

Hamari Kahani - Version 2

Co-authored by Rohan Autee & Arun Nathani

An IT professional while getting ready for work, gazed in the mirror and noticed a grey strand of hair. "Age is catching up," he reflected gloomily, "and I still haven't found my life partner!" His glance slid down to his old, faded shirt, the wrinkles gradually smoothening against the slight bulge of his stomach. "It's high time I got back to my exercise routine," he reminded himself, "and perhaps it's also time to upgrade my wardrobe, maybe my entire lifestyle. I need to get out of this tiny apartment, discard my old bike and buy a car." The brainwave triggered an image of his parents and made him ponder, "What is more important? Upgrading social status or financially assisting those whose sacrifices are the reason I have a good job today?"

The thought of his 'good job' failed to elevate his spirits. Career came with its set of stresses—demanding boss, subtle politics, promotion anxiety, and competing colleagues. Yes, the teammates were nice, but it was just not the same as college friends of the carefree days. "I wish my old friends lived nearby," he lamented as he got off the elevator, only to realize that his bike had gone for repair. "Everyone has deserted me, so why not my travel companion as well," he resigned with a dejected smile. "So today is the first day I try out the new metro," he concluded as he walked over to the station and boarded the train.

The train started. As the train sped, he began recalling the familiar places the train was passing by. "So much has changed", Karan thought to himself. He grew up in this town. His daily bike commute to work never took him to this side of the city.

"Next Station, Pratap Nagar", the voice of metro announcement lady rang. He knew this area. His old college campus. The gate was same from his time, but it appeared much smaller now. He spotted the narrow lane where he and his buddies escaped for smoking cigarettes. He saw the old samosa shop where he and his friends always hung out.

"Dubey Ji, 3 samose... aur chai" the opening statement of countless lengthy afternoons that stretched into evenings. Somebody always owed Dubey Ji, and he would casually say "Kal de do beta".

"Maybe I owed him from some time too." He wondered. Nostalgia had taken over.

The train stopped. Few people got off, and a few boarded. It had just begun to move when a gentle tap on his shoulder brought him back from his memories. A man appearing to be in his late 60s nudged him to move towards the window so he could take a seat. The old man sat, folded a cloth carry-bag, and tucked it into his pocket taking his time doing so. The man looked familiar. It didn't take long for Karan to realize that it was Dubey Ji himself.

How could this be? Was he thinking so hard, that his thoughts had manifested into Dubey Ji? This just had to be a coincidence. Peculiar, but surely a coincidence.

"Uncle... Didn't you own a samosa shop near the college?" unable to contain the suspense anymore, he asked the old man.

"I still do. How could you tell?" replied the old man.

"I graduated from this college. We came to your shop all the time."

Dubey Ji stared, trying to recall something.

"Aah... You three guys... what brings you to the metro today" Dubey Ji asked.

Dubey Ji had good memory. He told Dubey Ji of his bike that's in repairs and had decided to take the metro to reach work today.

"So how's life?" Dubey Ji asked and small talk ensued. Karan's version was a bit wordy. About college days, things being simpler etc. Inversely, Dubey Ji's was terse.

"I've been running this samosa shop for around 40 years. Now my son runs it. I make trips to the market for supplies" he said, pointing to the bag in his pocket. That was it.

Karan found the exceedingly short version a bit inadequate. He went on anyway:

"So just Samosas and Chai? Or do you have new menu? Any franchise may be? I bet you have special items now..."

Dubey Ji smiled, as if he knew where this was coming from.

“Beta... I got everything I wanted with this. A home well provided for, a family that couldn’t be happier. I love how everyone made friends and memories here, and I get to be a part of it every day. To this day, it gives me great joy, how special can it get?” ... He paused and with a hearty laugh, concluded... “No need for special items.”

That seemed to be end of their conversation. Dubey Ji was staring out of the window. Karan was absorbed. Minutes passed and something started to fall in place. It seemed that maybe a bigger apartment or a car aren’t the ingredients to make his life special. He doesn’t need to beat himself up over accomplishments. He could do it all, but in different spirit, and may even have fun doing it.

A dialogue from one of his favourite movies ‘Kung-Fu Panda’ flashed in his mind- *“There are no secret ingredients. To make something special, you just have to believe it is special.”*

Before he could say something, Dubey Ji said *“Sorry Beta... This is my stop.”*

Not wanting this to be the last time he met him, Karan hurriedly asked *“Uncle, maybe I still owe you for some chai...”*

Dubey Ji smiled ear to ear and with the same coolness of old times said, *“Kal de dena beta”*.

40 minutes later, he disembarked and began strolling toward his office. His walk was light-footed, he hadn’t felt so positive in a long time! His mind raced back, reliving those 40 minutes and replaying every moment from the time he boarded the train...