



## Novels of Paul G.

A collection of motivational novels, testimonial, tried and proven in the hard testing ground of real life, highly readable with verve and passion, enjoyable too.

# Novels of Paul G.

Dedicated to the fond memories of my dad,

Dr. George Gasper

This is purely a work of fiction and has no resemblance or nothing to do with anyone living or dead and the author profusely apologizes and regrets if the feelings of anybody is hurt or offended.

## MALDIVES TALES

When I am sitting on my easy chair and thinking about writing Maldives Tales, my dream to become a writer is fulfilled. Everything happens for a reason and there is no coincidence. Life always put me in very tricky and delicate situations so that I could feel the hands of Providence always in my life, supporting and sustaining me, as well as those of the evil one trying to hamper my dream to be a writer to come true. I tried myriad ways to get exposure and experience, to bring out the best in me. I went chasing a dream to be a writer and that dream came pursuing me and I learned that the best is yet to come, all is always for better and now is the best and most opportune time for everything, even in this corolla times. Since I had an accident breaking my right leg, I had to postpone a Middle East trip, the next day and that saved me from getting stranded in some airport and undergoing quarantine there.

There is such an episode in my life that I always wanted to forget, but never could, and it always came popping up on the monitor of my mind, like a disco, snorkelling in the shallow seas, scuba diving, beach parties or even a hard drink of Tequila with a pinch of pepper on the expense account, the life at Pathala resort in Maldives, a sought after destination of the billionaires and connoisseurs of the world, who did not know what else to do with their money, which they had plenty. I was offered money and wisdom on two platters and I chose wisdom and became a poet. Poets die poor, while novelists get richer and richer.

It was quite accidentally that I landed up there and I still get goose pimples thinking about my first journey there and my last trip. Some time ago I made a futile attempt to reach the resort I was in. I had to abort the attempt and came away half way

through. The first time, a good friend sent me there and another friend took the ticket, and my ticket was only one way. It was like burning the bridge.

To me Maldives is a land of dreams, tranquillity, synchronising with serenity, exotic sun, sand and sea, and all those who visited there once would be like the Lotus Eaters, never wanting to return home, so captivating, mesmerising and alluring in its charm and attraction. When we are high up in the sky, the pearly islands, more than many hundreds, scattered in the blue ocean attract and beckon us, with such a charm that we cannot leave or get acquitted from.

It was accidentally that I ended up there, but the impact that Maldives had in my life was tremendous and I became a different person altogether, I became a writer, a universal citizen, a dude or a real connoisseur in the true sense of the word, and the kind of exposure I got there, even a million dollars could not buy. Good experiences and bad experiences balance at a point, the equilibrium in life, wants and needs coinciding, we had everything we wanted and don't need anything anymore and then one have the urge to write. An unhappy childhood and if the negative was more in the graph the more passionate would be the writing and love and love failures would add more charm to it. That was the ultimate for a writer to start his saga of writing. My life had all the ingredients to become a writer and it was waiting to overflow at the tip of my finger to the key board, the media I chose to write after my computer training in American College, Madurai in 1991. I got into the midst of a triangular love story, very passionate, intimate and I became the deciding factor of the climax of the story and I tried to make it a comedy.

## 1

It was 1990s and the computers were making their debut in the world, and there was so much of controversy going on as to whether they should be permitted in the offices, whether they would displace the workforce, whether they would really reduce work load and how to learn the artificial language to operate them. I was sent to American College, Madurai to learn how to use the computer. To know what to learn and the modus operandi, I visited a friend who was giving training for using computers and while we were gabbing and making fun of each other, the man

sitting next to me asked, what I was doing and hearing that I was an accountant, he told me that they needed an accountant in Maldives and whether I was interested in coming.

Without thinking twice I said yes, I saw it as a God given chance to get away from the strife in my office. He told me to send an email with my bio data, the first thing I did after reaching American College. The training was good and the American Professor who was the coordinator, used to pull my legs and tease me, that on the last day in the farewell party I organised a skit to pay him back in the same coin.

I covered up a guy with a blanket and brought him to the middle of the stage and told them that it was a skunk, a fierce looking animal from Africa and only brave people could look at it. Susan from Stella Maris College came, parted the blanket slightly, looked inside and fell fainting as previously agreed. I lifted her up, sent her off and Ilka Singh from a college in Punjab came and looked inside and ran for his life. The audience were sitting tight with apprehension and then I announced that the most courageous and brave person in the whole group was that American Professor and asked him to come and have a look at the animal.

He got up with courage, looked at his wife and everyone around him with a sneer, came and parted the blanket to look at the animal and it fell down, fainting. He stood there looking like a clown, when all were laughing at him and even his wife denounced him, he smiled at me and told me that he would never forget me and that skit. Though about computer I did not learn much, I enjoyed the stay there, the prayer services in the chapel and the company and fellowship of some smart people from all over India. The trip to and fro was such an awesome experience in the meter gage train, through scenic places like Kulathupuzha, Chenkotta and Punalur and the bridges and tunnels built by the British were amazing.

The appointment order to join for the job at Maldives was waiting for me when I came back. I had to get concurrence from the government to go abroad and my friend in the secretariat arranged it. Since I took leave, a colleague was promoted to my post, his life's greatest ambition because I was appointed when he was eligible

to get promoted to my post. That grudge he kept in his mind and I had to pay the hell later, as it was by accident, I landed up there.

I was a constant visitor of Kurisumala Ashram, Vagamon and Francis Acharya, the Belgian abbot there inducted me to Veda, Vedanta, Yoga and meditation. I was also in constant touch with Guru Nithya Chaithanya Yathi of Fernhill, Ooty and he invited me there to become his disciple. It was Nirvana I was seeking but life offered me unbearable agony and pain, because of a false step that I took. I was thinking of booking my ticket to go to Ooty, to work in a Public School there, owned by my former boss, as I had settled the accounts of Kuttiady estate, Calicut which was pending for five years. It was a Herculean task, as there was no record for anything and I had to make the accounts out of my imagination and used all my creativity.

I was staying at Pala and my life there was full of adventure and fun. I was given a car for my travelling and could stay in top hotels like Priya Tourist Home, Pala, Alakapuri, Calicut etc. Even the stay in the estate bungalow at Kuttiady was fun; I slept on the bed slept by the Britisher who built it. I did not know the hazards and perils of the job till I left it, my boss could not go there, his life was threatened, and there was police protection for the estate from encroaching people from the neighbourhood.

Lucky that I did not stay there; and I brought all available records to Pala and did my work there. It was a tight rope walk and I do not know how I did it, may be at gun point, I had no other go, the burden of my family was on me and I settled the last part of the accounts at an Income Tax hearing at Vadakara office. Somehow or other I convinced the officer and came away after paying him some bribe, I only paid him half and kept the other half to anchor myself in life.

Soon I was travelling with a group of merchants from Pala, who went to Trivandrum for their annual convention and I met two of my seniors in the college. One of them told me about an opening at a college in Trivandrum and I applied for it and was called for the interview. Abbot of Kurisumala, Francis Acharya, offered to give me a letter of introduction to the principal there, and I came for the interview and got the first rank. May be it was my destiny and all that I had to undergo and suffer in the

bargain later which was all predestined to be there for me. But I came out of it all in flying colours, retired as the office head, was at the helm of affairs when the President of India visited our college, for its Golden Jubilee and also paved the way for the top most score for our college in the NAAC accreditation. Almost three thousand friends I have in face book and most of them are former students from there who remember me with gratitude and are pleased to meet me in the course of my travelling around. I tried to be maximum helpful to people, did smart work, more work in the least possible time, the easiest way possible, never putting off for another time, using the computer, which was initiated from American College, Madurai.

I did all my writing using computer, I collected what I wrote and kept them in CDs and even posted it in my website which was there as early as 1995, my cousin Alex Andrews hosting it from New Jersey. The dream and goal of my life was to be a writer and it materialised and became true, more than twenty of my books are there in Amazon Kindle and "E-novels of Paul G." brought out by SBPRA Books, Texas and Novels of Paul G. by Notion Press, Madras and four books of poetry. I wrote all those books after my sojourn in Maldives, which changed my life and fate.

## 2

I became friendly with two fellow passengers in the flight to Maldives and later they played a decisive role in my life, one was Dr.Sanal, working in the National hospital, Male' and the other was Krishnan a school teacher there. I was supposed to meet Ramesh, my colleague and to proceed to the airport with him. But he went ahead of me and checked in and I tried to find him out in the flight.

As I was tense with apprehension, Dr.Sanal consoled me and assured me that he would take me to the main land and to my office. Krishnan assured me that I could stay with him for the time being, in his school staff quarters. I was feeling terrible head ache throughout the journey and when I saw the pearly islands, scattered in the blue ocean, my heart leapt with some untold joy. Soon the aircraft landed and we went to the customs and emigration to check out and Dr.Sanal asked the sentry boy standing there with a sten gun to find out Ramesh, and he said that, there he

went, just checked out from there. I went after him, caught hold of his hand and said that I was pleased to meet him, but I was not sure whether he was pleased to meet me. We got in the boat to the main land and the doctor ushered a car and dropped Krishnan in his quarters and dropped us at our office and he left, promising me any help, anytime, I needed.

We went and reported to our office, to the General Manager who conducted the interview in Trivandrum for recruiting us there. He introduced us to all the staff there and showed us our accommodation, close to the office, a studio apartment with two beds and a toilet attached. He took us to a restaurant, close by and we had some typical Maldivian food, which I did not like at all. We had good sleep and reported for work the next day. I had to monitor the payments from tour operators and payments to a branch resort. Ramesh was settling the payments to creditors in a tricky way, appeasing the greediest first, always with a part payment.

We were running the show perfectly and the stay in the mainland was fabulous. I used to visit Dr.Sanal in National Hospital and was introduced to Hema, a nurse there and Anthu, his assistant and translator. Once Hema was found at the staff quarters of Krishnan and I was glad that they were friends and made for each other. Dr.Sanal was making passes at both Hema and Anthu and none of them took him serious.

I used to spend my evenings in the National Library and the librarian, Jiff was so friendly and I used to clear my doubts in Library Science which I was still trying to study from IGNO University. I came across many fascinating books and Jeff introduced me to a number of great authors. Thulfa was the assistant librarian and she took a lot of trouble to reserve good books for me when they were returned. I read many wonderful books and it was a tremendous reading experience for me and it was a deciding factor for my becoming a writer.

Meeting Sylvia at the library being introduced by Jeff; opened a new vista in front of me in the form of UN parties and a new circle of friends in the Indian High Commission. She was an avid reader and we used to exchange our expertise on different authors and good books. I used to crack some jokes to Sylvia; that paved

the way for me to be invited to one UN party and that reserved a niche for me in the hearts of those people and a standing invitation for all the parties at the UN and the Indian High Commission.

I came across Jan and Mark at hotel Alia, they were the friends of Sylvia; both of them were married to Maldivian ladies and resort owners. They had their wives and children at home also. I used to play table tennis with them and spent the evenings on discussions and discourses, mostly philosophy. They were very eager to hear about Hinduism and the Indian Philosophy and I explained to them about Purushartha, the Indian way of looking at life, to do one's duty, Karma, to make Artha, enough money, without Kama, lust and greed, and only with Dharma, good moral principles, to reach Moksha, heaven, the ultimate destiny of human life. They had accepted Islam and tried to attract me to it, but I did not want to become one, though the baits were high, like resorts and big business houses and on one condition that I should marry a lady from there. With the one wife that I had, I was finding it so difficult to manage and she was driving me crazy, asking me to come for the delivery of our baby, it was going to be a Caesarean and she was so scared of the operation. As the date drew closer, I applied for paternity leave, and it was granted on a condition that I met the travel expenses, nothing should go wrong in the office and I should make alternate arrangements.

### 3

The next day I was airborne and landed up in Trivandrum. Stayed with a friend and visited the college I worked. Met my colleagues and went to my wife's place. She was all one big tummy and was so scared about the impending delivery. The day we had to report to the hospital was harthal and no vehicles were permitted on the road. We started walking and my fear was whether the delivery would take place on the road. We reached the hospital, got her admitted and the doctor told me that she would do caesarean the next day.

I made a decision that changed our fate and destiny and told the doctor that since that day was thirteenth and Friday, we would have the surgery on fourteenth Saturday. She said okay, and the next day was such an inauspicious day with some

special harm for the father as per the horoscope and I would have even lost my life. I had to pay the hell later, suffer inhuman suffering, but ultimately all helped me in my career as a writer and the best in me was brought out and the better was yet to come. Saw the baby and mother, stayed with them for one or two days and I flew back to Maldives and the real story began.

The moment that I came to my office, I found something fishy, my chair was occupied by Ramesh and I had no place to sit. I went to the GM and he told me that they had made some shuffle in the office, as Ramesh could manage the things there, I would be sent to our resort, Pathala to be the accounts manager there. The fun was that Ramesh had to do my share of the job also at the same pay, though it was his idea of the shuffling in the office, on the hope of getting my pay. I decided to go to the resort the next day and went and bode farewell to all my friends in Male' as I had made lots of contacts there. Mark, Jan and Sylvia gave me a send-off party which was so memorable. I had liked them and their company and the intellectual discourses we had, were going to be over. Sylvia gifted me with a table tennis racket, as I was becoming a good player and I told her that it was very thoughtful of her. We had some mugs of beer and Jan toasted that may my dream to be a writer come true and told me to go extra mile in whatever I did, kept the contacts of people on similar lines, kept the faith blazing and learning from defeat, budgeting time and money, keeping healthy and loving every one, controlling the mind with self-discipline, concentrating on the thing I did and making it a habit of life. They all promised to keep in touch and the next day I began my life of adventure, fun and thrill, which turned out to be a tragedy or a comedy I am not sure in the end. My conviction was that it had ended up as a comedy or I would not be writing this.

## 4

I realised that the most important and precious things in life are time and money. It was so difficult to make an extra buck in today's competitive world and all were trying to snatch away from those who have not, even what little they have, by hook

or crook. To find an honest means to make money is very important in life. Then to multiply and preserve it is much more important.

We have so many wants in life and desires to have many things that others have but our needs are relatively a few, and that too, the necessities, comforts and luxuries in the order of priorities. Always go for necessities first and give them top priority. Save every penny, never wasting a single buck and always create assets. Our spending should be for capital assets and not for revenue expenses. Food, clothes and shelter are priorities in life, but spending for fun and frolicking are a waste and misuse of the money. The more we wallow in such pleasures like drinking, dancing, smoking and squandering, the more we lose our precious money, time and health. Ultimately we will feel glad, sad and mad for indulging in such vices and may not be able to get out of such bad habits, a vicious circle, later in life and become an addict and a problem for us and others.

I had some spiritual encounters there in Maldives, without any religious activities I learned to pray myself relating to my maker, coining my own prayers, not reading or muttering by heart, which did not appeal to me. Our minds would never stick to it, not knowing what we pray. It was better to close the eyes and speak out what we wanted to tell our God. We could be praising, on and on, thanking, repenting for our trespasses and interceding, for our needs and that of others.

To keep the mind under control, it was always good to go on praising God, in all possible ways we can imagine, for the great things He did in our lives and for sustaining us, when so many are removed from this earth every day by Corolla. For the tasty food we ate, for the stylish dress we wore, for the jobs and trade we do to make a living, and for the good health, which all of us have, thank Him profusely and profoundly.

We would need so many things in our lives and pray to God to grant us all that. It may be anything we need, pray with faith that we already received it as everything is ours for the asking. Pray to God and request to humans. We should feel sorry for the sins of omissions and commissions that we did. Confess to God with a firm resolution, not to repeat them in future. In silence we can hear His voice as our

conscience, if we attune our mind to His calling. When feeling depressed or unhappy, keep praising God and when in dire need, cry out to God and have a deep faith that we have somebody who cares and looks after us. Fear the Lord and love Him with all our hearts and soul. Have deep faith that He will take care of us and nothing untoward would happen to us unless He permits it for our good. On the shallow waters of the tranquil sea, lying on an air mattress I used to pray and praise God, feeling his caring hands in that unknown land where I had no one to take care me. In desperation I used to lie on the beach at night, gazing at the sky and the numerous stars in it and tried to locate me in that small corner of the universe and still in communion with my Lord.

Time after time I could feel the hands of the providence taking care of me, I never went without food, I always had a place to sleep and there were people near me to help me around. I learned to pray, praise, thank, confess and intercede to God in Maldives.

## 5

Treasure Island was a cruise, that travelled to resorts unloading the tourists and I also got into it to reach my new destination, Pathala Resort, a small island in the Ari Atoll. Dr.Sanal and Krishnan came to see me off, and I invited them to the resort, that became a bone of contention between them in their wooing and warfare for winning the love of the same lady, Hema. I saw love and consideration in Krishnan, lust and greed manifested in Dr.Sanal, the two lovers in their strategy to win the affection of the same lady.

The sea was calm, dolphins and mantas were seen on the way and when I got fed up with the same monotonous view of the sea, I went to the deck and soon fell asleep. When I woke up from the stupor I saw near me a handsome couple sleeping close to each other. I waited for them to wake up, I smiled at them, got introduced to them as Henry and Hazel, also going to Pathala. They came to shoot an ad film in the back ground of a resort in Maldives, using remote cameras and sophisticated gadgets, to get the natural look for an ad film, as a project for his M.S. in film directing from a university in Brussels. He sought my help in taking some visuals on

the beach and seashore. I liked them, the help she was doing for the man she loved and agreed to help them on one condition that I would take the visuals only with the clothes on. First we came to our branch resort Mayafushi, had breakfast, sandwiches and hot coffee. Some of the guests got down there.

I tried to make friends with some of them who were coming to our resort and they were all very cordial. They chose Pathala because of the excellent diving facility there. They all had training in deep sea diving and were looking forward to the captivating coral reefs and underwater flora and fauna, the star attraction of Pathala.

We reached the jetty, the landing and I climbed over the small wooden bridge and put my first step into that dreamy, exotic and captivating island, for a new phase of my life of fun, adventure and ecstasy, indescribable. The receptionist gave us all a wet perfumed napkin to wipe our faces, which were sweating. Harris, the manager came to receive me, showed my office and accommodation. He took me to the bar for a drink, an appetiser he told me and also that I had an expense account for the choicest drinks, whenever I wanted.

The food in the restaurant was European, and a roasted lobster was especially tasty. Tuna were fried and kept in heaps and I came to realise that it was the only fish they ate and there were times when my food was only boiled tuna, with the water it was boiled as gravy. The guests kept such decorum and manners when they had the food, no loud talking and always took the same seats that were reserved for them.

The bar was the nerve centre of the resort, most visited by the guests, all the choicest liquors of the world were displayed there, inviting and alluring, but the price so exorbitant and expensive. Everyone was encouraged to drink as much as they could, it was the main income for the resort and the biggest expense was buying tuna, which I found out later to be fraudulent and a source for misappropriating the funds. It came free from the sea and they charged exorbitant amounts for catching it, at their whims and fancies and kept spurious vouchers, bills and receipts.

I had a closer look at the cottages, which were thatched huts, a round construction, a sit out, bedroom with a cot and a toilet with a commode and shower. Some had

split air conditioners, but most of them had just a fan in the middle. Just because they were on the fabulous beaches of Maldives, staying in them costed five hundred to thousand dollars per night. By the time they came to settle the bills and check out only the guests realised they had lost such a lot of money, which they paid at home as a package tour and using credit cards. It meant that they had to work harder during the next season.

I used to get regular calls from Dr.Sanal and Krishnan. The doctor was full of stories about his amorous adventures with Anthu, how shapely she was and at times he used to mention that he liked Hema and would say that a good wife should be like her. He was switching his attention between those two ladies. Anthu was willing to oblige him any time, but Hema kept a distance and did not fall for his amorous approaches. He knew that Krishnan also liked her and doubted that it was the reason for her keeping off. I kept neutral in my attitude and decided to support the most deserving and genuine one among them and my sympathy went with Krishnan and Hema who would be a great wife for him. With her amicable and soft-spoken caring nature, Krishnan was the right type of man for her, with maturity and integrity, coupled with efficiency and erudition, and I was in his favour.

## 6

It was officially that I went to Male' but I made it a point to visit all my acquaintances there. At National hospital, Dr.Sanal was in top form, among the two ladies he admired, witty and charming. He was examining a patient, a middle-aged lady who used to become unconscious on and off, he cross examined her and found out the cause of the illness was due to the nagging of the second wife of her husband who held an upper hand in the house hold and to get the attention of her husband, she used to fall unconscious.

When Anthu narrated her plight, Dr.Sanal advised her to take bath every day, wear clean clothes, look attractive and show more consideration and care for her husband and act friendly to the other wife, not to compete with her, but to collaborate with her in running the household and assured her that her situation would improve and sickness go off. By way of treatment he prescribed some sleeping pills for the other

wife and asked her to make her take it after supper on the pretext of vitamin support for her paleness and tiredness. I smiled at the cleverness of the doctor, but was aghast when he told me that he wanted to visit our resort for a week end and ask Hema whether she would like to come. I told him that Anthu would be a better choice and he said that it was a good idea, while I felt relieved about rescuing Hema, I was sure that he was getting into trouble.

I visited hotel Alia and my friends were there to spend the evening. I played with them table tennis and had a mug of beer. I invited Sylvia to the resort and promised some discount to Mark and Jan to bring their whole house hold for a week end. I told them the latest joke about my late father, who was a doctor in the high ranges. He had to attend a delivery at an estate bungalow as the lady could not be moved. He had a small suit case with all his gadgets. After sometime he came out and asked the waiting husband to give him a big knife, and later a hammer and they all were flabbergasted. The delivery was smooth, the cry of the child was heard, and all were happy; especially the husband, but his mother wondered why my father had asked for a knife and hammer. He told them that it was for opening the suitcase as its lock was stuck.

Krishnan came to collect me and I decided to spend the night with him at his staff quarters. He was doing self-cooking and we had some rice and beef curry with curd. It was all so tasty and I felt envy for the woman he would marry, because he was such a nice cook.

Before going to sleep he asked my help in talking to Hema about his love for her and desire to get married and to avert Dr.Sanal from making passes at her. Hema told him that the doctor was just interested only in a physical relationship and he is so weak on his moral side. She had seen him unnecessarily fiddling ladies by way of examination and ill-used Anthu many times. She could not understand the real disposition of Anthu, what was in her mind and why she yielded to Sunder.

I told him that I would find out the attitude of Hema, and invited them to the resort, to come in the morning and spent the day. I told him not to make passes or have sex with her before marriage and be the maximum loving, caring and courteous. He

was a man of integrity and principles and I felt happy to help him. I knew that Hema was also an upright lady and both of them would make a good couple.

I visited my former office and met Ramesh. He was so jealous of me, my fabulous life in the resort and it was he who should have gone to the resort, if he had not displaced me. I came to know that he was pulling the strings to come there. I left them and took a speed boat so that I could reach earlier than before.

The difference of the life in the resort and the main land was that the resort was so isolated and cut off from the world. The guests wanted just that, away from the hustle and bustle of the cities, from crowds, traffic jams, schedules and deadlines of the everyday job. They wanted a peaceful holiday and may go back, rejuvenated and with a better perspective to face the life and job at home.

The allurements of the resort were getting into me too and I bought all the materials needed to do the writing that was trying to gush out of me. When I sat on the beach, with pure and pristine sand, the calm and serene sea, all turned me on to write and the thought about my child and wife made me euphoric and romantic. While having some discussions with the guests I used to get good ideas and I sat down on the beach and scribbled down, looking at the lolling waves and turbulent movement of the sea that turned on the poet in me.

## 7

On Trivia I called it, one after another, poems came gushing out of me, all symmetric, which did not need much editing, almost a hundred of them. I was perplexed at the variety of the topics, some relevant international themes, because of the crowd I was interacting with and the outcome of the discussions I had with them. They were also surprised at the relevance of the theme and the freshness of the ideas, when I showed the poems to some guests.

Sitting on the beach and looking at the lolling waves, with the gentle breeze winnowing over me, I got the right ambience to scribble down, whatever that came to my mind and later I posted it in my office computer. The last poem that I wrote there was 'On Slumber', why almighty God permitted all the atrocities that were

happening in the world, why He was in slumber and indifferent to the cruelties and man-made calamities. We should not question the integrity of God and we would never know why He did something to some people, yes, I lost my job and had to flee, leaving everything because of that wrong move.

I did not learn my lesson, later on when there was a competition in the US, I decided to send that poem to New York, sat in the computer room of the college I worked to type it out, somebody accidentally locked the room and I could get out only after four hours. I decided to mail it from the RMS at Quilon railway station, but slept off and did not get down in Quilon. The next stop was at Mavelikkara and I was aghast. The train stopped somewhere in the outer of Karunagappally and I jumped down. It went away; there was no sign of any station or people, all in utter darkness. I prayed and cried out to God, asking for forgiveness, soon an auto came that way; I was offered a lift to the highway and was able to reach home, though very late.

The poem was shortlisted for a thousand dollars prize money, but I lost in the finals and the collection of poems On Trivia was published as a book, nicely printed by my friend Cresence D'Souza and released by Prof.Madhusoodhanan Nair, the poet of Kerala at a function in the Public Library hall in Quilon. The function was hosted by Sangamam, the fellowship of co-passengers in the train. They also organised the hosting of my author website paulg.in at my home, Paradise by Dr.Udayakumar, the then rotary governor, former director of college development council and a fellow train passenger. The second edition of the poems, Agony was released by the late Maharaja of Travancore, with the cover page Agony, a painting by my dear friend, late Dr.Francis Karithra, who drew that painting with blood flowing out of his eyes, heart-broken, after receiving the wedding invitation of the woman he loved. He was drawing an oil painting; he drew that image behind the wedding card, his agony and pain untold. It is now available on Amazon Kindle and in my website.

## 8

Same way another poem also got me into controversy and much criticism was made about the climax that I changed it conveniently. In the poem 'On son of God', I just

mentioned that the son of God really came, but was taken aback by seeing such a lot of followers, not knowing him really, but denouncing each other factions as fake and fighting for the church assets. He told them not to fight and become one group, instead of many, and they told him that if he said that again they would crucify him once again. I changed the ending in a later version as he did not come for all that, but to save us from the clutches of the devil. While interacting with the richest people of the world I realised that money never made anyone really rich. The true riches of life were sound health, self-discipline, positive outlook, freedom from fear, hope that the best was yet to come, faith that everything will be taken care, all was always for better, discernment to know the motive of others, readiness to share, open mind, harmony in relationships, a job or trade that one love to do creatively and financial security. That was the longest poem that I wrote, including Niagara Syndrome, that we are rowing a boat on a sunny evening in a calm river quite aimlessly and suddenly a water fall comes and we are about to fall into it unaware. Most of us are afflicted by that syndrome and only when a tragedy happened that we came out of that.

The poem that I liked the most from my collection came out of a midnight trip on a full moon day with my teacher and poet of Kerala, Professor Madhusoodhanan Nair, and poetry was gushing out of us, and the contention that many of us would bargain to a fisher woman, auto driver or a cobbler on the street, but spent exorbitant amounts in bars, jewelleries, and textile shops without thinking, the poem 'frugality' was born.

It was a wisdom dawning on me when I wrote the 'ultimate', why there was competition and conflict in the world, describing the interaction of a pack of dogs, their fight for power and sex, which I witnessed in the stadium at Pala, on a full moon night, I was sitting there, cogitating and brooding over, and realised that the most important baits were sex, booze or money. The euphoric life and intellectual discourses and discussions, the disco and choicest liquors of the world all made those poems gush out of me and I had the folder with those poems, when I left Maldives and it came out as my masterpiece and made me an internationally

published poet. An American poet, Professor Tony Connor, suggested Poetry.com as a forum to begin publishing my poems and most of them, I tried publishing in there.

## 9

Henry and Hazel approached me to help them shoot their movie on the beach and while they were doing snorkelling. I told them that I wanted to see the camera and how it worked. It looked like any other SLR, but was much sophisticated with lots of functions, and it could be converted as a video recorder as well as good enough to shoot underwater. We decided to have two sessions, one in the evening and one in the morning.

That evening we set up the camera on a tripod on the beach, near the sea and started our session. Henry told me to take anything that happened in front and he assured me that he would do the editing to make it presentable. There were three things I had to be careful, when taking stills, I had to make sure that the objects were in the middle, while zooming I had to make sure that the clarity was not compromised and in the video mood I had to see that the action was recorded at the right time.

I was behind the camera, the evening sun was casting a red tint, and they came striding slowly in front of the camera, hand in hand, in casual dress. When they came close to the camera, I took some stills and saw some passionate and intimate scenes, revelling western films. It was all so natural and they never cared to look at the camera. That intimacy they had to each other was manifest in their movements, and I wondered that they were selling it for money. We decided to have the scenes in the sea, the next day morning.

I set the tripod on the beach, little down into the sea, and the waves were not strong. They came in swimming dress, with snorkelling masks on the face. Slowly they swam in front of the camera, intertwining I kept the camera focussed and zooming as needed. I was taken aback and by the movements they made, but went

on shooting. They came back on the shore in between and recouped sufficient energy for the next session.

## 10

I was surprised when Dr.Sanal and Anthu landed one fine evening there. I received them warmly and got them a cottage on the beach near the sea. They stripped, changed to swimming dress and rushed to the sea. I sat watching them and their amorous pranks, astonished at the perfect shape of Anthu, a feast for the eyes and any man would be tempted. Dr.Sanal winked at me.

Taking the hint I left the place and I guessed what he was going to do on the lone beach with no one around. Seeing such a lot of perfect shapes of blondes and brunettes I did not feel anything special. I was waiting for them in the bar and soon they turned up in fresh clothes and gleaming. She had a sly smile on her face when she looked at me, but Dr.Sanal was in good cheer and laughing from ear to ear at the foolish remarks that Anthu was making.

I ordered whisky on the rocks for us and gin tonic for Anthu. That night there was going to be Disco in the bar; the middle portion was cleared as the rink. He joined the gang that were dancing and Anthu also followed suit. The drink was taking effect on him and it was fun, his monkey dance, at the tune of the thundering music and I sat sipping the drink and enjoying the different expressions on the beautiful face of Anthu. She was catching up to the tempo of the dance and doing it as good as any western lady.

Dr.Sanal had asked me not to have dinner from the restaurant as Hema had sent some boiled tapioca with fish curry; she knew that I would love that. After the disco we went to their cottage and sat down to have the food. She was sitting close to the doctor and he suggested that she came and sat with me. I was aghast and told them that I was vowed to single wifeness, my better half, wife and I can't break that vow for my head would blow off, if I did that. I ate the food and got away from

there and left them for the amorous adventures they were waiting for. She looked at me with disappointment.

We had breakfast together and told them to go for snorkelling and I would join them for lunch. I had my work to do and the deeper I went into the intricacies of the accounts I was baffled and found something fishy. From the interaction of Rasheed the assistant manager with the purchase-in-charge, Wahid, I knew there was something they were trying to hide from me and how ever hard I tried I couldn't figure it out.

There was a primitive spread sheet programme called Quattro Pro, designed by my predecessor, an Australian accountant there. As soon as we fed the details on the debit and credit sides, it would tally by itself; if the account was correct but I had my doubts that if some variables were wrong, about its accuracy. I found it at last; the purchase of tuna for the restaurant was an overhead on which exorbitant amounts were spent, whereas for lobsters it was not that high, though they were more costly. I did not show any hint of suspicion, and waited for more concrete evidence to nail the purchase manager. He wouldn't be doing it alone and then I saw the involvement of the assistant manager also as a possibility. Manager Harris did not bother about such things as long as things were going on smooth. I tagged a voucher, and went digging more into its authenticity as a test case and the result was astonishing.

Dr.Sanal came out to check out and I gave him a good discount and charged the drinks on my expense account after consulting Harris. He was so happy and pleased about his stay in the resort and the disco, but Anthu seemed like a monkey that had bitten row ginger, especially after the crude love making of the doctor. In secret he told me that he was planning to come again, if Hema was willing, and I dissuaded him from that, and send them off in Treasure Island, a cruise that came our way.

## 11

One fine morning I was surprised to have two visitors, Krishnan and Hema. They came without informing and I received them without showing my surprise, I knew

there would be some reason behind their visit. I took them to the restaurant and ordered them breakfast. While eating I confronted them, I was afraid of the worst, like some assault from the side of Dr.Sanal. My intuition was proved right, Krishnan told me that the doctor was always making passes at her, speaking in suggestive language and even proposed to her. She knew by instinct that he was after her flesh and not soul, once she yielded and complied she would be a gone case. Anthu was paying for it, had to be always at his beck and call and oblige him whenever he demanded.

They wanted me to interfere and avert the doctor from further atrocities to Hema, by way of amorous approaches. I told them not to worry, in the due course of time I would interfere and just to test them, asked them whether they needed a cottage to spend the day. Krishnan told me that they were not that type and they would spend the day on the beach and leave by the evening boat. He even declined the drink that I offered him.

There were two hammocks tied to adjoining coconut trees, frequented by honeymoon couples and I led them there. I told them to enjoy the breeze on the sea shore and went back to my work. I hoped that they would share and built up intimacy between each other, so that she would have the courage and moral strength to resist the amorous approaches of the doctor. They would be the perfect couple, made for each other and I wanted to do the cupid's work, and support them as much as I could.

It was time for them to leave and I just discussed with them about their future plans and ideas of getting settled. They were resolute about working for some more time to make enough money to get settled. Then they would go home, get married and come back to work as long as they can, as it was so difficult to get a job in Kerala. The salary they were getting was fairly good, compared to the Indian standards, especially since they were getting paid in US dollars.

She confided something privately about Dr.Sanal, how he was taken for a ride and taken advantage by Anthu, exploiting him to the maximum and extracting all his salary, by way of jewellery, clothes and expensive gifts. She kept him tied to her

apron strings, by baiting him with sex and denying it, when he was so much interested in her. He lost all his integrity, self-control, and self-esteem. Hema could only stand aside and watch, the cat and mouse game and requested my help to make the doctor aware of the dangerous terrain he was treading and the quagmire into which he was about to fall.

I assured them that I would interfere, and if things were getting out of hand, I would come to the main land Male' and confront them. They told me that as good friends, we should see to it that the poor doctor should not be allowed to be exploited and cheated. We were sure that in the end she would coolly walk off and he would be emotionally and mentally shattered.

Krishnan figured out a strategy, to put an end to all that by making the doctor propose to Anthu for marriage, and confront her. They were sure that she would never agree for the proposal and to stop the amorous exploitation, ask the doctor to forget her and to propose to Hema, in front of her in that instant, and then Hema would tackle the situation by acting concerned and getting him out of the fad. Krishnan also agreed to cooperate. We agreed that at the first possible chance I would go and meet the doctor and Anthu, and get the proposal done. They asked me to buy two fake diamond rings and take it along, to show Anthu at the time of proposing. We were all sure that she would never agree for the proposal, and then Hema playing the trump card, could incapacitate Anthu from further exploiting the doctor.

I saw them getting into the cruise Treasure Island, such a handsome pair in love, there was no lust or illicit cravings in their relationship, and I wanted them not to burn their fingers by trying to help Dr.Sanal, who was acting like a simpleton. He was loveable and innocent, that was why he could be so easily cheated and taken for a ride by Anthu. They both waved at me adieu and disappeared among the crowd on the deck of the boat, enjoying the pleasant evening sun and soft breeze. I thought about my wife and child, far off, and wondered when I would be able to see them. To drown the sorrow, I went to the bar and had a cocktail, Bloody Mary, fixed by the Srilankan barman, only for myself, less harmful stuff among the horrible brands of liquor displayed there. I gulped down the booze slowly and had a look at

the happenings inside the bar, the different dispositions of the crowd there. All were glad when they had the drink, they took it slowly, enjoying it thoroughly and soon they would become mad with its effect on them slowly catching up and sad when they saw the exorbitant bill, and lost the impact of the drink and fun they had. It was universal, the reactions of people drinking, except that in India, where people would gulp down the drink as fast as they could, taking in as much as they could, especially when they get it free, to win some favour or to do some atrocities as a bait or lure or trap.

## 12

That day, Hazel and Hendry requested my help to capture some visuals of the underwater scenes of scuba diving, with the diving outfit and all. I accompanied them on the boat that went to the diving spot, and one after another, they lowered into the sea, and disappeared under the tranquil façade of the blue ocean. I tried to capture as much as I can of them lowering into the sea but after that the images were a blur.

All of a sudden, the two of them surfaced, embracing each other, and I focussed on them, floating on the surface with their mask and other outfits on, and took video of their swimming together. After those gimmicks they went diving into the belly of the sea and did not turn up for some time.

The time allotted for the diving was over, most of their oxygen tanks were empty, and they surfaced one after another. I took more of their visuals, as they removed the masks and other paraphernalia like the oxygen cylinders and all. I put the video mode on as the boat went back to the resort and captured some dolphins that came our way, jumping and sneezing to catch our attention. They were so harmless, in spite of their huge size, looked so gentle. There were also flying fish, sea gulls and mantas, on the way and I tried to capture as much as possible to give an authentic look to the episode.

They thanked me for my help and told me that they would do the editing of the movie that night itself and email the rushes to his university. I wished them the very

best and told the boy, not to forget the sacrifice she made for him and not to go for a better model after his studies were over and getting a good placement. They thanked me for my help and support, and I told them to find a meaningful and healthy relationship in future. She had such an innocent, meek looking face, sleek and slim body that was not at all alluring or sensuous. One thing I liked about them was that they had no inhibitions or she no ill-feelings. I told them that she was doing a great thing especially for their future career. They told me that they would never get married or have children and just live together. I knew that it was futile arguing with them or trying to persuade them to marry, because they had their mind set and decided on what they were doing. I would never forget them or the visuals of passion and love I had seen when I shot those scenes for them.

I saw lights in their cottage, even after midnight, and was late purposefully, when they came for checking out and depart by the cruise that came and unloaded another crowd of guests into our resort. I was surprised to see that their payment was made by plastic money promptly and on time before their departure. I checked the server and found that a large file of data was transferred around midnight. Everything worked out the way they planned and my only wish was that it had the expected and desired result and he became a big time director and she an actress, the way they wanted and hoped for.

## 13

Things were brewing up in such a way that I wanted to make a thorough system analysis and find out some discrepancy that I was sure taking place. Funds were flowing to one overhead, purchase of tuna for the kitchen, and the vouchers that they kept were not convincing enough. I tagged a particular payment, went tracing to its original voucher and found it to be so unconvincing, that I contacted the person who had signed as receiver and came to know that he never got that payment on that day.

I noted the details of the whole payment and same way traced another similar voucher on a later day and did the same checking and cross checked with the receiver and came to know that he never got that payment. I noted the details of

that payment and to be more thorough, asked the details of some payment really made to him, took the date, amount and other details and it was not found in our records.

I had enough evidence to nail the culprits, but pretended as if I had not suspected anything and waited for a chance when they would make a false move and fall into the trap that I had set for them to fall. I found the house keeper and the assistant manager who was supposed to make the payments, conspiring with each other, and talking in hushed tones between each other, when I looked at them intently.

But the arrival of Ramesh for a visit made the scene much worse, and he teamed up with them, to make hay while the sun was shining. He even took up the role of a mediator to negotiate for those scoundrels and suggested that I kept quiet and my share of the loot would come to me accordingly. He requested me to just ignore the matter and overlook that as a clerical error. I knew what he had in mind and so made a report of the whole situation and took copies of the spurious vouchers and kept them in my back pack. I wanted to display them and discuss that matter with the general manager when I went to the main land.

Soon the chance came, in the form of a phone call from Krishnan asking me to come to the main land and interact with the doctor as we had conspired before. I set sailed at the first possible chance to go to Male', when there was a transfer of guests to the airport. I knew that Ramesh was looking for a chance to creep into the administration of the resort, but I overlooked that possibility, when I left for the main land. Ramesh came to the resort and joined hands with those thugs and with his expertise and knowledge of accounts and auditing, destroyed all the evidences that I had noted and made the accounts fool proof and perfect. All the evidences that I had earmarked were tampered with to make them convincing enough.

I had to pay dearly for that oversight in the future developments that took place. He lobbied against me with everyone to be reckoned with in the resort and tarnished my image by spreading the rumour that it was a punishment transfer that I had to the resort. Same way he won the favour of the manager of the resort, and tried to creep in there, at the very first chance possible, by tampering with the accounts and

making them tally and perfect without any loop holes to be found out, in future audit, the trick only a very professional accountant could do.

## 14

The first thing that I did after landing at Mali was to go to the head office and have a meeting with the GM and other authorities there. I pinpointed the evidences that I had brought and presented the extent of corruption that had taken place. They were not surprised and told me that a much worse racket had been operating there, and it was with great difficulty that they could clear the muddle, but the old crew was retained and they found new modus operandi.

They assured me that proper corrective measures would be taken in due course and I left the place half convinced. By evening I visited Dr.Sanal and suggested that it was Valentine's Day, a very auspicious day for proposing and persuaded him to call Anthu for a treat to the close by restaurant Daffodils on Majidu Maagu. I showed him the rings and he believed that they were real diamonds and requested him to propose to Anthu. I never mentioned to him what I had in mind and it was a very costly error and miscalculation that I made. I had arranged Hema to make a call on my mobile after I made a missed call and act agreeable to what Dr.Sanal said.

We three got out of the hospital and walked to the restaurant, got in there, I ordered three ice creams and gave the box containing the rings to Dr.Sanal. He took the hint and blurted out, "Anthu, shall we get married?" offering a ring to be put on her finger. She just giggled and withdrew her hand saying, "No Sanal, I can't think of getting married to you, let's always be friends."

I made the missed call without them noticing. Sanal was thunder struck and not opening his mouth or saying anything. Suddenly my phone rang; I said 'Hello' and went on describing how Dr.Sanal proposed to Anthu and her declining it. I added the tag line, why don't I ask him to propose to you, and cut the phone. Hearing about proposing Anthu got furious and left the place. She understood to whom I was

speaking and what I was hinting at, but poor Dr.Sanal was not aware of it and it would have cost his life. I ate her share of ice cream also, stayed the night with Dr.Sanal and left for the resort the next morning.

## 15

News had reached the resort even before me that I had reported the matter about corruption in the office to the head office and they were waiting for me to give me some task. Ramesh was at the helm of the conspiracy and he wanted to dethrone me and acquire my position. The modus operandi was to defame me with some allegations that I would leave the place without a fight or stand my ground.

As I was thunderstruck and demotivated another tragic news arrived in the form of a phone call from Hema, Anthu tried to poison the doctor, putting some Mentos in a Coco Cola which turned out to be cyanide. Unwittingly he drank it, was in critical condition, after being made to vomit many times to get rid of the poison getting into his system. Both Krishnan and Hema were near him and once the doctor gained consciousness he had to be air lifted to Trivandrum to a better hospital with more facilities.

I felt concerned about my friend more than the stinking job there, took a paper and wrote a resignation letter and gave to the manager and told him that I was leaving on the next boat that came for the transfer of guests. He did not say anything, accepted the letter and I told him to inform the head office about it and did my packing.

The staff there, hearing that I was leaving came to bid me farewell, one after another and I too felt sad in leaving the place all of a sudden. I thanked many of them who had been affectionate and kind in their dealings and told them that I would never forget them or my stay in that island resort. I downloaded the poems from the computer and kept it in a CD and also emailed them to my own email id.

Ramesh and gang were keeping away and they could not understand the reason why I was leaving the place, without even explaining my stand as they knew too well that it was they who should have been leaving the place. Except them few the whole crowd on the island came to see me off and I embarked the speed boat that left the small pearly island to which I had fallen in love and where my poetry book was born. It was fading away from my vision, but the short sojourn there was so memorable, my interaction with the guests, the booze and food, the sea and beaches, it was an unpaid holiday for me, a rare treat that I would always cherish in my mind. As no good things would last long, my life in the resort also did not last long.

## 16

I rushed to the hospital, and saw the condition of the doctor was improving, and told them to arrange his transfer to Trivandrum SUT hospital. I reached the head office and reported there and told them that I had resigned my job, how impersonal the manager and other officials there were about it, and so I did not want to work anymore in Maldives and going back to my country. They told me to think twice, as the opening which Ramesh left was vacant there and I could immediately join the work there. I told them that I had made up my mind about the whole thing and adamant in leaving the job and requested them to arrange my exit papers and okay the ticket which I already had. Neither did I tell them about the real reason of leaving the country.

Both our papers were ready simultaneously and before leaving to the airport the GM in the company called all my colleagues together, who were working with me once, in a meeting to give a send-off for me. He was lavish in praise and approbation about my discovery of the fraud and misappropriation in the resort, my cleverness to probe deeper and collected all concrete evidences that could nail them. He told them that he was giving me a gift of appreciation for the timely help that I did and gave a cash gift of thousand dollars.

I thanked them all and got away from there, knowing very well that it was Ramesh who was behind the clearing up job of accounts in the resort and I had a feeling that

he would replace me once I am gone. Those thugs would have given me a fortune, instead of the thousand dollars that the GM gifted me. I went to my bank there in Mali and withdrew the maximum possible amount in my account and went to the hospital.

Dr.Sanal had gained consciousness, but was very tired. When he saw me, he was so relieved and looked at Krishnan and Hema who had been attending to him the whole night, sleepless. He slowly collected their hands and joined them together, as if blessing their reunion. As he was being pushed to the entrance on a wheel chair, he saw the face of Anthu, peeping at him, smiled at her and waved his hands in her direction, though they were strapped with tubes and needles for giving glucose. She hid herself behind a shelf and Dr.Sanal saved her face, without going for filing a complaint against her.

At the departure terminal of the airport, just before embarking into the flight, Dr.Sanal was looking for someone, and they came, Hema and Krishnan. He smiled at them, pulled out a small packet from his pocket, the fake diamond rings which he still believed to be real diamonds and signalled them to put on each other's fingers. With me only as the only other witness they exchanged the engagement rings and I pushed the wheelchair into the tarmac, Dr.Sanal waving at them farewell.

## 17

Life treated me quite badly after coming back from Maldives. I got Dr.Sanal good treatment and after getting discharged from the hospital he preferred to go back to his native place and practice there, the nightmare of Anthu still haunting him. I tried to get back my old job in the college, but the guy who was posted in my leave vacancy would not step down and he tried many a trick to incapacitate me from joining for the job. When I was selected for the job he was eligible to get promoted to my post, now when he got my post and was getting the feel of it and enjoying it, he did not want to step down. I waited till the period of my leave was over and went and joined there one fine morning.

I went on with my work, travelling between Quilon and Trivandrum, a distance of a hundred and seventy kilometres every day, till my senior in the office had some bright idea to displace me to put his nephew in my position, as he was going to retire and I would be becoming the office head. He tried all tactics, did not succeed and as a last resort increased the pressure in my work and with the help of my colleague, a nun, dumped all the difficult work on me and made it impossible for me to operate and perform.

There was no other go, no way to survive and I contacted the people in Maldives whether I could come over there on a visit and find some job. A friend in Quilon wanted to make a study about sea planes and the feasibility of implementing a Velodrome in Quilon, arranged my ticket. The mother of Hema, hearing that I was going to Male', asked me whether I would take some beef curry and borottas, which she liked to eat in her advanced stage of pregnancy. I agreed to take it and the next day went to Trivandrum airport and embarked the flight.

Landing at Male', when I went to the customs and emigration for getting the visa for my stay there, they asked me whether I got five hundred dollars, a credit card or a hotel reservation. Hearing that I had none they asked me to wait there, and they would not give me the visa or allow me to go to the main land. I contacted many friends, including an MP there, but none of them could help me as the spy scandal lady came and shot all the places she had been tortured and showed it as a movie in Male' city and they were waiting for a Keralite to turn up to pay back in the same coin. The lot fell on me.

As providence would have it, the food given by the mother of Hema acted as my dinner along with some mineral water, while I was detained in the airport lounge, and the next day, I requested them to send me back home in the next flight. I was conversing with my fellow passenger who was in the business of sea planes and he gave me all the details of them and even the place where it could be purchased with their email id.

I went back to my office and things had changed for the better, the threat to my chair was over, the guy being absorbed in the government through the back door. I

joined back and could retire as the office head, getting a handsome pension and lots of money from the government by way of gratuity. Though I did not give in to the baits and temptations of bribes and lures, I was given my rightful share by the Almighty. The climax of the story was Krishnan phoning and telling me the next day that Hema gave birth to a healthy boy and they were going to call him Sanal.

## HOW AMAZING WAYS

1

It was love at first sight for Sam, an office clerk in a reputed college, Good Shepherd College, Trivandrum scrutinizing the documents and certificates of a cute, slim, trim girl, Jaya before the interview for the admission to MSW course. She was wearing a midi and top, in a highly westernized style, revealing the fineness of her shape. She held her head in such a confident manner, something unusual for a Keralite girl. On further scrutiny Sam found out that she had done her studies at a boarding school in Ooty, the place where millionaires send their children for studies. That too was evident; her father was in Kuwait, manager of a big oil company. His voice was a little shaky when he told her to wait in the parlour, for being called for the final selection interview. The interview was a formality and from her marks, he was sure that she would get admission and she would be there for sure in their college, a premier institution of higher education in South India. She looked back and wondered who that smart guy might be, in blue jeans and blue T-shirt, with crew cut hair, combed backward and dreams hiding in his sparkling dark eyes.

He was an eligible bachelor, waiting for the Miss Right to turn up. He was always on travail like a pelican for rain, waiting for his missing rib to materialise. It had been going on year after year at the time of the admissions. He was a connoisseur and he knew the right type of girl he had been looking for, when he saw her he resolved that he would try his luck, risk his job and future on that incarnation.

The interview being over, she came back with 'Admitted,' scribbled on the top right hand corner of her application by the Principal, Dr.Menon. He collected her transfer certificate and mark lists. She paid the fees and smiled at him, before she left the college office.

Her senior students were waiting in the portico of the college, to get to know her more and to rag her, to baptize her in to the college community. Sam knew it and since there was time before the next admission, got out and interfered. He literally rescued her from her aggressors and accompanied her to the car, where her brother had been waiting. Suddenly he recognized him to be one of his old classmates for Pre-Degree, at a famous college, where he was a budding seminarian. Manoj sprang up from the driver's seat and embraced Sam, yelling, "Sam, what the hell are you doing here, from all places?"

"I am working here in the college office as an accountant. What a surprise, seeing you after so many years. Where are you and what are you doing?" Sam asked.

"I am a planter looking after the family's rubber estate in Calicut."

"I am so glad to meet you after so many years. What have you been doing all along?"

"I tried to become a doctor and joined St.John's Medical College, Bangalore, but dropped out after a serious drug problem. Then I tried Civil Engineering to Chartered Accountancy, but I could stick to none of it. Ultimately I ended up in running a rubber estate. I am stationed there in the estate in Kuttiady; you are welcome there to spend a weekend with me. By the way, meet my sister Jaya. This is Sam, my old classmate. How come, you are working here?"

"It is a long story. I was studying for priesthood, when we were together. You know I was a diminutive rascal at that time and the Rector, a German father, asked me to go out to see how competition is out there, do my degree and to resume my seminary studies after that. I had an uncle in Kuwait who promised to take me there

and so I did my B.Com and did not go back to the seminary. The job in Kuwait did not materialize as my Uncle did not take me there. I taught at a Parallel college for some time and one of our class mates informed me of the opening here in this college. I sent the application and they called me, for interview. When I was about to set out, I came across a monk from Belgium called Francis Acharya whom I knew, the superior of an Ashram in Vagamon and he gave me a letter of introduction to the Manager of this college. I fared well in the interview and since I had the recommendation from that monk, I got the job here.”

“Why don’t we celebrate our reunion, over a beer, I hope.”

“You go and get her admitted to the ladies hostel. Come back after that and I will be free then. There is a beer parlour close by, and of course the beer is on me!”

Manoj said good bye and drove off. Jaya looked back and smiled at Sam. He hoped that she too would be there, when he came back to collect him for the drinks. He went back to the office and resumed his work, incorporating Jaya also into the database of the computer and admitting two more students.

The day was hectic; he had to attend to the details of every transaction that took place in that office, including cash and if something went wrong he would be reprimanded. It was tight rope walking, doomed if he did something well, and doomed if something went really wrong. He cursed the day he took up that job and became a Lotus-Eater in that panoramaic campus of that college. There was no escape from the allurement of that place and he stopped looking for better jobs or writing tests and attending interviews. He could not go to the Persian Gulf as he hoped and he was not getting a better job. He had got acclimatised to the situation there and got reconciled to his fate.

Suddenly he woke up from his reflection, when he saw the smiling face of Manoj over the counter of his office. He signalled him to wait and concluded his work. He locked up and got out with Manoj. As he approached the parked car, his heart beat

and pulse rate increased. He hoped that Jaya too would be there with them when they went out.

Manoj opened the front door and he slid into the car. He saw two cute eyes through the rear-view mirror eyeing him and his heart leapt with joy. They drove in past the lush green trees of the Green Palace, a drive in bar, got out of the car, entered a round cubicle and sat down. The waiter came to take their order. Manoj ordered two chilled beers and a rose milk for Jaya.

Sam was dying to know more about Jaya than listening to the monotone of Manoj, as they gulped down the beer. Sam purposefully sipped the beer slowly and limited his drink to one mug. Manoj ordered a whisky on the rocks and persuaded Sam to have one too. He turned it down and started to interact with Jaya. Soon he could win her confidence and affection and they became thick friends. She was curious about Sam and he was evasive about his antecedents, as he had nothing to boast about, or talk about a proud heritage. By dusk, they were dropped to their respective hostels and Sam went to sleep, feeling jubilant.

## 2

It was the fresher's social ceremony, when their seniors inducted the first year students into the college community. Sam too was invited for the get together. The first item on the agenda was self-introduction by the fresher's. They moved in a circle in front of the audience and introduced themselves. Sam was not much curious about the other forty-nine students, and he knew all the vital information concerning that one. It was just to bluff her, that he asked, when she materialized in front of him, the redundant question, "Jaya, may I know your name?"

She gave a quizzical smile and simply looked into his eyes. He blurted out, "Yes, I have met you before. I have nothing to ask of your where-about. If you want to know anything about me, you can ask."

"You are Sam, accountant in the college office, from Lower Periyar, chronic bachelor, having a notorious reputation for cracking jokes and boring others. I love to listen to jokes and one day I will come and listen to them."

"I will surely oblige you. I stopped cracking Achayan jokes as they might come with a Sten gun and shoot me down for defaming them. Now my hero is Achayan, the late minister. Come one day when you are free and be ready for a laugh. The other folks are waiting to introduce themselves. See you."

One after another the new students came to him, and introduced themselves. He also responded, giving his name and they already knew that he worked in the college office as they had all met him when they came for admissions.

There were songs, speeches and some skits. One skit was especially remarkable, where they teased Jaya purposefully, as she was the most outstanding girl of the new batch. It was something innocent in the beginning, as they covered someone with a blanket and brought him to the middle of the group saying that it was a horrible animal called, skunk, very frightening to look at. All were sitting tight with apprehension, when two people, one boy and a girl pretended to faint on purpose, coming forward and looking at the animal, through the bed-sheet. Nobody expected the climax, when the girl who compeered said that the bravest new student must be Jaya and requested her to come and have a look at the animal.

Jaya felt something fishy and she came slowly, parted the sheet and looked at the animal. To everyone's surprise, it was the animal that fainted. There was rip-roaring laughter and amidst it, Jaya went and sat down, not a bit taken aback. Sam could fathom her guts and presence of mind and was highly impressed.

The last item was an oath taking by the fresher's. One senior student read the oath, "In the name of God Almighty, we pledge that we will be respectable to our teachers and seniors, committed to our studies, never side-tracking like, falling in love or

ogling the senior sisters and brothers. We will be loyal to the traditions of Good Shepherd College and uplift its name and fame among the student community of Kerala. Help us, O' God."

Snacks were served and Sam moved to the group, where Jaya was the star attraction and he felt out of place, among the senior boys who were tearing her apart with their queries and questions. She was facing them boldly and answered them squarely. Sam simply smiled at them and came away to his office and buried himself under the dust-covered files, which were waiting for their redemption, from time immemorial.

The others working in the office eyed him cruelly as they all had boycotted the function and were making filthy remarks at Sam behind his back. They were all shy and timid to face the students and could not digest the fun and thrill of such a get-together. Sam sat down, peering into one file, pretending not to hear anything, but felt terrible. He thanked God that they had not found out the secret motive that he had, when he went to attend the get together and smiling to himself he got out of the place and walked to the students' hostel, where he was staying for a quick game of table tennis. He relished the quick movements of the game, which made one agile and alert but did not exhaust, like the basketball, which he played at times.

### 3

It was a fine Sunday morning, and Sam went to attend the holy Mass. His attention was caught by a cute figure in the front pew and he was distracted all throughout the Mass. He prayed fervently for some divine intervention in his love life, that Jaya reciprocate his feelings. He was not a Romeo, neither was he like James Bond, he could not express what he felt to others and that was his problem. That day he wanted to open up his mind and heart, to show her how much he loved her and cared for her.

At the time of communion, he perfected his timing to go simultaneously with her to the priest and stretched out his left palm to receive the holy host. She looked up to see, who it was standing next to her and he looked at her, demure in contrast to the tall brick structure of the college chapel. They came back to their respective pews and attended the mass, as if nothing had happened.

Sam was a little hesitant to get out of the chapel, though he was the first to get out of there, before. He sat on the cement bench built around an almond tree, the mascot of the lovers in the campus and waited there, like a pelican for prey. Soon she came and stopped, where he sat and a cute smile blossomed on her beautiful face.

He said, "Hi Jaya, how are you? Any news from Manoj? How is your studies and life here in the college?"

"It is fine. I like the place. Manoj will be coming next week to take me home for the Christmas holidays. I will tell him to come and meet you. Have you any new jokes?" Sam told her jokes from his collection and she liked them.

"That was a good one. I will tell our friends in the ladies hostel these jokes and they will like it."

