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# UNIT 8

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## 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit our aim is to give you further practice in reading comprehension by

- i) giving you an interesting story to read — 'Witches' Loaves' by O. Henry and
- ii) giving a glossary of difficult words and questions on comprehension.

We have also set exercises on the use of selected items of vocabulary.

The section on grammar and usage deals with

- the simple present tense,
- the present continuous tense, and
- ways of expressing the future.

For practice in writing you will re-write the story you have read in an abridged form.

After completing this unit you should be able to

- read and appreciate simple short stories,
- use the simple present tense and the present continuous tense correctly,
- understand the different ways of expressing the future, and
- re-write a story in an abridged form.

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## 8.1 READING COMPREHENSION

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### 8.1.1 Introduction

How does it feel to be rich and prosperous but single? How does it feel to be forty and unmarried? If the person in question is a woman....? Read this delicately woven story of a woman who falls in love at forty. Look out for the twist in the tale! Some of the words are explained for you in the glossary given at the end of the story (Section 8.1.4).

### 8.1.2 Passage for Reading

#### Witches' Loaves

by O. Henry

1. Miss Martha Meacham kept the little bakery on the corner (the one where you go up three steps, and the bell tinkles when you open the door).

- 2 Miss Martha was forty, her bank book showed a credit of two thousand dollars, and she possessed two false teeth and a sympathetic heart. Many people have married whose chances to do so were much inferior to Miss Martha's.
- 3 Two or three times a week a customer came in, in whom she began to take an interest. He was a middle-aged man, wearing spectacles and a brown beard trimmed to a careful point.
- 4 He spoke English with a strong German accent. His clothes were worn and darned in places, and wrinkled and baggy in others. But he looked neat and had very good manners.
- 5 He always bought two loaves of stale bread. Fresh bread was five cents a loaf. Stale ones were two for five. Never did he call for anything but stale bread.
- 6 Once Miss Martha saw a red and brown stain on his fingers. She was sure then that he was an artist and very poor. No doubt he lived in a garret, where he painted pictures and ate stale bread and thought of the good things to eat in Miss Martha's bakery.
- 7 Often, when Miss Martha sat down to her chops and light rolls and jam and tea, she would sigh and wish that the gentle-mannered artist might share her tasty meal instead of eating his dry crust in that drafty attic. Miss Martha's heart, as you have been told, was a sympathetic one.
- 8 In order to test her theory as to his occupation, she brought from her room one day a painting that she had bought at a sale and set it against the shelves behind the bread counter.
- 9 It was a Venetian scene. A splendid marble palazzo (so it said on the picture) stood in the foreground — or rather fore-water. For the rest there were gondolas (with the lady trailing her hand in the water), clouds, sky, and chiaroscuro in plenty. No artist could fail to notice it.
- 10 Two days afterward the customer came in.
- 11 "Two loafs of stale bread, if you please."
- 12 "You haf here a fine bicture, madame," he said while she was wrapping up the bread.
- 13 "Yes?" says Miss Martha, reveling in her own cunning. "I do so admire art and" (no, it would not do to say "artists" thus early) "and paintings," she substituted. "You think it is a good picture?"
- 14 "Der balance," said the customer, "is not in good drawing. Der bairspective of it is not true. Goot morning, madame."
- 15 He took his bread, bowed, and hurried out.
- 16 Yes, he must be an artist. Miss Martha took the picture back to her room.
- 17 How gentle and kindly his eyes shone behind his spectacles! What a broad brow he had! To be able to judge perspective at a glance — and to live on stale bread! But genius often has to struggle before it is recognized.
- 18 What a thing it would be for art and perspective if genius were backed by two thousand dollars in the bank, a bakery, and a sympathetic heart to — but these were day-dreams, Miss Martha.
- 19 Often now when he came he would chat for a while across the showcase. He seemed to crave Miss Martha's cheerful words.
- 20 He kept on buying stale bread. Never a cake, never a pie, never one of her delicious sally luns.
- 21 She thought he began to look thinner and discouraged. Her heart ached to add something good to eat to his meager purchase, but her courage failed at the act. She did not dare affront him. She knew the pride of artists.
- 22 Miss Martha took to wearing her blue-dotted silk waist behind the counter. In the back room she cooked a mysterious compound of quince seeds and borax. Ever so many people use it for the complexion.
- 23 One day the customer came in as usual, laid his nickel on the showcase, and called for his stale loaves. While Miss Martha was reaching for them, there was a great tooting and clanging, and a fire-engine came lumbering past.

