

## **Poka ((The Insect)**

On that day Ghanada was almost outwitted and put to shame.

Almost outwitted, in the sense that Ghanada was not someone who could ever be actually put out of countenance. In whatever awkward position he found himself, Ghanada had an exceptional ability to extricate himself and emerge unscathed. Like an oily fish, he is always capable of slipping out of any odd situation.

However that day he found himself too deeply entrenched to be able to easily escape ridicule. The laughter and mockery of all his residential mess mates almost caused his longstanding famous and powerful reputation to be completely washed away.

Ghanada lived all alone in a tiny pigeonhole-like room in the attic of the Mess. Needless to say this arrangement was not to his liking at all. Not that it was actually very acceptable to us either. After all to be in close proximity all the time to a man of his extra-ordinary caliber, was something we all felt was a little hazardous for us as well.

On that particular day, at around midnight, we thought some skirmish had broken out suddenly in Ghanada's third floor room. It was a Saturday night. Since the next day was a holiday and there was no need to wake up early, all of us had spent a little more time playing cards and dice. We were just about to go to sleep. Just then, the sounds of table and chair upturning, along with Ghanada's inhuman scream from his room upstairs made us sit up on our beds.

What had happened!

Cards and chess were anathema to Ghanada. So, on Saturday, a little upset with us, he retired somewhat earlier than normal. Then the sound of his settling down comfortably and savouring tobacco; from time to time the sound of his snoring akin to a chainsaw cutting through wood could be heard. We were aware of all this from below.

But what had suddenly happened tonight to disturb this blissful sleep? Hearing Ghanada's scream one would have thought that the disturbance must have been caused by nothing less than a ferocious tiger who had been starving for at least seven days, or by some murderous goon who had broken out of a lunatic asylum armed with a knife. But to a valorous global hero like Ghanada, why would he make such a loud fearful cry? Then what could the matter possibly be?

Within a moment we could hear the protagonist of this mystery, Ghanada, come hurtling down the stairs. Quickly moving forward we asked in anxious tones, "What is the matter, Ghanada?"

Ghanada had possibly not expected us to be awake till now. Facing all our anxious questions, initially, for a moment he appeared to be a little awkward and unprepared. However that must have been a mistaken notion in our minds. In a second he stunned us by speaking in an undertone, "Matter? The matter is exactly what I thought it would be."

If his words were hard to comprehend, then Ghanada's voice was even more mysterious. In that tone, there was such a hint of terrible fear and panic, that it felt as though a current of chilled cold water had suddenly been poured down the spine!

Shibu was the first to recover and standing up in a trembling voice he asked, "Was it a ghost, Ghanada?"

"Ghost!" one could gauge from Ghanada's sarcastic tone, that by suggesting something as ordinary as a ghost, Shibu had greatly insulted him.

"Let's all go upstairs and see for ourselves," proposed Gaur.

It was evident though that Ghanada was strongly against this suggestion. From his words it was clear that he was unwilling to send us to face such terrible danger. He would rather spend the night in one of our rooms and take whatever action required in the morning. We, however, were unable to give up so easily. What was it that had compelled someone like Ghanada to let out a desperate call for help in the middle of the night, was something we could not leave undiscovered. How could we rest without even making an effort to find out the cause?

Very cautiously all of us climbed up the stairs to Ghanada's room. In this haste, Ghanada had not even been able to switch the light on. The room was pitch dark. We were scared to even press the switch, apprehensive at what we would see. Shishir was the first one to have the courage to do so.

However, what was there to see!

Except for upturned table and chair there was nothing else to be seen!

After having failed to prevent us in spite of his best efforts, Ghanada entered the room behind us. The minute he saw us looking at him in amazement, with a serious face he said, "What did I tell you!" His attitude was that there being nothing in the room was itself a dreadful mystery.

Before we could react, suddenly a strange sound could be heard in the room. A sound like *Gon*, rose up from the floor and ended with a thudding *thak* sound. Surprised by this sudden noise and primarily out of fear we had almost unknowingly rushed back towards the stairs at first. However, having within a moment discovered the reason, we all collapsed into such prolonged peals of laughter, that we almost got stomach cramps.

Gour was up right in front of us all. In spite of having also leapt back initially like us, he was the one that picked up the real cause of this frightful mystery from the floor.

A big sized, hard-shelled coconut shaped insect!