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## The Suicide Bomber

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“The head of the suicide bomber has been found. The disfigured facial features reflect his Pakhtoon breed. Further investigation is underway.” The headlines and the photograph on the front pages of national dailies had frozen the feet of many passersby. Some of them were really appreciating the police and other agencies who had traced out the roots of yesterday’s suicide attack on the lawyers’ rally. Shazoo had a huge smile on his face.



Safdar was born into a humble family; his father was a laborer in Rahwali sugar mills. Rahwali is a small town near the Gujranwala district. He was just an infant when rain first fell from the cloud of misfortune. One day his father, Abdul, who was an utterly innocent and uncomplicated man slipped into the furnace while working and later his ashes was recovered. Unfortunately there was no one to mourn Abdul’s departure but Safdar and his cancer-stricken mother, who was taking last breaths of her life.

What could the humble neighborhood do except organize a funeral? Fortunately, Safdar’s maternal uncle Javed (who worked as a barber at Garhi Shahoo Lahore) came to take Safdar along with him after the death of his mother, who joined her late husband only on the third day of his death. There were tears oozing out from the eyes of the people, their faces were stiff with agony and they were looking at the sky with extreme pain, but what could they do except be patient. The old dying walled house of Safdar’s uncle was nothing less than Paradise to him. This house was right in the middle of the densely populated and mazy area of the Christian colony, adjacent to Garhi Shahoo Bridge. The sky here was usually full of colorful kites in the spring season, and in all other seasons it remained full of different kinds of flying insects. Sometime it was hard to differentiate the insects and humans. Huge serpentine ridges and skyscrapers were landmarks of the rapid growth of Lahore, but it could not give life to the barren fates of the slum dwellers. The evenings came down early on the thresholds and the poor people lived with the darkness. Fighting with darkness, Safdar had conquered twelve years of his life and it was a constant struggle.

The Hepatitis had multiplied the blindness of his aunt many times, and after twelve years of serving her religiously, there were times when he felt blind himself. His aunt Bilqees (who was childless) said that Safdar was “just like my eyes.” Safdar didn’t have even a faint idea about his real parents. Javed and Bilqees were the only parents he knew.

And on one routine morning the string of his aunt’s breaths snapped and she died. For the people eking out their life-in-death existences, death was considered to be a form of liberty and Bilqees

had got her reward after years of suffering. Now Safdar had to live within the filthy walls where loneliness gets multiplied with every inch of time. Serving his aunt prevented Safdar from getting formal education in schools and the schools were places where government teachers attended only to collect their monthly salaries. The school was the meeting point of young lovers. Javed, who had turned fifty, was losing his young customers. Many new barbers and hair-stylist had opened their saloons around and the typical structure ( one large mirror, two chairs and the same hair cut ) was not impressive for the youngsters who watched Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan's movies all day.

One day Javed called Safdar to his shop. Safdar had been visiting the shop before, but this time when he saw himself in the large mirror he felt almost grown up, his light moustache and wispy beard were a sign of his youth. He was becoming muscular.

“Hey! Concentrate on shaving, this may cause injury”, his uncle shouted while he was looking outside the door glass. The girls and boys who were going to their home after school time, were great fun to watch for Safdar, especially the girls hanging their bags on the shoulders keeping the scarves on their head and smiling with their eyes. Sonia was one of them.



He had started learning how to shave. Initially he was taught how to put foam on the face of the client. Then his uncle taught him how to indulge the client in petty discourse in case of a wound. For the first time he was assigned the task of mock shaving his own face with a blade-less razor. Even then his hand was trembling. He had left a large amount of foam on the edgy surface of his client's face. After doing this when his uncle found it suitable to shave with a razor, he shaved his uncle's face. He was afraid but with trembling hands he finally accomplished his task. The first time he shaved a client, it was completely bizarre. A year of practice had made him a reasonable barber. Now it was his uncle's turn to fall ill, his extreme cough and weakness made him resemble a skeleton. He had been a *hashish* addict. Now Javed used to come late to the shop, because Safdar was doing considerably well. The blessing of his tender age has caused a considerable increase in revenue. Once on a sunny winter noon, he wedged down the shutter of his shop and started chasing Sonia who was chirping with her other two friends. This gang of three girls was famous for miles around due to their beauty and merry making attitude. After crossing two thin streets two of her friends left Sonia and disappeared into a run-down house. Now Sonia was alone, she looked backward but didn't take notice of the boy who was stalking her. Many of boys had been shunted by her in that way and Safdar was well aware of it. Before entering her house she halted for a second and threw a lovely glance at Safdar. Safdar had turned into a statue.

“By God, Shazoo! She has been trapped! She smiled before entering her house.” Safdar was telling excitedly to Shazoo while flying kites in the evening at Jhandi ground.

“You asshole! Don’t get overjoyed: she is a whore and she gives the same kind smile to every potent customer.” Shazoo replied with a harsh tone.

