

EXCERPT FROM MEMOIRS OF A TERRORIST(Fiction)

Three thousand feet in the air, the lone pilot, in a plane packed with explosives, scanned the inky expanse below him, the little towns and villages he passed, a flicker of fireflies in the night. He didn't have night vision equipment but an accomplice on the ground, in a crackle of sound and static, guided him to his destination.

Alone and freed of the shackles of the numerous influences around him, Trent, found himself slightly disoriented. Beset by conflicting emotions. Nostalgia: wishing that he could be doing nothing more earth shaking than taking a walk on the beach; or watching a game on television.; doing those ordinary things that normal people do. A fierce sense of justice; he would avenge all those who had died before him. All those who fought to be liberated from the yoke of tyranny.

He knew almost instinctively, why people were isolated in camps; if they had a taste of any other kind of life; the cause would be lost. Eating, drinking and talking Eelam skewered your focus and upset your priorities. Life became conveniently narrowed down. It is easy to forget, there was a wider world waiting to be conquered. A world where there was so much to discover, inventions to be invented, diseases to be cured and new solutions found to age old problems. He shook his head trying to free himself of the

contradictions running loose in his head. This was not the time for regret.

It was too late now.

There was more to life than lurking in the shadows, planning murder and mayhem, he thought. Revenge and destruction became the only two key things in your life, he sighed at the belated realization. Breathing hard, trying to relax, he flexed his fingers and toes. He would need his wits about him, when he reached Colombo.

There it was. Colombo. Sprawling across the west coast, shimmering in the reds, blues and gold of a vibrant night life, high rises reaching up to the stars, giant trees, patches of dark in the muted street lighting. He thought of his grandparents. They would be horrified and possibly cry their hearts out. They were not aware of his involvement with the tigers or even that he was in Sri Lanka. He smiled automatically at the sight of traffic, hotels, neon signs; he wanted to be part of the crowd on the ground zooming around in a little car, instead of sitting alone in this light aircraft, with a cyanide capsule around his neck. He felt an instant of shame as he tried to evict the thought from his head. Coward, he taunted himself, you are trying to chicken out. Sweat stood out on his upper lips in little pearly drops. His ears were red with the effort of concentrating on keeping his plane on course.

He longed for a cool lemonade, the kind his mum made when he was busy with his exams. He was shaking slightly, fearful of the task ahead of him. The sweat pouring down his back in little rivulets made his rubber seat wet and clammy.

You are a hero; you will be an inspiration for generations to come. The Leader's words echoed back and forth in his brain, trying to strangle his reason. You are the foundation of our Eelam, the clipped voice, had reassured him. Fresh images from the battlefield flashed in his head, the hopeful faces of the tiger cadres and the sight of the war dead. He squared his shoulders, his resolve stiffening. Yes, he was ready to wreak vengeance. He flew low on one engine to escape the radar and the early warning defense system, that might track his journey. The normal civilian population would assume that the plane was an army reconnaissance plane. A flash of light nearly blinded him. His breath caught, his arrival into the Colombo area had been noted. He found himself in the criss cross of searchlights, as a dazzling display of beams lit up the night sky. They had warned him, the shooting would begin the minute he entered the enemy territory and when he realized that he was all alone in the glare of the searchlights, he found it hard to focus on the commands crackling from the communication set. He muttered under his breath. This made it all the more harder. Rahul

had insisted: minimize civilian casualties, target the Headquarters. Well they would start firing, and he had to be ready.

There it was. Ping. Something struck the wing. And another. And another. A hail of bullets coming right at him. They were blinding him with their searchlights. He was desperate, twisting this way and that, frantically avoiding the barrage of bullets they kept firing at him.

They kept pushing him off course towards the sea, away from his target. Struggling to concentrate, his energy now focused only on dodging the bullets, he realized he had no way of reaching his destination, despite the insistent clamor of his communication set to turn 45 degrees north. He would have no option but to crash. Wincing, every time that the bullets struck home, he tried hard to maneuver, the plane towards his target but with no avail. The plane was way off course and he knew he had missed his target.

He grabbed his cyanide capsule, horrified as he realized he might have to crash his plane full of explosives on civilians on the ground. And he would lose his life in vain. His plane was running out of fuel, and he felt the plane scraping a building and then starting to plummet. Gripping the controls, he waited with bated breath for the explosion but the plane nosedived,

shuddered and with a thundering roar crashed between two buildings on top of some vehicles parked in the alley.

He crunched hard on the capsule, hoping that Kanna at least would have decimated his target. By a miracle, the ammunition packed inside the plane did not detonate.

