SATYAJIT RAY

the complete adventures of feluda
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Satyajit Ray was born on 2 May 1921 in Calcutta. After graduating from Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1940, he studied art at Rabindranath Tagore’s university, Santiniketan. By 1943, Ray was back in Calcutta and had joined an advertising firm as a visualizer. He also started designing covers and illustrating books brought out by Signet Press. A deep interest in films led to his establishing the Calcutta Film Society in 1947. During a six-month trip to Europe, in 1950, Ray became a member of the London Film Club and managed to see ninety-nine films in only four and a half months.

In 1955, after overcoming innumerable difficulties, Satyajit Ray completed his first film, *Pather Panchali*, with financial assistance from the West Bengal government. The film was an award-winner at the Cannes Film Festival and established Ray as a director of international stature. Together with *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished, 1956) and *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, 1959), it forms the Apu trilogy and perhaps constitutes Ray’s finest work. Ray’s other films include *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room, 1958), *Charulata* (1964), *Aranyer Din Ratri* (Days and Nights in the Forest, 1970), *Shatranj Khilari* (The Chess Players, 1977), *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World, 1984), *Ganashatru* (Enemy of the People, 1989), *Shakha Proshakha* (Branches of a Tree, 1990) and *Agantuk* (The Stranger, 1991). Ray also made several documentaries, including one on Tagore. In 1987, he made the documentary *Sukumar Ray*, to commemorate the birth centenary of his father, perhaps Bengal’s most famous writer of nonsense verse and children’s books. Satyajit Ray won numerous awards for his films. Both the British Federation of Film Societies and the Moscow Film Festival Committee named him one of the greatest directors of the second half of the twentieth century. In 1992, he was awarded the Oscar for Lifetime Achievement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and, in the same year, was also honoured with the Bharat Ratna.

Apart from being a film-maker, Satyajit Ray was a writer of repute. In 1961, he revived the children’s magazine, *Sandesh*, which his grandfather, Upendrakishore Ray, had started and to which his father used to contribute frequently. Satyajit Ray contributed numerous poems, stories and essays to *Sandesh*, and also published several books in Bengali, most of which became bestsellers. In 1991, Oxford University awarded him its DLitt degree.


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Gopa Majumdar has translated several works from Bengali to English, the most notable of these being Ashapurna Debi’s *Subarnalata*, Taslima Nasrin’s *My Girlhood* and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay’s *Aparajito*, for which she won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2001. She has translated several volumes of Satyajit Ray’s short stories, a number of Professor Shonku stories and all of the Feluda stories for Penguin Books India. She is currently translating Ray’s cinematic writings for Penguin.
Foreword

My husband was always deeply interested in science fiction stories. It was not surprising, therefore, when he decided to write them for his children’s magazine Sandesh.

One day, he told me that he wanted to experiment with stories other than the science fiction ones.

‘What other kind?’ I asked, although I knew the answer instinctively, since both of us were avid readers of detective stories. He didn’t have to tell me, so he smiled and said ruefully, ‘But there’s a big snag . . .’ I looked inquiringly at him. ‘The magazine is meant for children and adolescents, which means I shall have to avoid sex and violence—the backbone of crime thrillers . . . you do realize the difficulty, don’t you?’

I did, indeed. Still, I told him to go ahead and give it a try—I had so much faith in him!

He did. And that’s how ‘Feluda’ was born and became an instant hit. Story after story came out, and they all met with resounding success. When they were published in book form, they became best-sellers. It was really amazing!

After finishing each story, he would throw up his hands and say, ‘I have run out of plots. How can one possibly go on writing detective stories without even a hint of sex and hardly any violence to speak of?’

I couldn’t agree with him more, but at the same time, I knew he would never give up and was bound to succeed at his endeavour. That is exactly what he did. He never stopped and went on writing till the end of his days. That was my husband, Satyajit Ray, who surmounted all difficulties and came out on top!

