



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F69

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1. The Fear of Dishonour

Adapted from Premchand

Chapter 1: A Troubled Heart

In a beautifully furnished room in Calcutta, a delicate woman sat, her elegant clothes contrasting with the worry etched on her face. Her name was Sarla, the wife of Babu Dhiren Choudhary. Though she appeared lost in thought, her anxiety was clear. Her eyes darted toward the window, as if expecting someone to arrive at any moment.

Dhiren was a successful barrister, known for his gentle and generous nature. Unlike many in Calcutta's fashionable society, he preferred to keep his own counsel, avoiding horse races, parties, and political gatherings. His passion lay in studying legal cases, spending hours poring over documents. He had a small circle of friends, and their conversations were warm and sincere, free from the superficial politeness common in high society. Dhiren had no proclivity for modern trends or politics. While the city buzzed with political news, he only glanced at newspapers, uninterested in the latest debates.

Sarla, however, was different. Educated in a Western style, she was deeply invested in India's political and economic affairs. She was a staunch advocate for women's rights and had once argued fiercely with a college principal who made a derogatory remark about Indian women. Despite her modern ideas, Sarla's heart was full of warmth, embodying the grace of a traditional Indian woman.

As she sat, her mind wrestled with a troubling thought: Could Dhiren really be so indifferent to politics? The idea seemed impossible. She suspected someone had spread a clandestine lie about him. "It's just not possible," she whispered to herself, her heart heavy with doubt.

Chapter 2: A Shocking Accusation

Earlier that day, the police superintendent, accompanied by constables, had searched Dhiren's home. On Tuesday at four in the afternoon, a young Bengali man had thrown a bomb at a British officer on Harrison Road. The incident sent shockwaves through Calcutta, prompting widespread raids. Most shockingly, Dhiren was accused of helping the attacker. The news stunned everyone who knew him.

“Dhiren Babu? Impossible!” friends exclaimed. His calm, peace-loving nature made the accusation unthinkable. He was too absorbed in his work to be involved in such a violent act. Yet, an informer claimed to have seen Dhiren pass the bomb to the attacker on Harrison Road that Tuesday afternoon. Based on this statement, the police had searched every corner of his home—trunks, almirahs, papers, and documents. Despite their thorough efforts, they found no evidence to incriminate him. Still, the superintendent took Dhiren into custody.

Sarla was distraught, her mind racing. “The police have made a mistake,” she thought. “Dhiren must have been in court at four on Tuesday. The court records will prove it. He’ll be home soon, once this is cleared up.” Her heart lightened at the thought, and she began to feel hopeful.

Just then, a car pulled up at the gate. Sarla’s heart leapt. She ran downstairs, her face bright with anticipation. But it was not Dhiren. Instead, Jyotindro Sen, a close friend, stepped out of the car. Sarla’s excitement faded.

“Where’s Dhiren?” she asked, her voice trembling. “The police have made a terrible mistake! You know he was in court on Tuesday evening. Has the matter been resolved? When will he be back?”

Jyotindro’s face was grave, filled with concern. “Sarla,” he said softly, “Dhiren may not come home tonight. His release might take time. Perhaps you should visit him.”

Sarla’s heart sank. “Why do you look so worried, Jyotin? Tell me everything, honestly. Don’t beat around the bush.”

Jyotindro sighed. “Dhiren wasn’t in court on Tuesday evening.”

Sarla gasped. “Not in court? Then where was he?”

“He won’t say,” Jyotindro replied, his voice heavy.

“Why not? Is he his own worst enemy?” Sarla asked, her voice rising in frustration.

Jyotindro explained, “We know he was in court until two o’clock. After that, he took a cab somewhere, but he refuses to say where he was between three and six. We’ve tried to convince him to speak, but it’s like talking to a brick wall. He says he doesn’t care if he’s exiled or imprisoned. He’s reticent about his whereabouts that evening.”

