

Strange Friends (Advanced) – Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for advanced learners. The name of the story is *Strange Friends*. You can find a transcript of the episode at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/FriendsL4, where you can also download the episode as a PDF.

This is a levelled-up version of a beginner-level story. You can listen to the beginner-level version of *Strange Friends* at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Friends, F R I E N D S.

So, yes, we have actually had this story twice on the podcast already, I believe at beginner and intermediate levels, but I love this story so much. It's one of my favourite stories.

I adapted it pretty early on when I started doing the podcast, and I actually performed it to a group of students I was teaching, and one of the students was having so much fun and laughing so much, so that gave me very positive associations with this story.

This actually appears in my collection of books. Hold on a second.

Here is one of them. So you can see if you're on YouTube. Obviously, if you're listening, you can't see, but I have my book, *Easy Stories in English*, here. And this story appears in all four levels in the book. So, if you enjoy it today and you like that kind of thing, go pick up a copy at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Book.

The version I'm performing today I have actually changed a bit. There is a slightly different way I present the vocabulary in those books versus on the podcast because in the books I can rely on visual descriptions of vocabulary. I can use pictures to explain what words mean. Obviously, I can't do that on a podcast. And I can also use different amounts of new vocabulary because I can introduce them as you go.

And then also when I was preparing the script for this episode, I changed the story a bit because, you know, it's been a few years since I wrote the original version, so I've changed a lot as a writer, I've developed my skills, and when it comes to performing a story, it's really important, I think, to have a close connection between the words and how you feel about it, so there are a few parts that I changed to feel more natural in my performance.

Basically, it's very hard to put down a story in this kind of performance style. Like, it's very hard for me to ever just completely stop changing something if I am going to be performing it with my voice. And I'm sure it's the same for many forms of art. I know musicians, you know, if they're touring and doing concerts, they're constantly changing the way they do things.

So yeah. As I mentioned in the last episode of the podcast, the rerun, I was sick and the sickness hit me pretty hard, not gonna lie. Uh, it was not fun. I've been sick a lot this year. So right now I am really focusing on my health. I'm going for a walk in the woods first thing every morning. I'm scheduling naps in the afternoon. That's a very important part of my job is to take regular naps. And I'm focusing on leaving more time for reading and writing, which are of course really important parts of my creative process and my work, but also I just enjoy them. So yes, looking after your health, pretty good idea.

Okay, I'm in a strange mood today! I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

An **altar**, A L T A R, is a special table that you find in churches. The altar sits at the front of the church, and the priest uses it to perform parts of the mass, the ceremony. Altars often have coloured clothes and crucifixes on them.

When you **fantasise** about doing something, you imagine and dream about doing it. Usually, it is something that is unlikely to happen. For example, many of us fantasise about being rich and famous. I know I have, certainly. Those of us who are more realistic might fantasise about, oh I don't know, eating a really delicious chocolate cake. Let your mind run wild.

In Christianity, when a child is born, there is an event called a **christening**, C H R I S T E N I N G. During a christening, the priest pours water on the baby's head, and the parents officially name the child. This is also referred to as a baptism – 'christening' refers more to the giving of the name and 'baptism' to the pouring of the water.

During a christening or a baptism, usually two friends of the parents come forward to become the **godmother** and godfather of the child. They accept the child as their godchild. Basically, they agree to help look after the child, and if anything happens to the parents, the godparents often look after them instead.

A **crumb**, C R U M B, is a small piece of bread, cake or biscuit. When you eat bread, little bits of the bread break off and fall on your plate. These are crumbs. With some food you have to eat carefully or you get crumbs all over yourself.

And speaking of getting crumbs all over yourself, **savour**, S A V O U R, means to slowly and deeply enjoy something, usually food. For example, if you buy a really expensive dessert you'll probably want to eat it slowly and savour it, presumably because you spent your life savings on it and it's going to be the last thing you ever eat. Or maybe you have a wonderful experience, like a wedding or going to a theme park, and you really want to savour it, take it in slowly.

Someone's **disposition** is their tendency, their natural way of being. Someone can have an active disposition, a cheery disposition, a fragile disposition and so on. Apparently today I have a bit of a flamboyant disposition. That's a lie. I always have a flamboyant disposition.

A **kitten**, K I T T E N, is a baby cat. When a cat gives birth, it will usually have four to six kittens. When we want to talk to a kitten or a cat, we often call it '**kitty**', K I T T Y. 'Kitty' is basically a cute way of talking to a cat.