- 24 The customer hurried to the door to look, as any one will. Suddenly inspired, Miss Martha seized the opportunity.
- 25 On the bottom shelf behind the counter was a pound of fresh butter that the dairyman had left ten minutes before. With a bread knife Miss Martha made a deep slash in each of the stale loaves, inserted a generous quantity of butter, and pressed the loaves tight again.
- 26 When the customer turned once more, she was tying the paper around them.
- 27 When he had gone, after an unusually pleasant little chat, Miss Martha smiled to herself, but not without a slight fluttering of the heart.
- 28 Had she been too bold? Would he take offense? But surely not. There was no language of edibles. Butter was no emblem of unmaidenly forwardness.
- 29 For a long time that day her mind dwelt on the subject. She imagined the scene when he should discover her little deception.
- 30 He would lay down his brushes and palette. There would stand his easel with the picture he was painting in which the perspective was beyond criticism.
- 31 He would prepare for his luncheon of dry bread and water. He would slice into a loaf — ah!
- 32 Miss Martha blushed. Would he think of the hand that placed it there as he ate? Would he .....
- 33 The front doorbell jangled viciously. Somebody was coming in, making a great deal of noise.
- 34 Miss Martha hurried to the front. Two men were there. One was a young man smoking a pipe — a man she had never seen before. The other was her artist.
- 35 His face was very red, his hat was on the back of his head, his hair was wildly rumpled. He clenched his two fists and shook them ferociously at Miss Martha. At Miss Martha.
- 36 “Dummkopf!” he shouted with extreme loudness; and then “Tausendonfer!” or something like it in German.
- 37 The young man tried to draw him away.
- 38 “I vill not go,” he said angrily, “else I shall told her.”
- 39 He made a bass drum of Miss Martha’s counter.
- 40 “You haf shpoilt me,” he cried, his blue eyes blazing behind his spectacles. “I vill tell you. You vas von meddlingsome old cat!”
- 41 Miss Martha leaned weakly against the shelves and laid one hand on her blue-dotted silk waist. The young man took the other by the collar.
- 42 “Come on,” he said, “you’ve said enough.” He dragged the angry one out at the door to the sidewalk, and then came back.
- 43 “Guess you ought to be told, ma’am,” he said, “what the row is about. That’s Blumberger. He’s an architectural draftsman. I work in the same office with him.
- 44 “He’s been working hard for three months drawing a plan for a new city hall. It was a prize competition. He finished inking the lines yesterday. You know, a draftsman always makes his drawing in pencil first. When it’s done he rubs out the pencil lines with handfuls of stale bread crumbs. That’s better than India rubber.
- 45 “Blumberger’s been buying the bread here. Well, today — well, you know, ma’am, that butter isn’t — well, Blumberger’s plan isn’t good for anything now except to cut up into railroad sandwiches.”
- 46 Miss Martha went into the back room. She took off the blue dotted silk waist and put on the old brown serge she used to wear. Then she poured the quince seed and borax mixture out of the window into the ash can.

### 8.1.3 Note on the Author

O. Henry was the pen name of William Sidney Porter, 1862-1910, a short-story writer from U.S.A. His stories are known for the amusing representation of characters and surprising endings.

### 8.1.4 Glossary

(The numbers refer to the paragraphs in the reading passage.)