Calcutta
October 1995

Bijoya Ray
Introduction

One of my earliest recollections of childhood is of struggling to get two thick bound volumes from my father’s bookshelf, with a view to using them as walls for my dolls’ house. To my complete bewilderment, when my father saw what I had done, he told me to put them back instantly. Why? They were only books, after all. ‘No,’ he explained, handling the two volumes with the same tenderness that he normally reserved for me, ‘these are not just books. They are bound issues of Sandesh, a magazine we used to read as children. You don’t get it any more.’ Neither of us knew then that Sandesh would reappear only a few years later, revived and brought to life by none other than Satyajit Ray, the grandson of its original founder, Upendrakishore.

That Satyajit Ray was a film-maker was something I, and many other children of my generation, came to know only when we were older. At least, we had heard he made films which seemed to throw all the grown-ups into raptures, but to us he was simply the man who had opened a door to endless fun and joy, in the pages of a magazine that was exclusively for us. This was in 1961.

In 1965, Sandesh began to publish a new story (Danger in Darjeeling) about two cousins on holiday in Darjeeling. The older one of these was Feluda, whose real name was Pradosh C. Mitter. The younger one, who narrated the story, was called Tapesh; but Feluda affectionately called him Topshe. They happened to meet an amiable old gentleman called Rajen Babu who had started to receive mysterious threats. Feluda, who had read a great many crime stories and was a very clever man (Topshe told us), soon discovered who the culprit was.

It was a relatively short and simple tale, serialized in three or four instalments. Yet, it created such a stir among the young readers of Sandesh that the creator of Feluda felt obliged to produce another story with the same characters, this time set in Lucknow (The Emperor’s Ring), in 1966. Feluda’s character took a more definite shape in this story. Not only was he a man with acute powers of observation and a razor-sharp brain, we learnt, but he also possessed a deep and thorough knowledge of virtually every subject under the sun, ranging from history to hypnotism. He was good at cricket, knew at least a hundred indoor games, a number of card tricks, and could write with both hands. The entries he made into his personal notebook were in Greek.

After The Emperor’s Ring, there was no looking back: Feluda simply went from strength to strength. Over the next three years, Kailash Chowdhury’s Jewel and The Anubis Mystery, the first two Feluda stories set in Calcutta, appeared, followed by another travel adventure, Trouble in Gangtok. Over the next two decades, Ray would write at least one Feluda story every year. Between 1965 and 1992, thirty-four Feluda stories appeared. The Magical Mystery, the last in the series, was published posthumously in 1995-96.

In 1970, Feluda made his first appearance in the Desh magazine, which was unquestionably a magazine for adults. This surprised many, but it was really evidence of Feluda’s popularity among...
young and old alike. Between 1970 and 1992, nineteen Feluda stories appeared in the annual Puja issue of *Desh* (the others were published in *Sandesh*, except for one which appeared in *Anandamela*, another children’s magazine). Pouncing upon the copy of *Desh* as soon as it arrived, after having artfully fended off every other taker in the house, became as much a part of the Puja festivities as wearing new clothes or going to the temple.

A year later, Ray introduced a new character. Lalmohan Ganguli (alias Jatayu), a writer of cheap popular thrillers, who made his debut in *The Golden Fortress*. Simple, gullible, friendly and either ignorant of or mistaken about most things in life, he proved to be a perfect foil to Feluda, and a means of providing what Ray called ‘dollops of humour’. The following year (1972) readers were presented with *A Mysterious Case*, where Jatayu made an encore appearance. After this, he remained with the two cousins throughout, becoming very soon an important member of the team and winning the affection of millions. It is, in fact, impossible now to think of Feluda without thinking of Jatayu.

Interestingly, the two films Ray made based on Feluda stories (*The Golden Fortress* in 1974, and *The Elephant God* in 1978) both featured Lalmohan Babu, as did the television film *Kissa Kathmandu Ke* (based on *The Criminals of Kathmandu*) made by Sandip Ray a few years later.

