hoping to catch him off guard. "Ramu, it's high time you tied the knot," she said, her voice brimming with conviction. "My brother's daughter is nearly fourteen, a real diamond in the rough, and he's ready to offer a handsome dowry. I'm getting on in years, and I'd like to kick up my heels a bit, free from slaving over the stove. Who'll look after you if I'm gone? Marriage will turn your luck around—it's not the hand that holds the plough but the hand that holds the pot that brings in the harvest."

Ramu rolled his eyes, a faint smirk on his face. "Here you go, beating the same old drum again!" He brushed off her words, clearly not biting the bait. His amusement only fanned the flames of her frustration, so she laid out her arguments like cards on the table: she wasn't getting any younger, and Ramu's aimless ways were driving her up the wall. But tonight, she'd made up her mind—if he threw cold water on her plans again or sulked like a bear with a sore head, she'd wash her hands of him. No more meddling, even if he was about to walk into the lion's den.

Despite her resolve, his dismissive tone about her brother's daughter—mocking her "protruding tooth"—set her blood boiling. "This is the last time I'm opening this can of worms," she snapped. "If you want to sink or swim on your own, so be it. Even if I see you drowning, I won't lift a finger!"

Ramu brooded, picking at his food. He'd flunked his Intermediate exams four times, couldn't land a job to save his life, and now his mother was piling on the pressure to marry. Of all girls, his uncle's daughter? That tooth alone was enough to scare the pants off any man. He dreamed of a bride like Rezia, the glamorous Hindi film star, not some plain Jane. Life felt like a dead end, and Ramu was perpetually down in the dumps, loafing in the free reading room or dozing over old newspapers.

He sat before his dining leaf, his face like a storm cloud. His mother glared. "I can't stand that long face at the table. Even a widow fresh out of mourning would look more chipper!"

“You’re just sore because I won’t marry your brother’s daughter,” Ramu shot back.

“Sore? I’m not losing sleep over it!” she retorted. “She’s a catch and will land a fine husband.” His sullenness was the last straw. She ranted, her words sharp as knives, until Ramu cut in, “Can you hold your horses and let me eat in peace?”

“My days are numbered,” she said, her voice trembling. “You’ll get your peace soon enough, my boy, when I’m six feet under.”

“Peace? With this food?” Ramu muttered.

That did it. “If you’re so high and mighty, get a job and bring home the bacon!” she screamed. “Don’t bark orders when you’re flat broke!”

Dinner ended, and Ramu slipped on his sandals. “Where are you off to?” his mother demanded.

“Just out,” he replied, leaving the street door ajar, as if he hadn’t a care in the world.

Her chores done—kitchen scrubbed, vessels gleaming, broom tucked away—she fumed at Ramu’s carelessness. Leaving the door open? It was like spitting in the face of her hard work. She popped a clove, cardamom, and areca nut into her mouth, chewing to calm her nerves. Shutting the door without bolting it, she lay down, muttering “Sita Rama” to keep her worries at bay. But her thoughts drifted to Ramu. Where had he gone? Her harsh words at dinner gnawed at her. Had she pushed him over the edge? She’d always had a tongue like a whip, and now she feared it had driven him to do something drastic. Guilt crept in—she’d even blamed her sharp tongue for her husband’s early death.

Somewhere, a gong struck one. She bolted upright, calling, “Ramu, Ramu!” No answer. Her mind raced, painting a grim picture: Ramu’s body floating in Kukanahalli Tank, his striped shirt and dhoti sodden, sandals abandoned on the steps, his face bloated beyond recognition. She let out a scream, leapt from the pyol, and ran down Old Agrahar Street. The deserted street, lit by flickering electric lights, echoed with a distant tonga driver’s song and a constable’s whistle. She stopped, gasping, trying to talk herself out of the nightmare. Maybe he was at the drama, which ran till the wee hours. Chanting “Sita Rama,” she fought to keep the image of the tank at bay.

Sleep came in fits and starts, each gong jolt waking her. By six, tears streaming, she set off for Kukanahalli Tank, avoiding the water's edge. There, on a bench by the bund, was Ramu, fast asleep. Her heart leapt to her throat—was he alive? She shook him, crying, "Ramu!"

