



ESCAPEE

UPOMA AZIZ

My eyes fly open, and I bolt up, my heart still racing. It takes me more than a moment to realise that it had been just a dream. Just. A. Dream.

Or had it really?

"What? Is the train here yet?" She croaks from somewhere to my right, and that weird residue of mixed feelings – joy, nervousness, fear and relief ebbs away, and is instead replaced by one of pure bitterness.

"No," I say through gritted teeth, and place my hand on the ground. I can sense a faint humming, as if the ground were slowly coming to life, just as this city soon will.

A while later, the harmless humming metamorphoses into violent shaking, and she scrambles up to her feet. "What are you doing?" she hisses, "We have to go!"

I scowl at her, but of course, she can't see. Then I take her hand most unwillingly, and drag her along the sketchy path. She reaches inside her sack and pulls out a piece of dry, stale bread. She bites the most of it and hands me the rest. Damn, this stuff would need two more sets of teeth to chew, and at least a few weeks to soak and digest. I let go of her hand to wipe my off on my clothes. She gasps instantly.

"Don't fuss, I'm not leaving." I grunt. *Though I would've loved to.* She knows it too, and that is exactly why she's so suspicious. She grabs my hand so tightly my blood circulation will seize to a stop undoubtedly.

A bright gold light bathes the city in pleasant warmth, and we walk the streets slowly, me walking in front, while she drags on behind me, still holding on to my hand like a vice. We wait for the people to come flooding in, to begin their days in a good mood so that we could whine some money out of them. Well, I'm just around for directions. It's she who does all that whining. To be fair, she doesn't even need to whine much; most

people take pity on a poor, scrawny blind woman anyway.

The hours tumble by, and coins go clinking inside the nasty sack of hers. Right, time to cross the road. *Shall we, madam?*

I face the road, waiting for it to clear up a bit, when my dream from earlier today comes back to me. There we were, on one side of the road, waiting to cross it. Since we were still on the footpath, she didn't go to hard on my hand, allowing me to inspect the road in peace. A stray truck came racing in, and I glanced at her, nervous. *Could I do it? Could I truly get the freedom I desire so badly?*

The truck came right up in front of us, and with all my might, I pushed her right in. And then I woke up.

I've had this dream quite a few times, and I figured it must've originated from my will to leave. But when it comes down to this, I always let myself down. "Come on," I tell her, and she clings on to my hand once more, and we cross the road.

She fishes a few crumpled up dirty notes and hands them over to me. Then she tags along to the hotel to order, geez, the woman sure is controlling. We sit outside, by the side of the road, gobbling through our meal. When she slams a small piece of egg down on my plate, I look at her both in surprise and amusement. This woman, never in the span of time I've known her, and that'd be as long as I can remember, has shown me any form of affection. Well, that is certainly something. Maybe she's just overstuffed.

She most definitely isn't my mother, but she won't tell me who is, either. And she also happens to be the reason I cannot take up lucrative offers like a job working at a household, or a hotel. She's kind of a stone tied to me, only that she's more of a cancer than a harmless stone.

She kept me, because she needed me, and I've known that since the first time I let go of her because I had to pee. When I came back, she was sitting exactly where I left her, confused and alone.

Back then, I'd felt pity for her. God, I was so naïve back then. Now I know her for what she is.

We nearly lick our plates clean, and oh, there she goes again, holding on to me for dear life. I look at the other girls my age working inside the hotel, and my insides blaze in jealousy and frustration. I want to detach myself from her, and run like there's no tomorrow. *Well, if you don't do just that, then no tomorrow for you, dear.*

It's nightfall, and we finally head home. Well, at least the place we call home. It's a bamboo frame draped with tattered plastic. But anyway, it's still something.

She must be really tired tonight, because she's dead asleep within a minute, and my heart starts thumping once more. This is my one big chance, and surely I can't miss out on this. Blind people tend to have very sharp sensations to make up for their inability. I rise up slowly, pick up my only other set of belongings, and tiptoe outside. I peek back once more, and she's still as a rock. I inhale deeply; I'm unsure if air has ever felt so full of life. Then I start running.

The streets are almost empty, and I sprint across them, the sodium lights above skidding of my skin. Never, in my life before, have I felt more alive.

Okay, maybe the excitement on my part was a bit too much, and a while later I'm clutching my knees and panting. I decide on walking the rest of the way.

How far have I walked? And where am I headed? I then decide against thinking too much, that has always ruined everything for me.

After hours and hours of walking, I finally stop.

"Where have you been?" she screeches, her voice tight. *Has she been crying over me?*

"Relax, I'm here. I just went to get us some bread." I hold up a fresh loaf.

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