Ray had often spoken of his interest in crime fiction. He had read all the Sherlock Holmes stories before leaving school. It was therefore no surprise that he should start writing crime stories himself. But why did the arrival of Feluda make such a tremendous impact on his readers? After all, it wasn’t as though there had never been other detectives in children’s fiction in Bengal. The reason was, in fact, a simple one. In spite of all his accomplishments, Feluda did not emerge as a larger-than-life superman whom one would venerate and admire from afar, but never get close to. On the contrary, Topshe’s charming narration described him as so utterly normal and human that it was not difficult at all to see him almost as a member of one’s own family. A genius he might well be, but his behaviour was exactly what one might expect from an older cousin. He teased Topshe endlessly and bullied him often, but his love and concern for his young Watson was never in doubt. Every child who read *Sandesh* could see himself—or, for that matter, herself—in Topshe. Herein lay Ray’s greatest strength. Feluda came, saw and conquered chiefly because each case was seen and presented through the eyes of an adolescent. Ray’s language was simple, lucid, warm and direct, without ever becoming boring or patronizing, even when Feluda corrected a mistake Topshe made, or gave him new information. Added to this were his graphic descriptions of the various places Feluda and Topshe visited. Sometimes it was difficult to tell whether one was watching a film or reading a book, so well were all relevant details captured in just a few succinct words, regardless of whether the action was taking place in a small village in Bengal, a monastery in Sikkim, or the streets of Hong Kong.

It would be wrong to think, however, that it was smooth sailing at all times. Feluda and his team, like most celebrities, had to pay the price of fame. It was their popularity among adults that began to cause problems. Naturally, the expectations of adults were different. They wanted ‘spice’ in the stories and would probably not have objected to subjects such as illicit love or *crime passionnel*. Feluda’s creator, on the other hand, could never allow himself to forget that he wrote primarily for children and, as such, was obliged to keep the stories ‘clean’. Clearly, letters from critical or disappointed readers became such a sore point that Feluda spoke openly about it in *The Mystery of Nayan*, the last novel published during Ray’s lifetime. ‘Don’t forget Topshe writes my stories mainly for
adolescents,’ Feluda says in the opening chapter. ‘The problem is that these stories are read by the children’s parents, uncles, aunts and everyone else. Each reader at every level has his own peculiar demand. How on earth is he to satisfy each one of them?’

The readers were suitably chastened. And Feluda’s popularity rose even higher. In 1990, when he turned twenty-five, an ardent admirer in Delhi went to the extent of designing a special card to mark the occasion. Ray is said to have been both amazed and greatly amused by the display of such deep devotion.


Initially, Ray was hesitant to allow the Feluda stories to be translated as he was unsure about the response of non-Bengali readers. However, the two films he had made as well as the television series made by his son had evoked an interest from other communities. When he did finally give his consent, it was only to discover that he need not have worried at all. The Three Musketeers, comprising Pradosh C. Mitter, Private Investigator, and his two assistants, were received with as much enthusiasm elsewhere in India as they had been in Bengal.

Translating the Feluda stories has been a deeply fulfilling experience for me. Some of the early stories took me back to my early teens, when a ride in a taxi would cost one the princely sum of one rupee and seventy paise, and a bearded foreigner in colourful clothes was likely to be labeled a ‘hippie’ (*The Anubis Mystery* and *Trouble in Gangtok*). More importantly, translating these stories gave me a new insight into the author’s mind and a chance to rediscover his varied interests, ranging from music and magic to history and hypnotism and, of course, cinema.

This definitive edition contains, in two volumes, all the Feluda stories that Ray completed. Included are new translations (by me) of *The Golden Fortress*, *The Bandits of Bombay* and *The Secret of the Cemetery*. For the first time, the stories are arranged in chronological order, and one can note Feluda’s development from a totally unknown amateur detective to a famous professional private investigator. Those who have read them before may be pleased to find them all together in an omnibus edition. To those who haven’t, one hopes it will give an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with a legend in Bengal, and catch a glimpse of the brilliant mind of its creator.
# Chronology of the Feluda Stories

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danger in darjeeling
I saw Rajen Babu come to the Mall every day. He struck me as an amiable old man. All his hair had turned grey, and his face always wore a cheerful expression. He generally spent a few minutes in the corner shop that sold old Nepali and Tibetan things; then he came and sat on a bench in the Mall for about half-an-hour, until it started to get dark. After that he went straight home. One day, I followed him quietly to see where he lived. He turned around just as we reached his front gate and asked, ‘Who are you? Why have you been following me?’

‘My name is Tapesh Ranjan,’ I replied quickly.