- 2 **'credit:** the amount of money in a person's account at bank
- 3 **trimmed:** made neat and tidy, especially by cutting away irregular parts
- 4 **'accent( n.):** (here) a particular way of speaking, usually connected with a country, area, or class
  - darned:** mended
  - 'wrinkled:** with small folds or lines on the surface
  - 'baggy:** hanging in loose folds
- 5 **stale:** not fresh
- 6 **'garret:** a small unpleasant room at the top of a house
- 7 **chop:** a small piece of meat, usually with a bone in it
  - sigh(v.):** let out a deep breath slowly and with a sound, indicating tiredness, sadness, or satisfaction, (here) longing
  - crust:** the hard brown outer surface of baked bread
  - 'drafty:** with cold air blowing through
  - 'attic:** the part of a house just below the roof
- 9 **Ve'netian:** of Venice, a city in Italy
  - palazzo:** palace
  - 'foreground:** part of a view (in a picture) nearest to the observer
  - 'gondolas:** long, light, flat-bottomed boats used on canals in Venice
  - 'trailing:** dragging behind
  - chiaro'scuro:** distribution of light and shade (in a painting)
- 11 **loafs:** (the usual plural of *loaf* is *loaves*)
  - blease:** please
- 12 **haf:** have
- 13 **'reveling in:** enjoying greatly
- 14 **der:** the
  - bairspective:** perspective, the art of drawing solid objects on a flat surface so that they give a natural effect of depth, distance, and solidity
  - goot:** good
- 17 **genius:** great ability, especially in producing works of art
- 19 **crave:** have a strong desire for
- 20 **pie:** meat or fruit covered with paste and baked in a deep dish
  - sally 'lunns:** slightly sweet bread-like cakes
- 21 **dis'couraged:** lacking in courage or confidence
  - meager** (American spelling), **meagre :** insufficient, poor
  - affront:** hurt somebody's feelings or self-respect, especially in public
- 22 **quince:** a hard fruit related to the apple, used in jelly
  - 'borax:** a white powder used to make glass, etc.,
  - com'plexion:** the natural colour and appearance of the skin, especially of the face
- 23 **'tooting:** a short warning sound from a horn, whistle, etc.
  - 'clanging:** a loud ringing sound, such as when metal is struck
  - 'lumbering:** moving in a heavy, clumsy way
- 24 **in'spired:** encouraged to act
- 25 **slash:** a long cut
- 27 **'fluttering:** quick and irregular beating
- 28 **'edibles:** things fit to be eaten
  - 'emblem:** an object which is the sign of something
  - an'maidenly:** not suitable to an unmarried girl
  - 'forwardness:** boldness
- 29 **dwelt:** thought at length

- 30 **'palette:** a board (with a hole for the thumb) on which an artist mixes his colours  
**'easel:** a wooden frame to support a picture
- 32 **blushed:** became red (in the face), from shame or confusion
- 33 **'jangled:** made a harsh metallic noise  
**'viciously:** in an ill-tempered manner
- 35 **'rumpled:** disarranged, crushed  
**'clenched:** closed tightly  
**fe'rociously:** fiercely
- 36 **Dummkopf:** (German) a word of abuse  
**Tausendonfer:** (German) a word of abuse
- 39 **'bass 'drum:** the large drum of an orchestra or band
- 40 **shpoilt:** spoil  
**'blazing:** shining very brightly (with anger)  
**vill:** will  
**vas:** was (were)  
**von:** one  
**'meddlingsome:** (meddlesome) in the habit of interfering
- 43 **archi'tectural:** of the art and science of building  
**'draftsman:** a man who prepares drafts or rough sketches, especially in architecture and engineering
- 44 **crumbs:** small pieces of dry food, especially bread or cake  
**India 'rubber:** rubber, especially as used for making toys or rubbing out pencil marks
- 45 **'railroad:** railway
- 46 **serge:** hard-wearing woollen cloth

### 8.1.5 Exercises in Comprehension

In some of the earlier units, as part of your attempt at reading for accuracy and detail, you did comprehension exercises that focused on reading for facts (factual comprehension) and reading by inference or reading between the lines (inferential comprehension). In this section, we shall give you more experience of inferring meaning and gathering significant factual information. In addition, we shall introduce you to the idea of

- i) **Critical or Evaluative** comprehension (which requires not only an understanding of what is both stated and implied in a reading text but also an ability to **judge** the ideas in it in the light of one's own experience); and
- ii) **Global** comprehension (which calls for an overall understanding of the whole of a reading passage or a sizeable section of it).

#### Exercise 1

Answer the following questions by choosing the best alternative under each. (Tick the correct answer.)

