

Eight days

Usually when a kid's birthday approaches, parents wrap presents, not suitcases, family and friends are invited over for celebration, not final goodbyes. The countdown is supposed to lead to balloons and cake, not airports and goodbyes.

But when she was six years old, her countdown was different.

She cannot quite remember how they broke the news to her, it just happened.

Maybe they sat her down. Maybe they smiled as they said it would be an adventure.

All she remembers is the strange silence that followed.

She was not counting down to her birthday anymore.

She was counting down to goodbye.

8 days left.

On day 8 she said goodbye to her friends at school.

The hardest goodbye came first. The one she was not prepared for. She walked through the familiar blue gates of her little Catholic school in India, the one her father and uncle had gone to before her, the one she never truly got to be a part of. She tried to pretend it was just another ordinary morning.

It was not.

Her classmates crowded around her desk, asking question she did not know the answers too.
"Will Australia have school?," "Will you forget us?," "Can we still play together?"

She wished she knew

Before the final bell, she handed every classmate a lollipop. It was not much, but to six-year-old her, it was everything she had left to give.

Then Sister Mary gently held both of her hands. "We'll pray for you" she whispered. The classroom fell quiet. A prayer she barely understood would become one she carried across oceans. "Goodbye my friends and school" she cried.

On day 7 she said goodbye to her books.

The colourful picture books she has sounded out with her teachers. The notebooks filled with uneven handwriting and backwards letters. The tiny gold stars her teachers proudly stamped beside her neat work

She wondered whether Australian books looked different.

Would they tell the same stories? Would the children laugh at the way she spoke?

Her mother smiled at her frowning face. "Learning goes wherever you go." She did not understand then. Years later, she would.

On day 6 she said goodbye to her house.

The house looked bigger once it was empty, no longer full of life. She wandered from room to room as if she were saying goodbye to old friends.

The walls covered with tiny pencil marks measuring how much she had grown.

The bedroom where she had hid beneath blankets during thunderstorms.

The living room where she laughed until her stomach hurt watch her favourite cartoons.

Wait... do they even show Doraemon in Australia?

That evening, they moved to her grandparents' house.

As she closed the front gate, she turned back one last time, "goodbye my house" she cried, the house stayed silent.

On day 5 she said goodbye to the street.

The street had watched her grow up.

It flooded every monsoon until puddles became ocean for little feet.

It echoed with laughter during Holi as children chased one another with coloured powder, returning home looking like rainbows.

On Diwali, it sparkled with tiny lamps while fireworks danced across the night sky.

Every neighbour knew her name.

Every auntie reminded her to eat more.

Every uncle asked how school was.

She never realised how special that was.

Not because everyone knew everyone, but because everyone cared. It was neighbours becoming family without even sharing the same surname.

She looked down the streets one final time, “goodbye my street” she cried, it looked the same.

She was the one changing.

On day 4 she said goodbye her barbies.

All gone to her cousin 5 years older than her. *She already has a million barbies, why does she need mine? Why can't I just take them with me? Does Australia have a no barbie rule?* No one answered.

She carefully brushed one last doll's tangled hair before placing it onto her cousin's overfilled drawer. Years later she would realise that sometimes love means giving away the things you want to keep. Back then, she simply thought life was unfair.

She cried all the way home, “goodbye my barbies”.

On day 3 she said goodbye to the food.

There was one question that kept her awake, *“What if Australia does not have Indian food?”* The thought was terrifying.

She imagined eating nothing but fries forever.

The adults laughed. She did not.

To this six-year-old, food was not just food.

It was birthdays.

Family dinners.

Weekend treats.

It was home.

Looking back now, she smiles at how wrong she was. Australia had Indian restaurants. Indian grocery stores. But somehow... it never tasted exactly like it did in her childhood kitchen.

Maybe recipes do not change, Memories do.

“Goodbye my food” she cried in the market

On day 2 she said goodbye to her family.

The goodbyes became quieter.

Grandparents hugged a little longer.

Aunts tucked money into her tiny pockets “for luck.”

Uncles promised they would visit.

Cousins told her not to forget the.

Everyone smiled.

Everyone cried after they thought she had stopped looking.

Their blessings made her believe that even when everything felt unfamiliar, she was never truly alone,

On the last day she said goodbye to her past self and boarded the plane.

The airport was louder than she expected.

Announcements echoed through the terminal.

Suitcases rolled across polished floors.

People hurried in every direction.

Yet somehow, everything felt still. One by one, relative hugged goodbye.

She did not know that some of those hugs would be the last for many years. She simply waved goodbye until they disappeared behind the glass.

Then she climbed on to the aeroplane. As the city became smaller beneath the clouds, she pressed her forehead against the window.

She wondered if she would remember the streets.

Her house.

Her School.

Her friends.

Or whether Australia would slowly replace them all.

She closed her eyes.

And somewhere between one country and another, she turned seven.