‘Well then, here is a lozenge for you,’ he said, offering me a lemon drop. ‘Come to my house one day. I’ll show you my collection of masks,’ he added.

Who knew that this friendly old soul would get into such trouble? Why, he seemed totally incapable of getting involved with anything even remotely sinister!

Feluda snapped at me when I mentioned this. ‘How can you tell just by looking at someone what he might get mixed up with?’ he demanded.

This annoyed me. ‘What do you know of Rajen Babu?’ I said. ‘He’s a good man. A very kind man. He has done a lot for the poor Nepali people who live in slums. There’s no reason why he should be in trouble. I know. I see him every day. You haven’t seen him even once. In fact, I’ve hardly seen you go out at all since we came to Darjeeling.’

‘All right, all right. Let’s have all the details then. What would a little boy like you know of danger, anyway?’

Now, this wasn’t fair. I was not a little boy any more. I was thirteen and a half. Feluda was twenty-seven.

To tell you the truth, I came to know about the trouble Rajen Babu was in purely by accident. I was sitting on a bench in the Mall today, waiting for the band to start playing. On my left was Tinkori Babu, reading a newspaper. He had recently arrived from Calcutta to spend the summer in Darjeeling and had taken a room on rent in Rajen Babu’s house. I was trying to lean over his shoulder and look at the sports page, when Rajen Babu arrived panting and collapsed on the empty portion of our bench next to Tinkori Babu. He looked visibly shaken.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Tinkori Babu, folding his newspaper. ‘Did you just run up a hill?’

‘No, no,’ Rajen Babu replied cautiously, wiping his face with one corner of his scarf. ‘Something incredible has happened.’

I knew what ‘incredible’ meant. Feluda was quite partial to the word.

‘What do you mean?’ Tinkori Babu asked.

‘Look, here it is,’ Rajen Babu passed a piece of folded blue paper to Tinkori Babu. I could tell it was a letter, but made no attempt to read it when Tinkori Babu unfolded it. I looked away instead, humming under my breath to indicate a complete lack of interest in what the two old men were discussing. But I heard Tinkori Babu remark, ‘You’re right, it is incredible! Who could possibly write such a threatening letter to you?’

‘I don’t know. That’s what’s so puzzling. I don’t remember having deliberately caused anyone any harm. As far as I know, I have no enemies.’
Tinkori Babu leant towards his neighbour. ‘We’d better not talk about this in public,’ he whispered.

‘Let’s go home.’

The two gentlemen left.

Feluda remained silent for a while after I had finished my story. Then he frowned and said, ‘You mean you think we need to investigate?’

‘Why, didn’t you tell me you were looking for a mystery? And you said you had read so many detective novels that you could work as a sleuth yourself!’

‘Yes, that’s true. I could prove it, too. I didn’t go to the Mall today, did I? But I could tell you which side you sat on.’

‘All right, which side was it?’

‘You chose a bench on the right side of the Radha restaurant, didn’t you?’

‘That’s terrific. How did you guess?’

‘The sun came out this evening. Your left cheek looks sunburnt but the right one is all right. This could happen only if you sat on that side of the Mall. That’s the bit that catches the evening sunshine.’

‘Incredible!’

‘Yes. Anyway, I think we should go and visit Mr Rajen Majumdar.’

‘Another seventy-seven steps.’

‘And what if it’s not?’

‘It has to be, Feluda. I counted the last time.’

‘Remember you’ll get knocked on the head if you’re wrong.’

‘OK, but not too hard. A sharp knock may damage my brain.’ To my amazement, seventy-seven steps later, we were still at some distance from Rajen Babu’s gate. Another twenty-three brought us right up to it. Feluda hit my head lightly, and asked, ‘Did you count the steps on your way back?’

‘Yes.’

‘That explains it. You went down the hill on your way back, you idiot. You must have taken very big steps.’

‘Well . . . yes, maybe.’

‘I’m sure you did. You see, young people always tend to take big, long steps when going downhill. Older people have to be more cautious, so they take smaller, measured steps.’

We went in through the gate. Feluda pressed the calling bell. Someone in the distance was listening to a radio.

