

Returning Home

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Sergeant Greysen Abdul stood next to the runway as soldiers and civilians entered and exited a C-17 Globemaster aircraft at the Kabul International Airport in Afghanistan. Sergeant Abdul had come to Canada more than twenty years ago as a refugee from Afghanistan when the war first started, and now it is ending. He served with Joint Task Force Two, the JTF2, in the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and was here in Kabul to evacuate Canadians and a few Afghans. The unit which he was placed in was one of the most elite special forces regiments in the world. Abdul had been in the infantry before he applied and got accepted into JTF2 and began rising up the ranks quickly.

Four hours ago, Abdul and his unit, concealed behind their tan balaclavas and sleek tactical shades, were being flown towards Afghanistan on an United States Air Force C-17 Globemaster transport plane. His C8 rifle with advanced attachments rested quietly on his laps as the plane travelled at twenty-thousand feet above ground. Going back to Afghanistan was the last thing Abdul wanted: he didn't want to see the terror that had been caused by the Taliban again. The image of his mother being brutally killed by the Taliban more than twenty years ago was glued into Abdul's mind. He also thought about the little girl who had tried to escape along with Abdul onto a private Cessna plane that took off under heavy fire. He remembered the Canadian soldier that helped him and his father off the plane and into a safe shelter where he tasted his first Tim Horton's donut and hot chocolate. He remembered the watery blue eyes of the young soldier that wore green camouflage. Abdul wasn't certain, but it must have been that moment when he decided he was going to join the army to free innocent civilians from corrupt governments. Now, the plane touched down on the runway: they had arrived at Kabul International Airport, five kilometres away from the city of Kabul. Kabul, where his mother died. Kabul, where bullets whizzed inches away from his head. Kabul, where he was deployed to extract and evacuate Canadians and Afghans. Kabul, where they were now.

Watching Afghans desperately raise their babies next to a gate at the airport, Sergeant Abdul tried hard to control and conceal his emotions behind his balaclava. It had been the first time he saw so many people united for the same purpose: freedom. People with different hair and skin colours, different genders, and different backgrounds formed a crowd in front of the airport to get to safety and freedom. Abdul regretted that he could not give all of them the privilege of democracy and freedom. However, he knew he had to do something. Subsequently, Abdul reached over the gate and took two young Afghan boys and handed them to a soldier next to him.

"I want these boys out of here. Alive," said Abdul. The last word was spoken as if it were a challenge.

Ten minute later, the Globemaster's engines slowly turned on and gained its maximum rotational speed within minutes. Soldiers were doing their final checks when two boys, faces

filled with fear, made their way into the plane. Behind them, a single figure, wearing ballistic armour and a protective helmet, stood under the shine of a spotlight.

“You’re not coming?” asked the lieutenant.

“No, sir,” Abdul responded. “I’ll stay behind for a bit.” Finishing his sentence, Abdul raised his right hand to his eye and gave a formal salute. In return, the lieutenant saluted him back, looked at him one last time with love in his eyes, and returned back to the Globemaster, the door closing behind him.

Sergeant Greysen Abdul watched as the wheels of the aircraft slowly left the runway and disappeared under the body of the aircraft. The spotlights flickered off, leaving Abdul stranded in the dark, surrounded by deafening silence. He took one last look at the aircraft, let out a sigh of both desperation and relief, and began walking towards a small and hidden piece of stone outside the airport that had words engraved on it. He let his left knee drop to the ground while his eyes focused on the engraving on the stone. It was the tomb of his mother. Suddenly, a shot rang out in the night as Abdul clutched his stomach, attempting to figure out what had happened. When he raised his hand to grab his rifle, it was filled with blood. Before he could say a word, the cold, dusty ground rushed up to meet him. He smiled as the ground beneath him seemed to quickly sink. He knew he was home.