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BEQUEATHED

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If inanimate objects had the power to think, act, or speak, this particular 5 dollar bill would probably be at its wits end, feeling extremely awkward and out of place in its incredible finish and straight posture, trapped among torn, dirty, foreign notes hurling obscenities at each other.

But since that ability was, monopolised by humans, or at least they thought so; the crisp, green five dollar note lay motionless in Aqbar's pocket as he patted it absent-mindedly, staring out the window. The green of the fields that passed by in a blur, as seen from the windows of the moving metal cocoon he was trapped in, was vibrant and full of life, unlike the green of the note in his pocket, which was the colour of old, corroded copper; lifeless, and ancient-looking.

But he had been told it would be different.

He'd been told that what he would get in exchange of his money, the native notes familiarised by the struggle to earn them, would be priceless; that he would be able to trade his labour for more than he did in his own country; that there were people who were eager to pay him for every drop of sweat he'd shed.

And he'd believed them. He had good reasons to, or maybe just because he wanted to.

Dreams, he had been taught just as he

was a child, were not exactly banned, but it wasn't quite legal either. As long as he'd dream of three square meals a day, or of a new fence to put around the garden, it was good. Healthy, even. But like Icarus, he'd dreamed of touching the sun, and was plummeting down to the ground after he'd been scorched. But, he was not falling solo; he had dragged his entire family down with him.

The scattered pieces of land his family owned, that single piece of gold jewellery his wife had brought with her at the time of their marriage, the tidbits of cash kept hidden in tins of biscuits – it was gone, all of it, evaporated like the office in which he was so heartily reassured that the money he was spending would ricochet back to him, tenfold the original amount.

The metal cocoon screeched to a spot, and Aqbar was significantly surprised at the fact that the seven and a half hour journey had never seemed shorter, and also at the fact that the metal cocoon managed to reach the destination without falling apart.

His family, his clueless, naive family who believed he was away on some foreign land, like one of the princes from the tales heard in childhood and passed on to successors, would not be expecting gifts, gifts of simple substances with scribbling they couldn't decipher. His mother would probably be happy enough to see him come back safe and sound. His father

would badger him with questions about the food. His wife never said anything, but she would probably be expecting a bar of sweet smelling soap that would not melt away at the touch of water, one that would feel soft on her skin, and leave the fragrance on her skin for hours; one like a neighbour of theirs showed off when her husband and brother-in-law came back from Malaysia.

And his daughter, Maynah. His heart churned at the thought of her. He had callously destroyed her entire future. She was yet too young to understand that what his father had done, and would probably love him anyway. But when she would come to know – would she ever be able to forgive him?

Aqbar hesitated for a moment, and then walked into the hut he'd possibly lost the right to call his home anymore.

Aqbar threw a pebble into the pond and watched it sink instead of skip like he'd expected it to. He sighed. After he'd told the truth, it had been easier to walk away and ledge himself between the bushes. He couldn't bear to see the look on their faces, so he'd chosen to walk away like the coward he was.

"Abba?" a young voice called out, and it made him cringe. The last person he would want to face right then would be his daughter. But then again, the thought of seeing her face once more was the only thing that

stopped him from throwing himself under a bus. She had a way of finding him, even when no one else could.

"Hey, there!" he tried not to sound too croaky.

"What have you bought me back from the faraway lands?" asked Maynah, beaming at her father, and a bit of his heart chipped off from around the corners.

"C'mere" her father beckoned and she looked up expectantly.

Taking her little hands in his, he motioned for her to close her eyes. She did as she was told, and felt her father gently squeezing something papery into her hands.

"What is this, Abba?" she asked in awe.

"This," said her father with the stance and a flourish of a magician, "is something you can exchange for anything. When, one day, you too will go to the faraway lands, you can use this to get candies, dolls... Anything."

"Anything?" she asked.

Her father nodded, smiling.

One hand tucked in her father's, the other wrapped cautiously around that what her father had bequeathed upon her, not a mere medium of exchange, but the dreams he had suppressed for so long, Maynah skipped along the gravelly path she'd never taken before.

Upoma Aziz is a walking-talking-ticking time bomb going off at random detonators. Poke her at your own risk at www.fb.com/upoma.aziz