‘Have you decided what you’re going to say to him?’ I asked. ‘That’s my business. You, my dear, will keep your mouth shut.’

‘Even if they ask me something? You mean I shouldn’t even make a reply?’

‘Shut up.’

A Nepali servant opened the door. ‘Andar aaiye,’ he said.

We stepped into the living room. Made of wood, the house had a lovely old charm. All the furniture in the room was made of cane. The walls were covered with strange masks, most showing large teeth and wearing rather unpleasant expressions. Some of them frightened me. Apart from these, the room was full of old weapons—shields and swords and daggers. Beside these hung pictures of the Buddha,
painted on cloth. Heaven knew how old they were, but the golden colour that had been used had not faded at all.

We took two cane chairs. Feluda rose briefly to inspect the walls. Then he came back and said, ‘And the nails are new. So Rajen Babu’s passion for antiques must have developed only recently.’

Rajen Babu came into the room. Feluda sprang to his feet and said, ‘Do you remember me? I am Joykrishna Mitter’s son, Felu.’

Rajen Babu looked a little taken aback at first. Then his face broke into a smile. ‘Felu? Of course I remember you. My word, you have become a young man! How is everyone at home? Is your father here?’

As Feluda answered these questions, I sat trying to hide my astonishment. How unfair the whole thing was—why hadn’t Feluda told me that he knew Rajen Babu?

It turned out that Rajen Babu had worked in Calcutta for many years as a lawyer. He had once helped Feluda’s father fight a case. He had come to Darjeeling and settled here ten years ago, soon after his retirement.

Feluda introduced me to him. He showed no sign of recognition. Perhaps the matter of offering me a lozenge a week ago had slipped his mind completely.

‘You’re fond of antiques, I see,’ said Feluda conversationally. ‘Yes. It’s turned almost into an obsession.’

‘How long—?’

‘Over the last six months. But I’ve managed to collect quite a lot of things.’

Feluda cleared his throat. Then he told Rajen Babu what he had heard from me, and ended by saying, ‘I still remember how you had helped my father. If I could do anything in return . . .’

Rajen Babu looked both pleased and relieved. But before he could say anything, Tinkori Babu walked into the room. From the way he was breathing, it appeared that he had just come back after his evening walk. Rajen Babu made the introductions. ‘Tinkori Babu happens to be a neighbour of Gyanesh, a friend of mine. When this friend heard that I was going to let one of my rooms, he suggested that I give it to Tinkori Babu. He would have gone to a hotel otherwise.’

Tinkori Babu laughed. ‘I did hesitate to take up his offer, I must admit; chiefly because of my special weakness for cheroots. You see, Rajen Babu might well have objected to the smell. So I wrote to him first to let him know. He said he didn’t mind, so here I am.’

‘Are you here simply for a change of air?’

‘Yes, but the air, I’ve noticed, isn’t as cool and fresh as one might have expected.’

‘Are you fond of music?’ asked Feluda unexpectedly.

‘Yes, but how did you guess?’ Tinkori Babu gave a startled smile. ‘Well, I noticed your finger,’ Feluda explained. ‘You were beating it on top of your walking-stick, in keeping with the rhythm of that song from the radio.’

‘You’re quite right,’ Rajen Babu laughed, ‘he sings Shyamasangeet.’

Feluda changed the subject. ‘Do you have the letter here?’ he asked.

‘Oh yes. Right next to my heart,’ said Rajen Babu and took it out of the inside pocket of his jacket.

Feluda spread it out.

It was not handwritten. A few printed words had been cut out of books or newspapers and pasted on
a sheet of paper. ‘Be prepared to pay for your sins,’ it read.

‘Did this come by post?’

‘Yes. It was posted in Darjeeling, but I’m afraid I threw the envelope away.’

‘Have you reason to suspect anyone?’

‘No. For the life of me, I cannot recall ever having harmed anyone.’

‘Do certain people visit you regularly?’

‘Well, I don’t get too many visitors. Dr Phoni Mitra comes occasionally if I happen to be ill.’

‘Is he a good doctor?’

‘About average, I should say. But then, my complaints have always been quite ordinary—I mean, more than the usual coughs and colds. So I haven’t had to look for a really good doctor.’

