



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F43

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1. Dr Schering's Memory

By Satyajit Ray

2 January

What a splendid morning! The clear blue sky dotted with fluffy white clouds, as well as the bright sunshine, can almost give you the mistaken feel of autumn. The pleasure you get holding a freshly-delivered egg in your hand is strikingly similar to the experience of gazing at so fine a sky.

Of course there's another reason for my happiness. I'm actually resting after a very long time. This morning I finished working on my latest gadget. After returning from my garden to the laboratory, I sat down to take a long look at my new invention; this act of introspection gives me a feeling of great satisfaction. The device doesn't look much when viewed from the outside. At the most, it gives you an impression of a fashionable helmet or hat. The inside of this helmet contains 72,000 wires interwoven intricately into a dense electric circuit. It's the result of three years of untiring hard work. Let me give you an easy example to demonstrate how the invention works.

Just now, as I was resting on my chair, my man Friday, Prahlad, brought me a cup of coffee. I asked him, 'What fish did you buy on the 7th of last month?' After scratching his head a couple of times, he said, 'I don't remember this, Babu!' Then I asked him to sit on a chair, placed the helmet on his head and pressed a button. Prahlad's entire body shook for a while and then suddenly became still. In addition, his face bore a completely vacant look. I repeated my question.

'Prahlad, on the 7th of last month, what fish did you purchase?'

Upon hearing the question this time, there was no change in his expression and his lips parted only to utter the word, 'Tyangra.'

When I removed the helmet from his head, Prahlad stared blankly at me for a moment. He then suddenly jumped up from the chair and, with a beaming smile said, 'I now remember, Babu—it was Tyangra!'

Prahlad is only an example. This contraption can refresh anyone's memory at any given point of time. Apparently every human being's head has a collection of 100,000,000,000,000—i.e. one hundred trillion—memories, some clear and some hazy. These include scenes, incidents, names, faces, tastes, smells, songs, stories and countless other details. On an average, a person loses his or her memory of the first two years of life quite easily. My own memory is far superior

compared to others. I still remember a few things from when I was eleven months old. But then, too, a few of my childhood memories have also faded a little. For instance, when I was a year and three months old, I remember the local magistrate Blackwell, cane in hand, taking a walk with his dog by the banks of the Usri. The dog was white in colour but I couldn't remember its exact breed. But when I put the helmet on and recollected the scene, I immediately identified the dog as a bull terrier.

I've named this invention Remembrain, that is, a machine that helps your brain to remember old memories. Yesterday I sent an article about this in the English journal, *Nature*. Let's see what follows.

23 February

My article has appeared in *Nature* and ever since I've been receiving countless letters in response. People from Europe, America, Russia and Japan have all showed their eagerness to study this machine. On the 7th of May, there will be a science summit in Brussels where I have been requested to demonstrate this apparatus. In the world of scientists, none seem willing to believe that such a machine could be conceived, though they all are well aware of my calibre. The fact remains that the enigma of memory is still well beyond the realm of science and neurology. My own understanding is that when a fact enters your head it takes the form of a memory. I think each memory is equivalent to a chemical substance and each memory is marked by a different molecular structure. As years go by, memory fades away as no element can remain constant forever. My machine creates an electric current in the head to recharge the structure of the memory, which in turn helps to refresh one's memory.

I know many will question me on how I managed to work on such a machine despite not unravelling the basic mystery of memory. Even one-fourth of the knowledge that we now have about electric power wasn't available a century ago. Yet, despite such lack of knowledge on this subject, amazing inventions were carried out in the world of electrical gadgets. Similarly, I too discovered my own equipment, Remembrain. In short, this would be my reply.

I was very amused by a letter I received in response to my article in *Nature*. An American millionaire industrialist, Hiram Horenstein, has mentioned that while

writing his memoirs he could not clearly remember the incidents which had taken place before the age of twenty-seven. He plans to use this machine in order to revive his memory and to do so he is ready to recompense me adequately. In my reply, I mentioned very gently that my machine had not been invented to fulfil the desires of whimsical millionaires.