"Don't do that. If anybody wants to hear jokes, let them come to me."

"No chance. I don't like you to crack such jokes to other girls. It is my privilege."

"Okay, agreed. You hold the copyright and monopoly to hear my jokes."

"It is already late for breakfast. Let me go. See you."

"Bye then, take care!"

She was gone like a gentle breeze and Sam felt jubilant. He felt really happy about cracking jokes, as he always said them to make others laugh, so that he could forget his innate sorrows.

## 4

Cupid was unkind to Sam as his competitor arrived in the arena, in the personification of a Yankee, Ralph Higgins. He held a Ph.D. and came to teach in their college on some exchange programme, and came to stay in his hostel. Sam was very much hospitable to Ralph and was very friendly to him. When Manoj arrived next time Sam introduced Ralph to Manoj and invited him also for an outing, they had planned. When he heard that they were going to Kovalam beach, Ralph was all ready and joined them. In the back seat of the Benz, Ralph found Jaya, whom he had seen in his class but never had a chance to know better. Sam introduced Jaya to him and that was the beginning of all the misfortune for Sam.

Ralph was a married single man, whose wife had eloped with one of his students who was more skilful in bed than him. He was fascinated by Jaya and found her highly alluring and attractive. He made passes at her; spoke to her in such sweet and romantic manner, that she liked him from the outset.

Sam did not suspect the motives of the Doctor, as he respectfully called Ralph. They reached the beach and the three gentlemen stripped to shorts and jumped right into the rolling waves and Jaya sprawled on the beach. They tried swimming for some time and it was Ralph who reached back first, while Sam and Manoj were out in the shallow waters jumping over the waves. Ralph came, sat down near Jaya, looked in to her eyes and said, "Your eyes are as deep as the blue sea and I was taken aback by your beauty. I haven't seen such a classy woman like you, not even in the whole of America. Would you like to come to the U.S. for higher studies? I could arrange an MBA or Ph.D. programme in our university for you. You could take up a teaching profession or any other job that would suit your liking. There is immense scope and

wide potential in America and you can have a wonderful life, which you can't even dream of in India."

"I always wanted to go to the U.S. There is no other way, except through matrimonial alliance."

"I can arrange a fiancée visa for you."

"That would be very kind of you, sir." She said so without knowing the implication of what she said and what repercussions it would have on her future and that of the whole humanity.

Manoj and Sam joined them and they dried themselves by basking in the hot sun. For Ralph, it was a real treat, getting sun-tanned. Manoj went to the car, came back, with some cans of beer and a can of sprite for Jaya. They gulped down the drink and sat there making fun of each other; Sam tried to be romantic to Jaya and she just ignored him. He couldn't find out why she was withdrawing and keeping aloof from him. Innocent that he was, he did not suspect anything, but kept quiet, all along the trip back to college.

Ralph was so hilarious during the trip back and he took Jaya's palm in his hand and tried palm reading. He was saying all improbable things about her future, to which she responded with giggles. Manoj and Sam felt annoyed at the way Ralph was behaving, but did not react, as he was her teacher.

They reached the college and Jaya did not even respond, when Sam bade her farewell. She was looking at Ralph, with dreams in her eyes and looked, as if she did not want to leave him. Both Sam and Ralph went back to the hostel. Ralph tried to know all that he could, about Jaya from Sam. Sam revealed the fact that Manoj was his classmate. Ralph said that he liked the girl and if she was willing, he would marry her and take her to America. He told Sam that he had some ulterior motives in making a relationship with her. He requested the help of Sam in finding out her

opinion about him and to help him get her, as his partner in life or at the least beget a son from her.

Sam felt like spitting on his face or terminating him with his bare hands. He did not say anything but cursed his misfortune in introducing Jaya to Ralph. He went back to his room, resolved to reveal to Jaya the evil motives of Ralph and what he really was and his intentions were.

## 5

Sam met Jaya the next day, but she was not even looking at him. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her and how fraudulent Dr.Ralph was. He was feeling gloomy and depressed. He was like the remorseful lover in the classics. He lost interest in his work, lost his appetite and did not care to shave or walk around smart as he had always done.

He felt aghast when he happened to see Jaya in the staff room, talking and giggling with Dr.Ralph, during the lunch hour. That evening when he met Dr.Ralph, he was in high spirits and confided that Jaya had invited him to their estate in Calicut for the Christmas holidays and Sam should also accompany him. Hearing the news was torture for Sam, but he told Dr.Ralph that he would also come. Sam wanted to talk to Manoj about the precarious situation and to deter Jaya from falling a victim to the booby- trap, set by her cunning professor.

The day set for the trip was after the Christmas celebration in the college, by the night train. They had reserved three seats in the sleeper coach of the night train and had arranged a cab to drop them at the railway station after the function.

The party was in the evening. Sam did not feel like dressing up smart for the function. He put on a Kurtha on top his blue jeans. With his sunken eyes, half grown beard and shabby dress he looked like a poet or literary figure or even an artist, a 'buji' as they called such figures in the campus.

The Principal of the college, Dr. Menon, asked him, why he looked so dejected and uninterested in his work. He told the principal that he was not feeling well and was going away for a week and he would commute the half - pay leave he had. Menon said okay and did not probe the cause of his sorrow, as he usually did.

At sharp five o' clock, the function began. There was singing of Christmas carols and it was Ralph who was conducting the singing. They sang 'Silent Night' and 'O come all you faithful'. The song 'Mary's Boy Child' was as good as the original and all the music turned out well, played by Ralph at the keyboard. Jaya was singing her heart out. Sam felt uneasy watching her gyrating to the rhythm of the beats that Ralph so expertly made on the keyboard, imitating Jazz, Guitar, accordion and rhythm pad.

The chief guest of the function, a top bureaucrat, the Director of Collegiate Education, was invited because he would become useful for the official matters of the college. He made a speech that was so boring, mostly on the implication of Christmas in the modern era, where love and concern was vanishing from human hearts. He stressed that Jesus was the personification of love, and love should come back to prevail in our hearts, where strife and hatred have dominated.

The sermon was so boring, especially when it came from an amateur bureaucrat. Throughout the speech Ralph and Jaya were conversing in soft tones, sitting in the last row of the audience. After the speech, the chief guest cut a Christmas cake and proposed the toast. Cake and wine were served and it was Jaya who gave Sam his goblet of wine. He wished her merry Christmas and told her to set out immediately after the gift exchange was over. She asked him to collect Dr.Ralph also.

Soon there was the dinner, which was fried rice and chicken curry served on the lawn of the college. There was big illumination, which seemed to rival heaven in magnificence. Sam did not feel exuberant as he had felt during previous Christmas celebrations. He longed for someone to be near him, to eat the dinner, but she was

sitting elsewhere, with someone else, who was not her benefactor. Sam wanted to tell her that, if only she would listen to him. He hoped to get a chance during their trip to the estate. There was an added reason to it all.

It was in the form of an email from a man called Lin Chi to Dr.Ralph in the official email address of the college. It said that Ralph had found the right girl to accomplish his mission and asked him to go ahead. In the template of that email, a web-site in Tibet was mentioned. Sam browsed that site and found it to belong to a radical Buddhist clan, Tantrayana that was involved in Bonism, witchcraft and black magic. They were stressing much about the end of days and that the last days had come. Sam had a feeling that it referred to Jaya and he wanted to observe Ralph at close quarters and to prevent him from misusing Jaya.

After the dinner, there was a programme of exchanging Christmas gifts. Each student had to pack up and give a small gift, to an anonymous Christmas friend. Santa, with big fanfare and bursting of crackers, came to the stage and took over the function. He started distributing the gifts, and passing funny comments on persons according to his performance that scholastic year. Sam got his gift from the Principal. The Christmas father accused Sam of being romantic and showy in front of the girls and cracking nasty jokes. Sam felt annoyed, but regained his composure and caught on the long beard of Santa, shook it and said, 'thanks.' The Christmas father was aghast, as he would be stoned if the beard came off and his identity revealed.

Dr.Ralph was called to receive the gift and he was teased, saying that the wedding bells are ringing and would the Yankee kidnap and elope with a Kerala girl. Sam felt angry and resentful. He got out of the function to pack his backpack for the trip.

## 6

When the cab arrived, Ralph was not to be found in the near vicinity of the hostel. Sam searched for him all over the place. Finally he found Ralph, talking to the final year girls who were hanging around, even after the Christmas party was over. Sam was angry inside and asked Ralph to rush. They went and collected Jaya and reached the railway station. There wasn't much difficulty in finding their berths as the train was on the platform. It was a three-tire berth and Sam climbed to the upper berth. Ralph opted for the middle one and Jaya was on the bottom one.

Sam was exhausted after the ordeal of the Christmas celebration, and he fell asleep soon. Sometime later, awakened by the movement of the train, he heard fast breathing and hissing sounds from the lower berths. Ralph was stooping down and caressing Jaya and she hissing, catching him on the shoulder and pulling on his hair. Sam realized that it had been going on for some time. To avert further advances, he just coughed twice, an indication that people were watching. The people on the opposite berths also seemed to be awake.

Ralph withdrew his hands and lay there as if nothing had happened, and Jaya pulled off her hands. Sam knew that their relationship had progressed into dangerous dimensions and the Yankee had made advances in luring his victim into the booby trap. Neither Sam, nor Ralph, nor Jaya slept after that incident. They got down when the train reached Calicut and made a phone call to the estate to send a jeep to collect them. The jeep came and drove them to the Kuttiady estate, past coconut plantations and grooves of rubber trees.

When they reached the estate bungalow, Manoj was not there as he had to go to the town on some official assignments regarding the income tax hearing of the estate. His wife Sheila and two children were eagerly waiting for their arrival. She ushered them into the hall and offered them tender coconuts. Jaya introduced Ralph as her teacher and Sam as the friend of Manoj and an accountant in the college

office. Sheila sneered at Sam and gave all her attention to Ralph. She gave the best guestroom to Ralph and asked Sam to sleep in a dungeon like room, next to Ralph's.

Jaya was so keen about showing the bathroom to Ralph and he took a quick shower and got dressed for breakfast, while Sam went to a mountain-brook close to the bungalow and took a bath in it. It was so cool and refreshing and he stayed in the natural pond for some time. By the time he came back, dressed and ready for breakfast, Ralph had almost finished his.

Sam devoured with delight, the boiled tapioca with fish curry. He took a bull's eye and a banana. Jaya was talking to Ralph in the portico and Sam got infuriated, hearing his thunderous peals of laughter and the giggling of Jaya. He did not go near them or disturb them in their fun. He was so tired that he went and took a sound nap.

Manoj came and woke up Sam from his stupor and they embraced each other. He said, "Hi, Sam, welcome to my kingdom up in the hills. I am the uncrowned king here and all that I say goes here, without questioning."

"In that case, please see that your sister keeps off from that Yankee, Dr.Ralph. His intentions are not good. We will have to regret about her later. He has allured her with some sweet promises and she has fallen into his trap. He is a divorcee, someone with sinister connections and very bad motives in his approach to Jaya. Better, watch out!"

"You are the one who introduced him to me and as he happens to be her teacher, I can't simply throw him out from my place or tell him not to interact with her. I throw you a challenge. You try your charm and masculinity to win Jaya over from him. She has to purchase some clothes from town. I will tell her to take you as an escort, because I am busy. Mind you, she is my sister and I trust you."

"I will try all my charm and talk her out from her new found fad. If she listens to me we are lucky. Otherwise, she is heading for trouble."

"By the way how will I treat you old' chap, as you have come here for the first time as my guest. Why don't we go hunting tonight? We will take Ralph also along and if she still persists on her fad, I will shoot him and dump him in some canyon beyond the estate."

"You don't do that. This is a man to man job. I will try to talk her out of it. Once she comes to know the real intention of Ralph, she will stop her attachment and attraction towards him."

"Can you drive the car? In case you can't, don't worry; Jaya would drive. I will get Ralph out from the scene, as I will take him to the estate to show how latex is made. I will ring up Jaya to go with you to town, in my car, as I am busy."

"Okay, settled. You call Ralph and get away. I will be ready by that time and pick up Jaya when you ring up."

"Bye then. Everything as we have said."

"See you, bye."

## 7

Jaya started the car and they sped away through the winding roads of the rubber plantation and coconut groves. They did not speak, much by way of conversation. Sam asked, "When did you learn driving? You are driving pretty well."

"I started driving my dad's car, sitting in his lap, when I was ten years old in Kuwait. I got the license only recently."

"I can't drive though I got steering balance; when it comes to the gears, I am at a loss."

"Sam, what is your opinion about Dr.Ralph? You don't quite appreciate my mingling with him. Why are you so jealous of him?"

"Jaya! That was a topic that I wanted to bring up myself. From what he told me, his motive in dealing with you is not straight. He wants to seduce you, to marry you, if possible or otherwise enjoy you and desert you later. He is a divorcee, has got sinister connections with a radical Buddhist group in Tibet, and from his dealings, he is not a straight forward person."

"I like him and I am sure that he is so fond of me. He had promised me to arrange my higher studies in America. It is my great dream to go to the United States. He is so masculine and dashing. I like him."

"I have nothing to say about it. You may have to regret later. I too was fond of you, liked you and would have loved to marry you. Depends whether you like me or not. But I have no antecedents like Ralph and I can't promise you to take you to America. Besides, I am a clerk in the college, while he is a lecturer. But I have a loving heart and intend your wellbeing. Manoj asked me to talk to you, and that is why I said so much. It is you, who have to decide and it is your life."

"I have nothing to think and I don't offer any promises to anyone. If Ralph is willing to take me to America, I will go with him. He was speaking of some fiancée visa, which he could arrange so easily."

"Okay, thank you for being frank with me. I will not open this topic anymore. You can count on me, like your brother. The moment I saw you, I liked you and cherished undue expectations, which you don't reciprocate. That is it. See, we have come to the town. You park here and we will go to that textile over there. I haven't

much idea about clothes. You select whatever you want and I will stay in the back ground.”

Jaya was like a lone elephant, let loose in a sugarcane farm, and Sam nodded ‘okay’ whenever she asked him whether he liked a particular piece of cloth. She purchased a lot of clothes and paid the bill. The Manager of the shop offered them tea, as if they are couples and they set out on their journey back. Throughout the trip, Sam was rather silent and when they were about to reach the estate Sam told her:

“Let us part as good friends. You can count on me, and I mean your wellbeing. Back in the college, whenever you need anything, you can approach me. See me just like Manoj and I will be your loving brother here after. Bye!”

They reached the Bungalow and Sam helped Jaya unload her packages of cloth and Manoj and Ralph received them. Sam did not feel like hanging around there; he went to his room. He undressed, put on a Bermuda and T-shirt and went, trekking through the rubber plantation. He was feeling so unhappy, in losing something that he held precious to his heart. He got reconciled to his fate and thought that it was the will of God, and Jaya was too good a girl for him, to have as a wife.

## 8

After supper Manoj abruptly suggested, “Why don’t we go for hunting?”

Ralph said, “I am sporty enough for that.”

Sam said, “In fact, I am afraid of the sound of the gun shot. I hate hurting innocent animals. Anyway, I will just come with you for company sake, at least, to prove my manliness.”

Jaya said, "We have no doubt about your manliness. In fact, I have got you as another brother like Manoj and I am so glad in having you as a friend or even a brother."

"That is great. I am also very happy to have a good friend like you Sam. Manoj, I like you too and your family as someone intimate to my heart," Ralph said.

"Let's go for hunting. Ralph, you walk in front, with this big torch. I will be wearing the headlight and aiming my gun at the eyes of animals that my light picks up. Sam, you stay close behind and pick up whatever I shoot down," Manoj said.

'All the best!' We will be waiting to cook whatever you bring. Please take care, there are snakes in the under growth of the estate and Ralph, you be very careful with your torch in selecting the way you go," Jaya said.

Soon, they were on their way for hunting. They scanned through the estate and not finding any animal worthy to fire a shot, went to the outskirts of the estate, which was like a small forest. Soon Manoj asked them to stop proceeding and shone his headlight on top of a big palm tree.

He took aim and fired a shot. There was a thud, of something falling heavy on the ground. Sam jumped in the direction of the sound and caught hold of a tree-cat that was writhing with pain and ferociously scratching at his hands and chest. He held fast to it, because he was sure that Manoj would fire the next shot at him, if he let go the wounded animal. Ralph shone his torch and Manoj came and hit at the head of the cat with the butt of his rifle. Sam dropped it and it became motionless.

They went back to the bungalow and Jaya was eagerly waiting for them, without sleeping. She fried the meat and when the food was ready; Manoj took out a bottle of Bacardi, white rum from the shelf of the dining hall and poured three pegs. Jaya opened three cans of coke and Ralph suggested that she too take a peg to get the

feel of rum-cola, the best cocktail in the whole world. She said that she didn't mind and Ralph poured a small peg for her and Sam mixed it with coco cola.

They said cheers, and slowly sipped down the booze and devoured the fried meat. Jaya's face was like that of a monkey that bit raw ginger when she had the first sip. Soon they emptied the bottle, mostly by Ralph and Manoj. Both Sam and Jaya did not drink more than the first peg. Sheila stayed in the background.

After washing the hands they sat down and went on chatting with each other. Sam invited them all to his place, Lower Periyar for a holiday. Ralph said that he was going to explore Goa during the next holidays and promised to take anyone who wanted to accompany him. Sam said that he was sporty enough and it was a great desire he cherished. Jaya said that if Manoj was there she too would like to join their expedition. Manoj said that he too wanted, but could not keep away from the estate for such a long time. Ultimately Sam agreed to go to Goa with Ralph.

"The place, I will be staying in Goa is like a monastery in Hindu tradition. I got a friend there, Maya, someone well versed in the Vedas and Vedanta. I am taking keen interest in all that, besides the Buddhist tradition, that is my present fad. I am from a radical group of Christians, snake people who are trying to change the world order, collaborating with all the leading world religions and leaders. You may not be interested in hearing all that and it must be boring for you," said Ralph.

"Tell me more. I am interested to know more about that," Jaya said.

In fact you could Assist us in accomplishing what I am after. I will tell you all that, when we are back in the college. I am feeling terribly tired and sleepy, walking all over the estate in the middle of the night," said Ralph.

"That is right. If it was during daytime, you would never imagine climbing all those hills or walking over such crevices. Let us go to sleep. Besides, your train is at ten in

the morning. I will drop you at the railway station. You be ready by nine. Good night," said Manoj, and they went back to their respective places to sleep.

## 9

The trip back was quite memorable. Manoj drove them to the railway station. They had to wait for a long time for the train to arrive. When it came at last, they got in the chair car compartment. Ralph and Jaya were sitting on the same seat and Sam was opposite them. Throughout the trip Ralph was speaking to Jaya and she was giggling to his alliterations and pranks, as if enjoying them thoroughly. Sam felt ill at ease, but he remembered the pact, he made with Jaya, and did not even look at her with evil intentions.

When she got bored with his jokes, she said that Sam knew some excellent jokes. Ralph persuaded Sam to crack one or two as a specimen and Sam told them a few.

Ralph said, "I will tell you a joke about a Yankee, one Joe, who was about to die. He called his wife aside and told her that if she would ever have any affair with any one after his death, he would weep in his tomb, and he died. It was after twenty-five years that the wife died. She went to heaven; at the pearly gate St. Peter welcomed her and told her that the custom in heaven was that, if the wife came there after her husband's death, she would have to fetch her husband, and they had to face the final judgment together. She went all over heaven, searching for her husband, but could not find him as twenty-five years have elapsed since she saw him last. St. Peter told her not to worry; he would find her husband, as they had a short cut method in heaven to do that."

Sam and Jaya asked him simultaneously, "What was that?"

"St. Peter asked her what was the name and last words of her husband? She told him that he was Joe and said that he would be weeping in his tomb if she had an

affair with any one after his death. Suddenly St.Peter told an angel there, to go and fetch the always crying Joe.” Ralph ended the joke and they all enjoyed it thoroughly.

Ralph told them, “Let’s stop all joking and I want to share with you a few serious things, the reason for my coming to India, as well as, my need for help from both of you. When I finish talking, tell me whether you would collaborate with me. Or better, I will tell you, after getting an e-mail from the U.S., one from Tibet and talking to Maya in Goa over the phone. It should never leak out and the train is no good place to talk about such a life and death matter for me. The purpose of my life is centred on that and I have made some headway, but it depends on how you would react to what I tell you. Wait a few more days and I will tell you all, what it is all about.” Ralph concluded.

They were taken aback with apprehension and did not utter a word throughout the trip, thereafter. Sam felt a sudden fear of some imminent disaster or some ominous thing that was about to take place, and decided to avert it at any cost. He decided to have a private talk with Jaya and to plan the course of their future actions. He cursed the day; he came across Ralph and even more, introduced Jaya to him. He remembered the email from Lin Chi, and put two and two together to realize that it had something to do with that all.

## 10

Sam was waiting for a chance to talk to Jaya and he wanted to collect more information about Ralph. He observed him at close quarters and realized that he was a highly spiritual man, always reading the Bible and praying whenever he got time. He started the day with scripture reading and spontaneous prayer. Sam spied after him to listen to what he was praying and since it was loud, he could make out that he prayed for world peace, love and harmony among different people, end of the strife, terrorism, atrocities and hatred that had affected mankind.

When he had a chance, he interacted with Ralph and persuaded him to speak about his sinister motives and piety that was at the grass root level. Sam also found out that he had an all-world tuner, with which he was scanning all the short wave stations of the world especially that broadcast spiritual things and songs from America. Ultimately Ralph agreed that his mission to India was to find out a suitable woman to beget the antichrist, whom they, a Christian radical group in America and a Tibetan school of Bonism together with an ancient Ashram of traditional Hindu Monasticism were masterminding in fabricating. As per Buddhist teaching and Hindu mythology, the devil incarnate was to be born around the wake of the next millennium. After much prayer and fasting in his religious group, and consulting his counterparts in Tibet and India, Ralph was destined to be the father of the devil-child and he was searching for the right woman, someone preferably from the orient, a virgin with no blemishes, but with real sophistication. The lot fell on Jaya.

Ralph persuaded Sam to talk to Manoj about accepting the romance between Ralph and Jaya, and also getting official sanction from their father for their wedding. He wanted Jaya to accompany them to the trip to the ashram in Goa, where some rituals were to be performed by Lin Chi and his accomplices. Maya was looking for the lagnam and auspicious occasion for all that and would inform them about the right time of the journey.

Sam felt like backing off and also saving Jaya from that conspiracy, but he had to change his mind when he talked to Jaya. He could find some divine destination in all that and his role was also crucial, and from that moment on, his mind was burdened and his soul mortgaged.

He decided to read the Bible and see what it all meant and to go through Vedanta to read about the appearance of Kalki, the last of the divine incarnations. That Sunday, the reading for the Mass was from Revelations, about the beast that was to appear in the last days and Sam decided to talk to Jaya and to see how much she was aware of the facts. Sam waited for the congregation to disperse and went after Jaya, and he was taken aback by the mission of a messenger that she entrusted to him, to

inform Ralph of her love and willingness to be married to him. Sam promised her that he would do all in his ability to carry out the mission that she entrusted to him, left her, with a broken heart and nothing more to say. He decided to be an accomplice too, in that conspiracy that was to fulfil all prophesies about the destiny of the world and the end of days.

## 11

Ralph planned the trip to Goa, booked the tickets and made all the arrangements for boarding and lodging there. They had to wait for a few days and Sam was preparing himself mentally for all that was to take place; that turned his life topsy turvy. Jaya was very enthusiastic about the whole thing and she looked forward to the trip. Ralph was rather silent, seemed cogitating, brooding over and highly prayerful.

Life in the college was as miserable as ever. Sam had a lot of problems from his peers. He was highly misunderstood and his actions were interpreted to have some ulterior motives, whereas he had never meant anything of that sort. If he did something well, he was doomed, because he did it with his own initiative, making his senior jealous and if he did not do something good, then also he was accused of gross negligence on his part. He was between the devil and the deep sea.

Jaya was walking on the clouds and there was a gleam in her eyes always. The boys in her class were always teasing her, connecting her name with Professor Ralph. Some boys, who were jealous of the whole affair, made up stories and even connected Sam to it. They said that Sam was the intermediary, who arranged rendezvous for them to meet and interact freely. In the office they were accusing Sam as he was so fond of talking to girls and mingling with them, since Jaya came and confided something or other to Sam.

When Sam was talking to Jaya on the portico of the college building, his senior informed the Principal that Sam was talking to a girl student and Dr.Menon came and shouted at Sam, humiliating him in front of Jaya. Sam felt hurt, but did not respond and went back to the office and hid under the counter, the seat where he was supposed to occupy.

Sam was feeling so dejected that he thought of resigning his job and going away so many times. There was no chance to prove his genuineness. He had no options left; to get another job was difficult, he had sacrificed his youth there in that college, and had a hope that one day his life would bloom. That college would have been like heaven, but was the synonym of hell for Sam with the backbiting from his senior and he was frightened whether he would lose his sanity.

Sam was spending his days, rather wasting his life and rotting there. When the time came for going to Goa, the ordeal in the college had reached its culmination and to get away from all that, Sam applied for two week's leave and got ready for the trip. Ralph also managed to get away from his teaching assignments, as it was PRA camp for the students. As for Jaya, a fake telegram was arranged to be sent from Calicut asking Jaya to come home immediately for some family function, supposedly from her father. All three of them left the college, one after another, separately and boarded the Kurla train that was to take them on their journey to Goa. The planning was meticulous; the decisive day came; they set out, three people to decide the destiny of humanity and channel the flow of history to a different direction.

## 12

Though they set out one by one, they got united in the railway station. Ralph had a big backpack on his back and Sam had a big travel bag. When Jaya came, she had a trolley bag full of clothes and other paraphernalia to last for a fortnight. They went in search of some empty seats in a chair car where, they all three could sit comfortably. Jaya got a side seat and Ralph sat next to her and Sam sat opposite

them. Luckily there was no one in that cubicle and they could freely converse. Ralph began:

“It all started with my trip to Tibet five years ago. I wanted to conduct a research on Bonism, the traditional Buddhist practice of exorcism and black magic. I was not convinced much about its authenticity and effectiveness, till I got there and interacted with Lin Chi. In fact, they were waiting for a man like me, to come there to entrust him with a mission that none of them could accomplish. According to Tantrayana, it was time for a world leader to evolve in history and there were some rituals prescribed in it, by which, the bondage of the people of Tibet could be over and lead the whole humanity to another phase, in the third millennium. The mother had to be necessarily from the orient whereas, the father could be from the west, but necessarily be of Aryan blood. Lin Chi and his gang were waiting for a westerner to arrive, to entrust the mission. They analysed my horoscope and found it the right one, except for one hitch, about my wife; she couldn't possibly be the mother of the promised one.

“I never knew how true their occult sciences could be, but soon the news arrived, in the form of a telegram, to the remote corner of Tibet, from my sister, informing me, that my wife eloped with one of my research students. I was shocked. Lin Chi consoled me saying that it was there in my horoscope, it was inevitable to happen to me. He predicted that, I would travel further into the land of Hinduism, the mother of all religions and find a suitable mother for the king.

“That too came true; it was like a bolt from the blue that I had a chance to come to India on a teaching assignment. I came across you two, and here we are, to hear more about it, Tantrayana and Bonism from the mouth of an expert Lin Chi and to see what Vedanta has to say about it, from his Indian counterpart Maya, an exponent of Veda and Vedanta,” Ralph stopped his narrative and Sam was curious.

“Where do I fit in this racket? Please leave me alone. I will take the next train back from Mangalore and go back to my useless, monotonous, thorn in the flesh kind of

life. Please leave Jaya also alone. She is a Christian and does not believe in all this crap.”

“Sam! I am quite excited about it all and feel sporty enough. Sam, you should also stick on with us throughout this deal, as you are our mutual friend,” Jaya pleaded.

“Haven’t you read the Revelations in the Bible? If it is the same one, your promised one, then we all will have to regret about it,” Sam replied.

“We are becoming part of history, accomplishing things that no one else could ever do, and please stay on till you hear, from Lin Chi and Maya. I too am a devoted Christian and I feel I can’t back off, because of it. It is the need of the time, and Sam, you have a crucial role to play in the whole thing. So please come with us to Goa. This is terribly important. Let us keep quiet for some time and think about all that I told you,” Ralph concluded.

“Okay, let no one speak, let no one speak, the first person to speak is an ass.” Jaya repeated the childhood prank that she used to play with her brother to keep him quiet.

## 13

It was evening when they reached Panaji, the capital of Goa and went in search of a hotel they had heard of before, where there were no rooms to spare, and it was black out in the city.

One man asked them if they were looking for room to stay, and told them that he took paying guests in his house as a Home stay, and they were welcome. Though a little apprehensive, they set out, reached his home and got in there. His wife came and received them, and introduced their two daughters. Jaya was to stay with them and the two men were to sleep in the attic, which was converted into a bedroom. They were given a typical Goan style supper and they had a good sleep.

They were waken up from sleep by their hostess who came with steaming hot coffee on a platter, with a smile, in the morning and when the bill was to be settled, they found even her smile was included. The two girls were friendly to Jaya, and the eldest of them said that she was trying to come to Trivandrum Medical College, the next year for medical studies. Jaya asked her to keep in touch and contact her once she reached Trivandrum. Ralph settled the bill and Sam expressed the vote of thanks and Jaya was sad to bid farewell to her newly acquired acquaintances in Goa.

They reached their destination, Vagatore beach, where Maya was having an Ashram and rehabilitation centre for drug-addicted hippies. A monk in his fifties, with curly long hair and beard, wearing a long saffron garb, Maya welcomed them to the Ashram. The inmates of the Ashram were all wearing saffron robes. There were fifteen of them. The hippies were around twenty in number, among whom five were women. Jaya was accommodated in the ladies compartment, while Sam was given a cot in the middle of the hall purposefully, as Sam found out later. Ralph stayed with Maya as the chief guest.

“Welcome to our Ashram and be comfortable here. Lin Chi is arriving by the evening flight. We are on an important and vital assignment for the whole humanity, and Ralph will brief us all about it in the Satsang this evening. Sam, you have a pivotal role to play and please bear with us and co-operate. I am glad that you came,” Maya concluded.

“The few days that we spend here would be days of prayer, fasting and indoctrination from Christian, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. I will be mostly briefing you all from the Bible and our mode of worship will be on Buddhist, Hindu and Christian tradition. I am going to fast on all these days, for the success of our mission. Jaya and Sam will have to be equally prayerful, especially Sam. I will brief you about the implication of what we are going to do in the evening,” Ralph told them.

"I feel like having a good swim in the sea and I don't grasp what you are driving at. Behold the handmaid of the Lord and be it done unto me as you had said," said Jaya as she winked at Ralph.

"Okay, let us go for a swim. It will be quite refreshing," said Sam.

They went to their rooms and came back in swimming dress. Sam was astonished at the shapeliness of Jaya and the masculinity of Ralph. Sam felt humble in stature, but took up courage and ran to the beach and jumped into the inviting hot sea. They swam and floated on their backs and idled there on the lolling waves. When they had enough of it and had a good swim, they swam back to the shore and lay there on the sand, drying themselves under the shade of the coconut trees. There were other tourists there who were fully nude or half nude. But Sam could not find another woman, as attractive as Jaya, even among the western blondes and brunettes. He contained himself from looking too openly at the feast for the eyes and fell into a stupor.

## 14

Lin Chi arrived on that same day evening and Sam found him to be funny and attractive with his long beard, round specs and saffron robe. Ralph introduced Jaya and Sam to him, and he bowed down each time when each person was introduced. He scrutinized Sam through his glasses and nodded in approval when he saw Jaya and embraced Ralph and said, "I am so glad to meet you doctor after such a long time. I am glad that you both, Jaya and Sam also came. We are going to prepare ourselves for a great event; the whole humanity is in travail and waiting. This is so vital and very important for us and we are going to change the course of history. We had been preparing ourselves for years, Maya and me. Ralph took up our cause when he came to Tibet and saw the sad condition of our folks there and also by analysing history at close quarters in Washington, the capital of the world, from where the real political power emanates. This is for the sake of the whole humanity

and we may lose, suffer and might have to give up all that we hold precious. I know the pang of pain that you feel, Sam, at the moment, but you have to forgo, give up and collaborate, if you are a true philanthropist and altruist; I believe, you are one.”

Maya interrupted, “Jaya, it is you who have to be really prepared. You are chosen for a great cause, but you may regret and a great sword may pierce your heart. There would be moments of triumph, achievements but the end would be trauma and pain and you will have to be aware of that. We are aware, it is a necessary evil of which, we may not be there to see the end, but the end would be a tragedy. I see signs of the end of days; today is a good lagnam to start with, the world reaching the pinnacle of Kaliyuga. We got to act fast; our time is limited and Sam you are the Sutradarakan, the facilitator for this great event. You will hold the reins of time and space in your hands that calamities may be averted and tragic things prevented from happening in the world like tornadoes and tsunamis.”

Ralph smiled at them and summed up, “We are taking the first step to this great leap today, and I will indoctrinate you about rapture, the hidden truth in the word of God, about what we are about to begin. One of these days, Jesus is sure to come and take his faithful to heaven, but there are some pre-set conditions that have to be fulfilled, and we are beginning to pave the way for his kingdom to come. We are not sure, who all will be taken, but I want to reserve my ticket for the trip and I want you my friends to be rescued. When we are through, the pre-condition for the Lord’s coming would be accomplished, and then there won’t be pain and suffering any more, if you are of the chosen lot. Be prepared and be there, it is out of love for you, as we are one in our master-mind group, I am inviting you to join me and be prepared.”

“I am not grasping a single thing you are speaking about. Ralph, what is this rapture, something I never heard in my whole life. I am rather frightened by what Maya and Lin Chi were speaking about. I know it is a noble cause that you are after from what I could make out from your dialogue. My life has become miserable and I

will have no peace of mind until I see this thing through, I am there with you, through thick and thin," Sam concluded.

"What about Jaya? You should give your unconditional consent, before we begin our mission," Maya looked at her.

"I know it is a great cause you are after, I can't grasp the full significance of it, but I am there with you, what might come," Jaya consented.

"I am glad to hear that from you, Jaya and Sam. Please be prayerful and receptive to the word of God, when I speak from the Bible tonight. Through that we enter a new phase in our life, to a noble cause, for the love of God and love of our fellow men," Ralph summarized.

"Let's have tea and get ready for the Sathsang. The whole community would be there, eagerly waiting to hear what Ralph would have to speak about. First it would be Bhajans, then Ralph's message and in the end Lin Chi would lead us in praise and worship of God according to Buddhist tradition," Maya reminded them.

They went to the refectory for tea and had round pieces of dry baked bread and lemon tea. Its aroma added to the aura of the atmosphere of the Ashram and Sam wondered what else would be taking place.

## 15

The congregation sat on mats in a circle, facing each other. Maya operated a music system and Bhajans started emanating. They all sang after it, clapping their hands, rhythmically. One monk was playing a tabala and another was kneading a sitar. Song after song came in succession. In the end Maya asked whether anybody wanted to sing, and Sam started chanting, stopping after each line, "Praise God, Praise God Halleluia, Halleluia, Halleluia Praise the Lord". Then they all sang after

him. He repeated the chorus and went on singing. They all liked it and sang it again and again.

Then Ralph got up with the Bible in hand and started speaking about the end of days. He quoted from hither and thither, all over from the Bible, speaking so convincingly about the signs of the last days, as well as the fact that Jesus was about to appear on the heavenly clouds to take his faithful and to resurrect the dead. He was speaking about the signs of the day, like the massacre of children on the first coming of Jesus. It was by the goons of Herod at that time, now by way of abortion of unwanted babies all over the world and it was a sign that the second coming of Jesus was near.

He warned everybody present to be prepared; otherwise they would be taken by surprise like a thief in the night. That day was the day, and the right time to repent and to reconcile to the Lord. He invoked everyone to repent for their sins and to accept Jesus as their redeemer and to believe that he was the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. If one believed that in his heart and proclaimed it with his mouth he would be saved. He was so convincing in his indoctrination that all in the congregation felt the need for salvation.

Lin Chi got up when Ralph stopped. He gracefully bowed in front of everyone and started his invocation. He said that according to Zen system of meditation, they should suppose themselves to be a tree, receiving oxygen and food from the Almighty and strongly rooted on the ground. Sitting with his backbone straight and relaxed, he invoked them to praise God after him. On and on he went on praising God, chanting the praises as if in a Litany. They all repeated after him and found all tension and traumatic feelings flowing away from them and feeling inner happiness, calm and strength.

Lin Chi affirmed that there was only one God, whatever we called him, Jehovah, Hari Om or Abba. All teachings of the orient and occident taught that there were three persons in the Godhead, and the second person was supposed to make his

appearance according to Bonism, in the near future. He would be born of a virgin and the modus operandi for that process was described in the holy scriptures of Buddhism. He convinced them that it was the right time to initiate the rituals for which they had all gathered there. He said that the next morning they would consecrate the parties to that great event and asked them to remain prayerful and hoped that the selected ones were the chosen ones. He requested them to fast till the next morning, and if anybody felt hungry or thirsty, they could help themselves of the tea made with lemon grass, kept in a big urn on the side of the hall.

They all dispersed but were silent with apprehension about what they all heard that evening. Sam wanted to speak to someone, to find out what his role was in the process, but did not dare to do it. From his limited knowledge, he knew that there was some mistake somewhere. He was a strong catholic and he was convinced that the Son of God was Jesus and he was born nearly two thousand years ago. He did not feel the need to have another one to be born. Resolving to wait till next morning to hear and see what was going to take place; Sam retired to his bunk, adjoining to the prayer hall and went to sleep. He had weird dreams and funny feelings throughout the night and woke up at five in the morning. After his ablutions he got ready for the rituals.

## 16

Dr.Ralph got up to speak, and the congregation was all attentive to him. "Friends, as an American, I am going to start my discourse by describing the key idea behind the great American enterprise and how relevant it is to what we are about to witness and do. Whatever ideology we may believe in, we have to move with a definite purpose in life. What should that purpose be? You will all say, 'to have a good life here and hereafter.' I would say it is to lead an enriched, fully fruitful life and to attain heavenly happiness. How do we go about that?"

Everyone was sitting tight with apprehension and wondered whether it was such a vital and important issue as they all expected it to be. He continued, "It is to have a

positive mind, sound health, harmony in human relationship, freedom from fears, hope of achievement, capacity for faith, willingness to share, labour of love, open mind, self-discipline, ability to discern the motives of others and material prosperity are the true riches of life, and must be the goal of one's life in this world. But is that all? What if we gain the whole world and lose our soul? Life hereafter is as important as the life here in this world."

"We should have a purpose in life and a dream to lead an enriched life here and reach heaven after death. Make a plan to reach the goal in life and live everyday making headways to reach that purpose. We should go an extra-mile in everything we do, doing more work than the pay we get. We should have a group of mastermind friends, who would support and sustain us by giving proper counsel and moral support. We should have faith in God and in ourselves that we would reach, where we aim to reach. We should have a pleasing personality that would impress others to help us. We should learn from our defeats by constant self-evaluation. We should use our creative vision to see how things are going to be and tackle each situation. The initiative should come from within us. We should think accurately and be self-disciplined to control our mind. Have concentration on what we do and get the co-operation of others. Be enthusiastic and lead a healthy life. Budget our time and money to have the optimum, complying with the golden rule and make it a habit of applying these principles. Living in this manner, our life would be successful and enriched in this world. But what about our life after death, yes, we have to reach heaven."

"To reach heaven, there is only one way and that is through Jesus. There is no other way. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is time he comes to take his beloved to heaven, and do you want to be among them? Believe in him, confess your sins and lead a pure and sinless life and you can reach heaven after death."

"We are from different cultures and religions, and I know it can be offensive if I say that, but my friends Maya and Lin Chi would testify that the end days are near and the last incarnation is due. I came to pave the way for him and we would be

performing the rituals as per the Thanthrayana tradition by Lin Chi, and Maya would forecast the right and auspicious lagnam for all that. We will have a break and the rituals would begin at midnight today. You all can relax and be prepared for an epoch making event.”

Ralph ended his discourse, and Sam and Jaya decided to go to Anjuna Beach to see the Flea Market. They set out on foot from Vagator Beach, sticking to the seashore. On the way they came across two fully nude women, playing with a ball and bat and Sam stopped, short of breath seeing such perfect figures. He sat down on the beach in front of them to have a better view and asked Jaya, what that game was called. She told him that it was beach tennis. Sam said that he had never seen such a game in his lifetime and Jaya sensing why he was flabbergasted, caught hold of his ear and pulled him up. He followed her like a meek lamb and they reached the Flea market. All the hippies in Goa were there and they were buying and selling things. Everything 'foreign' could be bought there and that too very cheap. They did not have much money. So Sam just bought an iPod and Jaya, some perfumes. They got into a beach side bar and had a can of beer each. After roaming around there for some time, they got fed up and walked back to the Ashram.

## 17

The congregation thronged in the hall after supper. The rituals were about to begin. Lin Chi, Maya and Dr.Ralph were taking up prominent positions on the podium. Sam and Jaya were invited to the front of the stage.

Lin Chi got up to speak, “We are going to witness an epoch making event that would turn the course of history topsy turvy and set human life in a new direction. Maya would be performing the rituals according to Vedic tradition; we would be witnessing a wedding as per the Gandharva rites. I would initiate the ceremony in the Tantrayana tradition of Buddhism. I request all of you to be prayerful and keep your inner self glued to the ceremonies. The three important people of this occasion are

Dr.Ralph, Jaya and Sam. Sam would be the facilitator or Sutradarakan for this event. All of you please stand round the fire in the middle of the room. I am about to start the rituals. Be prayerful.”

Lin Chi started reciting some mantras and poured some oil and incense into the fire. He looked at Sam and beckoned him to come forward and touched his forehead, whispering something. Sam felt as if struck by a thunderbolt. Some great power possessed him and he felt as if he could not move his limbs. The atmosphere was tense and Maya got up, ushered Ralph and Jaya, followed by the congregation to the sea and they immersed themselves in the seawater. With the wet dress, they were led to the pond of the Ashram and they dipped in it to wash away the salt water and purify themselves. They entered the hall, followed by the congregation, circled the fire and stretched out their hands over the fire and placed them on their foreheads. Maya handed over to them two garlands. They garlanded each other and Maya extended a tray with a silk sari to Ralph and he ceremoniously placed it into the outstretched hands of Jaya. To make the wedding more authentic two rings were exchanged. He led her in a procession around the fire, thrice, and they were declared man and wife.

Ralph led Jaya out to the open and they walked to the beach. The congregation was loud singing out a hymn and Sam felt infuriated at the whole development, but feeling the blood on his whole body flooding to the middle and he had a hard on. The singing reached its pinnacle as if invoking all that is evil, forbidden and detestable to transcend and take flesh. He felt as if the devil incarnate was germinating, the dogs in the near vicinity were howling, there was a peel of thunder with lightening though there was no rain, and he let go; the clock struck twelve. He visualized the possible scene on the beach and shuddered, with an unknown feeling of moral indignation.

After some time, Ralph followed by Jaya, entered the hall. There was a look of triumph on his face and Jaya looked like a fully blossomed flower, slightly torn and wasted. Her head was bent and shyly she looked at Sam through the corner of her

eyes. Sam felt as if beaten and let down in the competition, where always the evil won. Maya poured holy water from the river Ganges and consecrated the couple. They went to wipe themselves dry and came back changing the dress.

Maya declared: "The ceremonies are over and the consummation of their marriage was done at the Brahmamuhurtha. Nothing has gone wrong and everything took place as we planned and a special thanks to Sam for holding the bridle of time and space for the events to take place. Now we will sing a hymn of thanksgiving to the Almighty and go to our respective places to sleep. Now that this great event has come off, let us break up tomorrow to our different destinations and walks of life. Thank you one and all."

Sam went to his bed and his mind was full of apprehension, doubts and bad feelings. He could not figure out how he would face Manoj and what explanation he could give for teaming up in such a horrible incident. Immersed in such thoughts he fell asleep, drifting into the realm of dreams with a sense of loss at the thought of Jaya.

## 18

Early morning they set out by train to Calicut and on the way they discussed the different possibility of disclosing the state of affairs to the relatives of Jaya. The lot fell on Sam and they persuaded him to go ahead of them to the estate, meet Manoj and inform him and persuade him to accept the marital alliance that had taken place and also to secure the concurrence of the family.

Sam knew that it would be a tough job, and having known Manoj for years, as ill-tempered and ruthless, he knew it was a risk. He had no other way than doing it. Ralph and Jaya took a luxury suite in Hotel Alakapuri, Calicut and Sam set out on the direction of the estate.

By noon Sam reached there. Manoj was surprised to see him. He interrogated Sam but he did not give any clue as to the reason of his untimely appearance. Casually Sam remarked as to what would be the reaction of Manoj if he came to know that his sister eloped with someone. Manoj was infuriated and shouted, "I will kill that bastard. Tell me what happened. Why are you acting funny?"

"Don't be angry. I am to be blamed for the whole incident. Relax, if you lose your composure, what would be the case of your father?"

"Speak out; what happened? Did she run away with that stupid Yankee?"

"They haven't gone anywhere. They are here. If you don't react violently I will bring them here myself. We gave them too much of freedom to interact and ultimately it happened. They got married. It was a simple function, I was also present and I will bring them here, the moment you say so."

"I don't know how my father would take it. He was bringing her up with such a lot of affection and now she going away with him would pain him so much. How would I console him?" Manoj wept.

"The unwanted thing has happened. Now what we can do is to see how we can face it. Since there is no point in revolting and that way losing your only sister, the best thing is to accept them. They are in Calicut and if you agree, I will bring them here myself. Relax, forgive her and give them a happy welcome."

"You can say it so easily. But she is my sister and what great dreams I had about her wedding! I would have got her a prince. Sam, couldn't you try to seduce her and marry her? I would have surely given her to you in marriage. It would have been much better than this. Go, bring them over."

"That is a good and understanding brother. It is hard to take and I am sorry for you old' man. I will bring them over before you change your mind. Don't get boozed up

in the meantime and act nasty or make a scene. I will be back soon with them.”  
Sam left the place in a hurry.

## 19

They hired a cab and travelled uphill to the estate and reached the bungalow. Manoj, wife and children were all there to receive them. Jaya was shy and downcast when she got out of the car. She went to her sister-in-law, embraced her and clung to her, unable to face her brother. Ralph went straight to Manoj and shook hands with him. Manoj said, “Congratulations”, something unexpected from him. He went and took the hands of his sister and placed it in Ralph’s hand and went away to his office. Sam went after him, patted on his shoulder and beckoned Jaya to go to him and console him.

“I am sorry Manoj, it was all so unexpected and I couldn’t tell you before. Please talk to our Dad and get his consent for our wedding. Only you can face him in this situation. Ralph is a nice man and you all will like him,” Jaya pleaded.

“You didn’t ask our advice and now you face the music, good or bad. It is your life.”  
Manoj reprimanded her.

“Don’t be angry with her. Let us all hope for the best and invite the newlyweds to the house and I am leaving. I’ve got to go for my work,” Sam responded.

“Have lunch and go. I wanted to invite the whole locality for her wedding. Now only you are there as my friend on this occasion. I entrusted her into your hands and made you her local guardian. You should have been more concerned.” Manoj reprimanded Sam.

“It all happened in such a way that no one could prevent it. If they are happy together, what is our problem? I find a divine destination in all this and I will support them, what might come,” Sam concluded.

"Food is ready, please come," the lady of the house, Sheila, Manoj's wife invited them all for lunch.

They all marched to the dining hall and had a sumptuous lunch. Ralph was feeling at home and he teased Jaya for eating such a lot. He said that she would become like a pumpkin in spite of her present shape like a drumstick, if she ate such a lot. They all laughed and finished eating.

Manoj invited Sam and Ralph to the study where there was a mini bar and poured them all whisky, on the rocks. Manoj loosened up and all his pent up feelings emerged and he started weeping. "She was my only sister and I lived for her. How could she betray us and elope with a foreigner? Ralph, why did you do this to our family? Couldn't you find someone else? My father will be really upset and surely he will have a heart attack when he hears about it. Sam, say something."

"I am not a party to all this though I was there when it took place. I could no way avert it, as it happened so unexpectedly. You ask Ralph for an explanation."

"We liked each other and got married. She is of marriageable age and I am an eligible single man, a U.S. citizen with a good job and high social status. I will take her to America and we will live there happily. We will come on and off to India whenever possible," Ralph said.

"You found only my sister to get married. She is the lamp of our house and we treated her like a princess. If anything untoward happened to my sister, I will finish you up. We never let her shed a tear and she was always so happy. I don't know what her future is going to be."

"You don't have to worry about her. I will look after her like the apple of my eyes and treasure her close to my heart. I want to be liked and loved by you all. On our way back to the U. S. we will get down in Kuwait and meet her daddy. Don't inform

him about it and let it be a surprise. "Manoj was drunk and blurted out, "You would kill that poor heart patient. He is still working in the Arabian Desert to make money to marry her away decently. You have shattered all our dreams. I will call him tonight and inform him. Let him come off as there is no need of all those millions now to marry her and give as dowry."

"Let us not quarrel. Who brought the issue of dowry? What do you think about Ralph? Is he going to take your money as dowry? Now you are all a family. Let me not interfere. I am going. See you then." Sam left them to sort out the problems themselves.

## 20

Sam joined for work after the leave. His peers rebuked him for going away irresponsibly and dumped all the pending works on him. He was losing all bargaining power and had to take up the works of others too. After a day or two Ralph and Jaya turned up together and announced that they were man and wife, married and together. All at the college were aghast, and Dr. Menon threatened Ralph for dire consequences for spoiling the reputation of the college and seducing his own student. He just smiled politely and said, "We are of marriageable age and liked each other. If you threaten me, I would resign my job here and you can't do anything to me."

The anger of Menon subsided and he tried to pamper Dr. Ralph, as he was someone very useful for the funding of the college from the U.S. He unleashed all that anger on Sam and connected the absence of Sam as the cause of all the trouble. The scolding was so severe that Sam thought of ending his life, by jumping down from the top floor of the college building.

Jaya came to meet Sam in the office and everyone was teasing him for that. His peers mocked at him, asking how much commission he got for arranging the

wedding. They also teased him, saying that the guy who stood leaning on the pole eloped with the bride, a local expression.

He told her that he was feeling so uneasy and miserable about the whole issue and wanted to quit his job, but had no other alternative to earn a living. Without the salary that he was getting he could not survive. Jaya understood his predicament and consoled him to take it easy and never do anything drastic. A sisterly affection was flowing from her towards him and he felt consoled. She asked him to have a shave and look smart as he used to be. Sam told her that it would never be the same again, as all his hope and motivation to live was gone. Sam felt at a loss in front of Jaya for words and felt uneasy. She reciprocated his feelings, and was very understanding and consoling.

Dr.Ralph was very understanding and tried to support Sam, in the hour of his agony. He could not do anything by way of improving the image of Sam in the office or help him overcome the unpopularity. He promised to include him in a flourishing business from America called 'net-work marketing.' He was involved in it, had done some research about spreading it globally, and had some connections with the people involved in it.

Sam was rather apprehensive about his calibre to do it, as his mental disposition was such that he could not even do his office job properly. Dr. Ralph was all-persuasive and did some sort of counselling to boost up the morale of Sam and finally he agreed to get involved. Dr.Ralph briefed him on the immense potential of the business and Sam was not convinced enough. He was invited to a business convention where they explained the possibilities of the business.

## 21

Something unexpected took place. Jaya started vomiting and that too in the middle of the library hour. She ran out of the library and vomited her guts out. Suddenly

her classmates took her to the nearby hospital and the doctor after thorough examination looked quizzically at Jaya and told her that she was going to be a mother. Jaya was neither overjoyed nor excited and while she was resting in the hospital, she sent her friend to Dr.Ralph and asked him to come to the hospital.

When Dr.Ralph arrived, Jaya was shy to look at him and he was so much worried about her sickness. Soon the doctor came and broke the news, which made Ralph thrilled and overjoyed. He went and embraced Jaya and placed an affectionate kiss on her lips.

She was given some medicine and was discharged from the hospital. Ralph took her and placed her in her hostel and asked the warden to take special care of her. Since men were not allowed there in the hostel, he had to leave her and he came out of there triumphant, with a thrilled heart. He was sure that the baby conceived would be a boy and that too, the promised one.

Feeling jubilant he came and collected Sam from the office and took him to the nearby bar and they had a treat of liquor and good food. Sam was drunk very fast and he started accusing Ralph for spoiling the life of a girl.

“It is natural that girls would become pregnant after they are married, and I expected it. Maya and Lin Chi also expected it. I will soon take her to America when I go. I want to fix up a life for you before I go, as you are our dear friend. There is a big business convention in Ernakulum and I will take you there, introduce you to the right people and enlist you in the business by getting you a starter kit. Then you can do the business yourself and I will monitor it for some time and get you established in the field. Then we will fly to America and will help you do the business, as good as a franchisee”

“That is very kind of you. After snatching away the girl I loved, whatever you do to help me will be insignificant. But I forgive you and absolve you from that sin. It is

my fate. Life has been treating me all along like that, never giving me what I wanted, and giving me the wrong thing at the wrong time.”

“Don’t worry. I will do everything in my power, to give you a quality life and set up every infrastructure to get you launched into the orbit before I go from here. This is my word. There has to be a metabolic change and you should gradually shed the sorry figure and become smart and enterprising as you were when I met you first. It is our attitude and outlook that decide our future and fortune. Change it. Have a dream about your life. Visualise what you want to be, how you will reach there and go about doing it. I owe you so much; not only myself but also the whole world.

Let us finish the bottle, bottom up and celebrate. This is a great thing to rejoice and the destiny of my life and my existence is fulfilled. It is all due to you, and thanks a lot. Let’s get out of this confounded place at the earliest.”

## 22

Sam went and browsed the web-site that Ralph told him to look into. He had to give his details and he clicked the different options and got the idea that was conveyed. The most impressive fact was that the kind of work he was doing in the college would only help him just to survive; hand to mouth existence, and when he retired there would be nothing left for him to look forward to. That new business, which he was looking forward to, had lasting returns, passing the heritage on to the next generation too, by way of Royalty.

Sam enrolled himself after the online interview and he was selected to do the e-commerce business. All that he had to do was to copycat the proven method of that business system and they would help him through the web-site with all necessary instructions for carrying out the business.

Ralph got Sam involved in a prayer group too. It was a radical Christian group that praised and worshipped God in loud singing and tongues. He could not adjust to the mode of worship of those people as he was used to calm and silent prayer, read from prayer books. Though he felt uneasy at first, he got used to it and started clapping and singing like others. He was feeling immense spiritual joy, ecstasy and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Jaya came to Sam to ask his opinion about dropping out from the college as she was having the uneasiness of initial stages of pregnancy. There was constant vomiting, nausea and tiredness. Ralph was a great moral support for her, but getting nightmares in sleep and having some constant fear, chilling her spine was gripping her. Sam told her to pray constantly, think and feel happy and consult the Principal as to whether he would grant her leave. To drop out from the course was foolishness as getting admission would be difficult, later in life and completing the course would help her in future.

Jaya was so adamant about leaving the college as her classmates teased her and made so much fun of her marriage and pregnancy. Her father rang her up from Kuwait and told her that he is coming to the college to meet her husband and take her home.

Ralph also was thinking about stopping his teaching career and to go back to America. He had only one apprehension, whether the relatives of Jaya would allow her to accompany him. He was also eagerly waiting for the coming of Jaya's father. At any rate he wanted the delivery to be in the United States, where they had all the modern amenities for a hundred percent safe childbirth. He wanted his baby to be brought up in America as a first class citizen.

Ralph spent, as much time with Sam as he could, for persuading him to make a list of all the people he knew, his potential customers in the new business. Ralph went with him to meet them, talk to them and presenting the business plan. Sam was fast learning how to do the talking, as he had to do it himself when Ralph was gone.

Many people showed interest and they were given the website and the password to log into. They had to join the business on line. Together they sat and prayed too, as the first thing in the morning. They read the Bible and probed deep into it to make Sam realize the values of life, and how worth he was as a child of God. Sam was losing all his desperateness and he was becoming smart and jovial. But the situation in his office became worse; he was persecuted by his peers; he became downcast and remorse-stricken.

## 23

When the persecution in the office increased, Sam tried the path of prayer. He started going for evening prayer meetings that stretched out into late night. He learned to pray spontaneously. He jotted down the Bible references in a scribbling pad. He had some apprehension about praising loud and in tongues.

While moving in different prayer groups, he met one brother Jose and his wife Jessy. They were a young couple and highly spiritual people. They invited him for the Monday evening prayer meeting that was held regularly in their place. Since Jessy was a nurse, lot of medical and nursing students came to that prayer meeting. The meeting was so inspiring, full of testimonies and strong Biblical messages.

Sam looked forward to the Monday evenings, which he never missed. Gradually he spotted a face, cute looking and fresh, always stooping down the moment the prayer started. She neither turned sideways nor looked at anyone. One day their eyes hooked each other for a moment and Sam read something more than fraternal love there.

He used to notice her and did little digging about her background. She was a nursing student, from a rich Protestant family, very prayerful. She tried becoming a doctor, but she could not qualify the entrance examination, took up the next option to become a nurse. Sam wanted to interact with her, know more about her and if possible wanted to fill the void left in his heart's core by Jaya. But he was rather

apprehensive about the whole thing and was afraid to get involved in another affair and go through the traumatic experience as before.

While entering the coffee house near the medical college, Sam spotted her sitting at a table with two other girls. Sam went up to them and smiled at her. He asked her, "May I join you?"

"Sure", she replied. Sam sat down opposite her and there was a friendly smile on her lips. Sam introduced himself and asked her name. She said, "I am Mini and this is Reena and Ansu. We study in the same class."

"I have seen you at the prayer meeting at Jessy's place, but never had a chance to be introduced. You seem to be highly spiritual and never miss a prayer meeting. Would you tell me what has made you so spiritual, as I am someone new to the field?"