He stirred, rubbing his eyes. "Mother? What are you doing here?"

"What a place to catch forty winks!" she scolded, relief flooding her.

"I just dozed off," he said, yawning.

"Come home," she ordered, and he followed. As he stepped toward the tank to wash, she grabbed his arm. "No, don't go near the water!" Her voice was fierce, her fear still raw from the night's terrors. Ramu obeyed, puzzled, as they headed home together.

2. Comprehension

Question 1: What does Ramu's mother mean when she says it's "high time" Ramu tied the knot?

Question 2: Why does Ramu's mother say she might "wash her hands of him" if he refuses her marriage suggestion?

Question 3: What does Ramu mean when he accuses his mother of "beating the same old drum"?

Question 4: Why does Ramu's mother imagine him "six feet under" during the night?

Question 5: What does the phrase "catch forty winks" refer to when Ramu's mother finds him at Kukanahalli Tank?

Answers

Answer 1: She means that it is long overdue for Ramu to get married, emphasizing the urgency of settling down.

Answer2: She threatens to stop interfering in his life and let him face the consequences of his actions alone if he continues to dismiss her plans.

Answer 3: He means that she is repeatedly bringing up the same topic of marriage, which he finds tiresome and repetitive.

Answer 4: She fears that her harsh words during dinner may have driven Ramu to commit suicide, leading her to imagine his death.

Answer 5: It refers to Ramu taking a short nap on the bench by the tank, which surprises his mother who feared he was in danger.

3. Idioms Used:

High time:

Usage: "It's high time you tied the knot."

Meaning: It's the right or overdue time to do something.

Tie the knot:

Usage: "It's high time you tied the knot."

Meaning: To get married.

Diamond in the rough:

Usage: "My brother's daughter is nearly fourteen, a real diamond in the rough."

Meaning: Someone with great potential but lacking refinement or polish.

Kick up my heels:

Usage: "I'd like to kick up my heels a bit, free from slaving over the stove."

Meaning: To relax, have fun, or enjoy oneself freely.

Turn your luck around:

Usage: "Marriage will turn your luck around."

Meaning: To change one's fortunes for the better.

Beating the same old drum:

Usage: "Here you go, beating the same old drum again!"

Meaning: Repeating the same argument or topic persistently.

Bite the bait:

Usage: "He brushed off her words, clearly not biting the bait."

Meaning: To fall for or accept a tempting offer or persuasion.

Fan the flames:

Usage: "His amusement only fanned the flames of her frustration."

Meaning: To intensify or worsen a situation, especially emotions like anger.

Lay out like cards on the table:

Usage: "She laid out her arguments like cards on the table."

Meaning: To present something openly and clearly.

Driving up the wall:

Usage: "Ramu's aimless ways were driving her up the wall."

Meaning: To cause frustration or irritation.

Throw cold water on:

Usage: "If he threw cold water on her plans again..."

Meaning: To discourage or dampen enthusiasm for an idea or plan.

Bear with a sore head:

Usage: "Sulked like a bear with a sore head."

Meaning: To be in a bad mood or irritable.

Wash her hands of:

Usage: "She'd wash her hands of him."

Meaning: To abandon responsibility for or involvement with someone or something.

Walk into the lion's den:

Usage: "Even if he was about to walk into the lion's den."

Meaning: To enter a dangerous or risky situation.

Set her blood boiling:

Usage: "His dismissive tone... set her blood boiling."

Meaning: To make someone extremely angry.

Open this can of worms:

Usage: "This is the last time I'm opening this can of worms."

Meaning: To bring up a complicated or problematic issue that causes trouble.

Sink or swim:

Usage: "If you want to sink or swim on your own, so be it."

Meaning: To succeed or fail based on one's own efforts without help.

Lift a finger:

Usage: "I won't lift a finger!"

Meaning: To make any effort to help or intervene.

Scare the pants off:

Usage: "That tooth alone was enough to scare the pants off any man."

Meaning: To frighten someone greatly.

Down in the dumps:

Usage: "Ramu was perpetually down in the dumps."