Sarla clutched her head in despair. “This is unbelievable. Dhiren involved in a conspiracy? I won’t believe it, even if he confesses! Why won’t he tell the truth? Haven’t you advised him?”

“We’ve tried,” Jyotindro said. “For hours, we urged him to speak, but he won’t listen. He knows the consequences of staying silent, yet he’s willing to suffer rather than reveal where he was. That’s why I’m here. Do you know where he might have gone?”

Sarla shook her head. “He never goes anywhere unusual. I assumed he was in court. I can’t understand why he’s keeping quiet. Can you take me to him? He might open up to me. I’m sure he’ll spill the beans if I ask him.”

Jyotindro nodded. “That’s why I came. But it’s too late to arrange a meeting with the magistrate tonight. I’ll take you tomorrow. Keep your chin up, Sarla. Everything will be fine, God willing.”

Tears welled in Sarla’s eyes, but she held them back. “Thank you, Jyotin,” she said, grasping his hands. “I’ll never forget your kindness.”

Jyotindro left, his steps heavy with worry. Sarla’s hope had faded, leaving her heart heavy with vexation.

Chapter 3: A Painful Discovery

By ten o’clock that night, Sarla hadn’t eaten a bite. She couldn’t bring herself to swallow anything. Lying in bed, sleep escaped her. She picked up a newspaper but couldn’t focus, her eyes fixed on the window. She paced the room, tempted to rush to Dhiren and demand answers. “Would the magistrate refuse me permission to see him?” she wondered. “What is Dhiren doing now? Is he thinking of me? Why is he so heartless? Doesn’t he know how much this hurts me?”

Her gaze fell on Dhiren’s desk, cluttered with letters and papers. As she tidied them, a scrap of paper under the table caught her eye. She picked it up, intending to file it away, but a few scribbled words stopped her cold: Tuesday, four o’clock. Her heart raced. That was the exact time of the bombing. Could this be connected?

Sarla hesitated. She loved Dhiren deeply, but her modern education made her wary of reading his private letters. “Would he be angry?” she wondered. Yet, she felt certain the note held answers. “In a crisis like this, I have a right to know,” she told herself. “As his wife, I share his secrets.”

She read the letter. It was brief, but its words drained the strength from her body. She froze, the paper trembling in her hands. Her face paled as she stared at the wall, the contents of the letter blurring in her mind. After a long moment, clarity returned, and she sank into a chair with a sigh.

“So, this is why he’s silent,” she thought. The letter revealed Dhiren’s secret—a truth so shocking it left her numb. “This will clear his name,” she realized. “I could show it to the magistrate, and he’d be free. But what would happen to us afterward? Could we ever love each other again? He’s willing to suffer to keep this hidden. Can I stay silent and let him face punishment for a crime he didn’t commit?”

After agonizing thought, Sarla made her decision. Wrapping a shawl around her shoulders, she slipped out into the deserted streets. The city slept as she walked to a large bungalow where a light glowed in one window. Inside, a woman sat writing at a desk. She looked up, startled, as Sarla entered.

“Sarla? So late? Is Dhiren unwell?” the woman asked.

Sarla’s voice was steady. “Haven’t you heard? Dhiren’s been accused in the bombing. An informer claims he was there, passing the bomb at four on Tuesday. He denies it but won’t say where he was. I’ve come to ask you—where was he?”

The woman paled. “Tuesday at four? He was...” She stopped, then said softly, “Hasn’t he told you? He must have been in court.”

“No, he wasn’t,” Sarla said sharply. “He’s keeping quiet to protect someone’s honour. Don’t act innocent. I know everything.” She placed the letter on the desk.

The woman grabbed it, her eyes scanning the words. “I’m not afraid,” she said boldly. “Dhiren loves me. He’s loved me for years.”

Silence hung between them. Then Sarla spoke firmly. “If that’s true, why not save him? Show this letter to the magistrate, and he’ll be freed.”

Without another word, Sarla turned and left. Back home, dawn was breaking, but she hadn’t slept. She was no longer consumed by worry over Dhiren’s release. New, deeper fears gripped her heart.