‘Does he charge a fee?’

‘Of course. But that’s hardly a problem. I’ve got plenty of money, thank God.’

‘Who else visits you?’

‘A Mr Ghoshal has recently started coming to my house . . . look, here he is!’ A man of medium height wearing a dark suit was shown into the room.

‘Did I hear my name?’ he asked with a smile.

‘Yes, I was just about to tell these people that you share my interest in antiques. Allow me to introduce them.’

After exchanging greetings, Mr Ghoshal—whose full name was Abanimohan Ghoshal—said to Rajen Babu, ‘I thought I’d drop by since you didn’t come to the shop today.’

‘N-no, I wasn’t feeling very well, so I decided to stay in.’

It was clear that Rajen Babu did not want to tell Mr Ghoshal about the letter. Feluda had hidden it the minute Mr Ghoshal had walked in.

‘All right, if you’re busy today, I’ll come back another time . . . actually, I wanted to take a look at that Tibetan bell,’ said Mr Ghoshal.

‘Oh, that’s not a problem at all. I’ll get it for you.’ Rajen Babu disappeared into the house to fetch the bell.

‘Do you live here in Darjeeling?’ Feluda asked Mr Ghoshal, who had picked up a dagger and was looking at it closely. ‘No,’ he replied, turning the dagger in his hand. ‘I don’t stay in any one place for very long. I have to travel a lot. But I like collecting curios.’ Feluda told me afterwards that a curio was a rare and ancient object of art.

Rajen Babu returned with the bell. It was really striking to look at. Its base was made of silver, the handle was a mixture of brass and copper, which was studded with colourful stones. Mr Ghoshal took a long time to examine it carefully. Then he put it down on a table and said, ‘You got yourself a very good deal there. It’s absolutely genuine.’

‘Ah, that’s a relief. You’re the expert, of course. The man at the shop told me it came straight out of the household of the Dalai Lama.’

‘That may well be true. But I don’t suppose you’d want to part with it? I mean . . . suppose you got a handsome offer?’

Rajen Babu shook his head, smiling sweetly.

‘No. You see, I bought that bell simply because I liked it, I have no wish to sell it only to make
‘Very well,’ Mr Ghoshal rose. ‘I hope you’ll be out and about tomorrow.’

‘Thank you. I hope so, too.’

When Mr Ghoshal had gone, Feluda said to Rajen Babu, ‘Don’t you think it might be wise not to go out of the house for the next few days?’

‘Yes, you’re probably right. But this business of an anonymous letter is so incredible that I cannot really bring myself to take it seriously. It just seems like a foolish practical joke!’

‘Well, why don’t you stay in until we can be definite about that? How long have you had that Nepali servant?’

‘Right from the start. He is completely reliable.’

Feluda now turned to Tinkori Babu. ‘Do you stay at home most of the time?’

‘Yes, but I go for morning and evening walks, so I’m out of the house for a couple of hours every day. In any case, should there be any real danger, I doubt if I could do anything to help. I am sixty-four, younger than Rajen Babu by only a year.’

‘Don’t involve poor Tinkori Babu in this, please,’ Rajen Babu said. ‘After all, he’s come here to relax, so let him enjoy himself. I’ll stay in if you insist, together with my servant. You two can come and visit me every day, if you so wish.’

‘All right.’

Feluda stood up. So did I. It was time to go.

There was a fireplace in front of us. Over it, on a mantelshelf, were three framed photographs. Feluda moved closer to the fireplace to look at these. ‘My wife,’ said Rajen Babu, pointing at the first photograph. ‘She died barely five years after our marriage.’

The second photo was of a young boy, who must have been about my own age when the photo was taken. A handsome boy indeed. ‘Who is this?’ Feluda asked.

Rajen Babu began laughing. ‘That photo is there simply to show how time can change everything. Would you believe that is my own photograph, taken when I was a child? I used to go to a missionary school in Bankura in those days. My father was the magistrate there. But don’t let those angelic looks deceive you. I might have been a good-looking child, but I was extremely naughty. My teachers were all fed up with me. In fact, I didn’t spare the students, either. I remember having kicked the best runner in our school in a hundred-yards race to stop him from winning.’