Ponder, P O N D E R, means to think deeply about something, usually something that is not too serious. For example, some people spend a lot of time pondering the meaning of life. In fact, I am one of those people. And, you know, pondering is, is very important. You, we should all be pondering more, you know. If you're not pondering, stop and ponder. Just go, 'Mm, yes, mm, very important. I'm pondering.' You know? Do more of that.

When we say you **might as well** do something, it means that you should probably do it because there is no better choice and it probably won't hurt. For example, maybe you plan to go to a barbecue in the park, but you find out on the day that the barbecue has been cancelled. Well, if the weather's nice, you might as well go to the park anyway. And once you're there, you might as well sit down and enjoy the view.

The phrase '**for all the good it will do you**' or 'for all the good it did me', for example, is a dismissive way of saying that some action or knowledge turned out to be, or will end up being, useless. For example, maybe you go on holiday and buy a first class ticket on the aeroplane, but your flight is ruined because there is a very loud and annoying person sat next to you. Someone like me, imagine. No, I'm very good on transport. I'm very quiet. Well, in that situation where Ariel is very annoying on the aeroplane, you could say, 'I flew there first class for all the good it did me,' or, 'I flew there first class, for all the peace it gave me.'

Or maybe you fail an exam and tell your friend, 'I studied all night for all the good it did me. I still failed.' That wouldn't be very good, would it?

OK, so listen and enjoy!

Strange Friends

Once upon a time, there were a cat and a mouse who lived together in a little house. Unlike others of her kind might behave, this cat did not chase or eat the mouse, which meant that they could be friends, and indeed they were. Everyone called them the 'strange friends', and they lived a peaceful life together in the city.

But one dark day, the cat came and spoke to the mouse.

'We must think of winter, my dear. It is bright and sunny now, but in a few months' time it will be dark and cold, and there will be hardly any food to eat. We should save something for the winter. After all, if you go out looking for food, a cat could eat you!'

'You're quite right, friend,' said the mouse. 'And I know just the right food to keep. Let's buy a pot of fat. It won't go off, and it's very versatile. You can cook lots of things with fat.'

So they bought a pot of fat, and were about to store it in the kitchen, when the mouse said, 'Wait! We cannot keep it here. Can you imagine? Every day we'll walk past this pot of delicious fat and want to eat it. No, let us put it somewhere where we will forget about it until we need it: in the church, under the altar. Nobody goes to that church anymore, do they? Out of sight, out of mind.'

So they went into the church, hid the pot of fat under the altar, and then went home and promptly forgot about it.

Or at least, the mouse forgot about it, but for the cat, 'out of sight, out of mind' was not an accurate description of her thought process. In fact, she thought about the pot of fat very often.

At first she thought, 'Ah, what a wonderful idea it was to get that pot of fat! We will be very thankful for it in the winter.'

But as the weeks passed, she thought more and more about the fat, and her thoughts began to turn selfish. She fantasised about going and eating the fat. Oh, it would taste so good!

So the cat came up with a plan. She went to the mouse and said, 'Dear mouse, I have to ask you a favour. You see, my cousin has given birth to a beautiful little kitten with white and brown fur. He really is very special, and my cousin has asked me to come to the christening and be his godmother. As I'm sure you can understand, this is a great honour. Would it be alright if I left you to look after the house alone, just this one day?'

'Of course, of course!' said the mouse. 'Family comes above all. Go and enjoy the christening, and if there happens to be some nice food or drink, bring a few crumbs back to me. In fact, I would love just a few drops of the wine – christening wine is always sweet and delicious.'

The cat smiled and said, 'I'll do my best.'

Naturally, the cat was lying. She had no cousin and nobody had asked her to be godmother. She happily strolled out of the house and went straight to the church. She pulled out the pot of fat, opened it up and licked her lips.

Oh, it looked so good! The cat licked wildly at it, savouring the delicious taste, and she ate the whole top layer of the fat, until she was quite full up.

Then she went for a walk on the roofs of the city. She hoped to spot some dessert there, but finding none, she lay down in the sun and had a nap. She fantasised about the pot of fat again, licking her lips in anticipation of the next time she could eat from it.

When she returned home that evening, the mouse said, 'Well, you look like you've had a wonderful time! I suppose it was a good christening, then?'