4 March

My morning began with reading the news of a horrible accident in Switzerland. Within half an hour I received a long telegram about this very accident. What a clear case of telepathy! The news which the paper reported was basically this: two noted scientists, Auto Lubin from Switzerland and Dr Heironimus Schering from Austria, were travelling in a car from the city of Landeck in Austria to Walenstadt in Switzerland. In the recent past, these two luminaries had been working on some scientific research, the subject of which was hitherto kept a secret. Both Lubin and Schering had been sitting at the back of the car. While driving down a hillside, the car fell into a deep gorge. A cowherd from a nearby village spotted the ruined car dangling precariously from a height of one thousand feet. Lubin's crushed body was located lying close to the car. Dr Schering had a miraculous escape. His body was caught in a bunch of bushes thirty feet below the road.

The moment this news reached Walenstadt, Norbert Busch, the Swiss biochemist, arrived on the scene. Lubin and Schering were both on their way to visit Busch in order to take a break. Busch put the unconscious body of Dr Schering into his spacious Mercedes Benz and brought him home. The newspaper had reported this much. The rest of the news I received via the telegram which Busch sent me. I must mention that I have known Busch for over ten years. We first met each other during a conference held in Florence. Busch has written—

'Though Schering's body bears no mark of injury, the wound in his head has erased his memory completely. And the additional news is, the driver is absconding and so are the research papers. The doctors, psychiatrists, hypnotists and others have all failed to revive Schering's memory.'

Busch has asked me to join him in Walenstadt immediately. Busch will bear the expense for this trip himself. He states at the end of the telegram, 'Dr Schering is

an outstanding individual. The science fraternity will eternally remain grateful to you if you bring him back to his normal self. Please let me know about your decision soon.'

I'll never find a more opportune moment to test the true potential of my machine. I need to organize my trip to Walenstadt right away. My machine is cent per cent portable. It weighs only eight kilos. There's no question of paying the airlines for extra baggage.

8 March

After landing in Zurich, I enjoyed the sylvan surroundings of the mountains as I was driven to the tiny town of Walenstadt, sixty kilometres away from Zurich, in Busch's car. I reached around 8.45 a.m. Soon I'll be called for breakfast.

Meanwhile, sitting in my room I made a quick entry in my diary. Surrounded by trees and flowers, biochemist Norbert Busch's house is built upon an area of 14 acres against a picturesque landscape. The house has wooden floors, a wooden staircase and wood-panelled walls. My room is west facing, on the second floor. When I open the window, I can see the Walen Lake surrounded by hills. Packed in a plastic bag, my machine is resting on a table next to the bed. I don't think there'll be any flaw in my hosts' hospitality. Just now Busch's three-year-old son, Willie, offered me a packet of chocolates. The child is very friendly and lovable. He freely roams around the house, reciting nursery rhymes and humming songs and jingles. Within minutes after my alighting from the car and greeting everyone, Willie came towards me and holding out a black cigar case said, 'Will you have a cigar?' I'm a non-smoker but trying not to disappoint the child I thanked him and took out a cigar from the case. If one needs to smoke at all it has to be a cigar; a high quality Dutch cigar like this one.

Six people are at present living in this house. Busch and his wife, Clara, Master Willie, Busch's friend—who is also Willie's teacher—the charming and quiet Hans Ulrich, and Dr Schering and his nurse, whose name probably is Maria. In addition, two policemen are constantly on vigil outside the house.

Schering's room faces the east. In between our rooms, there's a landing and a staircase leading to the ground floor.

Soon after reaching the house I went to meet Schering. He is of an average height, aged around fifty with blond hair showing a bald patch at the back. The shape of the face is somewhere between square and round. When I

entered his room, he was sitting on a chair next to a window, playing with a wooden doll. When he saw me enter, he turned his head in my direction but didn't get up from the chair. I realized he has forgotten the very basic manner of greeting a man by standing up. When I saw his face, I was stuck by a certain doubt. I asked him, 'Do you wear glasses?'

On reflex, Schering's left hand had reached near his eyes and then he put his hand down. Busch replied, 'His glasses have broken. A new pair has been ordered.'

