



# Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F76

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# New Dolls and Old

By Rabindranath Tagore

A man used to make dolls for children in the palace

Every year a fair of dolls took place in the palace yard. There, this man got the lion's share of the honour due to his craft.

When he was eighty years old, a new craftsman, named Kishenlall, came to the city. He was young and his style of making dolls was new. He left his dolls deliberately half-finished; and he painted them in an original way.

The new order said: "This is what we call boldness."

The old order replied: "Boldness! Why, this is simply audacity."

But new times create new tastes. The young princesses demanded: "We want those new-style dolls."

Their old attendants tried to dissuade them. But the princesses remained obstinate.

The old man's shop no longer attracted crowds. His rows of unsold dolls stood staring like rows of men waiting at the riverside for the dubious return of the ferry-boat.

A couple of years passed, and the old man's name was forgotten. Kishenlall became the chief purveyor of dolls at the palace.

The old man broke down in spirits. He found it hard even to make a living. His daughter, a married woman, called one day and said: "Come over to our home, Father, and pass your last days in comfort and happiness."

The old man's daughter used to be busy all day in housework. His son-in-law made earthen lamps and sold them in neighbouring towns.

As the old man was blind to the changes of times and tastes, he was also blind to the fact that his granddaughter was no longer a child, but a comely maiden of sixteen.

He sat in the cornfields to scare away the birds and dozed. His granddaughter came and flung her arms round his neck, making his bones quake with pleasure.

“Make a doll for me, Grandpa,” she said.

“But you won’t like my dolls, darling,” he replied.

“Who can do them better than you?”

“Why, Kishenlall.”

“Kishenlall! Nonsense,” she said.

They argued about it again and again. At last the old man brought his tools and a lump of clay, and put on his big round glasses.

“But, darling, the crows will eat away the corn ...”

“I shall scare them off, Grandpapa.”

Daylight began to hide. The tinkling of cow bells came from afar. The girl kept the crows at bay and the old man made his dolls.

One morning the old man was busy with his work when his daughter came striding up to him.

“Subhadra is old enough to do a bit of housework,” she said. “And you encourage her to waste her time. She should give up playing with dolls, shouldn’t she?”

“Why, yes,” the old man said quickly. “But I am making these dolls for children in the palace. I want to make some money with which to buy a wedding gift for Subhadra.”

His daughter was annoyed. “Who will buy your dolls?” she sneered.

The old man bent his head. But Subhadra shook her curls and said: “I’ll see if they will buy Grandpapa’s dolls or not.”

Two days later, Subhadra gave a gold coin to her mother. “The price for Grandpapa’s dolls,” she explained.

Her mother in surprise asked: “Where did you get it?” “At the palace.”

The old man laughed happily and said: “There you are! And if only I had better sight and my hands didn’t tremble so ...”

Mother was delighted.

“Sixteen of such coins will make a gold chain for Subhadra's neck,” she said.

The old man nodded: “Don’t worry. She will have it soon.”

Subhadra clung to his arms and whispered: “Grand- papa, no one will have to worry finding a bridegroom for me.”

The old man laughed and wiped away a tear from his eye.

He seemed to have become young again. Sitting in the shade of a tree, he made dolls while Subhadra scared away the crows and the tinkling of cow bells came from afar.

One by one sixteen gold coins were procured and the necklace was bought.

Mother said: “Only the bridegroom is yet to come.” Subhadra whispered in the old man’s ear: “Grandpapa, the bridegroom is ready.”

The old man asked: "Where did you find him, darling?"

Subhadra replied: "When I went to the palace for the first time, the doorkeeper asked me, "What do you want?" I said I wanted to sell those dolls to the princesses. He told me those dolls wouldn't do, and he wouldn't let me go in. I was coming back in tears when a man stopped me and said, 'Let me change their dress a little and they are sure to sell.' If you happen to like that man, Grandpapa, I shall be so glad to marry him."

