I close my eyes to let it all in: the smell, the taste, and the feel of the stuffy air. I open my eyes again, and the downtown Seremban, Malaysia comes back to me. This is where I have to be, what I have to do.

It’s been 12 years since I last visited this place and a lot has changed. The feel, the sights, what used to be is not any more. As I look around the busy market place, I study the people and I realize they all have the same look. This look of emptiness, of no life. As if all they knew how to do was work. There are so many different people here, and I mean a lot of different people, but they all look the same.

Malaysia is like the salad bowl of Asia. We have barely any natives but a huge collection of other cultures. Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Sri Lankan, all come under the one banner, which is the Malaysian Flag. It’s this same diversity of culture which brings, Malaysia to life. The foods, the music, the language all contribute to what make this place special looking at it now, I ask myself, what happened to this place.

I remember the good old days. This place was popular and alive. The smell of different dishes filled the air and the sweet sound of cultural music echoes from each stall and shop. Each shop had its own product to sell and any shop that had something in common, would trade with each other to renew stock. I remember the old ladies sitting up near the tea parlour with bamboo leaves being woven into beautiful baskets and gossip exchanged between one another. All the old would pack the curry stalls and eat to their graves. They would make so much noise as well, to let everyone know not to disturb them. Children would play along the street with kites and bamboo balls. They would wave and say hello to the people as they walk past. Those were the good old days.

I continue to walk down the crowded path and I stop at a familiar sight. I’ve found it, my old shop, and my old home. Run down and bleeding dust is what this two story building has been reduced to. It has an open front with two steps running along the width of it. There is a bar bench to the left and the rest of the space is used to be filled up with chairs and tables, a kitchen in the back, not big and not small. Behind the shop was a pair of stairs which lead up to the second floor. That’s where me, my parents and my two younger brothers used to live. How my parents manage to survive with three kids in a small space like that I don’t know. However if we weren’t helping at the shop we used to stay with our grandma in a small village in Kuala Lumpur.

As I step over the threshold of my old home, a small breeze from the back of the shop blows a scent into my nose and then the whole shop comes alive. As if my childhood was a movie being played out in front of me, shadows of things that once existed danced their way around the shop. As I run my fingers down the dusty bar bench I see figures of my parents busily working to operate our restaurant. Customers coming in and out. People genuinely having a good time. As I sit down times catches up and I come back to reality.
I did it; I found what i was looking for. All these years, i had forgotten what it was like to live like a Malay and now it’s like I’ve found myself. As I look outside, the old downtown Seremban comes to life and i smile. Seremban never changed, I did. What they say is true “you are never too old, too bad or too sick to start from scratch”. I mean look at me, 16 years old and still being amazed and taught a lesson by my home country, Malaysia