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Shattered

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It is the huge blackened lengthening train, *Udarata Menike* that traverses forward on the railway track heading towards the hill country with mounting haste like a sizzling dark cobra. Kaushitha is now crouching on his school bag, and there is an unceasing blush on his face which, instead of shattering away, seems to get darker and darker by every second passing. He tries hard to quash the mounting tension, and he is now as unsteady as a kid crying of hunger. He lays his head on the fully packed bag that is on his hands. He again straightens his back and rests his head on the handlebar of the seat. Now, he flings his hands beneath his head sighing nervously. There is nothing that he can do for the moment being, but to sigh and sigh till the fire that is raging in his heart diminishes. Balls of tears well out his reddish eyes and glisten at the touch of the twilight filtering through the windows.

His heart is now getting overwhelmed with the thoughts; the memories of the recent event are crisscrossing here and there within his head. He tightens his eye lids to squeeze the tears away, but only to grasp a succession of past events being reflected on his mind's eye. Now, his heart suddenly rushes to the past, to around five years back, revealing how he beamed up with exuberance hearing the news of his great achievement at the Grade V Scholarship examination, especially how his parents hugged and kissed him brimming with delight. Now, he remembers the day before he was to embrace his new life, the Colombo life where his school was a humongous and sparkling college in the buzzing metropolis of Colombo. A crowd of his relatives were gathered at his home, and they talked about their great expectations for him to become a doctor or an engineer. They also made humorous remarks imagining how he would treat them contemptuously, once he became a big man. Now his heart is sinking within himself because he is getting crippled by the thought that his entire future is going to be gloomy.

Kaushitha is a boy from a village in the hill country. Having passed the scholarship examination with flying colours, he entered a top-ranking school in Colombo, and it was with myriads of hopes that his parents sent him there. His father is a farmer and earns only a meagre income by cultivating the small plot of land that he has inherited. Kaushitha's mother is unemployed, and he has two younger sisters at home. He is now engaged in a great battle with his heart to suppress the torturing sense of impending doom. Though he endeavours laboriously to get rid of the evil memories, he can't fight them hard enough. So, he lets his heart trace them. He has been punished most severely for a wrong-doing in which he had no dealing or complicity. The aspirations that he and his family had been harbouring for years took only a few seconds to collapse just like a sand castle on the coast being squashed by the tidal waves.

Tharuk is one of Kaushitha's friends in the class, and his father is an affluent businessman in Colombo. He is frivolous and very spoilt, and hence shows a proclivity to do things which the students of his age are not supposed to do. Most of the time, he disobeys his teachers, and is quite used to do the exact reverse of what he is asked to do. Yet, none of the teachers dares to speak a single word against his misbehavior due to his father's influential status. One day, he brought a mobile phone to his classroom though cellular phones were strictly prohibited for students within the school premises. During the interval, Kaushitha was asked by Tharuk to join them to watch a video clip on his phone, and Kaushitha who had no idea as to what kind of a movie was to be shown to him approached Tharuk.

No sooner had he taken a glance at the phone, than one of the teachers arrived in the classroom and caught them red-handed. They had nothing to do or say, but to be enquired. Drops of perspirations rolled down Kaushitha's forehead, and he was shivering like a fish stranded in a net. The phone was taken by the teacher, and the complaint soon went to the class teacher who was a very rigid middle-aged man with a dark complexion and a short beard. Finally, the complaint was passed onto the principal. The teachers then inspected the movies saved on the phone, and found out that they were pornographic films. Kaushitha also got to know this only during the inquiry. The issue was quite serious because it was not merely a phone, but filthy movies too.

The teacher looked stealthily at Tharuk and didn't question him much. The principal, however, ordered the presence of the parents of both of them the following day saying, "Your destiny will

be decided tomorrow. Wait and see!”. The crucial day arrived, and it was the longest night in Kaushitha’s life as he couldn’t sleep even for a second, but kept on turning here and there on the bed. Kaushitha couldn’t take his parents to the school, because they were far away from Colombo, and above all, how could he tell his parents what happened the other day at school. Yet, Tharuk was there early in the morning with his father. Before being enquired by the principal, Tharuk’s father had a very cordial chat with the class teacher, and Kaushitha saw how Tharuk’s father showed a black suitcase to the class teacher with a crooked smile on his face. Then, all of them marched towards the office of the principal sir who then started examining the case seriously admitting that it was an offence punishable with suspension or termination. First, he asked about the person who brought the mobile phone to the school. Even before asking the question, Tharuk said that it was Kaushitha’s phone, and the latter was so nervous that he couldn’t even say anything to defend himself. Kaushitha wanted to say something, but was discouraged by the menacing stare of Tharuk’s father and the class teacher.

Tharuk further went onto say that though he had a mobile phone with him at home, he had never brought it to the school. Tharuk’s father readily confirmed his son’s words, and even the class teacher supported them saying that Tharuk was a good boy. Then, Tharuk’s father gave a repugnant look at Kaushitha, and the principal’s look was also loathsome. Kaushitha was shivering with fear, and he felt as if he was going to suffocate. He then started stammering that Tharuk was lying, but the principal said stop, and even the class teacher prevented Kaushitha from uttering anything. Kaushitha was then branded as the wrongdoer. He had nothing to do, but to listen to a long line of accusations and warnings. Kaushitha was flabbergasted, and he could barely retain his consciousness. He then heard the principal yelling at him, “Come tomorrow and get your leaving. That’s what you deserve!” His heart was deranged for a moment, and he couldn’t distinguish between the past and present. He felt like the whole world around him was falling into pieces.

After about half an hour, Kaushitha returned to the classroom to take his bag, and there he saw the class teacher shaking hands with Tharuk’s father, and gleaming with a wily grin while putting a black suitcase into his cupboard. And, Kaushitha understood that it was the suitcase that was in the hands of Tharuk’s father earlier in the morning.

Biography of Author:

Indunil Madhusankha is currently an Instructor in the Department of Mathematics of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Even though he is academically involved with the subjects of Mathematics and Statistics, he also pursues a successful career in the field of English language and literature as a budding young researcher, reviewer, poet, editor, content writer and proofreader. His creative works have been featured in several international anthologies, magazines and journals. Moreover, Indunil was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2016 by the Scarlet Leaf Publishing House based in Toronto, Canada.