

A Man From Jaffna

“Ah! Yes, I’ve heard the bad news. Have some tea. Keeps you warm in this cold Boston weather. When was he taken in? Yesterday? Sugar? These Americans like it with lemon. So what has the boy been up to?” Mr. Sundar looked grave as he sipped his tea delicately. “This is too strong — some hot water Rani,” he called to his wife.

“We don’t quite know Mr. Shayam-Sundar. My mother called me up last night from Colombo — they want us to do something at this end.” Suresh fidgeted in the overstuffed armchair. Actually it was his cousin Sonali who had called first, and then three times after, each time with a little more information. She had known before any one else, it seemed. He could still hear her voice, echoing in the distance at the end of the line, seeming to break into

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little bits as she said out loud, “They’ve taken him to Boosa.”

“Yes, yes of course, we will do everything — you can be rest assured of that. Now, what is your brother’s name?” Mr. Sundar settled down into a well-worn corner of the sofa across the room.

“Krishna.”

Mrs. Sundar brought in the hot water, and put it on the coffee table. “What would you like for a snack?” she asked.

“Whatever you have Mrs. Shayam Sundar,” Suresh hardly looked up.

“Your brother was here before he went back, didn’t he?” Mr. Sundar asked.

“Yes, he was at MIT. He was here for three years; he is a junior. He took a leave of absence and went back.” Biting his nails, Suresh looked around the room. An expensive TV and stereo, both protected with transparent covers, sat in two corners of the room. Bookshelves lined the walls, filled with leather bound classics that seemed brand new.

“Em. Eye. Tee. Shah! That is what I heard, nice to see our young Tamil boys doing well in the States. Do I know your father, son? What is his name?”

“Yoganathan”

“Yoganathan... was he station master Hatton?”