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A Burdensome Inheritance

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Amid deep silences of a village nestled a lonely house like a stoic in an eternal meditation. The owner of the house was an aged, retired professor of literature whose pale, wrinkled face resembled the pages of an old philosophy book covered in dust, confined in a closed library. This man had peculiar habits: he never socialized with anyone in the vicinity; he had this smugness around his personality which made people in the vicinity nauseated. His existence relied solely on his servant, Shyam, whose job was to procure everything he wanted— be it some fancy food item or some obscure book from the city. This person had none but a son who was a mechanical engineer in the USA. He never looked forward to the visits made by his son as his son wanted him to leave this place and shift to the USA.

It was the month of May, and the sun was beating down. That afternoon, something was unusual as the wind was not blowing fire as usual.

The professor [*angrily*]: Shyam, where have you been since morning? Is this why I have hired you?

Shyam: Don't get angry, *sahib*. I got a call from the bookseller. Your books have arrived. I went to the shop to get the books. I just forgot to inform you before leaving the house.

The professor: Whatever! In the morning, I just got a call from Vishesh. He would be here by Monday; I don't understand why he doesn't take his work seriously in the USA. Why does he keep coming every six months?

Shyam: He has to come after all he is your only son.

The professor: Huh, wish you could understand what I feel about all this stuff!

It was a gloomy Monday evening; the transformation of the color of the sky made people aware of the transient nature of all things mortal. This very Monday evening, a smiling person was knocking at the door of this house.

Shyam [*elated*]: My goodness! Welcome back, *beta*! I was waiting for you throughout the day.

Vishesh enters the house gingerly, anticipating the reaction of his father at his arrival.

The professor: Come, how was the journey?

Vishesh [*touching his father's feet*]: It was good, dad. Hope you are doing fine.

The professor: What made you come at such a short notice?

Vishesh [*feeling a bit awkward*]: I have come to visit you, dad.

The professor [*with a tinge of sarcasm*]: Oh really! What is it that you want from me now?

There was an impenetrable silence in the room. Vishesh seemed hurt and went to his room straight. Shyam went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. The professor seemed emotionless, lost in a reverie. The father and the son shared a strained relationship since the professor decided to leave the city and moved to an unknown village to reflect over his remaining life. Throughout his life, this professor had never bothered to make any friends, as he found most the people he met too practical to share his company. He never got along with his relatives. He hardly spoke to anyone. The only way he kept himself busy in his life was delivering lectures at his college and poring over literary and philosophical books. He never wanted his son to be like him, and was happy when his son went to the USA to pursue his higher studies.

At 10 PM, the dinner was served; both the father and the son hardly made eye contact. There was something inside Vishesh that he wanted to say.

Vishesh: What have you decided, dad?

The professor: [*nonchalantly*]: About what?

Vishesh: About shifting to the USA.

The professor [*looking vexed*]: How many times do I have to tell you that I am not going anywhere?

Vishesh: Can I ask why?

The professor: I don't feel comfortable in crowded places. Here I am at ease. And people are good here.

Vishesh: Why do keep yourself confined here all the time? There are things I have achieved that I want you to see in the USA. I have no one except you, dad. And here people don't speak to you at all. I know everything. What is it that you are looking for here, dad?

The professor: You won't understand anything because you are like other people. You will never understand what it feels to be by yourself. You and Shyam, both of you, have no idea what it is to be at peace. I want to live life my own way at this stage of my life. I want to be left alone.

Vishesh [*hesitatingly*]: Dad, haven't you been living your whole life this way. Where are your friends? Where are our relatives? You have been living your whole life in denial. Dad, you have still got time to make a change in your life.



The professor [*angrily*]: Don't lecture me on the philosophy of life. I sent you to an engineering college in a foreign country so that you can make a career out of it and live comfortably. Now, I don't owe you anything. And I don't want anything from you too. I don't want you to be here. Neither you, nor Shyam.

Vishesh [*restlessly*]: You can't even last a single day without Shyam.

The professor stood up furiously, hurried down to his room and shut the door up.

The next morning at 4 AM, Vishesh came out of his room with a suitcase. Shyam had this habit waking up early in the morning and tending to the trees in the garden. When he saw Vishesh coming out of his room with a suitcase, he knew something ominous was about to happen.

Shyam [*astonished*]: Where are you going, Vishesh *beta*?

Vishesh: Back to the USA. I booked the flight tickets last night. I don't want to see dad suffer because of me. I know he is different from others, but I have some expectations from him. I want him to behave like a normal father like my friends' fathers do. You know uncle, for past two years I have been in a relationship. I want dad to meet her and her family. And because of his eccentricities, I could not even muster up the courage to invite them over here.

Shyam: He may be eccentric and all that, but he is your father, *beta*.

Vishesh: Do you think he is happy being my father?

Shyam: Look *beta*, he is what he is. You have to accept him as he is. I have been working for him for past fifteen years. He was very rude to your mother too. But I know, deep inside he craves for love like others. I have seen him shedding tears when he is alone.

Vishesh: Shedding tears because he cannot fit in this society, *ha*?

Shyam: You can't understand his pain.

Vishesh: Look uncle, I am getting late. I have to reach the railway station to catch the train. When he wakes up, tell him that he doesn't owe me anything.

With these words, Vishesh left the house, walking down the pathway hurriedly, without looking back.

The train left the station on time. Vishesh felt something choking him in the throat. His phone rang, he avoided. The phone rang again, this time he picked it up.

Vishesh [*disinterestedly*]: Who is on the other side?

Shyam [*on the line*]: It's me, Shyam uncle. Come back fast, *beta*.

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Vishesh [*worryingly*]: What happened, uncle?

Shyam [*his voice shaking*]: *Sahib* didn't wake up.

In the evening, after the cremation ceremony, attended by few people of the village, Vishesh and Shyam came back home.

Vishesh: Tomorrow, I will be leaving early in the morning.

Shyam: As you wish, *beta*.

The next morning, the sun was smiling cheerfully at one and all. Vishesh and Shyam both were tending to the tress in the garden. In the eyes of Vishesh, there was a sense of peace and tranquility. Shyam looked dejected, though surprised at this change of events.

Shyam: What is it that made you stay, *beta*?

Vishesh [*Looking around*]: I want to see what he was looking for in this solitary place.