After meeting Schering, we went to the drawing room. Following an exchange of pleasantries, Busch sheepishly confessed, 'To be very frank, I wasn't that enthusiastic about your new machine. In fact, I sent you that telegram partly at my wife's request.'

'Is your wife a scientist, too?' I asked, looking in Clara's direction.

Clara smiled. 'No, not at all. I work as my husband's secretary. I was very keen that you come. I have deep respect for India. I've read a lot of books on India and happen to know quite a bit about your country.'

If Busch has some reservations about my machine, he is sure to change his mind today. This evening, I'll try to unlock Schering's blocked memory.

At this point I couldn't help but enquire about the missing driver. Busch said, 'The cops are still investigating. He could be hiding in one place out of the two. He could either be westbound from the place of the accident, towards Remus, about four-and-a-half kilometres away, or eastbound—about three-and-a-half kilometres away, towards Schleins. The investigations are under way at both these locations. In addition, one team is also combing the forest areas adjacent the hills.'

'How far is the site of accident from here?'

'Eighty-five kilometres. The absconding driver has to take shelter somewhere as it snows at night in that region. My fear is that he could have passed on all the documents to an accomplice.'

8 March, 10.30 p.m.

There is a bright fire in the fireplace. A strong and cold wind is blowing outside. Despite the tightly-shut windows, one can clearly hear the howling of the wind.

Busch is amazed to realize my true potential as a scientist. Now, it'll be difficult to gauge who's a bigger fan of mine—he or his wife.

Today at six in the evening, we all assembled in Schering's room along with my device. He was still sitting in his chair like a zombie. He gave us a glazed look when we entered. After greeting him, Busch said in a jovial tone, 'We'll put a cap on your head today. Is that all right? It won't hurt you at all. You can continue to sit in the same chair.'

'A cap? What sort of a cap?' Schering asked in his deep yet mellow voice, sounding a bit uncomfortable.

'Just take a look.'

I took the gadget out of my bag. Busch handed it over to Schering. Just like when he was playing with the toy in the morning, he felt it and gave it back to me.

'Will this give me pain? The injection did hurt me that day.'

After receiving our assurances it wouldn't hurt, he relaxed and leaned back in the chair, letting his arms fall loosely by each side of the chair. Other than the mark of a sticking plaster on the wound near his neck, I didn't notice any overt sign of injury.

I faced no difficulty in putting the helmet on Schering's head. Then I pressed the red button and the battery of the helmet began to function. With a jerk, Schering's body turned stiff and wooden, and he stared at the fireplace blankly.

The room was deathly silent. I can still visualize the whole scene. With the exception of Schering himself, I could hear everyone breathing. Clara was standing in front of the door. The nurse was standing at the back of the bed, looking at Schering in fascination. Busch and Ulrich were standing on either side of the chair, bending forward in sheer tension.

I whispered to Busch, 'Would you like to ask him questions? Or should I? It'll work equally well if you do.'

'You might as well start.'

I pulled out a stool from the corner of the room and sitting down in front of Schering began my interrogation.

'What's your name?'

Schering's lips parted. In a low yet clear voice, he answered. 'Hieronymus Heinrich Schering.'

'It's for the first time . . .' Busch said in a choked voice, 'for the first time he is telling his own name!'

I put forth my second question.

'What's your profession?'

'I am a professor of physics.'

'Where were you born?'

'Austria.'

'In which city?'

'Innsbruck.'

Inquiringly, I looked at Busch. Busch nodded to say that it was all falling into pattern. I turned my attention back to Schering.

'What's your father's name?'

'Karl Dietrich Schering.' 'Do you have any siblings?'

'I've a younger sister. My elder brother is dead.'

'When did he die?'

'During the First World War. On the 1st of October 1917.'

In between my questioning, I was glancing at an astonished Busch. His repeated nodding confirmed Schering's answers.

'Did you go to Landeck?' 'Yes.'

'For what purpose?'

'I'd some work with Lubin.'

'What work?'

'Research.'

'On what subject?'

'BX 377.'

Busch whispered to say this is the code for their research. I returned to my questioning.

'Did you finish your research?'

'Yes.'

'Was it a success?'

'Yes.'

'What was the subject of your research?'

