



# Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E13

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## 1. Lapse of Memory

Every Monday, on his way back from work, Bepin Choudhury would drop in at Kalicharan's bookshop in New Market to buy books. Crime stories, ghost stories and thrillers. He had to buy at least five at a time to last him through the week. He lived alone, was not a good mixer, had few friends, and didn't like spending time in idle chat. Today, at Kalicharan's, Bepin Babu had the feeling that someone was observing him from the corner. He turned around and found himself looking at a round-faced, meek-looking man who now broke into a smile.

"I don't suppose you recognise me?" said the man.

"Have we met before?" asked Bepin Babu.

The man looked greatly surprised. "We met every day for a whole week. I arranged for a car to take you to Hudroo Falls, in 1958, in Ranchi. My name is Parimal Ghose."

"Ranchi?" said Bepin Babu.

Now Bepin Babu realised that it was not he but this man who was making a mistake. Bepin Babu had never been to Ranchi. He had been at the point of going several times, but never made it. He smiled and said, "Do you know who I am?"

The man raised his eyebrows, bit his tongue and said, "Do I know you? Who doesn't know Bepin Choudhury?"

Bepin Babu now turned towards the bookshelves and said, "Still you're making a mistake. One often does. I've never been to Ranchi."

The man now laughed aloud.

"What are you saying, Mr Choudhury? You had a fall in Hudroo and cut your right knee. I brought you iodine. I had fixed up a car for you to go to Netarhat the next day, but you couldn't go because of the pain in the knee. Can't you recall anything? Someone else you know was also in Ranchi at that time. Mr Dinesh Mukerji. You stayed in a bungalow. You said you didn't like hotel food and would prefer to have your meals cooked by a home cook. Mr Mukerji stayed with his sister. You had a big argument about the moon landing, remember? I'll tell you more: you always carried a bag with your books in it on your sightseeing trips. Am I right or not?"

Bepin Babu spoke quietly, his eyes still on the books.

“Which month in 1958 are you talking about?”

The man said, “October.”

“No, sir,” said Bepin Babu. “During Pujas, in 1958, I was with a friend of mine in Kanpur. You’re making a mistake. Good day.”

But the man didn’t go, nor did he stop talking.

“Very strange. One evening I had tea with you on the veranda of your bungalow. You spoke about your family. You said you had no children, and that you had lost your wife ten years ago. Your only brother had died of mental illness, which is why you didn’t want to visit the mental hospital in Ranchi...”

When Bepin Babu had paid for the books and was leaving the shop, the man was still looking at him in utter disbelief.

Bepin Babu’s car was safely parked on Bert Street by the Ritz Cinema. As he got into the car, he told the driver, “Just drive by the Ganga, will you, Sitaram?” Driving up Strand Road, Bepin Babu regretted having paid so much attention to the stranger. He had never been to Ranchi — no question about it. It was inconceivable that he should forget such an incident which took place only six or seven years ago. He had an excellent memory. Unless - Bepin Babu’s head lost its brain.

Was he losing his mind? But how could that be? He was working daily in his office. It was a big firm, and he was doing a responsible job. He wasn’t aware of anything ever going seriously wrong. Only today he spoke for half an hour at an important meeting. And yet...

And yet the man knew a great deal about him. How? He even seemed to know some intimate details. The bag of books, wife’s death, brother’s insanity... The only mistake was about his having gone to Ranchi. Not a mistake; a deliberate lie. In ’58, during the Pujas, he was in Kanpur at his friend Haridas Bagchi’s place. All Bepin Babu had to do was write to — no, there was no way of writing to Haridas. Bepin Babu suddenly remembered that Haridas had left with his wife for Japan some weeks ago, and he didn’t have his address.

But where was the need for proof? He himself was fully aware that he hadn’t been to Ranchi — and that was that.

The river breeze was bracing, and yet a slight discomfort lingered in Bepin Babu's mind.

Around Hastings, Bepin Babu decided to roll up his trousers and take a look at his right knee.

There was the mark of an old inch-long cut. It was impossible to tell when the injury had occurred. Had he never had a fall as a boy and cut his knee? He tried to recall such an incident, but couldn't.

Then Bepin Babu suddenly thought of Dinesh Mukerji. The man had said that Dinesh was in Ranchi at the same time. The best thing surely would be to ask him. He lived quite near — on Beninandan Street. What about going right now? But then, if he had really never been to Ranchi, what would Dinesh think if Bepin Babu asked for a confirmation? He would probably conclude Bepin Babu was going nuts. No; it would be ridiculous to ask him.

And he knew how ruthless Dinesh's sarcasm could be.

Sipping a cold drink in his air-conditioned living room, Bepin Babu felt at ease again. Such a nuisance! Just because they have nothing else to do, they go about getting into other people's hair.

After dinner, snuggling in bed with one of the new thrillers, Bepin Babu forgot all about the man in New Market.