“Don’t tell me man! Are you serious?” Tell me please. Safdar inquired like a child.

“Swear to God! She is a whore and you know she is a Christian too.” Shazoo replied in disgusting tone.

Hmmmm!!! Safdar reflected on his friend’s words. “You know Shazoo, Christian girls are always very pretty.”

“O! Mother. F...r! My kite has been cut.....shit! Hey! Amjad Mother F...r! I will teach you the lesson.” Shazoo was very angry about the loss of his kite.

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It was their ninth meeting at school. Safdar gathered that Sonia was a shy girl and the angry gestures were mere pretensions. She was a pretty girl and she knew the art of decking herself. She used contact lenses which added fire to her beauty and fair complexion. Most of the time, they talked about love and marriage and so on. Planning the future at this tender age was evidence of their sincerity. Once Sonia declared that she was a Christian and her father, a head sweeper in Lahore Cantonment Board, wouldn’t allow her to marry a Muslim. Safdar told her not to worry: he would become a Christian. This brought a huge smile on Sonia’s face and for the first time she gave Safdar a long lip-lock. On that night Safdar remained in great anguish, though he had a very limited knowledge about his religion he felt that he had committed a crime or a sin..

The very next day a filthy chubby old man came to his shop as he was sitting alone and thinking about his future.

“Ji sahib! Any service for me sir!” He asked politely.

“You asshole! What do you think who you are; you don’t know what you are going to do, never try to meet Sonia again. She is my daughter and I will cut both of you into pieces and throw you on the garbage. You would be a treat for the dogs.” The old filthy chubby man was shouting in anger and the foam flecked his lips. Safdar was still as stone, trembling with fear. That fear lasted some moments. He pulled down the shutter and quickly ran to the nearby motor workshop where Shazoo worked as a mechanic.

“Shazoo! Shazoo! Where have you died? Come on!” Safdar was shouting but his voice was dying in this throat. On seeing Shazoo (who was ascending from beneath wrecked vehicle) he held his arm and almost dragged Shazoo out of work shop.

“O! O! You Mother F...r! What the hell are you doing?” Shazoo protested, but could not stop Safdar.

“Shazoo! The game is over.” In a voice enfeebled by disappointment, he narrated every episode of his affair with Sonia and especially the recent one.

“You are such an asshole.....now what can I do?” I had told you that she is a bitch, and it was you who did not believe in it. Shazoo added oil to the fire.

“Shut up!” (Safdar was crying) “She is neither a bitch and nor unfaithful. She is..... A very good.....Girl we both love... each other.” (He expressed his love under his breath).

“Ahaan! And you are going to change your religion for her?” Shazoo asked sarcastically.

“No.....I am not. But I will marry her. We will run away from home, we will have a court marriage.” Safdar replied quite confidently.

A wave of worry appeared and died instantly on Shazoo’s face. “Okay don’t you worry, I’ll do something. You go home and relax and please come to me in the evening. We will go to Sheena’s ( A dancer cum prostitute) Kotha in Diamond market.” Shazoo tried to relax him.

“Why are we going to such a notorious place in the diamond market?” Safdar asked him suspiciously.

“Don’t take it the wrong way, my friend bholu is a drummer in her Kotha, he can do something for his uncle is an officer (actually clerk) in Cantonment board. He is the only man who can straighten out the situation.”

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“Hey Safdar get up, shabash! Half the day has passed; you have to go to the shop. Get up, my dear!” Javed who was almost dead was trying to wake him up.

It was the third consecutive day Safdar had not woken up early. Shazoo was a regular drinker, but for Safdar drinking the desi (local) wine was a very strange experience. Sheena was an elderly lady but the marvelous attire and her Mughal beauty had added spice to her dance. Her ravishing looks and penetrating gaze had aroused his sensuousness. In just three days Safdar had wasted all his savings. On the fourth day when he was penniless, he was beaten up by the guards and thrown out of the kotha. He went to Shazoo’s workshop, but Shazoo was not there.

Safdar was feeling exhausted: he needed wine and Shazoo’s company. He started wandering in the streets, as far as the tomb of Mian Meer. He sat amongst the pigeons. Then he left the tomb and started walking towards the Mall. After an hour’s walk he was near Mall road. There was a rally of lawyers who were protesting the detention of the Chief justice. He had heard about the lawyers’ movement and their rallies but this was the first time he had witnessed them in person.

He started walking on the footpath. He saw Shazoo running blindly the other way. Safdar shouted after him; Shazoo halted, saw him and started running again. He stopped and looked toward the rally: lawyers and policemen were running blindly.

An old man shouted, “Run boy run! A suicide bomber has entered the rally.” He could not hear clearly. Meanwhile, the mob came nearer to him, but he remained still in the overwhelming chaos. He fell down due to his weakness. There were black coats everywhere. Suddenly an explosion took place in the vehicle standing near him.

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