"I have also noticed you, and would like to know more about you and your testimony," Mini remarked.

"I have nothing to say by way of testimony as I am someone new to this mode of praying and loud worship. But I like it and seem to forget all my problems and remorse, once I am into it. I wish to probe deeper and want to learn more from the Bible and be a spiritual writer. Please pray for me."

"My parents are in the Persian Gulf; I was brought up in boarding and hostels most of my life. I had no difficulty financially, but I never had love and affection, mostly when I needed it. I have been a loner, always, but have had a soft corner for suffering people. I wanted to alleviate the pain and suffering of sick people and wanted to be a doctor. Unfortunately I couldn't qualify myself for it. Next option was to become a nurse. I like it here in this Medical College and enjoy the fellowship I am having here. I came close to God because of my loneliness."

"I would like to have you as my friend and please edify me when I slacken in my spiritual growth. This is my phone number, whenever you feel like it, call me." Sam gave her his mobile number and had tea with them. He had ignored the other girls throughout the conversation and felt guilty and wondered what they would have thought about him. But there was a new sense of direction in his spiritual life.

## 24

Dr.Ralph showed interest in the family background of Sam and he wanted to visit his home. In a weekend they set out to Lower Periyar from where Sam hailed. They went by train up to Aluva and took a bus from there. They reached the hometown of Sam. As they walked around, all the people on the way greeted Sam. He also made some friendly exchange with them, always asking about their whereabouts and their dear ones.

When they reached home, only his mother was there. Sam introduced Ralph. They had boiled tapioca with fish curry. They changed dress, walked downhill to the great river Periyar and started swimming in it. Sam always liked to dive into the water from a protruding rock. He jumped head down, with hands stretched in front, piercing the water. In the belly of the river, he shuddered in the cold dark water and came up floating. That feeling of going down into uncertainty and then floating up to the surface of the river was a great exhilarating experience that Sam always cherished so much.

Beyond the river was a virgin forest. They climbed into it and started trekking. As they moved through the undergrowth, they smelt the sweet aroma of ripened mangoes. Sam found a big mango tree and ripened sweet smelling small mangoes strewn around it. Ralph bit one and found it extremely tasty. Monkeys were hopping on the trees and they were inquisitive as to who they were that intruded into their natural habitat. They were neither afraid nor friendly when they tried to catch one. They walked through the forest and climbed a hill, from where they could see the

mountains stretching out into eternity, green and enormous. There were arid rocks protruding out and the fad of mountaineering returned to Ralph. He had conquered the arid rocks of Arizona and had skied on the snow-covered mountains of Alps. But this was a new experience, conquering wild rocks, which were unexplored and uninhabited.

Sam managed to get Ralph out of the forest from which he was so reluctant to come away. When they reached home, Kuttappan a tribesman, and their neighbour invited them to his house. He had a palm tree from which he tapped toddy. He treated them with fresh toddy and boiled yam, which Ralph liked so much. He drank mug after mug of the delicious sweet toddy and became drunk after that. He had difficulty coming down hill after the treat.

Sam's brother, Joe soon arrived and took them in his jeep for sightseeing to the hydroelectric project area of lower Periyar. There was a tunnel being made, fourteen kilometres long and Joe drove them straight into it. It was a fascinating experience travelling in the middle of the mountain. Ralph liked the place, the river, forest and the valley that made Lower Periyar an exquisite place for sightseeing and tour.

In the evening, when the family was united for prayer, Ralph led a discussion with them about healthy family relationships. Out of it he could find the traces of some games played by the family members of Sam to avoid intimacy. The parents were at two poles apart, mother always nagging at father for not taking the responsibility of the family affairs. Ralph probed deeper and found the attachment between family members minimal. He made mental notes and agreed to talk to each person separately next day.

Ralph advised Sam's father to assert himself and take up the responsibility of the family. The mother was the problem with lots of complexes and inhibitions. She used to keep quiet till something is done and would be full of ideas or criticism when it was over. Ralph advised all others to be careful with her and never give her a chance for nagging. It was all due to lack of attachment and love. She made it a hell of a hard life for everyone around, never giving advice before some untoward incident happened but was full of criticism and practical wisdom when things misfired, blaming others for doing things in such a way. She was such a hard game player that it had affected the mental health of Sam so much. He was waiting for the mother to coax him to do something. He could never do a thing properly, always attracting criticism and rebuke from his peers.

As they wandered on the shores of river Periyar, Ralph opened up his mind and gave some sound advice to Sam. He told Sam to visualize what he wanted to be in life, where he wanted to reach, to dream about his purpose and fix a goal, for his life and go about with a schedule. Sam could become the superintendent of the college where he worked, get married to a nice employed girl and lead a settled life near the place he worked.

Sam had to go an extra mile in all that he did, so that his efficiency would increase, he would be sought after. Ralph advised him to cross check if what he did was correct; it could be improved or not. That way, mistakes could be avoided and his lost image regained.

Sam should find a group of thick friends who would support him, mainly his down line in business. Those in the up line also could be activated by Ralph to support Sam. He should only disclose his plans and purpose only to close friends in his core group and get their support and feed back in planning as well as evaluating the moves in life. It was a difficult task, as Sam did not know who his real friends were.

In this connection, Ralph asked Sam to make a list of all the people he knew. Then he was asked to classify them into different groups such as those that would join him in business, who would buy the products from him and who would no way be helpful. Those that would join with him must be the core group that he would form. With them he should interact in an intimate manner, supporting them in the business line by providing all necessary advices. Ralph agreed to help Sam to approach each one of them and to explain the business plan and convince them. If Sam did the explaining, no one would join, as he did not have the professional touch and canvassing ability.

## 26

Ralph enunciated the other principles of the business sitting on a rock, protruding into the river. The calm river and the tranquil scenery were a much better place for it than an elegant boardroom. He said that Sam should have an abiding faith in God and in himself that he would succeed in what he set out for. That confidence was very important for success in business. He should have a pleasing personality, smiling sincerely and affectionately showing interest in others and always being a good listener, capable of appreciating and admiring the good in other people. Whenever there is a failure he should analyse its cause and learn from that. He should always use imagination and creative vision.

The initiative had to come from him as it was for his future and fulfilment of his dream; he should analyse every situation accurately. Self-discipline must be there, controlling the mind with will power, using positive emotions like love, sex and romance, reason and conscience to sensor every thought. Concentration is essential in all endeavours like getting cooperation from others, being friendly to them and being enthusiastic as one was heading to the attainment of his dream and purpose in life. Live and think healthy, budget the precious time and money, never be at the extremes of too much and too little and make it a habit to observe these principles

regularly and systematically. Such should be the credo and life of a man in network marketing," Ralph concluded.

Sam was convinced enough about the authenticity of those principles. He agreed to make it a part of his personality and shed the sorry figure of a defeatist and fatalist. To be thriving and enterprising was what Ralph demanded of Sam, and there were some mental blocks hindering him from becoming that. The dream about future was the spark that had to set ablaze the personality of Sam to become dashing and winning.

Sam thought about a dream for his future and a purpose for his life. He wanted to get married, to have a home and children, and to have a steady income and all the amenities of modern life. Providence had provided him with a good job when getting a job was so difficult in the land. But that would only offer him a hand to mouth existence, never be able to have all that he wanted. That was the relevance of network marketing. There would be no limit to the riches he could attain, if the dream came true.

Behind every successful man there would be a satisfied woman and Ralph instigated Sam to have someone in the core of his mind. Suddenly the thought about Mini came to his mind. He thought of giving it a try to make her the girl of his dreams and the queen of his heart.

An arranged marriage was difficult for him. He had to find his own girl to suit his tastes and needs. Mini would have been good enough, but to get the concurrence from her folk would be difficult. There was the cultural barrier, but Sam had to overcome it for the prize to be won. He decided to interact with Mini and find out whether they were on the same wavelength and she reciprocated his feelings towards her. Ralph agreed to talk to Mini and explain the business idea as an excuse to approach her and later assign Jaya to do the Cupid's trick, to win her over to him.

Sam met Mini at the prayer meeting on Monday. He told her that a couple, his friends, would like to talk to her and asked her when it would be convenient for her to meet them. She told him that she would be free on Saturday afternoon and asked them to come to her hostel. Throughout the prayer meeting Sam was praying for her and their meeting.

The decisive day dawned, and they set out to the hostel. Jaya was very enthusiastic about the whole thing, though she was a bit nervous. Her father was arriving to meet them the next day. She was rather apprehensive about meeting him and was not sure what his reaction would be. Sam was nervous, but did not feel that excited as he was, in the case of Jaya and there was no infatuation in his affair with Mini. He was mature and took it in a matter of fact way.

Reaching the hostel, they rang the bell. The warden came and enquired as to whom they wanted to meet. Jaya asked for Mini. Mini was surprised to see a foreigner and a lady with Sam. Like a good hostess, Jaya opened the conversation: "We are Sam's friends, this is Ralph my husband and I am Jaya. Sam told us that you are a fascinating person and we thought that we would come and see you, as his best friends."

Mini blushed and said, "I've known Sam for some time and we are good friends. We belong to the same prayer group and nothing more than that."

Ralph interfered, "Jaya and I were good friends before and we got married. What we would like to suggest is that if you like each other, why don't you become united as we did? You think about the proposal and take your time. In fact I have come to talk about a business, which Sam is about to join. He has to get a down line and since he knew you, he wanted you to join him. Anyone could do it and there is a

web-site, which if you browse, you get the business idea. Before that I will give you a few hints. Please consider these factors too when you take the decision.”

“I don’t know how feasible it is for me to get into a business, since I am only a student. I will not have time for anything except my studies. I am so tied up with my studies that I can’t think of anything else, even about falling in love or getting married,” Mini remarked.

“It is imperative. We wanted to talk to you about Sam, and since Sam is banking his life on this network marketing business, my husband thought that he would speak to you about it. You are more mature and frank than I thought, and I appreciate it. It would do you no harm, just listen to what Ralph says,” Jaya concluded.

“Okay, go ahead,” Mini, conceded.

“Don’t you want to have sufficient money for your needs, and for the future? In case something unwanted happens and you are not able to work, how would your sustenance be? Think about it. In this case, as a side business along with your main occupation, you can get rewarded for the good word recommending the products of this business firm. The work you put in, and that of your down line comes in a geometric progression and your reward would be much. You will be able to pass on this heritage to the next generation too. All that you’ve got to do is to use the products of the company for your personal use and get other people to use it,” Ralph took a break.

“If it is selling things, I can’t even imagine of doing it. Besides I have no canvassing power or business knack,” said Mini.

“Don’t get carried away by such ideas. Multilevel marketing is not just selling and it is the new business order of the day. In conventional marketing there are so many intermediaries like wholesaler, retailer, stockist and much money is spent for

advertisement. The producer gets hardly forty percent. In network marketing there is no advertisement and no middlemen.

The profit made that way is distributed to the members who are involved in the particular sale. You don't have to own a shop, or make heavy financial investments for doing this business. All that you've got to do is to be with Sam and give him moral support. Please consider this plea from us, his friends," Ralph stopped his discourse. Jaya smiled at her and embraced her before leaving.

Sam looked at Mini and said, "See you on Monday. Please tell me your decision then. Hope it will be positive. Bye!" and they left.

## 28

Sam was waiting for Jaya's father to arrive and he wanted to be the first one to meet him in the campus. Soon a Benz car arrived and an old man got down. Sam went and smiled at him.

"I am Jaya's father. I would like to meet her and her husband."

"I am Sam, a classmate of Manoj. They are waiting for you. Come I will take you there."

"I have heard about you and that you are the man behind all this mishap. What explanation can you give young man?"

"It all happened in such a way that it could not be averted. I could only stand aside like an onlooker. Since it had happened, the best thing you can do is to accept it and be reconciled to them. This is my plea as a family friend."

"That is the only option I have left. I loved and cherished her so much that I can't bear it. I have been working in the Arabian desert even in this old age, all for her and she took away all our happiness and hope about the future when she eloped with a foreigner. Take me to them."

"The hostel where Jaya stays is outside the campus. You go ahead. I will fetch Ralph and come there. I've got a request. Please be nice and gentle to her. She is very much troubled and scared to face you."

"She should have thought about it before. Heard, that she is expecting. I will not be harsh to her. See you," and he left.

Sam ran to their hostel, and found Ralph tight with apprehension. Sam broke the news and asked him to come with him. He put on a dhoti, like the people of Kerala and set out after saying a short prayer. They walked to the ladies hostel and found the father and daughter sitting in the parlour embracing each other. Jaya was crying and her Dad was consoling her.

Ralph went to him and took his palm and kissed it. The old man was taken aback by such a friendly gesture, and finding his son-in-law in the local attire he was flabbergasted. Ralph gave a winning smile and asked, "Daddy, when did you arrive? You came alone or with Manoj. We were thinking of coming there and visiting you tomorrow. Please forgive me for snatching away your dearest daughter and don't be cross with us. I will look after your daughter like the apple of my eyes and you will never regret that she is married to a foreigner. Though I take her to U.S. we will come often and will be always in touch with you. I am intending to start a college in Quilon. If you want to spend your old days with your daughter, you are welcome to be with at in my home. You will feel much comfortable there compared to your sojourn in the Persian Gulf."

"In spite of my apprehension, I like you and feel my daughter has not made a bad choice. I will give you the rightful share of my daughter in all my property and you

should spend half of the year in Kerala and the other half in America. I mean the winter here. She can't bear the cold climate there."

"She will have to be in America when the baby arrives. They will get the best possible medical attention there. We will soon go there and come back at the earliest. Shall we go and have some food."

"It is my treat to my son-in-law, and Sam you also come. We will have a buffet in hotel Taj. Come let's go."

## 29

They set out, the old man sitting between his daughter and son-in-law on the back seat, and Sam sitting with the chauffeur. They reached the hotel, went into the restaurant and helped themselves from the heaped up dishes. There were so many dishes that they were confused as to what to eat. The food was good and they had a can of beer each. Jaya was given a shot of gin with tonic.

Even after the food, they sat chatting there in the hall. Ralph tried to be in the best of his form, dashing and affectionate to the old man. They seemed to get along well. He remarked, "My boss in the Gulf was an American. I admired him so much, and I am blessed with a son-in-law like him. What is your family background? I would like to meet your parents. We give a lot of importance to family relationships. Have you got brothers and sisters? Who are there at home?"

"My father passed away a long time ago. My mother stays alone in our ancestral home. My brother and sister are single but they are in live-in relationships. We don't believe much in the institution of marriage. I too was married before, my wife left me and I was single for some time. Then I met Jaya, got to know each other and decided to get married. Rather it happened so fast that we had no time to think twice. Hope that you understand us."

“What? My daughter married to a man who was married before? It is ridiculous. Did you tell her about it before and she agreed to this marriage? I am damned. Would you leave her and go away like before, when you want? What guarantee do I have, that you won’t leave Jaya, if you find someone better?”

“You have misunderstood me so much. My former wife left me not because of my fault. She did it on an impulse and now she is suffering for that. Jaya and I are married for life and we will not part till death.”

“That is good son. I only want an assurance that my daughter will not suffer or be neglected in the future. Come let’s go! I will drop you guys in the college and take my daughter home. I have talked to your Principal and he has agreed that she does her studies after her delivery even though she may lose a year or two.”

“We are planning our trip to the U.S. Till I finish the arrangements, let her stay with you. I will come there on weekends. There is no problem for her visa, as I am a U.S. citizen and we are legally married. You told me about your property and her share. We don’t want anything from that. I have everything in life and your daughter will live like a queen in America.”

“I am glad. What is hers is hers. You can claim it whenever you want. My son Manoj would be always willing to give you. Come let’s go back.” They paid the bill, and drove away.

## 30

Sam went to the prayer meeting on Monday evening and met Mini. She was warm and affectionate. Sam felt a little shy to interact with her. He prayed throughout the meeting for the divine intervention in his life, so that all his problems could be solved.

Sam lost his interest in the job, that he had a tough time running the show. He felt dejected and depressed and prayed fervently in the prayer meeting for some solution, for his problems.

To find solace, Sam decided to go for a fasting prayer and night vigil, that was to be conducted at a house, close by. He set his intentions clear; to have a peaceful time in the office and to get married to Mini, if God willing. Mini too joined the prayer meeting in the evening and there was singing and praising followed by powerful messages. When praising reached its culmination, Sam felt highly ecstatic and the rhythm of praising changed and he started uttering incomprehensible sounds that were extra-ordinary which he had uttered never before. He felt his grip on himself losing, and while clapping, reached a tempo that was unusual; he felt a heavenly bliss. Suddenly like a thunderbolt, he felt a power hitting him on the forehead and taking possession of him in the form of a snow-white dove descending on his mind.

Sam's face became radiant and transparent. All his desperation vanished and he became calm. She was also clapping her hands, and felt great ecstasy. After the evening prayer, Mini left but Sam stayed on for the night worship. There was tea kept in a big flask, and that was the sole nourishment for the whole day. Sam did not feel hungry and felt his mind sharp and body agile.

As they progressed in prayer Sam felt himself wavering and all the pent up ill feelings in his mind popped up. A man placed his hands on Sam's head and warned him to be very careful in his dealings, never trusting anyone as the devil would be trying to trick him so that he would lose the vision he had and the spiritual advancement that he had made. He left the prayer meeting with lots of apprehension and heaviness of mind. The incidents that followed proved that the prophecy was coming true.

That day was the Onam celebration in the college. Sam did not feel all that enthusiastic as he used to feel before. A swing was tied in front of the college and the girl students were swinging one after the other. There were a variety of competitions. A flower arrangement, typical to Onam was another competition. Jaya

won the first place, in a particular one where the contestants were having a balloon tied to their left leg, trying to break the one on the others' legs, moving about inside a circle. Jaya was defensive and offensive as well. Ultimately she won stamping on her last rival's balloon.

After the competitions, there were cultural programmes like singing of folk songs, relating to Onam. Then one guy dressed up in dhothi, like the kings of ancient days came as Maveli, the ancient king, riding on a bike, followed by his wife. He had a cell phone on which he was getting frequent calls, probably from hell, from where he was supposed to come. He made a satirical speech and then there was Thiruvathira, traditional dance of women. It was followed by a sumptuous vegetarian feast. Sam found it difficult, sitting on the ground and devouring the tasty food especially the payasam, which was of three different varieties.

Jaya was sitting near Sam and they had an intimate talk in between. She enquired about Sam's whereabouts and told him that she was discontinuing her studies, as her father wanted her to be at home to take rest during the initial stage of pregnancy. He was so adamant about not sending her to the United States for the delivery and he preferred to have Ralph also settled in India, building a college for his teaching fad or looking after the estate with Manoj. He wanted to have his grandson to be near him and to lavish his love on him. She wished Sam all the best and asked him to find a mate, preferably Mini and get settled with the job in the college and do the side business of referral marketing. All that she wanted was to see Sam happily settled and having a fulfilling life. She promised to give him all support, both moral as well as emotional. She asked him to treat her like his own sister and to open up all his problems to her for consolation. After lunch, Sam went back to office and resumed his work. He also wanted to concentrate on the business a bit so that he could retire prematurely and voluntarily with a pension that would make his life secure and he could live happily on the income from the business. If his wife too would be working, they could lead a financially secure life. He wanted to set apart his life for God and spiritual writing for which he had a flair.

The day came when Jaya had to go home. Ralph was also accompanying her. Manoj came to collect her. Sam was also there. The students organized a send-off meeting for Jaya and they made short sentimental speeches, all praising her and full of apprehension about her future. They all wished her well and she went to each teacher and non-teaching staff to bid farewell. Sam accompanied Jaya out of the office and got her into the car. Manoj looked at him affectionately and bade him farewell, embracing him and shaking his hands vigorously.

Ralph too accompanied them, and Sam felt left out. That was the end of an episode in his life, and Sam decided to never repeat it. The situation in the office became worse. Persecution after persecution came and Sam found even his footholds slipping. In desperation he went to the prayer meeting on Monday evenings and the spiritual insights delivered there relieved him much.

Sam decided to confess that he was a sinner and affirm the faith that Jesus died for his sins, making him a child of God. He got up and gave the testimony in short words and dedicated his life to Jesus. It was the turning point of his life, the greatest moment of triumph and he felt like a different person ever after. The man delivering the message placed his hands on Sam's head and prayed for his spiritual upkeep and prophesied that Sam would be someone highly useful in the hands of the Lord, and he will be instrumental in manifesting God's glory in the days to come. Sam felt a shudder as if hit by a thunderbolt when he placed his hands on his head and prayed for him.

Many persons including Mini congratulated Sam on his decision. She said that Sam had made a wise decision. Love and compassion were flowing out of Sam when he interacted with Mini and secretly he prayed that she would be his. But he controlled himself lest other people in the prayer meeting should get a wrong impression. That night he read the bible, Romans up to chapter seven and the gospel of John. He was getting new insights and could comprehend what the Bible said as never before, and

he thanked Jesus for that. When he woke up in the middle of the night he recited a short prayer and went back to sleep.

Life was so changed for Sam and he saw a silver lining to every dark cloud in his life. He saw the glory of God as well as how tricky the devil could be. When unexpected complications came, he prayed and got delivered. He found life to be a pleasure to live and worth living.

## 32

Soon Ralph came back, alone and forlorn after leaving Jaya at home. He interacted with Sam and tried to give a new perspective and orientation for Sam's life. He took Sam to his room and edified him with the moral principles every man has to follow, like loving God, others and oneself, never harming or hurting anyone. He admonished Sam to read the Bible in a systematic manner to get ideas as to what and what not to do.

Sam decided to pray and read the Bible in a systematic manner as Ralph instructed him and spend some time in the morning, as soon as he got up for quiet-time, time for meditation and prayer. He decided to be always praising God and be prayerful in his life, never sinning but doing as much good, as he could. He learned from experience that such a life was not easy and so many impediments would come on the way; trials, tribulations and temptations. He surrendered his life to Jesus and asked him to be at the helm of his life and lead him, to do the right thing.

Life became more meaningful and fulfilling. He always found something to praise God for and blessings came showering into his life. The first sign was a phone call from Mini, simply to ask his whereabouts and he told her about the changes that came in his life after he accepted Jesus as his personal Saviour and Lord. He told her that he would like to see her, and was waiting for the next prayer meeting. He wanted to share with her the change that came in his life and also the methods Ralph taught him to lead a successful life.

Ralph was making plans to leave the country and he applied for his visa and Jaya as well. Her people were aghast and brought up all excuses to prevent it. Her father wanted Ralph to continue the teaching in the college, which was not possible for long as he was on a contract as guest lecturer.

Ralph went to Jaya's home in the mountains, coaxed her and got her to talk to her father and to persuade him. At last he agreed on a condition that she comes home after the birth of the baby and stays with her father, looking after him in his old age. It was not acceptable to Ralph but he pretended to give in. He knew well enough that once Jaya reached U.S., she would be at his beck and call. He came to the college to make the arrangements to leave. Sam was feeling ill at ease about his leaving and Ralph utilized his maximum time with Sam to train him up.

Sam tried learning Word and Excel. They could be handy for him, especially Word for his writing purpose and Excel for monitoring the network marketing. He incorporated the details of all the people who joined him in the business as a separate database.

Ralph coached him in the niceties of human relations as to how to approach some prospective customers into joining business. The next thing he had to master was how to conduct a business meeting, explaining the business plan. Ralph gave him links to you tube lessons and on line coaching.

Sam also got a collection of CDs from Ralph about the scripture and related topics, enunciating the teachings from the Bible. Listening to them would enlighten Sam and make him proficient in the word of God. Sam started reading the Bible and listening to the CDs about the end of days, the Apocalypse, he got scared with apprehension. Ralph gave him a film, 'Thief in the Night', after which, Sam could not get proper sleep, as he was terrified. The thought that he too was part of the conspiracy, frightened him. He wanted to discuss with Ralph the implications and the

intricacies of the act that they had performed in Goa, but Ralph evaded the topic and told him that in due course Sam would know the relevance of all those things.

Maya in Goa and Lin Chi in Tibet were keeping in touch with Ralph and he was getting calls and emails from them constantly. Before leaving India, Ralph had a last wish to visit Papanasam beach in Varkala where Ralph wanted to spend some time with Sam and discuss the topics on which Sam had serious doubts.

Ralph was a bit nervous, when it came to the adjustments he had to make for taking Jaya to US as well as her delivery, which he wanted to have in the most advanced hospital in the United States. He arranged everything through internet and booked the hospital for the delivery. They were waiting to get Jaya's papers ready.

## 33

Ralph and Sam set out to Varkala beach by train from Trivandrum. Then they took an auto rickshaw to Papanasam Beach. There was a cliff, beneath which the sea was lapping the shore with tentacle like waves, and the sheer beauty of the place, fascinated them.

They sat on the sand facing the sea, which went on washing the shore with foaming waves. Ralph said a short prayer, which put Sam under a spell. He started concentrating on all that Ralph said, trying to catch hold of the erudite tomes of wisdom.

The doubts and confusion that Sam had regarding Christian belief were cleared. A new dimension was brought to the fact that Jesus had to undergo all the ignominy and suffering because only that way he could atone for the sin and original blemish of man. That way he saved mankind from eternal doom by ransoming them from the devil by dying on the cross, making all who believed in him, heirs to the kingdom of God. Ralph convinced Sam that by believing that Jesus died for his sins and rose

again and by confessing his sins, accepting Jesus as the Redeemer, he could be saved and would have eternal life.

Ralph assured Sam that they had played their roles in the game, the time is up and nobody could prevent the things from happening. Their only wish would be to be taken with the Lord in the rapture. Ralph programmed it in such a way that Sam pulled through the strife in his office, got married and consummated the wedding and had a meaningful and enriched life.

While they were lolling on the shore, Ralph's cell phone beeped and it brought some good news that, their itinerary was all got settled; tickets confirmed that Ralph and Jaya could fly to the United States, the very next day. Ralph was overjoyed, embraced Sam and told him that they were spending their last day together and never expected that their life together would end so fast.

As a last bit of admonition Ralph told Sam to be always praising God, whatever happens, good or bad. He also exhorted him to believe that everything was for the best and read the bible every day, systematically. They got up, packed up their things and left the beach to make arrangements for the next day that was to be so decisive.

Ralph called Manoj and told him the news about the imminent trip and asked him to rush Jaya to Trivandrum, with all her things packed up. As he had to make arrangements for the trip, he couldn't go there to bid farewell to them all. He requested Manoj to bring their father also along, if he was healthy enough to travel or otherwise bid farewell to him on Ralph's behalf.

Then Ralph requested him to call Mini, talk to her and as the last thing, inform her that Ralph and Jaya would be leaving the next day to the U.S., and they wanted to bid farewell to her. He wanted her to come to the airport.

While talking to her over the phone, Sam felt highly thrilled and had goose pimples on his body with excitement. He ended the phone call with a note that he was dying to see her, and that he loved her more than ever. She assured him that she loved him too. He also requested her to be prayerful, as that night would be something special for both of them.

They took a cab to the railway station and rushed to Trivandrum by the next train. Soon they reached their abode and Ralph started packing up. He sent an email to the U.S. informing of his arrival and made so many phone calls, bidding farewell to all the acquaintances that he had made in town. When everything was over, they went and had their dinner, the last supper that Ralph had in the hostel mess. The news spread that Ralph was leaving the next day and they gave a send-off to Ralph. Everyone spoke briefly and sentimentally wishing Ralph all the best. Ralph made a reply in such an affectionate manner that they all felt sorry to leave him. Soon Jaya, Manoj and their father arrived and Ralph went with them.

## 34

Sam went to his room with a funny feeling that he had never felt, all excited and aroused. His mind was full of the thoughts about Mini, her face shining on the monitor of his inner mind. He had a good shower and the lukewarm water tickled him all over. He felt excited and prayerful. On and on he repeated in his mind the litany, 'praise God' and concentrated his mind on Mini, how she looked and what she would be doing.

While going to bed Sam said a short prayer for being united to Mini and fulfilling his life, and that he be someone useful for the Lord. There was some power that came and possessed him, filling the vacuum and void of his mind. Sam worked out a purpose for his life, to do the network marketing and make a career out of it, to marry Mini, quit his thorn in the flesh kind of a job which he was engaged in and be a positive writer.

The thought of having Mini as his partner in life excited him so much that he felt a tickling sensation all over his body; all the blood flooding to the middle of his body. He felt as if caressed by Mini, coming over to his bed with him. The ecstatic feelings took sway over him and he felt excited and determined to reach his goal in life and to go an extra-mile in all that he did. He didn't know when he went to sleep. Hearing a knock on the door, he got up from his slumber.

Ralph stood there, with the lap top and cell phone and gave them to Sam. Sam thanked him and embraced Ralph. Though they were silent, the silence was eloquent enough and they stood there for some time like that. At last Sam excused himself to get ready to go with them to the airport; he had a good shower and dressed up smart.

By the time he got ready to go to the airport, Mini also came there. She saw Sam and felt a little shy, and Sam also felt the same. She went to Jaya, embraced her and they both were sad to leave each other. Tears gushed out of their eyes and Sam went to them, met the woman he loved more than anyone in life, but now the wife of his friend and the woman he was in love with, who would be his partner in life. Jaya took the hands of Mini and Sam and united them together and said that she was happy to see them together. Sam felt greatly excited, thanked her and they got in the car and drove to the airport. While waiting to see them board the flight; Sam felt great intimacy to Mini and they waved at Ralph and Jaya, when they embarked on the flight. They vanished into the huge aircraft and Sam caught hold of the hand of Mini and walked away to a new life, new horizons, fields of activity and a fully enriched life, wondering at the amazing ways of God.

# LAST ENCOUNTER

1

"Did you bring your Accountancy text by Batliboy?" Anita asked me and I looked at her and admired the kind of dress she wore and her beautiful demeanour in which she had held her head. She was the most attractive girl in the class.

"It is so big and heavy that I thought I will bring it tomorrow with the help of a porter." She giggled and turned away from me in the front seat. Vinod, my neighbor asked me what she said and why she giggled. I told him that I won't tell him that and to find it out himself if he wanted. I knew that Vinod had an eye on her like every other boy in the class. We were a selected batch of students, mostly rich business men and moneyed class. The girls in the class were all stylish but Anitha was the star attraction.

We eyed each other and Vinod told me, "You speak good English, which none of these creeps in the class does. Where did you do your studies? I studied in the US."

"I studied in St. Xavier's, Trivandrum along with my seminary studies. German fathers taught me English and French. That's why I can speak so well."

"I was in the US, dad a US citizen and now, running a college in Trivandrum, I did my schooling in America. My mother a Malayalee, did not want me to get spoiled in the US got me admission in this college; I stay in the college hostel. Come to my room on the ground floor, last room. We will be friends."

"I am on parole from the seminary. They sent me out from there and the rector told me to go out into the world and see how competition is out there and to come back if I wanted. My uncle had come from Kuwait and he had promised to take me there after my degree. I may not go back to the seminary."

"I wanted to be in the US and will do an MBA from there after our studies here. But my mom dumped me in this God forsaken place so that I don't perish on drugs and sex like every other student in America."

"It seems that there is no class in the afternoon. I would like to come to your hostel and eat my lunch which I have brought. Let's go!"

"How did you get admission here? I managed to buy a management seat. It is not easy getting in here." Vinod said while going out.

"I am still wondering how I got admission. I had applied for literature and had given an option for commerce and with my good marks; I might have got in the list." I said.

"Forget about it. Any way we got admission. Let's make hay while the sun shines. I am redoing an old bike to look like a Honda and I am bringing it to the hostel." Vinod said.

"Please take me also around. I have borrowed a sports cycle from a cousin, with whom I stay." I told him and we left the college.

## 2

Classes were stale, teachers boring and to while away the time I started reading all the good books, world class which Vinod was bringing from Trivandrum and Ernakulam. When I finished reading Fountainhead, Vinod gave me Atlas Shrugged, all by Ayn Rand and that was the ultimate reading experience for me.

Then I shifted to Alistair Mclean and was aghast while reading Guns of Navarone, Puppet on a Chain and Ice station Zebra. I was taken to another realm of love and romance in Erich Seigal, Love story and Doctors.

Vinod had brought an accordion to the hostel and I played the Sound of Music tune, Doe a deer, a female deer in an intercollegiate competition that was a tight one. I wanted to impress a girl in the other class whom I had bumped into by accident, but was greatly attracted to.

Vinod used his money power and bribed the jury, that they gave me second place and a big trophy at the end of the function. It was the late film actor Jayan, who gave away the prizes. He had a fake beard, placed by the makeup man and I caught

on it and shook it, as a friendly gesture and he was aghast that it might come off. I proudly presented the trophy to the girl in the next class in whom I was fascinated and she was impressed enough that we became on talking terms.

We travelled around on the Commando, the bike that Vinod did up to look like a Honda, when bikes were so rare those days, and I did not feel the lack of money or infrastructure while I was in the company of Vinod. I was attracted to that girl so much that I felt miserable at my pathetic condition, lack of money and to impress her I tried other things like playing table tennis, to become a champion in the college. I looked at her from far, did not dare to go and talk to her but I wanted to marry her and make her my life partner, and to go to Kuwait and work there. The moment I looked at her I felt elated and miserable at the same time.

### 3

The life in the college went on uneventful, classes boring and teachers stale, but the association with Vinod was so inspiring and motivating. He always got the best of music and classy books that he shared with me freely. I did not gain anything from the classes but the extra reading put a spark in me and widened the horizon of my imagination and thinking. The best of music and literature I was exposed to, that soon I was becoming a man of taste, a connoisseur, at the expense of Vinod.

Vinod was a born leader, who inspired others and got them to do anything that he wanted, by his persuasive ability and money power. There was something typical about his audacity and the demeanour in which he got things accomplished, though he did not care much about studies. He could grasp anything at a single glance and he was so polite and obliging, that others thought that he was such a nice fellow.

Exams came annually and I was able to clear all the papers, though my marks were not that great. Vinod had a paper on Statistics lagging and we did combined studies. Even when I wrote the final exams, I was not sure of the concept of debit and credit and it was tough time, doing the final accounts in the exam.

We sat day and night and did combined studies. We even took a pill called Dexedrine to keep off sleep. When we went to write the last exam, we were in a daze and half asleep. It was a paper on Company Law and somehow I finished writing it and left for home, waiting for the results. It was a miracle that I could finish the studies and clear all the exams. I am eternally grateful to Vinod for pulling me out through the studies in that college.

I graduated when the final results came, but Vinod had to clear a paper on Statistics. We got separated, but he promised me a job in the Luciference College which his father had found and established in Quilon. Vinod would be doing an MBA from Harvard University and might do a Ph.D. later. He dropped me on the Commando in the boat jetty and I took a boat to Kottayam and travelled to Lower Periyar, my native place. That was the last I saw of Vinod and I used to call him, when I saw a phone somewhere, when phones were such a rare thing to find and only the rich and affluent had it at their homes or offices.

It was the emergency period in Kerala, everything was strict and political activities were suppressed. There was a good side to it for the ordinary people and a bad side to the revolting and uncouth people. Many were taken into custody and man handled by the police of Jayaram Padickal. Rajan, an engineering student disappeared in police custody and many student leaders were tortured. There was fear on every face and anything could happen to anybody. There were no strikes and harthals or bandhs and normal life was peaceful.

## 4

As soon as I finished my course and landed at home, some parallel college people heard about me and came and invited me to Hillview College, near Munnar. I joined there and had to teach accountancy and commerce, but as my knowledge in those subjects was minimal and those teaching English were no good, I opted to teach English.

I took classes, even five hours a day, going to every class and taught them prose, poetry and grammar. My tongue became mellifluous and thanks to the training from Fr. Manfred, I taught prose and grammar meticulously, but when it came to poetry, I had to bluff very often and give my own explanation, especially when it came to Shakespeare which was anathema to me. The students were very eager to learn though, not very brilliant or of high standard. The girl students were very pretty and in between dictating notes I eyed them and wondered how cute they all looked, but not aware of it, as they were wild blossoms, bloomed in the wilderness of that forest and cardamom estate there. Some cute girls even looked back, knowing that I was eying them cruelly.

I was staying with other teachers and eating from hotels. Week-ends I went home and had to walk most of the way to reach there through Ellakallu, Ponmudy and Panniarkutty. It was a panoramic route and very thrilling to climb, the hills and plantations.

The principal of that college, Rajaram was doing a tight rope walk, collecting the fees from the students and paying our salary and other overheads. The students were poor, could not afford the fees and they could not go to the established and recognized colleges far off. Such a nearest college was in Kothamangalam and students of that place either joined Hillview College or a Lumen institute, which catered to a richer class.

Rajaram had snatched off the administration of the college from Pappachan by revolt and displaced him and with the help of Ravi, ran the college. They did many gimmicks to attract the students and visited their homes and canvassed them. There were classes up to degree level, under private registration in the Kerala University. The teachers were very sincere and taught classes with utmost devotion and I was tired by evening, lecturing all the five periods and I took some classes on History too.

When I taught them modern world history, especially about the western countries I was very loquacious and it even increased my perspective, especially about the formation of Israel and the Second World War. It struck me, the formation of Israel

as a nation, the sign of the end of days and the fulfilment of prophecies. In grammar I made a break through by making a chart on conjugation of a verb, both active and passive voice, with three persons and three tenses and their four classifications. With just a glimpse, the students could make out the correct usage.

## 5

Things took a different turn, when Mathew joined the college to teach Politics. When we were not getting the salary on time he challenged Rajaram and I decided to stay with him in his cardamom estate on Chokken Mudi, a big mountain, cook our own food, and not to eat from hotels. Mathew was an endearing person, very affectionate.

We did aerobics and wrestling in the evening, with the youngsters of the estate and an Asan came and taught us Kalari. We made a bonfire and after the work out, took bath in a mountain brook and ate boiled yam or tapioca and Robusta plantains. The nights were very cold and we slept near a fire place, covering ourselves in woollen blankets.

There was strife between the estate owners and labourers and the Kalari and martial arts were a training to defend ourselves. The different steps we had to make, first bowing in front of the mother, father, guru and God, facing the four directions. Actually the first step was pleading not to fight and avoid conflicts. Gradually the steps advanced into aggression and self-defence. The ultimate was the eighteenth step running away and after learning it one graduated in Kalari.

The scholastic year was about to end and we had covered all the portions. We revised the lessons and worked out the probable questions that could come for the exam and coached the students in all important topics. The companionship of Mathew and the stay in the cardamom estate was all very pleasant. The Kalari lessons were progressing and I learned aerobics and the work out portion well and intended to do them, all my life to keep trim and agile.

I told the students that I won't be there next year and they gave me a send-off. Selini, a girl student sang a song, her soul out and I could feel deep affection. In my farewell speech I told the students that they were all really committed to their studies and would have a great future. I wished them all the very best and urged them to continue their studies, though it was not possible for most of them. Many students could not get away from that remote place to towns to pursue higher studies and it was the end of their formal education and ended up as farmers or girls getting married to planters.

Their life would be ending up in that wilderness and remote village, without knowing what was happening in the world outside or seeing the attractions of the cities and hustle and bustle of the towns. They had the least exposure to the niceties of life or refinement and culture. What we taught them was the last word for them and they had no dreams or visions beyond the periphery of their village. I tried to motivate them further to write tests and appear for interviews and travel outside the high ranges. Many had the potential for better things in life, than ending up as farmers and intellectual acumen to do higher studies and aspire for good jobs.

## 6

I left that place and teaching when I had an offer for a job as the accountant of Kuttiady estate, in Calicut, but operating from Pala and going only occasionally to the estate. I joined for the job and stayed in Priya Tourist Home at Pala. Menon was the manager there and my companions were Pavi and Babu. Babu was the boy in the hotel but was more powerful than the manager. Pavi was in the business of gold, selling cheap and fashionable gold ornaments in low carats. Both were ruthless and would do anything to make an extra buck. Menon was also cunning, but conceded to the manipulations of them both, smuggling in girls to the rooms and helping people for drinking and fornication. Many guys came for extramarital affairs, pretending to be couples. I was aghast when I heard recently that Babu's daughter became a nun.

I was sent to the estate with some cash to be given there; I took a night bus and landed up in Calicut in the morning. I travelled to Kuttiady, Thottilpalam and Kunduthode. Reached the estate and entrusted the money to the superintendent and he took me to a bungalow to stay. It was built by the British in the middle of the rubber trees of clonel variety, well maintained. I stayed there for a few days and collected as much information and records to make the accounts for the past five years, pending.

I operated from Pala, and went to the estate once in a while and to one agricultural income tax office at Vadakara, with our advocate. It was fun, watching the advocate bluff the officer with all fake facts and figures, invented by him for his convenience. Once my boss, Varkichan Chettan entrusted me with a fairly good amount to be given as bribe to the officer and the advocate told me that even half of the amount would do for the officer and to split the balance between us.

I went with the money, greeted the officer and requested him not to make the assessment hard and told him that I have brought a gift for him and offered him the money. It was only half the amount given and the stupid officer wouldn't fall for my baits and I tried to persuade him, unless, he took the money I would be losing the other half. He told me that I couldn't get away bribing him, all the accounts that I had projected were fake and I pulled off my hand with the money from his table and he sprang up, got hold of it and put it in his drawer.

I thanked him in mind for two things, for accepting the bribe and for making it possible for me to get half of that amount. When I was about to leave, he requested me to give a tip to the peon also, as he used to take the files and place it before the officer. While leaving there, I dropped fifty bucks into the hands of the peon, who came after me scratching his head and requested me to come early the next day.

I went there the next day, there was no sign of the peon, and the officer came late and told me that the peon had a heart attack and died the previous day, with the tips he got, he got drunk, he was a heart patient and shouldn't be drinking. He requested me to make a contribution to help his poor family and I gave another fifty bucks to wash away the sin of giving it the previous day. I settled the pending

accounts for the past five years and in the mean time I had a letter from Vinod that they needed an accountant for their college office and to send an application with my resume to his father.

## 7

I was called for the interview, Dr. Ralph Higgins, the principal of the college, Jaya, his wife and dean of studies, Lopez, the office manager were there on the board. Vinod had told them about me, but Lopez gave a hell of a hard time for me in the interview, with many tricky questions to dodge me from getting the job. When I was given the key board test he suggested that I typed faster, so that I made too many mistakes. About accounts also he asked me some tricky questions and I realized that he didn't know even what was debit and credit from his questions. I smelt that I had an enemy there, if I got the job.

My intuition proved right; as I got selected, Lopez acted too friendly but tried to trick me by giving false information and misguided me about people and things there. He had a gang of people, his goons around him like Vijay the typist, Kuttappan and Rajappan the peons and they had a secret understanding between them. I knew there was some foul play going on there, but couldn't figure it out, like the police officer in the Pakistan border.

Sasi used to come on a Royal Enfield bike with a sack of soil tied behind the bike to the Waga border. The sentry, Soman a police officer sensed some foul play, made a thorough checking and since he could not find anything fishy, packed up and send Sasi away. Sasi came every week with the soil behind the bullet and Soman couldn't find anything suspicious and sent him across the border, but he knew there was some foul play going on, but could not find anything being smuggled. He lost his appetite and fun of life, saw Sasi sitting in a bar one evening, went over to him and asked him about the sack of soil and what he was smuggled into Pakistan.

Sasi smiled at him and asked him to figure it out. Soman admitted defeat. So he told him that it was actually bikes that he smuggled into Pakistan, the sack of soil was

meant to misguide the police. Dr. Ralph would sign cheques and did not care what happened to the money later as it was Lopez who managed the cash.

## 8

Dr. Ralph was a very big scholar and administrator and he ran the college in a meticulous and perfect manner. There was good discipline and high reputation for Luciference College in the academic circles with international repute. Only a select band of students were admitted there and the faculty was of top pedigree. Many seminars were conducted there, discussions held and many accomplished people were invited to give presentations.

Jaya was a motherly figure around, the dean of studies and a mentor to the student community. Her benign nature and affectionate way of dealing, made her sought after and remembered by everyone who studied there.

Some students were set to get the rank and high grades and they did not mind compromising. Some boys managed to seduce their class mates and many were steady and sincere in their affairs, but many of them ended up as tragedy.

The students were also exposed to a rare culture of 'you scratch my back and I scratch your back'. They were taught the rat race and trained to be selfish, to resort to any means to gain ones end. Those who succeeded in conning others always reached the top and were held in high esteem and it was the most desired way to operate there. Into its midst, Vinod landed in the college after having completed his MBA from Harvard University. I was overjoyed in having him there and he immediately set out to do a Ph. D. under Dr. Ralph and took up the position of the Bursar of the college.

## 9

Cupid had been playing his tricks on me again and I got fascinated by a girl studying in the college. The affair with my college mate was a miserable failure, when settled and got the job in the college, I approached their family, her grandmother who was so fond of me, told me to come after a week and when I met her then, she told me that she couldn't get the concurrence from the family and to forget her. It was not easy forgetting her, but I got used to it and the vacuum and void in my heart was filled in by a cute, smart girl who was studying there in the college and she started interacting with me. I am eternally grateful to God for that episode that it gave me a sense of direction and I could keep my chastity by not going after other dames and side tracking when the attractions were too many on the side road.

I loved talking to her, whenever I had a chance, we conversed about umpteen numbers of things and I enjoyed her company so much. I used to crack jokes and tease her and make fun of her. We were of the same wavelength, as none of her class mates were up to the mark in good conversation. I used to feel so elated, romantic and in top form when I was in the vicinity of that girl.

My competitor arrived in the form of Vinod; he also noticed her and wanted to win her attention. He used his upper hand and prominence in the college to attract her and to shine in front of her. I was in a delicate situation and I decided to keep off and not to be a stumbling block or competition for my friend.

But the girl came seeking after me while Vinod had to go after her making one or other excuses for a chance to interact with her. I found genuine love and affection in her dealing with me, while she was putting up a polite façade in front of Vinod because of his prominence.

Along with his research, he was also seducing the girl students of the college and ill using his capacity. Many girls took advantage and money, Lopez tried to be his pet and Vinod teamed up in their corrupt practices. I was watching my friend from far, not commenting or involving in his bad old ways. Lopez was injecting venom into Vinod that he started hating me and giving me tasks. I was finding it difficult to operate and an opportunity came to escape from it all, in the form of an invitation for a computer training from American College, Madurai.

The lot fell on me to go for the training when computers were just making their appearance, and to know what to learn there, I visited my friend, who was in the software field. There I came across a Maldivian, who became the Consul to India later, and hearing the interaction and jokes between us, asked me whether I was interested in coming to Maldives as an accountant. As fate would have it, I said yes, and immediately after the training in American College, I was air born to Male'.

I reached there, had my office and stay in Mafannu, Male'. I was working for a resort group there, and with Sankar, my colleague, we were settling some payments to be made, in a tricky way, without offending other creditors and collecting as much money from our clients, tour operators in Europe and US. When Sankar became capable of operating single handed without my help, he started back biting me and I asked them to depute me to Pathala Resort, a small island in Ari Atol, an international destination for holidaying, with crowd from the US, Canada, Germany, France and other European countries.

## 10

It was like a dream, my life in the resort, fabulous guests, all billionaires, European dishes, and choicest drinks on expense account, singing, music, disco and parties. I was exposed to the niceties of the classy life of connoisseurs, felt euphoric and started writing poetry, 'on trivia' all symmetric and mellifluous while interacting with the guests, inspired by the fabulous blondes and brunettes. Parties were fun, good food, nice discussions, champagne and scotch whiskey, any amount on board.

Disco was a thing I enjoyed but hated to do the dancing. I used to sit, sip a peg and watch other people making the ugly gyrations when they are drunk and did not know what else to do by way of dancing.

Boduferu was the singing of Maldivians, banging a drum and yelling out, muttering unintelligible poetic stuff in Dhivehi, their language. It had variations in tone and style and I used to watch the reactions of the guests when they were listening. It was like the monkey that bit the raw ginger. Pathala was famous for deep sea scuba

diving. Only those who had previous training, dared to do diving and I kept off from diving, on the fear of dying. But I enjoyed snorkelling, swimming face down with a mask and biting a tube to breath. I used to float on an air mattress on the calm sea, slowly drifting into sleep and euphoria. Time went off unaccounted and I had my annual leave.

I flew back and visited the college. All were jealous of the new developments in my life and when I narrated my adventures, Vinod was tickled. I gave him the email and phone number of Sylvia, a UN official from the US who was our guest and very fond of me, he wanted to apply to the UN and get in there. He was going to have his defence viva and we made arrangements. Invitations were dispatched; arrangement for the staying and entertaining of the adjudicator was arranged.

The D-day dawned. Vinod made a presentation of the gist of his thesis and the jury bombarded him with questions and clarifications. He stood his ground and with a winning smile, bluffed them into things which he was not so sure of and at the end of the defence viva, he was awarded the doctorate.

The first thing that he did after becoming a doctor was to ring up Sylvia whom I introduced and impressed her so much that she asked him to email her, his resume. She found him fascinating over the phone with his fine American accent and gentlemanly demeanour.

Things developed so fast that when I returned, he flew with me to Maldives to meet Sylvia and attend a UN party, where a UN chief executive could be introduced to him and if he could impress that guy; his entry into the UN was assured.

## 11

We had adjoining seats on the flight and I took him to our resort to stay with me. He enjoyed the short stay in the resort and we went for snorkelling once and he had a couple of drinks from the bar. He enjoyed the dishes in the restaurant and was introduced to all the guests, with whom he mingled freely. That evening there was a disco and we went for that. While I was simply sitting, sipping a beer, he went and

danced till he got tired and worked out. He was an impressive figure on the dance floor and many ladies were attracted to him.

Sylvia invited us both for the UN party and we went to Male' for attending it. It was a big time event, all colourful high profile people and Vinod fitted into it and I knew that he was going to get the assignment. He was introduced to the big executive and he tactfully handled him and impressed him by his pleasant and homely dealing. The Yankee found him on the same wavelength and sophistication, that he said that he would consider his case and inform him when an opening came.

I told Sylvia to be persuasive and to influence the official and to remind him of Vinod's case after some time. Vinod stayed at Male' to fly back to India, next day and I went back to the resort. I knew that I did a good turn to my friend and came to know later that he was invited to the UN and joined there at New York as some under-secretary. There was not much communication between us, except some occasional phone calls or emails.

He used to narrate about his amorous adventures with some fashion models or his interaction with some world leaders who visited the UN. He was pulling the strings in the right direction and climbing the ladder of power and influence in the international rat race. Even the president of America used to call him, using his first name and was a favourite in international parties and summits. He spoke well in discussions and made memorable speeches, impressing every one, be it global warming or going frugal on petro dollars. Even the names of Hollywood actresses were connected to him, but he did not hook up with any one of those. He was a notorious chronic bachelor and travelled extensively all over the world when some issues were to be dealt by the UN and took part in diplomatic negotiations and international arbitrations.

## 12

My life in the resort also had a twist of events. When the holiday season was over I found that lot of money was funnelled from one overhead, purchasing of tuna for

the food purpose of the resort. Many fake vouchers were made and exorbitant payments were made on that account. I probed deeper and went digging into it and found the culprits behind that. It was an assistant manager and the cook, they smelt my moves and approached me to keep quiet and would give me a share of the misappropriation, if I just closed my eyes and kept my mouth shut. I told them to get lost and I would report it in my next fax to the head office.

They became aghast and tried to befriend me and later threatened me that they would make my life miserable in the resort and I would have to regret about it later. The pressure was mounting on me high and I wanted to stand for fair play and justice and told them that my integrity and principles would not allow me to do that.

They offered me a big sum, and baited me with many promises and I stood my ground and stand and did not budge. I collected some real concrete evidence to nail them, reported the matter to the head office and asked them to take appropriate action.

They kept their word and tried all dirty tricks to smoke me out from the place. From saying bad words behind my back to making noise outside my room, so that I could not sleep properly. They made gossips about me and spread it in the resort that the manager even was not in my favour.

I found clinging on there to my job difficult and reported to the head office that I could not operate there any more in the resort and I was leaving the place. When they heard my plight they asked me to come to Male'. Before leaving the resort they made me resign my job formally so that they could terminate my contract with the resort. I did that too and packed up my things and left for Male'. They put me in a Dhoni, a slow boat that it took ages to reach the main land.

I was not feeling bad about the whole thing, I wanted to be a man of integrity and principles and reached the head office. They okayed my ticket and gave me a gift of an extra thousand dollars to my salary and I flew back home. The irony was that the thugs in the resort offered me a bribe many times more. I thought that I would join back to my job in the college as I was on leave.

When I came back to the college to join, Lopez put in lot of impediments and obstacles to prevent me from getting in there. I was feeling like jumping from the frying pan to the fire. I resigned the job in Maldives and I could not regain my old job in the college. I rang up Vinod and he interfered and directed them to absorb me immediately. Three people supported me and stood with me in the issue and I interacted with them in close association and moved on intimate terms with them, whenever there was a chance. They were three professors, Jose Netto, Rameshan G. and Abdul Rahman.

They were conducting an international seminar on world religions and how they could collaborate and live in consensus with one another. They requested my help to organize it. Invitations were emailed to all the leading universities attaching the brochure and many scholars registered. There were three sessions and in the afternoon there was the valedictory function and conclusion of the seminar.

The auditorium was fully packed with a number of invitees. The first session was handled by Prof. Rameshan; he enunciated that Hinduism was the mother of all religions, all-encompassing and ever tolerant. Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara and them together, Hari Om was the deity in Hinduism and Adwaitham, the belief in one God, doctrine of reincarnation and law of Karma, everything was the result of one's actions were the gist of Hindu religion. He advocated that to be a Hindu was the ideal way to lead a healthy and enriched life by doing Karmam, without Kamam to make Artham always with Dharmam to reach Moksham, the end of life in this world of chaos and commotion and reach heaven.

The second session was handled by Prof. Rehman and he quoted the Quran and enunciated that Abba, the almighty and ever compassionate God is the one and only God, he is so forgiving that salvation can be attained even before the last breath by the believer, professing the faith and repenting for the sins. All sins would be forgiven by Abba. He was a jealous God and if his due share of worship was given to any one or other images he would be angry. He inculcated that the doctrine of

Islam was the need of the times and only way of life that could suit the modern life to survive in the strife and permissiveness.

Prof. Netto was the advocate of Christianity, the one and only one God with three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Accepting Jesus Christ, the son, as the redeemer and savior and believing that he died and rose from the dead for the atonement of the sins of everyone and defeated the devil and gives the Holy Spirit to everyone who asks for guidance and wisdom. God does not dwell in man-made mansions and big church edifices, He dwells in human hearts. It is the religion of love and forgiveness, of giving and helping each other in fellowship to worship God with Jesus who divided history into two, BC and AD.

It was followed by a sumptuous buffet and the participants interacted and mingled with each other, introducing themselves. They formed groups and had heated discussions among themselves along with the eating of food. They were all waiting for the valedictory function, where Dr. Ralph Higgins would sum up the session and the selected representatives could air their views and a conclusion would be drawn. It would be watched all over the world through streaming in the internet, arranged by Vinod.

Dr. Ralph Higgins got up to speak. The audience was spell bound and he started his discourse about a sixth sense, in every human being, the faith, faith in God and faith in himself. He said that faith came naturally, whatever the brand or religion people belonged, and one has to believe in God and in himself. The colour of the blood of every one was the same, whatever religion he belonged. It is the discretion of every one to believe in a religion, as long as others never tried to convert some one from one religion to other and created unnecessary strife and hatred. Faith and prayer were imperative for men to survive and succeed. Love was a factor that bound humanity together and as long as it was alive, there would be no fighting and wars and it was this gift of God, coupled with wisdom and affluence that kept the world ticking.

He said that everybody should have a dream, a purpose and a sense of goal for his life. Identifying it was the first step to success. Then make a plan to attain that and

think about it on a daily basis in prayer to God. With faith in oneself and God, everyone would accomplish what he sets out to be, if he goes an extra mile in all that he does, doing more than he was supposed to do in his job or service and have a group of people in a master mind alliance to support each other and to edify one another.

He asked the audience whether there was any difference of opinion and to comment if there was any disagreement. All were keeping quiet and he said that there were two spirits dominating the world, the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. It was the work of the devil and evil spirit that brings all bad, negative and terrible things in the world. If we believed and trusted in God's protection, the Holy Spirit would guide us, lead us and protect us.

To lead a successful life, we should have a pleasing personality, pleasant in our disposition, learning from failures and defeat, analysing its causes and rectifying in future. We should have accurate thinking to discern the motives of others and self-discipline to control the mind with will power, using imagination, memory, reason and positive emotions. Concentrate on the purpose of life, giving and getting cooperation, feeling enthusiasm and using personal initiative, forming the habit of living healthy and budget time and money, applying golden rule, not too much or too little of anything and see if something is good, useful and affordable. We should make it a habit of applying all those factors in our day to day life.

He ended up his discourse by pinpointing what we should aim in life to be enriched. They were a positive mind, sound health, freedom from all fears, harmony with other people and hope, faith, willingness to share, labour of love, open mind, self-discipline, discerning the motives of others and material prosperity.

With these values and to be loving, there would be harmony in the world and all atrocities and strife would be over, he said. He thanked everyone on behalf of Luciference College and on his behalf and with tea served, the seminar ended. People were hanging around even after the tea and held discussions and interaction and I made as many contacts as possible with the delegates.

Prof: Rameshan interacted with me and asked me why I was not getting married. I told him that I wanted to marry someone, one of his students, she was then working in Titanium, Chavara, but it was not easy, may not get the concurrence from their family. He told me to leave it to him; two of his students were doing block placement in that company and he asked them to interact with her.

Both those students did a nice promotion about me to her, asked her opinion about me and her reaction was positive. Then it was the formal occasion of my people visiting her house and that too became possible when one of my uncles and aunty visited Alleppey, I took them to her house in Mankombu, they saw her and liked the girl and her people and we requested them to visit my house in Lower Periyar. Her brother and a gang of relatives reached my home one afternoon and formally agreed for our wedding and soon the date of the wedding was fixed. But unfortunately I had jaundice and was bedridden for a month and the wedding was postponed. She kept on praying for me and when I became okay, our wedding was conducted.

