

Short story by Paul J Clearwater for Asia:NZ/Cathay Pacific Diwali Short Story Competition

I had never even met my dad's parents.

My dad says that his parents came to see me when I was two or something, but that was like *yonks* ago.

I had met them countless times over family meals at the kitchen table though. Slurping noodles, I even once flicked greasy noodle soup at them. As the soup dribbled down my grandfather, I was met with a *what'd you think you're doing* look from my dad.

Black and white, in a wooden photo frame, surrounded by candles and the odd vase with flowers upon the kitchen table – that was my grandparents.

An aunty had even placed a chocolate lamington square among the more-than-normal amount of candles when grandma died two years ago. Someone took a bite out of it. It was *so* obvious that *thingme*, my baby brother, did it after he started a non-stop vomit-athlon that night. Just deserts, I thought. Mum said it was karma, but she says that about *everything*.

I was nervous about the planned trip to go and see granddad. I had never met people so *super old* before, apart from my teachers and my parents – and they weren't *that* old.

Sometimes I saw old rubbery people through the nearly-always fogged up windows of the rest home down the street. S'pose that counts.

To be honest, it wasn't really that he was *super old* that scared me. I was afraid of that black and white man with a turban three times the size of my mum's woolen tea cosy. His long black beard made it seem like I only ever saw his dark eyes that watched us while we ate.

Whenever dad spoke about the trip, he rubbed his hands together and called it his 'homecoming.' Dad always rubbed his hands together when he was excited about something.

It wasn't a hand-rubbing homecoming time for me, more like a stomach churning eating two week old lamington feeling. I felt like I was leaving home, off to a strange land shaped like an upside down rhinoceros horn.

My sister Deb, who's 15, going on my mother, announced that she wasn't going. She said she had to study for exams, but I knew that she didn't want to leave her secret boyfriend. She wasn't allowed boyfriends, only boy-friends if you get the *diff*.

'Oh yes you are,' said my dad every time she said she would not go.

When she would try to argue with my dad about it he would hold up his hand, flutter his eyes before they closed and say 'full stop!' Then she would go to her room and play *soft as* Cold Play albums like a crybaby.

The trip kind of sneaked up on us all. One night dad came home and told us all to leave the kitchen, and shuffled us into the lounge.

Just as we were all thinking dad's gone totally *bizerko*, he told us to come in. The room was only lit by candles on the kitchen table.

The whites of his eyes were like saucers. His eyes rolled around like marbles in a bowl.

'Well ...'

'Well – what?' Mum said.

'The table ... look!'

We all looked down in the direction of my grandparents. At first, I didn't notice anything unusual, but then a flame caught my attention.

My mum shrieked and my father dived on the table trying to catch the flaming piece of paper.

It turned out he had bought tickets for us to visit India, but he had placed the tickets too close to one of the candles.

My mum said it was karma and dad stopped rubbing his hands for a few days.

But a couple of days later another set of tickets magically appeared on the table.

Although this time, they were safely sitting in front of the photo so that I could only see granddad's tea cosy turban. The table was also candle-less for the first time in living memory

I couldn't really make out what the tickets all meant. The ticket had a colourful 'Cathay Pacific' on it and dates and stuff. Didn't mean much to me.

Dad went all googly-eyed every time we sat down for dinner now. He said we would be in time for the 'Diwali' festival. He even started growing a beard *again*. I didn't even know he used to have one.

*Thingme*, dad, mum, Deb and me are now waiting at the airport for our plane. Granddad is still on the kitchen table. Mum's worried that we forgot something and dad is wringing his hands. *Thingme* is being a pain. Deb is texting her secret boyfriend. I feel like I've eaten an old lamington square.

780 words

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