- 1 Suppose you were asked to describe Miss Martha in a few words, how would you do it?
  - a) Not-so-old, unmarried, fairly rich, tender-hearted woman.
  - b) Middle-aged, fairly rich, sympathetic bakery owner.
  - c) Forty years old, rich and unmarried, and possessing two false teeth.
- 2 What picture of Blumberger emerges from the first five paragraphs of the story?
  - a) A middle-aged, spectacled, bearded German architectural draftsman who could speak English.
  - b) A neatly dressed, good mannered German artist who always bought stale bread.
  - c) A well-behaved, neat, middle-aged person who always bought stale bread and did not speak English like a native.
- 3 Why did Miss Martha think that Blumberger was a poor artist?
  - a) He lived in a garret where he painted pictures and ate stale bread.

- b) He once had a red and brown stain on his fingers.
  - c) He was bearded and his clothes were worn and baggy.
- 4 When was Miss Martha convinced that Blumberger was really an artist?
    - a) He told her that he himself was an artist, on seeing the painting in the bakery.
    - b) He gave her a knowledgeable opinion of the painting.
    - c) He told her that the painting was an extremely fine one.
  - 5 What did Miss Martha daydream about?
    - a) That Blumberger might share her tasty meal instead of eating his stale bread.
    - b) That Blumberger might buy her delicious cakes, pies and sally lunnns.
    - c) That Blumberger and she could get married.
  - 6 Why didn't Miss Martha add something good to eat to Blumberger's regular purchase even though she really wanted to?
    - a) She was afraid that it might hurt his pride.
    - b) She did not have the courage to do it.
    - c) She thought he desired only her cheerful words and nothing more.
  - 7 How did Miss Martha manage to slip the butter into Blumberger's loaves of bread?
    - a) She did it when he was admiring the painting.
    - b) She did it when he left her alone for a few minutes.
    - c) She did it when he was busy looking at the fire-engine.
  - 8 How did Miss Martha feel after she had inserted the butter into Blumberger's bread?
    - a) Happy.
    - b) Slightly nervous.
    - c) Very frightened.
  - 9 'He made a bass drum of Miss Martha's counter' (Paragraph 39). Why?
    - a) Blumberger was an experienced drummer.
    - b) Blumberger had a habit of drumming on any counter with his fists.
    - c) Blumberger was expressing his anger.
  - 10 Why did Miss Martha's good intentions have a result different from the one she had expected?
    - a) Blumberger's chances of winning a prize were ruined by her action.
    - b) Blumberger shouted angrily at her.
    - c) Blumberger could not use buttered bread to rub out the pencil lines.
  - 11 What is the significance of the title 'Witches' Loaves'?
    - a) Miss Martha was a witch.
    - b) The actions of a witch have an evil effect.
    - c) Miss Martha's loaves spoil a man's chances of winning a competition.

### Exercise 2

There are twenty-five statements below. Only twelve of them are correct, according to the story. Read the statements carefully and pick out the twelve correct ones. (Tick the correct ones)

- 1 Miss Martha's bakery was built a little above ground level.
- 2 It was possible to open the door of the bakery without making any sound.
- 3 Miss Martha was not married because she was a very ordinary woman.
- 4 Miss Martha got interested in a customer who regularly bought stale bread from her.
- 5 The way the customer spoke English never suggested that he might be German.
- 6 Miss Martha thought that the customer bought stale bread because he was very poor.
- 7 There was no doubt that the customer always thought of the delicious things Miss Martha sold whenever he sat down to his simple meal.
- 8 Miss Martha placed a painting she had done in her bakery to find out the customer's occupation.
- 9 There was distribution of light and shade in plenty in the painting.