'We had invented a new formula for an atomic weapon.'

'Were you returning to Walenstadt after finishing your work?'

'Yes.'

'Were you carrying the papers of this research?'

'Yes.'

'The formula as well?'

'Yes.'

‘Was there an accident on the way?’ ‘Yes.’

‘What happened?’

Busch placed his hand on my shoulder. I know why. I’d been noticing a state of restlessness in Schering. He now licked his lips, and blinked his eyelids once. [The veins were swollen at his temples.](#) ‘I . . . I . . .’

Schering stopped speaking. He was now breathing heavily. I’m convinced that he has grown anxious as he had let out the secrets of his invention.

I pressed the green button to stop the battery. There was no point in further questioning him under the present circumstances. We could wind up the rest tomorrow.

The moment I removed the helmet from Schering’s head he leaned against the chair. He then took a deep breath, shut his eyes then opened them at once, looked around and said, ‘A cigar . . . a cigar . . .’

I wiped the sweat from Schering’s forehead. Busch looked a bit embarrassed. He cleared his throat and said, ‘But there are no cigars. No one smokes a cigar in this house. Would you like a cigarette?’

Ulrich took out a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offered him one. Schering didn’t take any.

I asked, ‘Did you have a box of cigars of your own?’

‘Yes, I did,’ Schering replied. He looked tired and restless. ‘Was it a black case?’

‘Yes, yes.’

‘In that case, it’s with Willie. Will you please look for it, Clara?’ Clara immediately left the room in search of her son.

The nurse took Schering’s hand and helped him lie on the bed. Busch went near the bed and with a smile said, ‘Do you remember it now?’

In response, Schering stared at Busch looking very surprised. In a calm voice he asked, ‘Remember what?’

This question from Schering didn’t please me at all. Busch, too, looked puzzled. He gathered his wits and calmly said, ‘But you’ve answered all our questions correctly.’

‘What questions? What have you asked me?’

Now I briefly described our question-answer session held a few minutes ago. Schering remained quiet for a while. He gently put his hand on his head and looking at me asked, ‘What did you put on my head?’

‘Why do you ask this?’

‘I’m in pain. I feel as if hundreds of pins are pricking inside my head.’ ‘You’ve already had a head injury. When you fell down the hill you injured your head and lost your memory.’

‘I anyway had a head injury. Why should I fall down the hill?’ All three of us stared at each other.

Clara returned. She was carrying the cigar case I’d already seen. She gave it back to Schering and apologized, ‘I don’t know when my son took this to his room. Please don’t mind.’

Busch once again cleared his throat and said, ‘I hope you now remember that you smoke cigars.’

Schering took the box in his hands and closed his eyes. He genuinely looked tired. We realized it was time to leave this room.

After putting back the Remembrain into my bag, we returned to the drawing room. I was going through a mixed feeling of elation as well as anguish. If you regain your memory after wearing the helmet, why must you lose your memory all over again? Does that mean Schering’s head injury is rather grave?

The other three did not look that dejected.

Ulrich was, of course, ecstatic about my machine. He said, ‘There’s no doubt that your invention is a real milestone. This is no mean feat: to bring out the right answers to all the questions you put to him, knowing he had a complete loss of memory!’

Busch said, ‘Actually the door to the memory is so tightly shut that it’s not completely opening up yet. All we can do is to wait till tomorrow. Once more we need to put the helmet on him. Our part would only be to extract answers from him. We have to find out what transpired in the car before the accident. The rest will be handled by the police.’

Around 8 p.m. Busch called up the police to get the latest report. There’s still no news about the driver, [Heinz Neumann](#). Does that mean Neumann, along with the formula BX377, has been buried under the snow forever?

9 March

When I didn’t get any sleep till 2 a.m., I finally took Somnonil, a pill of my own invention, and fell into a deep sleep for three-and-a-half hours. In the morning, when I was just thinking of checking my machine to see if it was functioning fine, I

heard a knock on my door. I opened the door and saw Schering's nurse. She looked agitated.

'Dr Schering is calling for you. There's an urgent need.'

'How's he now?'

'Very well. He slept soundly last night. The headache is no longer there. He is a completely changed man now.'