He had arrived in Sri Lanka, the year before, from his home in Montreal, Canada. After a long and miserable flight with a 48 hour transit in Tokyo, he had expected to be thoroughly out of sorts when he landed, but his first sight of the island had enthralled him.

The pictures he had of the suffering of the people in the north of Sri Lanka were vivid in his memory. People huddled under tin sheets in 46C degree heat in open plains, baking in the scorching sun, in detention camp like surrounding. Victims of a war that had robbed them of homes, livelihoods, an education, their children and some of them crippled by the random, shells that the army dropped on the peninsula. Graphic images on the internet and the television fed the fire that raged across the Tamil diaspora.

He had felt strange: that he was coming home. A connection to a country he had never visited. The reports coming out of Sri Lanka, seemed at odds with the people and the City of Colombo, with its cosmopolitan crowd and

diversity. He had expected forbidding mountains and a harsh landscape, not the smiling, sunny, beautiful island that lay stretched before him, the picture of peace and tranquility.

He had landed early in the morning when most of the island was still shrouded in a fleecy white quilt of mist, its golden beaches fringed by palms, the blue waves curling in a whisper of lace at its shores, a novel sight for someone born and bred in the cold frosty, sanitized, colourless Canadian cities.

Perhaps it was something to do with the physical warmth - almost sauna-like in its intensity - that thawed and melted his blood, frozen in the bitter cold of the Canadian winter that he had left behind, making him dizzy. He loved this smiling, happy land, an instinctive love of a child to the parent, not to be analyzed or examined, but to be reveled in.

Rushing through the customs as a Canadian citizen, encountering the good will of a friendly people, he found his hostility melting. Caught up in the frail embrace of his grandparents, he truly found himself to be at home. The jumble of color, sights, sounds and smells of his parent's birthplace captivated him. .

His grandparents, lived in a fifteen story storey apartment block, in a secluded neighborhood surrounded by similar apartment blocks, rather

like his own home in Montreal. It had a basic no frills elevator, and a nice neat well kept lobby, with a motley crew of workers eternally busy sweeping, mopping, scrubbing, polishing.

“You are acting just like a tourist.” His grand ma pointed out.

“I am I am.” he responded delightedly. The view out of his window, of the tranquil, distant Indian ocean, the churches, mosques, temples, the huge statues that dotted the city evoked a sense of wonder and he found himself excited and garrulous. The sounds of bells, the muezzin calling the faithful to prayers, the eternal blare of salespeople on loudspeakers, created a strange mix of sounds. He did not want to call it noise pollution. He wanted desperately to walk out and merge with the masses thronging the streets.

Two weeks later, he took a flight to the north to see his fathers sister and was appalled by the desolation and despair that was evident everywhere. His natural sense of chivalry was outraged, by the broken down and gutted buildings, crippled and maimed humanity, aged before their time, the poverty and the unmistakable air of desperation, sorrow and hopelessness, that was everywhere. The land of the living dead he thought., before chastising himself for being insensitive. Refugees huddled in railway stations that had no trains and inside buses that had no engines. They were

everywhere. His heart went out to the people who could smile in the face of such calamity. He watched in amazement, his nephew's total absorption in his physics, chemistry and further mathematics, stuck to a little corner of the room piled high with books, leaving his place, only to go to school.

“How can you study with all the problems you see around you?” he asked.

“I have learnt to isolate myself from these problems.” he had answered.

While eating breakfast one day he told his aunty, “ I want to meet the Tigers.”

“No.....” Her vehement refusal angered and puzzled Trent, but his curiosity was not be quelled and with the help of another youth who worked at the bank where he changed his money, he made his way to Kilinochi, the administrative capital of the Tiger Capital.

He was taken around the administrative buildings, the LTTE Headquarter and then the graveyard, where the martyrs of the movement reposed in a quiet, sunny garden with well tended hedges. He was introduced to Rahul, (of whose fame he had already heard much) who took him around the little store houses they called factories, manufacturing explosives and other weapons of destruction. Rahul took him deep into the jungle, in his double cab on rough roads to a place, where most of the training camps were:

pointing out the firing range where the young cadres practiced, the lecture rooms. Then to the Sea Tiger Base i where the Sea tigers showed off their array of sophisticated arsenal.

“Its awesome!” he kept repeating when he saw the variety of weapons the sea tigers had acquired.

On his return to Canada, he found that the normal pleasures that he indulged in, like snooker and bowling did not hold his interest anymore.

His visit had made such an impact that he could not wait to come back again.

“I want to help,” He had pleaded with Rahul. Emails flew back and forth and Trent, came back to realize his dream.

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