- 10 Miss Martha substituted the word 'paintings' for the word 'artists' (Paragraph 13) because she felt it was too early in her relationship with the customer to say 'artists'.
- 11 The customer thought that Miss Martha had been very clever in using the painting to test his occupation.
- 12 It was because the customer lived on stale bread that he was able to judge perspective at a glance.
- 13 When he got to know Miss Martha fairly well the customer would come to the bakery not just to buy stale bread but also to chat with her.
- 14 Miss Martha prepared a compound of quince seeds and borax to sell it to all those people who needed it for the complexion.
- 15 The day Miss Martha slipped butter into the customer's bread there must have been a fire in the town.
- 16 When the customer wasn't looking Miss Martha inserted butter into each of the fresh loaves.
- 17 'There was no language of edibles' (Paragraph 28); it suggests that an emotion like love is not usually conveyed through the offering of edibles.
- 18 The perspective in the pictures which the customer painted was always perfect.
- 19 The bakery doorbell did not tinkle but it jangled when the customer made a violent entry one day.
- 20 'At Miss Martha' (Paragraph 35); this phrase is repeated to suggest surprise at the customer's rude behaviour towards a friend like Miss Martha.
- 21 Miss Martha was not badly shaken by the customer's violent outburst.
- 22 Blumberger himself explained to Miss Martha why he was so angry with her.
- 23 Blumberger was using the stale bread he bought from the bakery for erasing pencil marks.
- 24 Miss Martha took off her blue-dotted silk waist and threw away her quince seed and borax mixture because she realised that her relationship with Blumberger had ended.
- 25 Miss Martha's romantic dreams came true.

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## 8.2 VOCABULARY

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In Exercise 3, you will learn to rewrite sentences, using the given words. In Exercise 4, you will learn to use a number of words from the story in different but meaningful contexts.

### Exercise 3

Rewrite the following sentences using the words given in brackets.

*Example* : Can you tell me how much money there is in my account? (credit)

*Answer* : Can you tell me how much money I have standing to my credit?

- 1 When Mr. Podgorny speaks English it is evident that his way of pronouncing it is that of a Russian. (accent)

.....

.....

- 2 The meat sold at Chin Lung's is certainly lower in quality than the meat sold at D'Souza's. (inferior)

.....

.....

- 3 Bertrand Russell was a man of very great and exceptional capacity of the mind, especially in philosophy and mathematics. (genius)

.....

.....

- 4 If his father had not encouraged him, Gurbux would have performed miserably at the interview. (inspire)

.....

.....

5 Sajani became red in the face at the mention of her lover's name. (blush)

.....  
.....

6 The restaurant near my Institute is becoming notorious for serving food that is dry, unappetizing and smelly. (stale)

.....  
.....

7 The kick was intended to hurt; it made Rahman helpless for the rest of the match. (vicious)

.....  
.....

8 Renuka was found lying in a pool of blood; somebody had made long, deep cuts on her pretty face. (slash)

.....  
.....

9 Whenever Kirti visits the fair she shows a strong desire for a ride in the merry-go-round. (crave)

.....  
.....

10 It is true that Naveen has been without work for a long time, but we should realize that he is looking for employment suited to his abilities. (occupation)

.....  
.....

#### Exercise 4

Fill in the blanks with the words taken from the following list:

affront	discouraged	ferocity
complexion	stain	rumpled
emblem	blaze	wrinkled

People called her the Quiet Maiden. Nobody could provoke her to anger, none could disturb her calm. She was the ..... of patience and understanding. The ..... forehead and the pale..... suggested a life of hardship and intense suffering. Yet it had not forced her to commit any wrong which would be a ..... on her character. There was not a single occasion when she had ..... a friend from approaching her for help or companionship. And then it happened. Someone stole her precious little money-box, which had a unique collection of old coins and ..... notes. It was an ..... to her sense of honesty and faith in humanity. She lost her balance. Her eyes began to ..... with hatred and contempt for all. When she began to indulge in acts of violence and cruelty her ..... knew no bounds. Soon, however, she was cured of her illness. In one of her violent fits she rushed to the nearest well and jumped in.

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### 8.3 GRAMMAR AND USAGE

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#### 8.3.1 The Simple Present Tense and the Present Continuous Tense

In this section you will learn to distinguish between the simple present tense and the present continuous tense.



The simple present tense has the simple form of the verb (called plain infinitive), with -s or -es added when there is a third person singular subject.

*Example* : He speaks English with an Indian accent.

The present continuous tense has a form of the verb *be* (agreeing with the subject in number and person) and the *-ing* form of the verb (called the present participle).