The next day, in the office, Bepin Babu noticed that with every passing hour, the previous day's encounter was occupying more and more of his mind. If the man knew so much about Bepin Babu, how could he make such a mistake about the Ranchi trip?

Just before lunch, Bepin Babu decided to ring up Dinesh Mukerji. It was better to settle the question over the phone; at least the embarrassment on his face wouldn't show.

Two-Three-Five-Six-One-Six. Bepin Babu dialled the number.

"Hello."

"Is that Dinesh? This is Bepin here."

"Well, well — what's the news?"

"I just wanted to find out if you recalled an incident which took place in 1958."

“1958? What incident?”

“Were you in Calcutta right through that year? That’s the first thing I’ve got to know.”

“Wait just a minute... 1958... just let me check in my diary.”

For a minute there was silence. Bepin Babu could feel that his heartbeat had gone up. He was sweating a little.

“Hello.”

“Yes.”

“I’ve got it. I’d been out twice.”

“Where?”

“Once in February — nearby — to Krishnanagar to a nephew’s wedding. And then... but you’d know about this one. The trip to Ranchi. You were there too. That’s all. But what’s all this sleuthing about?”

“No. I just wanted to — anyway, thanks.” Bepin Babu slammed the receiver down and gripped his head with his hands. He felt his head swimming. A chill seemed to spread over his body. There were sandwiches in his tiffin box, but he didn’t eat them. He had lost his appetite.

After lunchtime, Bepin Babu realised that he couldn’t possibly carry on sitting at his desk and working. This had never happened in the twenty-five years he had been with the firm. He had a reputation for being a tireless, conscientious worker. But today his head was in a whirl.

Back home at two-thirty, Bepin Babu lay down in bed and tried to gather his wits together. He knew that it was possible to lose one’s memory through an injury in the head, but he didn’t know of a single instance of someone remembering everything except one particular incident — and a fairly recent and significant one at that. He had always wanted to go to Ranchi; to have gone there, done things, and not to remember was something utterly impossible.

At seven thirty, Bepin Babu’s servant came and announced, “Chuni Babu, sir, He says it’s very important.”

Bepin Babu knew what Chuni had come for. Chunilal had been at school with him. He’d been having a rough time lately and had been coming to see him

about a job. Bepin Babu knew it was not possible to do anything for him and, in fact, told him so. But Chuni kept turning up like a bad penny.

Bepin Babu sent word that not only was it not possible for him to see Chuni now, but not in several weeks.

But as soon as the servant stepped out of the room, it struck Bepin Babu that Chuni might remember something about the 1958 trip. There was no harm in asking him.

Bepin Babu hurried down the stairs and into the living room. Chuni was about to leave, but seeing Bepin Babu appear, he turned around hopefully.

Bepin Babu didn't beat about the bush.

"Listen, Chuni - I want to ask you something. You have a good memory, and you've been seeing me off and on for a long time. Just throw your mind back and tell me - did I go to Ranchi in 1958?"

Chuni said, "1958? It must have been 1958. Or was it 1959?"

"You're sure that I did go to Ranchi?"

Chuni's look of amazement was not unmixed with worry.

"Do you mean you have doubts about having gone at all?"

"Did I go? Do you remember clearly?"

Chuni sat down on the sofa, fixed Bepin Babu with a long, hard stare and said, "Bepin, have you taken to drugs or something? As far as I know, you had a clean record where such things were concerned. I know that old friendships don't mean much to you, but at least you had a good memory. You can't really mean that you've forgotten about the Ranchi trip?"

Bepin Babu had to turn away from Chuni's incredulous stare.

"Do you remember what my last job was?" asked Chuni.

"Of course, you worked in a travel agency."

"You remember that and you don't remember that it was I who fixed up your railway booking for Ranchi? I went to the station to see you off; one of the fans in your compartment was not working — I got an electrician to fix it. Have you forgotten everything? What is the matter with you? You don't look too well, you know."

Bepin Babu sighed and shook his head.

“I’ve been working too hard,” he said at last. “That must be the reason. Must see about consulting a specialist.”

Doubtless, it was Bepin’s condition which made Chunilal leave without mentioning anything about a job.

Paresh Chanda was a young physician with a pair of bright eyes and a sharp nose. He became thoughtful when he heard about Bepin Babu’s symptoms. “Look, Dr Chanda,” said Bepin Babu desperately, “You must cure me of this horrible illness. I can’t tell you how it’s affecting my work.”

Dr Chanda shook his head.

“You know what, Mr Choudhury,” he said. “I’ve never had to deal with a case such as yours. Frankly, this is quite outside my field of experience. But I have one suggestion. I don’t know if it’ll work, but it’s worth a try. It can do no harm.”

Bepin Babu leaned forward anxiously.