Meaning: Feeling depressed or sad.

The last straw:

Usage: "His sullenness was the last straw."

Meaning: The final event in a series that makes a situation intolerable.

Hold your horses:

Usage: "Can you hold your horses and let me eat in peace?"

Meaning: To slow down or be patient.

Six feet under:

Usage: "When I'm six feet under."

Meaning: Dead and buried.

Bring home the bacon:

Usage: "Get a job and bring home the bacon!"

Meaning: To earn money to support the household.

Not lose sleep over:

Usage: "I'm not losing sleep over it!"

Meaning: To not be worried or concerned about something.

Spit in the face of:

Usage: "It was like spitting in the face of her hard work."

Meaning: To show disrespect or disregard for someone's efforts.

Tongue like a whip:

Usage: "She'd always had a tongue like a whip."

Meaning: A sharp or harsh way of speaking.

Push over the edge:

Usage: “Had she pushed him over the edge?”

Meaning: To drive someone to an extreme emotional or mental state, often leading to drastic action.

Catch forty winks:

Usage: “What a place to catch forty winks!”

Meaning: To take a short nap or sleep briefly.

Heart leapt to her throat:

Usage: “Her heart leapt to her throat—was he alive?”

Meaning: To feel sudden intense fear or anxiety.

4. Grammar Page

Unit
73

the 1

A

We use **the** when there is only one of something:

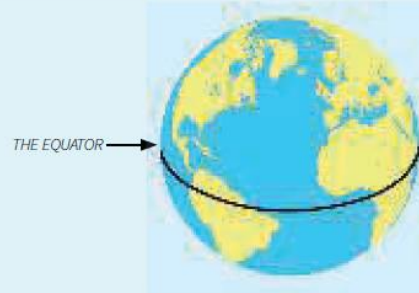
- Have you ever crossed **the equator**? (there is only one equator)
- Our apartment is on **the tenth floor**.
- Buenos Aires is **the capital of Argentina**.
- I'm going away at **the end of this month**.

We use **the** + *superlative* (**best, oldest** etc.):

- What's **the longest river in Europe**?

Compare **the** and **a/an** (see also Units 71–72):

- The sun** is a star. (= one of many stars)
- The hotel** where we stayed was a very old hotel.
- We live in **an apartment** on **the tenth floor**.
- What's **the best way** to learn a language?



B

We say '**the same**':

- Your sweater is **the same** colour as mine. (*not* is same colour)
- 'Are these keys **the same**?' 'No, they're different.'

C

We say: **the world** **the universe** **the sun** **the moon** **the earth**
the sky **the sea** **the ground** **the country** (= not a town)

- I love to look at the stars in **the sky**. (*not* in sky)
- Do you live in a town or in **the country**?
- The earth** goes round **the sun**, and **the moon** goes round **the earth**.

We also use **Earth** (without **the**) when we think of it as a planet in space (like **Mars, Jupiter** etc.).

- Which is the planet nearest **Earth**?

We say **space** (without **the**) when we mean 'space in the universe'. Compare:

- There are millions of stars **in space**. (*not* in the space)
- I tried to park my car, but **the space** was too small.

D

We say:
(go to) **the cinema, the theatre**

- I go to **the cinema** a lot, but I haven't been to **the theatre** for ages.

TV / television (without **the**), but **the radio**

- I watch **TV** a lot, but I don't listen to **the radio** much.

but Can you turn off **the television**, please? (**the television** = the TV set)

the internet

- The internet** has changed the way we live.

E

We usually say **breakfast/lunch/dinner** (without **the**):

- What did you have for **breakfast**?
- We had **lunch** in a very nice restaurant.

But we say '**a big lunch**', '**a wonderful dinner**', '**an early breakfast**' etc.

- We had **a very nice lunch**. (*not* We had very nice lunch)

F

We say: **size 43, platform 5** etc. (without **the**)

- Our train leaves from **platform 5**. (*not* the platform 5)
- Do you have these shoes in **size 43**? (*not* the size 43)

In the same way, we say: **room 126, page 29, vitamin A, section B** etc.