

Echoes of the Protector

The golden hues of the setting sun painted the sky in strokes of orange and pink. A gentle breeze rustled through the station, carrying the distant chime of a temple bell and the faint laughter of children playing near the platform. I adjusted the heavy bag on my shoulder, feeling the weight of both my luggage and my longing.

It had been two months. Two long months away from home, away from her—away from Kevin.

I settled onto a wooden bench, stretching my legs. The rhythmic murmur of the station surrounded me—the rustle of newspapers, the hum of voices. And then, a sound overhead made my heart pause.

An airplane.

I looked up instinctively, watching it streak across the sky, a silver thread cutting through the soft pastels of dusk.

“Appa! Look, look! An aeroplane!”

His voice rang in my ears as if he were right beside me. I smiled at the memory.

Whenever an airplane passed over our home, Kavin would rush outside, his little feet pattering against the floor, hands cupped around his mouth as he called for me. His eyes would widen with wonder, his tiny fingers pointing skyward.

“How does it fly so high, Appa?”

“With powerful engines, Kanna. And a pilot controls it.”

“I want to be a pilot, Appa. I want to fly in the sky and wave at you!”

I had laughed then, ruffling his soft curls. “You have to grow up, study hard, and train. One day, you’ll fly all over the world.”

He was only four, yet he spoke with the conviction of someone much older. My little dreamer.

The airplane faded into the horizon, and I lowered my gaze. My throat felt dry—water. I needed to buy a bottle before boarding the train.

I turned toward a small shop near the platform. Rows of mineral water bottles gleamed under the yellow light, condensation forming on the cool plastic. Just as I reached for one, something caught my eye.

A toy shop.

Tucked beside the general store, barely noticeable among the larger stalls. My feet hesitated. I was thirsty, but something pulled me toward it. Without thinking, I stepped inside.

The scent of fresh plastic and paint filled the air, the soft clatter of toys being rearranged. And then, I saw it.

A small, beautifully crafted white toy airplane with delicate blue streaks on its wings.

My fingers traced its sleek body. I could already see it—Kavin's eyes lighting up, his tiny hands grasping the plane, his laughter echoing through our home. He had never asked for one before, always dreaming of real planes, but this... this would be special.

"If I give him this, he'll cherish it. He'll dream even bigger."

I smiled to myself, momentarily forgetting my thirst.

The shopkeeper noticed. "You seem happy, sir."

I chuckled. "I'm buying this for my son. He loves airplanes."

He nodded knowingly. "A future pilot?"

I beamed. "Yes, a future pilot."

I handed him a thousand-rupee note, but he hesitated before giving me change. "For you, sir, it's eight hundred. Your son's dreams deserve a little encouragement."

Something tightened in my chest. Gratitude.

I left the shop with the toy airplane in my hand, feeling as though I had just bought him his first real step toward the sky.

Back at the bench, the train rumbled into the station, its metal wheels screeching softly as it came to a halt. I boarded quickly, securing a window seat.

The train lurched forward, picking up speed as the cool night air rushed in, caressing my face. Outside, the scenery blurred into green fields and distant lights. But my mind was elsewhere.

Kavin.

I imagined him beside me, chattering excitedly, his tiny hands gripping mine. I imagined him growing, his school years flying by, his dream never wavering. I imagined him, a young man in a crisp uniform, stepping into a cockpit, his voice steady as he announced his flight.

“This is Captain Kavin speaking.”

A protector. That's what I was. Not just a father, but the shield that would guard his dreams, the hands that would lift him whenever he stumbled.

I closed my eyes, my heart swelling with warmth.

And in my dreams, I heard Kavin's voice, echoing through the wind.

"Appa, tell me a story."

"A story? About what, Kanna?"

"About you. About when you were little."

I told him everything—my childhood, the village I grew up in, the love of his grandparents for me.

"What was Appa's dream when you were little?"

I had loved math. I had wanted to become a teacher. And now, I was.

At that moment, something echoed in my mind—words my father once told me: “A man truly becomes a father when he starts to protect and live for the dream of his child.”

I understood it now.

The train jolted slightly as it slowed, the rhythmic clatter of the tracks shifting into a softer hum. I opened my eyes, glancing at my watch. Almost there.

Outside the window, the scenery had changed. The sprawling city lights had given way to quiet roads, shadowed trees, and the occasional flicker of lights in distant houses. A deep breath filled my lungs with something familiar—something warm.

Home.

I leaned against the window, watching the station come into view. It was small, simple, unchanged. A single bulb flickered above the worn-out signboard bearing my village's name. The platform was mostly empty except for a few sleepy travelers and a vendor stacking newspapers for the morning.

Finally, my stop.

I stepped out, the cool night air settling around me. The silence was different here—not empty, but peaceful.

No vehicles, no honking, no rush—just the quiet rustle of leaves and the distant murmur of crickets. The faint scent of jasmine and damp earth lingered in the breeze. It had always been like this.

In my childhood, I had walked these same roads barefoot under the moonlight, racing my friends.

A wave of memories washed over me.

I had left this village for my job, a promising opportunity that took me far from home. At first, the distance had felt temporary, something I could adjust to. But days turned to months, and months turned to years. The job provided stability, but it had also taken me away from everything I loved.

I walked, my excitement growing with each step.

I could already picture my wife waiting at the door, as she always did. Our love, once uncertain, had bloomed despite the odds. Both our families had accepted us, and we married with their blessings.

Six years later, we were still choosing each other, every single day. Love wasn't just in words but in the silent understanding

between us. Distance had never truly separated us—our hearts remained tethered, an invisible thread connecting us always. I felt her, and she felt me, no matter the miles.

The house came into view, warm light spilling from the windows. And there she was—my wife, standing in the doorway, her silhouette glowing softly. Wrapped in a simple saree, her hair cascading over her shoulders, she looked effortlessly beautiful.

Even in the dim light, her eyes held warmth, a quiet joy at seeing me return. My breath caught. How was it that every time I came back, she seemed more beautiful than before?

She smiled, and for a moment, everything else disappeared.

God, how I had missed that smile.

As I reached her, she took my hand, her fingers warm against mine.

“You’re late.”

“I know.” I chuckled, squeezing her hand. “But I’m home now.”

We stepped inside, and my parents were waiting, their faces glowing with happiness.

And then—they started laughing.

I was confused.

My father pointed at my hand. The toy airplane.

“Are you going to play with that?” he teased. My mother chuckled, my wife covering her mouth to hide her laughter.

I looked down at the little airplane, suddenly self-conscious. “It’s for Kevin,” I mumbled.

My wife stepped closer. Then, gently, she guided my hand to her stomach.

“Can you feel him?” she whispered.

For a second, I didn’t understand. And then—realization.

A slow, beautiful, earth-shattering realization.