*Example* : I am painting a picture.

The simple present tense is generally used to refer to

- a habit

(*Example* : I go for a walk every morning.)

- a repeated action

(*Example* : He often comes here to play tennis.)

- something which is always true

(*Example* : The sun rises in the east.)

The present continuous is generally used to refer to an action going on at the moment of speaking:

*Examples* : The child is crying.

Look! he is coming in now.

Some verbs are generally not used in the present continuous even when they refer to the real present.

*Examples*:

I hear a strange noise.

I like some of the television serials.

I know the Principal very well.

We have no stamps in stock.

He wants to be a teacher.

This bag contains all my books.

I remember your friend Sohan.

### Exercise 5

Fill in the blanks with the simple present or the present continuous forms of the verbs given in brackets.

- 1 She ..... (have) a small shop in the market.
- 2 I ..... (do) my home work now. My brother ..... (play) in the garden.
- 3 I ..... (go) to the doctor. My father ..... (suffer) from a pain in the stomach.
- 4 Every time you ..... (visit) him, he ..... (think) you ..... (want) some help.
- 5 He ..... (seem) to be very busy.
- 6 You cannot go now. It ..... (rain)

### 8.3.2 Ways of Expressing the Future

You will now learn various ways of expressing the future. Here are some examples :

- 1 I shall see you in the evening. (simple future)
- 2 We are going to spend the vacation in Delhi. (intention)
- 3 It is going to rain. (likelihood)
- 4 The train is going to start. (action about to take place)
- 5 My father is going to Bombay next month. (planned programme)
- 6 I'll be staying here for a week. (planned programme)
- 7 The President arrives here next Monday. (official schedule)

### Exercise 6

Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the verbs given in brackets to indicate the future:

- 1 I ..... (leave) for Calcutta tonight.
- 2 I doubt if I ..... (be) able to come to the meeting.
- 3 I ..... (go) to the station this evening to meet my friend Gopal.
- 4 I think you should take an umbrella. It ..... (rain).
- 5 I ..... not (work) in this office any longer.



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## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have given you practice in

- i) reading and understanding a short story by O 'Henry,
- ii) using some of the words occurring in the story,
- iii) using the simple present tense and the present continuous tense correctly,
- iv) using the correct verb forms to express the future,
- v) noticing the deviations in a foreign speaker's use of English, and
- vi) re-writing a story in an abridged form.

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## 8.7 KEY WORDS

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**a'bridged:** made shorter

**al'ternative(n.):** one of more than two possibilities

**com'mand:** mastery

**'critical:** giving a judgement

**devi'ation:** turning away

**e'valuative:** deciding the value of something

**facts:** things that have happened

**'future:** time coming after the present

**'global:** covering the whole of a group of things

**'inference:** conclusion based on facts or reasoning

**loaf (plural: loaves):** mass of bread cooked as a separate quantity

**'normal:** in agreement with what is usual

**witch:** a woman said to use magic, especially for evil purposes

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## 8.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

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### Exercise 1

- |   |     |    |     |
|---|-----|----|-----|
| 1 | (a) | 7  | (c) |
| 2 | (c) | 8  | (b) |
| 3 | (b) | 9  | (c) |
| 4 | (b) | 10 | (a) |
| 5 | (c) | 11 | (b) |
| 6 | (a) |    |     |

**Exercise 2**

1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24.

**Exercise 3**

- 1 .... he has a Russian accent.
- 2 .... inferior to .....
- 3 ..... was a genius, especially .....
- 4 ..... had not inspired him, .....
- 5 Sajani blushed at the .....
- 6 .... serving stale food.
- 7 .... was vicious; it made Rahman .....
- 8 .... had made slashes on her pretty face.
- 9 .... she craves for a ride .....
- 10 .... looking for a suitable occupation.

**Exercise 4**

emblem, wrinkled, complexion, stain, discouraged, rumped, affront, blaze, ferocity

**Exercise 5**

1 has 2 am doing, is playing 3 am going, is suffering 4 visit, thinks, want  
5 seems 6 is raining

**Exercise 6**

1 am leaving 2 shall be 3 am going 4 is going to rain 5 am not going to work