Prof. Netto arranged the venue of the wedding as Gathsemany in Changanacherry, convenient for both the families and he and his students took up the arrangements of the function. My people reached Changanacherry and my loving friends Jayadas and Tessy took me in their decorated car to the venue of the wedding and they stood with me throughout the function as bride's maid and best man. Prof. Rehman took care of the party, the students served the food, I went to every guest with my wife and they felicitated us. After the function, we went to Aranyanivas, in Thekkady, where our friends, Thomas and Premna had arranged our honey moon. They were both working there. Thomas treated us with champagne and put us in a boat and we started our life journey together. We stayed there for a week, every day, going for the boat trip and I telling her all the jokes I knew and she listening to it without much option, other than jumping down from the boat.

We visited all her relatives in Kuttanadu and my folks in Pala and Alleppey for a month. We rented a house in Mundackal, and started our life as husband and wife

together. I resumed my work in the college and the girl students remarked that there was a peculiar beam and gleam on my face after the wedding. Things were going on smooth and steady, when that untoward and unexpected event took place.

## 15

Dr. Ralph was lecturing in a final year class and all of a sudden, he stumbled and succumbed down to the ground and before rushing him to the hospital, passed away. Everyone in the college was panicked and Vinod was informed. He air dashed immediately, as he could not get leave, resigned his job, he was aghast and helpless. The funeral had to be arranged and many celebrities and important personalities visited the college, paying homage. Bishops and priests came and made special prayer and the dead body lay in state in the hall of the college.

Vinod came to the college auditorium where the dead body was kept, he stood still in front of the coffin and every one sitting there wept, but there was not a drop of tears in his eyes. He kept his poise and demeanour, started making the arrangements for the funeral. News was given to the media, information about the time and venue of the funeral were all given out. It was a royal funeral, cars in rows and people thronging from all over, old students, political leaders and clergy. The coffin was carried in a procession and lowered in the tomb and all threw flowers on it as a sign of paying homage. Jaya was weeping and shattered, beyond consoling.

After the funeral all loitered around there, sharing, joking and some were making boisterous laughter while interacting with the other sex. With Dr. Ralph gone, my misfortune also started.

Vinod took up the administration of the college and appointed himself as the manager. He arranged a cabin for himself in such a posh and luxurious manner and acted big, always talking to some international figure on the phone or having the

company of some celebrity in the college. Late coming was not permitted, neither leaving early.

The staff was driven to their wits end and they were not able to budge from their seats and to go even to the toilet, permission was needed. He used to fling at everyone's throat and shout at people even if they were seniors or respected there.

But some people who were in his good books, took advantage and acted very important, not doing anything creative but made a lot of fuss, pretending as if they were very busy and hard working. I had a tough time, because I never pretended or acted but was natural in my dealings. Vinod did not like my attitude and wanted me to be always obliging and submissive. He always found fault with me and was arrogant and haughty in his demeanour.

Lopez and gang were making hay while the sun was shining and took advantage of my pathetic condition and misappropriated as much as they could and would not do any difficult work in the office. All dirty and difficult work was dumped on me and had me chastised by Vinod at the least excuse. He used to subjugate and be haughty and arrogant, at the same time pleasing and humble to get anything done out of the way. I rotted away working like a mule, always exploited and put to task, watching everything at a distance and never involving.

Two daughters were born; I bought a house on bank loan and my wife's salary which they deducted in instalments. Time went on flying and I bought a Honda Activa and joined a prayer group of the English speaking people of Quilon City. For a spell, I became the animator of the group, a thing I felt very proud about, they, the most sophisticated people of the town, selecting a country bred guy like me as their leader. I loved to conduct prayer meetings, inviting members through phone, arrange the singing, giving insights from the Bible after reflecting over it and arranging snacks at the end of the meeting. Praising, thanks giving, interceding, and repenting were the main agenda of the meeting.

The strife in my office started brewing up. Lopez made my life miserable and brought up all delicate situations where I was finding it difficult to hold on. In a moment of desperation I contacted my friends in Maldives and asked them whether I could come and work there. They said okay and I took a ticket and was about to go, when my neighbor lady heard that I was going to Male', asked me to take some beef curry and Borotas for her pregnant daughter there, who liked them so much and gave me her daughter's phone number.

I rang up a friend who was an old student of the college, to come to the airport and collect me and got on the flight. I landed there at Hulu Hulu airport. It was visa on arrival and that was the time when Fausia Hassan shot a movie about the places she was persecuted in the VSSC spy scandal case in Kerala and exhibited it in Male'. They were so angry about Keralites after seeing the movie and were waiting for a chance to give a task to some Keralites. They asked me whether I had a hotel reservation, a credit card or five hundred dollars and if not I won't be given the visa. I told them that my friend would come to take me to the main land and rang him up. He said that he couldn't come as there was some problem in his island; he was detained in there and asked me to try some other source.

I rang up my friends, including an MP, but none of them came to fetch me and I sat there in the airport lounge, ate the food my neighbor sent with me and drank some mineral water. I told them that if they don't give me the visa I would go back and boarded the flight back and came back.

In the meantime, things took a twist as the threat in my office was over and I got back into my job. If that had not happened they would have resorted to some drastic methods to eliminate me. I was feeling God's protecting hands in that event. As providence would have it, the food that was given by my neighbor lady was the most helpful thing in the whole episode and I came and sat in my seat in the office as if nothing really had happened and resumed my work.

Snake people, along the line of by Dr.Ralph, were the people with whom Vinod was associating, ruthless people who would get anything done and get away at any cost. He attracted such lot in to the campus and they had a mastermind of their own. They were the progeny of Eve, bearing the first born child of the Devil who came in the form of a snake and ensnared and trapped her. They were the brains behind the pyramids of Egypt being built in prehistoric times, to the mining of gold from Africa at the time of King Solomon, modern mansions and great structures of the world. They controlled the economy, finance, trade, transport, defence and communication. They were the moneyed class, wielding power and controlling everything and they managed to be at the helm of all affairs. They were supposed to be well brought up, educated in top schools and polite and gentlemanly in their dealings.

Just a phone call was enough for him to get any mean thing done by any one higher up. He appointed Dr. Rameshan as the principal of the college, a puppet on a chain who would dance to his whims and fancies. It was after superseding other eligible professors and Jaya had no say in any of the administrative matters.

Corruption was at its peak, anything would be done by the office at a price, any certificate or testimonial would be issued like transcripts, if an exorbitant amount was paid. While my policy was 'at the earliest, the easiest and speedy way', things were delayed and needed permission for everything, written request, and formal sanction. The students had to go flattering and wait so long for their official things to be done. Many people who came from far off places were kept waiting. Vinod had some particular grudge to me and put me to task because I was somewhat resentful of the new developments in the administration. He always had discussions with Lopez and asked his opinion before doing anything or taking any decision, but never consulted me or asked my opinion.

## 18

Into its midst a world summit of religions was held in Luciference College. The students were divided into groups and various committees were formed. Each committee had a leader and they made meticulous planning for the event to come

off. Invitations were emailed and dispatched with a colourful brochure and also in face book and whatsapp groups.

The resource persons of the seminar, Maya and Lin Chi, friends of Vinod's father, one a Hindu monk and the other a Tibetan lama arrived by flight and they were accommodated in the guest house of the college. Hassan Rasheed, a Muslim scholar, was invited from Maldives on my behalf and he stayed at a hotel in town. Anil Pereira, a renowned gospel preacher from Australia had also arrived at the college. They were the speakers of the summit and the auditorium was decorated and seating arrangements were done with a sparkling podium for the speaker.

The invitees for the seminar arrived one after another and the whole place was flooded with cars and bikes. The seminar started with a girl student reciting the gayathri mantra, in resonant and crisp voice, which rang out like a church bell. Vinod made the welcome speech, inviting every one for the seminar and introducing the speakers, starting with Lin Chi, a lama, who was to deliver the key note address and his father's friend and acquaintance in Tibet at the time he was doing research on Bonism and Budhism there.

Maya was his father's friend from Goa, a Hindu monk and a scholar of Veda and Vedanta. He welcomed him and Anil Pereira who was his class mate in Harvard University and became a gospel preacher later. He invited Hassan Rasheed, a Muslim scholar from Maldives and welcomed them all to deliver an inspiring discourse that the audience was waiting eagerly to listen to and imbibe.

Lin Chi started his speech, how Ralph Higgins came to Tibet, they were waiting for a redeemer for their race and the world, found him to have the horoscope and lagnam to be the father of that redeemer and how Ralph came to India, mother of all religions and befriended Maya and found Jaya to be the mother of the promised one. He described how they were married according to the Gandarva rites in Maya's Ashram in Goa and how they begot a son, Vinod Higgins. He was watching the growth and developments in Vinod's life from far and he was quite impressed that he was faring so well. He inaugurated the seminar and wished Vinod and the college, found by his dear friend, all success and elaborated on Bonism and

Tantrayana and its relevance in modern life as the only way out for the world to survive.

Maya remembered Ralph Higgins as a great visionary, who felt the need of the times and collaborated with them. He described how he conducted their wedding, at the peak of Kaliyuga and how the wedding was consummated in the Brahma muhurta and he was pleased to see his son Vinod faring so well and reached such a high echelon in the international arena. Kalki had made his appearance in him as the last incarnation and humanity had reached its peak in its development and intellectual growth. He said that Vinod had the last word on all that and wished him and his college all success.

Anil Pereira said that he was pleased to speak in his class mate's college, he had a feeling that his friend would have been some one high up and it would have become a reality, if Vinod had not resigned his job in the UN, he would have been the next secretary general, he was sure. He indoctrinated them about the end of days and how the prophecies in the holy book were fulfilled one after another. The formation of Israel, the clearing of the area of the Jerusalem temple, the working of the Holy Spirit and his anointing manifested all over the world and how the evil spirit also, equally active, time for rapture, were all signs of the end of days.

Hassan Rasheed spoke about me and how he found my resigning the job in Maldives on the question of integrity and principles, fascinating, he always wanted to visit the place I came from and now he had the chance to be in Luciference College. He admonished everyone to worship Abba, the one and only one God and not to give his due share of worship or bow down in front of any image or object however holy they may be. He stressed the importance of faith and said that only through faith we could have salvation.

It was followed by a prayer meeting lead by all those leaders from different religions, each saying prayers according to their rites, followed by readings from Gita, Bible and Quran. Vinod conducted a prayer song which he had written and composed, by the college choir, with all the orchestration and musical instruments,

played by the students. It had high class musical standard and was performed so well, he swinging his hands as the chords went high and down, while conducting it.

Jaya proposed the vote of thanks and she was so loquacious in praising Maya and Lin Chi as her husband's oldest friends and thanked the other two speakers. She thanked all the participants who came from far and wide. She wished them all a pleasant evening and invited them for the cultural fest; the students of the college had organized. There were dances, singing both solo and duet, instrumental music and a skit.

The guests mingled with each other after the seminar and held discussions and interaction with one another. I took Hassan Rasheed to his hotel room and we shared about the time we had together in Maldives and the where about of our friends. I went home and slept peacefully, as I was so tired and worn out with the arrangements of the seminar.

## 19

Vinod was acting smart and high flying, interacting with the international community and he had a say in every issue. World leaders were seeking his counsel and Luciference College had its role in training world leaders and top executives who were moulded in his fashion, smart, polite, endearing and at the same time, tactful and people who meant business and had to be reckoned with.

Many atrocities were done; he just ignored and sneered at my vegan approach and vow of having a single wife. I was afraid when he paid a friendly visit to my home and spoke to my wife and children, knowing his bad old ways.

Drinking and gluttony was his pastime, those who teamed up with him and in his good books also had chances for such encounters. Lopez and gang were making hay while the sun was shining and amassing as much as they could. Vinod was travelling extensively, invited to speak in foreign universities and world summits. For getting the funding for the college he went to Delhi and he had an eye on Diana, the newly

appointed guest lecturer, looking like an angel in character and profile. Vinod had of late, acting too bossing, pretending to be someone very high up.

Whenever department audit team came they were given drinks and good food. They asked some redundant questions and their main contention was getting an admission in the next batch and Vinod sometimes obliged them by giving them admissions from the management quota.

Tossed around by the vicissitudes of official life, and not able to cope with the strife, I resorted to prayer and reading the bible. I did not want to compromise my integrity and tried to keep off from everything. The others were eyeing me suspiciously and I pretended that the lamp stand was magnificent and that I too should get my share, as Kunchan Nambiar said and kept off from involving. I really learned to pray for survival as the only way out.

## 20

The college should get the accreditation from NAAC and send the self-study report to them to come for the visit. It was a hectic work, all the staff put their head together and sat overtime to draft the report. Facts and figures were collected from every nook and corner, compiled and edited and I used my language skills to edit and refine the report. Vinod came up with some, solid input about the working and functioning of the college which others had overlooked. I prepared the infrastructure of the college office, laying out of files and keeping the books and accounts for inspection, in the most accessible manner.

We had the report prepared and bound and he flew to Bangalore to entrust it at the NAAC headquarters. The date of the visit by the peer team was given and there was hectic work to train everyone to come up to the mark, when questions were asked and many infrastructural developments were made, like CCTV, public addressing system in the class rooms and library, display panel where it would be noticed the most, library, made most modern with bio metric punching, bar code reader, IBM server for LAN and browsing for the students with the campus made Wi-Fi.

The office was made the most modern with net working for computers and each one was given a terminal in front of him. The filing system was re-organized with the files in alphabetical order with an alphabet and numerical index was given to every file and they were stacked in pouches in the filing cabinet. Office work was automated with a data base of the students made, from which automatic SMS would go with their marks and when they were absent to their parents. Interactive boards were installed in class rooms.

For the salary disbursement, bank accounts were opened for every employee and money was credited to their respective accounts and they could withdraw their salaries from ATM, with SMS alerts instantly. An ATM counter was opened in front of the college.

The college building and library was painted bright, the garden and lawn trimmed to look beautiful and the whole place was cleaned up. The canteen was renovated, with breakfast, tea, lunch and tiffin in the evening. The crew was made more obliging, service oriented and ready to serve the food on time.

The staff and students were drilled and coached about the best practices mentioned in the self-study report and mock visit and academic audit was conducted to find out the lacuna and many areas were identified that was lagging behind and needed rectification. Vinod was at the helm of affairs and did meticulous planning and preparation, he did not even sleep many nights to get things done. The college was divided into committees and each committee was headed by a teacher. The D-day dawned and the peer team was brought in and made their appearance in the college.

Prof. Rameshan received the team into the campus and Vinod followed at close heels. They visited the teaching departments, library and office. They were asking questions everywhere and in the office they wanted to know about the admission procedure. I was given the chance to explain to them, how the application was published in the college website, students downloaded it and applied, they were called for written test, group discussion and personal interview. Based on their performance in them and merit a list was drawn out, and they were admitted after

scrutinizing and verifying their documents and collecting the fees. They were satisfied and wanted to know about the practice of correspondence we followed.

I told them that when a letter was received it was recorded in the inward register, reply prepared with a letter number from the connected file, the index of the file with a running number and year. The reply had to be crisp, simple and matter of fact, covering every aspect. Then it was duly signed by the principal along with the office copy and delivered by post recording in the outward register or by hand, recording in the delivery book. They were happy about my explanation and left the office and went to the canteen.

They had separate meeting with the stake holders and alumni. Many of the famous alumni were present and along with them some VIP friends of Vinod as the stake holders. Some parents also were present. The peer team interacted with them all and started drafting their report. They questioned Vinod on areas they needed clarification and he was ever ready with the answers at fingertip and in great form, impressed them so much.

An art festival was also showcased to entertain the team with three kinds of traditional dances, Mohiniyattam, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam by old students who were good at them and a solo was rendered by a student in Karnatic classical tradition. Vinod conducted the orchestration for singing the college anthem. The lyrics were written by me and he set the music and every student sang their heart out. The peer team was taken to their hotels and we were relieved that the whole exercise turned out well and when the end result came, top most in the country.

## 21

The time was evening and I was kneeling and praying in front of the alter of the chapel of the Luciference College, with the tallest dome in the world and a magnificent structure near the college, and let out my ill feelings and frustration, by way of prayer. I had literally rescued Diana from the wicked hands of Vinod, as she was not conceding to his amorous approaches and he was so angry with me. She

was pleading at me to rescue her from being raped, in his office and tactfully I lead her out of there, she literally weeping and Vinod was eyeing me with red hot eyes. I took my freedom as his class mate and smiled at him and came away. He was also angry that I was withholding an email he was making from being sent to three powerful opposing clans of the world that would have brought out a big dissension among world religions and nations and even triggered on a world war.

Suddenly, I saw that with burning red hot eyes, Vinod came and was looming over me over the altar of the church of God, looking intently at me. Stench of liquor was coming out of his mouth which he had from the bar nearby. He spoke slowly, "None of your prayers can help you, nor your God will rescue you. I am all powerful. You and that girl are at my mercy and if you are not submissive, you are dismissed from your job with immediate effect and I am going to rape your wife and destroy your daughters. Now, give me your resignation letter or bow down in front of me and profess your allegiance to me at once!"

"I will not do either, whatever may come. I believe that I have done my job well. You can sack me or do whatever you want to do, but I will not resign my job."

"Then you are fired with immediate effect, pack up your things and get lost. Clear out from the campus." There was such commanding nature in his stare and my heart was burning with agony and apprehension. I knew the beast in him and that he would do what he said, was so drunk and the personification of all that was evil.

Helpless and in agony I looked up to heaven through the glass top of the dome over the tabernacle to the feet of the Almighty God and prayed earnestly, since I had no one else to go, plead or cry.

Time stood still, calamity was about to let loose, I was desperate, yes, really desperate and cried out to God to avert the situation. If I conceded, that was the end of my life of integrity and corruption less career, resisting all temptations, baits and lures so far. That would be the final victory for the evil. With red hot eyes he was eyeing me and was about to leave the church and I knew that was the end of me and with great agony I cried out to God once more.

A peel of lightening flashed and thunder struck him down, the fury and wrath of God was unleashed and my prayer was answered. Time was five fifty five p.m. and I knew that the world would be at a standstill, he, the devil incarnate, struck down there dead. There would be bandhs and harthals, people killing themselves with uncontrollable grief and strife, attack each other, riots and fleeing to safer havens. I thanked God and walked out into freedom and a new lease to my life, the last encounter of my life and strife, being over.

## REACHING HIGH

The cadaver lay motionless on the dissection table of the anatomy lab at the Trivandrum Medical College, with no identity, no antecedents or anyone to mourn for. He could be anybody from anywhere, with none to claim and none to bury him with all the fanfare of a funeral. Man comes, man goes, all are equal at birth and death, rich or poor, famous or infamous, sought after or denounced; is the sole owner of the six feet of land, one's grave yard.

Ajith, a medical student there held his scalpel to make an incision in the tummy of the corpse. He browsed through the internal organs and wondered at the magnificent handiwork, the most perfect operating system, made by the great creator of all things, who claims neither copyright nor trademark.

His cell phone chirped. It was Manju, his girlfriend, who was requesting him to accompany her to an internet café to download some data for her college assignments and to chat with her cousin. He waited till the session in the lab was over and ran out to an ATM counter as he was running short of money. He inserted his debit card, punched his pin number and brand new notes peeped out. Now, he was one of the typical modern students, with all the sophisticated gadgets like cell phone, ATM card and internet; the three great boons of the new millennium.

Rushing along he fell into a pensive mood, thought about the day of the send-off to Dr. Alen, the American intern at the Kuttiady Estate Hospital. He was his role model, who instigated him to plunge into uncertainty, to tread untrodden paths to become a doctor, always feeling the caring hands of the Providence.

## 1

It was evening and the red sun was peeping through the silhouette of rubber trees in the Kuttiady estate, played tricks of black and white shadows on the tree tops, spread like intertwining snakes and the breeze was winnowing the whole rubber plantation that was spread around the hillsides of the Western Ghats. Ajith a smart and enterprising youngster in his teens, son of a rubber tapping labourer there felt nervous and uneasy at the task that lay ahead of him that evening, ushered his brother Anil aside, a boy of thirteen, studying in the eighth standard.

Ajith said to him, "Anil, you should learn the prayer song by heart for today's meeting. Sing it aloud once or twice. Fold our big blanket and take it with you when you come to the meeting. Let me have a quick bath."

Taking a towel and soap, he walked in the direction of a mountain spring for a nature's open air bath. The cold mountain water splashing on him made him shudder for a moment. He felt fresh and vigorous.

He visualized the meeting, where he was the organizer and compeer for giving send off to Dr. Alen, the estate doctor. The minutest details went through his mind. He was convinced that he had looked into and arranged everything.

Cold and shivering, he went home and put on his Sunday best, a T-shirt and a pair of jeans, a gift from Dr. Alen, on his last birthday. He combed his crew-cut hair backward and wore the air-shoes, another expensive gift from the doctor. He felt trim and smart.

He walked in the direction of the hospital and met Dr. Alen. Ajith smiled at him and said, "Good evening, doctor."

Dr. Alen smiled at him pleasantly and said, "Good evening, I was waiting for you. How is the farewell meeting going to be? I have thought out a good message to give to the audience. You should translate it for me. How was your exam, by the way?"

"It was easy and I expect a first class with distinction. But the real exam begins today when I am giving send off to you in the evening party. I will gladly translate your message. I am going to arrange the stage for the meeting". Ajith said.

"Wait, Ajith," Dr. Alen said, "Today is my last day here. I got to tell you something. Don't end up your life in this wretched estate. Try to study further and become a doctor, as you always wanted to be. Here is a gift for you to pursue your studies further."

He pulled out ten, two thousand rupee notes from his wallet and giving them to Ajith said, "This is the last Indian currency left with me. Once I go from here it is of no use to me. Keep this, you will need it."

Ajith hesitated for a while, because it was the doctor who taught him never to receive anything for nothing from anyone. The blue eyes of Dr. Alen read his mind.

"Don't hesitate; you deserve it. You have been my companion, friend, translator, errand boy and even cook for the past one year. If I don't give you, then to whom shall I give? Remember, even if we are far apart, at different corners of the world, we will keep in touch. I may never come back to India but you can come to the United States to visit me, may be after years."

Two drops of tears bulged at the corners of Ajith's eyes. Accepting the money he said, "Thank you, Doctor. Unless I get away from here I will end up as a rubber-tapping labourer in the estate. You have given meaning and a new vision to my life. I will always remember the values that I learned from you. Now let me go and arrange the stage."

The venue of the meeting was the old tennis court in front of the hospital. There was a good turf of green grass. Ajith put a small table and three small chairs at one end of the court. He covered the table with a laced cloth. There was a gentle breeze and the sun was peeping through the rubber trees, about to set.

Women, men and children in and around that estate began coming in and thronged in front of the small podium. Raghavan Master, a retired schoolteacher, tall and elegant, with a little stoop when walking, occupied a chair. He was supposed to make a felicitation speech.

He pressed a finger to his lips and suddenly a hush fell on the audience. As a teacher he had done that trick many times before, with real success.

Soon Dr. Alen and Mr. Robin the estate superintendent, an Anglo-Indian, came and occupied the other two chairs. The time was six o'clock; the time Ajith had told everyone the meeting would begin.

## 2

With a smile, Ajith went to the side of the podium and announced. "The meeting for bidding farewell to our beloved Dr. Alen begins now. Everyone please stand up for the prayer song."

His brother Anil recited the mantra in a crisp and resonant voice. "Asatho ma sadgamaya, Thamaso ma jyothir gamaya, Mrithyor ma amrutham gamaya, Om santhi, santhi, santhi."

Then everyone sat down and Ajith made the welcome speech, which he had rehearsed time and again in his mind.

"Respected chairman, Mr. Robin, the superintendent of this estate, Dr. Alen, Raghavan master and my dear friends, this is an era in which human life is treated as trash, with terrorism and atrocities reaching its peak. Like a messenger descending from heaven to preserve our lives, Dr. Alen came among us, a year ago. In partial fulfillment of his studies, he has finished his work in our estate hospital

and is bidding farewell to us today. I am sure that all of us would cherish the fond memories of him always.

“Personally speaking, he gave meaning and a new dimension to my life. I will never forget every minute that I spent with him. He is flying to the other side of the globe, but he will always live in our hearts. Dear Dr. Alen, I welcome you to this small meeting where a few of your admirers have gathered. I cordially welcome Mr. Robin the chairman of this meeting to our midst. I also extend a cordial welcome to Raghavan Master, to deliver the felicitation speech, as he always inspired us with his wisdom and erudition. And finally I extend to you all a warm welcome.”

As Ajith finished, Raghavan Master got up. In his clean, deep, resonant voice he said, “Friends, to bid farewell is always painful, especially to someone as dear as Dr. Alen. Some divine destiny brought him to our midst and the same destiny is sending him away. We can’t hold him back any longer, even if we want to. Within the short span of one year, he learned so much about our rich Indian heritage, culture and way of thinking. There is a small secret between us. He has accepted me as his guru for learning Indian philosophy. I am proud to say that he has learned and imbibed from the Vedas, Vedanta and Upanishads so much that he believes in the Advaita philosophy. I wondered how he being a Christian could grasp the connotations of Hari Om. He once told me that Hari Om, Jehovah and Abba are three-in-one, the same entity in different names. His outlook on life, the meaning and value that he gives to human life is unique and I request him to elucidate his views for the benefit of everyone here. Dear Dr. Alen, I wish you a bright future as a great doctor. Protect our life and try to preserve it, as even the humblest of human life is precious. It is a great thing if you do that, when everyone around has gone crazy destroying life, and as your Guru I feel sure that you will be a great man someday. May that day come soon! Wishing you the very best.”

He sat down amidst the clapping and Ajith said, “I request Mr. Robin the chairman of the meeting, to present the memento to Dr. Alen as a symbol of our love, admiration, gratitude and esteem towards him.”

Sindhu, the estate beauty, a teenager with great charm, approached the podium in her elegant gait with a gift packet. While receiving the packet Mr.Robin made it a point to rub on her fingers. Very pompously he opened the packet and fished out a sandal wood statue of Goddess Saraswathy, deity of arts and learning. He handed it over to Dr. Alen and shook hands with him.

### 3

Ajith covered his brother Anil with a blanket and brought him in front of the audience and said, "This is a fierce and very ugly looking animal called Skunk brought from the jungles of Africa. Only very brave people can have a look at it."

Then he looked at the audience and said, "I request two people from you to come forward and have a look at the animal."

As previously agreed upon, Deepu, one of Anil's friends came, looked at the animal through the fold of the blanket and fell down fainting. Ajith lifted him up from the floor and then Sindhu came and looked through the blanket, let out a wild cry and ran away. The audience sat tight with apprehension.

Ajith said, "The bravest man among us is Mr.Robin. I request him to come forward and have a look at the animal."

Mr. Robin hesitated for a while, then came forward gallantly, parted the folds of the blanket and looked in. Suddenly the animal in the blanket fell down and fainted. Before realizing what was happening Mr.Robin stood there for a second, while everyone of the audience was laughing and making fun of him.

Then he announced, "Thank you Mr.Robin. I request Dr.Alen to come forward and address us."

Dr.Alen got up with a smile, gave a namaskar, and said, "My beloved brothers and sisters! The past one year, the best in my life, is going to be over. I have to go. I give a big thank you to every one of you, who interacted with me, who inspired me and taught me many great values in life, which are extinct in the West. As I have

benefited out of my interaction with you, let me share with you a few insights that might give a new meaning to your life.

“As a medical doctor, I would say that to stay healthy is the most important factor in life. It is a pure mental state. Let us see, which all are the factors, contributing to the state of our wellbeing? It is a positive mind, free from all negative way of thinking and feeling, feeling physically fit, free of diseases, having a harmonious relationship with others and not afraid of anything or anybody. Should have the ability to discern other people’s motives, to be occupied in some work which one loves to do and willing to share one’s good things with others. One should nurture hope about future accomplishments and have an abiding faith in oneself and God. We should keep our mind open for new ideas, exercising self-discipline. We need to have material riches, as much as we require. With these factors anyone can have a perfectly healthy and wealthy mental attitude.

“This is what the ancient Acharyas of the occident and orient taught people to aim at in life. Then life can be a pleasure, even in this chaotic age where destruction, death and brutality are the order of the day. I invoke every one of you here to see how precious our lives are. Are we not the keepers of the lives of our brothers as well? I will always remember you as people who inspired me. You all mean a lot to me; thank you, each one of you and good bye.”

As the doctor sat down Ajith got up and said, “Thank you, everyone who attended this meeting. Please have a cup of coffee and snacks at the other end of the lawn.” Everybody rushed there as the meeting ended.

Ajith walked home with the blanket and other things that he had taken for the meeting and met his mother who was preparing the dinner. He told her, “Dr.Alen is also leaving this place. To whom will I go for consultation and advice? I will talk to him about the situation at home and ask his opinion. He used to tell me that father has to be given de-addiction treatment to get out of his drunkenness. He is away for getting drunk, and Mr.Robin gives him the money for that. He has sold me to the superintendent as his cook. He won’t let me go for higher studies. My dream to become a doctor will never come true.”

“What to do? With a drunkard father and not much money, how can you ever become a doctor? He will be coming home after getting drunk to beat me up. It is the time he came home. You better be not here.”

“Okay mother, I will go and see Dr.Alen.”

Ajith walked through the rubber trees and reached the other side of the hill. The brook there went on rippling down, oblivious of the happenings around. Ajith stood there and fell into a pensive mood. Suddenly the predicament he was in popped up in his mind. He decided to discuss it with Dr. Alen. The thought of his mentor, friend, philosopher and guide was leaving the place the next day made him really unhappy.

He went to the dispensary. Dr.Alen was packing up his things in a knapsack. He smiled at Ajith and said, “Thank you for organizing such a nice farewell party.”

“I couldn’t say half of what I wanted to say. Come on! Be prepared for the real speech.”

“You don’t have to say anything. I can read your mind. Here is my email address. Contact me whenever you want. You will surely get a reply from me.”

“Once you are gone, to whom shall I go to for consultation and solutions?”

“Ajith, nobody can solve your problems. Only you can do it. The more complex your problems, the more intense would be your ability to tackle them.”

“My problems have reached their culmination, and are going to stunt my growth. I will not be able to study further. My father has already agreed to Mr.Robin to send me as his cook. If I had the money and proper surroundings, I would have written the medical entrance examination. After the interaction with you, I want to become a doctor.”

“Very good, if you have a dream goal, and if your mind is set on reaching it and if you pray hard to reach that goal, you will surely reach there. This is my experience.”

"Now all the odds are against me and I am losing even the slightest bit of hope that I have. It was by dint of sheer will power that I finished my college studies. Though my exams are over I feel that they are beginning now."

"From all that I could gather from you, only expert counselling can solve the problems at your home. There is no element of love in the marital relationship of your parents. Your father must be liberated from alcoholism. He needs medical treatment as well as proper follow up. I wish I had more time in India to pull your family out of this muddle."

"It is my mother who suffers, either way. If only I was old enough to earn money to look after her I would have taken her away from this wretched estate and my father."

"No, it is not the solution. You should never split up the family. The family gives us the inner strength to live and survive in this mad, mad world. What you should do is to mend the relationship between your parents, act as a catalyst and reunite them. It involves many factors, including finance, counselling for them individually and later more sessions together".

"I am thinking of leaving this place, sort of running away. I don't want to work for Mr.Robin. When you go, I too will leave this place to come back later, to give a better life for my parents. Now I can't interfere in their affairs. The only thing I can do is to get away from the scene and wait for time to heal the wounds."

"That would be cowardice. But in your case, it is the best thing for the moment. We don't know what destiny has in store for us. You are plunging into uncertainty and with the money I gave, you could anchor yourself somewhere. Take care of yourself. Don't do anything bad and do all the possible good that you can. Move with a purpose and be sure to reach there, sooner or later."

"Even if I have to starve I will not do anything evil. I will always remember the great values that you taught me. I will make my life an experiment with those ideals."

"Though our goals are different, you pray hard like me. It is a great power. Here are a few gifts from me that can be useful to you on your journey. This is an air mattress, a back pack and a pair of jeans. These are my parting gifts for you, Ajith. I've to do my packing up. I leave tomorrow at five o'clock in the morning. Mr. Robin will drop me in town in his jeep. My flight is at ten thirty."

"Doctor, I do not know how to thank you or even say good bye. You are always there in the corner of my heart as a role model to live up to. I am taking a plunge into uncertainty. I do not know what my future will be. I am leaving you with a heavy heart, good bye."

Ajith looked at the doctor once more and not able to control and contain himself, he walked away briskly. He was about to burst out weeping and went home straight.

## 4

"Open the door, you slut." Ajith heard someone shouting in his sleep. He opened his eyes and sat up on his cot. It was his father. He was drunk for sure. The time was past midnight.

Ajith was tense. It was going to be a bad scene. His father kicked at the front door and it rattled. He went and opened the door before it caved in.

Staggering, Vasu got into the house. He yelled, "Where is your mother. I am going to teach her a few lessons."

Ajith did not say anything. He could smell the stench of alcohol. His mother was sleeping peacefully, unaware of what was happening.

He told his father, "Please don't wake her up." Vasu snarled: "Shut up and don't interfere. She is my wife and I am going to teach her what her husband really is."

Vasu went to the bed, grabbed a handful of his wife's long hair and pulled her down from the cot. With pleading eyes she looked at him and said, "Please don't beat me."

Ajith spoke for the first time. "Mother, please bear all this for some more time. When I am big enough, I won't let you work in the estate."

Vasu retorted, "When are you going to be big enough? Even last week the superintendent asked me to send you to work in his bungalow. Gradually you can even become a tapper like me. Now that your exams are over, you should start working tomorrow itself."

Ajith replied, "I want to continue my studies and become a doctor."

"Shut up, you fool. Tapper Vasu's son becoming a doctor! A good joke! My father was the tapper here at the estate during the time of the British, I followed his footsteps and my son also will become a tapper like myself."

Ajith felt a nerve snap in his brain and even cursed himself for being born into the progeny of labourers. He realized that to reach his goal was a difficult task, with no money, bad heredity and a broken family.

He was shaken out of his stupor, when his father said, "The tadpole in the muddy pond, wants to fly over the mountains!"

It was a challenge thrown at Ajith; the drunken metaphor blurted out by his father. He resolved in his mind upon a new plan.

His father went on droning. "I will not spend a single buck to teach you further. Just because you went to the college and sat there you got a feeling that your parents are not fit enough to be your parents. I will not tolerate that. Your father is tapper Vasu. You can consider yourself lucky if you can become another tapper like me."

He went on speaking in a monotone and went to sleep, still muttering. Ajith sat up in his bed and resolved on something that was a leap into uncertainty but he had no other course than that. He could not sleep. He lay down and worked out a course of action for his future. Everything was uncertain and he tried to forge a path through uncertainty. He reckoned that he would try to study further and become a good doctor like Dr. Alen.

Soon he was in the realm of dreams, as he lay restless in bed. He was a doctor with a stethoscope on his shoulder and a smile on his lips, examining patients and consoling them. He patted an old man on the back and assured him that he would be all right. The smile on his sleeping face vanished and he woke up with a start as he heard a jeep being started, its horn blowing and then sped away past his house.

It was five fifty five a.m. in the morning. Dr. Alen was given a lift to the airport. Ajith shook off sleep from his eyes, gently got up and packed his few things in the knapsack. He carefully wrapped the twenty thousand rupee notes in a plastic paper and pushed it into his shoes. Once the lace was tied no pick- pockets or thieves could lay their hands on the money, the safest place to keep anything intact.

He looked around the room in dim light. His younger brother was sleeping, oblivious of all that was happening. His father was snoring and his mother was sleeping, her eyes closed and face tranquil. He looked at the dim bulb, spreading light on the picture of goddess Saraswathy, his favourite deity, prayed to her in all earnestness to bless him and give him a chance to study further. Then he moved to the side of his mother, touched her feet with his two hands and put it on his forehead and looked at her once more. With tears gushing out from his eyes, he opened the front door and walked out into freedom, plunging into uncertainty, all by himself, but with a definite purpose and determination to reach his dream goal.

Ajith heard the distant horn of a bus. He walked briskly through the dew-covered leaves of cover crop in the rubber plantation and reached a hamlet. As the bus reached the town he stretched out his hand. It groaned to a halt. He got in and sat near the window.

The bus passed along winding roads, silhouette of rubber and coconut trees went past them. It stopped once in a while and some passengers got in. Soon it was broad daylight and as the bus stopped, a youngster of his age got in. Ajith looked at him and as he approached his seat, signalled him with his eyes to sit down next to him.

That boy sat down in the next seat and Ajith sized him up. He was wearing a simple, but neat dress. He gazed out past Ajith through the window and Ajith thought of talking to him. He had heard one of his professors once remarking that all the great people went out to meet and talk to strangers and to make new friends by becoming interested in other people. Ajith looked at him and asked him, "Where are you going?"

"Vadakara", was his reply and he kept his gaze away from Ajith as if uninterested in a conversation. Ajith did not want to leave him like that and went on speaking, showing more interest in him.

"I am Ajith; may I know your name?" "Gopi," he said.

"Are you a student?" asked Ajith.

"Yes and no," he replied. "I am not a college student, but a music student."

Ajith told him that he too was a student, and wanted to study further, but had no means.

For the first time Gopi looked up and assessed him and asked him, "Why are you not studying further?"

Ajith told him "I am running away from home. If I stay there I will end up as a labourer in an estate. I am on the lookout for some job to start with, earn some money and then proceed with my studies. I would like to become a doctor."

But I am also on the same boat like you. I am trying to learn music. I have no steady job, but see how I am going to raise the money for my studies, when we reach Vadakara."

Soon they were climbing the hill to the bus stand at Vadakara. All the people were disembarking from the bus and Ajith followed his new found friend at a distance.

There were lots of people in the bus stand, moving helter-skelter and Ajith watched Gopi, sing a classical song while going up and down the scale. Nobody seemed to

care except for a bald headed old man who was swaying his head and drumming his fingers on his thighs.

Ajith was astonished at the clarity of his diction and the resonant voice. Gopi stopped abruptly, looked at every face and said,

"I am a poor music student and I was singing for you my last night's lesson. It seems that you don't like it. Here is the latest hit song from Yesudas."

Then he started singing a film song, not at all imitating the famous popular singer, the biggest blessing to the music world, the greatest Keralite singer and a living legend, in an attractive way. People gave him attention and some modern looking college students thronged around him and he went on singing fully immersed in the song. As he came to the last verse, some people even clapped to the end.

He said, "I request you to help me continue my studies by your generous contributions."

People started giving him money, some small coins and others some rupee notes. He collected the money, nodding his head in gratitude.

The bald headed old man gave him hundred rupees and told him, "This is an encouragement for pursuing your studies. You have a good voice, correct diction and rhythm. Practice constantly. One day, you will be a great singer."

"Thank you, very much. Your goodwill alone was encouraging. I will sing any song you want."

"In this hustle and bustle, the bus stand is no place to enjoy a song. Here's my card. Come home one evening. We will have dinner and listen to some of your songs. My wife would like that very much."

"I will surely come and sing. I will phone and let you know when I am coming."

"That is a good lad. Good bye. Take care."

"Very kind of you sir, thank you so much. Bye!"

As the man left Gopi, Ajith materialized in front of him and said, "Your songs are good and this is a superb way of raising money."

"Well, you did not go away. Did you see the encouragement that man gave me? It is people like him that motivate me to keep going."

"I have nowhere to go and am in no hurry. I'd love to spend some more time with you and enjoy your company."

"In that case please come with me to Santhigram in the hills. I am going to play music for a special meditation course there. The Swami there is a very helpful man and he will be able to fix something for you. Come let's go and eat something. Then we will take the bus to the Ashram."

## 5

They were travelling along the road cut by the side of a mountain and Ajith could see the hills and valleys down the road through the window of the bus. The place was fascinating with mountains of black rock, arid and protruding into nothingness.

As the bus slowly climbed up rounding the hairpin bends, Gopi woke up from his stupor. Ajith was interested in knowing more about his background and got him into conversation very tactfully.

"Gopi, who all are there at your home?"

"My mother and me," Gopi replied. Then he went on "My father was once a popular singer. He went to sing in temples and church festivals as well as dramas. My mother was from a rich family and she fell in love with my father and his singing and ran away with him. None of her people liked that and when my father died ten years ago of tuberculosis, she had nowhere to go for support. In those days my father was singing without the sound systems like that of today and soon he got infected by tuberculosis".

"What happened to you after your father's death?" Ajith asked him.

“My mother was too proud to seek help from her brothers who had not cared for her all those years after her eloping. She went to work in the neighbouring houses to support me”.

“How did you start singing?” Ajith asked him.

“My father used to teach me ragas when I was a small boy. I used to sing with him when he did his sadhakam, the clearing of voice that singers do in the morning. Just before his death he called me to his bed and taught me a song, which he had composed and set to music. It was a love song he sang when his love was fulfilled and was able to marry my mother. I can still remember the scene, his head in my mother’s lap, his voice as sweet as ever, though a little weak as he sang and made me sing after him. There were tears in my mother’s eyes, and my father could not complete that song. He coughed his last breath and died. That was the last song my father ever sang.”

“I remembered that song as I grew up, sang it for the youth festival and got the first prize. One of the judges, a famous musician asked me to see him after the competition. He asked me, who had taught me the song I sang and when he heard that it was my father, he embraced me and told me that it was my father who was the inspiration for him to become a famous singer.”

“He asked me more about myself and when he heard my plight, he volunteered to teach me singing in the evenings. During the day I sing in the bus stands and once in a while for some stage programmes. I feel sleepy now. It will take another half an hour before we reach our destination.”

Gopi went off to sleep and suddenly Ajith woke up into the reality, the apprehension about the future and what and where he was heading. There was a gnawing fear in his stomach and a shivering in his spine at the stark reality that he had no place to go and no one to look after him. He prayed that he be given some solace and looked forward to some opening or breakthrough at the Ashram, where they were heading.

The bus came to a halt, panting and coughing up smoke after its steep climb. There unfolded altogether another scenario where there were egg-shaped hills laced with carpets of green grass. They had reached their destination, Vagamon.

Gopi got up and took his small bag and signalled Ajith to follow him. They took a small deviation from the main road and walked through a narrow road, on the side of the egg shaped hills and then suddenly Ajith stopped for a moment seeing a signboard by the side of the road.

"Welcome to Shanthigram." Ajith was afraid, and the fear about the uncertainty started to torment him and there was a gnawing pain in his heart. Cautiously he asked Gopi about the where-about of the place they were heading for.

Gopi told him. "We are going to an Ashram. Though the Ashram is on Hindu traditions, today Fr. Joe is giving a demonstration on Positive Mental Attitude meditation. I play the music while he helps other people meditate. He is a holy priest with a doctorate in counselling and clinical psychology. I will introduce you to him; he might be able to help you."

They reached the gate of the Ashram. There were no doors there to open or close. The cobbled road led them to the garden, budding with flowers in different colours.

Gopi knocked at a door. A bearded man clad in saffron clothes and a smile on his lips, opened the door. Gopi said, "Vanakkam," with hands in the traditional greeting posture to the man who opened the door and they were ushered to a room. Gopi told him, "I am Gopi. I have come to play the key board for tonight's meditation of Fr. Joe. This is Ajith. Kindly let him stay with me. We would like to meet Anandji. Please find out a convenient time for us to meet him." He put them in the parlour.

Soon a tall, well-built man walked into the room. Gopi got up, shook hands with him and said, "Nice meeting you, father, once again. By the way, this is Ajith. Please give him some of your time and he will tell you his problems."

"Did you practise the chords and bits for tonight's meditation? I fully count on you to play the right rhythm at the right time. Ajith, I will see you later, may be after dinner. Bye for now."

## 6

There was a knock on their door and a monk entered. He announced, "I have a message from Anandji. He will meet you after ten minutes. His room is the last one on this row."

"Thank you, we will wait there," said Gopi.

Ajith said, "I think I should tell him of my plight and ask his help or at least get his guidance."

Gopi said, "Let me introduce you to him and then you do the talking."

They got out of the parlour and went to the last room. They waited there for some time and then knocked.

"Come in," a resonant voice was heard and they opened the door and walked in.

"Om Santhi, my good friend Gopi. Who is this with you?" Anandji asked.

"This is Ajith, stuck in the same boat like me. The only difference is that he is aspiring to become a doctor while I am trying to be a musician".

"Ajith, tell me more about yourself," Anandji said.

"Swamy, my house is at Kuttiady. I have run away from home. I've just finished my Pre-degree course this year. I would like to go for medicine, but my future is so uncertain, I do not know what will happen to me as I have no place to go to and no one to help me. I am on the lookout for a job at present."

"Life is so intricate. The Gita teaches us to do your dharma and forget about the outcome. I am doing just that, as the head of this Ashram. This is my advice to both of you. We don't know what life has in store for us."

“Swamy, you have helped me so much in my life. All I request you is to help Ajith also, as his too is a genuine case of lack of encouragement and opportunity.”

“Let me remember, I have got something to suit your need. There is an old friend in Pala, Mathaichan who wants somebody like you to help him and accompany him during his travel schedule. Before his death he wants to visit a place in Maldives. The job should suit you. He is an affectionate old man, sporty and naughty in his old age. I will give a letter of introduction to him. You meet him and he will help you. So Gopi, how are your studies? I have just written a song in Sanskrit. Could you set it to music and sing it in the Satsang next week here?” Anandji asked.

“Let me have a look. The lyrics may be difficult to set to tune as it is in Sanskrit. I will give it a try. Shall I tune it on the lines of a gazal?”

“Go ahead; give a try. I leave it entirely to your sense of rhythm. Meanwhile, I have an appointment with an American lady whom I’m teaching meditation.”

“Would you teach me also to meditate?” Ajith asked. “I hear that it will help us to control the mind.”

“What you have heard is right. By practising meditation you can get para-psychic abilities and attain real happiness. But it cannot be learned in a day. Do one thing. You can stay along while I am teaching her.”

There was a knock at the door. Anandji said, “Talk about the devil and there he is. It must be her. Come in.” he called out loudly.

A lady in a loose fitting garb entered. She came and greeted Anandji and he introduced Gopi and Ajith to her.

He said, “While teaching you I’d like these young men also to listen. Sit down straight and close your eyes. Breathe slowly in and out. Try to say “Om” in your mind. Repeat that in your mind on and on, controlling your other thoughts. I will touch your forehead, on a spot that is a nerve centre where you should concentrate.”

They sat there with their eyes closed and Anandji moved to each one of them touching and activating the nerve centre on their foreheads. He said, "Five minutes in the beginning would be sufficient. Gradually you increase the time and you can meditate for half an hour to one hour. Concentrate on the spot that I have activated and try to meditate every day."

Gopi asked, "What are the advantages of meditation?"

Anandji said, "When you meditate, you are attuned to the cosmic mind and you will get ideas and thoughts out of that source. An added advantage is that you will get peace of mind, tranquillity and happiness."

The lady opened her mouth for the first time and said, "I am a Christian. So shall I think about Jesus? I know a short prayer called the 'Jesus prayer' that could be used for meditation".

Anandji said, "Tell me, what Jesus prayer is?"

"It is to repeat in the mind, over and over, "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner". If we repeat this, it will bring solace and spiritual ecstasy."

"Okay. Go ahead, and say that prayer during the meditation, if that gives you inner joy, once you have mastered the technique. Now to conclude the session I advocate you to practise Yoga and to stick to vegetarian food, especially uncooked. That will keep your mind and body healthy. I had been a naturopath for the last fifteen years. I eat a lot of fruits, raw carrots and don't drink tea or coffee. I have never tasted alcohol or tobacco. That is the reason for my perfect health, though I am eighty. Let us call it a day. I have to do my yoga. Ajith, come and collect the letter to Mathaichan later, before you go."

## 7

Ajith was sitting on a rock, enjoying the beauty of the place and came out of the trance when Gopi waved his palm and then snapped his fingers in front of his face. Gopi pointed out to a pool on the side of the mountain. There was no river there but

a dam for collecting rainwater. When they reached the pond they saw water lilies in full bloom, a real magnificent sight.

There was a frog in a yellow and green suit squatting on a floating leaf in the water, invoking rain through its croaking. It had a lot of flesh on its thighs. It looked at them and almost pleaded them to take it away, so that it could see the wide world outside. Suddenly a kite hovered over and went sweeping into the pond and the frog was in its grip and up they went, the frog squealing and squeaking in horror.

There were lot of fish, but nobody seemed to catch them, as those fish were not good for eating. Some of the barren heads of hills were now converted into grasslands, where cows were grazing. They were big cows with equally big udders, and though they looked fierce, they were as meek as lambs.

Gopi was busy flying a kite and it floated into eternity but it came back like a boomerang and it was quite a tough job disentangling its strings from the shrubs and bushes.

“Hey Ajith,” Gopi said, “I will talk to Fr. Joe about the plight you are in. He might be able to help you; at least, he could put you on to the right track. Why I associate with such people is that, they are the wisest of the society and their service is free. No need of booking their time, paying fat amounts for their consultation and eating and drinking all the medicine they prescribe. Fr. Joe does not prescribe medicine and make you a pill-addict and kill your creativity. He listens to your problem, analyses it and then makes you understand the situation you are in, in a realistic and open-minded manner. Then it is up to you to get control of your mind and a grip of the situation.”

“Thank you for your kind and concerned attitude. It is a great relief that there are such people doing good things, at their own cost, trying to help others, lessening their burden of worries and scars of trauma they carry in their minds.”

Gopi said, “Let us go for tea and later to the evening prayer. You might find it amusing, so many people of different faiths praying under a single roof. Our

meditation programme is at 7 O'clock. You should also try it. It would do you immense good".

"How is it done?"

"It is a synchronization of music and suggestive words that will touch the core of the subconscious mind and do many wonders there. It is intended to give positive suggestions and strokes that change the attitude and outlook of the participants."

"How is the music going to do all that?"

"It is a special kind of composition with psychedelic chords and rhythms that can penetrate into the mind and touch its core. I have done the score, especially for this programme. It is also experimentation with music and the wonders it could do in healing body and mind. I have used the composition of Mozart, Beethoven, Chaurasia and Ravi Sankar. I have put in my own notes also as and when required."

"What is father going to say?"

"He will be giving suggestions for making our mind positive and enriched. I should not reveal the secret of the modus operandi, but I tell you, it is to make the mind attuned to the realm of the subconscious where it will be communicating to the divine beings, especially angels who will affect the mind in such a way as to make it positive."

"Can you give an example how it is to be done?"

"I will play the music, a psychedelic note that will take you to a hypnotic trance and then father will tell you to thank the different angels who are in charge of your protection, like the angel of positive mind to take away all negative inklings from your mind and to make you think only positive thoughts, helpful for your life, controlling the negative suggestions that the devil gives to get you into trouble and keep you depressed."

“Well, I don’t quite get that. But I look forward to the meditation and if it can get me rid of the blues, I will be damn lucky,” said Ajith, and they went back to the Ashram.

## 8

There were about thirty-five people sitting in a rectangle on straight-backed chairs. Fr. Joe was standing on one side of the table and Gopi was playing some music on an electronic key board. Ajith sat near Gopi.

Fr. Joe spoke, “Good evening friends. This is the last item on your one-week self-building programme. What you are going to undergo in the next one hour is called praise and worship meditation. For the well-being of our life, we should have a healthy mental attitude and let us see how we can acquire that through praise and worship.”

He turned to Gopi, “My young friend Gopi will be playing some music and you look at my hands and listen to what I say. I am taking you to a trip to the realm of what heavenly bliss is like. Sit erect, bring your right hand up and close your nose with the thumb and index finger. Breath in closing one nostril and breath through the other nostril half closed, hold the breath for some time and breathe it out through the other nostril, doing Pranayama. Listen to the music and as the notes go on ascending, breath in, hold the air when the sound is steady, release the air slowly through the other nostril as the notes come descending.”

Everybody was busy breathing in and out and Ajith also tried it and Fr. Joe said, “Come on everybody, close your eyes. Don’t open them until I tell you.”

Gopi played the music in a descending rhythm with slow beats and Ajith could distinguish the sound of many other instruments. There was great music and serenity prevailed.

Suddenly the music stopped and everyone opened their eyes. They all saw the smiling face of Fr. Joe. He said, "You were not supposed to open your eyes yet. Your inner mind had been hearing what I was saying. Now, to conclude we are going to thank God Almighty for his guardian angels according to our Christian belief, controlling our mind and thought, the angel of riches for making us feel rich and having sufficient money for our needs. The angel of health for making us feel healthy to do all our daily deeds; the angel of peace of mind for removing all fears and worries from our mind, the angel of hope for fulfilling all our needs and the promise to fulfil them in future; the angel of faith for making us do only what is good for our lives and preventing us from doing harmful deeds for our growth; the angel of love for filling our mind with love so that we can love all, including ourselves; the angel of romance, for making us romantic and playful to relax; the angel of wisdom, for making us realize all that is good and worthwhile to pursue in our lives."

He pulled out some picture cards and asked Ajith to distribute it among them. When the circulation was over, he said, "Look at your card. Before you go to sleep, repeat the prayer to thank God, let it be Hari Om, Abba or Jehovah and suppose there are angels as well as devils around, when you thank God for these angels your mind will be attuned to be positive and you will get a proper sleep. By the way, wake up that fat fellow near you and tell him to go to sleep on his bed. Thanks a lot for letting your minds to travel into the realm of positive outlook. On your behalf I thank Gopi who played the music. Bye, for now."

Ajith and Gopi went for supper and they had to sit down cross-legged on the ground, and they were served rice and curries on a banana leaf. Nobody was talking. Somebody was reading from a book. Ajith could not make out much from the reading.

After dinner they followed Fr. Joe. He went out into the moonlit night near a grove of Eucalyptus trees. They sat on seats curved on pieces of rock lying scattered as God created them.

Ajith broke the silence, "Thank you father. After the meditation I feel much better and the gnawing in my heart has disappeared. I would love to hear your other talks, if it could give a new meaning to my life."

"Why don't you come to Lower Periyar? I am giving the same course at a place called 'Paradise' on the same date next month. It is the same talk except for the last session. Ajith, after having heard your story and knowing your goal I think I could help you. Be there on this same day next month. By the way Gopi, a real big thanks to you. How could you manage to play the pieces from Mozart, Yehudi Menuhin, Ravi Shankar and Chaurasya all mixed on your key board? Even I got distracted some times during my talk. The music you played was soul stirring. Good night boys, I got to go to say my prayers."

When Fr. Joe left, Gopi told him, "Ajith you should go to that place in Lower Periyar. I know those people. They are father's great friends. They will be able to find something for you. By the way, I will talk to Anandji also. He can help you for this one month, while you are waiting. Now let's go to sleep."

They slept on a mat spread in the hall and had a thorough sleep.

Next morning they were about to leave the place. Gopi lead Ajith to Anandji to bid farewell. Anandji got up, took the right hand of Ajith in his hand, stamped strongly on his left toe and told him, pushing him away from him, "Love God and love men, God be with you" and Ajith felt some power flowing into him through that blessing. Gopi also got the same blessing but the advice he got was "Do your duty and forget about the outcome."

Anandji turned to Ajith and told him, "Gopi told me about your crisis. Sixty five years ago Swami Theerthananda took me from the street and taught me all the great epics, Upanishads, Vedas, Vedanta and I am now the head of this Ashram. One of my old friends Mathaichan from Pala is going to Maldives on a pilgrimage. If you can accompany him, it would be a chance for you to get more exposure and an opening for your life. Here is his address and a letter for him. After reaching Pala, ask for his house. Give him this letter and he will take care of you for the time being."

Parting was a painful experience. Both Ajith and Gopi had become thick friends, people on the same boat and of a similar plight. They agreed to keep in touch with each other and to meet again as, a famous musician and a great doctor. Ajith got into a local bus while Gopi boarded the long distance fast passenger bus. They left in the opposite direction heading for their different destinies.

The bus was crammed and Ajith could just cling on to the footboard. Suddenly he felt a hand holding him strongly and helping him to get in the bus. He looked at the kind face beaming at him with a smile. Ajith spied the stranger with the corner of his eyes and perceived that the man was in his late middle age wearing a dhoty and juba. There was a black book that he held close to his chest. He did not speak a word; his eyes were highly loquacious and inquisitive.

Ajith relaxed his legs on the foot-board of the bus and said, "Thank you sir."

"Where are you going?" he enquired.

Ajith said, "I am going to Pala. The last bus to Pala will soon go. I don't have a place to stay for the night."

The stranger said, "I am Pastor Sam. You can stay in my humble home for tonight or you can take a late night bus, you will reach Pala early morning."

Ajith replied, "You are very kind. I will come with you."

"I am on my way home. Please do come along."

They started walking through the coconut groves by the side of a rivulet. The paddy fields were glittering in the golden rays of the evening sun and the gentle breeze winnowing over it. A hunch-backed old woman with a stick supporting her came in front of them. She smiled at the pastor with toothless gums. He greeted her with a smile and said,

"Mariachedathy, where is Ousephchettan? Is he okay?"

She said, "Pastor, please come home and speak to my husband. He is paralyzed, and repents for what he did. If only you forgive him he can die in peace. There is a fasting prayer at home tonight. Please come and lead the prayer."

"O.K., I will come, visit him and be there for the prayer meeting. I forgave him twenty years ago. Bye for now. God bless!"

The old lady moved out, stooping forward, and Ajith asked the Pastor what it was that the women spoke to him. The Pastor said,

"It was twenty years ago. She and her husband Ousephchettan used to quarrel often. He used to desert her and the children and go away for short periods. All the money he earned from daily labour was spent on liquor. When he was away, one of their children became seriously ill and was about to die. Hearing that, I went there and took the child to the hospital. I sat by the side of the sick child and finally when the fever subsided and the child was able to sleep, I thought I would go home and have a little nap. It was quite dark, and on the way a blow was struck at me on my head and I fell down. More and more blows were struck on my body. As the aggressor spurned me away with his foot, there was a flash of lightning and in that light I saw Ousephchettan with his protruding mustache and the towel tied around his head. There was the stench of alcohol in the air and I fainted. In the morning people found me beaten up, bleeding and lying on the road. I was in the hospital for a fortnight. We will visit the same person tonight."

