**THE HOME-COMING**

“When life brings big winds of change that almost blow you over… close your eyes, hang on tight, and just believe..”

The word home-coming in itself sounds so heart- warming and fulfilling. A school boy coming home from his boarding school for the summer holidays, or a soldier returning home from a long fierce battle. Homecoming really gives you that feeling of complete contentment.

But it hasn’t been the same feeling with me. It always reminds me of the tragic and heart-rending story of Home-coming by Rabindranath Tagore.

But this is a story of Ejaaz’s homecoming. It is a story , of both despair and hope.

Ejaaz is a 20 year young boy, in the prime of his youth. When you have the first glance of him , you will never imagine that he is a boy with intellectual disabilities .Young , smart, confident ,well-behaved, cheerful all these qualities you can surely attribute to him.

Ejaaz joined the school when he was a small boy, and then on completion of 18 years, he joined the Vocational Training Centre of the same school.

Ejaaz suffered from seizures right from his childhood. He is a victim of Epilepsy, so his poor health did not permit him to go to any general school.

First time I saw Ejaaz when he was busy working in the centre. He was packing the files all ready to be dispatched. Every crease, every fold, Ejaaz did it all with utmost precision and perfection.

Ejaaz comes from a middle-class family. Very simple, calm and composed. I was quite impressed by his well groomed personality and an equally well –mannered behaviour. He is always prompt and very obliging to help whenever he is asked to. He is equally a very enthusiastic boy who takes part in all the extra curricular activities of the school.

Seeing the remarkable progress and his competence, the school management gave him a small job in a file manufacturing factory.

We were all very happy for Ejaaz. He would stand on his own feet and have a decent living. Ejaaz too was very excited to have the job.

We all knew we would miss him. We gave him a warm farewell and wished him all the best.

A month passed by, every time I visited the vocational training section , unknowingly my eyes searched for Ejaaz and felt the void he had created. Some other boys were given his task of packaging but everyone missed his precision and perfection.

It was Tuesday afternoon, as I walked in, I saw Ejaaz silently packing the files.

I was totally taken aback. It was just a month and Ejaaz was back. His home-coming? What must have brought him back? Were his superiors not happy with his work? Was Ejaaz not able to adjust to his completely new environment? A hundred questions stormed my mind. But I didn’t question him at that point. I knew that something was terribly wrong. He looked at me. His eyes were filled with pain and anguish.

“Hello Ejaaz, Welcome home.”

He looked at me , just gave a half-hearted smile and said nothing. But my heart felt the pain he had experienced to give that faint smile. It’s more than a fortnight now for his home-coming. Ejaaz is back with us. But he is quiet and withdrawn. Speaks to no one, just continues silently doing his work.

‘Ejaaz, I said to him one day, sitting next to him.

“What’s that , that is troubling you so much? Can you share it with your teacher?

He slowly lifted up his eyes and looked at me. The pain was intense and deep. He said nothing but slowly his eyes brimmed with tears.

“Mam, nobody there wanted to accept me. They all shunned me, laughed at me and made fun of me. I was all alone to myself. I had no friends . I just couldn’t work there….

I was speechless. I just couldn’t believe it. Could people also behave like this?

“Mam, they made me realize that I was not one of them and would never be one. I was no match to their intelligence, calibre and smartness. My world is different, there is no comparison between the two…

I said nothing, just listened to the voice of a broken heart.

“Ejaaz, I can feel the struggle you have had with your life and emotions for the past days. It’s very unfortunate that this has happened to you. But don’tcompare your life with others. Someone has rightly said,” There is no comparison between the sun and the moon.. they shine when it’s their time.”

We had tried to shape Ejaaz’s future, give wings to his dreams, hoped for a brighter tomorrow for him. But, may be it was not God’s plan.

I looked at him once again and realized that everything happens for a reason. Nothing occurs by chance. It’s all a part of God’s divine plan.

May be Ejaaz will be happier in his own little world.

It was not an easy task to bring Ejaaz back from his shattered world. We all helped him to gather the broken pieces. These boys here may not have a great intellectual mind, but God has surely given them a big and amazing heart. They perfectly understood what Ejaaz was going through.

Now it’s nearly two months Ejaaz is back with us .He is slowly coming back to his normal life.

Today we are having the Christmas celebrations in the school. I have given Ejaaz also a small role in the Christmas Tableau. He is one of the three wisemen.

I watch him walking slowly to the manger with the box of Frank incence in his hands. He kneels down in front of Baby Jesus and bows his head in perfect serenity and reverence.

I watch him , watch his every move and emotion. My heart is filled with an unexplainable joy and peace. The storm had calmed down and it’s time for celebrations. I have no words , just a silent prayer ,”I trust your plans Oh Lord, even though I do not understand your path.”

**Curie Pereira**