

The background of the cover is a lush, green forest scene with pink cherry blossoms falling from the trees. In the center, there are two dark silhouettes of people in traditional Indian attire, facing each other. In the foreground, there is a white, stylized figure of a person, possibly a deity or a character, with a small black triangle on its chest. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

Two

# Short Stories

**Chandrashekhara Siva**

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# And I thought I lost you



**I**t was five in the morning and Ram was still awake. The whole world was blessed to enjoy what he desperately wanted to experience, but couldn't. He could not sleep. Sleep and peace of mind was successfully eluding him for a long time now. He tried everything (as usual), from counting numbers, to reading books, to watching a movie on his laptop, to flipping through the boring channels on TV. Nothing seemed to work, unfortunately. He was still awake. Ram lay on his queen size bed and in spite of promising himself of not smoking any more, lit his 15<sup>th</sup> cigarette of the day. Or was it the 16<sup>th</sup>? He had lost the count. Took a few long puffs and watched his bedroom getting filled with smoke and its usual pungent burnt smell. He again remembered what his mother used to say when she used to get angry with him. Those lines "Ram...You were, are and will be a FAILURE" were haunting him and he was not able to wipe it out of his memory box. It seemed as if the delete button had suddenly stopped functioning or vanished out of his system and those particular lines were continuously running on a loop. All he knew was that he had scooped down to the level where no man or very few would have gone.

Several thoughts, all negative, suddenly started running in his mind. He felt so dejected and unwanted that he even thought of ending his life. Suddenly his chain of thoughts was broken by a sound. It was his cell phone ringing. This untimely call made him feel uneasy and nostalgic at the same time. Not very long ago, he thought, there used to be a time when he was the most wanted person in his so called professional and personal circle. He used to get calls at odd hours and he was the Mr. Dependable for his business partners and friends. But things changed and those people who were a part of his life were not even acquaintances any more. Now they became strangers and rarely felt the need of calling him.

Now the only calls he gets are from the telesales people but he never complained as he was happy that at least some one was calling him and there was someone to talk to. But today Ram chose to ignore the call, but the persistent caller went on calling. Ram reluctantly gave up and picked his

blackberry to see who was so desperate to talk to him at around five in the morning.

The name and number flashing on his cell brought mixed emotions in him. One side he was happy to get the call from this particular number and on the other hand he was not sure about the purpose of the call. It was the love of his life calling him. He quickly answered back hoping against hope that things might become normal again and there might be some chance of reconciliation. But his happiness was short-lived. Ratna was in no mood of romance and did not entertain any thoughts of any kind of reconciliation between her and Ram. She started her conversation with “Please do not think of sweet taking me through things. I hope you know why I have called you”.

It had been almost a year since they had separated. Their daughter, Ramya was with Ratna. “How is Ramya?” He asked. Ratna asked mockingly “do you still remember that you have a daughter?” Even before Ram could answer he heard a click and the line got disconnected. Ratna’s number started flashing on his mobile again. He was confused as to why she was calling him again as her purpose of mocking him was over already. He did not want her to feel that she was being ignored so he answered the phone immediately and the first thing he heard was a sobbing from the other side. He didn’t understand whether he should ask her as to why she was crying or try to console her. He chose to hear her out before saying anything. The last thing he wanted was another fight between them. “Why are you disconnecting my call? I know that you do not like talking to me but I called you to remind you that today is our daughter’s birthday and if you call her she will feel good” and before Ram could say anything she cut the call. Ram gave a wry smile and went on to sit on his favorite arm chair. The arm chair was one of the very few things which he loved. “If only she knew how much I love listening to her” he thought.

Sitting on the arm chair with his laptop on he started viewing the photos that were the only witness of his happy days. Going through the photos, he came across an old photo in which he was riding his cycle. Looking at it made him forget all his problems and sorrows and made him laugh again. Those photos made him go down the memory lane to when he was a handsome smart young lad. In his childhood days, Ram used to be an epitome of gregarious happy go lucky care free kid who was an average student but with sharp brains. Never cared for academics and always interested in drama, sports and other extracurricular activities. He was just opposite to his elder brother, Suresh, who was more inclined towards books and academics. Suresh always used to top his class and was the blue eyed boy of the house. Everybody wanted their child to be

like Suresh. Ram was the black sheep of the family. His mother was always concerned about his future. Suresh had his trophies and certificates to show for his intelligence whereas Ram had nothing but his street smart attitude and fighting ability to back him up.

These thoughts came as a blessing to him as he dozed off to sleep at last.

But alas, the blessing didn't last for long. A shrieking noise woke him up. It was his alarm clock which he had kept to be woken, in case he did manage to get some timely sleep. It was six thirty in the morning and Ram was again awake. Reluctantly he woke up from his arm chair and managed to drag himself towards the kitchen to prepare some much needed coffee. While drinking coffee he again drifted to his past thinking about his so called good old days. His life was going normally with no earth shattering events happening till he passed his high school. Things were business as usual for him. His elder brother was growing from strength to strength and was in one of the highly rated B schools of India and his parents were very proud of him and his achievements. Ram was in his 12<sup>th</sup> standard and was in that part of his life where he had to decide whether he wanted to take science (which he hated) or commerce (which he never understood). He wanted to take arts as he always wanted to do drama and theatre. Being from an orthodox family he had to take either science or commerce only as there was no scope for a third option. Ram obviously thought of choosing commerce stream and was working on going the route of being in that field.