'Oh yes, the best I've ever been to.'

'And what did they name the child?'

The cat thought for a moment and then said, 'Top-Off.'

'Top-Off!' said the mouse. 'I must say, I have never heard such a peculiar name in my life. Are there others in your family with that name?'

'It is a perfectly normal name, thank you very much. You have a godchild, don't you? He's called Big Nose, if I recall. That's just as strange a name as Top-Off.'

And with that, the conversation was over.

The cat's fantasising, on the other hand, continued strong. A week passed, and the desire to go for another secret meal filled the cat up, until she simply had to do something.

So once more, she went to her housemate and said, 'My dear mouse, I'm afraid I must ask for your assistance again. My cousin has quite an active **disposition**, and has already given birth to another child. I know, can you believe such things? This one has a white ring around her neck, which is quite a rarity. They want me to be godmother again, and I am afraid I cannot say no. Would you be so kind as to look after the house one more time?'

'No problems, friend! Go and enjoy yourself, and if you could possibly spare a few drops of that christening wine...'

'Oh, we drank it up so quickly last time! But I will try.'

Of course, the cat did not go to any christening, but to the altar in the church. And this time, she ate half the pot of fat, filling her stomach up to bursting.

'Food tastes much better when you don't have to share it with anyone else.'

Upon arriving home, the mouse of course asked her, 'What did they name the child this time?'

'Half-Done,' said the cat.

'Half-Done! Are you telling the truth? I have never heard of that name. I don't think you would find it in a single name dictionary in the country!'

'Then perhaps the dictionaries should be rewritten,' **grumbled** the cat.

A few days later – and what else could you really expect? – the greedy cat got hungry again, and once more fantasised about the fat. Well, if she had already gone this far, why not go further?

'Good things come in threes,' announced the cat to the mouse. 'I have been asked to be godmother again. I have decided I must have some truly professional qualities to make me such a desirable godparent. Now, this child is black with white hands, which, as I'm sure you can imagine, makes it really quite a special **kitty**. I must attend the christening. Will you take care of the house while I'm gone?'

'Top-Off! Half-Done! Those names really do make me think. I wonder what name it will be today?'

'Well you just sit at home and wonder while I go and take part in the christening.'

So the cat headed off to the church. In the meantime, the mouse cleaned the house from top to bottom, and while she rested from her labours, the cat finished off the pot of fat.

'It is so good to finish a meal,' said the cat. 'I simply felt so *incomplete* before. It was wrong of me not to eat all the fat in one go. But I have corrected my mistake, yes.'

She was so full that she had a long sleep on the roof and did not return home until the late hours of the night. The mouse woke up from her nap and eagerly asked what they had named the third child.

‘You’re not going to like this,’ said the cat. ‘He is called All-Gone.’

‘All-Gone!’ cried the mouse. ‘Why, that is the strangest name of all! I have never heard such a name in my entire life. What could it mean?’

Pondering these questions, the mouse went off to bed.

After that day, the cat’s ‘cousin’ did not have any more children, and she was called to no more christenings. Winter finally arrived, and the cupboards ran empty, but the mouse was not put off by this.

‘It is a good thing we have that pot of fat!’ she said. ‘Let’s go to the church and enjoy our food.’

‘Yes,’ said the cat to herself, ‘although you might as well stick your tongue out of the window and lick the air for all the good it will do you.’

‘Hmm, what was that?’

‘Oh, nothing! I am simply looking forward to our food.’

But when they arrived at the church, the pot was as empty as an eggshell.

‘Oh no!’ said the mouse. ‘I see what has happened. I thought we were friends, but in fact you have betrayed me! While you were “going to christenings”, you were really off eating the fat. First Top-Off, then Half-Done, then—’

‘Do not finish,’ said the cat darkly. Just the sound of the names brought back memories of the delicious fat, and she was getting very hungry. ‘If you say another word, I’ll—’

‘All-Gone!’ cried the mouse.

And with that, the cat jumped on her and ate her up.

Because that is the way of the world. Cats eat mice, and cats get fat.

THE END

Phew! That was a fun episode, huh? I’m really feeling my oats today. Feeling your oats is like when you’re a horse and you’re eating your oats and just like having a great time.

Anyway, if you want to experience this insanity one to one, you can book a class with me.

Just go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes). If you book a package of 10 classes you can get a third off, a 33% discount. Don’t delay, book a class with me, and I’ll see you next week!