Still in my nightgown, I went to Schering's room. He greeted me with a bright smile and wished me good morning. I asked him, 'How are you?'

'I've completely recovered. And my memory is all back. Your machine is indeed a marvellous one. But just one request. Whatever I have disclosed about our research in response to your question, please keep to yourself.'

'There's no need to mention this. You can completely rely on our discretion.'

'One more thing. I want to find out about Lubin. I want to know where he is. Is he, too, lying in bed, injured?'

'No. Lubin is dead.'

Schering's eyes widened. 'He is dead?'

I said, 'It's by the sheer grace of God that you've survived.' 'And the papers?' Schering sounded desperate.

'Nothing has been recovered. What's really worrying is that the papers along with the driver have disappeared. Do you think you can enlighten us about this?'

Schering slowly nodded his head and said, 'Yes, indeed I can.'

I drew up a chair and sat next to his bed. The people in this house were yet to wake up. Never mind. Since such an opportune moment was right here, I'd continue with the conversation. I asked, 'Why don't you tell me what had happened exactly?'

Schering said, 'After leaving Landeck and crossing the border of Finstermuntz, we were in Switzerland. Travelling further for a few kilometres we reached the small city of Schlientz. The car halted there for fifteen minutes. After having beer in a shop we resumed our journey, but within ten minutes the car appeared to have developed some trouble and the driver, Neumann, stopped the car to locate the problem. He seemed to check under the bonnet and then called for Lubin. The moment Lubin went towards him, Neumann struck him with a wrench on his head, rendering him unconscious. Naturally, I stepped out of the car. But Neumann was a very strong man. I lost out in the scuffle and he struck me on the head with that same wrench, knocking me unconscious too. After this, I remember nothing.'

I said, 'It's easy to predict the rest. Neumann put both of you in the car, pushed the car into the gorge and then fled with the research papers.'

I'd heard the phone ring a while ago. Now I heard the stomping of feet on the wooden floor. Busch ran into Schering's room. His eyes were gleaming.

'They have found some papers in the gorge near the accident site. The writing on them has more or less disappeared but it's not difficult to guess what papers these are.'

'Which means the formula hasn't been lost!' Schering exclaimed.

Busch looked quite perplexed when he heard these words from Schering. I explained to him what had occurred this morning. Busch said, 'I hope you can now gather what happened—perhaps Neumann never took the formula. He may have fled carrying the cash and a few valuables with him.'

'How can you say that,' said Schering, sounding very worried. 'Apart from important documents we also had some not so important papers. The papers which have been recovered from the gorge may not have any connection with the research papers.'

Schering is right. It can't be ascertained from a few faded papers that Neumann hasn't taken the formula with him. Anyway, Busch and I decided that after having breakfast, we both would visit the accident spot, leaving Schering with Ulrich. We're hoping against hope that we may recover a few more papers which may contain the formula. The accident site between Remus and Schlientz is twenty-five kilometres away. At the most it'll take us a quarter of an hour to reach there. I feel it's much more important to look for the papers rather than for the driver. It doesn't matter if they are all washed out. I have the expertise to decipher such texts.

Now it's 8.30 a.m. We'll leave in ten minutes. Though I've no clear idea why, somehow I feel a bit bothered. There seems something wrong in this whole affair. But I can't exactly pinpoint what it is.

But I'm certain about one thing, though. There's absolutely nothing wrong with my machine.

10 March, 11 p.m.

I've come out of an unending and terrifying nightmare. I'm yet to recover from this ordeal. I know I'll finally come out of this only when I get back to Giridih and its normal environs. I could never believe that such a horrifying incident could take place against the backdrop of such a charming city. I could hardly believe that a

horrifying incident like this could take place . . .

When Busch, Hans Berger of the Swiss police and I left for the accident site yesterday morning, I looked at my watch. It was quarter-to-nine. One could see ice everywhere—on the roads, on the hills and on the peaks. Even though the windows of our car were rolled down, judging by the restless trees one could gauge the speed of the wind. Busch was driving; I sat next to him and Berger was sitting at the back.