That is when the first lightning struck in his life. That incident was still fresh in his memory as if it happened as recently as yesterday. That is what changed the whole course of his life. He was coming back home after meeting his friends when he saw his neighbors in his house and his parents having a worried face. As soon as he entered his house, the first thing that his father told Ram, stuck him like an arrow. His fathers told him "get lost, get out of my house. You are not my son anymore". Not knowing what happened and what transpired in to his father saying so, Ram was just standing at the door steps, totally perplexed. His neighbors' son was the first one to talk. According to him, Ram bullied him and forced him to give him 10,000 Rs and that is why he was forced to steal the money from his house. Without being asked for any explanation Ram was kicked out of the house. When he had woken up that day he had a family and a house. And now he was on street with nowhere to go and no one to fall back on. That is when he first said to himself "I lost it, but, all is well".

Life was a big struggle for him from that time onwards. First things first, he

had to make sure that he had a place to live and money to survive. That is when he remembered his friend talking about his father wanting someone to work for in his hotel. Getting job to survive was much easier than he thought and by the evening he had a job in his hand and had managed to get a place in a dorm near the hotel. Life had suddenly changed for Ram. Now his priorities had changed. Now he had to worry about his daily bread, instead of worrying about which stream to pursue in order to build his career. All he knew that he was wronged and he was down, but he was not out.

He started his professional life as a server in his friend's hotel. His friend's father agreed to Ram working in the evening so that he could continue with his studies. But life had different plans for him. The so called ordeal for him was not over. The next day at school Ram got his second bad news. He was suspended from school as his father had called and told them that he is not going to finance for Ram's studies. "Two in two days, hundred percent strike rate for bad luck" is what Ram thought in his mind.

Being the optimistic kind he was, he thought that it is a blessing in disguise as he will be able to work morning and evening and will be able to earn a bit more than he had thought of.

From Ram, Mr. Agarwal's younger son, suddenly he became Ram the server. He congratulated himself for his situation and gave a pat on his back. Now he was the so called self made man. Life was going on smoothly. Ram did manage to start saving a bit of money and was able to get a small decent house for rent. He got promoted from being a server in the hotel to the front desk manager of the hotel. He was able to afford a decent living, but still it was more of pay check to pay check living. Two years had passed away and there was no efforts from his family to search for Ram. He understood that he is not a part of his family anymore. Ram had resigned to his fate and was happy working in the hotel and had prepared himself to a life of a struggle.

Life is full of incidents, some good and some bad and we need to go through them whether we like it or not. Ram's life, it seemed, was over dozed with incidents and he somehow seem to have no control over them and their outcomes. But for change this incident was a real life changing event for Ram. It was a normal working day which had started early in the morning for him. As usual he was busy managing the proceedings of the hotel and making sure that all the customers are kept happy. That is when he saw Pawan (his school time friend) in the hotel. At first Ram had the urge to go and talk to him, but then thought against it. He didn't want to create an embarrassment for Pawan. He was dressed well and was with a girl, probably his girl friend. So Ram just continued

with his work. Suddenly someone called out “Ram. Are you Ram?” Ram turned around to his amazement, it was Pawan. Ram was both happy and sad at the same time. Happy that his friend still remembered him and sad that he had to meet him in this situation. After exchanging pleasantries Pawan asked him, “So do you own this hotel?” Ram hesitated a bit but then said “No I work here as a front desk manager”. When asked, Pawan said he was into stock market. And his wife name was Sapna. “Sapna Ram is my best friend from school but after that we parted as I went to another school and could not keep in touch with him” Ram was happy that Pawan didn’t mention the reason for their parting, although he knew what had happened. He shared pleasantries with Sapna.

Then the most unexpected happened. Pawan gave Ram his business card and said “Call me when you are free my friend; we have a lot of catching up to do”. Ram was awestruck. He was thinking “did he say that to me or am I dreaming?” Took a few minutes and then took the card. Pawan went in his new Honda Civic and then the day passed by as usual with nothing major happening in the rest of the day. At night Ram saw the business card and all that he thought was, “is he serious? Maybe...maybe not”.

There is a saying that when god closes a door for man he opens another somewhere. Maybe this was the door which god had opened for him. Or was it just an eye wash? “Come back to the ground Ram” he told himself, pinched his left hand and then went to sleep. The next few months went as usual. Ram became busy with his normal work. He used to see the business card every night, but never had the guts to call his friend.

It was the month of June and the work in the hotel was going smoothly. The hotel business had prospered quiet well and the owner did recognize Ram’s contribution towards its growth and made him the manager of the hotel. Ram was happy with the slow but steady growth of his professional life. He knew that in this way he will not be able to achieve a lot in his life. With his educational background and limited means he could only expect a miracle to happen in order to change things drastically for himself. He knew that miracles happen in movies, not in real life. But he had no reasons to complain. He was proud of his professional achievements.



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