

The good old days

All we hear are cries of pain, and gentle sobs.

All we feel is anger, frustration, and sorrow.

I have forgotten the comforting feelings of happiness, and joy.

I have forgotten the sounds of laughter, and glee.

The world we once knew is no longer alive, and I am uncertain whether it can be revived.

My life has been turned on its head. It's like I am experiencing something worse than a world war. Something that will go down in history. This war, a war between India, and Pakistan, slowly taking over our lives, and now, the prime source of death.



Just before dinner, I was reading one of my comics, when a hunger pang washed over me. I could smell the delicious wafts of my mother's world-famous paneer curry, and it was making me very hungry. Today was Holi, and I had had the time of my life throwing and getting covered in bright and vibrant colours with my cousins.

I wandered downstairs to see when dinner would be ready, but I stopped abruptly when I heard the hushed whispers of my parents.

"We mustn't scare the children. We have to be positive - this can't go on forever." My mother said inaudibly.

I pushed open the oak door, *"What can't go on forever?"*

My mother shot my father a concerned look, before looking up at me and replying, *"Nothing that you need to worry about,"* she got up and wrapped me in a tight hug, and it seemed as though nothing was wrong, but I had a sickening feeling at the pit of my stomach, and suddenly, I wasn't hungry anymore.



Holi is now a distant memory. I can't remember how many times I have dreamt about what my parents continue to keep on discussing in their hushed tones, when they think my sister and I are not listening.

As I stroll down the footpath to school, I realize that it is odd that that my best friend has not yet arrived. We always walk to school together once we reach the corner shop, and

sometimes if we are lucky, and have saved some paisa, we would buy some jalebi for our break, and after school.

When I walked through the school gates, I ran to a nearby teacher, and asked, *“Excuse me Ma’am, I was wondering; where is Ina?”*

“Ina has moved to the other side,” she replied.

“What do you mean the other side? Why didn’t she tell me? I’m her best friend!” I exclaimed. Ma’am gave me a sorrowful glance, but then rushed away. Suddenly, the feeling of unease, which had been buried inside me for many months now, resurfaced once again.



I tried to sleep, but I was too restless. There were rumours about the partition of India, and how Hindu’s, like myself, were being killed and looted, and having to hide and leave the newly separated country, Pakistan.

As if on cue, my father came into my room, trying to be as quiet as possible, so he did not awaken my sister.

“Eashwar, I have to tell you something,” he said, as if he was afraid to speak, *“Have you heard about the partition of India? Now, we are no longer living in India, but in Pakistan.”*

“Yes, Papa. I have heard. We are Hindus, so will we have to leave?” I questioned, unnerved.

“Unfortunately, we will. We will leave at midnight tomorrow night. I know it is hard, but it is what has to be done. I’m sorry.” He bent down, and gave me a hug, which instantly made me feel safe. I had tears streaming down my face, but as much as I didn’t want to leave home, I knew it was better than getting killed.

“Papa, will we make it to India alive?” I squeaked.

“I don’t know, Eashwar. I don’t know.”

I cried. I cried like I had never cried before. I was finally admitting to myself that I was scared. I was the kind of girl who would never cry; a tough girl, but I knew after this night, I had to be brave for my sister, for my parents, but most of all, for myself. We may not make it out alive, but I know we will do everything within our power to try.

I had confided my sister in my worries, a couple of months back, but Papa had asked me not to tell her, and said that he and Mother would, when we were all together – like a family, for maybe the last time.



I helped my sister pack few of her clothes, one of her favourite toys, and most importantly, a family portrait. At seeing our family so happy in the photo, tears sprung to my eyes. Our

family, and many others were being torn apart, and it was insufferable. My sister had rolled up into a ball on her bed and sobbed. She would miss our home as much as I did. We lived on over 200 acres, and we were the head of the village. We would miss everyone. All our maids, gardeners and workers, have all become our close friends, and to be losing everything we love, is excruciating.

I felt my-self go weak to the knees. In just several hours we would be taking a horse and cart to the train station, and then taking a train - or rather a blood carriage, all the way to the new India-Pakistan border. I could not believe that our life in Pakistan was slowly coming to an end, and that we would have to re-start in India.

It was pitch black outside. Not nearly as many people kept lights on anymore, as if in fear of being discovered, then looted. It was nearly midnight, we had heard that usually attacks happen at night, so we were all packed, and were about to leave.

