

Title: Goodbye Baba

Reluctantly, he handed over the key. It made it seem final now, handing over his house key to the man he had always known as Baba Khan. He had been a faithful employee to him, his parents and his grandparents. He never knew his real name. It seemed a bit late to ask now, after thirty five years. It was final. He locked the door for the last time turning the big steel key in the heavy iron lock. It creaked as if it was feeling sad, expressing the emotion which was in Zee's heart. He took one last look at his old home through the metal gate. The square shaped veranda which in the summer was used to sleep in when the nights inside were unbearably hot and sweaty. The veranda where once chickens and rabbits had been kept as pets. On the weekends the children always argued whose turn it was to clean the cages. In the cooler months the veranda was used to sit in with all the extended family members gathered round a little fire whilst roasting peanuts and telling stories from long ago. Somehow the stories always ended with someone saying: "Ahhh things really were better in those days weren't they."

They had all gone now and Zee had nothing to stay for. The house was empty and quiet whereas once all that could be heard was laughter and noise. In the last few months he almost felt like an intruder in his own home. The quietness had scared him.

As he handed Baba Khan the key, he noticed he took the key with both of his hands, hands which seemed almost child like now. He had aged in body but his mind was still sharp as ever. In the background the morning call to prayer could be heard over the loud speaker of the neighbourhood mosque. A few men were making their way towards the mosque, some with prayer mats slung over one of their shoulders, some still seemed sleepy eyed and a quiet exchange of "salaams" were uttered as they passed Zee and Baba. His street was slowly coming back to life after the quiet of the night. Soon the tea vendors will be opening up their little shop, which sold bitterly sweet milky tea. The milk man will be doing his rounds and all the housewives will start their daily complaints of water being added to the milk. The milk man will deny ever doing this but everyone knew he did. Little familiarities of his street, which put a smile on his face, which he will always remember.

"Ahhhh" said Baba Khan. "I still remember when you were brought home from the hospital."

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It was exactly a morning like this, a warm drizzly morning, the call to prayer being heard over the loudspeaker and now you are leaving.” His eyes welled up and his voice broke.

“I will be back Baba” said Zee placing a gentle hand on his slight back, he could feel his bones through his long white tunic. “I I don’t know when but I will come back.”

“Who knows if I will be alive then” said Baba using the scarf around his neck to wipe away a stray tear from his eye. His blue eyes contrasted sharply with his tanned skin.

“May you live to be one hundred years Baba.”

“Bless you but this heart and these bones are tired now.”

Just as Baba finished talking the taxi they had ordered to take Zee to the airport arrived. Zee said a silent prayer as soon as he saw the taxi, a little black fiat which looked as if it had been involved in many accidents and made a strange tuck tuck noise.

The driver pulled up right beside them and he got out of the car to take Zee's suitcase. He looked about eighteen, which made Zee nervous.

“Oh you must be Mr Zee?” said the young driver.

“Yes, yes, that is me.”

“To the airport sir?”

“Yes” said Zee hesitating slightly.

“Quick sir, I take your suitcase and we get going, otherwise we will catch traffic.”

“Yes, of course.”

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He lifted Zee's heavy suitcase with ease, something Zee didn't expect him to do. He put the suitcase into the boot of his little taxi and hurriedly sat down in the drivers seat.

Baba turned around to face Zee and held both of his shoulders in his small frail hands. Zee felt his hands were icy cold. He barely came up to Zee's shoulders now.

“Have a safe journey and write to me as soon as you can. I will be waiting for your letter.”

“I will Baba. Take care of yourself. And don't work too hard. You need to take care of your health.”

Zee put his arms around Baba, embracing his thin, frail frame. He hoped deep in his heart that this wouldn't be the last time they see each other but a little voice inside him said it was.

Zee kissed Baba on the forehead and got in to sit down in the passenger seat of the taxi. His window was already wound down and Zee turned around. Both had tears in their eyes and the taxi started to pull away navigating the uneven and dusty streets. Zee saw Baba kept waving until he couldn't see him any more. He turned around and looked straight ahead towards his destination.

“Going on a big trip Sir” asked the young driver.

“Yes, a long, long journey.”