



HOME

UPOMA AZIZ

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but we're closing now."

I look up to see Timothy, a student on scholarship who worked part time in this cafe, standing a few feet away from my table, with his hands folded politely behind him.

"Pity you've already started to forget me, Tim."

"Oh Lisa, it's you," he can't mask the embarrassment in his voice. "I... err, you could sit for a little longer if you want to, I'll get the other..."

"No, Tim, it's fine, it's..." I hesitate for a split second, and in a completely different context, the words find their way out as an exasperated exhale of wariness, "It's about time, too."

I leave him a few extra bucks, and after we've exchanged a few formal, and naturally, meaningless pleasantries, I stuff both of my hands in my pocket and stride out.

"You'd do okay there," my mum had told me once she'd grasped the fact that she couldn't really talk sense into me. "You could..." as she fumbled with her words, I hoped that she wouldn't come up with phrases like "Go make your dreams come true" or something cheesy like that. But she just said, "You could finally be free, I guess."

And that was truly something, the question that I'd been desperately pushing away for so long – what was I really trying to achieve, or prove?

To whoever enquired, I'd replied boldly that I was leaving to see, to explore, to feel, to learn, and the answers changed periodically, based on whom I was trying to convince, but I couldn't really fool myself. And now my mum's one harmless sentence had sent a storm brewing inside my head, and I had ended up spending three hours in this ratty, yet comforting cafeteria on the eve of my departure. So much for family devotion.

And just right then, I had an epiphany, all my walls broke down and I was facing the truth, standing tall in all its unclothed, luminous glory. I

could feel my doubts crumble away in its presence.

"I'm leaving because I want to escape." I said softly, and I felt immensely relieved once my own words hit my ears.

Why did I keep coming to this terrible café half a mile away from home, when there were numerous better ones right in my neighbourhood? And why did I choose to move to a town when it was only slightly better than this one? And why else, despite everything else I could do, all I wanted to do was to *leave*?

I hated goodbyes, or that's what I had thought. In reality, I hated not the inevitable or the choice, but the fact that I was *always* the one left behind. Be it my cousins leaving after a family get together, or my dad leaving without glancing back. I was so, so tired of being the left behind.

The yellow street lights blinking overhead made me notice that I was three and a half blocks past my home. But I kept walking.

"You had gypsy blood, the whole lot." My grandma had once joked. But I knew now that it was not something to do with blood. It was something with the soul.

We were, perhaps, or our souls were, cursed, so that they knew no place to rest, wandering around for eternity, looking for a home that never existed. And now I knew how vain my relief was, for I'd be running again, and again, and yet again, my feet never touching the ground.

Drops of rain metamorphosed into gold upon the contact of the soft, melancholic yellow lights, which I let soak me and trickle down my lips.

And just as I close my eyes and it starts pouring, I shiver a bit in the realisation that the water that passed lips were salty.

Upoma Aziz is a walking, talking, ticking time bomb going off at versatile detonators. Poke her to watch her explode at www.fb.com/upoma.aziz

ECHOES

MUNIMA AHMED

Crows, cawing through the dead trees,
Dogs barking around the pitch roads knitted with dark memories.
As if the city is cursed,
By the old witch and her magic wand.

Mannequins with soulless eyes,
Creeping under those city lights.
Anomalous objects crawling on the roof
Spelling her name, attempting to make a move.
There she is, under the blanket sheets,
Hiding her existence like she wouldn't be seeked.
Purses her lips, trying not to scream,
For people mock her, the way she is.
As it is a disease, she's bearing,
Seeing things that are unseen.

Time is a thief indeed,
Stealing every bit of life she's left with.
In the middle of the sleepless nights, as the hour strikes,
Uncertainty tickles her mind,
For tomorrow shall be born again.
Yet, the same echoes will haunt her mind.

The writer is a class 12 student at Birshreshtha Noor Mohammad Public College.



FYROZE SHAFIQUE

Where the stars aren't at fault,
Where rivers don't flow into the sea,
Where scars heal by their own medicine,
Where life doesn't go upon a plea.

Where nights are as long as the light,
Where depths aren't measured by scale,
Where hues are free to adorn themselves
By the moments fading pale.

Where a rock isn't judged by its surface
Where people are always as they seem,
Where love hangs both in heaven and hell
Where the tears of heart don't turn into steam.

Where the passage of the time doesn't search for a purpose
Where cascades aren't tired of falling,
Where stars meet their light within,
Where all are heard before calling.

Where I shall live my entire age,
In the castle built with self esteem,
And the place will hold something called freedom,
The freedom of the loneliest dream.

The writer is a student at Viqarunnisa Noon College.