It took us one hour and ten minutes to reach our destination. We had halted for three minutes in Remus where we met a man from the police department. I was told that they still had no news of Neumann. Investigations were on in full swing and they had even announced a reward of 5000 francs for finding Neumann.

The natural surroundings of the accident site are beautiful. The gorge alongside the road is three-and-a-half thousand feet deep. When you look down you can spot a narrow river. I thought to myself that if the documents had gone floating in the river then the chances of recovering them were rather bleak. The road here is so wide that unless someone deliberately pushes a car or the driver loses his mind there's no chance of the car falling straight down the ravine. I could see some cops near the hill, and on the road across I spotted some jeeps and cars. Clearly they were keeping no stone unturned in this investigation. Busch and I began to climb down the hill . . .

There's a footway and the slope is not that dangerous either. From afar I could hear the ringing of bells. Perhaps some cows were grazing. Swiss cows wear big bells. And the sweet sounds add to the charm of the surroundings.

We first needed to see the site where the car had crashed as well as the spot where Lubin's body was found. A thick carpet of ice surrounded us and occasional blobs of snow fell off the branches of tamarisk, beech and ash trees.

However, even after hunting for forty-five minutes, we couldn't locate a single piece of paper. After climbing down from the spot of the crash for about 500 feet, what I discovered was simply unexpected.

This discovery was mine alone. Everyone was looking for pieces of paper. But my own scrutiny didn't escape the branches and the leaves of trees. I stood under an oak tree, thickly covered with leaves, and when I looked up what I observed was neither scraps of paper nor snow. My sense of observation is ten times more powerful than that of a policeman. I immediately realized that the object was a piece of cloth. I gestured at Berger and pointed my finger towards the tree. The moment he saw that, he

swiftly climbed up a branch. Within minutes I heard his agitated voice. He screamed in his mother tongue, German—

‘Da ist eine leiche! I can see a dead body!’

The body was brought down within five minutes. Because of the snow, even after so many days the body had remained intact. It was no trouble to figure out that the body was that of the driver, Heinz Neumann. The pocket of his coat contained his driving licence and some personal identity cards. Neumann’s body showed signs of broken bones, and there were marks of injury on his face and hands. There’s no doubt that he, too, had fallen out of the car on to the oak tree.

Does that mean that Neumann, after rendering both Schering and Lubin unconscious and while pushing the car with the bodies in it, himself slipped and fell down the ravine? Or could someone else have done him in? Whatever the case, the police department need not work any further to look for Neumann.

I must also mention that no research related papers were located in the pockets of Neumann’s clothes. If these are located within the gorge, well and good, otherwise this was the end of the BX377 affair . . .

We left for Walenstadt at 11 a.m. We were both in a state of complete exhaustion. This was partly due to the exertion of climbing up and down the hills as well as the discovery of the body. Coupled with this, like the previous night, today, too, there was something that made me very uneasy. Occasionally, I react to a chain of thought—trying to connect to something—but that thought process swiftly snaps and goes into oblivion. Remembrance was still with me. I didn’t feel like staying away from it. Once I thought of asking Busch to question Schering, but I soon realized I’ve no idea about the kind of queries to frame in order to restore his memory. I decided to drop the idea.

It was getting a bit cloudy and the moment our car stopped at the gate it began to drizzle.

Schering was as baffled as us when we told him about the discovery of Neumann’s body. He said, ‘The death of two people along with an absolute waste of seven years of sheer hard work.’ He took a deep breath and then remarked, ‘It’s good in a way.’

We looked at Schering in surprise. He seemed dejected and said, ‘I anyway had no wish to work on any weapon of mass destruction. The offer first came from Lubin. Though I’d initially protested, I inadvertently got involved as Lubin was a very close friend of mine since college days.’

With a smile, Schering looked in my direction. 'Do you know what inspired us to work on this invention? I'm particularly telling you since you're an Indian. Lubin knew Sanskrit. He happened to have read an amazing scripture written in Sanskrit kept in the Berlin Museum. The name of this scripture was *Samarangan Sutram* (Techniques of Warfare). It mentioned countless descriptions of combat mechanisms. After reading the books, Lubin conceived the very idea of this invention. Never mind . . . perhaps what has transpired will prove to be good in the end and actually be a blessing in disguise.'