By the time they finished talking they reached a thatched hut with no doors to prevent the intruders from breaking in. As they got inside Ajith realized that no doors were needed for the house, as there was nothing to be stolen away from there.

The pastor went to take a bath in a pond nearby. Ajith also washed his hands, face and legs. They came home and the pastor scanned his Bible to prepare a message for the prayer meeting to be held soon.

The pastor and Ajith entered the small hut, which was full of people who were squatting on the ground. In one corner lay Ousephchettan straight on the only cot. His body was paralyzed and only his head was moving. He looked at the pastor with sparks flashing from his eyes and tears gushing out. The pastor went close to his bed, took his palms in his hands and looked straight into his crying eyes. Pastor smiled benignly and a smile blossomed on the sick man's lips.

Ousephchettan said, "I am sorry; please forgive me."

"There is nothing to be forgiven. I thank you for hospitalizing me with your blows. It was the turning point in my life. I read the bible that a nurse gave me, fully, while in the hospital and that made me what I am now. You ask forgiveness to God and repent for your sins," said the pastor.

"I am sorry pastor, but it does not do any good to feel sorry after doing all the atrocities that I did. I repent now. Please pray for this sinner if you forgive me," Ousephchettan said.

"I have already forgiven you and I have nothing against you. Brothers and sisters, I am now going to pray for our brother here. You keep praising God for his repentance, and making him a child of God. Let us start."

Everybody in the room closed their eyes except Ajith and he was watching what others were doing. They were all muttering some prayers in some unintelligible language and tone. Ajith also shut his eyes, tried to pray without knowing what to pray and how to pray.

Suddenly there was a convulsion in the body of Ousephchettan and the pastor spoke something into his ear. He started repeating it and the prayerful atmosphere became electrified. The pastor started to pray loudly.

"Almighty and ever-loving God, please look at this brother who is trying to reach out to you, repenting for his past sins. Forgive him and take no grudge on his past failings and please take care of him in his struggle of life and death and let all that is evil depart from him."

Suddenly Ousephchettan made a loud cry and a spasm convulsed out of his dying body. Children in the room cried out in terror and a cow tied on a coconut tree broke the rope and ran helter-skelter. There was a tornado like whirlwind that shook the trees and plants upside down. The congregation was loud yelling prayers. The face of the patient became calm. The pastor caught on his hand and made him repeat the prayer that he said. He summed up saying,

“Into your hands O’ Lord I surrender this life. Take care and honour it. Amen.”  
There was a smile on his face as he passed away.

## 11

Ajith left the pastor after supper with him, as there was a long distance night bus to Pala from there. All the passengers were sleeping and the area that the bus travelled was under the spell of darkness. Only the headlight of the bus pierced through the mountains and valleys. Ajith was dozing. When the bus stopped all of a sudden, he opened his eyes and found to his astonishment the driver’s head stooping down in sleep. Suddenly he grasped the extent of the danger they were in. He went near the driver and caught on his shoulder and shook him. The driver woke up with a start and looked at Ajith with guilt.

He said, “I fell asleep. I haven’t slept for the past two nights, as this is my return trip. Would you keep talking to me so that I won’t sleep again?” Ajith started talking to him about everything under the sky to keep him awake and told him a story that one of his professors said in the class. It was about the Indian minister who visited America. He was supposed to make a speech at a dinner party, given in his honour and they requested him not to speak for more than half an hour.

He could not speak like that and if he got the mike he would go on speaking for three to four hours. They knew his bad old ways and so they asked him to limit the speech. He asked his secretary to make a speech for half an hour and she typed and gave it to him.

The party started and the minister started speaking. To his dismay his speech got over only after two and a half hours. He found the audience sleeping and yawning. He got furious and asked the secretary for an explanation. She said that she made a half an hour speech all right but kept the five copies that she typed.

Ajith finished the story in its climax and the driver chuckled loudly and went on laughing. By that time they reached Pala. Ajith bid farewell to the driver and got down there.

It was dawn. Ajith walked along the lonely road and reached a tall shrine. There was a statue on the top of the shrine, stretching out its hands as if it was blessing the whole land. Ajith asked the direction to a man and reached the house of Mathaichan.

He rang the calling bell and a slim and beautiful girl in her teens opened the door. Ajith was taken aback by her beauty and they stood, eyes hooked. He felt a vibration starting around his knees and spreading all over his body. There was a twinkle in her eyes, as she looked at him intently and inquisitively.

Ajith unearthed the letter of introduction from the hold-all and gave it to her. She read the address, asked him to wait for a minute and went inside. He waited outside with a feeling which he had never felt before and found his pulse rate increasing.

An old man clad in a dhothy and juba came to the door and said to him, "So you are Ajith, please come in. Tell me more about yourself."

The inside of the house was very attractively decorated. They were in a big hall and all the rooms around opened to it. There was an enormous table in the middle of the hall with lines drawn and a net tied in the middle. Ajith saw a fat, but not ugly woman through the kitchen door, doing some cooking. She looked at Ajith, a look quite piercing and sizing him up.

Mathaichan ushered Ajith into a side room and he stretched out on an armchair. He said to Ajith, "Now young man, tell me all about yourself." Ajith narrated his plight

and the desire of his life to become a doctor. Mathaichan said, "Be realistic. Someone in your condition could no way become a doctor unless some miracle takes place. But if there is a will there is a way. It all depends on how strong your will power is."

"I am willing to work hard to any extent and would do anything honest to reach my goal," Ajith said.

"What work can you do?"

"Anything, beggars cannot be choosers," Ajith said.

"I got a job for you. It is to keep me company while I go visiting some places. If you can keep me company during these trips I will take care of your future studies."

"Okay, I am ready. I would like to know more specifically what it is like."

"I want to visit my daughters and a place in Maldives before I go from this world. I am quite old, I had all that I wanted and this is my last wish. You tell me about your decision later. Now take a bath and change your dress. You can use this room adjoining to mine. Make yourself comfortable here."

Ajith went into the room to change his dress. After a shower he changed into clean dress, combed his hair and felt fresh. He got out of the room and went in to the hall. Mathaichan and the girl he saw earlier were sitting at the dining table. He had a good look at the people. The old man had grey hair that seemed to create a halo of greatness around him. His eyes were smiling though his mouth did not twitch into a smile. It was a pleasing sight to look at his kind and venerable face. The girl was so beautiful with big twinkling eyes, sharp nose and pearl like teeth breaking through ruby lips when she smiled.

Mathaichan motioned Ajith to take a seat. A middle-aged plump woman wearing white mundu and chatta, the dress of Syrian Christian ladies came in bearing a tray full of white cylinder like puttu and green Robusta plantains. Soon Varkichan, her husband and Mathaichan's son came in and sat down. He was a big business

executive and looked like one. His clean-shaven face, crew-cut hair and oval glasses gave him an impressive look.

Mathaichan said, "This is Ajith. He is sent to keep me company by an old friend. I have let him stay in the room adjoining my room. Ajith, please feel at home and join us for breakfast."

Varkichan asked Ajith, "Where do you come from?"

Ajith said, "Kuttiady."

"At your age you should be studying rather than keeping an old man company." Varkichan said.

Mathaichan interfered, "He wants to become a doctor, but doesn't have the means. I promised him that I will take care of his studies if he takes care of my trips, especially when I go to the Maldives".

"If so, let him apply for his passport. Ajith, you should also write the medical entrance examination," Varkichan said.

His wife Kuttiamma looked at him fiercely as if she had disapproved of the idea and changed her look when Ajith turned to her. He knew by instinct that he had an enemy in her as long as he associated with that family.

Mathaichan said, "We are going to church. I prefer walking than your dropping us by car. Ajith and I will walk."

Soon they finished their breakfast. Mathaichan and Ajith set out in the direction of the church. Everyone on the way smiled at Mathaichan and he asked everybody about their well-being. Ajith wondered how he could remember everybody's names and details. Ajith appreciated Mathaichan for that matter.

"If you are interested in people, naturally they will like you and show interest in you. The only way to win friends is to show interest in others. If you take pain and

effort, you can remember the names of people. Associate their faces with their names and connect the new name to some old acquaintance.”

They reached the Cathedral church, which was so elegant and majestic. Ajith went inside with Mathaichan. He didn't have much idea as to what to do, and did all that Mathaichan did. He liked the singing and the sermon. They walked back home chatting, Mathaichan talking about his daughters and grandchildren.

## 12

Ajith was very tired and he went to sleep straight away. When he woke up he heard the noise of Mathaichan and Manju playing table tennis. He got up and joined them. Manju looked elegant in her three fourths and top, and she was very agile in her movements. She smashed a ball and Mathaichan couldn't return the ball and Manju won the game. Mathaichan said to Ajith,

“Do you want to learn this game? It is the best indoor game one can play and easy to learn. I am tired. Manju, teach him how to play.”

Mathaichan handed over the racket to Ajith and said, “You should hold the racket like this and serve. Hit the ball in your court, and it should bounce over the net to the other court. Then she will return the ball over the net and you should hit it back to her court. You can play well only with some practice.”

Ajith hit the ball and it bounced off. Manju giggled and took the ball and served it back. Ajith tried to return the ball and Manju shot back. Gradually he gained control of the ball and they played on.

There was a twinkle in her eyes as they went on playing. Manju taught him how to chop the ball and to smash it. Ajith felt fascinated by her looks and smashed a ball that went off the table. Manju said, “You have improved a lot. Let us stop the game. It is not very interesting to play with a novice.”

Kuttamma came into the room, saw both of them playing and gave a fierce look at them as if she did not approve of it. Mathaichan got the hint and took them out into the garden and they started to chat.

There was a soft breeze rustling the leaves and the smell emanating from the petals of the jasmine was fascinating. Manju said,

“Grandpa, tell us a story about your adventures.”

Mathaichan narrated a story from his past adventure as a sailor and how he reached Maldives. He was all thrilled about describing how he begot his son in an island in Maldives, and how much he cherished visiting that place again.

That evening Mathaichan packed up his suitcase. There was a box full of toys for his grandchildren. He told Ajith, “We are visiting my daughter at Calicut as the first leg of our trip. You can also visit your home while we are there.”

“That is a great idea. The only thing I am afraid is to meet my father. He will be cross with me.”

“Forget about him. I will give you a bottle of whiskey to give your father, he will like it. Take this money and buy some clothes for your mother and brother.”

“I appreciate the goodwill behind that. But no thanks; I don’t want to take the drink home. Drinking will make my father a brute.”

“To motivate people, you will have to give them what they want and my success story is that I remembered that rule always in my life.”

“I want to get him out of drinking and beating up my mother.”

“Then I will teach him a lesson that he will never forget. I will be in my daughter’s house. Send your father there. In the bargain I will make him never drink again.”

“Okay; settled. When do we start our trip?”

“Tomorrow will be a good day.”

Ajith gently knocked at the door of his house. His mother opened the door. There was a big smile on her face and she embraced her son. She started sobbing and Ajith could not control his feelings. They did not speak for some time. Suddenly Anil saw Ajith and came running to him.

For some time Ajith could not speak. He said, "I am working for an old man in Pala. We came for a short trip this side."

Jaya said, "We were worried as to what happened to you. Lucky that you came! Your hall ticket for the Medical entrance examination has come. There is a letter for you from America. It may be from doctor Alen."

"Where is father gone? I have got a very attractive proposal for him. My boss, the old man wants to see him; he promised to give him a treat. Tell him to come to Paradise, Lower Periyar next Sunday."

Jaya did not want her son to go. She told him to have dinner and Anil wouldn't leave his brother. Ajith wanted to quit the place before his father came. He knew there would be a bad scene if he stayed on and confronted his father.

"Good-bye mother. I will keep in touch. You can contact me in Paradise, Lower Periyar. Tell father to come there on Sunday."

Anil would not let his brother go. Ajith had to shake off his hands and tell him, "Be a good boy, study hard and look after your parents. See you; I've to go now."

Ajith rushed through the rubber estate, ignoring everything he loved once, the bungalow on top of the hill and the stream on the slopes. He jumped down the ridge of the road and came across Sindhu.

She was surprised and taken aback. She came running to him and caught on his fingers. She smiled with a rich and resonant peel of laughter. Ajith pulled his hands off, lest someone should see it and start off a gossip in the whole estate.

He tried to smile at her and wanted to get away from her presence. He was afraid of any intimacy with her, as she was an attraction in his mind, with her great beauty and pleasing manners. He kept away because if he fell in love with her that would be the end of all his ambitions. She saw the two letters in his pocket and asked him what they were all about.

He told her, "One is the hall ticket for my medical entrance exam and the other is a letter from Doctor Alen."

"So you are going to become another doctor Alen. I always wanted my husband to be a doctor, because at the time of my delivery he will stand with me and support me."

"Even if I become a doctor I can't stand such a scene, especially with somebody I love. In your case it will be no problem. I will rush to you if you inform me on time."

"There is nothing to be informed. You must be there at any cost."

"How will I know?"

"If you are my husband you should know all that or will you go to America and marry a foreigner?"

"Look at your nasty way of thinking. Mr. Robin would love to hear that. He has an eye on you."

"Yes, yes, don't you remember the farewell party to Dr. Alen? He caught my hand and squeezed as I gave him the memento for Dr. Alen."

"Remember, I took revenge on him by fooling him into looking at the 'animal'. Even if we don't get married, you are like a sister to me, and a good friend. You can count on me for any help."

"Who wants your help, if you don't love me? Did you come across any other girl more beautiful than me?"

"Yes. One, cute girl, she is slim like a rope and not plumb like you, pumpkin. She is brilliant and does her homework on computer and sings like Lathe Mangeshkar. She knows dancing. We play table tennis together. The only thing is that she is the daughter of a multi-millionaire."

"I don't want to hear any more. Let me also try whether I can get someone more handsome than you. Get lost."

"Calm down, our marriages are a long way off. I can't think of marriage for ten years but your people will marry you off in two years, if you go on getting plumb like this, next year itself!"

"I am willing to wait for you any number of years".

"Please don't wait for me and spoil your future. Listen, it is my father coming, I can hear him, that drunken monologue. Run off, if he sees us together he will be angry".

Vasu came in front of them. He saw Ajith talking to Sindhu and fumed like a volcano shouting at Ajith in a drunken monotone.

"So you came back, and what a sight! If you talk to that girl again, I will not let you enter my house. She is so proud that she abused our superintendent. Where were you all these days?"

"Father, I got a job at Pala and I am staying there. My boss wants to meet you and promised to give you a treat next Sunday. It is a small job. I have given the address to Mother".

"Small or big doesn't matter to Vasu. If I get a good drink I will do any job. By the way, are you leaving?"

"Sorry, I have to go. I will wait for you at Lower Periyar." Ajith rushed off stopping the conversation before it reached a bad conclusion.

On the way Ajith stopped and read the letters that his mother gave him. Dr. Alen is getting married to his girlfriend, Sylvia who was a U.N. official. She had been waiting for him to return to get married. Dr. Alen had shown him her photos. She was a very beautiful woman, tall and elegant. She was very fond of Dr. Alen and found his sojourn in India hard to take. That was the reason for the immediate wedding. She would be getting posted in Maldives as a UN delegate and Dr. Alen had applied to the National Hospital, Male' to work there and to be with his wife to enjoy the honeymoon in the famous holiday country. He invited Ajith to the wedding, though he knew that it was impossible. He requested Ajith's prayers on the occasion.

There was another piece of information also in that letter. Dr. Alen had done a case study of Ajith's family problem which he was including in his thesis. Sylvia would be doing the analysis and interpretation of his thesis. Along with their honeymoon they would do that work and after submitting the thesis to his university, Dr. Alen had plans to get it published as a book. He promised to send Ajith a copy.

The doctor requested Ajith to write to him a detailed letter as to his whereabouts and his plans of study. Ajith decided to send him a letter congratulating him on his wedding and his chance to come to Maldives and all the new developments in his life.

## 14

Ajith got on a bus to Vadakara and he was on the watch out for Gopi on the way. As he reached the bus stand Ajith spotted Gopi in the crowd. He got down and ran to him. Gopi smiled and Ajith said, "Hi Gopi, it's been a long time since we met; how are you?"

"Hello Ajith, I used to think about you, lucky that we met each other. How are you getting on? What about your plan to study? I am planning to go to Trivandrum to join the Tharangini Music School run by the great Yesudas. It would be a great training," Gopi said.

“Wish you all the best. I got a job, looking after an old man. He is so sporty and kind. I got the hall ticket for the medical entrance exam today and I too would like to come to Trivandrum Medical College. It is all a mirage and a mid-summer nights’ dream.”

Gopi said, “Try hard, if you move with a purpose you will surely reach there. I have to rush, take care. See you.”

“Bye Gopi! 'All the best.'

He changed buses and by evening reached Mathaichan’s daughter’s house. Mathaichan said, “Lucky that you came now. Tomorrow we will have to go to Lower Periyar. My daughter Ansamma stays there. She and her husband Jose have only one regret, that they don’t have children. Jose is a social activist and a social worker. They have dedicated their lives for the progress and growth of the poor. He is very rich and has built a social centre in his ancestral property. By the way, did you tell your father to come to Lower Periyar day after tomorrow?”

Ajith said, “Yes, I told him. He will come. I got the hall ticket for the entrance examination. There is a letter from my friend Dr.Alen. He is getting married and is coming to Maldives to take up a job in the National Hospital, Male’. His wife is in the UN. She is working in Maldives. They are going to have their honeymoon there.”

“Maldives is the best place for honeymoon. Do you know I had my honeymoon in Maldives? I was a sailor at that time and soon after my wedding I had to go to Male’. I took my wife Maria on board the ship and we reached Maldives. My friends there put us in an uninhabited island there. We stayed there for one week. She conceived my son Varkichan there. I got a feeling that her soul is still lingering there. I want to visit that place once more before I die,” Mathaichan said.

“When I go with you to Maldives, I could visit my friend and his wife,” Ajith added.

“You need a passport to go there. We go there by air and not by ship as in the old days. We shall work it out later.”

"In the meantime, I have to write the entrance exam. Even if I pass it I don't have a chance to do the course. I won't get any money from home," Ajith remarked.

"I have thought out a plan. If you are lucky it will work out. Tomorrow we are going to Lower Periyar. When you reach there be lovable and considerate to my daughter and husband. They are very sorry that they haven't got a son. If they like you I will tell them to adopt you. That would solve all your problems," Mathaichan proposed.

"That is a great idea. I would become their real son, if they want me to. My father does not love me a bit. I don't want to go back to them. I have attachment only to my mother," Ajith said.

"I am going for hunting with my son-in-law. Whenever I come here we go hunting. If you want you can also accompany us. It would be fun."

"I am scared of hunting. But I will give it a try and keep you company."

After sometime they set out. Mathaichan loaded the rifle and strapped a headlight on his head. They reached the forest, and it was very dark. They could see things only by the beam of the light. Mathaichan flashed his headlight on the top of trees. He spotted a flying squirrel. The eyes of the squirrel were ablaze in the light of the torch. Mathaichan took aim with his gun and fired a shot. Suddenly a thud was heard in the undergrowth and Mathaichan shouted to Ajith to catch hold of it.

Ajith flashed the torch and went in the direction from where the sound came. He saw the animal bleeding and shaking with pain. Ajith was afraid to touch it. Mathaichan yelled at him and Ajith caught the animal lest the next shot be fired at him. Ajith flashed the torch and found the animal, caught it and threw it in front of Mathaichan. Mathaichan banged on its head with the butt of the rifle. The animal shuddered and died. Ajith carried it and they reached home. It was very deliciously cooked and they ate it with boiled tapioca. Eating his full, Ajith went to sleep and slept peacefully.

The next day they reached Lower Periyar by jeep. The house was on top of a hill. There was a big hall and the rooms were on its side. There was a film screen and a table tennis table. There was no net and plastic chairs were put round it.

Ansamma and Jose were a perfect couple. To compensate for the lack of children they worked for the betterment of the children, by way of camps, training and life orientation courses. There used to be get-togethers and weeklong camps at Paradise, their house at Lower Periyar.

Ansamma was very happy to have her father at home and she developed a soft corner for Ajith. Ajith tried to be friendly with them as much as he could. Since there were no other guests, Ajith got the most attention.

## 15

The next day Vasu came. Ajith took him to Mathaichan. He had worked it out neatly and asked Vasu to dig a pit near the septic tank of the toilette. He told him to drink as much liquor as he wanted before he started the work and gave Vasu a bottle of rum. Vasu drank half of it and started to dig. Ajith kept away from the scene.

By noon Vasu had dug a big pit. Mathaichan came and asked Vasu to try to finish the bottle. Then he asked Vasu to open the septic tank and empty it by transferring the contents to the pit.

Vasu took another peg from the bottle of rum and his body was all shaking. He opened the septic tank. The whole place was filled with stink. Vasu was oblivious to all that. He had to dig the shit, carry it in a basket and put it into the pit.

When half the work was done Mathaichan turned up with another bottle of rum. Vasu poured one glass and drank it mixing with water. He was shaking when he lifted the spade but he went on digging and carrying the shit till the septic tank was empty. Vasu stopped the work and took a little rest. Mathaichan came and poured him another drink.

Vasu closed the septic tank and started filling the pit he had dug. He finished the work. Mathaichan gave him a bottle of lotion to pour all over the place. The smell of shit was lingering on and mingled with the smell of the lotion had a different odour and Vasu could not hold on any further. He vomited into the mud he had peered up over the pit. He vomited his guts out.

Mathaichan came with the bottle still half-full and asked Vasu whether he would like to have another drink. Vasu said,

"If I drink a little more I will vomit and die. I don't know why I don't like liquor anymore. If it wasn't for the vomiting, I would have emptied the bottle in a gulp."

Mathaichan said, "Come on. See if you can finish the bottle. If you can't, promise me right now that you won't drink again."

"Well, I have no problem. I don't like the booze any longer and I will never, ever drink again. You have my word." Vasu promised.

"Keep this hundred rupee note. Don't ever drink again and make sure you look after your family. You don't have to worry about Ajith. We are trying to give him a new life. Now you are healthy and able bodied to work, look after your family, and leave Ajith to himself. See you then."

Ajith could not hide the smile on his face and he told his father, "I am trying to work and study further. Even if you don't help me, don't be a stumbling block. There are some good people who will help me."

"You go the way you like. Remember I can get you a job in our estate," Vasu said.

"Thank you Father, I will build my life myself. I will come and see you off."

"I will find my way. You don't have to come," Vasu muttered.

"We will walk around and see the place. I love to be here, such scenic beauty! This house is spread on the side of the big hill. A British architect had landscaped it. Jose and Anamma entertain their guests here. The place is full of young children and there is always fun and laughter. That way they forget their sorrow that they don't have children," Mathaichan explained.

"It seems they don't have electricity here," Ajith said.

"The place is air-conditioned by the climate here. They got a Gobur gas plant that provides the gas for cooking and the lights. If there is a function they operate the generator. They had no TV or phone. I bought Anamma a DVD player last year and they bought a TV also. There is no telecast. All they watch is movies on it. They got a micro-projector also. Tomorrow they are having a get-together and somebody is going to speak. Let us go to the river for a bath," said Mathaichan.

They crossed the road and walked down to the tranquil river Periyar. They changed their dress and Ajith jumped into the water. He swam across the river and reached the other side where there was a forest, which was untarnished by human beings. There was a very good smell, an aroma of mango fruits. He found a small mango. He ate it and found it so tasty and sweet. He collected some more and swam back and gave to Mathaichan. They ate them with relish. Mathaichan floated on his back in the river and looked at the sky. Everything was so tranquil and the silhouette of the forest and the mountain seen from the river was very beautiful.

They stayed in the river till nightfall. They dried themselves and climbed up the hill to Paradise. There were lights from the generator and the whole place was reverberating with soft, western music.

Anamma met them at the lounge. She said, "Daddy, dry your hair properly. It is not good to stay so long in the water. You could catch a fever. I don't want tomorrow's seminar to be disrupted. Ajith, you can also attend it. It is about how to be enriched in life. The speaker is Fr. Joe."

"I met Fr. Joe a month ago. He told me about it. I attended a meditation session he gave, and it was very good."

"We have invited our friends also and the house will be fully packed. Tonight we are watching a film. It is a classic called `Pather Panchali' by Satyajith Ray. Let us have supper," Anamma invited.

After dinner they watched the movie. The story touched Ajith and tears gushed out of his eyes. He thought about his mother and home, which he had to leave. He could identify himself with the lead character and suddenly an urge for achieving and acquiring better things in life, not to succumb to one's fate and reconcile to what life offered, came to his mind. He wanted to fight against all odds, and be an achiever in life. From the quagmire of pessimism and depression he set his mind to be positive, and to acquire the enterprising nature from the people he interacted with, especially Mathaichan.

## 17

By 10 o'clock all the guests arrived. There was a long row of jeeps and cars on the parking lot. Children ran helter-skelter, playing and frolicking. Old-time friends, the guests were chatting among themselves. Soon a bike rider in leather jacket and crash helmet arrived. Everybody looked up and the rider pulled the helmet off. It was Fr. Joe. There was a hush. Anamma came with a glass of cool drink and a wet perfumed towel to soothe his face. They all thronged into the hall and Ajith went to meet the Father.

"Good morning, Father. I reached here one day early."

"Ajith, I was wondering whether you would be coming. There is a surprise for you and be prepared for good news."

"I got teamed up with an old man and he happened to be the father of Anamma Chechi."

"Good." Say all the prayers you know so that the trick that I am playing gets proper effect. Did you apply for the medical entrance?"

"Yes, I am revising my lessons in mind. I got a few texts with me."

"Try hard. I am getting you a sponsor today. Make a brief statement in the meeting when I ask you. Now let me begin the session."

He went to the hall and everyone was seated. Children were playing outside. Everybody stood up when father came in and said, "Good morning Father."

"Good morning. Let me ask you a question. Is there anybody who doesn't want to be rich and prosperous? Put up your hands."

Nobody responded.

"What are the true riches of life, anybody?"

Patrick responded, "To have sufficient money for our needs."

Ansamma said, "A vigorous mind with positive outlook."

"Sound health," Jack said.

Mathaichan said, "A mind free from all kinds of fears and worries."

"Harmonious human relationship," put in Salim.

"To have hope and faith that all our desires will be fulfilled," was Beena's remark.

James said, "To be willing to share our riches."

"A profession out of which we derive maximum satisfaction," added Mathaichan

"Is there anything more?" Fr. Joe prompted.

Ansamma said, "An open mind."

"To have self-discipline," responded Tommy.

Fr. Joe said, "Thank you for sharing your thoughts. There can be many more riches and I would like to add 'the ability to discern the motives of other people.' Is there anything more?"

Nobody responded.

Fr. Joe concluded, "The purpose of our lives must be to attain these riches here and heavenly happiness hereafter."

"Since we all know each other, there is no need for any introduction. But some of you may not know Mathaichan, the father of Ansamma, a veteran, who is truly rich in every sense of the word. The next person is Ajith, who is going to be our case; based on whose problem we will have our seminar. Not to beat about the bush, he is aspiring to become a doctor. Since he has no infrastructure for that he ran away from home. Let us see how his problem can be solved.

He has got a definite purpose, let us say, to become a doctor. For attaining this goal he should have a definite plan which unfortunately he doesn't have. Let us see how it can be made. By the way I forgot to congratulate the most perfect couple, Jose and Ansamma. They are our beloved friends, and today is their fifteenth wedding anniversary. Let us wish them a long and happy married life."

There was a loud and hearty applause.

"Do you know what my present to them on this occasion is? It is Ajith, for them to look after and to help attain his goal. You all know that Ansamma was my girl-friend, and my friend Jose was our intermediary. Ultimately they got married."

"Thank God, otherwise we wouldn't have got such a good priest like you," commented Mathaichan.

"I have no regrets and since Jose and Ansamma don't have children I am presenting Ajith to them as their son."

Everybody clapped again.

Jose said, "Thank you Father for not thinking of me as a villain in our story. I was a bit hasty when I snatched Ansamma away from you, and I had to pay the price, no children for the past fifteen years, and, ironically, you are giving us a son. I accept him as our son if he so desires."

Ajith was perplexed. He sat dumbfounded. Fr. Joe continued, "Now let us get into the theme of today's seminar. How can we become rich and successful in God's plan? We should have a definite purpose and a dream about life. We should go an extra-mile in whatever we do; that is, rendering more service than what we get paid for or what we are expected to."

He continued, "We should have a group of friends with whom we can share and get the feedback and advice. They should be mutually supportive. We should have a practical way of believing in God and in our ability to attain our goals. We should have a pleasing personality and good health. Eat and drink only as much as we need, exercise regularly and be full of love and cheer. That is the way we can have a pleasing personality. Thank God, everybody here except Mathaichan has a pleasing personality. I wonder why he looks like a butcher!"

Mathaichan said, "If you have seen half of what I have seen and done the kind of atrocities that I did to stay on top, you won't look any different."

"I was only joking; you are such a presentable and venerable old man. I've known you as the father of Ansamma for the past twenty years. The best thing is to learn from the failures in our lives, analysing their causes and avoiding them in future," Father intervened.

"We should have a creative vision to make plans for every new step. Our initiative must come from within ourselves and we should move ahead with accurate thinking. These are possible only if you discipline your minds."

Felix interrupted, "We know all these. But how can we achieve them."

"To know about them is the first step. I am giving you all a chart and if interested, we can have a ten days training for you all. I can speak for hours about this; it is my pet topic."

Jose said, "We will work it out." Father continued, "We should concentrate on our purpose and be co-operative with other people. Cultivate the enthusiasm to live. We

should budget our time and money to get the optimum output. Make a habit of this way of living.”

Mathaichan said, “I know all this. When I was in Maldives the general manager of our firm, an Australian lady, spoke to me about these principles.”

“These are known in the West and form the foundation of the American enterprise. The last thing I am going to say is easy for Christians to follow, because it is part of our faith. Anybody can observe them; “Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourselves.” Ibrahim said, “It is acceptable to our religion and Hinduism also doesn’t teach anything against that.”

“Thank you, now I request Ajith to distribute this chart with the theme of today’s talk. He must be very happy. Please include him also as one of the youngsters in our mastermind group.”

Ajith said, “Thank you” and distributed the cards. Father John said, “Ajith, please introduce yourself.”

Ajith said, “I am Ajith, born and brought up in an estate near Calicut. I finished my Pre-degree course. I am a run away from home, aspiring to become a doctor. My inspiration is an American doctor from whom I learned the values that father has spoken of. I am glad and much grateful to God for the recent developments in my life, all due to the magnanimity of Mathaichan. I will come and join my foster parents after a trip with him to Maldives. He is looking forward to that trip with much sentimental attachment, and I have agreed to keep him company. I am very glad to move into your circle, as father said. Thank you, father, for this great opportunity and let us all, remain friends.”

## 18

There was a grand party after the session of Fr. Joe. It was a buffet dinner. Food was heaped on a table, and people helped themselves.

Ajith joined his newly acquired foster-parents, and Mathaichan was with them.

He said, "I will give Ajith back to you after the trip to Maldives."

Ajith said, "I am very happy to be with you. This is the greatest thing that has ever happened in my life. Now you are my parents, who are quite different from my real parents. You saw my father, how drunk he was, and he makes my poor mother suffer a lot. I can't forget my parents either."

Jose said, "You are their son. You can always visit them whenever you wish."

"We will look after your studies and see that you become a doctor. It is your future; you will have to make it," said Anamma.

"I am fascinated by the human mind and I would like to help people who suffer from mental problems. I would like to specialize in Psychiatry. If I can't make it I will try clinical psychology and become a psychotherapist," said Ajith.

"If you want to join our family circle, you will have to become a Christian," Said Mathaichan.

"You would be surprised that I know a lot about Christianity and I am fascinated by the personality of Jesus Christ. That American doctor I told you taught me a lot of Christian values. Still I want to learn what it is to be a Christian," said Ajith.

"I will tell my grand-daughter Manju to teach you all that. She is working in the students' wing of our religion. She believes that if she can win a soul to Jesus her seat in heaven will be assured. They got their camps and prayer meetings. I will tell her to include you also in their gang," said Mathaichan.

"Unless I am convinced, I will not change my religion. I don't find anything objectionable in Hinduism, and my prayer to Saraswathy is equally heard. But I am attracted by the personality of Jesus Christ," Ajith said.

Anamma said, "There are very good Christians and the Christian way of life will attract you, I am sure. To be a Christian the elementary thing is to love God and love your neighbour."

They had finished eating, and Fr. Joe came and joined their group.

Jose said, "We are becoming friends with Ajith. Anamma wants him to be a Christian but my opinion is to leave him as he is. What do you think about it Fr. Joe?"

Fr. Joe said, "My desire is to see everyone a Christian and every Christian a saint. You sort out that problem among yourselves. Ajith, I would like to have a chat with you after dinner."

Ajith said, "I've finished eating. Shall we go to the lawn outside and speak?"

While they were walking out Fr. Joe asked, "You said that your parents are having problems at home and they are not on loving terms? What is the real issue?"

"There is no love between my parents. My father suspects my mother, and he is a drunkard. He beats her up at every excuse. They need some counselling, or they will go on living in their miserable way, hating and fighting each other," said Ajith.

"I understand. It must be your mother who suffers in the bargain. Why don't you direct them to our counselling centre? Your father needs medical help if he is an alcoholic. We will work it out. Now you try to get in the medical entrance examination. It needs years of painstaking study and there is no short cut. God is good to you, and there are people who will take care of your studies. You should be moving with a burning desire to reach your purpose. In case you don't get through in the entrance exam let me know. There is another course open to you if you do B.A and M.A in Psychology. You can do M.Phil. In clinical psychology by which you will be able to heal abnormal people. That is what I am doing," said Fr. Joe.

Ajith said, "Thank you Father for the guidance. I am now going on a trip to Maldives with Mathaichan. The foster parents you gave me are also nice people, thank you father for this break."

"Go ahead with a definite purpose and be clear about the priorities." Father advised.

"I get depressed at times and have negative attitudes. I will try the meditation you taught us. What are we having in the afternoon?"

"After launch we will have a game called housie. Everyone will be given a small piece of paper with numbers and a toothpick. Numbers will be called out and whoever gets that number will have to poke a hole on the sheet of paper. One who finishes poking holes on the whole sheet first will be the winner. After the game there will be a dance performance by the daughter of Jack and Beena," father said.

"We are leaving this place tomorrow and going to Pala," said Ajith.

"Keep in touch and write to me about all the latest developments," father reminded.

## 19

The next morning Mathaichan and Ajith set out to Pala. When they reached the house, only Manju was at home. She asked, "Grand-dad how was your trip?"

"It was wonderful. Jose and Anamma are adopting Ajith as their son. They will sponsor his studies," he answered.

She turned to Ajith, "Now you can really become a doctor, prepare hard for the medical entrance exam."

Mathaichan said, "I am buying him some audio-visual aids for the preparation. On our trip to Maldives also he can study. 'Any news about Ajith's passport?' It is due now."

"There was a registered letter for Ajith in our address. I told the postman to keep it in the office. It must be that, grand-dad. Shall I also come with you to Maldives?"

"Not now. After your wedding, I will send you to Maldives for honeymoon."

Ajith said, "It must be a long time from now." He looked quizzically at her and she blushed.

Mathaichan looked at them in a queer way and there was an understanding smile on his lips. He said,

“Ajith wants to know more about Christianity. Manju, teach him all that you know.”

“I will do that with pleasure. If he comes for our prayer meetings on Sunday afternoons, he can learn more about the bible. I will introduce him in our prayer group and he can interact with our gang,” replied Manju.

Mathaichan said, “Tell him about Jesus.”

Manju said, “Jesus is the foundation of our faith, son of God. Accept Jesus as your personal saviour and leave the sinful path and take a decision to follow him. It is as simple as that.”

Ajith said, “Why should I believe all that. I believe in God. Is it not enough?”

“There is only one God and Jesus is the son of God who came to this world and died to save us from our sins and the clutches of the devil. There is nobody like him in history. He is alive and active and answers our prayers. When you pray, praise, thank, repent and intercede. When two or more people are gathered in his name Jesus is there. Accept him as your personal saviour, and confess your sins. You hear my personal testimony. My parents were quarrelling with each other, daddy going and getting drunk in his club and my mother always going for their women’s club meetings. They did not care for me. Grand-dad told me to pray to Jesus and I prayed for them. Gradually there was a change in father and so my mother also changed. I am still praying for my mother that she becomes a little bit more affectionate and caring.”

Mathaichan said, “She is the typical Pala lady, sneering at others as inferior, proud of her ancient family heritage. Thank God she looks like a toad. Manju, when you grow old you will be like your mother. Please don’t copycat her character. Your husband will have only time to beat you.” He looked at Ajith. He concealed his emotions and looked indifferent.

"Ajith, you go to the post office and see whether it is your passport. Bring it and we will book the ticket for next Monday," said Mathaichan.

"Grand-dad, let us play a game of table tennis," Manju said.

"I would like to learn the game better, shall I also join?" Ajith asked.

"Manju you play with Ajith. I will give the necessary coaching."

They started playing, and Ajith served the ball and it bounced off.

Manju laughed and Mathaichan said, "Take care. You should concentrate on the ball and where it goes. Hit like this. This is called chopping. The ball will spin and go."

Suddenly Kuttiamma came into the room and from her looks it was clear that she did not approve of what she saw there. She said, "Manju, go and water the garden. Old man has no shame to make her play with a strange boy. Keeping and feeding such a useless boy. I won't give him food if he stays any longer."

Mathaichan said, "Calm down. This boy is going to stay with your sister-in-law as her son. Don't worry. I will send him away soon."

Ajith felt ashamed and was hurt. He said, "I am going to the post office," and left. Manju was feeling resentful. She looked straight at her mother and said. "This is not the first time I am playing with a boy. Mom, you used to get drunk in parties with men. This is not as serious as that."

Mathaichan said, "Why do you want to be so mean? That boy is hurt. Come, Manju let us play a game."

They started playing and suddenly Varkichan came there. Manju told him "Grand-dad is going to Maldives next week. He is taking Ajith also with him."

Mathaichan added, "Ajith is getting his passport today. We will stay there for two weeks. I have a reservation in Pathala Resort. Send them a fax saying that we are arriving next Monday. Get two, two-way tickets on Monday's flight."

"I will do it in the evening. Manju, why don't we play a game and see who will win?"

They started playing and went on serving alternately. At last Manju gave a service, which was very fast, and Varkichan shot it back and Manju smashed it. She hit the ball in such a way that Varkichan could not take it and she won the game.

She said, "Bye Daddy. I am going to water the garden."

## 20

Varkichan drove them to the airport and Manju was with him. He gave them their tickets and passport, and they went into the entrance. Mathaichan kissed Manju and Ajith said farewell to Varkichan and Manju. She seemed upset and looked into his eyes with tears in her eyes. He felt sad and his eyes spoke, not very obvious, lest others should notice.

They got in and went through the emigration and got cleared. They had to wait in a lounge for some time and then the announcement was heard that people going to Male' were to board the flight.

They went to the aircraft, got in and an airhostess welcomed them. Ajith was feeling nervous and frightened. He sat on a side seat and there was an emergency exit near him with buttons to push. He was so frightened that the airhostess came and gave him another seat. Soon the plane took off and they reached high altitude. Ajith felt a terrible pain in his ear.

He looked out and could see the sea, blue and turbulent and after sometime, he could see the small pearl-like islands scattered in the sea. They were in Maldives and the small islands spread out in the ocean were fascinating.

They landed at Male' airport and Ajith took off his seat belt and felt relieved. They came out and went to the emigration and customs counters.

They got their luggage cleared and visa was stamped for 15 days. Ajith found the phone number of the National Hospital, and rang up Dr. Alen. The doctor was

surprised to hear Ajith on the phone. Ajith told him that he had reached Male' and would ring up again, or come and meet him.

Suddenly a man came to them and asked them, "Is your name Mathai?"

Mathaichan said, "Yes."

"I am Fiaz. I am here to receive you and take you to Pathala resort. Today there is no boat to the resort. I have booked a room for you in Travel-inn. Stay there, see Male' city and relax. Tomorrow I will send you to the resort. Come, the boat is waiting."

He took Mathaichan's big suitcase and led them to the jetty. They got in to a boat, dhoni as it was called there. The trip was short and they landed in the Male' island.

They got into a car and drove to Travel-inn, a good hotel in town. They were taken to their room. Ajith had a shower, dressed up and asked at the reception the direction to National Hospital. He reached the Majeedi Magu, the main central road. He walked on, looking at the shops and then he saw the National Library. He wanted to go in and have a look around the place, but the thought of meeting Dr. Alen deterred him. He reached the hospital and asked for Dr. Alen. He was shown his room and he knocked. Suddenly he heard the familiar voice of Dr. Alen, "Come in."

Ajith got into the room and was surprised to find Dr. Alen grown a little more plumb and radiant. Dr. Alen was also taken aback.

He said, "Ajith this is a real surprise. From all places, meeting you in Male' city!"

"I was eagerly waiting for this chance to reach here."

"Sit down; this is Fatima. She interprets the patients for me. She is coming to Trivandrum Medical College to do medicine."

Ajith looked at her and found her extremely beautiful, though she was dark.

"I would like to meet your wife," said Ajith.

"Come home, we will have dinner there tonight. Who is with you? Shall I invite him also? Would you wait till my work is over? Fatima, move a bit and let him sit on that chair," said Alen.

Then there was a knock and a lady in a long robe entered. Fatima said something in their native language, Dhivehi, and the lady told her of her ailments. She translated it to the doctor. The lady fainted and fell down unconscious very often. Dr. Alen said.

"Fatima, ask her how often she gets this and who all are there in her family?"

Fatima asked her and she replied. It was translated to Dr. Alen. "Her husband is in jail as he spoke something against the President. She is staying with her mother-in-law, who ill-treats her. Then she falls unconscious."

Dr. Alen nodded and prescribed some medicine. He said to Fatima. "Tell her to take the medicine for three days and to bring her mother-in-law with her the next time she comes. It is she who needs treatment."

The patient left and then Dr. Alen turned to Ajith "What is your news?"

Ajith said, "The day you left, I too left the estate. I found a fascinating old man, and his daughter and husband have adopted me and they will take care of my studies. I have to pass the medical entrance exam. I am staying in Maldives for a fortnight. The place is called Pathala Resort. It is a little far from the mainland."

Alen said, "I know the place, I have treated its owner. I shall try to come there for the weekend, with my wife."

Soon they got out of the hospital and walked along the road. They arrived at the public library and got in. One fat girl was at the counter and Alen smiled at her.

She asked him "Now what book does your wife need?"

"Thulfa, get me 'Doctors' by Erich Segal. I want this young man to read that book."

Thulfa smiled at them, went and came back with a book. She entered the details of the book in a register and gave it to Alen. He asked, "Is Jeff around? Please give him my regards. Ajith, this is a wonderful book. All doctors and those who aspire to become doctors should read this." They left the library and went on walking. They reached Travel Inn and met Mathaichan.

Ajith introduced Dr. Alen. "This is Dr. Alen. Please meet Mathaichan."

They shook hands and Alen said, "I came to invite you home for supper tonight. If you feel bored here, come with me. We will have a drink and that will make you cheerful. Should I send for a car or shall we walk?"

Mathaichan said, "I have heard that every place in Male' is within walkable distance. Shall we walk?"

They got out of Travel-Inn and went on walking. They reached a tall building and climbed the staircase, reached the top floor, rang the bell and a lady opened the door.

They got in and Alen said, "Meet my wife Sylvia. This is Ajith and Mathaichan?"

She said, "Oh! Ajith! Alen has been telling me so many stories about you. Come in and make yourselves comfortable. What would you like to drink coffee, tea or coco cola?"

Alen said, "Give Ajith a coke and I will fix a drink for Mathaichan. What would you like to have, gin-tonic, rum-cola or whisky on the rocks?"

Mathaichan said, "I prefer whisky. Fix me one large. Ajith you better not drink anything hot. Watch me drink it and you won't like to have it."

Ajith said, "I will have a sprite."

Dr. Alen went to the kitchen and came back with the drinks. He opened a can and gave it to Ajith, a glass of whisky to Mathaichan and opened a can of beer and drank himself.

Sylvia also came and sat with them. She asked, "Ajith! How is your life and have you made any plan for your studies?"

Ajith said, "It is all settled. The day I met Mathaichan all my problems were over. He has become my godfather. Now I see a bit of hope about the future and I have the faith that I will make it. I have heard a lot about you, seen your picture, but seeing you in person is different. Dr. Alen is lucky to have you. How did you reach Maldives?"

"I was working with the U.N and when a post was ready here I got transferred. Alen joined the National Hospital. We are still on honeymoon. What shall I cook for you? Can it be tuna fry and noodles? We will fry a chicken but it is frozen. Is it okay for Mathaichan? I have a collection of films on CD. What would you like to watch?"

Mathaichan said, "I can see McKenna's Gold on the rack. It was such a lovely movie. Please put that on."

She went and loaded the CD. Mathaichan got engrossed in the film.

Ajith asked Sylvia, "Did Dr. Alen submit his thesis?"

She said, "We are preparing it. I am feeding it in our computer. After his editing we will take the printout, bind it and send it to the University. One of his case studies is about your parents. Do you want to read it? I will put it on the computer."

"I don't want to see it. That problem is gnawing at my heart. Has he suggested any solutions?"

"Yes, there is. I will put that page on. When you finish reading that page press the page down key and the next page will come."

Ajith focused his eyes on the monitor and read that part. The suggestions were that his father be given de-addiction treatment and let his mother stop working in the estate, if possible.

Ajith pressed the page down key and the rest of the solution came. It was a long range planning and Ajith was the key factor. He was to take care of the family. He knew that was out of question for the time being.

Dr.Alen came to him and said, "This is all theory but in real life things would be much different."

"Mathaichan gave my father a severe treatment and I feel that he won't drink again."

"What did he do?"

"He made my father drink a bottle of rum and empty a septic tank. He vomited his guts out. He agreed not to drink again."

"What about your plans?"

"I met a fascinating priest and he told me to write the medical entrance and if I don't get it, I would study psychology and then I can become a clinical psychologist. He made one family adopt me and they are to sponsor my studies. They are a childless couple. After going back from Maldives I will continue my studies."

Sylvia said, "Time for dinner. Please come."

They moved to the dining table. Ajith helped himself a big lump of fried fish and noodles. He found it exceedingly tasty, and said:

"Dr.Alen, you are lucky. Sylvia is a very good cook!"

Mathaichan asked, "How long will you be in Maldives?"

"My contract is for one year. Sylvia can get a transfer whenever she wants. Mathaichan, do you want a shot of baccardi with coco cola? It will give you good sleep and no hangover."

Dr.Alen fixed him a peg of Bacardi and he drank another can of beer. They finished eating, and Alen said, "I will take you to your hotel."

They walked through the semi dark streets and reached Travel-Inn. They went to their room and fell asleep.

## 21

Early morning, Fiaz came and woke them up. He said, "Please get ready, your boat is leaving at 8'o clock". He sat down on the sofa. Ajith had a quick bath and dressed up. Mathaichan also got ready. Fiaz rang up for a car. Ajith packed up their luggage.

When the car came they got in and went to the jetty. Fiaz got them in a big boat called Treasure Island. They sailed through the calm sea and Male' faded into the background. Ajith looked into the wide sea; occasionally a flying fish flew over the water. Once they sighted a group of dolphins jumping up over the waves. They went past several islands and at last reached Pathala. From the boat another couple also got down and they walked to the reception. There was a thin young man with a welcome drink and a wet perfumed towel. They had the drink and wiped their faces. The boy at the reception gave them the forms to fill up. Mathaichan asked for a non-air-conditioned cottage near the beach.

He said, "I would like to make a phone call to India. Here is the number"

It was Manju who took the phone. Mathaichan said, "Tell your father that we reached the resort. We are all right. Last night we had a party at Ajith's friend, one Dr.Alen. It was so good and I got drunk. They are such a nice couple. We will be here for two weeks. Here is our phone number. In case of any emergency call me here in the evening. Bye, then darling."

Habeeb the Asst. Manager showed them the bar and briefed them about the life in the island. He told them about the meal timings, about recreation etc. They were taken to their cottage.

Soon it was time for lunch and they went to the restaurant. Their table was near the window. Mathaichan smiled at the neighbour at the next table. They were a British couple; both of them attorneys, Mark Alison and his wife.

"I came to this place some years ago and it was much different. Now the island is full of cottages and congested."

"We had been here during the last winter. We fell in love with this place." Mark said.

"What are the entertainments besides scuba diving? I am afraid of diving. I may die in the bargain."

"You can try snorkeling, if you know swimming", Mark said.

Ajith said, "If you are snorkeling, shall I also join?"

"Come to the diving school at two o'clock. We will go."

They finished eating and then Hassan, the manager, came to them and said, "I've come to invite you to my daughter's birthday party tonight. It will be on the beach".

Mathaichan said, "Thank you for inviting us. We will be there."

They got out of the restaurant. Mathaichan went to the bar. Ajith took the book, 'Doctors,' went to the beach and began reading it. He was so engrossed in it. Then he remembered the appointment at the diving school. He put on shorts and a T-shirt and went to the diving school. Mark was there. They got the snorkels from the diving instructress. She asked, "Where are you from?" Ajith said, "I am from India. May I know your name?"

She said, "I am Alina, from Germany."

"Pleased to meet you, I am Ajith. We are going to try snorkeling"

"It is nothing compared to scuba diving. When you dive you go into the belly of the sea and there you find things so beautiful which you can't even imagine." She said.

"Would you take me for scuba diving one day?" Ajith asked.

"Sorry, it needs training. Otherwise it can be pretty dangerous." Alina explained.

"See you, we will be going," Mark said.

They went to the beach and Mark taught Ajith, how to wear the snorkel and they went to the sea. Breathing was a little difficult for Ajith but he followed Mark. The bottom of the sea was so colourful and the fish so attractive. They were not afraid of Ajith and came, swimming close to his face. Coral formations were in so many different patterns. They went on swimming. Ajith felt difficulty in having the tube in his mouth. He lifted his head and spat out the salt water. Mark was going straight into the sea. Ajith kept closer to the shore and swam to the beach when he was tired. He sprawled there on the sand.

After some time Mark also returned. They sat on the beach and dried themselves. Mathaichan came and joined them with a can of beer in his hand.

"Mark, how is life in England these days? What is your attitude towards India?" Mathaichan asked.

"We love and respect India, but hate the Indians who come to work in England. They take away our job opportunities and our money."

"What is the nature of your work?"

"We are advocates. We share the same office. While I take up criminal cases my wife practices civil law."

"Why did you come to Maldives, of all places?"

"We wanted to have a peaceful holiday, away from the hustle and bustle of the metro-cities. Here, it is very calm. We don't have to rush to the city and back like maniacs," said Mark.

"I've come on a pilgrimage. It was here that I spent my honeymoon. I was a sailor and when I came to Male' with my wife after our marriage, my Maldivian friend arranged a holiday for us here. My wife enjoyed our stay here thoroughly. We stayed here for a week and she conceived our son here," said Mathaichan.

"We came to lay the foundation for the future generation. We have been married eight years and for the two years before it we stayed together. All this time our idea was not to have children. Now we realize how meaningless life is without children," said Mark.

"In India we don't have many pretensions. We beget children more by accident than by choice. I had my son, and when he was hardly two years old, my daughter was born. Then I had four more daughters in succession. I had to pay fabulous sums as dowry to marry my daughters away. All that I made, I had to give away. Luckily I could educate my son well and he got anchored with a good job. By the way, have you thought about tonight's party? We got to give the child some present. There is no time to buy anything," said Mathaichan.

Ajith said, "I have got a new pen with me. We will wrap it up in a small gift packet and give her."

Mark joined, "I too was invited. I don't know what we would give. I must talk to my wife about it. Ajith, thanks a lot for your company. See you all." He left.

Ajith and Mathaichan sat there. The sea with its blue colour, the gentle breeze and the evening sun about to set in the horizon, all made them feel elated and romantic.

Mathaichan said, "This is worth the money that we squander here. Nature has been very kind to Maldives. See how they are milking that factor and converting every island into resorts. We should have tried that in Kerala which is far more beautiful than this place."

Ajith said, "Shall we go bathe and get ready for the party?"

They got ready and reached the beach where the party was held.

The beach was decorated with colour bulbs. There was a stage and one music band was singing songs, oldies that made everyone nostalgic and highly elated. When Ajith and Mathaichan came, they were singing 'Country Road' by John Denver.

Hassan welcomed them and they sat down. The dinner was buffet and was arranged on the beach. It was all typical Maldivian dishes and the main ingredient was fish. It had a peculiar flavour and Ajith concentrated on the songs that were being played there.

There was a bar on the beach and Mathaichan ordered a gin tonic.

Hasan told Ajith, "Why don't you have at least a beer?"

Ajith said, "No, thanks I don't drink."

At twelve o' clock, midnight, they sang happy birthday and bottles of champagne were opened and served. Ajith also took a sip, as it was mere wine. It was sour and not tasty.

Mathaichan gave the gift packet to Haseena, Hassan's daughter, and she smiled and thanked them. The air was full of fun and cheer. Mathaichan had a peg of Johnny Walker with soda, and they went to their cottage after some time to sleep.

## 22

One speedboat came to the jetty and Dr.Alen and Sylvia alighted from it. At that time Ajith was sprawling on the beach, reading, Doctors. He went to them. Dr.Alen paid the boat fare and they all came to the reception.

Alen said, "I had booked a room for two days. Is it ready?"

The boy Hasan Rasheed at the reception said, "Yes, it is ready. Here is the key. I will show you the way."

Ajith followed them. Sylvia seemed radiant after the trip over the sea. They wanted to go to the sea immediately for a swim. Sylvia changed into bikini and Alen wore Bermudas.

Ajith said, "Why don't we try snorkeling. I will get the snorkels and come back soon." He went to the diving school.

He came across Rasheed, the Assistant Manager, a resentful employee who asked, "Where are you going?"

Ajith said "To the diving school."

"For what?" he asked.

Ajith got irritated, by his questioning.

He said, "To see Alina."

"Why do you want to see her?" Rasheed asked.

Ajith wanted to tell him to get lost.

"We are going for snorkeling. I am going to get the masks. Why don't you mind your business?"

Rasheed said, "The business of everybody on this island is my business."

"See you then, you don't have to poke your nose into my affairs," Ajith said and left him.

He went to Alina, got the masks and came to Alen's place. They put on the snorkels and went swimming.

When they came back after swimming, it was evening. They sat on the shore to get dry and the setting sun was spreading its red tint on everything.

Dr. Alen said, "Ajith, why don't you crack one of your jokes? Sylvia will like it."

“Minister Achayan was travelling to New York. There was a stop-over at Amsterdam. To while away the time he roamed around in the airport and found a computer that would show the details of the person approaching it. To him it said, “You are Thomas Achayan, fifty years old, from Chengannoor and going to New York.” He was taken aback and wanted to make sure that the computer would say the same thing if he approached it again. He loafed around and went to the computer after an hour and the computer showed, “You are Thomas Achayan, fifty years old from Chengannoor, going to New York, but your flight left half an hour ago to New York.”

Sylvia giggled and said, “Alen told me some of your jokes. But this is the best.”

Ajith said, “I tell jokes and make other people laugh so that I can forget my sorrows for the time being at least.”

Alen said, “You should control your thoughts. Never let any bad thought take sway over the mind. Think always of what you want to be, how you like to be and not what you are.”

Ajith said, “That is the most difficult problem.”

Sylvia said, “Shape your thoughts and you can shape your future. Thoughts pop up in our mind and then to analyse and accept a healthy thought is very important. We should cultivate the habit of entertaining only desirable thoughts.”

Ajith said, “I cannot control the depression that I get at times.”

Dr. Alen said, “If the depression is unmanageable by ourselves we should take medicine. There is lot of antidepressants for that.”

Ajith said, “I have heard that people turn to drugs and alcohol when they cannot control the depression. I never feel like blaming people who take too much of drinks. That is the case of my father too.”

Dr. Alen said, "We should show concern and empathy to such people by making them talk about it. That is the least we can do to people at such times and it might turn them away from drinking or taking drugs."

Ajith said, "I have decided not to drink or smoke whatever be the provocation."

Sylvia said, "If you can stick to that you will have a peaceful and decent life."

Ajith said, "Thank you; that is all I want. I hate asking somebody a cigarette or money for a drink."

Dr. Alen said, "The benefits are much more than that. You will save a lot of money and your health will remain intact."

The sun was about to set. The whole place was bathed in the red glow of the sinking globe. The beach was shining red and the sea had a purple tint.

They felt elated as the sun set and the scenery was enchanting. Soon it was dark and Alen said,

"There is a disco in the bar after the supper."

Ajith said, "I don't know how to dance. I will come and watch you do it."

Sylvia said, "There is nothing to know. You jump and wriggle as the music goes and when you are tired, stop. If you have a couple of drinks, you will enjoy it the more. This is all about disco."

Ajith said, "I feel ashamed to do it."

Alen said, "When the music is blasting and you have a couple of drinks, anybody will dance."

Ajith said, "I'm not going to drink. I'll watch what you do."

There was thunderous music in the bar as against the usual, muffled slow music. It was high watt output and the music was real fast. Ajith, Mathaichan, Alen and Sylvia reached there and Alen and Sylvia started jumping and writhing according to the music. Mathaichan ordered rum-cola and Ajith had a Coco cola. There were lots of people dancing to the tune of the wild music. There was no common style and everybody danced according to their whims and fancies. After sometime, Sylvia came and sat down near them and ordered a beer. Soon Alen also stopped dancing and he ordered whisky on the rocks. They sat there listening to the wild music and some people reached frenzy and danced violently. One after the other, the songs were played.

