

Bepin Choudhury's Lapse of Memory

Introduction

It is a humorous story in which the main character is made to believe himself sick. Perforce, he thinks that he has a lapse of memory. In truth there is nothing wrong with him.

Bepin Meets Ghosh

Bepin Choudhury was a regular visitor at Kalicharan's book shop in the New Market. That day, however, he had a strange feeling that someone was observing him closely. He turned round only to see a meek looking person break into a smile. The man seemed much surprised that Bepin Babu had not recognised him. He told Bepin Babu that he had been with him for a week when he visited Ranchi in 1958. Obviously, Bepin Babu thought that the man who called himself Parimal Ghosh was mistaken. He had never been to Ranchi. He told him so. But Ghosh looked at him in disbelief.

Ghosh Confuses Choudhury

Ghosh laughed aloud. He narrated the incidents of his Ranchi journey in detail. He told Choudhury how he had injured his knee in Hudroo. It was Ghosh who had come to his help then. One Mr. Dinesh Mukerji was also in Ranchi at that time. Ghosh was sure that Choudhury knew him. Choudhury had stayed in a hired bungalow while Mukerji remained with his sister. He even reminded Choudhury that he always carried a bag with his books on his sight-seeing trips. Now Bepin Babu asked Ghosh which month it was. 'October', replied Ghosh. At this Bepin Babu said that in October 1958, he was with his friend at Kanpur,

Ghosh is Determined

Ghosh didn't give in. He told Bepin Babu how he had one day spoken about his lonely life. Bepin Babu had then spoken about his dead wife and the only brother who died insane. Bepin Babu felt that while he stepped out, Ghosh was still looking at him in disbelief.

II

Bepin Babu Doubts

Bepin Babu asked his driver Sitaram to drive by the Ganga. He regretted having paid any heed to Ghosh. Yet the incident haunted his mind. The man knew a great deal about him. For the first time a slight doubt assailed his mind. "Was he losing his mind?" But he remembered well that he was at Kanpur. Suddenly he thought of writing to Haridas Bagchi, his host at Kanpur. Then he remembered that Haridas had left for Japan a few weeks before.

Bepin Babu Decides to Confirm

Bepin Babu rolled up his trousers and took a look at his right knee. There was a cut-mark. It was difficult to remember when he had got it. Then he thought of Dinesh Mukerji. Ghosh had said that Dinesh was in Ranchi at that time. He wanted to go to him at once. But what would Dinesh think of him ? After all Bepin Babu knew that he had never been to Ranchi. Dinesh would certainly consider him a little insane. He knew also that Dinesh was never his well-wisher.

Bepin Babu comes Home

Bepin Babu felt much better when he was home. After dinner, he lost himself in a new office the incident came back to him. Just before lunch Bepin Babu decided to ring up Dinesh. To his surprise, Dinesh confirmed what Ghosh had said.

Bepin Babu is Sick

Bepin Babu slammed the receiver down. He had lost his appetite. He did not take his lunch. Mr Mukerji had only added to his worries.

III

Chunilal Confirms His Fears

Bepin Babu had been in that firm for twenty five years. For the first time he was feeling sick. He could not continue working. His head was in a whirl. He came home. It was only 2.30. At 7.30 there was a visitor named Chuni Babu. Bepin Babu knew why Chunilal had come. They were at school together. Now Chunilal was having a rough time. He wanted Bepin Babu's help about a job. Bepin Babu knew he could not do anything and told him so. Yet Chunilal kept pressing. So at first he sent word that he could not meet Chunilal for a few weeks. Then remembering something, he hurried down to see him. He asked Chunilal if he remembered his going to Ranchi in 1958. Of course Chunilal did. He looked at Bepin Babu's face with concern. How could a man with so sharp a memory forget it ? Chunilal had himself been at the railway station to see him off. He expressed great concern about Bepin Babu's health. Bepin Babu said that it must be the hard work. He told Chunilal that he would consult a specialist.

The Specialist

Bepin Babu went to Dr Paresh Chandra and put his problem before him. The doctor was puzzled. He told him that his was an unusual case. He remembered everything except his trip to Ranchi. Yet he was somehow convinced of having been there. So the doctor suggested that he should go to Ranchi now. The sight of the place might remind him of the trip.

Bepin Babu at Ranchi

Acting upon his doctor's advice, Bepin Babu went to Ranchi. At the railway station of Ranchi itself, he felt certain of one thing. It was that he had never been there before. He went round the city and had the same feeling. He decided to try a trip to Hudroo also. So he went there. At five O'clock, the same afternoon two Gujarati gentlemen

found him. He was lying unconscious beside a boulder in Hudroo. On regaining consciousness, his first words were, "I'm finished. There's no hope left."

Bepin Babu is Cured

Next morning, he was back in Calcutta. He was a shattered man. He wondered if he was going to end up in an asylum. He rang up Dr. Chandra and asked him to come over. That day he went to bed with an ice bag clamped on his head. Then he received an envelope. He went through the letter at once. It was from Chunilal. In his letter Chunilal had first expressed his bitterness for getting no help from Bepin Babu. Then he frankly told Bepin Babu that his memory was alright. It was his plan in retribution against his unfeeling behaviour. Then he told Bepin Choudhury how he had played a practical joke upon him. This he did with the help of Mr Ghosh and Dinesh Mukerji. Now it was clear to Bepin Babu that he had not really lost his memory.

Bepin Babu's Lie

When Dr. Chandra came, Bepin Babu told a lie. He said that he had remembered everything on reaching Ranchi Railway station. He said that he had called him for a pain-killer. He had the pain in the hip due to a fall in Ranchi.