Chapter 4: A Broken Bond

Sarla sat by the window, staring at the greenery outside, her mind adrift. “He’ll be home soon,” she thought. “But can I face him? Knowing he loves another, what claim do I have on him? My dreams, my love, my happiness—all tied to him. Where is my joy now?”

The hours crawled by. Sarla had always seen Dhiren as mild and reserved, his indifference a quirk she accepted. She thought he loved her quietly, buried in his legal work. Now she knew the truth: his heart belonged to another. The realization shattered her. Yet, despite the pain, she still loved him. Jealousy burned, but it was proof of her devotion.

After long reflection, she decided, "I must let him go. I've forced him to live a lie. He deserves to be free, to live happily. I'll find peace in his joy."

At ten, a car's sound broke her thoughts. Dhiren stepped out. Sarla's heart pounded, but she remained still, like a statue. He entered, smiling, and tried to embrace her.

"Were you worried?" he asked lightly.

She turned away, stepping back. Dhiren continued, "The police were foolish, but I'm home now. It was a living hell last night."

Sarla stared at him, his casual tone stinging. "How can he act as if nothing's happened?" she thought. Unable to hold back, she said bitterly, "Why are you here?"

Dhiren looked surprised. "Sarla, what do you mean? Where else would I go? You don't seem happy I'm back. What's wrong?"

"Have you seen her?" Sarla asked pointedly.

"Who? I don't understand," Dhiren said, frowning.

"Stop pretending," Sarla snapped. "I found the letter on your desk. I showed it to her. She must have given it to the magistrate, and that's why you're free. Don't lie to me. I won't stand in your way. You're free to live as you wish. I wish I'd known sooner, so you wouldn't have suffered in this suffocating charade."

Dhiren was speechless. His secret was out. "What a fool I was not to destroy that letter," he thought. He'd seen it at the magistrate's but couldn't recall how it got there. Now he understood.

"My love," he said, his voice soft with regret, "I'm so sorry. Can you forgive me? The magistrate saw the letter and released me without presenting it in court. It's still a secret. Please, for my sake, don't tell anyone. People love to stir the pot with scandals. If this gets out, it could ruin me. I swear I'll never see her again."

Sarla's eyes narrowed. "Why not? Don't you love her? You were willing to face exile to protect her honour. Has your love faded so quickly? Be honest. You're free to live your life. I won't be a thorn in your side."

Dhiren sat down, his face heavy with shame. "Sarla, this talk is pointless. I'm ashamed, truly. I promise I'll cut all ties with her. Don't hurt me with these words. I stayed silent to avoid disgrace. Rumours would have spread like wildfire. I'd rather face exile than humiliation."

"If your love is true, why fear society?" Sarla retorted. "You shouldn't care about disgrace if you're committed to her."

Dhiren shook his head. "Sarla, the fear of society is stronger than anything. If you expose this, my reputation will be ruined forever. I'll fall from grace in everyone's eyes. You're angry now, but when you calm down, you'll see things differently. Many women face such problems, but they stay hidden. I admit I love her, but don't you love me? If you do, for the sake of our love, forgive me. I promise this won't happen again."

Dhiren left the room, but Sarla sat, lost in thought. She realized that fragile threads hold society together. Love, honour, and secrets weave a complex web, and she was caught in it. Could she ameliorate the broken trust between them, or was their bond lost forever? She pondered, unsure of what her future held.

2. Comprehension Questions

Question 1: Who is the main character in the story, and what is her relationship to Dhiren Choudhary?

Question 2: Why is Dhiren accused by the police, and what specific incident leads to this accusation?

Question 3: What does Sarla initially believe about Dhiren's whereabouts on Tuesday at four o'clock?

Question 4: What does the word clandestine mean in the context of Sarla suspecting someone spread a lie about Dhiren?

Question 5: What idiom does Sarla use when she asks Jyotindro to tell her the truth directly?

