

A few lights began to shine in the hostel; some students were already up and at work. I glanced at my watch. It was four; just a few hours ahead to fulfil the long-cherished idea of travelling by a plane.

At half-past eight my three friends and myself left the hostel, by a Studebaker Champion. We reached the Air-India Office in just ten minutes, to see that the Air-India Car was waiting for us. When the formal ceremony of taking our weight, as well as that of our suitcases, was over, we stepped into the car.

We reached the Aerodrome at 10 O'clock. The plane landed at 10-20. From the hostel friends had come to see us off. We shook hands with them and amidst shouts of "Cheerio" we entered the plane. The plane hissed, took a round on the concrete road and soon we were up above the world.

We saw cattle grazing near the road, buffaloes that refused to move and walked as slowly as if all the road and time itself was theirs, great tanks full of lilies and lotuses - and every scene with a charm of its own.

The Railway Station, the hundred and one mills which are scattered over the Manchester of South India, were very soon out of sight.

The young charming Air-Hostess offered me a toffee and a cup of coffee. How different the latter was, from our hostel coffee which is a decoction of dubious ingredients, of fluctuating colour and odour, and a remote, perhaps illusory suggestion of milk.

We were flying at a speed of 120 miles per hour. Far below us were blue-black mountains and evergreen forests, streams and rivers trellising the land, placid lagoons, backwaters lined with coconut palms and dotted with verdant islands, paddy fields stretching to the horizon, - and a wonderful variety of scenery.

The plane slowly came down. We flew over squalid villages of small mud huts, with children playing in dirt, over towns where beggars crowded round at every halt. The dirty dwellings, the naked people, the starved cattle, - the land is smiling but her children suffer. We saw the mighty waves rushing to the sandy coast and the ships anchored in the calm harbour.

In another minute the Dakota landed at the Willingdon Island Aerodrome and thus ended our maiden flight.

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A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

By

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The news that Raju had fallen in love came as a bolt from the blue even to his intimate friends. No one had expected such a thing would happen. Some how Raju did not appear to be of that sort to go and fall in love. At least he did not look like it. But the inevitable had happened and Raju was really in love.

He himself could not say how all began. One fine evening as soon as the dull and monotonous lecture in Agriculture, was over, he went to the Nirmala College to see his sister who was studying there. He was

asked to wait in the visitors room. Raju had a hell of a time waiting there – flocks of girls passed by that room staring at him as if he was an unusual specimen. While he was sitting there and fidgeting nervously, a girl entered and asked him in a sweet, soft voice, “Whom do you want to see, please?” Raju looked up and suddenly he felt a strange sensation. He forgot even good manners and involuntarily stared at the girl. How beautiful she was. Raju was sure he had never seen before such a girl. Soon he woke up from his reverie and realising the awkward situation, blurted out, “Oh! I want to see my sister, – I mean, I want to see Miss Leela.” Quite involuntarily his left hand plunged deep into his trouser pocket and his right hand began to twitch at the funny knot-of his necktie. The girl, ignorant of his nervousness, knit her charming eye-brows in perplexity and asked, “Thangam, which one do you mean?” Raju summoned up all his courage and replied. “I mean K. Leela of junior inter.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the girl as if wisdom had suddenly dawned upon her. “Please wait a minute. I will go and call her.”

After a few minutes Raju’s sister arrived along with that girl “Hallo, Raju”, his Sister began, “Sorry I kept you waiting.....By the way, this is my friend and classmate, Miss Sunatha.” And Ramu brought together his palms before his face and murmured “Vanakkam.” That was how Raju came to be introduced to Sunatha.

Needless to say, Raju returned to his room and spent a sleepless night. The figure of Sunatha, her charming eyes, her rosy dimpled cheeks, her red lips, and her slim and slender form began to haunt him. He realised that he had fallen in love with her. He realised that without her his life would be a barren desert, devoid of all earthly pleasures. Alas! He did not know how many barren deserts she had created so far!

A few days later, he received a letter from his sister asking him if he would like to go with her to pictures. By then Raju had come to know that his sister and Sunatha were inseparable friends and his ‘sixth sense’ told him that Sunatha also would be coming along with his sister. So, on the appointed day he hurried to the theatre and there, sure enough, were his sister and Sunatha waiting for him. He bought tickets and they all entered the theatre. It was by pure chance or luck if you please, that Sunatha happened to sit by the side of Raju. He seemed to be deeply engrossed in the picture. But Raju was not a bit interested in it.

If you had asked him what the title of the picture was, he could not have told you. Suddenly Sunatha dropped her kerchief, and Raju gallantly picked up and handed it over to her. While doing so his hand touched hers and he felt she distinctly pressed her fingers against his palm. A peculiar thrill ran through his veins. “Can it be true” he thought, “Does she love me” Why not? He began to imagine himself in the role of Romeo. Suddenly the lights were on and Raju realised with a shock that the picture was over. He returned to his room.

Raju lay awake thinking deeply. Something must be done and pretty quickly too. He could not tolerate this suspense. But what to do? “Why not write a letter to her?” he thought. But supposing she had not really pressed his palm, and the whole incident was only a

figment of his imagination? Supposing she hands over the letter to his sister! Sunatha would surely write to his father and then.....? He shuddered to think of it.

Raju was essentially a man of action. He got up the next morning and taking an attractive hostel letter pad; wrote as follows:—

“ Dear Miss Sunatha,

You may be surprised to received this letter.....well, I don't want to beat about the bush. To put in plainly, I love you. Without you I simply cannot pull on. You are the light of my heart.....” It went on in this strain for about 6½ pages and finally concluded. “..... For Heaven's sake don't show this letter to my sister. If she comes to know of it, I will be doomed.....I will call you on the phone tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock to know your answer. I fervently hope it will be in the affirmative.....” He wrote another letter to his sister. placed the two letters in blue envelopes, addressed them, one to Sunatha and the other to his sister and posted them.

The next day dawned.° Raju felt as if he had to face his Waterloo that day. He began to pace up and down in his room nervously. He finished breakfast hurriedly, stepped in the phone room after due salams to the bearded Sarma, to get the phone key and rang up.

‘ Hallo ’ ! He called,

‘ Hallo, whom do you want, please?’ asked the voice from the other end

“ I want.....er.....Miss Sunatha of junior inter class.

The receiver was visible shaking in his hand. His whole body itself seemed to be shivering.

“ Hallo ” came the voice from the other end. “ Who is that ”

It did not take long for Raju to understand who was talking.

“ Hallo, Miss Sunatha ”, he replied, “ it is Raju, it is about the letter that I ”

“ I have given it to your sister ”

“ Given it to my sister ? ”, Raju echoed incredulously.

A chill ran down his spine.

“ Yes ” replied Sunatha, “ This morning I got a letter to me of course – but on opening it I found your letter to your sister. I handed it over at once to your sister. I think ”

Raju did not hear the rest of it. His head began to swirl. The truth dawned upon him slowly.....He had wrongly addressed the envelopes.....And at that very moment his letter to Sunatha was in the hands of his sister.....

“ My God ! ” He whispered hoarsely and replaced the receiver with a bang.