

# The Lost Encounter

by J. Kaval

Jeevan saw his house at a distance in the middle of mango grove perched on the edge of a paddy field. His eyes welled up. Tears of joy mixed with sorrow blurred his vision.

Jeevan hoped that his father would be at the gate anxiously waiting to welcome him. The thought of mother going around the house preparing for the grand reunion with their son really overwhelmed him. He was more than excited and was in a salubrious mood. His legs began to move faster than the beats of his heart.

Jeevan could feel his mother's warm embrace and kisses as if rained on him yesterday, though it was over ten years ago that she had seen his face- when he had run away from home at the age of sixteen. Since then only link between them was the letters exchanged occasionally. In every letter she had urged him to return home. Sometimes she had even asked him to come back and take care of the aged parents. Once or twice she had pleaded with him to meet his ailing father at least once in life. When he was born the father had already been in Sri Lanka. Father returned home for good after 20 years of hard labour in the plantations. They have never met.

Jeevan had always been a recalcitrant child, a spoilt youth and an angry man before. Now he seemed a matured one tempered by the weight of his own deeds. He could visualize the impact of his first encounter with the father. The initial shock and the discomfiture of the old man would gradually change into wonderment and then to the paternal bliss in holding his own seed now grown into a big tree. The old man would reveal the son his dream about him. He would ask him to marry a humble village girl, and to care for the family as they have more than enough to live. He would be dreaming of a happy family with grandchildren.

Jeevan too had dreams of bright future, had high hopes in life. But his hopes were crumbled and the dreams shattered when he was told by the company doctor that he was HIV positive. The authorities dismissed him with enough money and medical aide. As the news got spread his longtime girlfriend Anitha deserted him. Friends vanished one by one. It was a year and half that he had been at the love and care of Sisters of Mercy. It was Sister Nirmala who had encouraged him to visit the aged parents at home.

A sense of guilt engulfed Jeevan. He knew that he was going to be a burden and a grave risk to his parents in their old age. He was sure to become a sign of shame and ignominy instead of cause of joy. He felt that he could have remained in the rustle of Bombay (Mumbai), a faceless and a nameless man, one

among the many dying daily in obscurity. Why did he return at all? He had no one to turn to but to the roots of his groin.

Exhausted from the long and tedious journey Jeevan entered the front-yard of the house. There was no one to greet him. He thought that the parents must be inside .They did not know his arrival time.

Jeevan climbed the steps to the verandah. He gently knocked at the door, once... twice... thrice... There was no response. He listened too. Why no sound at all? Were they sleeping? He called out. His own voice echoed feebly in the house. He was surprised and then shocked to find that the door was locked from outside. He thought that his parents might have gone to the nearby temple to offer pooja for the welfare and the well-being of their only son, they might turn up at any moment to greet him with god's blessings and Prasaadam.

Jeevan sat on the steps and waited for the parents to arrive.

He waited... and waited...

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