Question 6: Why does Dhiren refuse to reveal where he was on Tuesday afternoon, according to Jyotindro?

Question 7: What does Sarla find on Dhiren's desk that causes her distress, and why is it significant?

Question 8: What does the idiom spill the beans mean in the context of Sarla's hope that Dhiren will reveal the truth to her?

Question 9: How does Sarla react when she confronts the woman at the bungalow, and what does she ask her to do?

Question 10: What does the word ameliorate imply in the context of Sarla wondering if she can repair the trust in her relationship with Dhiren

Answers

Answer 1: The main character is Sarla, who is the wife of Dhiren Choudhary.

Answer 2: Dhiren is accused of helping a young Bengali man who threw a bomb at a British officer on Harrison Road on Tuesday at four o'clock.

Answer 3: Sarla initially believes Dhiren was in court at four o'clock on Tuesday, as she thinks court records will prove his innocence.

Answer 4: In this context, clandestine means secret or hidden, referring to Sarla's suspicion that someone secretly spread a false rumour about Dhiren's involvement in the bombing.

Answer 5: Sarla uses the idiom beat around the bush, asking Jyotindro not to avoid speaking directly and to tell her the truth.

Answer 6: According to Jyotindro, Dhiren refuses to reveal his whereabouts because he is willing to face exile or imprisonment rather than disclose where he was, suggesting he is protecting someone or something.

Answer 7: Sarla finds a letter on Dhiren's desk with the words Tuesday, four o'clock. It is significant because it coincides with the time of the bombing and reveals a secret about Dhiren's whereabouts, causing her distress.

Answer 8: The idiom spill the beans means to reveal a secret. Sarla hopes Dhiren will tell her the truth about where he was on Tuesday when she speaks to him.

Answer 9: Sarla confronts the woman boldly, showing her the letter and accusing her of knowing Dhiren's secret. She asks the woman to show the letter to the magistrate to secure Dhiren's release.

Answer 10: In this context, ameliorate implies improving or making better. Sarla wonders if she can repair or improve the broken trust in her relationship with Dhiren after discovering his secret love for another woman.

3. Grammar Page



GRAMMAR STUDY: Reporting Various Types of Sentences

Each type of sentence takes different connectives and reporting verbs.

Assertive/statements → *Reporting verb: said + no object/ told + object*
Connective: that
Sentence structure: subject + verb + full stop

She said, "I live here."	She said that she lived there.
She said, "I do not live here."	She said that she did not live there.
He said to me, "I will help you."	He told me that he would help me.

Interrogative/questions → *Reporting verb: asked/wanted to know/enquired*
Connective: if/whether (yes/no) and WH word (WH)
Sentence structure: subject + verb + full stop

He asked, "Do you know this man?"	He asked me if I knew that man.
He asked her, "Will you help me?"	He asked her whether she would help him.
He asked, "What's the matter?"	He asked what the matter was.
He asked me, "What are you doing?"	He asked me what I was doing.

Imperatives/commands → *Reporting verb: told, requested, advised, asked, warned, begged, forbade, ordered, urged, reminded, etc.*
Connective: to
Sentence structure: to + verb + full stop

She said, "Go to your room."	She told me to go to my room.
The doctor said, "Walk a mile a day."	The doctor advised to walk a mile a day.
She said, "Buy some bread, please."	She asked me to buy some bread.
He ordered, "Stay where you are!"	He ordered them to stay where they were.

Optative → *Reporting verb: wished, blessed, prayed, cursed, bade, etc.*
Connective: that
Sentence structure: subject + verb + full stop

He said, "May you pass your exam!"	He wished me that I might pass my exam.
She said to him, "May you go to hell!"	She cursed him that he might go to hell.
They said, "May God help us!"	They prayed that God might help them.

Exclamatory → *Reporting verb: exclaimed with joy, exclaimed with sorrow, exclaimed with surprise, etc.*
Connective: that
Sentence structure: subject + verb + full stop