The third photo was of a young man in his late twenties. It turned out to be Rajen Babu’s only child, Prabeer Majumdar.

‘Where is he now?’ Feluda asked.

Rajen Babu cleared his throat. ‘I don’t know,’ he said after a pause. ‘He left home sixteen years ago. There is virtually no contact between us.’

Feluda started walking towards the front door. ‘A very interesting case,’ he muttered. Now he was talking like the detectives one read about.

We came out of the house. It was already dark outside. Lights had been switched on in every house nesting in the hills. A mist was rising from the Rangeet valley down below. Rajen Babu and Tinkori Babu both walked up to the gate to see us off. Rajen Babu lowered his voice and said to Feluda,

‘Actually, I have to confess that despite everything, I do feel faintly nervous. After all, something like...
‘Don’t worry,’ said Feluda firmly. ‘I’ll definitely get to the bottom of this case.’

‘Thank you. Goodbye!’ said Rajen Babu and went back into the house. Tinkori Babu lingered. ‘I am truly impressed by your power of observation,’ he said. ‘I, too, have read a large number of detective novels. Maybe I can help you with this case.’

‘Really? How?’

‘Look at the letter in your hand. Take the various printed words. Do they tell you anything?’

Feluda thought for a few seconds. ‘The words were cut out with a blade, not scissors,’ he said.

‘Very good.’

‘Second, each word has come from a different source—the typeface and the quality of paper vary from each other.’

‘Yes. Can you guess what those different sources might be?’

‘These two words—“prepared” and “pay”—appear to be a newspaper.’

‘Right. Ananda Bazar.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘Only Ananda Bazar uses that typeface. And the other words were taken out of books, I think. Not very old books, mind you, for those different typefaces have been in use over the last twenty years, and no more. Apart from this, does the smell of the glue tell you anything?’

‘I think the sender used Grippex glue.’

‘Brilliant!’

‘I might say the same for you.’

Tinkori Babu smiled. ‘I try, but at your age, my dear fellow, I doubt if I knew what the word “detective” meant.’

We said namaskar after this and went on our way. ‘I don’t yet know whether I can solve this mystery,’ said Feluda on the way back to our hotel, ‘but getting to know Tinkori Babu would be an added bonus.’

‘If he is so good at crime detection, why don’t you let him do all the hard work? Why waste your own time making enquiries?’

‘Ah well, Tinkori Babu might know a lot about printing and typefaces, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he’d know everything!’

Feluda’s answer pleased me. I bet Tinkori Babu isn’t as clever as Feluda, I thought. Aloud, I said,

‘Who do you suppose is the culprit?’

‘The culprit—’ Feluda broke off. I saw him turn around and glance at a man who had come from the opposite direction and had just passed us.

‘Did you see him?’

‘No, I didn’t see his face.’

‘The light from that street lamp fell on his face for only a second, and I thought—’

‘What?’

‘No, never mind. Let’s go, I feel quite hungry.’

Feluda is my cousin. He and I were in Darjeeling with my father for a holiday. Father had got to know some of the other guests in our hotel fairly well, and was spending most of his time with them. He
didn’t stop us from going wherever we wished, nor did he ask too many questions.

I woke a little later than usual the next day. Father was in the room, but there was no sign of Feluda.

‘Felu left early this morning,’ Father explained. ‘He said he’d try to catch a glimpse of Kanchenjunga.’

I knew this couldn’t be true. Feluda must have gone out to investigate, which was most annoying because he wasn’t supposed to go out without me. Anyway, I had a quick cup of tea, and then I went out myself.

I spotted Feluda near a taxi stand. ‘This is not fair!’ I complained. ‘Why did you go out alone?’

‘I was feeling a bit feverish, so I went to see a doctor.’

‘Dr Phoni Mitra?’

‘Aha, you’re beginning to use your brain, too!’

‘What did he say?’

‘He charged me four rupees and wrote out a prescription.’

‘Is he a good doctor?’

‘Do you think a good doctor would write a prescription for someone in perfect health? Besides, his house looked old and decrepit. I don’t think he has a good practice.’