I've heard of *Samarangan Sutram* but never had the fortune to read it.

But the fact that Indians had devoted very special thoughts to warfare mechanisms long, long ago becomes quite apparent when you read the Mahabharata.

There was no point in detaining Schering any more. When we had been away he'd called up a friend in Altdorf asking him to come and fetch him. Altdorf is seventy-five kilometres away from here. Schering's friend said he'd come in the evening to pick him up.

*

All afternoon the four of us whiled away the hours in conversation. Around 3.30, a brand-new, fashionable red car appeared in front of our house. A well-built man more than six feet in height and aged around forty, wearing a leather jerkin and corduroy trousers, alighted from the car. Judging from his tanned face I could gather (and was later told what I thought was right) that his actual passion is climbing and that he has climbed the highest mountain, Monte Rosa, in Switzerland, five times. Otherwise he is a lawyer by profession. Needless to mention though, he is Schering's friend, Peter Frick.

Schering bade farewell to everyone. Once more, he highly praised my appliance and then left for Altdorf.

After ten minutes of his leaving, when Clara was about to serve us lemon tea and cake on the table, like a flash everything became clear about what had been bothering me for so long. And right then, alarming everyone in the room, I jumped up from the sofa, looked in Busch's direction and said, 'Let's go. We need to reach Altdorf right away.'

'What does that mean?' Ulrich and Busch spoke in unison.

‘Never mind the meaning. We can’t afford to lose any time.’

Noticing my eagerness to get going at once, even at my age, both Busch and Ulrich got up immediately. Running up three steps at a time I asked Busch, ‘Have you got a gun? I haven’t brought mine.’ ‘I’ve a Luger automatic.’

‘Bring it with you. And if the police officer is still here, ask him to come with us. Also, ask them to be ready with the police force at Altdorf.’

After picking up the machine from my room, the four of us got into Busch’s car and raced towards Altdorf. Busch was an expert driver. Within a minute he had picked up speed of 120 kilometres per minute. In this country, the person who sits in the front has to tie the seat belt like you do in a plane. The car is designed in such a way that unless you tie the belt the engine won’t start. Not only that, in case there’s need to suddenly brake, two soft pillow-like cushions appear from the dashboard, stopping you from falling forward and injuring your face.

We faced no sudden brakes.

On the way none of us spoke. Perhaps judging by the look on my face the others didn’t dare ask me any question. Except for me, the group was clueless about this expedition.

Within a few seconds of crossing the thirty-kilometre signage, we spotted Schering’s red car. I called out, ‘Overtake the car and stop!’

Blowing the horn, Busch overtook the red car and from a distance waved his hand. He stopped his own car at an angle so that Schering’s car couldn’t help but stop.

We got out of the car. Taken by surprise, both Schering and his friend came towards us.

‘What is it?’ questioned Schering.

I stepped forward. Even though Schering tried to look normal, his lips had gone dry and pale. His friend, Peter Frick, stood three steps behind him. I calmly said, ‘I feel like having a cheroot. Having smoked one last night, I’ve become addicted to your Dutch cheroot. I hope you still have the cigar case with you?’

These plain words, spoken softly, was like fire striking dynamite. In a flash, Schering's friend pulled out a revolver from his pocket and fired at us. I felt the bullet graze my right hand and embed itself into a corner of the roof of Busch's Mercedes Benz. Then I heard the sound of another shot; Busch had shot Frick with his gun and the revolver slipped out of Frick's hand and skidded on the ice on to the side of the road. With his knees folded, Frick sat down on the road; his face was contorted with pain as he held his injured left hand.



And Schering? Letting out a wild cry, he began to run in the opposite direction but both Busch and Ulrich pounced on him with tiger-like fireceness and grabbed him. And I—the noted international scientist Trilokeshwar Shonku—took out my unique invention, the Remembrain, and putting it on Schering's head, switched on the battery.

Sandwiched between his two captors, Schering stood motionless. With the machine on, his face had become vacant, as if he was meditating, looking at the far-off snow-capped mountaintop.