“As far as I can make out,” said Dr Chanda, “And I think you’re of the same opinion — you must have been to Ranchi, but due to some unknown reason, the entire episode has slipped out of your mind. What I suggest is that you go to Ranchi once again. The sight of the place may remind you of your trip. This is not impossible. More than that I cannot do at the moment. I’m prescribing a nerve tonic and a tranquilliser. Sleep is essential, or the symptoms will get more pronounced.”

Bepin Babu felt somewhat better the next morning. After breakfast, he rang up his office, gave some instructions and then procured a first-class ticket for Ranchi for the same evening.

Getting off the train at Ranchi the next morning, he realised at once that he had never been there before.

He came out of the station, took a taxi and drove around the town for a while. He realised that the streets, the buildings, the hotels, the bazaars, the Morabadi Hill — with none of these had he the slightest acquaintance. Would a trip to Hudroo Falls help? He didn't believe so, but, at the same time, he didn't wish to leave with the feeling that he hadn't tried enough. So he arranged for a car and left for Hudroo in the afternoon.



At five o'clock the same afternoon in Hudroo, two Gujarati gentlemen from a group of picnickers discovered Bepin Babu lying unconscious beside a boulder. When he came round, the first thing Bepin Babu said was, "I'm finished. There's no hope left."

The next morning, Bepin Babu was back in Calcutta. He realised that there was truly no hope for him. Soon he would lose everything: his will to work, his confidence, his ability, his balance of mind. Was he going to end up in the asylum at...? Bepin Babu couldn't think any more.

Back home, he rang up Dr Chanda and asked him to come over. Then, after a shower, he got into bed with an ice bag clamped on his head. Just then the servant brought him a letter which someone had left in the letter box. A greenish envelope with his name in red ink on it.

Above the name, it said 'Urgent and Confidential'. In spite of his condition, Bepin Babu had a feeling that he ought to go through the letter. He tore open the envelope and took out the letter. This is what he read —

Dear Bepin,

I had no idea that affluence would bring about the kind of change in you that it has done. Was it so difficult for you to help out an old friend down on his luck? I have no money, so my resources are limited. What I have is imagination, a part of which I used in retribution for your unfeeling behaviour.

Well, you'll be all right again now. A novel I've written is being considered by a publisher. If he likes it enough, it'll see me through the next few months.

Yours, Chunilal

When Dr Chanda came, Bepin Babu said, "I'm fine. It all came back as soon as I got off the train at Ranchi."

"A unique case," said Dr Chanda. "I shall certainly write about it in a medical journal."

"The reason why I sent for you," said Bepin Babu, "is that I have pain in the hip from a fall I had in Ranchi. If you could prescribe a pain killer..."

## 2. Grammar Page

### The Comparison of Adjectives

#### The Comparative Form

To **compare two people or things**, use the **comparative form** of an adjective. The comparative form is usually made by adding **er** to the adjective.

adjective	comparative form	adjective	comparative form
dark	darker	hard	harder
light	lighter	warm	warmer
high	higher	cold	colder
low	lower	fast	faster
old	older	slow	slower
young	younger		
rich	richer		
poor	poorer		
tall	taller		
small	smaller		
soft	softer		

#### Notes

The word **than** is often used to compare two things or people. For example, you say:

Mr. Lee is **taller than** Philip.

A car is **faster than** a bike.

#### The Superlative Form

When you **compare three or more people or things**, use the **superlative form** of an adjective. The superlative form is usually made by adding **est** to the adjective.

adjective	superlative form	adjective	superlative form
dark	darkest	warm	warmest
light	lightest	cold	coldest
high	highest	fast	fastest
low	lowest	slow	slowest
old	oldest		
young	youngest		
rich	richest		
poor	poorest		
tall	tallest		
small	smallest		
soft	softest		
hard	hardest		

#### Notes

The word **the** is often used before the superlative form. For example:

A bee is a small insect. A ladybird is smaller, but an ant is **the smallest**.

If the adjective ends in **e**, add **r** to form the comparative and **st** to form the superlative.

adjective	comparative	superlative
nice	nicer	nicest
close	closer	closest
large	larger	largest
rude	ruder	rudest
safe	safer	safest
wide	wider	widest

Suppose the adjective is a short word that ends in a consonant and has a single vowel in the middle. Just **double the consonant** and add **er** to make the comparative and **est** to make the superlative.

adjective	comparative	superlative
sad	sadder	saddest
wet	wetter	wettest
slim	slimmer	slimmest
thin	thinner	thinnest
big	bigger	biggest

Suppose the adjective has two syllables and ends in **y**. Just **change the y to i** and add **er** to make the comparative and add **est** to make the superlative.

adjective	comparative	superlative	adjective	comparative	superlative
easy	easier	easiest	heavy	heavier	heaviest
funny	funnier	funniest	lovely	lovelier	loveliest
dirty	dirtier	dirtiest	pretty	prettier	prettiest
noisy	noisier	noisiest	tidy	tidier	tidiest
happy	happier	happiest	friendly	friendlier	friendliest
naughty	naughtier	naughtiest	tiny	tinier	tiniest