Without a warning, our door was broken down, and I could hear the sounds of gunshots. My Mother had spoken to my sister and I before, and had warned us that something like this may happen. She had said in her soothing voice that I had to get my sister and I as far away from the house as possible, and try to get to the train. We had been given our train tickets and been told to board the train even if my parents weren't able to follow us. I longed to stay behind with Mother and Father, but I knew it was unwise. I grabbed my sister's hand and sprinted for the back door, with one quick glance back at our house, my sister and I sped away on foot instead of in a horse and cart, silently praying.



We were perched behind a rock, my sister, Amrit, and I waiting for the attackers to move away, so we could board the train. I had been constantly looking behind me, to see if I could spot my parents, but they were nowhere to be seen. Amrit had seemed to notice my constant obsession, but said nothing of it. I think she was almost scared to say it, in case, by saying it, it would come true.

One of the scary people in front of the train said something muffled that I could not hear, then the others moved away.

"Now's our chance," I whispered to Amrit. She peered behind us once, before disappointedly nodding in agreement.

We carefully scurried up to the train, and showed the conductor our tickets. He nodded, and ushered us inside. I decided it would be best to hide somewhere in a carriage, instead of just sitting on the bench. The carriage door slid open, and I held my breath. Amrit and I were in a reasonable hiding place but, I couldn't help asking myself, *will it be enough?*

I had no time to think this through, because Amrit jumped out of her hiding place, even with my restraint, *"Amrit!"* I hissed. If she had heard me, then she made no sign to acknowledge it. She jumped out and hugged the people who walked through.

I breathed a huge sigh of relief, and joy. It was Mother and Father! I was ecstatic! They wrapped us in tight hugs before telling us we had hidden well, and that after our twelve-hour journey, we would have a lot of running to do, so we will be grateful for the long sit. Mother squeezed in with Amrit and I, and Father hid in another similar place. It was quiet for a while, but I knew it wasn't going to be a quiet smooth journey.



I couldn't resist the urge to peek out from my hiding spot. Mother, Father, and Amrit were all asleep, but I was too paranoid to go back off to sleep, after my incredibly disturbing nightmare. As soon as I peeked out, I immediately wished I hadn't. All the sounds from my nightmare, hadn't been a nightmare. In our carriage, from my hiding place, was something I would never have imagined in my wildest of dreams. I instantly understood why carriages are now called blood carriages, and I prayed for my family, and best friend to make it alive. With the thought of Ina, I stopped short, this was the first time I was realising how much I longed for the old days with her.



We had arrived at a station, and many people got off. I asked Mother if we had to get off here too, but she simply shook her head and pressed her fingers to her lips, signalling me to stay quiet.

I silently gasped as our carriage door creaked open, and large men came in, one of them said, *"Nothing to see here, no one's in here."* I breathed a sigh of relief – we were alive, for now.

Roughly after about six hours, I drifted off to sleep, but was awoken with a start, when the train lurched forward, and then halted. Father had squeezed in next to mother, and they were trying to wake up Amrit.

As soon as Father noticed that I was awake, he whispered, *"We have reached, but we can't be noticed getting off the train. We are trying to wake up Amrit, without scaring her too much that she will make much noise."*

I nodded, and then began to help. She finally awoke after several tries. We explained to her what was happening, and she nodded sleepily.



After scrambling as far away from the hysteria as we could, we landed in a refugee camp, which gave us three meals a day, shelter, and water. It was not ideal at all, but Mother, and Father promised it was only until we found our own house or land. It was going to be incredibly difficult to adapt to our new life here, but after the last few days' events, I am certain that we can withstand anything that is thrown in our way.

I saw a few familiar figures in the distance. I called out to Amrit and my parents to come and see who was there. Amrit and I raced in front of our parents, and we were met with the best surprise of our lives.

"Ina!!" we squealed

"Eashwar, Amrit!!" she gasped. She ran to Amrit and I and wrapped us in the biggest hugs, my best friend had survived! I finally knew the good old days were back!

This is a story inspired by my grandfather's parents and sisters, who had to make the dreaded journey across the border during the partition. Unfortunately, many people were killed and injured on both sides, but thankfully, they lived to tell the tale, and I admire their bravery and courage in every way.