Mathaichan was drunk and he said, "I would like to learn how to do it."

Sylvia said, "Come on, I will teach you."

They went to the middle of the dance floor and Mathaichan looked at Sylvia and started swaying to and fro. Sylvia jumped up and down standing on one leg and Mathaichan also did like that. It was fun watching them and everybody in the bar started laughing.

They went on dancing, Mathaichan a veteran in shorts and Sylvia, a beautiful lady in a flowing dress that reached up to her knees. Mathaichan got fed up of the ritual of the disco, he came back and sat down, gulping down a peg of Bacardi, white rum.

He felt uneasy. When Alen came back after dancing Mathaichan told him, "I think all the booze in my tummy has turned into a cocktail. I feel quite uneasy."

Alen said, "We will order a peg of Tequila. That could either settle your tummy or it will become worse. One of this will happen."

He ordered a small peg of Tequila for Mathaichan and he gulped it down in one swallow.

Mathaichan felt a burning sensation in his throat and he suddenly decided to go back to his cottage and Ajith followed him.

Mathaichan spent a restless night. He waited for the morning and when he met Dr. Alen for breakfast he said, "I had enough of drinking. My throat has become sore and my head is cloudy. I don't know what to do. I don't even feel like eating anything."

Alen said, "There is no medicine for this sickness out of excessive drinking. I will give you a sedative. You lie down, go to sleep and take sufficient rest."

Sylvia told Ajith, "We will spend the day in the sea. Please go and get three snorkels and come to our cottage."

Ajith said, "That would be fine. Get ready. I will rush back."

He went to Alina and got the snorkels and came to Alen's place. Sylvia was wearing a swimming dress and that brought out the fineness of her shape.

Alen and Ajith stripped to shorts and they walked to the seashore. Ajith was the odd man out with his brown torso while the colour of the bodies of Alen and Sylvia was glowing golden. They looked like the most perfect couple with Alen's muscular body while Sylvia had all that a woman could hope for; well-chiselled features, shapely, tall and elegant at the same time.

They put on the mask and dived straight into the sea. Ajith looked down into the water. There were water plants, corals and coloured fish. All were attractive. He could not even imagine how beautiful they seemed to be. Small fish in various colours swam in front of his face. They were not at all afraid of human beings.

After sometime Ajith felt tired and he swam back to the shore. There was an air mattress lying on the beach. He took it to the sea and lied down on it. It went drifting over the small waves and Ajith stared at the sky. He floated into the realm of sleep and dozed off.

In the evening a singer called Mahoj was playing a hollow guitar and singing songs on request. Alen asked him to sing an old song, 'Congratulations and celebrations' by Cliff Richards. Alen looked at Sylvia as the song was about love acknowledged and Sylvia's cheeks turned purple. Ajith was listening intently and he learned the song by heart.

When that song was over Mathaichan requested "Country Road" by John Denver. Everybody around liked that song, and the British attorney Mark requested him to sing the song once more. Mahoj sang it again and everybody clapped.

Mathaichan was holding a beer can and was sipping at it. Ajith thought of telling him not to drink again. They sat in the bar till late and Sylvia was glowing as she requested her favorite songs one after another.

Ajith tried to learn another song "I have a dream" by Abba. But he liked the song, 'Congratulations', more, and requested Mahoj to sing it again. Mathaichan drank another beer and Ajith moved closer to him and said, "You better not drink anymore." Mathaichan said, "That is, okay. Beer does no harm."

Ajith went back to their room to finish the book. He had to give it back to Alen before he left. Mathaichan went to sleep straight away and Ajith went on reading. He could finish only two-thirds of it and he was astonished at the way the story developed. He also wanted to be a doctor to serve the ailing people. He learned that doctors are also humans with emotions and feelings and to be a great doctor it needed a lot of dedication and love of humanity. He dedicated his life for such a cause and fell asleep.

Alen came and woke up Ajith. They were leaving that morning. Mathaichan got up shook his hands and said, "The world is round. Hope to meet you somewhere. Bye!"

"Please take care of Ajith. See you then," Alen said. Ajith looked at Sylvia and told her. "I am happy that I could see you. Please take care of Dr. Alen. Come to India, it is very near."

"During one weekend we shall buy two tickets and fly to Trivandrum. We will inform you before. Be prepared to travel with us. Alen will rent a car and we will drive around as much as we can." Sylvia said.

"I will take you around." Ajith said.

Alen said, "Come let us go to the jetty. The boat must be ready now. I am sorry that I have to take away the book 'Doctors'."

Ajith said, "I could finish only two third of it. It was a tremendous experience and I will read all the other books of Erich Segal."

"Read 'Love Story'. It is so fascinating," Sylvia said.

They took the bags and Ajith carried a box, and they marched to the dhoni. The boat started and Alen and Sylvia left the island. Ajith roamed around the jetty for some more time and came to their cottage. Mathaichan was still sleeping. Ajith started reading the textbook for the entrance examination.

Mathaichan woke up from his sleep. They went for breakfast. On the way Mathaichan told Ajith: "Ajith, I want you to take down a few things that I dictate. You will have to get it typed and circulate among my grandchildren. It is the wisdom that I received through my practical life and reading."

"Why are you doing so?" Ajith asked.

"It is the short cut to success and an enriched life. It took me sixty-five years to learn all this. This is the idea propagated by an American millionaire Andrew Carnegie. Let us eat. I am hungry." Mathaichan said.

Ajith and Mathaichan were sitting on the beach. Ajith had a pad and paper and Mathaichan started dictating.

“My children, have a definite goal and a purpose in your lives. Decide on it, make plans to attain it, dream about it and go ahead doing more work than you intended or you are paid for. Find out friends who would support you and get their opinions and advice. Believe in God and pray to him and have an abiding faith in your ability to reach your goal.

Be enthusiastic about your life and cultivate a pleasing personality. Whenever you fail, analyse its causes and learn from defeat. Use your own initiative and have a creative vision to make plans and set goals. Always be realistic to see things as they are.

Have self-discipline to control your mind and use will power. Keep your mind concentrated on all that you do and get co-operation from everybody. Make a habit of healthy living and be enthusiastic. Budget your time and money. Love God and love your neighbor as yourselves. Make it a habit of observing these rules and your life would be successful and enriched.”

Ajith said, “this is a very crisp and matter of fact way of looking at things. I got the idea already.”

“Tons of volumes could be written elaborating all this and they are so vital for our lives that they should be given importance in education.”

“Children should be trained to live and think on these lines,” Ajith said.

“I have read a lot, thought about it and I used to meditate about it every night before I went to sleep. If you want to be anything, write it down, make a plan to reach there, dream about it and read it every day before you start doing anything.”

"I think I should do that. I know I want to be a doctor. But to make plans about life, nothing is definite," Ajith said.

"Once you move into these ideals, everything will take shape as you plan and living becomes a pleasure," Mathaichan said.

"I will try to cultivate this habit," Ajith agreed.

Mathaichan told Ajith, "Now you go and prepare for your entrance exam. Work hard and qualify for medical studies and then everything will become all right for you to become a doctor."

"Let us hope so," Ajith said.

Mathaichan went to swim and Ajith back to his studies.

## 26

'Boduferu' was the name of the singing. It was Maldivian folk songs and Ajith liked the rhythm of the music. Mathaichan went on drinking one peg after another. The beat of the drum was fast and changing. They were in the bar and some guests went to dance and Ajith thought that Mathaichan was going to do a twist.

Mathaichan came back to Ajith and ordered another peg of Johnny Walker. He was swaying to and fro. He got up and went to the middle of the bar where others were dancing. He began to jump and sway. Suddenly he caught on his chest. He came to Ajith and told him that his heart hurt.

Ajith quietly brought him to their apartment and helped him lie down. Mathaichan was feeling severe pain. Ajith rushed and phoned Dr. Alen. When he got the doctor he said, "Doctor, Mathaichan is feeling a severe pain in his chest. What shall I do? There is no medicine or doctor in this island."

Alen said, "Get him to the National hospital as quick as you can. If there is no boat there, ring me up. I will come with a speedboat. Till then get a hot water bottle and

apply hot water to his chest. You massage his chest and if he is having severe pain thump on his chest with your fist. Call me back after finding about the boat."

Ajith rushed back to Mathaichan and found him in pain. He massaged his chest and gave a few strokes with his fist. Mathaichan was yelling with pain. Ajith rushed to the reception and asked for the manager. Rasheed came.

Ajith told him, "Mathaichan, the old man with me is having severe pain in his chest. He has to be taken to Male'. Can you arrange a boat?"

Rasheed said, "There is no boat available. Tell him to wait till morning."

"He is severely sick and it is his heart. We can't wait till morning. If you can't arrange a boat I will arrange one. Prepare our bill. We are leaving tonight." Ajith said and called Alen.

When Alen took the phone Ajith said, "Doctor, there is no boat available here. Can you come around? Please bring some medicine also." He hung up. When he went to Mathaichan he was groaning. Ajith gave him a massage on the chest. Mathaichan felt relieved and closed his eyes as if to sleep. Ajith sat by his side, very much worried and anxious.

Soon Dr. Alen rushed in with a brief case. He woke up Mathaichan and asked him how he was. Mathaichan said, "I was feeling hell of a hard pain in my chest. I think it was the drinks. Now also it hurts."

Alen got the BP apparatus and fixed it on Mathaichan's hand and took his blood pressure. His face showed anxiety. He opened his case and took out some medicine and gave him an injection.

Ajith told them, "We are leaving this place. I have packed up everything. I will go and settle the bill". Mathaichan gave Ajith his wallet full of dollar bills. "Please pay them the bill amount and give some tips at the bar," said Mathaichan.

Ajith went to the reception and asked for the bill. He scrutinized the bills, added up everything and found a bill without Mathaichan's signature. He pointed it out to Hasan Rasheed and he said, "Sorry, it is a mistake; it should go to another room."

Ajith had that amount deducted from the bill. He paid the money, got the bills and came to their cottage. Mathaichan was ready to go. They moved to the jetty with their bags and baggage.

Mathaichan was feeling pain as the boat gathered speed. It was dark and the speedboat bounced over the waves. Ajith felt frightened.

Mathaichan was gasping with pain and Dr. Alen gave him a tablet to eat. The journey seemed never ending. It was a dark void and the only light was the stars in the sky and the lights from scattered island resorts.

At last the boat reached Male' and they got down. Alen called a cab and they drove straight to the National Hospital. Mathaichan walked into the intensive care unit, closed the door and Ajith waited for a long time, when at last Dr. Alen came out and said,

"He is put under observation. One valve seems to have stopped working. Our facilities here are limited. If the pain continues, we will have to airlift him to Trivandrum tomorrow. You don't have to wait here. It is already midnight. Come, we will go home, and have a nap. There is one doctor observing Mathaichan."

They went to Alen's place. Sylvia opened the door and she was half-asleep.

She asked, "How is Mathaichan?"

Alen said, "He is a little serious. He may have to be taken to Trivandrum. Tomorrow we will contact the Sere Chithira Medical Centre and send him to Trivandrum."

Ajith woke up with a start. Sylvia was in the kitchen making coffee and Alen was speaking on the phone. Ajith heard him arranging for two seats on the Trivandrum flight.

Ajith got up and went to him. He rang up the hospital to find out about Mathaichan's condition. The doctor said that Mathaichan had slept well and the pain had subsided and he could be moved. Ajith packed the luggage and Alen sent for a car. They went to the hospital. Mathaichan was very weak. He got dressed and slowly walked to the car. They drove to the harbour, got on a dhoni and reached the airport. Dr. Alen and Sylvia got in first to the customs counter and explained that Mathaichan was sick. Soon they got cleared. Ajith bode farewell to Alen and Sylvia with tears in his eyes and Mathaichan shook hands with both of them.

They moved to the entry point and soon the announcement to board the plane was heard. They got into the aircraft.

The aircraft took off; everybody fastened the seat belts and waited in apprehension. Soon there was an announcement that they were at a high altitude flying over the Indian Ocean and that they could loosen their seat belts and relax. The airhostess distributed snacks and suddenly there was a heavy down pour. Ajith saw a lightening flash, which would have hit the tail of the plane. The sky became dark and there were flashes of lightning and heavy downpour.

Ajith sensed that something was wrong. Their plane circled Trivandrum but flew off soon again and later he heard that they had landed at Chennai Airport, as the pilot could not land in Trivandrum. Mathaichan was frightened as he was feeling pain. Varkichan and Manju were waiting in Trivandrum Airport and they saw the Male' flight arriving but saw it turning and heading south in the heavy down pour.

Varkichan went to the airport office to find out what was really happening. They couldn't brief him much either. After all the consternation and much waiting the flight landed at Trivandrum and they went in through the customs. They had nothing to declare and soon they got out of the customs.

Ajith saw Varkichan at the entrance and his heart leapt when he saw Manju. Manju saw them and ran to meet them. She came running and embraced Mathaichan. She was sobbing. Mathaichan said, "Don't worry, I am all right. Thank God, we landed safe."

Varkichan said, "I have alerted the heart clinic and the doctor is waiting to examine you. We will drive straight there and I rang up Jose and Anamma. They will be coming to the hospital. Who was that foreigner who rang us up?"

"That must be Dr. Alen." Ajith said.

"It was I who took the phone. He said that he was a doctor and a friend of Ajith and that Mathaichan had a little heart problem that has to be shown in a hospital in Trivandrum. That made us worried. Why is it that there is no good hospital in Male'? He said that you were coming by today's Trivandrum flight. I rang up Daddy and we drove to Trivandrum," Manju said.

"When the flight did not land here we were worried. I thought that somebody had hijacked the plane with a sick man inside. I enquired at the airport counter and they said that the Trivandrum flight landed safely in Chennai and will come back to Trivandrum when the rain was over." They went to the car and drove straight to the hospital.

## 27

The doctor came out wiping the perspiration from his forehead. He said, "The ECG shows that one valve of the heart is not working properly. We will give medicine and see what will happen. Nothing can be said now. He is put in the intensive care unit."

Varkichan said, "If I have to take him to some other place please tell me. His life is more important than anything else for us. Please give the best treatment possible".

"There is an injection to stimulate the valves of the heart. It is pretty costly, around ten thousand rupees. Shall we give him one shot?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, give it by all means," Varkichan said.

Then Jose and Anamma came in. She was weeping. Varkichan said. "Daddy is in the intensive care unit. You can only see him through the glass panel."

They went inside and Ajith followed them.

Ansamma asked, "How did it happen? Is there any special reason for the attack?"

Ajith said, "It happened all of a sudden. He had been drinking a little too much. My friend Dr. Alen came at the right time and treated him. They gave him all possible treatment in the National hospital. It was not sufficient. So, we had him air-lifted here."

Manju came in shedding tears and Ajith smiled at her. He said, "He is much better and the critical stage is over. The doctor said that there is nothing to worry about. They are going to give him a costly injection and that might make him better."

Jose said, "Any way we can't go in. Let us go and have some tea."

They went out of the IC ward and went to the canteen. Manju asked Ajith, "How was your stay at the resort? Who was the foreigner who rang us up?"

Ajith said, "It was Dr. Alen. Now he is working in Male'. He and his wife came to the resort and they gave us a party. He was the one who pulled Mathaichan out of the heart attack. We had been lucky to get medical attention in such a remote island, sixty kilometers away from the main land. I had warned Mathaichan that he had been drinking too much. He drank different types of booze together and that became a cocktail in his tummy that caused the consternation. Thank God that we could get back here. It was all because of the timely intervention of Dr. Alen."

Manju said, "Your entrance exam is next Saturday. Did you do any preparation?"

Ajith said, "Not much. I was engrossed in a novel called 'Doctors' by Erich Segal. It was an experience but I could not complete reading the book. Later Mathaichan became sick and I had to look after him. You pray for me so that I can get through."

"Ajith, you come and stay with us straight away so that you can do some preparation. This hospital is not a good place for studies," Ansamma said.

"I would prefer to stay with Mathaichan till he gets out of here," Ajith said.

"You better come away. That exam means a lot to your future. We will get someone else to stay in the hospital," Jose said.

They reached the canteen and ordered tea and snacks. The waiter brought tea and Manju served it to them. Ajith looked at the tip of her nose between the eyes, when she poured tea for him and there was a twinkle there. He said, "Thank you," and drank the tea. They got out of the canteen and joined Varkichan in the hospital.

## 28

Varkichan drove them to the Railway Station. Ajith had said good bye to Mathaichan when he got a chance to get into the IC. It was Manju to whom saying good bye was difficult. He couldn't be too obvious either. He looked into her eyes and said bye to her.

They got into the train and Manju's eyes were loquacious. There were two drops of tears at the corner of her eyes. Ajith smiled at her and said, "See you," to Manju, and said to Varkichan, "After the exam I will come to the hospital to be with Mathaichan. He may have to be there for some time."

Varkichan said, "That is O.K. Now you do your studies well. I have asked my nephew Satheesh from Quilon to come and stay with Daddy. He will come today."

The train moved and Ajith looked into Manju's eyes and the same gleam was there again. Throughout the trip he was making up his mind with one resolution to marry her and also of becoming a doctor. Both goals seemed unreachable, but he made up his mind to strive hard to attain those goals.

Ansamma was very fond of Ajith and he tried to be loving and affectionate to her. He put her in his mother's position but Jose was keeping a little aloof.

He wanted to be a loving son to those childless people and tried to be affectionate. It was a great thing that they were going to adopt him as their son and to foot the expenses of his studies.

He knew he couldn't forget his parents either, especially his mother. He suffered all the pain and ignominy in the estate for her. His running away was also for her sake. He wanted to give her a good life. He didn't know for sure whether he loved his father.

As he was, he was unlovable and he did not feel any gratitude to his father for feeding him or bringing him up. Though his father was a good person when he was not drunk, he did not like him as he lacked integrity. The way he spoke, his cheap outlook on life was detestable to Ajith. He did not want to be like his father at any rate.

The heredity factor was so prominent in his nature and he had to control so many negative qualities that he had inherited from his father. He realized that whatever good qualities his father had, he too had them. He had inherited the noble nature of his mother also. He had acquired her soft-spoken nature and her pleasing way of dealing with other people.

He knew he had to be careful in life, especially when he was talking to others, lest he should be outspoken and give a wrong impression to people. He had a sarcastic way like his father in his remarks to others. Though he did not mean a thing, some of his remarks made others antagonistic towards him.

No one could be selective as to his progeny and that was the problem with Ajith too. Men are born by accident and not by choice. Though there is divine destiny in his life he was tied up to the elements of bad heredity, and however hard he tried, he could not overcome them. It was not an isolated case either.

What were his chances of reaching his purpose with such a heavy burden of bad heredity heaped on his back? How could he surmount all the high obstacles in front of him and reach his goal in life? That was the challenge he had to face like every adolescent of his age. He became hopeful and took every obstacle as a challenge

and decided to mount that hurdle and to go ahead in life. There was nothing much to lose, but a lot to gain and there was only one course open, which was, to go ahead with his life as, the way he wanted it to be. His self-initiative was activated, and he started moving with fresh enthusiasm.

Ajith wanted to give a de-addiction treatment to his father to pull him out of his drunkenness. But his father's basic lack of character and desire to get things without doing anything in the bargain made him, hate him. He disliked his cynical way of looking at things.

They got down at Kottayam and changed into a bus. The trip was long and tedious. At last they reached Lower Periyar. Jose showed Ajith the room he could use. They changed and walked down to the river for a bath. The water was cold and the bath refreshing. Ajith swam for some time and came to the shore panting.

When they came back Anamma served them boiled yam with chilly curry and tea. Ajith liked its taste and ate a lot. Then he went to his room unearthed the guidebook for the entrance exam and scanned it intently.

He revised the lessons that he learned and went through the guidebook. He went on reading one text after another. Soon it was midnight, the full moon rising in the horizon and beaming smilingly on the forest, mountains and valley. It was a beautiful sight. The scenario was so attractive that Ajith sat outside his room and went on enjoying it deeply.

At one o' clock in the night he went to sleep, meditating the way Fr. Joe taught them. He floated into the realm of sleep, angels fanning him to sleep. He dreamt about a big stethoscope swinging in front of him. He tried to snatch it, but it went away from him as soon as he was about to catch it. He tried again desperately as a last attempt. Finally he was able to hold the hanging end. He looked at the other end, which was in his father's ear. There was a tug of war between them and Ajith pleaded not to break it apart and he left it from his hand. Vasu was laughing and gave him a rubber tapper's knife, and Ajith yelled, "No, not that."

He woke up perspiring and turned on the light. He went on with his studies. When the cock crew he felt tired and went to sleep again.

## 29

He heard a knock at his door and went to open it. Ansamma stood there with a cup of hot black coffee. It had the aroma of cumin seed and was very sweet. He drank it and relished its taste. There was a small waterfall near Paradise and Ajith went to it, washed himself and came back to study.

They had their breakfast of boiled tapioca and chutney. Ajith liked it and was relieved to have homely food. He hated the western food they had to eat at Maldives.

Jose went to town to ring up and find out about the condition of Mathaichan. When he came back Ansamma was anxiously waiting and he said that Mathaichan had pulled out of the critical stage. The chances of a second attack were remote and that he could leave the hospital in a week. Satheesh was looking after him, staying outside the IC day and night. Varkichan and Manju had left and everything was all right.

Ajith went back to his studies and around ten o' clock he went to the river and swam for some time. He felt refreshed and cool. He swam across the river and climbed into the forest. The undergrowth was thick and the trees were tall. He remembered the sweet mangoes and went in search of it. To his dismay, he found not a single mango on the trees.

He sat on a rock and whistled a tune. Monkeys were hopping on the branches of the trees, and he ignored them. They were staring at him, an intruder into their privacy and someone who did not look like one of them. Ajith took a stone and threw at a monkey. He jumped down from the tree and shrieked at him. More monkeys were coming and they formed a gang. Ajith felt a little scared and he ran downhill and jumped into the river.

He dried himself and went back home. He started his studies and went on memorizing facts and figures. As he read, he realized how much he did not know. The stakes were high and it was a life and death struggle for him to qualify in the entrance examination.

## 30

Ajith got out of the exam hall rather perplexed and he was not sure whether he had done the exams well. He went to the bus stand and took a bus to Trivandrum. He was excited and a bit worried, as it was his future that was at stake.

He reached the hospital and came to Mathaichan's room. Satheesh was there and Mathaichan asked Ajith, "How did your exam go?"

Ajith said, "It was a little tougher than I expected. I did my very best."

"Let us wait for the result. We will see, what can be done," said Mathaichan.

"You should have prepared hard. If you are burning with a desire to become a doctor, you should have taken more pain in the preparation. My grandfather here used to tell me to have a definite purpose for our lives. Since I don't have a goal, I am moving in a vicious circle," said Satheesh.

"That is because you are immensely rich. Your grandfather and father had amassed millions and you are the only heir to that fortune. If you had to struggle to make that much of money, you would have known its worth," Mathaichan said.

"All my life I had been struggling to preserve what my millionaire father had amassed and I want to make my own fortune before I settle in life," retorted Satheesh.

"You have been losing money on projects you plan and give up half way through. It is not the way. Have a definite purpose and make your life oriented towards that goal. Don't go after too many goals. I have dictated to Ajith a small essay on how

you should build up your lives. You take a copy, read it and distribute it among your cousins," suggested Mathaichan.

"I will do that, grand-dad. We will go out to breathe a little fresh air and come back. Come Ajith, I will take you for a ride and show you a little bit of Trivandrum."

They got in the car and Satheesh drove away. They went through Palayam, Statue Junction and East Fort. Satheesh said, "Shall we go to Kovalam? We can breathe a little fresh air. Tell me more about yourself. You are also included in our gang."

Ajith told him about his life in the estate, the problem at home, his interaction with Dr. Alen, how he motivated him to pursue his studies and to become a doctor.

Satheesh said, "You should never give up that initiative that pulled you out of such a muddle. Our family is eternally grateful to you that you helped my grandfather when he had the heart attack. We love him so much".

"He has become my God-father as Mario Puzo wrote. He made your aunt sponsor my studies. They have almost adopted me to their family."

Satheesh said, "I heard that bit too. I had a feeling that you are a cunning guy who tricked my people into accepting you. But now I know you are genuine, and really needs support. I promise to give you my support."

"Thank you, I will try to live up to the expectation you have placed on me. I have learned to work hard and to go the extra mile in all that I do."

"Here we are. Do you want to go to the beach or have a snack at Hotel Taj?"

"I prefer to go to the beach," said Ajith.

They went to the beach and it was crowded with westerners who were sunbathing half-nude, white flesh exposed to the scorching sun and getting tanned. That is all they wanted. Ajith told Satheesh, "See how crazy these folks are. I would like to get more colour for my body while they are trying to get dark."

"This is all they will have left when they reach home to show their friends, squandering so much money. I wonder whether it is all worth it. The sea here is so inviting, but the foreigners are exploited to the maximum, though they know it or don't seem to give a damn."

"The beach, the rolling waves and the setting sun are all beautiful. Even in Maldives I couldn't find the sea so appealing. Shall we go and jump the waves?" asked Ajith.

They rolled up their trousers and jumped over the surging waves. The waves hit them on their shin and thighs with such force that they had to keep jumping not to fall down. It was such fun that they went on jumping over the waves and the surf got them wet.

They came to the shore and dried themselves, lying on the beach. There were lots of white people sprawled on the beach, and Ajith told Satheesh, "the sea in Maldives is much calmer than here and we can almost float on it. They keep the beach so clean that it is a delight to bathe in the sea. We can see its bottom full of corals and fish especially when we are snorkeling."

"Shall we go and have some food? It is pretty costly here." Satheesh said.

They drove some distance away from Kovalam and stopped near a coffee shop.

They ordered two cups of tea and seeing the tea-maker pouring tea from one mug to another lifting it high and pouring so thinly, Ajith said, "I want one meter of tea! Look at the way he does it!"

Both of them laughed and had two glasses of tea and paying the money left the place. When they reached Palayam, Satheesh said, "We will go to the Indian coffee house. My old gang in Trivandrum will all be there."

As they entered the coffee house, somebody from a table yelled, "Hi, Satheesh, come over here."

"Hi, Atul, how are you? What are all your new projects? How is your TV programme getting on? By the way, meet Ajith. This is Atul, a tele-film director."

"You got any bright ideas in your nut for me to work with?"

"Sure, if I open up my mind, it may sound crazy to you. But I want you to do it."

"Come on, what is your idea. Shall I order three cold coffees?"

"The idea is this. Ours is a country infested with lot of politicians. Ninety per cent of them are corrupt and mean. I want to expose them to the public, that too at their own expense. We will make a programme where half an hour daily we will interview one politician each. It will be from the village to the state level, who will be given a chance to explain to the public whatever service they have rendered to the country, their achievements and their activities. It will be at a cost of one lakh rupees which they got to pay in advance."

"This seems interesting. There will be lot of people willing to pay the money. It can be the best publicity a politician can get. But what is the catch?"

"It is coming. I got a cousin. She is so smart and naughty. She will be interviewing them. We will do our homework by digging up the history of this people and about the corruption that they had been wallowing in. In a very innocent way she would trick these people into admitting their corruption, that too in front of the public. We will shoot the whole programme that would last at least three months and then only we will telecast it. Do you want to see how we go about it?" said Satheesh.

"I got the idea. Act out a scene and let us see what you have in mind." Atul said.

"Let us take the case of James Achayan, the president of a panchayat and an ex-MLA. She will interview him and ask him what all he did for his constituency. He will say, I made three bridges and four roads in my Panchayat. Then Manju will ask him, how he spent the ten lakhs that contractor Thomas gave him as commission. He will innocently say that he got his daughter married to a doctor, and then only he will know what he said and may ask, how we knew, that too in front of the public. Manju will distract his attention by saying that his opponents are saying that," said Satheesh.

"That is a good idea. Let us go about doing it. You be the producer."

“Okay. You be the director. We will figure out hundred people, digging about them and do the homework. Then we will get them interested in our project. Before the interview, we will coach Manju as to what are all the questions to be asked.”

“We don’t have to worry about the finances as a lot of people will be interested to come to the limelight and get a little publicity,” Terence said.

In the meantime the waiter brought the cold coffee and Ajith remarked, “I know Manju. She will be the right person to do the interview. She has a way of asking innocent questions that will drive people crazy the very next moment.”

“By the way what do you do, Ajith?” Terence asked.

“My story could be used for one of your telefilms. I am aspiring to become a doctor. I have written the entrance exam. I am a runaway from home, at the mercy of others like Satheesh.”

“See you, Terence, we got to go. Come to my place when you visit Quilon. My grand-dad is sick and is in the workshop.”

“He used to be a venerable old man. What is his ailment? I would like to come and see him.”

“He had a heart attack in Maldives. He was air lifted here and is in the intensive care unit. If you want to see him, come after two or three days. Bye, then. See you.” They drove off.

## 31

When they reached the hospital Varkichan and family were there. Ajith was taken aback seeing Manju wearing a jeans and top. He looked into her eyes with fire burning inside him and two people noticed it. One was Satheesh and the other was Kuttiamma, her mother.

Mathaichan was getting better and he came out of the glass case. They all went to the canteen and had tea and snacks. Sathesh was cracking jokes and Kuttamma was laughing at the slightest excuse.

Mathaichan said, "You all go out and breathe a little fresh air. Ajith will stay with me."

Manju said, "I am also staying with grandpa."

"There is a flower show and I would like to see that. There are lots of orchids and rose flowers exhibited," said Kuttamma.

"I will take you there. Manju and Ajith come along. Uncle, you stay with grand-dad," Sathesh said.

They all got into the car and drove off.

The place was like a heaven full of flowers, and people loitering there on the excuse of looking at the flowers. Youngsters were in multicolour dress and they walked into the lot. Kuttamma behaved like a young woman laughing at every joke that Sathesh cracked. Manju was silent. She followed her mother and cousin.

Ajith kept ahead of them and the flowers did not make him romantic. He was feeling shy and withdrawn. He wanted to speak to Manju but, did not know how her mother would take it.

He looked at Manju. There was a gleam in her eyes. He asked her, "Do you like these flowers?" pointing to a bunch of hydrangea. She said, "Immensely."

"Flowers are God's beautiful creation, besides girls like you."

She asked, "Is it a compliment?" and giggled. Her mother looked at her with wrath in her eyes and the face glum. Ajith knew by instinct that it was not safe to mingle with her in front of her mother.

They walked into Kanakakunnu Palace where the flower arrangements, made by rich society ladies and different exhibits of painting by local artists were exhibited. They got into an ice cream parlour outside and Satheesh made a bet.

“Manju and Ajith try this quiz. If you give the answer, I will buy you all ice cream. If you fail, you will have to give us a treat. The question is this, ‘Washington has a long one, Nehru has a short one, every husband gives it to the wife, the Pope has one but he never uses it. Now come on with the answer?’ said Satheesh.

Kuttiamma giggled and said, “Shall I say that?”

Satheesh said, “No, not that. I didn’t mean anything bad. Think straight and you will get the answer.”

Manju and Ajith consulted each other. They could not get the answer. Ajith told her, “We admit defeat. I will trap him with another quiz.”

The waiter came and Ajith ordered an ice cream each. Then he said, “You give the answer, and I will ask you another question. If you can’t give the answer, please pay the bill.”

“Okay, agreed, the answer is ‘Name’, Washington is a long name, Nehru is a short name. Wife will be known in her husband’s name like Mrs.Varkichan. The Pope never uses his real name but will be known as John or Paul etc.”

“Brilliant. Now try this. One man and a woman were walking on the road. An old man came against them and asked the lady, “What is your relationship?” The lady said, “His uncle calls my uncle, uncle.” What is their relationship?” asked Ajith.

“Okay, it seems that I will have to pay. Auntie, can you figure it out. It confuses me,” said Satheesh.

The ice cream came and they started eating it. Kuttiamma said, “Are they lovers by any chance?”

"That projects your mood. It can't be. There is a difference of one generation between those two people," said Satheesh.

"They may be auntie and nephew," said Manju.

Ajith said, "You are getting closer. If Satheesh agree to sponsor the bill I will give the answer."

"Damn it, agreed, what is the answer?"

"They are mother and son," said Ajith.

"That never struck me," admitted Kuttiamma.

"Now let us get out of here."

"Wait, now my turn. Which is the longest word?" asked Kuttiamma.

"Smiles," said Satheesh. "There is a mile between the two S's."

"Agreed, I can't memorize the real long word. This is a quiz that I learned when I was in college," said Kuttiamma.

Satheesh paid the bill and they got out. The colourful lights made Kanakakunnu a dream world. The people who were loitering around were mostly youngsters. There were dreams shining in the eyes of young girls when they flirted around with their fiancées.

Ajith felt highly romantic and looked at Manju through the corner of his eyes. She was so beautiful, her eyes twinkling and she looked at Ajith with admiration in her eyes. Ajith reciprocated and there was a stream of communication of love between them.

She turned to him and asked him, "Ajith, if you get admission for medicine where will you be studying. I am coming to Trivandrum for my college studies. I am

taking science group so that I can also try for medicine. Why don't you join the medical college at Trivandrum?"

"If I get admission I will join here. It would be good to have a friend around. I love this city. So different from the place I was born. There is something aristocratic about Trivandrum," said Ajith.

"I will pray that it works for both of us," she replied.

## 32

Ajith went to Lower Periyar by the next bus. The trip through the winding roads of the High Ranges made him fresh and energetic. He looked through the window and saw the river Periyar in its slow course between the mountains. The forests on the other side were fascinating.

He got down, went to Paradise and knocked at the door. Ansamma opened the door and asked him, "How is daddy now? Has his condition improved?"

"He is out of the IC and the doctor said there is nothing to be worried of. His intake of medicines was reduced and within a week he will leave the hospital. He will go to Quilon and stay with Satheesh's parents. Satheesh is in the hospital and he told me that I could leave the place."

"You be with us till your classes start. Are you sure that you will get admission for medicine? How did you do the entrance? When will the results come out?"

"After two weeks. I am saying all the prayers that I know to get through."

## 33

They set out to the estate in a jeep. They reached a place called Chithirapuram and took a deviation from there. The place was so beautiful that they got out of the jeep and relaxed there a bit. Ansamma got out a flask and poured out hot tea for them all.

They resumed their journey and went through Kunchithanny, crossed a river and reached Pottenkadu. It was the valley of a big mountain called Chockenmudi. People started greeting Jose and he said hello to everyone. He grew up there and later shifted to Lower Periyar. They climbed the hill and passed through a grove of wild trees. It was a cardamom estate converted from virgin forest by cutting down the undergrowth and planting cardamom plants. There was the aroma of cardamom in the air and the whole place was very cool.

They reached the house of Kunju, elder brother of Jose. They had a son, John, slightly older than Ajith. John had passed M.Sc. in Agriculture and had come back to the estate to help his father to look after the estate. His notion was that the life of a farmer was the best, having lot of time to spend with the family. There was no hurry as in the city life. If one felt like working, he worked and took rest whenever he wanted. One didn't have to give account to anybody or superior officers who can be mean and nasty.

Soon John returned from shooting birds. They had a hand loading gun with which they hunted wild animals and birds. John was lucky that day and he shot down five wild doves. He was so glad to see Jose and Ansamma. Jose introduced Ajith to them. John became very friendly to Ajith and took him to show around the estate.

They reached a rock protruding among the trees. They climbed the rock and started talking. "Why did you decide to come and stay in this remote estate, while you can get a good job and settle in the city?"

"I prefer the life here. It is so calm and peaceful here and we are only accountable to ourselves. We structure our time. Now I get some time to spend with my father and mother. When I get married I can spend more time with my wife."

"It never occurred to me. The life of a farmer has lot of added attractions like that. I ran away from a rubber estate like this because I couldn't cope with the kind of life there. My life would have become stagnated there," said Ajith.

"I used to come and sit on this rock and sing songs that I know. I fall into an ecstasy when I sing and I play a flute. It is so wonderful to recapture the reverberation of the sound of the flute in the forest."

"I love music, but I can't sing. Can you sing a song for me?"

"Do you know the old song from `Sholay'? I shall sing it."

He started singing and Ajith hummed the chorus. He visualized the scene from the film of those great friends and felt an intimacy towards John.

John said, "This evening we have an invitation for the festival of the tribal people here. My father is supposed to attend that, as he is the village chieftain. He deputed me to go as the heir to his empire. You also come with me. It can be fun."

It was soon evening and they came out of the estate bungalow, which was protected from the attacking wild animals by a trench dug around it. There was a bridge across the trench. Electricity had not reached the place and the only communication from the outside world was through the radio, which was barking out classical songs all the time, and some news. John would at times tune in the BBC.

After eating cooked tapioca, Ajith and John set out in the direction of the tribal settlement. They were greeted by the tribal chief and offered two chairs. There was a small temple there and they were given 'prasadam' and delicacies offered in the temple. Ajith found it unpalatable and looked at John. He said, "We can't simply throw it away as it is a religious thing. I can't eat it either. It is such a lot. We will go to the forest, dig a hole and put it inside." They got up and walked into the jungle. John took a stick and dug a pit. They put the sweets in the pit, covered the pit with soil and came away.

Soon the festivities started. Songs were played over a loud speaker and people were dancing like in a disco in their tribal manner. The chieftain asked John to sing a song. John winked at Ajith, took him also to the microphone and started singing the song from Sholay. Ajith sang with him and there was big applause, when the song was over.

They hung around there for some more time. John secretly pointed at a tribal girl who was, in love with him. She was shy to come in front of John but he liked her very much. John always spotted her among the bushes looking at him and admiring him. She was so beautiful and looked intelligent.

Ajith asked John, "Would you marry her if she says yes, to you?"

"If only I had the courage, I would have surely married her. My parents won't approve of it and she is not much educated."

Ajith said, "Look at the way she peeps at you. She is dancing so attractively to impress you. Besides she is beautiful and looks not at all like a tribal girl."

"Who knows whether she is willing to marry me? Let us get out of this place before I break her heart," said John.

John smiled at that girl and her face lit up with a shy smile and she ran away and hid behind the temple.

When walking away John said, "I don't even get a chance to talk to her or see her properly. She is so shy."

Ajith said, "Shall I talk to her and find out? Tomorrow I will go to their settlement in the pretext of a government officer to take their census. I will go to her house and talk about you and find out her opinion. I will fix it, but you should be stern. She is a wild flower that bloomed in the wilderness. Her fragrance should not die away in the wild wind. If things go all right, I will talk to Jose Uncle. He will intervene and get you married. You decided to stay in this forest and to lead a wild life, she is the most suitable wife for you. No city girl will come and stay here in this forest."

"Okay, I will take you tomorrow to their village. But I won't come to her house," said John.

"No problem. But it is a chance to see her at close quarters and as part of taking the census I will get all her details. Have you got a big file to spare? Then I am ready."

They reached John's house. It was so cold, and a fire was burning in the fireplace. They had supper with the dove that John had shot and they went to sleep covering head to foot with a woollen blanket.

## 34

The next day John and Ajith set out to the tribal settlement. John pointed out the girl's house. Ajith went to the adjoining house and John hid among the bushes.

Ajith went in and smiled at the people in the house and said, "I am coming from the census department of the government to take your census. Who all are here in this house?"

"I have ten children, four boys and six girls. My wife is dead."

"Please tell me their names and age."

Ajith jotted down the details the old man gave. Then a man from the next house came and inquired what was happening. The owner of the house said, "This sir has come from the government to take our census."

Ajith said, "I am coming to your house also." He went with the man. He asked Ajith to sit on a bench.

Ajith asked him, "What is your name? How many people are there in your house?"

"I have a daughter. My wife died last year."

Ajith told him, "Call your daughter."

He called, "Malu! Come here."

Suddenly she came out and looked at Ajith. A flicker of recognition spread on her face.

Ajith asked her, "What is your name?"

She said, "Malu".

Ajith wrote it down and asked, "Age?"

She hesitated for a while, while the old man said, "Nineteen".

As they were talking their cow broke its rope and came, running helter-skelter. Ajith knew that John's wicked hands were behind that. The father said, "Let me go and tie that cow. She will give you the details."

As he left, Ajith said, "There is somebody who loves you and he knows that you love him too. He is interested in marrying you, if you are willing. You should not be shy and should talk to him, when you meet him next. He will be waiting on the west side of the temple this evening. You must come. By the way I got to complete my census. How much did you study?"

"How clever you are to trick us with this census. Lucky that my father went after the cow! I like John, but I was afraid whether he would like me. He is so educated while I did only my school studies. Then we are of two different castes and religion."

"If you both love each other, everything else is immaterial. His father won't approve of this marriage. So you should register your marriage in the Register Office. You should trust him and come with him if you want to get married. We will talk it out this evening. I will be around only for a week. We should settle this matter before we go."

"I have nothing to decide. I love him and if he loves me I am willing to get married. I will come anywhere he calls me," said Malu.

"In that case I will bring his uncle and aunt too. They will help you to get married. See you then in the evening."

Ajith left the house. He walked through the forest and saw John waiting anxiously, and said.

"There is good news. I talked it out with her and she is willing to marry you. The moment I started the census, you sent the cow there and her old man left us to ourselves. She likes you and is willing to marry you. She will come to the temple in

the evening. We will have to talk it out with your uncle and aunt. If they are on our side, we can forget about the objection from your father.”

“I have seen her from my childhood and I love her. We never had a chance to talk to each other and find out our likes and dislikes.”

“That is okay. You can do all the talking after you get married. There is the problem of religion and she is the only daughter of her father. It is going to upset her father. She must be a Hindu. You will have to teach her to be a Christian. Then you can get married in a church. I will talk about all this to your aunt and let her convince her husband. Come, let’s go.”

John was so happy and he started singing a love song very loudly as they walked through the forest to John’s house. There was a twinkle in his eyes and excitement on his lips. Ajith also felt happy that he had done a good job.

## 35

By evening John, Ajith, Jose and Anamma all set out in the direction of the temple. They waited there for some time, when Malu came there, always looking back to see if anyone had seen her. Anamma went forward and caught hold of her hands and brought her to the others. She said, “You are so beautiful. No wonder, John fell flat for you.”

Jose said, “We admire your courage. If somebody sees us talking, it would create unnecessary complications. We will give you all the protection and support you need. You will have to face a lot of opposition in the beginning. You and John talk with each other. We will stay away.”

Ajith, Jose and Anamma left John and Malu to be alone. Both of them were not sure as to what to speak or where to open a conversation. John got rid of the shyness and started talking to her. They discussed their plan to run away. Malu had dreams twinkling in her eyes when she looked at John and he caught on her hands. Both of them were shivering. He made sure that others were not watching, and planted a kiss on her cheeks. He came to call others while she stood anchored to the ground, her beautiful face blushing with shyness and happiness.

They all came where they stood and Jose said, "Tomorrow I will go and fix it with the Registrar, and day after tomorrow, we will have your marriage at Devikulam. You get away from home with some excuse and reach there. We will come ready to leave this place so that we can take you to our home and you stay there for some time till everything gets cleared. We are leaving. See you at Devikulam at ten o'clock in the morning, day after tomorrow. Look quite normal, and don't give anybody any chance to suspect."

Malu said, "I will tell my father that I am going to my auntie's place at Munnar for a week and reach the registrar's office at Devikulam. See you then." She left them.

On their way, to save John the embarrassment Ajith said, "Shall we go for mountaineering tomorrow? Auntie told me that whenever you come here, you climb the cliff."

"Okay, agreed. Tomorrow we will climb the mountain. I will go to its other side and reach Devikulam to make arrangements at the Registrar's. My only worry is how I will be able to face my brother after your wedding. I was always scared of my big brother. Now I am in a fix," said Jose.

Anamma said, "Think about it John. You will have to face the music all your life. I am not discouraging you. Love marriage has its advantages and disadvantages. We were highly thrilled when we got married, but my father was quite upset. The same way Malu's father would be very much upset."

John said, "My father has dreams about teaming me up with a very rich and aristocratic family. He was so proud that I am so educated. He would have bargained for my dowry. My mom would also be upset when she hears that I married a tribal girl."

Ajith said, "But you love her. To marry the girl whom you love is the greatest blessing in life. You want to get settled in this estate, and she is the best companion for that purpose. Besides, you both love each other."

## 36

They came to the bottom of the big mountain, Chokenmudi, food packed in knapsacks on their backs. The first phase of the climb was through cardamom groves. It was nothing extraordinary or thrilling. Suddenly their climb upward became difficult. There was tall grass, taller than a man. Parting it and climbing through it was difficult. They set fire to the grass as they climbed. The fire spread on ahead of them and they were trapped in smoke and fire. John acted resourcefully and led them out of the fire.

Suddenly a swarm of wild wasps came, flying and began circling around them. They were walking along a flat rock and Jose yelled out, "Lie down flat on the ground and cover the face with your towel. One bite from them and you are a dead man."

They all lay down on the rock and covered their faces with towels. The wasps were flying around them and the sound of their humming near their faces was scaring.

It seemed like an age. They waited for the wasps to leave and when the whole vicinity was cleared they got up. They opened their knapsacks and ate the food and drank water. They set out again and came below the peak, the last phase of their climb. A big rock was protruding into nothingness, and the climb was so difficult. John, like an expert, caught on the ridges of the rock and hauled himself up. He pulled Jose up and when he helped Ajith, he looked down into the abyss and was scared. He hung on John's hand for a second. It was life and death for both of

them. One false step and they were dead men. John hauled him up and he gave a sigh, when he was on firm ground.

It was such a stupendous sight, hills stretching out into eternity. They got engrossed in it for some time. The flora and fauna of the place were quite different. Trees were short but their stumps were thick. There were big red flowers on some trees. The undergrowth had a sweet aroma of herbs and the flowers were all so colourful. Wild goats were gazing there, undaunted by the intruders.

They ate up the last bit of food and John said, "It is so difficult to climb down the way we came. The other side is the Gap Road and we will get some lift to Munnar."

They climbed down the mountain, reached the Gap Road and got a bus to Munnar. Jose got down at Devikulam to go to the registrar's office. Ajith and John reached Munnar and had food from a hotel. The tea estates covering the round hills like a green canopy was so fascinating to Ajith. The tea bushes were trimmed short and on top it looked like a green carpet spread on the hills. They took a bus and on the way home Ajith said, "Tomorrow is your day, the greatest day in every man's life. Getting married to the girl you love. Say all the prayers you know that everything goes well and work out the way we planned."

John said, "I am only worried about my parents. My father will never forgive me. He has great expectations about my marriage, and the dowry he will demand from the bride's party. I am his only son."

"Make up your mind, to be or not to be, because once we commit ourselves, it is lifelong and have to face whatever that comes along. I got involved in this affair because you said you loved her so much. I know the feelings of a lover. She adores you and you love her. Everything else is immaterial if you stand straight and face it squarely. Your uncle is here to take up the responsibility, and he will pacify your parents. Why do you worry, then?"

"There is a letter for Ajith." Anamma closed the letterbox. Jose opened the door and Anamma said, "Malu, consider this as your house and step in with your right foot."

She brought a rosary and made the sign of the cross on her forehead. Ajith opened the letter. It was from his mother. His father was behaving funny and getting violent at times. He beat her up and did not come home often. She had informed her brother Sankaran and he interfered. He wanted Ajith to come home as early as possible to discuss about what was to be done. His mother complained that Ajith had not written to them till then.

Ajith said, "Now John and Malu are here. Let me go home. I am badly needed there. I will set out tomorrow morning and come back as early as possible."

John said, "If it is that urgent and bad I will also come with you."

"No need! Today is the greatest day in your life. You should be celebrating honeymoon. It is the first night for you. Don't worry about the things that you got to face, love each other and be happy," said Ajith.

"Let us leave John and Malu to themselves. This is your bedroom. Let me cook a good dinner for you tonight." Anamma proposed.

Ajith and Jose very understandingly left the place. John took Malu's hand and led her into the bedroom. Malu was very shy. John told her, "I liked you so much ever since I saw you as a child. Why didn't you come and talk to me if you loved me so much. You used to hide in the bush and peep at me."

"I was not sure whether you liked me and it was embarrassing for me to make the first move. Besides you went out to cities to do your studies. I thought that your tastes would be different from mine as I was brought up in the forest," confessed Malu.

John said, "My plan was to return to my village after studies and to get settled in the estate. You were one of the reasons."

Malu said, "I had a feeling that you reciprocated my adoration for you, though both of us did not express it or acknowledge it. I have seen you secretly looking at me intently."

John said, "I still remember the day when I first noticed you. I was twelve and you were ten. I saw you on a rock near the brook drying your long hair after the bath. I stood there and looked intently in to your eyes and you did not waver. Something flashed out of my eyes and our eyes hooked each other. From that moment on I always had the image of your face in my mind. Even when I was mingling with the most fashionable girls, the image of your face was in my mind. Now, darling, you are near me, I am glad, come closer and let us explore each other and fathom the depth of our love."

He caught on her hand and pulled her closer to him. She embraced him and they were united in love, one flesh and one soul!

## 38

Ajith packed his dress in a knapsack and got ready. He couldn't sleep properly as the whispers and shrieks from John's room excited him and he dreamt about his honeymoon. He was thinking about Manju and his blood became hot and nerves excited.

He thought about the hurdles, he would have to face, if he wanted to marry Manju. She is from a rich aristocratic Christian family while he is from a broken low caste Hindu family.

They would never let her marry him if they knew his family. He was expecting the worst when he got the letter from his mother. He knew that she was suffering like a candle, burning down, being the wife of such a ruthless fellow as his father who had no consideration towards his wife. He did not care how much she suffered; nor did he understand her difficulties.

John came out of his room, to meet Ajith. Malu brought two glasses of black coffee, which Anamma had made. There was shyness on her face and John too was feeling shy.

Ajith smiled at her and winked at John. Teasingly he said, "Now be prepared to face the music. Wish you all the best. I am going home. When I come back I will contact you. Inform your parents and her father that you are married. It will be a shock for them. Malu's father would be really upset. The best strategy would be to send a letter to your parents asking them to inform Malu's father too. After knowing their reaction and how they are taking it, plan your future move. After the first shock, there won't be that much resistance."

"I am only worried as to how I will face my father. He had great dreams about conducting my wedding in our parish church with a grand party and all," John reflected.

"Don't spoil the most beautiful time of your life by worries as to what will happen tomorrow, when today is the day. This is the time when you should love each other and grow in love. Malu left everything to come with you. Love her as much as you can and let her never feel left out. Bye then, see you later," said Ajith, and he went in search of Jose and Anamma to bid farewell.

He told them, "I will write you after reaching home. Please find out the results of the medical entrance exam in the meantime. Shall I go?"

## 39

Ajith reached his house. Jaya came out of the kitchen and she heard someone in the sitting room. She came running to him and embraced him, tears gushing out from her eyes.

She said, "Your father is going to kill me. He accuses me of faults I haven't even dreamt of. Your uncle agreed to come, this evening and take your father to a holy woman who reads the future and solves such problems. When drunk, your father

yells that he will kill me and then will kill himself. He won't listen to me. I am fed up with this life. What shall we do?"

"Don't worry, mother. When Sankaran uncle comes, we will discuss and find a way. It has been like this as far as I can remember. You don't say anything disagreeable to father. If you nag at him, he will easily get irritated," said Ajith.

Jaya said, "When he accuses me of things I haven't done, I get angry and shout at him reminding him of the atrocities that he did, throughout our married life."

"That will only anger him more and make him more violent. Did he attack you physically?" Ajith asked.

"Once he slapped me on both the cheeks, caught on my hair and whirled me round. It was on that day, I wrote to you."

Soon Sankaran arrived. He asked Ajith, "Where have you been? You are the eldest son of your mother and if you don't look after her, who else will? We will take your father to a holy woman, Matha Saraswathy. She will find out what is wrong and will prescribe the remedy. We will start as soon as your father arrives."

Vasu came home after some days. He was unshaven and looked dishevelled. He saw Ajith and started shouting at him, "Where have you been? Why did you come today? Get out of my house. Sankara, it is good that you came. I am fed up with your sister's nagging. She would not give me peace of mind. I thought that it was my drinking. I stopped that too. She blabs things I haven't even dreamt of. You take her with you or I will kill her."

Sankaran said, "Brother, everything is going to be all right. We are going to the Ashram of Matha Saraswathy. She will find a solution for your problems. You wash up and get ready. We will start immediately."

Jaya came to the living room and Vasu was angry at her. She said, "Take a bath and give your clothes for washing and walk around clean."

Ajith said, "Look, how much mother cares for you. We will soon go to the Ashram. Take a bath and have a shave. Mother, I am so hungry. Get something for us to eat. Please make some tea also."

## 40

The Ashram was across a river. Luckily the river was shallow. They jumped over the protruding rocks and reached the other side. The Ashram was a thatched house and an old man came out to find out, who they were.

Sankaran said, "We have come to see the Matha, to get her advice and blessings."

"You wait in the prayer room. After half an hour, the pooja will start. Keep concentrating on the statue of Kali there and sit there, praying. Matha will meet you after the pooja."

They sat in the prayer room. Ajith tried to concentrate on the statue. The room was dimly lit. He did not get any solace by looking at the statue. Vasu was deeply engrossed in prayer. Soon Matha came to the prayer room with a lighted lamp. She did arathy to the statue with the light and brought it to Vasu. Vasu brought his hands over the flame and brought them to his forehead. They all did so.

She put the light down and looked at them inquisitively. She was a black plumb lady who wore her hair matted, not combing or washing it.

Suddenly she yelled, "Om Kali! Om Kali!" Her countenance changed, she looked very old, and she started speaking in Tamil in the voice of an old man. She said, "I see an innocent woman tormented and suspected for no fault of her own. Tell me who is responsible? Say at once."

Vasu came forward and she looked at him with rage in her eyes. Suddenly her voice changed and she started speaking mildly like an old woman. She said, "Son, why do you do all that. Your mind and body is full of poison; poison of suspicion. It is all in vain. You have been administered some poison in your liquor. Somebody is jealous

of you and tricked you. Your wife is an innocent woman. Go back to her and love her.”

She shouted 'Om Kali' and fainted. Nobody touched her. After sometime she opened her eyes. She said, "Take this 'bhasmam' and eat a pinch before you go to sleep. I will do the necessary 'homam' to make sure that all your problems are over. Go home and live peacefully."

They left the place offering some money for the expenses. Ajith did not stay at home, feeling that it might antagonize his father. He reached Lower Periyar where the information that he got selected for medical studies was awaiting him. He was to join the Trivandrum Medical College. John and Malu were there to share the good news. He got ready in a day, went to Pala and met Mathaichan. He gave him a letter of introduction to a priest, the warden of a hostel, where Ajith could stay.

## 41

Ajith entered the portals of the Holy Cross Hostel. He wanted to meet the warden. There were some boys sitting under a Badam tree. Ajith smiled at a boy and asked him, "Where can I meet the warden?"

"Why, have you come to join the hostel?"

"I've come to see whether I can get a room here."

"You go straight ahead and turn left. The last room is the warden's," he said.

Ajith walked on, turned to the left and landed in the middle of the toilet rooms. He realized that he was tricked. He came out of there and the boys made fun of him. One of them said, "We thought that the warden had gone to the toilet. Sorry, Father has gone out. Since you want to join here, come to the parlour. We want to know more about you."

They took him to the parlour and asked him to sit down. They all sat down and one boy said, "Manu, remove his chair so that he can sit more comfortably and speak."

Manu, a fat and tough boy came behind Ajith and slid the chair away. Ajith was about to fall down.

Manu said, "Sit the way you are, don't stand up or sit down. This is only the beginning."

Ajith said, "How can I sit down without a chair. Let me go. What are you trying to do?"

"If you want to stay here, do as we say. If you are joining here we will have another session after supper." Ajith was feeling angry. It was the inevitable ragging of which he was so scared. It was the reason, why he preferred to stay in an outside hostel.

Suddenly a middle aged fat man appeared in front of them and all the boys got up to go. Manu said, "Father, this guy has come to join the hostel. We are just taming him."

Ajith stood up and gave the letter to the father. He read it and said, "So you are Ajith. There is a room vacant on the ground floor. Come, I will give you the key."

He got the key and went to the room. It was a small room with a cot, a table and a chair. There was a shelf built on the wall. He put his box in there and wanted to make a phone call to Manju who had joined a women's college in Trivandrum. Mathaichan had given her phone number and asked him to call her. He took out a coin from his purse and went to the phone.

Manu saw him going to the phone and asked him,

"Where are you calling?"

"All saints hostel! I got a friend there."

"Please do me a favour, my girlfriend is staying there. When you finish talking to her, tell your friend to fetch Mini. That way with one shot we can kill two birds."

“Okay, I will try.” Ajith dialled the number and when he heard hello from the other end, he inserted the coin. He told the girl who took the phone to fetch Manju. Manju came on the line and Ajith said,

“Guess who is speaking.”

“Well it must be you, Ajith. Did you join the hostel? What did Uncle Tom say?”

“I got a room and your uncle pulled me out of a little embarrassing scene. The guys in the hostel started ragging me and made me sit without a chair. My body was aching all over when your uncle came. Otherwise I would have hit the guy. That fellow is here a little far away. He wants to talk to one Mini there. Can you fool him and get somebody else?”

“Okay, I will teach him a lesson. Our cook is an old lady. I will tell her she has a phone call and let her talk to him. She will abuse him properly. Ajith, tomorrow we have a prayer meeting at St. George’s school. Fr. Joe is the main preacher. Please come. I heard that the guys in your hostel are real villains. Expect a good ragging tonight,” Manju warned.

Fr. Tom was listening to Ajith’s conversation. Ajith called Manu and handed over the phone. Manu was shouting through the phone. “Who is speaking there? I want to talk to Mini. You are not Mini. I don’t give a damn that the hell you are? Go and fetch Mini, otherwise get lost.” He hung up the phone.

Fr. Tom asked Ajith, “Who were you talking to? Ajith said, “To Manju.”