Now my show began.

I shot forward a barrage of questions aimed at Schering.

'How did Dr Lubin die?'

'By suffocation.'

'Did you kill him?'

'Yes.'

'How?'

'By strangling.'

'Was the car on the move at that point?' 'Yes.'

'How did the driver Neumann die?'

'Neumann observed the scene of Lubin's murder in the rear view mirror. At that point his steering went out of control. The car fell into the gorge.'

'And you fell along with it?'

'Yes.'

'Did you think you would kill both Lubin and Neumann and throw them into the gorge?'

'Yes.'

'And then abscond with the formula?'

'Yes.'

'What would you have done with it?'

'I would have sold it.'

'To whom?'

'To whoever bid the highest.'

'Do you possess the formula papers?'

'No.'

'Then what do you have?'

'The tape.'

'The formula is recorded in it?'

'Yes.'

'Where's that tape?'

'In the cigar case.'

'Is that a tape recorder in reality?'

'Yes.'

I took the helmet off his head. The police, with striding steps, walked up the wet road towards Schering.

I was thinking what an amazing thing our brain is and what strange games our memory plays. Yesterday, Schering asked for a cigar; Clara offered him the case yet he didn't light up one to smoke. At that point, I should have made the connection but I didn't. Even this morning, in his room, I neither saw any sign of a cheroot nor could I smell one. In the normal course, the cigar case should have been on the side table but it wasn't there. This afternoon we had sat in the drawing room for quite long but even then he hadn't smoked a single cigar.

The cigar case is now lying on my table. It's made of gunmetal and intricately devised. You can find a cigar when you open the case but below the layer of cigars is an almost invisible button that when pressed opens a hidden compartment which accommodates a tiny tape recorder along with a microphone. Running the tape, I could hear the entire formula of BX377 recorded in Schering's own voice. If one can record something else over this recording, Schering's dangerous formula will get deleted for eternity.

Isn't that Willie's voice? He is again humming a ditty. I take out the microphone and switch on the recorder.

2. Grammar Page

Present continuous/simple future/going to

⇒ We use 'going to' when we have the intention to do something before we speak or we have already made a decision before speaking.

I have won a lottery. I am going to buy a new TV.

We're not going to see my mother tomorrow.

When are you going to go on holiday?

⇒ We often use 'going to' to make a prediction about the future. Our prediction is based on evidence. We are saying what seems sure to happen. Here are some examples:

The sky is very black. It is going to rain.

It's 8.30! You're going to miss the train!

I crashed the company car. My boss isn't going to be very happy!

⇒ The present continuous is used for future arrangements and future certainties.

I've just finished making the travel arrangements! I'm meeting Aryan at the bus stop at five o'clock and we're leaving on the 5:30 bus.

I'm seeing the dentist tomorrow sharp at six. I have already made an appointment.

⇒ Simple future is used for promises, spontaneous decisions and future uncertainties.

I shall buy you a nice dress next month. It's my promise.

I think I'll go to Pokhara by bus.

Maybe they will arrive here tomorrow.



Grammar Practice: Supply the correct tense of the verbs given in the brackets.

- I will ask him about his plans when he back. (come)
- I'll wait here until he up. (wake)
- As soon as they in, lock the door. (get)
- I'm going to clean the room after I my bike. (wash)
- I'm sure he here soon. (be)
- She wants to know when you her books. (return)
- They (bath), (dress) and (feed) the baby. Then it was sick!
- The film (begin) before they (arrive).
- When she (arrive) at the airport, the plane (go) so she (have to) sleep in the departure lounge.
- Her hair (grow) too long so the hairdresser (have to) cut it.
- She (be) a famous model but then she (become) an actress.
- The musicians (practise) the concert for 5 days before they (be) ready to play.
- John and Jane (not see) each other for years when they (meet) by chance in the street.
- The patient (be) ill for years before the doctors (discover) the cure.
- We in Delhi 5 months ago. (arrive)
- They in Pokhara for five days now. (stay)
- We have each other for ages. (not see)
- The tour group (travel) different parts of India. They're in Dubai now.
- I (work) in this school for 15 years. I know everyone.