"Where is he now?"

"Down there — under the pipal tree."

The stranger stepped into the room.

The old man gazed at him and exclaimed: "Ah, but isn't that Kishenlall?"

Kishenlall touched the old man's feet. "Yes, that is my name," he said.

The old man took him in his arms. "Before, you robbed me of my clay dolls, and today you are robbing me of the doll of my heart!"

Subhadra flung her arms round the old man's neck and whispered: "Yes, Grandpapa, but he is taking you with me as part of the bargain."

### **Questions:**

Question 1: What did the old man do for a living in the palace?

Question 2: Who was the new craftsman that came to the city, and what was different about his dolls?

Question 3: Why did the young princesses want the new-style dolls?

Question 4: What happened to the old man's business after the new craftsman became popular?

Question 5: Where did the old man go to live after his business failed?

Question 6: Who asked the old man to make a doll, and what did the old man say at first?

Question 7: What job did the old man do in the cornfields, and who helped him there?

Question 8: Why did the old man start making dolls again, according to what he told his daughter?

Question 9: How did Subhadra get money for her grandfather's dolls?

Question 10: Who turned out to be the young man that Subhadra wanted to marry, and what did the old man say about him?

### **Answers**

Answer 1: He made dolls for children in the palace.

Answer 2: The new craftsman was named Kishenlall. His dolls were deliberately half-finished and painted in an original, new way.

Answer 3: Because new times created new tastes, and the princesses liked the bold, modern style of the new dolls.

Answer 4: His shop no longer attracted crowds, his dolls remained unsold, and his name was eventually forgotten.

Answer 5: He went to live with his married daughter and her family.

Answer 6: His granddaughter Subhadra asked him to make a doll. At first, he replied that she wouldn't like his old-style dolls and that Kishenlall could do them better.

Answer 7: He sat in the cornfields to scare away the birds (and often dozed). His granddaughter Subhadra helped by scaring off the crows so he could work on the dolls.

Answer 8: He said he was making the dolls to sell to children in the palace so he could earn money to buy a wedding gift (a gold chain/necklace) for Subhadra.

Answer 9: She took her grandfather's dolls to the palace and sold them to the princesses (after someone helped improve their dress slightly).

Answer 10: The young man was Kishenlall. The old man said, "Before, you robbed me of my clay dolls, and today you are robbing me of the doll of my heart!" (meaning Subhadra).

### **Vocabulary Questions:**

Question 1: What does the phrase "lion's share" mean in the sentence: "There, this man got the lion's share of the honour due to his craft"?

Question 2: In the dialogue "The old order replied: 'Boldness! Why, this is simply audacity,'" what does "audacity" mean?

Question 3: What does "comely" mean when the story describes Subhadra as "a comely maiden of sixteen"?

Question 4: In the sentence "His rows of unsold dolls stood staring like rows of men waiting at the riverside for the dubious return of the ferry-boat," what does "dubious" mean?

Question 5: What does "purveyor" mean in the sentence: "Kishenlall became the chief purveyor of dolls at the palace"?

**Vocabulary Answers:**

Answer 1: "Lion's share" means the largest or greatest part/portion of something — here, the old man received most of the honour and attention at the doll fair because of his skill.

Answer 2: "Audacity" means bold or daring behaviour that is considered rude, disrespectful, or overly impudent — the old people view Kishenlall's half-finished style as not just courageous ("boldness") but cheeky or improperly forward.

Answer 3: "Comely" means attractive, pretty, or pleasing in appearance (especially in a gentle, modest way) — it describes Subhadra as a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl.

Answer 4: "Dubious" means doubtful, uncertain, or questionable — the return of the ferry-boat is not guaranteed or reliable, just as the old man's dolls have little hope of being sold.

Answer 5: "Purveyor" means a supplier or provider of goods — Kishenlall became the main person who supplied or sold dolls to the palace.