“Why are you phoning her? She is my niece and from a noble family. Don’t make passes at her.” “I will be careful in the future.” Said Ajith.

## 42

Ajith entered the gates of St. George’s school and spotted Manju waiting for him. He smiled at her and they went into the hall. Fr. Joe was there ready to start the session. Ajith greeted the father and introduced Manju.

"This is Manju from Pala, niece of Anamma Chechi. She invited me to this function. I've joined the Medical College at Trivandrum and am staying in a hostel. I sent you a letter when I came here. Manju is trying to lead me to Jesus."

"That is great. Manju, you are a true friend. You lead Ajith to Jesus and your reward in heaven would be great." said Fr. Joe.

"I would do it with pleasure," Manju answered.

"What is the programme today?" Ajith asked.

"In the morning we will have a class on Transactional Analysis. After lunch we will hear the testimony of Sherin, an engineering student. Then we will have some group games and in the end there will be a Holy Mass. I think everybody has come. Let us start the session," said Fr. Joe.

There were around forty people sitting in a circle. Most of them were teenagers and half of them girls.

Fr. Joe smiled at them and said, "Good Morning". They all shouted, "Morning, father." He started the session by describing the three mental stages such as Parent, Adult and Child. He stressed the importance of keeping the mind in the adult stage.

He said, "The only thing we are not sure is what is going to happen in the next moment. All we can do is to foresee how it would be and act accordingly. Anticipate each moment and think what we would do to face it. Don't do what your impulses tell you to do. Have a purpose in life and programme your time to reach that goal, step by step. Avoid doing things not needed or helpful to reach your goal. Now you can ask me questions and doubts." Fr. Joe concluded his session.

There were discussions as to how one could keep always in the adult stage. Ajith suggested that they should control their thoughts. It is little difficult in the beginning but easy with some practice. The discussion stretched on and then it was time for lunch. They were given a packet of fried rice each and it was good. Ajith and Manju sat with the Father and ate their lunch.

Soon the session started with Sherin, an engineering student, giving a testimony as to how she found meaning in her life. It was a love story and she went on describing how her boyfriend took pain and patience to lift her up from what she was, a final year engineering student, a drug addict and dropout from the college. She was from a broken family, her father, a drunkard and mother always quarrelling with them.

After her testimony there was a group game, passing the buck. One guy played a music system and a packet was passed around. Whoever that had the packet when the music stopped, had to do as the leader said. While Manju had just passed the packet to Ajith, the music stopped. He was asked to sing a song. Reluctantly, Ajith got up and looking at Manju, he sang the song 'Congratulations and celebrations.'

The song was good and there was a twinkle in Manju's eyes and Fr. Joe noticed it. He gave them an understanding smile and started the Mass. He made a special prayer for the couples who were in love with each other, so that their love is fulfilled. While saying the prayer, he looked at Sherin and her boyfriend and at Ajith and Manju. After the Mass, Fr. Joe told Ajith and Manju to be highly prayerful that night and something tremendous was going to take place, in their lives. They stood there for some more time chatting and then took leave of each other.

## 43

Ajith was highly thrilled after the meeting. He reached the hostel with a smile on his lips and twinkle in his eyes. He was feeling elated and was in anticipation about what Fr. Joe told him. He visualized the smiling face of Manju and was thrilled at the way things developed.

The phone rang and Ajith took the call. It was Manju and there was love and affection flowing in her words. She said, "I was wondering how you would be feeling. Father told us to be prayerful. But I don't feel like praying at all. Your face is flashing in front of my eyes and I am feeling thrilled. It is great to be in love especially to someone, loving like you".

"I was thinking about you. When I close my eyes it is your face that is in front of my eyes. Shall I say something; I love you more than my life. I really love you," said Ajith. He was too engrossed in the conversation to hear the footsteps behind him. Two angry eyes were staring at him and a wicked mind was scheming against him.

"I love you too, Ajith, take care and I am dying to see you. When can we meet?" she said.

"I would like to fly over to your place and sneak into the hostel to see you."

"Why don't you come over? One beautiful girl is waiting for you to offer herself to you fully. I am thankful to Jesus for you."

"You are the greatest gift that He gave me. There are so many obstacles in front of us. But together we will face them. I fear a lot of opposition from your mother and uncle. They don't like me and keep an enmity towards me. I will have to struggle a lot to win you. But I will even give my life if I have to, for getting you", Ajith said.

"I know it. I trust you fully and admire your integrity. We will build up our lives so marvellously that even those who hate us would be wonderstruck."

"It will be years when I am ready to marry you. Will you wait for me all that long?"

"Surely, even if I have to wait for ages I will," she said.

"I am glad. Thank you so much."

"Do you know what? Fr. Joe told me that tonight it is going to be special for us. He asked me to be prayerful. He is doing some supernatural feat, uniting us together. I am feeling highly thrilled and am having a tickling sensation all over my body. I just had a bath and am wearing a new dress that my dad bought me for my last birthday. You are not here to see me," said Manju.

"I can visualize you. You are the most beautiful creature that ever dwelt under the sky."

"You are the handsomest guy who ever walked on the earth. You look so smart, elegant and full of confidence."

"That is only a cover. I am scared and worried in my mind. You don't know the kind of insecurity that I face. But God had been good to me. I never was in want of food or money. It is the Providence. Let us be prayerful and go to sleep. Call me whenever you can. I will be here at this time of the evening waiting for your call. Good bye! I love you."

"I love you too; take care. See you. Bye." She hung up the phone and Ajith, highly thrilled put the phone on the cradle and turned back to find Fr. Tom behind him, obviously he must have been listening to every word he said. He looked at Ajith with a wicked stare.

Ajith did not say anything or look at him. He went to his room and closed the door. He knelt down and said some prayers and read the Bible. He went to sleep in a prayerful mood. Suddenly he felt a tickling sensation, starting in his toes and it spread all over his body. He visualized Manju, how beautiful she would be in her new outfit. He felt an intense desire for her and suddenly he felt as if possessed by her. He could feel her caressing his body, her lips on his and her hands embracing him. Blood flowed to the middle of his body and throbbed there. He was feeling ecstatic, with a shudder of joy.

His body was shaking with pleasure. His mind was set with a definite purpose to become a doctor and to marry Manju. He was determined and shaking with pleasure, he smiled, a smile of triumph, of faith, with the conviction that he would reach where he set out for and his muscles tightened, giving him supernatural power. His breathing became louder and he fell into an ecstasy.

Suddenly he heard footsteps outside his room. He fell into a trance and all the good feelings that had occupied his mind, left him. He tried to cling to it, but as he gained it, he lost it immediately. He was feeling desperate.

He slept off seeing a nightmare; he was climbing a cliff, barehanded. He saw Manju on the top inviting him to come over. He was desperately climbing but could not

reach anywhere near her. He climbed three fourth of the cliff when he lost his grip and fell down. He was falling and gave a wild yell when he was about to touch the bottom. Perspiring he woke up.

He put on the light and then only he saw an aerogramme lying near his door. The letter was redirected by Mathaichan. He opened it and it was from Dr.Alen, informing him of his visit to India for the weekend. They would be arriving on Friday's flight and would be there till Sunday afternoon.

Suddenly there was a knock at his door and he opened it. Fr. Tom stood there looking fiercely at him and asked him. "What are you doing in the middle of the night? How dare you talk to Manju and meet her. I had warned you not to do it. Switch off the light and go to sleep. It is three o' clock in the morning. Don't try anything funny anymore and then you will have to face the consequences. Good night!"

Ajith wanted to tell him to get lost but he kept quiet. With a fierce look as if he would pulverize and blow him up, Fr. Tom got out of the room. Ajith shut the door and switched off the light and went to sleep. The moment he was about to get into the realm of dreams he felt a choking sensation all over his body. He felt as if somebody had lashed him or whipped him on his back repeatedly. Ajith woke up and heard footsteps leaving from outside his room. He felt frightened and took a crucifix that Manju had given him and put it on his chest and praying, went to sleep.

## 44

Ajith waited outside the exit lounge of the airport. Dr.Alen and Sylvia came out of the entrance; they saw him and came in his direction. Both of them were wearing Bermudas and T-shirts and had knapsacks, on their back.

Dr.Alen had booked a 'rent-a-car' by phone and it was waiting for them at the airport. He got the keys from the proprietor and drove straight to the city and reached Hotel Highland where it was not very costly. They rented a suite, not very spacious but air-conditioned with TV, phone and fridge.

Straight away Dr. Alen asked Ajith, "How are you? How is the girl you told us about? We want to see her and find out whether she is as fabulous as you described her. I have an idea. We will take her also on our sight-seeing trips, so that we can get to know the girl, and Sylvia will assess her psychologically as it is her profession."

"No need, I have made up my mind about getting her as my partner in life. There will be lots of obstacles on the way, impediments that I have to overcome before she will be mine. Her uncle threatened me not to meet her or talk to her."

"Forget about her uncle. We will straight away go to her hostel and invite her to join us. Call her on the phone and tell her that we are coming," said Alen.

Ajith dialled the number and got her. He said, "Guess who? My friend Dr. Alen and wife have come and they would like to see you. You get out of the hostel under some pretext and wait there at the bus stop. We will be there in five minutes. Be ready for a holiday and sightseeing for three days with our friends. Get out on some pretext and let no one know where you are heading for".

"It is a bit difficult. Every day I have to find a fresh excuse. I will have to return before six in the evening."

"That will be taken care of. We will drop you back by that time. Shall I give the phone to Sylvia? She would like to talk to you. They are my own folks. Talk to her". Ajith gave the phone to Sylvia and she said,

'Hi, Manju!' I am Sylvia, a friend of Ajith. I know your granddad. How is he now? Healthy? I would like to see you. We are coming over."

"I am really surprised. I never expected to see you in person and now you are all in Trivandrum. I will get out of here and wait for you. My granddad is keeping fine. He is in Pala and under medication. He has to keep a sorbitrate under his tongue, whenever he feels heaviness in his chest. Otherwise, he is okay. He would like to see you, as it is your husband who saved his life. Shall we go to Pala? You can visit my house also."

We will surely come for your wedding, wherever we are. We are tightly scheduled this time. Sunday afternoon we are flying off," said Sylvia.

"I will get permission from the warden and wait for you at the bus stop. See you there." Manju hung up the phone.

They drove to Manju's college and she was waiting there. When Ajith saw her, his heart leapt with joy. He felt a little shy. Sylvia got off the car, came to Manju and shook hands with her. She led her to the car. Manju got into the back seat of the car and Ajith was sitting there. She had a mischievous smile on her lips. Dr. Alen extended his hand from the driver's seat and shook hands with her. He asked, "Where shall we go to breathe a little fresh air?"

"There are two places I heard there is in Trivandrum, equally romantic; one is the Veli Lake and the other is the Museum compound. Shall we go to Veli as it is close by?" said Ajith.

They drove to Veli and Ajith looked at Manju through the corner of his eyes. She looked so beautiful and affectionate. There was such warmth and affection in her countenance, he had never noticed before.

Alen asked, "Manju, what are you trying to become? If you also try to become a doctor, it would be a good combination."

They reached the resort. They got out of the car and walked to the shade of a tree and sat down on the lawn. Sylvia opened her hold-all and unearthed some snacks that they all devoured with delight.

"Manju, you are more beautiful than I thought. Ajith, you are so lucky," Sylvia said.

"I too am so lucky to have such a sympathetic and sober wife like you," said Alen.

"Let us all be thankful to God. There is a recent development in my life. Manju lead me to God." said Ajith.

"My husband has become a Hindu after his sojourn in India. He doesn't like to go to church. He now meditates looking at the statue of a goddess. More than feeling piety, I like its smell," Sylvia said.

"That was the memento, a sandalwood statue; the people of our estate gave Doctor Alen at his farewell party. Tomorrow is Sunday. Why don't we go to church?" said Ajith.

"Yes we will go. There is an English Mass at Pettah church in the morning," said Manju.

"Shall we go for a boat trip on the lake?" Sylvia suggested.

They hired a speedboat and cruised in the lake. The breeze was playing naughty and Manju's dress clung to her body exposing her perfect shape. Ajith was feeling highly romantic. He took Manju's hand and fondled it while Dr. Alen planted a kiss on Sylvia's red cheeks. Ajith winked at Manju and said, "Shall we also try that".

"Only after our marriage, ol' chap, I won't let you touch me before that", said Manju.

"I was only catching up with the general trend here," Ajith excused himself.

"I am all yours; fully submit to you, just like Sylvia to Dr. Alen."

I will treasure it as the apple of my eyes and will no way tarnish it," assured Ajith.

"That is a healthy attitude. I respect your Indian outlook to have sex and physical involvement, only after marriage," Dr. Alen said.

They reached Aakulam. They got out of the boat and there was a swimming pool there. Sylvia wanted to swim. Alen changed to shorts and Sylvia to bikini. They jumped into the pool and started swimming. Ajith and Manju sat on the shore watching.

Ajith smiled at Manju and said, "You want to swim? You would look great in a bikini".

"I don't know swimming and besides I would feel ashamed to walk around in that outfit."

"Tomorrow we are going to Kovalam Beach. We will jump over the waves and it would be fun. Wear something suitable like a pair of jeans," said Ajith.

Sylvia was floating on her back, and Alen came diving under her unnoticed, lifted her up and put her down. They all laughed when Sylvia cried, frightened. They stopped swimming and came out of the pool. They dried themselves and resumed the trip back.

Alen was navigating the boat with his right hand holding Sylvia with the other. She caressed his bare chest and they were engaged in an embrace. The boat lurched and Ajith remarked, "No sex on board. If the boat turns turtle, Manju and I would be drowned. You two had some fun already. We are waiting anxiously for the day when we can be like you. You two would swim and escape." Ajith winked at Sylvia and she took off Alen's hand and put it on the steering wheel of the boat.

They reached Veli and were dry by that time. Alen drove the car and dropped Manju near her hostel.

Ajith told her, "Tomorrow we will reach here by eight o' clock. Be ready by that time. We will go to church and later head for Kovalam beach. See you, bye!"

## 45

Ajith reached the hotel by 7.30 in the morning. He woke Alen and Sylvia up and soon they got dressed and set out. They picked up Manju and reached the Church. The Mass had begun and Fr.Noel said the Mass in such a pious and inspiring way. They attended the Mass in a highly prayerful attitude.

They went to the coffeehouse and had breakfast. Ajith said, "When we reach East Fort, turn right. There is the Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is worth viewing."

They reached the temple, and both Alen and Sylvia were fascinated by the sculpture on the towers. She bought an elephant carved in teakwood. Then they drove off to Kovalam beach.

They reached the beach. Alen and Sylvia stripped and with the bare minimum clothes headed straight to the sea. Ajith and Manju rolled up their jeans and started jumping the waves on the edge of the sea. There were lots of Westerners there like Alen and Sylvia, exposing their bare bodies to the sun for a tan.

The blazing sun evaporated the seawater from their bodies. Manju remarked, "Sylvia, you will lose your golden colour if you lie down here like this."

That is what I want. My husband likes to see me red and tanned all over," said Sylvia.

Ajith said, "I wish I had that golden colour of your body. It is ironic that you are trying to lose it while I put all the cream and powder to add a little more colour to my dark face".

"You are not that dark," Sylvia said.

"Manju would have preferred a little more colour on my body." Ajith said.

"It is not the colour or your external appearance that I love about you. It is your integrity and personality," said Manju.

"May be I am a little selfish. I was taken aback by your beauty the very moment I saw you," Ajith said.

"Beauty is skin deep. It won't last long either. Life means a lot more than that," Alen remarked.

"Let us forget the differences of opinion and have some food. I am famished," Sylvia remarked.

They marched to a restaurant overlooking the sea. Sylvia spotted a big fried fish kept there. They ordered that with some lemon. While Sylvia sliced the fish into

pieces Manju cut the lemon. It was served on four plates and they started eating. It was very delicious and quite an unconventional lunch.

They drank some mineral water and the lunch was over. They went back to the sea. Alen and Sylvia swam straight into the sea while Ajith and Manju jumped over the waves. While jumping over a particularly big wave Manju tripped and fell into the sea. Ajith caught her hand and he too lost his balance.

They were washed away into the sea and both of them got frightened. Manju got dragged into the sea and she was not to be seen for some time. Ajith dived and caught Manju on the waist and swam, pushing her to the shore. Alen and Sylvia saw them and came, swimming to their side. Ajith reached the shore with his burden and laid her there. Manju had swallowed a lot of seawater and was not moving. Alan came over and took control of the scene. He said. "She has drunk a lot of water. Put her face downward and the water will flow off."

Ajith turned her face down. She spat out lots of water but did not gain consciousness. Alen took her pulse and said. "She is suffering from asphyxiation. We got to give her artificial respiration. Ajith, blow air into her mouth, closing her nostril and draw the air in and out. That is the only way out."

Ajith was feeling a bit shy. Sylvia winked at him and suddenly the paradox of the situation struck him. He wanted to bring her back to life; at the same time he felt bad about kissing her. Alen patted him on the shoulder. Ajith sat on the beach near her and covered her mouth with his mouth and started blowing air into her lungs, covering her nostrils.

He spat out the salt water and went on blowing in and out. After some time Manju opened her eyes and the colour came back to her face. Ajith felt happy to see her blossom into a shy smile and he really kissed her lips and said, "Thank God, you are all right."

Manju sat up and Sylvia took out a towel and wiped the sea water away from her hair and face. The scorching sun soon dried the water out of their bodies. They moved to the car and drove back to the city.

Ajith made a phone call to Manju's hostel and it was a nun who picked up the phone. Ajith said, "May I speak to Manju, first Pre-Degree".

"Who is calling?"

Ajith sensed that if he said his name she wouldn't call Manju. He changed his voice into that of a girl and said in a shrill voice, "Beena, her classmate." The sister unsuspectingly called Manju and she attended the phone. Ajith asked her straight away, "How are you? Is there any problem with your nose or throat? Are you having cold or fever?"

"I am all right. I came and had a good shower. I feel fresh and okay. Thanks a lot for saving my life."

"I will do it with pleasure even if I have to endanger my life. You can count on me for that matter, anytime, anywhere."

"What is your programme for tomorrow? I guess that tomorrow is the last day of Alen and Sylvia with us. I like Sylvia. Such a mature woman! I would like to spend some more time with them," said Manju.

"Hopefully you can later. They are our lifelong friends. Tomorrow we are going to the safari park in Neyyar Dam. You be ready by eight o' clock. We will come and pick you up. Don't give any trace to any one as to where you are going."

He heard a cough behind him and when he turned around, he saw the shadow of a figure moving away. He suddenly said, "hold on" and went in the direction of the person who moved off. He heard a door pulled open and bolted and lights switched on. It was Fr. Tom's room. He came back to the phone and said 'hello', but there was no response.

Ajith did not dare to make another phone call. He went back to his room and went to sleep. Early morning he got up, took a shower and got ready for the trip. They

collected Manju and set out on their trip to Neyyar dam. One guy on a motor bike was following their car. He was wearing a leather jacket, crash helmet and goggles. In spite of all the camouflage, Ajith made him out as Fr. Tom. He told Alen to turn right instead of left and he went along the wrong road. The bike rider was pursuing them. Alen stopped the car, reversed and drove back. Their pursuer went forward further while Alen took the road to Neyyar dam and reached there.

Alen stopped the car and they walked to the garden. Sylvia and Manju looked radiant and very beautiful. Alen was taking photographs. He clicked both Ajith and Manju together when they were in the best of spirits.

He wanted to get all four of them in a snap. He focused the camera putting it on a ridge and set the timer. Alen ran and joined them. The camera clicked itself. Sylvia had a camcorder and she was also taking pictures.

They crossed the dam and came to the safari park. They got into an armoured van and the driver took them straight into the forest. It was full of wild animals and crocodiles. As they left, their pursuer on the bike appeared there. He was looking inquisitively into the van and tried to follow them.

They moved into the dense forest and the wild track they were moving along was getting narrower. The forest with its wild noises was quite frightening. There was a pride of lions on the side of the road and Sylvia took a number of snaps.

Sylvia opened her bag and took out some apples, which she sliced with a long knife and distributed it among them. They came to a place infested with crocodiles lying all around. Ajith threw a piece of apple to one of them and it devoured the apple with delight.

Suddenly the guy on the bike came, overtaking their van, and while overtaking in a curve he fell down from his bike, skidding. He was thrown among the crocodiles. They all came, rushing to him and bit on his leg and on the helmet. Alen shouted at the driver to stop the vehicle and seizing the knife from Sylvia rushed to the spot.

Ajith also followed him and Alen poked the knife into the belly of the crocodile that was chewing away on the leg of the rider and Ajith pulled his head away from the crocodile that was snapping at the helmet. They lifted the man and rushed him to the van while crocodiles came swarming in their direction. They got him into the van and closed the door.

That man was yelling with pain and Dr. Alen tore his hanky and tied it on the wound around his leg. He pulled his helmet off and it was Fr. Tom. Blood was gushing out from the side of his ear.

Fr. Tom looked at them with guilt in his eyes and said, "I wanted to catch you, Ajith red-handed with Manju. That is why I came trailing after you."

"I am sorry, father. If I had told you, you would not have let me go. This is Dr. Alen and his wife. And of course you know Manju. We came with our friends for sightseeing."

"Thank you, Dr. Alen, for saving my life. But it is not proper to take them around. Manju is my niece and I have concern for her," said Fr. Tom.

"They are in love with each other and I don't see anything objectionable in falling in love. If you are a good man you should encourage them. This is my humble request to you; do not stand on their way. Since you are a priest you may not know what it is to fall in love," said Dr. Alen.

He looked into Ajith's face and then at Manju and took both their right hands and united them. He said, "May God blesses you!"

Ajith and Manju felt very happy. Ajith felt that he had overcome one more impediments in his life. Alen asked the driver to take them to the nearest hospital and shook hands with Ajith, congratulating him. Sylvia kissed Manju and there was a twinkle in her eyes when she looked at Ajith. He was surely reaching high...

## The Grace

"I have immense pleasure in clicking open and launching this e-novel, "The Grace" by my beloved student Paul G. I am sure that this is going to be a land mark in the annals of literature, where the grace and providence of God have been in a unique way, manifested to Paul and his wife Grace. I had glimpsed through the CD he gave me before the launching, and I take this opportunity to congratulate Paul and Grace, especially her for her name being immortalized and perpetuated. Here goes 'The Grace', for the reading public, to log on and to enjoy. God bless." Doctor Wilfred Hans clicked the mouse and the LCD projector reflected the home page of the e-book, "The Grace" on the wall behind the podium.

Everyone gathered there clapped their hands and I got up, took the microphone from the Rector and proposed the vote of thanks, to him and all the speakers who spoke before him and all my friends and admirers gathered there. I glanced at Grace; she was standing on the side of the podium, recording the proceedings with a camcorder.

"Ever dearest friends, I thank you all for accepting our invitation to come over and bless this occasion with your august presence, especially Doctor Wilfred Hans, who taught me English and French, but destiny made me switch to learn accounts. He came all the way from Germany. Thank you, loving professor for releasing my book and blessing us. I thank Mr. Satheesh Netto, a multimillionaire who never assumed to be one, for the felicitation speech. Thank you, Satheesh for being a friend and guardian angel throughout my life. Your protecting hand and magnanimity pulled me out, many a time, from hardships and obstacles. The next person to thank is Mr. Jayadas, a business tycoon and world traveller, but to me more than anything, a good friend and elder brother who made a critical appreciation of my book with his deep knowledge of literature and wide reading. I thank Mr. Jose Xavier, former Principal who was my dearest brother who gave me a life line, and Dr. Xavier Dias, my senior and a professor who all complimented my book with their thoughtful words which did not spare its shortcomings. More than anybody else I thank Grace for her great help in editing and making thoughtful suggestions all throughout the making of this book and being the inspiration behind. It was her love and concern that prompted me to complete this magnus opus. I am no Shajahan to build a

Tajmahal for her. This is my tribute to her, ever-loving and always tolerant wife. Last but not the least, I thank God Almighty for giving me the proficiency and skill to create this work of art and I dedicate it for the greater glory of God. I thank you once again dear friends, for gracing this occasion.”

“Hold on please, there is someone there on the back row, the hero and protagonist of this book, Mr. Robert, and I thank you for coming over. I tried to contact you, called all the people who knew you, but nobody knew your where about, not even your parents and as a last resort I sent a message in the email address, which Diana the heroine of this story gave me some years ago. We also lost touch with her as you walked out of her life too. What happened to you; you are shabby, famished and with a forlorn look on your face? Where is that smart and dynamic Robert who was plumb like a pumpkin and bubbling with enthusiasm to face life? These are your friends too, come and speak a few words, tell us what happened to you, where you were absconding these past few years, putting your parents and sweet heart into immense sorrow. Do you know that Diana, who was the sweetest girl ever lived, is in a convent, undecided as to join there or not. Please come over and speak to us a few words.”

Hesitating but with sure steps Robert came towards me and the whole crowd waited in apprehension to hear what he had to say. I was flabbergasted at the stooping and depressed figure of Robert and my memory went flying back to the good old days, and the pleasant things to be thankful for. I would not have been what I am now, happily united to Grace, had it not been for Robert and Diana. I flew back on the wings of time and mused about the decisive day that was, when Diana came like sunshine into my morose, depressed and deprived life and turned it topsy-turvy. I was steeped in memory so I did not hear what Robert was saying.....

## 1

I was stooping as usual under the counter of the college office, where I worked, when a smiling, radiant face beamed a flash of sunshine like smile at me and said, “You seem to be too busy with your work. We girls notice that you are always

depressed and down in the dumps. Why don't you come to a prayer meeting at a friend's place this evening? It would take away your sorrows and make you hopeful and optimistic. My friend's name is Robert, and here is his card. You won't miss his house, the second one on the right, if you take the left turn from Miranda Junction."

"I'll try. By the way, what is your name?"

"I am Diana, in the second MSW, and I stay in the Ladies' Hostel. Please tell me whether you like Robert after you meet him; we are going to get married, once my studies are over."

"Wish you all the best. I am not interested in romance. If you are serious that is nice. Don't take this for a pass time and end up your life in sorrow ever after. That is what happened to me. I am the victim of a tragic love failure and even after five years I haven't got over the shock."

"Forget about the past, and think of the bright future that stretches ahead. There will be someone who would truly love you and give meaning to your life."

"That is unlikely. I will never find anyone lovable and fascinating as my ex-girlfriend Selin. I was mad after her, but my feelings were never reciprocated by her the way I wanted. Moreover, she was beyond my reach. I should have never wished for things that could not be accomplished. She walked out of my life, casting a spell of darkness for an eternity and my life would never be the same again."

"Can't you look out for someone better, or give an ad in the newspaper and try the matrimonial columns in matrimony websites?"

"In fact I was introduced to someone. Her name is Grace, working in a company you go for field work training. My friend Babychen took me home one day and his wife introduced me to her and said that they worked together. She had done a counselling course and practised during her spare time. They thought that my talking to her would sort out my problems and bring me back to the main stream," I said.

“What is your present disposition? Was she able to help you as your friends expected? We feel so sad seeing your downcast face and gloomy countenance. We will do all that we can. All the girls in our class are your fans, reading your poems and short articles. Just point out the game and we will kill it with one shot and bring it to you. I think I know your Grace; next time I go for field work I will entice her and invite her to our prayer meeting. You come to the next prayer meeting and surely you will find Grace there. This is my word for you.”

I did not want to encourage the conversation any further as my colleagues were listening too, and they were waiting for a chance to fling at my throat and have me chastised by the Principal who was so ill-tempered. I bode her farewell and to get rid of her, assured her that I would be there at the prayer meeting.

## 2

I had no difficulty in finding the place of Robert and he was waiting outside, ushering in the people that came for the prayer meeting. I was astonished at the handsome countenance, the elegant and sure demeanour in which he held his head. Anyone would look at him twice and no wonder that Diana had fallen head and shoulder flat.

I went inside and Brother Johnson, Robert’s father smiled at me and offered me a chair. People were coming in, one after another and I did not look at anyone, fearing that it might lead me to becoming familiar with them. I was feeling uneasy, afraid that someone would show interest in me and I would have to reveal my identity.

Soon the hall was full and Robert came and sat near me. “Diana rang up and told me that you would be coming. Feel at home and be natural. Try to concentrate on the message and involve in the praise and worship. It will give you peace of mind and inner happiness. Just loosen yourself and go on singing and clapping. You might get the anointing of the Holy Spirit and spiritual ecstasy, when you do it.”

"I am new to this kind of prayer meetings. My idea of prayer is to recite a few Our Father and Hail Mary. I say the prayers by heart."

"You will find spontaneous prayer more meaningful and worth it. When you relate to God in a direct way, thanking and praising Him, He would be very happy, and bless you abundantly."

"I have problem formulating the wording of the prayer and am at a loss to pray loudly or make a speech. Such things are beyond my ability."

"Just leave yourselves free and let the Lord lead you and guide you. The Lord has great plans about you. Your coming to this prayer meeting indicates that. Unless the Lord attracts, no one comes to him."

Somebody started a chorus and everyone clapped and went on singing loudly. The song went on and clapping became more intense and ecstatic. When one song was over there came another song loud and not melodious. I too clapped the hands and yelled out the song which ended in intense praise and thanksgiving. I too was feeling ecstatic and I loosened myself and let go.

Robert's father got up with the Bible in hand and started preaching. Bible verses were quoted often. The gist of his speech was to always praise God and thank Him, which would solve all our problems and take away our traumas and tantrums. The message was an eye-opener for me and I decided to practise singing and reciting "Halleluiah and Praise God". Whenever our minds are troubled or not otherwise occupied, this incantation could be done.

"There is a new brother here, and I request him to come forward and introduce himself and give us any insight or message he has." It was like a thunderbolt and I was flabbergasted. I seemed to faint, unable to speak, but Robert patted me and encouraged me to stand up and go to the podium, the turning point of my life.

I used to go regularly for the prayer meetings there and became a fan of Robert. He was so fascinating with his elegant and radiant demeanour. Diana and Robert were like a pair of nightingales when they sang songs, so melodious and heart stirring. It was a relish to watch the two of them in motion, movements synchronizing and they were made for each other.

I used to confide to Diana my traumas and phobias, my inhibitions and complexes. She used to show empathy to me, true to her profession of a social worker. Robert started doing the Cupid's work, reuniting me and Grace. To become friendly to Grace he approached her like a client, requesting her help to solve the problems in their imaginary love failure and being naïve enough she ushered Diana by giving her a notice by way of a professional letter, which teasingly they showed me.

But I never ever imagined or dreamt even that Robert would have to be taken by Grace as a case for counselling, a broken, disheartened and ruined man, utterly shattered. That day after feeling jubilant when my book was released, I felt a failure, a total failure when I listened to the discourse of Robert, the few words that he spoke, how his life lost its momentum, grip and clasp from reality, how he got estranged from Diana by a trick that destiny played and his hiding off, withdrawn from limelight of a fabulous and happy life. I felt sad that I did nothing in my power to avert the tragedy, to save them from such a traumatic condition of a love failure. I got married to Grace and travelled to such heights of creativity and self-realization that I ignored or failed to monitor the life of two, true and great friends.

While driving home and having Robert beside me on the front seat tactfully I made him speak how that tragic separation between Robert and Diana took place. It was like a movie's plot unravelling. Sitting behind us in the back seat Grace suggested to Robert to be our guest for a week and undergo a soothing and consoling therapy by way of counselling, which she was going to apply straight away after reaching home.

I resolved to trace out Diana and bring her back to the mainstream of life from the self-imposed exile in a convent, not joining there nor dropping out, undecided and may be hopeful that someday Robert would turn up to claim her. Robert knew where she was, but out of guilt feeling and shame to face her, did not want to come

with me to meet her. I knew that something terrible might have happened between them, Robert would not reveal that and he was reluctant to open up that topic. I decided to hear it from the horse's mouth, straight from Diana. We decided to travel to Wagamon the very next day, getting a small lead from Robert as to her whereabouts. To while away the time and to make the maximum use of it I told Grace to talk to Robert, giving him guidance to lead a fruitful and enriched life, her pet topic in a nut shell. After a good shower and dinner we sat down on the terrace of Paradise, our dream home, soft breeze winnowing over us. Robert was quite relaxed and in a good mood to listen to her.

## 4

"Forget about the past; don't worry about the future and think only of the present moment, today only is within our reach. I am going to ask you a question; what do you want to make of your life of, what is the purpose and aim of your life? I give you five minutes to think and give an answer considering all the odds and evens." Grace made the opening line and I kept quiet, lest I spoil the tempo of the discussion.

"Now I want to be a motivational speaker, training people to lead a happy and content life and marry Diana. That is what my father always wanted from me, to be a teacher. He had amassed sufficient wealth for me, so that I don't have to worry about a career to earn a living. As for marrying Diana, I am not sure whether she would be willing. I have had enough of everything, fun, frolicking and loose living, now I want to change my style of living. I want to be someone useful to humanity." Robert affirmed.

"I am really glad to hear from you. Now you are on the right track. About Diana I would do all in my power to get her back to you, provided you sort out the problem between you." I remarked.

"I am not yet over. Since you confirmed your goal, we should chalk out a plan to reach there. We'd better wait to hear from Diana and make the plans to suit her

decision too. I don't see so much of a problem to make a successful plan for your life, if you are conscious about the priorities and things to aspire in life. They are the true riches of life." Grace said.

"I shall better elucidate them myself. First thing is to have a positive mind, then sound health, harmony in human relationship, ability to discern the motive of others, freedom from fear, capacity for faith, hope of achievement, willingness to share, self-discipline, labour of love, open mind and material prosperity," I blurted out.

"They are the riches we may like to have and to dream about. I will elucidate them later. Now we will work out a plan for you to accomplish these things. For that you should change your life style. You should cultivate some new habits, or change the pattern of your living and thinking, which is not so easy." Grace remarked.

"I had enough of loose living, without any purpose. I have tried every fun possible, and found no meaning in all that. I've become lazy, good for nothing and a failure in life. You are giving me a new option; this is the great thing that happened in my life. I think I will get out of the pessimism and traumas that I am having," Robert concluded.

"I will tell you one by one the qualities that you should cultivate. It takes lot of patience and time to get trained in that fashion. We will do it bit by bit, in a week's time and complete my in-service course by the time we hear from Diana. Let us have dinner and have a peaceful sleep after that," said Grace.

"We will say the evening prayer. There are so much to be thankful to the Lord, especially for finding Robert, the releasing of my book and the hope that the Lord gives about the future of Robert as he is sure of what he wants in life. Come let us thank the Lord," I suggested.

## 5

We intended to make it a family picnic, and my children enjoyed the trip more than any of us. Robert and me on the front seat of the car and Grace and the girls were

in the back seat. Robert offered to drive when I became tired. We hoped to have another person too, when we returned if our trip turned out fruitful.

We visited Kurisumala Ashram first, to see the tomb of Francis Acharya, the abbot there. He was a saintly man and he was a solace in my times of trial. He listened to my problems, suggested remedies especially in my love affair with Selin. It was by his advice that I gave up trying winning her over as my partner in life. He told me that if I took the risk and made an adventurous attempt, she might become my wife, but my life would be miserable later. She might have great expectations about life and if I could not fulfil them she might become upset and disappointed. He pointed out that I did not have economic security to afford such a luxurious wife, nor an attractive and prestigious job. He knew my calibre and the mettle out of which I was made, but he told me that what we are and not what we would be, that mattered.

It really upset me, but he had the vision and foresight to tell me something that was like a pill, bitter to take, but healed later. I conceded to his advice, though it was so painful to take. When I stood near his grave I felt like thanking him with my whole heart and being. My wife and two children were his gifts. Drops of tears bulged at the corner of my eyes and I prayed to God to make him a saint.

We had lunch with the inmates there in the traditional style of the Ashram, sitting cross legged on the ground and eating from plantain leaves. The food was vegetarian and the atmosphere solemn, complete silence and no one spoke. My daughters being chatter boxes found it difficult to keep their mouths closed even at the time of the meals.

We put Robert in the Ashram and drove to the convent that was close by. When we asked for Diana there, they told us that she was in the dispensary close by. We went there and got in a ward where poor and desolate patients were admitted. They did not have enough money to go to some costly hospitals in town. Diana saw us, came in our direction with a sweet smile, typical of hers. She wore a cotton sari in light colour with no ornaments or make-up. Grace caught her by the hands and patted her hair, and she started weeping. She looked at me inquisitively and I smiled at her in an assuring manner. I was praying inside me, that the

confrontation worked out the way we hoped it to be. She looked at my daughters in an affectionate manner and they went and caught her hands. She told the patient she was attending that she would come back soon and came out with us.

“Diana, we have good news for you; we found out Robert, he is sorry for the past and would like to see you. If only you say you have forgiven him and have nothing against him, he will come and see you. Think of the good old days that you had together, how you loved each other and forgive him,” I proposed to her. She did not make any comment, but simply kept quiet. Grace took the lead from me and tried another approach. She told her, “Robert came for our book release, out of the blue and then we took him home and had confronted him. He is a changed man now, wants to be personality trainer and likes to have you as his partner as well as in life.”

“Let me think it over.” She was not easy to bend and very difficult to break. The years of pain, trauma and uncertainty that she had to undergo made her hesitant and wavering in taking a decision. We asked her to come for a short trip with us and ushered her into our car. She told us that she had to get permission from the mother superior of the convent. We also went with her to the mother and got her permission.

## 6

Robert was standing near the tomb, a sorry figure, circumspecting and brooding over the issue of life and future that stretched ahead. Diana saw him and there was a mixed reaction of surprise, joy and pain at the pathetic way he looked. Robert saw our car but he did not expect Diana to alight and run to him. She stood before him; there was a silence of ages, a fathomless gap that had to be mended. Only God and time could do the work.

Their eyes were loquacious enough even though they did not speak anything. Robert caught on her hands and said, “I am sorry darling, for all the atrocities that I did. Let us forget all those bad days and start a new life. Just say that you forgive me.”

"Should I do that? No woman would forgive such an incident. But I forgive you for the old times' sake. Life would never be the same between us," Diana remarked. I knew it was time that I interfered.

"I am glad that you've got reconciled to each other. It is not easy to forget and forgive. But we got to do it out of love for ourselves and others. Then only life would go on smooth. Now angels would be rejoicing over your reunion. Grace and I are the happiest people in this incident. We are going to stay in the Ashram for two days. Robert and you talk it out between yourselves and we all will go back together. We will drop Diana home and have Robert with us for a week. Grace has to do a bit of counselling to level him out and to bring him back to the main stream. Good food and good thoughts would make him our good old Robert," I remarked.

"It is okay for me. But I got to think it over once more. Can't easily digest these new developments in my life! I was reconciled to my fate and would have ended my life in the convent here. Lucky that I did not join here formally! I was sort of an apprentice for nun-hood. Please take me back to the convent," Diana said.

"Shall we climb the Kurisumala as a pilgrimage tomorrow? You both talk with each other and sort out the problems between you during our climb. I will drop you, Diana, and would like to have a few words with you privately. Get in the car, let us go." Grace started the car and they were gone. "What is it that happened between you two that has brought the separation? If you don't mind, I would like to hear that." I confronted him.

"I don't want to think about it. Diana had a friend called Manju. I never expected that she would bring such a catastrophe when I was introduced to her by Diana. She was so cunning and calculative. She tried to speak so many bad things about Diana, but I never gave it a second thought. The same way she also spoke to Diana about me. I never knew that she had an eye on me," Robert confessed. "What was it that separated you and turned you taking to drinks and drugs?" I enquired.

"Manju invited me for a film and I told her that if Diana is also there I would come. I reached the theatre as she told me to come ready for the noon show. Manju was

alone. She told me that she had called Diana also for the film. But she did not turn up, and we two got inside. Throughout the film she tried to make passes at me, nudging me, resting on my shoulder as if tired and bored. I did not encourage anything. When we came out of the theatre, she was clinging to me, catching on my hands. Below the staircase Diana was standing there, staring at us. Manju winked at her and she ran off from there. I called her from behind. She did not even look back. Manju had it planned in such a way that she told me to come for the noon show and invited Diana for the matinee, that the timing would be perfect to come out in front of her after the movie in such a provocative way. She destroyed our lives, thinking that she would get me. That was the last time I spoke to her or looked at her. She rang me up many times, but I told her to get lost. She continued to harm us injecting more venom into Diana by way of phone calls.” Robert stopped short of breath, and I nodded understandingly.

## 7

The rest of the story is imaginable, a youngster, denied the love from his best friend and Robert tried all things possible to destroy his life, having no sense of goal. When depressed he took to drugs and alcohol. He went after other girls, showing off on his bike, to impress Diana, mingled with the most stylish girls, who were after his money, more than his love. Days, months and years were gone; Robert failed in the engineering exam and tried to go after the examiners who valued the paper, bribing them to get pass mark. That too did not work out.

I seldom saw Robert after that and lost touch with him altogether. Once I saw Diana and she gave me his email address, and told me that she had no idea where he was. She was also disappointed about life and took to spirituality, withdrawing into herself. She turned down all proposals that came and one day disappeared into a convent. There also she was half-hearted to join, worked in the hospital, whiling away her life.

It was that email I sent to the address of Robert that brought them together, by way of this reunion and I thanked Providence for the recent developments. I was proved

wrong again about fate, because I depicted in my book the love story of Robert and Diana as a tragedy, whereas Grace and I got united in wedlock. I wanted to change the climax, the ending of the story, and I had to know more about Robert and how he spent the time, the spell of time, since I lost touch with him.

I wanted them to share their experiences themselves, what they did after they got separated. I knew that Robert had gone into the wrong track, afflicted by the devil. All those who knew God, if they fall into bad ways, it would be a great pit fall and coming back would be difficult, as the devil would try all his tricks to destroy them fully, body and soul. Robert was afflicted spiritually as well as physically by way of smoking, drinking and drug addiction. When Grace would do the healing of the mind, the healing of the soul also had to be done. It had to be through fasting and prayer, worshipping and adoring God, by way of praise and thanks giving.

Grace paved the way for reconciliation from the side of Diana by talking to her and made her talk out all her ill feelings that were fuming within her. She must have done that so tactfully that, by the time they came back after the trip, the cloud on Diana's face was clearing and the sweet and beautiful countenance that was the attraction and dream of so many boys in our college who were after her, was emerging. She had turned them all down saying she was engaged; sons of multimillionaires and highly intelligent and career oriented guys were after her.

There were times she had to struggle hard to keep her composure when some or other fan made passes at her, even making a physical assault. That was what happened once when they went to Bangalore for block placement, the last part of her course. It was providence and her steadfast devotion to Robert that pulled her out of that scene, when one of her classmates tried to seduce her. He promised to marry her and got her trapped in his room in the hostel and would have raped her, if one of her teachers had not turned up, a very unlikely thing; for the supervision of their block placement, and she was rescued.

Many proposals came for her from the parents of boys in the United States, because her specialization was very attractive to get a good job in America. Her parents were disappointed and very unhappy. Her father enquired about the whereabouts

of Robert and, hearing the way he was perishing, advised her to agree for a wedding with a boy who was so keen about it. They had agreed to meet the whole expense of the wedding function including all the ornaments that Diana had to wear for the wedding. She disagreed and went to a convent.

I assumed myself the responsibility to set the course of their love life smooth and give them a dream and enrichment that they made it possible for me and Grace. It was to start the very next day when we went for the pilgrimage to Kurisumala. I dropped Diana in the convent promising to fetch her the next morning.

## 8

We set out early morning, and parked the car at the bottom of the Kurisumala and started the climb uphill. There was not much interaction between Robert and Diana as they were not feeling comfortable with each other. The years of traumatic experience, the separation that took place made them aloof and it was a Herculean task reuniting them. My daughters, Priya and Priyanka were sent purposefully to them as that might remove the barrier and block between them.

Grace and I kept off from them a safe distance praying between us that the reunion took place, pleading divine intervention. I joined Grace in spontaneous prayer as we started the steep climb of the pilgrimage. Priyanka was chatting with them, all inquisitive to know the whereabouts of Diana as she was meeting her for the first time. Robert was talking to Priya mostly about her school and studies.

Cupid was working his magic and our prayers were taking effect as Robert broke the silence with the confession of the remorseful and contrite lover. I heard him say, "To say sorry after doing all those atrocities that I did will no way take away the pain and suffering to which I subjected you, but I am really sorry, Diana. Never in my life will I cause any pain to you and I take pledge to depart from the filthy, useless way of life, which I am leading."

"I know you Robert more than anybody. I don't blame you, nor accuse you. It was fate that begot all those terrible incidents in our lives. Let us make up for the time

we lost, the chances that we have missed and live with new fervour and enthusiasm." We were astonished at the positive response from Diana.

Grace interrupted: "Great, that is the very best attitude that Diana is showing and it can solve all the problems between you. Every cloud has a silver lining. In your lives also the clouds had vanished and now only good and positive things will happen to you if you wish that way to sort out the problems between you. In a nut shell, Robert should lead a purposeful life, stop drinking and smoking. Diana should give up the idea to join the convent. If you love each other, these things are not difficult. I will take care of Diana, while you interact with Robert, teaching the short cut you have charted out to spirituality and inner peace." Grace entrusted Robert to me and I wanted to try it out on somebody on an experimental basis, the innovation I made in the realm of spirituality. It was a Bhajan that I developed praising God on and on, bringing in inner peace and tranquillity, giving momentum to our mental frame.

## 9

I took Robert aside and asked him whether he wanted to get out of the habits of drinking and smoking. What he told me did not surprise me, without smoking he could not manage for a single minute. He told me that he could manage without drinking provided that he is not offered one or got a chance to drink. I prayed by myself and started the experimentation of what I have developed.

"Praising God when our mind is troubled will drive out all unnecessary inklings and bad habits from our nature. However hard you try by yourself, you can't get out of smoking. But if you pray hard and gradually stop the habit you can be liberated. Fix a day when you are going to quit the smoking, resolve that you won't smoke again. You would be feeling uneasy for some time. In such moments sing the following lines on and on in your mind, loud if possible, 'Praise God, Praise God, Halleluiah, Praise God, Praise God, Halleluiah, Halleluiah, Halleluiah, Praise the Lord'. Try singing it with me again, 'Praise God, Praise God, Halleluiah, Praise God, Praise God, Halleluiah, Halleluiah, Halleluiah, Praise the Lord'. I have put it in my website as an

audio album. You enchant verse after verse repeating on and on, like this." I made him sing after me.

I sang one verse and he repeated after me. Soon he got into the tempo of the singing and fell into the pattern that I had composed. It was the first time I heard someone singing what I had visualized. I felt immensely glad and asked him whether he found it easy to recite.

"It is really great, I am feeling inner peace already, and knowing that praising God is the very best we can do, gives me the inclination to sing on and on this Bhajan that you have taught me. I feel I would be able to control my mind from unnecessary thoughts by singing it!" said Robert.

"If you decide to stop smoking and drinking, and if you get the desire to do it again, sing these lines in your mind and pray to God to give you strength and courage to control yourself. When you feel uneasy by withdrawal symptoms, sing fervently with real devotion. You will be able to get out of it. That too is the case with your whole life. When you drive, when you work, if your mind went astray, sing this and you will get self-control and presence of mind. That is my experience ever since I developed this incantation," I confessed.

"I was doing all those atrocities to seek revenge on myself, by self-destruction. Now there is hope about future, good things to look forward to and so I don't feel the need of smoking or drinking. Luckily, I did not get addicted to cannabis that I used to smoke. I got into hallucination and lunacy by doing it. But the habit did not persist. Thank God, otherwise I would not have been able to get out of it!" said Robert.

"Love God and live for him, as you expressed as your goal in life. Lead a highly spiritual and fruitful life, making up for the time you wasted. You have broken the heart of a girl who loved you. It is very difficult to redress the harm done. Now re-live your life, loving her more and never giving her a chance to feel sorry or unhappy." I stopped my interaction when I saw the rest of the gang catching up with us on our steep uphill climb.

"I gave Diana a few insights only a practicing wife could ever speak of. I told her that it was for the women to do the forgiving part, as well as support and encourage the repenting partner from not falling back into the same pit. She agreed to support and to encourage Robert in all his future endeavours. Give a hand shake to each other and say sincerely that you forgive each other as well as feel sorry for the past. Paul will say a word of prayer before you do that, so that it would be binding in front of God too," Grace said. We moved to a rock formation on the side of the path and sat down.

## 10

We praised God for some time and I started to pray, "Almighty and ever loving God, I thank you for this great moment when you have reunited two loving hearts, from the brink of separation and self-destruction. Please bring them back to their former selves, loving each other with a new fervour and great intimacy. Please accept their contrition as well as their forgiving each other. Kindly give them a wonderful life, fruitful in your service. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen." I concluded my prayer and looked at Robert and Diana.

There was a twinkle in the eyes of Diana, and Robert looked energetic and his elegant and romantic self, came back. It was a good sight to watch them both, a romantic pair of love birds, ready to fly into the horizon, to explore and live fully the life they have found out for themselves. I felt happiness inside me and I looked at Grace with a new sense of admiration for the way she had brought out the successful culmination of such a tragic incident. I wanted to tell her how much I loved her and admired her. We found a new connotation for our being in love with each other by binding two forlorn hearts with the bond of love.

Robert started singing the Bhajan that I taught him and we all sang with him in a chorus, repeating the verse after him. It was soul stirring and anointing of the Spirit was there when we sang it. All the problems between them vanished, and the bond of love and fellowship was re-established as we went on singing it and climbing the hill on our pilgrimage.

We reached the top of the Kurisumala. It was a wonderful panoramaic scene that unravelled before us. We could see almost up to the sea in the west and the arid mountains of the Western Ghats spreading around us into the vast horizon. We sat down on the grass and had some snacks and hot coffee that Grace had thoughtfully taken with her in a flask. The small girls started running around, we elders were feeling at the top of the world, highly romantic and at the same time prayerful. Robert started singing the Bhajan on and on and my small daughters sang their heart out after him. I felt great happiness hearing others singing my dream song.

I invited everyone for the thanksgiving prayer before we started our climb down-hill. We sat down in a circle clasping our hands and praising and worshipping the Lord in loud and fervent thanks giving. We all said small prayers rededicating ourselves for the Lord. I reminded them by way of admonition that whatever, our spiritual status be, acknowledge that Jesus is our redeemer who bought us by paying with his blood and God rose him from the dead and he is alive and active, looking after us, providing for all our needs. I told them that it was a great reassurance that the Lord is taking care of our lives and showers his Spirit over us abundantly.

Grace agreed to interact with them, advising them on a life building process by way of a series of talks straight away, so that it would have an impact on their newly budded relationship. I too loved to hear her talking about leading an enriched life. It was not only material, but metaphysical riches she was speaking about and the modus operandi, very simple, within the reach of any sober person who would give some time and effort. I said a short prayer by myself that the admonition becomes fruitful and takes effect on them.

## 11

"A definite purpose is the most important thing to have in life. Be specific as to what you want to have in life and pray fervently to the Lord for giving it to you, if it is His will. Make sure what you want in life, your greatest desire and dream to achieve in life; what will give the utmost happiness for you. After making sure about what you want in life, your dream, work out a plan to reach there. Be as specific as you can,

working out the details, the span of time that will be required for achieving it. If you use your imagination and creative vision the plan would unravel itself. The next important thing is to stick to the time schedule and making sure that the plan is working out all right." Grace stopped her admonition to see whether the audience is catching up to the tempo of her lecturing.

"Whatever your purpose is, include the following things in it. That is to attain a positive mind, sound health, harmony in human relationship, a labour of love, freedom from fears and worries, ability to discern the motives of others, hope of achievement, capacity for faith, willingness to share what riches we have with others, self-discipline, open mind and more than anything, sufficient and enough money." I concluded, listing all the riches which I was trying to cultivate and capture for myself in life.

"When you decide your purpose in life, you better consult your life partner like discussing it with Diana and making the plan with her help. It is called a master mind alliance. In your case we two would like to get involved and include us also in your mastermind group. It is a group of your closest well-wishers who would stand with you in thick and thin, be loyal to you, never let you down or betray you for their selfish interests." Grace slowed the pace of her discourse looking at me and I took the hint.

"The best example of a master mind group is our case. Whatever miracle that takes place in our life is because of the alliance between us two. We discuss with each other, seeing the pros and cons of every issue and jointly take a decision. This should be the case in your life too. Before going to sleep evaluate the day, analysing your performance, where you failed, where improvement could be made and where you did well. Praise and appreciate the progress made and never denounce each other for the failures. Be patient with each other, lavish in praising each other for the achievements and very stingy in criticizing each other. It does not pay, finding fault unnecessarily, blaming each other when things go wrong. That will sound the death knell of the alliance. Love and forbearance should be the element that controls this alliance."

“There is another thing. There should be a common interest that binds the relationship and never discuss your intimate plans with anybody outside your master mind group. Don’t take everyone into confidence. They may not have any interest in your purpose, they may misguide you or be a stumbling block in reaching your purpose or obstruct you purposefully out of jealousy or hatred. Use the power of discretion when selecting the members of your core group and see whether they got the quality of moving with a definite purpose and see whether they go an extra mile in what they do. The quality of going the extra mile is the touch stone to see whether you would succeed in achieving your purpose,” she stopped her discourse and we resumed our climbing down-hill.

## 12

“What do you mean by going the extra mile? I am hearing it for the first time, such phraseology.” Diana intervened.

“It is the habit that all who aspires for high echelons in life should practice, the habit that will make one sought after by the employers and those with whom we associate. It simply means doing more work than what we get paid for, or what we intended to do or we are supposed to do. Feel enthusiastic to do more work than we are supposed to do, and that way we put our employers and even fate at a debt to give us more than what we deserve, making us eligible for better things in life or a better quality life.” Grace concluded.

“You will never be out of job, if you follow this habit. The theory of compensation will repay you even if your boss doesn’t. His competitors would snatch you off for your quality of going the extra mile,” I interrupted.

“It may be difficult to practice that quality in the beginning. We all will feel lazy, disinterested and half-hearted to practice this habit. But when you fix your purpose and get enthusiastic about attaining it more than anything, the habit of going the extra mile would come naturally. Fill your mind with love and romance and later, sex

when you are married; that motivating element would trigger you on to go extra mile,” said Grace.

“If you have the twelve riches that I told you about, this habit would come naturally. You need control of two factors, one your physical health and the other your mental health. To have physical health, eat sufficient, play some good and enterprising games, like basketball, table tennis or even cot tennis if you are married. To have good mental health, keep your mind free from negative qualities like worries and fears, and fill it with hope, faith, love and enterprise. When your mind go roaming off, control it by concentrating on the present moment, deciding what to do, comparing it with past experience and visualizing the future and see whether it is apt enough. In transactional analysis they call it to be in the adult state. Observe the reality and adapt to the situation and if you can’t rein your mind, practice singing the hymn I taught you, especially when you are worried, when you have fantasy and when you indulge in negative thoughts.” I supplemented it with my own native wisdom.

“All these will become easy if you practice the next principle. It is to have faith in God and in yourselves. Let us have some snacks and we will discuss it after that. About having faith in God, Paul would speak from his experience and about having faith in ourselves I will give my testimony”. Grace concluded and we sat down to have some snacks.

## 13

We were terribly hungry and gulped down sandwiches and hot coffee from the flask which my daughter Priya had strapped on her shoulder. We were refreshed and from the place where we were idling we could see far into the horizon, rocks and arid mountains; the wonderful way how God created them. Seeing the magnificence of God’s creation, I opened up my discourse on faith. “Just have a glimpse of the horizon and you will have faith in God, because all this couldn’t come from nothing, this fine craft of artistry, only one person could have created all this, and that is God, who loves you and cares for you and provides for you. In spite of this fact His arch-

enemy, the devil tries to create havoc by playing with the destinies of people. God cares for everyone, is eagerly waiting for us to turn to Him, to believe in Him and worship Him. He is our loving Abba, to whom we can look up to always, and he gave His only son to die for our sake, redeeming us from sin and making us eligible for heaven. Feel the love of God and redemption of Jesus Christ and you will have enough faith in God.”

“Why don’t you give your testimony of how God took care of your life, making you achieve all those great feats without God’s help you could not have achieved?” Grace challenged me into opening my pet topic, to speak about the providence of God. I shuddered for one moment, at the fearful revelation as to what my life would have been if it was not for God’s providence. The audience knew me intimately well and I didn’t have to describe, how He redeemed my life, protected and preserved it, treasuring it in the palm of His hand. There were so many instances when the devil instigated some naive humans to interact in my life, showing demonic cruelty to harass me, and pester me for no fault of mine, almost destroying and crushing the feeble life and embryo of enterprise that my frail body had and held together, from poisoning my mind by brainwashing me, maligning my mind, filling it with venom of hatred and jealousy, frightening me of consequences that weren’t there, to almost electrocuting me to destroy my brain and mental power. The devil made my own colleagues and superiors do all those hateful atrocities to destroy my creativity, but nothing happened to me the way they had intended and conspired, because the providence took care, except the embarrassment and pain at the time of suffering it. All those terrible, traumatic experiences in no way deterred me from growing and reaching were God had set me to reach, to achieve the scales that he had set forth for me to climb and I became loquacious in describing to them, the love and providence of God, manifested in my life. I was sure that when I stopped my discourse, their faith in God really increased and mine reinforced.

## 14

It was Grace’s turn to give her testimony of how faith helped her achieve all those laurels that she could achieve, with a strong will power and trust and faith in

providence. She wanted to have a secure government job and had to take lots of trouble, doing small jobs and hoping and aspiring that her dream would be fulfilled. After getting the job she wanted, she liked to marry someone working in Kerala. She had lots of proposals from people from abroad and far off places; though many were attractive she turned them all down, on the faith that the right alliance would come at the right time.

