



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F79

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A Wrong Man in Workers' Paradise

By Rabindranath Tagore

The man never believed in utility. Having had no useful work to do, he indulged in mad whims. He made little pieces of sculpture—men, women and castles, quaint earthen things dotted over with sea-shells. He painted. Thus he wasted his time on all that was useless and unnecessary. People laughed at him. Sometimes he would vow to shake off his mad whims; but his mad whims would keep clinging to his mind.

Some boys never ply their books and yet pass their examinations. A similar thing happened to this man. He spent all his life in unnecessary work in the planet, Earth; yet, after his death, the gates of the heavens flung open for him.

But the Moving Finger writes even in the heavens. So it came to pass that the aerial messenger who took charge of the man made a mistake and found a place for him in Workers' Paradise.

In this paradise you will find everything except leisure.

Here, men say: "God! We haven't a moment to spare." Women whisper: "Let's hurry on, dear, time's a-flying." All exclaim: "Time is precious." "We are always having our hands full; we are making use of every single minute," they sigh complainingly, and yet those very words make them feel happy and exulted.

But this newcomer who had passed all his life in the planet, Earth, without any employment did not fit in with the scheme of things in Workers' Paradise. He lounged in the streets absent-mindedly, and jostled with hurrying men. He lay down in green meadows and was taken to task by busy farmers. He was always in the way of others.

A hustling, active girl went every day to a silent torrent (silent, for in the Workers' Paradise even a torrent did not waste its energy by singing) to fill her pitcher with water.

The girl's movement on the road was like the rapid movement of a skilled hand on the strings of a guitar. Her hair was carelessly done; a few inquisitive wisps flew on to her white forehead to peep at the dark wonder of her eye.

The unemployed man was standing by the fountain, motionless. As a princess sees a lonely beggar through her window and is filled with pity, so the busy girl of Heaven saw the unemployed man and was filled with pity.

"A—ha," she said, "you haven't any work in hand, have you?"

The man sighed: "Work! I haven't a moment to spare for work."

The girl did not understand his words; so she said: "I may manage to spare some work for you, if you like."

The man replied: "Girl-of-the-silent-torrent, all this time I have been waiting here only to take some work from your hands."

She asked: "What sort of work would you like?"- He said: "Girl-of-the-silent-torrent, couldn't you give me one of your pitchers—one which you could spare?" She asked: "A pitcher? Perhaps you should like to draw water from the torrent? "

He replied; "No, I will draw pictures and your pitcher." The girl became annoyed and said: "I have no time to waste on such as you. I am going 52 and away she went.

But how could a busy person get the better of one who had nothing to do? Every day they met, and every day he said to her: "Girl-of-the-silent-torrent, give me one of your pitchers; I will draw pictures on it."

At last she had to give way, and hand him over one of her pitchers.

The man began to paint on it; he drew line after line, he put colour after colour.

When he had finished, the girl held up the pitcher and stared at its side with eyes filled with wonder. Then, brows drawn into an arch, she asked: "What do they mean—all these lines and all these colours? And what is their purpose? "

The man laughed: " Nothing: A picture never has any meaning and it never serves any purpose."

The girl went away with her pitcher. At home, away from prying eyes, she held it in the light, turned it round and round and scanned the painting from all angles. At night she left her bed, lighted a lamp and scanned it again in silence and wonder. For the first time in her life she had seen something that had no meaning and no purpose at all I When she set out for the torrent, next day, her hurrying feet were a little less hurrying than before. For in her mind thoughts had arisen—thoughts that had no meaning and no purpose at all!

She saw the unemployed man standing by the torrent, and she asked confusedly: "But what—what do you want of me?"

He said: "Only some more work from your hands." "And what sort of work would you like?"

"Let me weave a coloured ribbon for your hair, if you will."

"And what for?"

"Nothing."

Ribbons were made—gleaming with colours. The busy girl of Workers' Paradise had now to spend a long time, every day, in tying the coloured ribbon round her hair ; the minutes slid by, unutilized ; much work was let unfinished.

In Workers' Paradise work had, of late, begun to suffer. Many persons who had been active before were now idle, wasting their precious moments in unnecessary things such as painting and sculpture.

The elders became anxious. A meeting was called. All agreed that such a thing had so far been unknown in the history of Workers' Paradise.