‘Then he couldn’t have sent that letter.’

‘Why not?’

‘A poor man wouldn’t dare.’

‘Yes, he would, if he was desperate for money.’

‘But that letter said nothing about money.’

‘There was no need to ask openly.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘How did Rajen Babu strike you yesterday?’

‘He seemed a little frightened.’

‘Fear can make anyone ill.’

‘Oh?’

‘Yes, seriously ill. And if that happened, he’d naturally turn to his doctor. What might happen then is something even a fathead like you can figure out, I’m sure.’

How clever Feluda was! But if Dr Mitra had really planned the whole thing the way Feluda described, he must be extraordinarily crafty, too.

By this time, we had reached the Mall. As we came near the fountain, Feluda suddenly said, ‘I feel a
bit curious about curios.’ We were, in fact, standing quite close to the Nepal Curio Shop. Rajen Babu
and Mr Ghoshal visited this shop every day. Feluda and I walked into the shop. Its owner came for-
ward to greet us. He had a light grey jacket on, a muffler round his neck, and wore a black cap with
golden embroidery. He beamed at us genially.

The shop was cluttered with old and ancient objects. A strange musty smell came from them. It was
quiet inside. Feluda looked around for a while, then said, sounding important, ‘Do you have good
tankhas?’

‘Come into the next room, sir. We’ve sold what was really good. But we’re expecting some fresh
stock soon.’
‘What is a tankha?’ I whispered.

‘You’ll know when you see one,’ Feluda whispered back.

The next room was even smaller and darker. The owner of the shop brought out a painting of the Buddha, done on a piece of silk. ‘This is the last piece left, but it’s a little damaged,’ he said. So the shop had a tankha! Rajen Babu had heaps of these in his house. Feluda examined the tankha like an expert, peering at it closely, and then looking at it from various angles. Three minutes later, he said, ‘This doesn’t appear to be more than seventy years old. I am looking for something much older than that, at least three hundred years, you see.’

‘We’re getting some new things this evening, sir. You might find what you’re looking for if you came back later today.’

‘This evening, did you say?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Oh, I must inform Rajen Babu.’

‘Mr Majumdar? He knows about it already. All my regular customers are coming in the evening to look at the fresh arrivals.’

‘Does Mr Ghoshal know?’

‘Of course.’

‘Who else is a regular buyer?’

‘There’s Mr Gilmour, the manager of a tea estate. He visits my shop twice a week. Then there’s Mr Naulakha. But he’s away in Sikkim at present.’

‘All right, I’ll try to drop in in the evening . . . Topshe, would you like a mask?’ I couldn’t resist the offer. Feluda selected one himself and paid for it. ‘This was the most horrendous of them all,’ he remarked, passing it to me. He had once told me there was no such word as ‘horrendous’. It was really a mixture of ‘tremendous’ and ‘horrible’. But I must say it was rather an appropriate word for the mask.

Feluda started to say something as we came out of the shop, but stopped abruptly. I found him staring at a man once again. Was it the same man he had seen last night? He was a man in his early forties, expensively dressed in a well-cut suit. He had stopped in the middle of the Mall to light his pipe. His eyes were hidden behind dark glasses. Somehow he looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn’t recall ever having met him before.

Feluda stepped forward and approached him. ‘Excuse me,’ he said, ‘are you Mr Chatterjee?’

‘No,’ replied the man, biting the end of his pipe, ‘I am not.’ Feluda appeared to be completely taken aback. ‘Strange! Aren’t you staying at the Central Hotel?’

The man smiled a little contemptuously. ‘No, I am at the Mount Everest; and I don’t have a twin,’ he said and strode off in the direction of Observatory Hill.

I noticed he was carrying a brown parcel, on which were printed the words ‘Nepal Curio Shop’.

‘Feluda!’ I said softly. ‘Do you think he bought a mask like mine?’

‘Yes, he may well have done that. After all, those masks weren’t all meant for your own exclusive use, were they? Anyway, let’s go and have a cup of coffee.’ We turned towards a coffee shop. ‘Did you recognize that man?’ asked Feluda.

‘How could I,’ I replied, ‘when you yourself failed to recognize him?’
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