It was then that I trespassed into her life, our paths crisscrossed, her friend and husband who were my friends too, became instrumental in cross matching our destinies. With so many impediments, like my people demanding more dowry than what her people could raise, and later I becoming sick with jaundice; consequently our wedding was postponed. She held on with her faith and ultimately the depth of her faith I fathomed and she proclaimed was when I came back sick after a sojourn abroad. With singleness of purpose she guided on our ship that was wrecked and her faith pulled us together, and helped me achieve some great feats like marrying two sisters, buying a house and a vehicle of our own. She helped and motivated me in writing seven immortal books and publishing many more in Amazon Kindle, and groomed my daughters into two charming darlings.

“It was destiny that prompted me to take up counselling and helping people and faith manifested itself in my solving the problems of others. I believed that the problem would be over and my clients would have a wonderful life, and that faith prompted me to intervene in their problems and to see it solved and they got reconciled. We got to visualize what the end is going to be, to believe that we will be able to achieve it and live every moment and day by day, step by step and we would surely reach there. When untoward incidents happen, don't lose heart, learn from failures and analyse their causes and learn from it making stepping stones out of every such failure. That is my experience and your life also could be made wonderful if you move with faith in yourselves and in God that He would see you through.”

“I knew your calibre and started appreciating you, the time I first met you in your company, when I came for field work training. When I heard that you are engaged

to Paul G. and your marriage is delayed I wanted to interact and bring you two together. I invited Paul for the prayer meetings and got you also into it and that way lead the horse to water and made it drink too," Diana commented.

"We are immensely thankful to you both for bringing us together, the moral and spiritual support you gave us and the same way we want to interact in your lives and bring you two together." Grace winked at me and I took the hint and restarted our deliberation.

## 15

I looked at those two people who were such a perfect love birds, who were envied by everyone who were resentful at the nice things of life. The devil succeeded, where men were mere victims of his manipulation, they got separated in a way not possible to be reunited and I knew it is a Herculean task to re-establish the bond of lost love between them. But I saw a faint hope for reconciliation as well as redemption of their lost love.

I said a secret prayer to the Lord to give me the skill to lead them back into the realm of love and romance, repairing all that was lost and rectifying the momentum of their lives that were shattered by negative acts and attitudes. To bring them back to the main stream and to rekindle the spark of love, using Cupid's arrows was what Grace meant when she winked at me and I took the hint.

"What is your immediate plan, Robert, to reach your purpose in life? When do you intend to get married? I hope that Diana has no objection to it if Robert gives up his bad old ways and become the Mr. Clean, we all knew him to be and appreciated him for that. It takes some more time to be on the landing legs, and get acclimatized to the new developments of life," I commented.

"I intend to do an MTh from some reputed Bible college before marriage, and I would appreciate if Diana could also join me in the same institute. My old man would foot the expense of us both, if you ask him. By the end of the course we

could grow and fortify ourselves for facing the vicissitudes of life and re-establish the lost bond of love," Robert said.

"That is a good and concrete suggestion. Diana, what do you think about that? You may have your own ideas and opinions," I commented.

"Sure, I want a life that is economically secure, free from financial and social worries and cares. I don't want my husband to sell God and live as a vermin on others, on the pretext of a religious leader. He should do something creative to earn a living and do the Lord's work along with that. If that does not work I will take up a permanent job and have to anchor our lives if he lets me work," Diana opined.

"I don't want my wife to be working, unless it is inevitable, that is if I am that sick and unable to look after my wife and kids. If God willing I will take up motivational writing for which I have a flair and earn some money that way besides the Lord's work. I will consolidate all my father's properties and riches and look after them, so that we have a sound financial footing. But I got to know what my old man thinks about it, because it is his money and he is so unhappy about my squandering almost a million bucks during the past five years by way of unsuccessful projects. I was a loser, a miserable failure and did many a foolish things that made my people think that I was of unsound mind," Robert said.

"Don't worry; we have all our stories of setbacks and squandering. It is a phase we got to undergo and grow over. But we got to learn from defeats, analysing and finding out the cause of failure. Every week, get people of your mastermind alliance together and discuss and evaluate the proceedings of the week and see how much of headway had been made and discover your weak points. Plan how such loopholes could be avoided in future. This is an important step in making your life successful and enriched. Make stepping stones of every failure by analysing its causes and avoiding it in future," I consoled Robert.

"It is a great principle that Paul enunciated and I would like to talk more about it later. I invite you both to our home Paradise, for a week to sort out the problems between you two. Diana, shall we go there straight from here? We have reached the

bottom of the hill. Why don't we end the pilgrimage by way of saying a prayer of thanksgiving? Please say a small prayer each one of you. Robert, you start and we all will follow you."

## 16

It was wonderful to observe the romance between Robert and Diana and it brought back the memories of the good old days, before our marriage. They were not fully attached to each other as there were some more mental blocks, keeping them at bay. I let Robert drive the car and he had Diana near him on the front seat.

Soon their interaction began, Robert saying sorry to Diana for putting her into such a lot of trouble. He said that it was unintentional, things took place in such an unanticipated way and he did not have any control over it. The more Diana kept distance and avoided him he felt reckless and wanted to destroy himself by drinking and taking drugs. He told her that there were no women in his life as he had professed that there would be only one woman in his life and that was Diana and only Diana.

"I am really sorry, but saying sorry will not take away the trauma and pain that I gave you. It was a suicidal attempt that I made, when you tried to avoid me, I hated myself and when you did not care for me, I did not care for myself and tried to destroy myself. I squandered a lot of money and took away the peace of mind of my parents and made you end up in a convent. My follies are unpardonable, but I am sure that you would forgive me, as you don't hate me and we will go back to the good old days and relive our lives with a new and renewed fervour," Robert confided.

"It is okay, I forgive you all right. It was partly my fault by avoiding you and estranging myself, instead of reconciling and bringing you back into the mainstream. I felt jealous and envious when you fell so easily a victim to the dirty tricks of

my own friend. I never guessed that it was her, who took the initiative and she had an eye on you. She was the villain of the game and it was difficult for me to forgive her. But when I heard her story about falling in love with a guy called Sam and later he ditching her and her coming to me for consolation was all the work of the divine hand. When I took part in an inner healing retreat I placed her in my heart and asked her forgiveness for hating herself and I forgave her for making my life miserable. Even then I could not forgive you, nor hate you. When my parents persuaded me to get married I couldn't think about marrying someone else. I had a faint hope that someday you would come back and that was why I did not join the convent either," Diana confessed.

"I see divine providence all along and to make up for the time lost, love each other with a renewed enthusiasm and get married and settled at the earliest," Grace assured.

"I will do that with all my ability and see that your wedding takes place and you have a wonderful life, like that you made it possible for both of us," I told them.

Robert took his left hand from the steering and took Diana's hand and told her, "Tell me that you love me, like in the good old days and I love you so much darling, though I can't express how much I love you."

The car lurched in the exercise and a truck came against us and I sprang forward to steer away the car from a head on collision. Robert applied the break and the car came to a stand-still. "Cool down, keep all the romantic feelings for your honeymoon and concentrate on the road. You change your seats and I will do the driving".

"Robert please come to my seat and I will go to the back seat. I don't feel all that romantic either." Diana remarked.

I took on the wheel and the rest of the journey was uneventful.

We reached our home by evening and all were tired. Diana was accommodated with the girls and Robert was given the master guest room. I asked Robert whether he wanted a peg of Scotch whisky to drain the sorrows. He said that he stopped drinking and I told him that I was just testing him and there was no booze available at my home. I had made it a point never to entertain anyone at home with liquor. We had dinner and all were so tired to continue the chit chat.

After dinner I took Robert aside and we went to the terrace and lay down staring at the star flooded sky and I made him open up his mind and made a trespass into his past. It was important to know what all mischief he was up to, to correct him and to bring him back to the main stream.

I opened up the topic as to what all projects he undertook to become a multimillionaire and to challenge his father by showing that he too could achieve great feats. He never had any definite purpose, but had many different purposes and set goal after goal when he failed in each attempt. All his projects were failures, miserable failures and everyone he trusted and took into confidence betrayed his trust and ditched him and took him for a real ride. He lost money in the bargain and got into the quagmire of indebtedness. All his projects became miserable failures. His father had to settle the debt he incurred and he became worn out. He was a highly spiritual man and he took all these mishaps as the temptations of the devil and the price he had to pay for getting close to God and enjoying the benefits of his immense love. The devil took Robert into his custody by pampering him with liquor and after wallowing in booze, he took the next step of consuming drugs. He smoked cannabis and was about to become an addict of brown sugar.

He was about to try brown sugar, when he got my email, inviting him for my book release. Suddenly he thought about the past, his dedication to the Lord, his love affair with Diana and on the faint hope that things could be rectified, he came for my book release. Hands of Providence were manifest in bringing him into my hands and there we were, discussing all those unwanted incidents as things of the past. I assured Robert that his times of trial were over and he had overcome the trials and tribulations.

As a last bit of advice I told him to take extra care and initiative and never to pain Diana again or give her another time of trial. Robert told me, "I see how dangerous the ground I had been trudging and it was providence and only providence that made me check my email and to know about the book release that day. I was so hesitant and ashamed to make an appearance there, but some inner intuition urged me to go ahead and that was the turning point of my life. I don't know how I got to thank you and I am greatly obliged to you."

"Compared to the great miracle that you and Diana did in my life by getting me married to Grace, it is nothing that we are doing to you. Grace will do her level best to get Diana out of the traumatic experiences she had. But you got to become all right and get out of booze and grass. You should also stop smoking. If you want de-addiction treatment, that could be arranged. I could teach you some techniques of meditation, if you can practice yoga with me in the morning and learn it. It could help you to self-discipline yourselves and take control of your mind and avoid unwanted cravings." I asserted.

Suddenly it struck me with the realization and I saw through the predicament we were all in. I realised all of a sudden why all this had to happen and I was shocked and puzzled at the vista of the past, unravelled in front of my mind's eye. I shuddered at the realization that it was also because of me those poor souls had to suffer all those ignominy and pain and I resolved to solve the labyrinth of this untoward incident. I flew back on the wings of time and got back into an episode of my life which I was forced to remember to find a solution for this intricate situation.

## 18

The devil got me into a real fix; people hating me for no reason, everyone turning against me and setting booby traps and land mines for me to fall into. All denounced me and I was a haunted man, because of a certain step that I took to become closer to God and to become his true follower, denouncing the devil and the world. The devil did not sit idle and he made my life really miserable and unbearable.

Robert's father was the only man who stood with me and that family offered me solace and moral support, encouraging me and alleviating my pain. If it was not for them I could not have survived such a traumatic experience. I did not know why my close friends turned against me, criticizing and denouncing me. Everyone found fault with me, haunted me like a wild, hateful animal. It was such intolerable pain that I suffered, without knowing why I was subjected to it all.

Robert's tragedy was the price they had to pay for supporting me and pulling me out of the quagmire of intolerable human suffering. Without knowing why I had to undergo this suffering, I suffered it when everyone persecuted me. It was unbearable and I would have ended my life by jumping down from the building where I worked. But the devil was defeated and I was saved by my friends who supported me and sustained me.

The prayer and moral support rendered by the father of Robert on that occasion was considerable and unforgettable. But he had to pay a heavy price for pulling me out of the muddle. The devil baited his own son and made him suffer so much of pain and ignominy because he helped me.

It was the trick that the devil played on the followers of God, to make them undergo terrible suffering and that way make them denounce God and His ways and fall a victim to the tricks of the devil. His father stood strong in those times of trial and I want to prove that he was right in helping me and wanted to alleviate the suffering caused by the misdeeds of his son. I resolved to do my level best to pull Robert out of the muddle. I knew that the devil would not sit idle and would come up with some new tricks, because he hates people loving each other. He was the symbol of hatred and all negative things that stood against God and goodness, the positive side of life.

We all went to sleep being tired after a hectic day of activity. I soon fell asleep and was woken out of my stupor by a yelling sound, heard from the adjoining room. I lifted up the hands of Grace embracing me in the coldness of the winter night, without waking her up. I came out of my room and ran in the direction of the room of my daughters. I got inside and put on the bed-lamp. I found Diana sitting on the

bed, unable to shout and shocked. Outside the room I found Robert trying to pull away his hands through the window from her half exposed shoulder. She was looking at him as if she had seen a ghost. She was pale and shocked.

Robert looked at me with guilt in his eyes and with a bent head walked to his room. I knew that the devil succeeded for the time being and shuddering with the thought that Robert fell a victim and loused up the whole thing that we had tried to build up so far. I decided to confront him and to ask him for an explanation and to patch up the situation as soon as possible, at the very best manner.

## 19

"I don't want to live. What would she think of me? I made such a damn bloody fool of myself. Thank you for your help. Let me go." Robert was full of repentance and remorseful.

"Why the hell did you do that? It is okay if you apologize and she forgives. If it doesn't work I do not know what else to do. Say all the prayers you know and come with me immediately to ask her pardon. Promise me straight away that you will stop doing all untoward and irresponsible behaviour from now on." I confronted Robert.

"I am really sorry and would ask sorry to Diana straight away, if you take me there and talk her first. I will never be irresponsible and ungentle manly in my behaviour," said Robert.

"Come with me, and stay outside the room. Let me talk to her first." I took him to the adjoining room and glanced inside. Diana was still sitting there, with tears gushing out.

I prayed desperately that the work of the devil did not destroy their relationship. I went inside the room and looked pleadingly at Diana. She asked me, "Why did he do it to me that way. Why couldn't he wait for some more time? All men are like that, waiting for a chance to take advantage. I don't want to see him anymore!"

“He is really sorry. He didn’t mean anything bad, but out of his fondness for you he must have done that. He is ashamed to see you. Please don’t feel bad towards him and forgive him. We can expect even worse from him because of his present mental disposition. If you don’t forgive him, he will even destroy himself. He is in a very bad shape and wants to run away or kill himself. Please show some sympathy,” I implored her.

With a bent head and nagging of conscience still unabated, Robert came into the room and without looking up he said, “I am really sorry for my foolish behaviour and I will never repeat it again. Please forgive me. If only you forgive me I will go out of this room or you can see me a dead man tomorrow.”

“All that we tried to do and hoped for is going to be over, if your reply is no, Diana, but if you forgive him there is so much to hope for and look forward to. Everything depends on your forgiving him,” I suggested.

Robert looked at her with pleading eyes and there was a silence of a millennium, pandemonium about to break loose and I prayed desperately to God to change her mental disposition and to make her forgive.

“Okay, only for this time, I am forgiving him,” Diana said.

I said, “Great, now you prove that you have a great heart Diana. Your reward for this pardoning will be great. I am glad. Robert, let us get out of here and allow her to go to sleep peacefully. Good night, Diana. There is nothing to worry, we are going.” We walked out of the room and Robert into a new lease to life.

## 20

I knew that the stakes were high and the things which I was involved were really intricate. One false step and all that we hoped for and tried to achieve would be over. Once more I shuddered at the realization that my adversary is very cunning and wicked and the fight is going to be tough, the war that I got to wage till I am taken from this world. He is there to destroy and tarnish all that is good and going

with God. The world is in his grip and almost all of the human beings are under his spell and sway. Those who stand away and aloof from his domain would always be in his hit list and be baited and put under mental torture and pressure. That was my experience ever since I decided to stay with God and to fight for His kingdom. That was the experience of Robert's father and many after him and before him.

I had to be more understanding and considerate with Robert. The previous incident was an eye-opener and I decided to be more careful and patient in my dealings with him. He was not in the right mental frame and was a tool in the hands of the devil and was under his spell and control, right then. I knew only prayer and fasting could redeem him and save him from his present plight.

I followed Robert into his room. He was so disturbed and agitated that whatever I might say to him would not touch his troubled mind. I prayed earnestly that God interacted with him and made him bold and full of integrity and character. I told him, "Robert, it is okay this time and I will not be there to pull you out the next time. Remember you are in the hit list of the devil and would be easily tempted and baited by him. Take courage and confidence that you would succeed in shunning his ways if you decide to stay with God and follow His ways. Let us say a short prayer whereby you commit yourselves into God's protecting hands and invoke his help in your future endeavours. But before that you got to repent and ask for His forgiveness for all your trespasses and misdeeds. I will say a short prayer and after that you pray committing yourselves into God's hands."

Robert knelt down and tears were trickling down his eyes. That was a good sign of repentance and I felt more hopeful. I started my prayer, "Ever loving and merciful God, I thank you for this opportunity to lead my beloved brother Robert into your protecting hands and for the great repentance that you have given him. Please take care of his future and use him fruitfully in the spreading of your kingdom and all that is good and positive. I commit him into your care and please take care of him and honour his repentance. Amen."

"Compassionate and ever forgiving God, I am really sorry for trespassing and committing so many sins. I tormented your good heart by my misdeeds. I was

blind at the good things that you gave me, the innumerable blessings that you send my way. I went astray and pained you and my beloved ones. I am really sorry. Please forgive me. Please give me a healthy and courageous mind that would not falter or fail in leading a victorious and fruitful life. I commit myself as a chivalrous warrior to fight for your kingdom against the devil. Please honour my pledge and take me into your lot. Amen”

## 21

We had a peaceful sleep and woke up with renewed vigour. Grace asked me to talk to them about a pleasing personality and how important it is for the success in life. There was an added reason for her to ask me to do it, with my butcher like appearance and always the down in the dumps kind of attitude, she found me the most eligible person to talk about it.

We sat down comfortably in the garden on wicker chairs and I opened up my discourse, feeling that I am confident enough to open the subject as those principles had worked magic in my life, pulling me out from delicate situations and helping me overcome hurdles and from antagonistic people who were after my skin for no apparent fault of mine.

“If you want to have friends and to be liked by other people there is only one way and that is to show interest in them. Ask about them, show interest about their whereabouts and you have a friend for sure. It should be genuine and out of the concern for them and not fabricated, articulated and mechanical way of showing interest. Listen attentively when they speak, showing keen interest by asking questions and by making them talk about themselves; they will be our friends for sure. Try to smile cheerfully when you meet people and you will be welcome anywhere. Remember the names of people and call it and use it affectionately.” I stopped my discourse and looked at Grace. She took the hint and opened the topic of making other people like us instantly.

“There is a short cut to make other people like you instantly and it is a trick and you should be very careful to be genuine when you try it and I warn you, it can misfire also. There is something about us that we feel important about. If you observe closely you can easily identify it and appreciate that quality in others. That would be their weak spot and soft corner and if you tickle there they would easily like you and be your fan all their lives. Do you want to see a concrete example of how you can go about it from the case of Paul?”

Getting the clue and not to induce her to make fun at my expense I confessed. “There are two things that I take pride, one my ability to crack jokes and the other is writing poems. If somebody compliments me on that aspect I will surely like them. For example if somebody says, “Paul, the joke you said about Minister Achaeon was so nice. Have you got anything latest?” I winked at Grace and she blurted out.

“Paul would tell them the latest joke and they would be sorry that they asked themselves into it. Instead of them becoming his fan, he would be their fan and they could tackle him any way they want.” Grace pulled my legs.

“It is not physical appearance or good looks that give a pleasing personality, but our attitude and mental disposition in dealing with other people. That is my experience and personal testimony and you can count on my words. My ugly face and gloomy and depressed disposition doesn’t guarantee a pleasing personality but by conscious effort and by observing these principles I have lots of friends. One more point, for not to be disliked by others, observe one principle, never say openly that someone is wrong or criticize them about their action. If you do it they would justify themselves by finding some reason for their action, right or wrong and hate you in the bargain. When you have to say a bad thing, give a positive stroke by complementing them on some good quality and after that say in a suggestive way that it would have been better if they had done such and such things.” I concluded it with hundred percent guarantee and conviction about it, because I had faltered and failed in that aspect umpteen times.

The next point we had to discuss was about learning from defeat and for that factor we don't have to go elsewhere. Grace opened up the topic and I kept my mouth shut, lest it be fault finding and criticism which I was prone to do that very often. From my past experience I had learned in a bitter way that nobody liked to hear what they did was wrong, even if there was reason to say so. They would find some or other reason to justify themselves and never admit that they were wrong and hate us in the bargain for finding fault. It had to be done much tactfully and with adroitness, that feelings are not hurt and minds not wounded. Grace brought up the topic in an interesting and indirect way; never mentioning what Robert did was wrong or never criticizing or finding fault. I liked it.

"The greatest knowledge is learning from experience and defeat and it is the best teacher for any of us. He is a fool that does not learn from defeats and repeat the same mistakes twice. By the end of the day if we analyse the reasons for our failures by evaluating ourselves and remedying such lacuna and loopholes in future action we can assure success. In that manner all our failures and defeats are our greatest assets and we can cash on them, not feeling ashamed that we did it, but getting consoled that we could learn a great lesson by analysing its causes and avoid it in future."

I interfered very tactfully, "The very fact that Robert was not moving with definite purpose was manifested in his action for the past few years and lesson number one is always moving with definite purpose. We make a false step and we are prone to falter further and that was your case. A very conscious effort has to be made to correct the wrong step and come back to the mainstream. The main job of the mastermind group is to point out the wrong things and miscalculations and to rectify the consequences of our misdeeds. Never be offended if somebody points out your mistakes with a good intention that you reform and improve. That is what our teachers, parents and benefactors are doing."

"The advantage if we learn from defeat is that we would never commit the same mistake twice as the pang of pain and bitter experience is there and we would make doubly sure and be careful never to repeat it. Don't feel bad about the failures and

negative things that happened in your lives, they make you realize the worth of positive and good things when you have them and make you enjoy them with real fervour and enthusiasm. That is my case. When I had tough times I never knew I would have better days, but when the better times came I really enjoy it, because I was denied it, it was snatched away from my hands and I was deprived of it for reasons that only God knows. Be filled with the realization that all is always for better and the best of everything is what the Lord gives." Tears swelled at the corner of my eyes and I felt like crying and that crying was full of joy. I liked to cry that way when filled with happiness and it is the good thing about crying. When we are really sad tears wash away our pain and when we are too glad, tears make us realize the worth of the happiness and make us enjoy it in real good spirit.

"I never knew that there is such an aspect as to make the bitter failure a priceless asset and stepping stone to success. It is an eye opener for me and we will have an evaluation of our lives every week-end. My better half should keep it in mind, even if I forget." Robert concluded and we broke off for tea and snacks.

## 23

"Now I am going to speak about a dream and creative vision about future. Only those who dream about future can succeed and reach where they dream to reach. Have a dream and work hard to reach there and your dream will come true. Make dreams about achieving your purpose and you reaching there and pray fervently to get it and believe that you already got it and then you will surely get it. That is my experience," Grace concluded.

"When you are idle just fantasy that you are what you want to be, reached where you wanted to reach and your subconscious would take it over and condition your mind to reciprocate and be prepared to be what you want to be. Once you are prepared for a thing it would surely take place. Robert, can you try to dream about your future?" I challenged him.

"I can dream about myself, addressing a large crowd of people speaking about personal enrichment and individual achievement and Diana standing beside me showing the power point. What is your dream, Diana?" Robert asked her.

"My dream is to be a good housewife looking after you and my children as and when they come. I too would like to assist you with your power point presentations."

"You all forgot one thing. Our ultimate dream should be to reach Moksha and praise and worship God." That was my angle of outlook on the ultimate aim of life and I wanted them too to think about that priority.

"Let us see how creative vision works. It uses our imagination to dream and make plans. The motivation for good imagination is three driving forces. They are love, sex and romance. I think Paul will give his personal experience as he got all his imagination and creative vision started functioning only after getting married. Paul, what is the secret behind that?"

"Genius is the outcome of those three factors. When love, sex and romance join together to work, the out-come is sublime creativity. When I got married and started giving and receiving love and felt romantic, I started to get a flair for writing poetry. I was marooned on an island resort, five hours ride in the sea away from civilization, but interacting with an international community, all multimillionaires and away from my loving wife and new-born baby whom I saw only on the day she was born. All that love and nostalgia made those poems to gush out of me. The outcome was the natural outpouring of around hundred poems, all symmetric and correct stanzas wise and I called it On Trivia. I did not have to edit it much even. Fill your mind with love for others, have sex only with your wife and feel romantic when you meet the other sex, are all things that will make the creative vision work. I hope that I made it clear." I ended my discourse, but I loved speaking about such things and to think about the days I wrote my first poetry collection.

"When our imagination sores high up into the realm of dreams, it is important to control it and make it stick to the reality. The next point is about that. We will discuss it after a short break," She signed off.

“Personal initiative is the thing I wanted to discuss. Psychologists say that we ought to love ourselves first, and then only we can love others. Our dream and purpose in life should be our ultimate goal and when we love ourselves and our dear ones, that motive would trigger on the action. We may feel lazy, try to procrastinate and put off for another time, but such negative qualities can be controlled with personal initiative,” Grace stopped for a while and I took over.

“To be practical, with our goal in front of us, we should programme our time in such a way as to reach our destination every day. It takes all the running to stay where we are in life. We should double our pace to reach where we want to reach. It would be small steps at a time, leading to a great leap. Our interest and enthusiasm for reaching our goal would be the touch stone of our personal initiative. It will make us love doing things, which we don’t like, scaling heights insurmountable and accomplishing things impossible. I had to start my career with a tough assignment, settling the pending accounts for five years of a five hundred-acre rubber estate. The owner could not go there, as there was a big strife over there, local people encroaching the outskirts of the plantation, being surplus land and police trying to evict them. I had no idea how to go about doing it, but it was part of my dream to anchor in life, to start somewhere to live and though I did not like doing it, I forced myself to do the job. I accomplished that feat in two years’ time and got a permanent, secure job because of that background and experience.”

“It shows that with personal initiative we can accomplish any hard feat and nothing is impossible if we set our minds on doing it. We got to love doing what we do, put our heart and soul into it and go extra mile as I told you in the beginning. The quality of going the extra mile comes from personal initiative and love for us and our beloved ones. Whenever setbacks come and we find negative influences, shun them using personal initiative. Avoid persons and instances that condition us negatively and deter us from proceeding to our goal in life. It can be our friends, relatives and loved ones. When Robert loves Diana and when she reciprocates it that would trigger on his personal initiative. Think of all those untoward incidents in your life as

the stepping stone and an escalator to come up and achieve our dream in life. We will have dinner and hold the discussion after that.”

## 25

We sat around the dining table, and Grace opened up the topic of discussion about accurate thinking. “To see the reality as it is, is a difficult thing and we had to use accurate thinking or power of discernment for that. There will be different priorities and to discern the right course of action, we got always to ask why, what, when, which, who and how, known as five wives and a husband. Asking such questions we can know whether something is useful to advance to our purpose in life. See whether something is good to reach our purpose in life or we should avoid it as it may hinder or retard our growth and future advancement. Power of reasoning, the greatest gift of God to human beings, is the tool to discern and do accurate thinking. Always ask ‘Is it good, is it affordable and will it help me reach my purpose in life?’ about a thing before taking a decision.”

I supplemented the group with my observation, “We should use self- discipline to train ourselves and our minds. To control our mind and stay in the adult stage, controlling and containing the parent and child nature as they say in Transactional Analysis, analysing and finding out whether we are prejudiced or affected in our thought pattern is important. We should use our will power to keep the mind on the right track, always concentrating and sticking to our plans and purpose.”

Diana asked, “What shall we do if we feel depressed or agitated? Then our thought pattern would be prejudiced. We may be suspicious, jealous or angry, and that way our thinking pattern also may be on the wrong track. In such cases what shall we do?’

“To be of sound mind we should relate ourselves to God and feel his providence and caring hand around us. That awareness itself may take away all the negative impulses and thought patterns. For me the most sober moments are when I am able to praise God as a mental activity. We should fill our minds with love for God, to others and to ourselves. Love is a triangle like that and such a divine emotion and it would take away all the blemishes from our thought pattern. We should not be childish or pre-occupied and remain in the present moment, not worrying about future or feeling sorry for the past. Such thoughts would no way help us and only hinder the advancement to our goal. Hatred and jealousy are also negative qualities that would take away the enterprise and love from our mind. Cultivate positive emotions like love, sex and romance that are creative.” I explained.

“We should register all useful thoughts to our memory and remember only good and happy things and forget about the insults and harm that other people did to us. Forget and forgive must be our motto in case of negative things. But never forget the good turn that somebody did for you. Try to be always loving and thankful to other people. My motto in life was to be loving, humble and cheerful. I still keep it that way in my human relations. Let us call it a day and split for the night. Have good dreams and positive ideas in your sleep. Good night.” I signed off.

## 26

Immediately after the breakfast we put our heads together. The topic of discussion was co-operation. I had my own apprehensions about being cooperative especially to the wrong people. Grace started the discourse, “In today’s world of strife, competition, annihilation and molesting of the opponents, co-operation has much relevance and is the only way out for the world to survive. It starts with the basic principle of ‘agape’, that is charity or divine love.”

I interrupted, “Simply speaking ‘I scratch your back and you scratch my back’ way of approaching people.”

Robert interferred, "When the neighbour's house is on fire, we will have to be the first person to pour water and put out the fire, not because we are concerned about the neighbour, but because that is the only way to prevent the fire from spreading to our house also."

"They are all projections of our selfish nature. Basic human instinct is to be loving and loveable. Look at a fruit tree. It never eats its own fruit. When we are born, our trait is to live for others. Later we change our scripts and learn games in which harming our brother brings sadistic pleasure, and envying others who are better off than us. Jealousy is also part of such nature. What we should do is to make a conscious effort to love our neighbour and show a friendly gesture whenever we can, not expecting anything in return, but that is the only chance of being helped by God and others when we need it. I would say we should go an extra-mile also in our interaction with people and doing good turn to others. God would reward us for being good and helpful if others don't," Grace commented, and I interrupted.

"My father was a helpful person who took all the chances for helping others as a doctor and alleviating their suffering and pain. It was me who got benefited of his good deeds and wherever I went and whatever I did, I had somebody helping me out, even without being asked and that is the secret of my survival," I chuckled.

"Think about the common good and let that be the priority of our action. Being social animals we try to help each other. Try to do the maximum help to others and do no harm to anyone. Then our seat in heaven is assured. Even if somebody behaves in a nasty way and tries to harm us, forgive and forget it, he may have his own reasons. Never criticize anybody or say some one is wrong or denounce the actions of others. He may have his reasons for doing something the way he does. Even if he is wrong, our criticizing him would never make him admit the mistake, but he would try to justify himself and find some or other reason for his action," Grace elaborated on the idea.

"I am sure in God's kingdom there will be only co-operation. Let's have it here also. That is the only way out for humanity and to stop all the terrorism and atrocities that some people do to others, who are also made of the same flesh and blood. There

won't be wars, mutiny and man-made calamities. Let us hope for such a day to come and conscientise others to be loving and helpful to each other," I commented and we took a break to resume the discussion immediately after it.

## 27

"The point of discussion now is enthusiasm. Haven't you seen someone bubbling with enthusiasm? I have seen it and it was our Robert in the past. I have analysed why he was brimming with life and vigour and I have even envied him. What were the reasons for you to be that way before and now different? It would be an eye opener for all of us," I ended my query.

"I was in love, and was in good terms with God. That triggered on all those enthusiasm and dynamism. Now I am not in the good books of God and my dream girl. That made the difference," Robert confessed.

"It is obvious, our dream and our love to reach our goal in life put the spark of enthusiasm in our personality. If we love ourselves and our beloved people, one hurdle is over. Next thing is to feel healthy, enterprising and romantic. When you are romantic you forget all the difficulties and hurdles and surmount them with real enthusiasm. That is my case. When I had difficult assignments to do, and when I couldn't love my job, I thought about the woman I loved and tried to be romantic. It took away the monotony of the rut and toughness of the task. Play games and do work outs, read and watch good story lines and that too would make you enthusiastic. I practise the breathing of Art of Living, do aerobics and that keeps me healthy in spirit and body," I enunciated.

"More than anything else, having a burning desire to reach your goal and make your dream come true would spark of the enthusiasm. To maintain and preserve the enthusiasm you should be creative, moving according to the plan of your life, never procrastinating or putting off for another time. Make schedules and stick to it. Make evaluation as to whether you are keeping your tempo in action or doing the wrong thing. Love should fill your mind and all the negative things and laziness would

disappear. Mingle with people, who are full of enthusiasm, as it is contagious. Avoid negative situations and discouraging people. Your desire to fulfil your dream would make you enthusiastic," Grace concluded.

"Along with enthusiasm the habit of good health also goes. Think healthy, feel healthy and you will live healthy. Never acknowledge in your mind laziness, lack of enthusiasm or tiredness. If you are brimming with enthusiasm and burning with definiteness of purpose you will never feel lazy, tired or ill. Be moderate in your activities and intake. It is to keep the middle way, never at the extremes, not too much or too little of anything in life. Never eat to the full, never drink to get too drunk, and never indulge in fun and pleasure to the extremes that would make you go astray. The imperative outcome is to budget your time and money. They are the most precious things to come by in our lives. Never misuse them or waste them. Look at the priorities and always catch tight with the spending of time and money. If you have comprehended all these points I am going to enunciate the last but the most important thing of our discussion. Have you got any doubts or difference of opinion about all these so far?" Grace concluded.

"Go ahead! We are dying to hear the rest of it. All these ideas are vital for leading a successful life. What is the next idea?" Robert asked.

"It is to make a habit of applying all these ideas in your day to day life and live according to this pattern. The law of cosmic habit force would take it up and convert it into a pattern of your life and you will be truly enriched and successful. It is not easy to follow, but I give a hundred percent guarantee that it would work out. It was the key idea behind the great American Enterprise and many a successful people copycat these ideals of individual achievement and personal enrichment that they reach higher echelons in their lives," Grace concluded.

"Here ends our indoctrination and tomorrow you are going to start applying these ideals in your lives. If you feel confident and fully equipped to face life, I will ring up your people and hand you over to them," I suggested.

"I got another important mission, the remnants of the past life to be settled and that is to settle the score with Manju before I go to face the world and life. Since I was in the convent she approached me and in the capacity as a nun, she requested me to interfere in her life and set it right. Her boyfriend would listen to me as a religious person and that credibility, as a member of a convent is great. I will give their phone numbers and please ring them up and ask them to come here. Like you did to us, we can also sort out their problem and that would give me peace of mind," said Diana.

"It is a great thing and good attitude that you are showing, helping the person who harmed and destroyed your life. We will do what we can. Make the phone calls and we will have them here," I remarked.

## 28

Diana took the phone and called Manju. Somebody at the other end took the phone.

"Can I speak to Manju?" "Yes, speaking," Manju answered.

"Guess who this is?"

"Let me think, yes, it is you Diana. From where the hell are you calling?"

"Close to your place. I am at a friend's house. Why don't you come over? You will have a surprise."

"Times of surprise are over and tell me, what news? Did you come out of the convent? Who are you staying with? Have you any news from Robert?"

"Robert is here with me. We have sorted out our problems and have decided to get married. Then we thought of you and your friend, Sam. When we told our friends here, they wanted to interfere and set your case aright. They helped us sort out our problems and in the same way, will help you."

"Mine is a gone case. Sam is not interested in me anymore. He had what he was after me for and after having it once, he wanted it often, and now he is fed up with it. I feel that he is after new pastures."

"Don't worry. Our friend Paul would call and talk to him and let us hear his version too. It was foolish of you to yield to him before marriage, and now that he has tasted the pie and since he knows that it tastes only so much, he will have second thoughts. We all will persuade him and corner him into accepting you as his partner in life. Let me hand over the phone to Paul. You give him the phone number of Sam and also talk to him about your present disposition. He and his wife will be able to help you."

I took the phone from Diana and said, "Hi, Manju, good to hear from you. I had a different notion about you as the villainess in the story of Robert and Diana, and now you are in trouble yourself. Don't worry, we will sort it out. I will call your friend here and hear his version and we will have you two together and try to rivet your relationship and mend it up."

"Thank you Paul. It is the punishment from God for my trespasses. I know for sure. I tried to seduce Robert, though it did not work out, I happened to be instrumental in destroying the life of my best friend Diana, and the agony and trauma that I inflicted on them was beyond forgiving. She is so good that she forgave me and is willing to pull me out of the muddle I am in. She is a true and noble friend."

"We all know that. They are concerned about you. That is why she asked me to interfere in your case. We will do all we can, and my wife will try scientific counselling and get you out of the muddle as you have said you are in. We will call you after talking to your friend and hearing his version. Let me jot down his number. Okay, I've got it. Bye then." I hung up the phone and looked at Robert and Diana. They were concerned too. I tried ringing up the mobile number that Manju gave me and the phone was ringing incessantly but no one answering.

"Hello"

"Can I speak to Sam, Please?"

"Please hold on. I shall give the phone to him." It was a lady and she handed over the phone to Sam. "Sam, speaking." "I am Paul, an acquaintance of Manju. She told us about you and I would like to meet you and talk to you about your relationship. She has a feeling that you are avoiding her deliberately and reluctant to interact with her. Does it mean that it is all over with you two? Why can't we mend up your relationship and take it to a dimension of getting married? Manju is a nice girl; she loves you and desperately wants to marry you and no one else."

"I got to think twice. We went all the way across, and if it was with me she will be doing it with anyone else. I don't claim to be a saint. Now I am having it with my new girlfriend and she doesn't insist on my marrying her. We will say quits now or later and then she has her way and I mine. To drink some tea, no one buys a tea estate. As for Manju, I got to think twice. You give me your address and I don't mind coming and meeting you all. But I don't make any promises," Sam concluded.

"There is more to life than just having casual relationships and forgetting about it. I got a feeling that your notion about marriage and life need modification. If you want to interact with us and lead an enriched and positive life, you are welcome to Paradise, our home. Please note down this direction to my home and you are welcome." I told him that we would be waiting for him.

By that time Manju also arrived and waited in apprehension for the arrival of Sam. I told her frankly what I think of him. "I don't think that he is a good person to relate to. I advise you to leave this matter. If you still want to continue and you have trouble later in life, Manju, we may not be there to pull you out."

"I love him and have given myself to him. Whatever he is, I don't mind. I want to get married to him," Manju affirmed.

"If you are that keen, we will stay with you through thick and thin. I will talk to him myself and interact with him and teach him to lead a decent life," Robert remarked.

"I know the pain and trauma of a woman in love and not reciprocated. I know how much I had to go through myself. I am with you, Manju, going to be your mentor and supporter in your war fare of love," Diana remarked.

By the time we were discussing the problem, Sam arrived and he came in parking his bike outside. Manju was on the verge of tears and we all waited in apprehension.

## 30

Sam looked at the tear-filled eyes of Manju and at us in turn. Robert shook hands with him and introduced us one after another. When I said 'Hi' and shook hands with him, I secretly prayed in my mind that his life be saved and averted from the tragedy, he is heading into.

I told them, "We are facing a problem and let us listen to divine counsel and start our interaction with a prayer. Robert, lead us in a short prayer."

"Almighty and ever loving God the Father, we thank you for this wonderful moment we are together and the chance that you gave us to meet each other. Thank you for reuniting me with Diana and the wise counsel you gave us through our friends, Paul and Grace. It was an eye opener for me and you brought me back into the mainstream, from depressions and traumas, from the self-imposed exile that I was in.

Now we pray for our friends, Sam and Manju, who were once bound by the bond of love and now drifting apart. Your greatest gift to humanity is the ability to love each other and bring back the element of lost love into their lives and reunite them. Give them the ability to sort out their problems and inhibitions and become welded into real and forgiving love. Lord, hear our prayer."

"Lord, hear our prayer," we all chorused.

I made the opening line by handing over to Robert, who was and should be efficient in handling such situations of other people and I thought that it would be an in-

house training for him. I intended to observe the whole situation intently and whenever they side-tracked, I was waiting to jump into action.

“Sam, Manju was speaking so much about you that I wanted to meet such a fascinating person like you. I know Manju, and if she had to like you, you should have some intrinsic worth and special charm. Love is the greatest gift of God and He has implanted it in the heart, the most secure and sensitive place in our body. We can use our mind and reason out but our heart with all the feelings will be upset when we deny the love that is due to someone. Manju loves you and wants to get married to you. She trusted you so much, and that is the reason she went all the way in your relationship. It was sin and you should feel sorry for doing it. Then about your relationship with other women, that too is sin, God specially insisted in his commandments never to commit adultery. You know the facts of life and I don't have to tell you that you are even prone to syphilis and other venereal diseases, if you have sex with multiple partners. You are playing with your life and that of others. What do you think about it?” Robert stopped short of breath and we all looked at Sam.

There was repentance in Sam and he was affected by the short discourse of Robert. He said, “My mental frame is such that I can't think about a marital relationship or staying with the same woman all through my life. I want variety. Moreover, I can't trust a woman to be faithful or loyal. That is my experience. I never got love from any women, not even from my mother. I can't love any one.”

Suddenly Holy Spirit of God inspired me, and I got an insight into his problem and I realized, with a shudder as rejection, the greatest of evils that can affect a human being. He was wallowing in self-pity. With such people whatever good things are driven into their head would not stay there and it was difficult rectifying and patching up their lives. I prayed in my mind and started my interaction with him.

"Sam, don't you know that God loves you and to save you from sin and unhappiness. Accept him as your Saviour; confess your sins and all your mental depression and feeling of rejection will be over. You will be happy, upright and enthusiastic to lead a fuller, sinless life that is worth living. Do you want that?"

"Sure, I want all that. I am fed up with the life I am leading and would like to lead an upright, decent life. If you can lead me to that mirage I will do anything that you say," Sam confessed.

"Come on Robert, Please tell him to love God, us and others and avoid sinning and to keep the mind prayerful, always praising and thanking God, whenever you are having presence of mind. If you do that, all your bad habits will go away; you will gain self-control and will not have the inclination to do sin. Do you want all that?"

"That is all I want in my life, and if you can relieve me from my depressions and unwanted cravings, I will be very lucky," Sam confessed.

"Brother Paul will help you to accomplish that. That is his specialization and field. I hope that by now you must have realized the dangerous ground that you are treading and if you repent, willing to change your ways, we are ready to help you and would stand with you through thick and thin. God has great plans for you that is why you are brought here."

"Robert, take care of him. Grace, please serve the tea. After the tea we will have further discussions," I intercepted and invited them all for tea.

## 32

Grace served us tea as we sat around the dining table. Robert remarked that we three couples could make a close mastermind alliance, and requested me to enunciate the kind of ideas that I hold as precious and would want to share with the people close to me and it was about prayer. Make the prayer short and up to the point. Prayer should be an interaction with God, praising him, thanking him and

implored to him. We don't have to instruct or conscientise God about anything. He knows everything, even our inner thoughts and also what we need.

"I have thought about it very often as it is a private affair with me and my maker," Diana remarked. "Believe that what we pray would be granted as our God is so generous and merciful."

I was feeling jubilant and happy that the seeds of insight that I sowed have sprouted out instantly. I was curious to know something from Sam and started interrogating him on that line.

"Sam, come on, tell us more about yourself. Who was that lady who attended the phone call? To take your mobile phone she should be someone close." I couldn't be more explicit.

"You have guessed it right. We were in an awkward situation when you made the phone call. It doesn't mean any attachments or commitments. She is after my money and I give her lavishly. She knows that I will never commit the foolishness of marrying her." Sam confessed.

"How did you know her?" Robert asked him.

"She is the daughter of the servant of my father. He did all the dirty work for him and became a drunkard. When my father died, that family became dependant on us. I give them money and she obliges me in the bargain. I spoiled her life and no one would ever marry her. She knows it and yield to me whenever I demand, because she has no other go." Sam narrated her plight.

"I feel sorry for her. How could you be so cruel?" Manju asked him.

"If you know my mental disposition you would never ask that question. Being the only son of a multimillionaire father, and my parents being more interested in their club and money making activities than their son, I never got any love from anybody and I learned to buy it by paying for it. That was the way with my servants and later with Deepa who was with me," Sam said.

Grace who was just an observer asked him, "Are you happy the way you are. Don't you want to lead a fuller and enriched life? Please come here tomorrow and we will discuss more about it."

"Bye then, I will be going." Sam got up ready to go. Manju also got up with him and asked him a lift. We never knew it was going to be such a terrible tragedy.

## 33

Our phone rang incessantly. It was from the nearby hospital. Sam was on the line. They had an accident and Manju was in the intensive care unit and his hand was broken and there was a cut on his brow. As they were speeding on the high way one private bus lost control, competing with another one, came and collided on their bike. We asked him who were all there and he said that Deepa came rushing to the hospital as soon as she heard about it. His mother was also coming. He said that Manju's condition was critical as she had head injury and the doctors had put her under close observation.

We told him that we were coming, got in the car and sped to the hospital. When we reached there, Sam was standing outside the ICU, his head bandaged and left hand in plaster cast and slings. We asked him how the condition of Manju was. He showed us her bed through the glass panel and she was attached to the ventilator and lot of other gadgets. Her eyes were closed and head was fully covered in bandages. I looked at Deepa and she was in tears. She was a homely, innocent looking girl and knowing her plight I felt sympathy for her.

Soon Sam's mother and Manju's parents arrived. All were in tears and Manju's mother looked at Sam in an accusing manner. Sam stood before them all down cast and feeling guilty. I felt sorry for him. The duty doctor came and I asked him how the condition of Manju was. He said that there was not much hope and he was going in to have a look at her condition.

After sometime the doctor told us that she had opened her eyes, fully conscious and was in deep pain. She wanted to meet two people, Sam and Deepa and others also could go in as a special privilege.

Sam and Deepa rushed in and we all waited outside the open door looking into the room. Manju looked at Sam and gave a painful smile and at Deepa. She lifted her hands, caught on their right hands and united them. There was a smile of achievement on her face and Robert and Diana also went to her and she united them also catching on their hands. Then she took her mother's hand that was fondling her, gave a sweet smile and passed away to eternity.

Two drops of tears bulged at the corner of my eyes and I stood there petrified at the thought that how insignificant it all was, money, power, prestige and love. By her death, she united four lives and at least two of them would never forget her and would be greatly obliged to her and one poor girl would be eternally grateful to her.

## TRAIN TALES

### 1

My saga to become a writer began after I started my train journeys, the first time I travelled by train was fifty years ago for joining for my studies in Trivandrum. I came to study there with an air bag, two shorts and shirts and with twenty four kilo in weight after I completed my school studies at fourteen. I was fortunate enough to get trained in English and French there by two German Fathers Wilfred and Philosophy by Dr. Jackenhoff. My companions were also like me; we interacted, played, prayed and learned in English. What English I learned from there helped me in my pursuit of chasing my dream to be a writer, travelling around a lot in the train, criss-cross across the country, meeting many different kinds of people with different languages, culture, religions, modes of worshipping and communicating. I listened

to people even without knowing their languages, ate whatever they gave me and slept in strange places.

When I took up the next assignment, I landed up in Trivandrum by travelling by train and my companions were also in and around there. I joined a college in the administration, one was my senior there, one was studying there, another one was teaching, one a police officer and one was like me, working in another college in Quilon. We interacted, supported and encouraged each other to help one another to reach high echelons in life.

Though not developed as today, Trivandrum was the cleanest city, the sought after destination of many international tourists with the unique attractions like the coffee house in Palayam, Museum and LMS compound, statue junction, temple in East Fort, Kovalam beach, the double decker bus and the road train.

There were many cultural activities and intellectual discourses to which I was exposed to like the functions at Alliance France, Soviet Culture Centre, Nishagandhi, Navarathrimandapam, Sankramanam, Kanakakunnu and Soorya festivals. I was fortunate enough to listen to the classical rendering of the great singer Yesudhas, which was their first program every year. I was a constant visitor of Public, University and Secretariat Libraries and read whatever I could lay my hands on.

I was one of the first persons trained to use a computer in Kerala, as I went to Madurai American College, by meter gage train and learned the art of word processing that helped in my writing, putting words at the speed of thinking into computer.

The first long train journey that I made was to Mumbai. I was called for an interview to go to Kuwait, my dream destination, and was interviewed by an American lady colonel. She asked me my background and I told her that I am a poet and writer and showed her my book On Trivia and opening it she read the poem on Kerala. She got so much fascinated that she asked me where the place was. I told her that it was the place I came from and if she selected me for the job, during the first holiday I would show her the place. She liked that line and told me that I was selected. After exploring Mumbai from one end to the other and victorious I came home.

My wife and parents would not allow me to go for that job, they would have got millions, for I would have surely got blasted and buried in the war zone of Iraq. I cannot forget that trip because I realised the suffering and pain of those people who went to the Gulf had to undergo, in olden days to go to the Gulf from Mumbai.

Soon after I made a trip to Jabalpur for the first communion of my niece Chinnu, as I was her godfather and I spent two weeks travelling around Madhya Pradesh, Nagpur, Itarsy etc. and had a memorable boat trip in a lake Beda Ghat from where marble was excavated and taken for building Taj Mahal. On the way back I had to sit in a filthy bar at Itarsy, the filthiest set up I had ever been to have food. The Malayalees all were very friendly there and I visited many of their homes.

Another long trip I made was to Jalandhar. From there I visited Amritsar and saw the Golden Temple and Jalian Valla Bag and went up to Waga border. I spent a week in Delhi being the guest of Vikram Shaw, a renowned writer in Hindi. I travelled around in an auto visiting all the important places including Akshardham and Rajghat, Lotus Temple, Kuthab Minar, JNU, St. Stephen's College etc. I got a friend Malkit Singh on the journey back, who was so affectionate and loving, and he was going to join the army.

I used to visit Bangalore by train when my daughter Priya was studying in Jesus College there for M Sc, Psychology. Once again I made a trip to Bangalore for the EFLU entrance exam for my daughter Priyanka. Thirty years ago when I visited that city it was so clean and unpolluted and I enjoyed travelling around. These days with the traffic jams and pollution and crowded with all malls and big shops I did not enjoy any bit of that trip there.

I made a trip to IIIT, Hyderabad by train for some value education training and it was such an enriching experience in my life. I made a presentation in the end of the seminar and all appreciated it. The friends and contacts that I made there were from the most elite among the academicians. For the silver jubilee of our wedding we visited Goa by train and the cruise and the travelling around with my wife was fun and made friends with Mandara Chatterjee of Calcutta. Goa was much different from what it was twenty five years ago when I visited.

## 2

Almost twenty five years I travelled daily by train between Quilon and Trivandrum, a distance of hundred and fifty kilometres. It was fun the fellowship, interaction, support and camaraderie of the fellow passengers and stories are unwinding in my mind about the adventures that we had, my constant companions, fellow passengers who used to send missed calls from Karunagappally and keeping me a seat ready. We had a group of fellow passengers called Sangmam, supporting each other and helping one another. They organised the release of my two books.

Once instead of landing at Kollam I slept and got down somewhere in the wilderness of Karunagappally and took a bus back. Once I got in the train on our platform, but that went to the other direction and had to take the bus back. One day I got in the train much early and went to sleep. When the train started I woke up and got confused that I asked the man next to me whether Quilon, thinking that we had reached Quilon. He said yes because he was getting down at Quilon and it was what I asked him. I jumped down from the train and it was gone and I was stranded on the Trivandrum platform. I took the next train that came only after three hours.

Once I was standing in the Trivandrum station and three of our former students were coming in a train to go to Cape Comerin and they wanted me to join them and asked me to take a ticket. I joined them, reached the cape, and they bought a sack full of beer. While in the hotel, they gave me a mug and though I don't drink and declined it they took a snap and posted it in the Face Book, me with a mug of beer in Bermuda in a hotel room, while I was supposed to be travelling back to Quilon in the train. They had to pay the hell later, because the next day was the wedding of my train mate Venu and so they had to put me back in the train that started at six in the morning.

One funny event in the train journey was when I was bringing a ripened jack fruit in the inter-city train. Three Frenchmen were sitting in front of me, and getting the sweet aroma of ripened jack fruit they asked me what it was and I told them that it was jackfruit. They asked me whether they could see it and I showed them opening the plastic cover. They asked me whether I would give them some of it to eat and I

told them to take it. They took out a pen knife and ripped it open and started eating. It was so appetising but they did not give me any. They liked it and asked for some more. I told them to take it and almost three fourth of the jackfruit was over.

They went to the wash room to wash the stain and gum from their hands, and it did not go and became stickier. They asked me what to do and I showed them to rub it on their hair and they had long hair. The train stopped in the outer and I got out with the remnant of the jack fruit and they would never forget me because the gum would get stuck to their hair.

Train tales will not be complete without the story I heard from Oscar Fernandez while we visited him in New Delhi and hearing about my train journeys, he narrated that a family in a train that was stopped for crossing at a station, was eating the meals they had brought. When they opened the food packet, a lame, crippled beggar came and stretched out his hand for some food. They pulled down the glass window and went on eating, relishing the meals.

He waited patiently hoping that they would throw the waste outside. Instead they threw it to the other side of the train purposefully. The poor beggar climbed down underneath the train and went to the other side and collected the waste packet and climbed back on the platform. When he opened the packet to eat the waste, a dog came wagging its tail and he kept the food in front of the dog to the ashamedness of those passengers inside.

### 3

To conclude, I feel like Kuttapan, the peon of the college where I worked. Hearing him speaking to many celebrities and people to reckon with, the Principal decided to take him also along, when he got a chance to visit Vatican. Kuttappan used his contacts and made Sonia Gandhi to get an appointment with the Pope, but it was only for one person. Kuttappan did not mention that part to the Principal and they reached Vatican. They were standing among the crowd that was waiting for getting a glimpse of the Pope.

He sneaked away, met the secretary of the Pope and reminded him about his appointment with the Pope. Pope was busy and was about to make his public appearance on the balcony of the Sistine chapel and so took Kuttappan also along. While the Principal was standing in the crowd taking snaps, people around were asking each other who that father was standing with Kuttappan and hearing that the principal was stunned and gaped, with mouth wide open from ear to ear.

I had a dream, like Abba sang and that dream is fulfilled now. I came across many loving and affectionate people, who helped me even out of the way, God sent and many miscreants, who went for my skin out of jealousy, took advantage, revenge, exploited me and like a fool that I am I fell for the devices of those devilish people. One fellow was manipulating, back biting and pulling the legs, all with a sweet smile, and I suffered inhuman pain and agony at his hands. Just because of him I made many adventurous trips, once to a mental hospital far off by train because his nephew had gone crazy and violent and I fetched the medicine to pacify him. Once he tried to pull my legs and snatch away my chair that I had to air dash to Maldives, and came back in the same way empty handed. I came back and the threat to my chair was over and had an achievement of my life to become the head of the office of the college that I worked and the place I was the most ill-treated in my life. I was also part of the history when the President of India visited our college and I paved the infrastructure in the office administration for the top most score in the NAAC accreditation.

Another achievement in my life was when I conquered Chocken Mudi, a pointed summit near Munnar with my students whom I was teaching English there. The climb was so difficult from the bottom, but fun especially when we reached the top. Even when I visited Himalaya I did not feel that kind of an excitement. It was as if we had reached the top of the world. The flora and fauna were different, with an aroma of herbs and the trees were short with big red wild flowers. We could see the low lands of both Kerala and Tamil Nadu stretching far off.

Once I became the animator of a prayer group of the English speaking people of Quilon. Some of them were the most affluent people of the city of Quilon and took

the group to the spiritual ecstasy in spontaneous prayer, praising, thanking, repenting and interceding.

While attending the convocation of my daughter Priya at Christ College, Bangalore, I heard a story about having dreams that inspired me a lot and I presented it in IIIT, Hyderabad while having a value education seminar there as a power point, along with the riches to aim in life, to have a definite purpose, dream and aim and set a goal and make a plan to reach there, going extra-mile, learning from defeat, having a mastermind alliance with people of similar outlook, having concentration and self-discipline, enthusiasm, self-initiative, giving and getting cooperation and making it a habit of living. It was well appreciated that the Health Secretary to the Maldives Government and Anti-Corruption commissioner of Bhutan copied it from me to show it in their place.

The story goes like this. Our ancient king Mahabali, wanted to see how his people celebrated Onam, a feast in his honor. Disguised he went to rich people's place, they drinking, dancing and making merry. He felt sad seeing such extravaganza, that he went to poor people's place. They were all sleeping, hungry and starving with no food, nor frolicking he felt much sad. From a half closed door of a house, some light was coming out and he peeped inside. One old man was singing a sad song and a girl with her hair cut, dancing to the tune and a thin young fellow playing a drum.

King got curious, went inside and asked them why the sad song. The old man said because of his foolishness. King asked him what happened. He said that he dreamt the other day that the king would come to his home for the Onasadhya, and having no money to prepare it, his daughter cut her hair and sold it and made food ready. His son was a writer and wanted to ask the king for a writer's job in the palace. They waited till late in the night for the king to come and not seeing him, started singing the sad song. King did not say anything, ate the food they gave and left the place.

Next day the king's soldiers announced about the job of a writer for the palace. Around five hundred people applied. King wanted only one person and to short list

the guy gave a test. It was an allegory, an old man singing a sad song, a girl with hair cut dancing and a thin young man playing a drum and what was it all about.

Only one person could write the answer, the old man's son and he got the job and that family got rescued from poverty.

In my case also the dream came chasing me, while the Maharaja releasing my book would have told me, 'If it was in the old days I would have ordered to have your head chopped off', but he told me, 'I can't tell anything unless I read your book.' I assured him, 'I will give you one to read'. He said 'I am taking this'. Sri Uthradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma was unraveling the packet that contained my book and releasing it to Fr. John SJ, a person whom I respect the most and manager of the college I work and Fr. Joy, my hero, Dr. Usha, daughter of my dad's friend, film director Sasikumar were also there on the podium. I felt humble in stature in front of those great stalwarts.

I had to pay the hell to become a writer. I had to forgo a fabulous job in an international holiday resort in the great holiday country Maldives and later suffer a lot of ill treatment and bad experiences from my peers just because of that.

When my enemies tried to destroy my brain power by way of some funny treatment that never did any good to me and I always remained a moron that I was. To prove otherwise I wrote a one lakh twenty thousand words book, brought out from Texas, two collections of novels from Madras, four poetry books along with more than twenty e-books in Kindle.

While Hemingway shot himself, or James Bond demolished his adversaries to smithereens, in such a situation like mine, this is my revenge, the most vital and memorable part of my life that I offer you on a platter, written with the true life blood from my very heart.