The aerial messenger hurried in, bowed before the elders, and made a confession.

"I brought a wrong man in this Paradise," he said: "It is all due to him."

The man was summoned. He came in. The elders saw his fantastic dress, his quaint brushes, his pile of paintings, and they realized at once that he was not the right sort for Workers' Paradise.

Stiffly the president said: "This is no place for the like of you. Therefore you will have to leave—at once."

The man sighed in great relief, and gathered up his brush and paints. But as he was about to leave, the girl- of-the-silent-torrent came up tripping and said: "Wait a moment; for me, too, will go with you."

The elders gasped in surprise. For never before had a thing like this happened in Workers' Paradise—a thing that had no meaning and no purpose at all.

Questions:

Question 1: What kind of activities did the man enjoy on Earth, and why did people laugh at him?

Question 2: How did the man end up in Workers' Paradise after his death?

Question 3: What is the main rule or atmosphere in Workers' Paradise?

Question 4: Why did the man not fit in with the people of Workers' Paradise?

Question 5: What did the busy girl usually do every day at the silent torrent?

Question 6: What did the man first ask the girl to give him, and what did he want to do with it?

Question 7: How did the girl react the first time she saw the painted pitcher at home?

Question 8: What did the man next ask to make for the girl, and what was her reaction over time?

Question 9: What problem started happening in Workers' Paradise because of the man's influence?

Question 10: At the end of the story, who decided to leave Workers' Paradise with the man, and why was this surprising to the elders?

Answers:

Answer 1: He made little sculptures of men, women, and castles decorated with sea-shells, and he painted. People laughed at him because they thought these activities were useless, unnecessary, and a waste of time.

Answer 2: He was sent to heaven after death, but the aerial messenger made a mistake and placed him in Workers' Paradise instead of the proper place.

Answer 3: In Workers' Paradise, there is no leisure; everyone is constantly busy, values time highly, hurries everywhere, and feels proud of having no free moments.

Answer 4: He had spent his whole life doing no useful work and loved useless, aimless activities, so he lounged around, got in people's way, and did not hurry or work like everyone else.

Answer 5: She went to fill her pitcher with water from the silent torrent (which did not even sing because even nature was efficient and purposeful there).

Answer 6: He asked her to give him one of her pitchers that she could spare, so he could draw pictures and paint on it.

Answer 7: She held it up in wonder, stared at the lines and colours, asked what they meant and what their purpose was, then secretly looked at it again and again at home, feeling surprised by something with no meaning or purpose.

Answer 8: He asked to weave a coloured ribbon for her hair (for no reason at all). Over time, she began spending extra minutes tying the ribbon, her hurrying slowed down, and she left work unfinished because thoughts without meaning or purpose had entered her mind.

Answer 9: Many people started wasting time on unnecessary things like painting and sculpture, becoming idle, and work in the paradise began to suffer.

Answer 10: The girl-of-the-silent-torrent decided to go with him. This was surprising to the elders because nothing had ever happened in Workers' Paradise that had no meaning and no purpose.

Vocabulary Questions:

Question 1: What does the word "utility" mean in the opening sentence: "The man never believed in utility"?

Question 2: In the phrase "he indulged in mad whims," what does "indulged in" mean?

Question 3: What does "quaint" mean when describing the man's sculptures as "quaint earthen things dotted over with sea-shells"?

Question 4: In the sentence "He lounged in the streets absent-mindedly," what does "lounged" mean?

Question 5: What does the word "exulted" mean in the description of the people in *Workers' Paradise*: "those very words make them feel happy and exulted"?

Vocabulary Answers:

Answer 1: "Utility" means usefulness or practical value — the man rejected the idea that everything must have a practical or productive purpose.

Answer 2: "Indulged in" means allowed himself to enjoy or take pleasure in freely — here, he freely gave in to his foolish or eccentric ideas without restraint.

Answer 3: "Quaint" means attractively unusual, old-fashioned, or charming in a strange or picturesque way — the earthen objects looked oddly pretty or curiously decorated.

Answer 4: "Lounged" means stood, sat, or moved about in a relaxed, lazy, or idle manner — he wandered casually without purpose or hurry.

Answer 5: "Exulted" means felt or showed great joy, triumph, or elation — the people felt proudly happy and uplifted by constantly being busy.