

SUNSHOWER



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

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"Ugh, rotten stains... Won't budge..." I make a sound which is a cross between a snort and a grunt, and Shireen whips her head around so acutely I could swear I heard her neck crack. Thankfully, she doesn't throw anything, she gets back at cursing and scrubbing at a stubborn coffee stain after scowling at me.

"Are you going to tell her, or am I?"

I jump as Ivan shoots the question into my ear. We used to think he snuck up on us on purpose to startle us. We now know that it isn't something he does consciously, though I still haven't gotten used to it. We told Ivan he should consider burglary as a career option. He said that he tried. It didn't work out because he gets anxiety jitters. We couldn't tell if he was joking and he refused to comment further on the issue.

Ivan nods at one of the tables backed against the glass and I have to do a double take before I can spot a woman – hunched forward and looking out.

"I'll go," I turn to tell him, but he's already gone. Slightly irritated, I walk towards the table.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but we're closing now," I say in my politest customer service voice, my hands folded behind me – we have had our fair share of customers who stay too long and then refuse to leave. The woman looks up.

"Pity you've already started to forget me, Tim," she says drily, with a hint of a smile playing on her lips. "Oh Lisa, it's you," I sound so embarrassed it's embarrassing in and of itself.

"I...err, you could sit for a little longer if you want to, I'll get the other..." I want to

kick myself, the entire café is empty except for her and the staff.

"No, Tim, it's fine, it's—" she fishes around for words for a moment, and then says, "It's about time, too."

She sounds tired. I can see the bags under her eyes. I don't probe her further. She tips me more than usual, and we exchange a few formal words, after which she stuffs her hands in her pockets and walks out. I feel like I haven't breathed properly during this entire interchange and I exhale slowly.

Lisa has been a regular for as long as I can remember. She doesn't live around here, so why she comes to this ratty place is beyond me. I want to know her motives. But only so much can be assumed about a person upon limited interaction. I know how she takes her coffee, I know what her favourite bagel toppings are, I know that she is three years older than I am, and she is moving away tomorrow. I don't know what I feel about bagels, and my coffee preferences change every few weeks. It does occur that I know myself less than I do her.

Do I like her? She certainly interests me and I feel drawn to her. Whether this attraction is platonic or otherwise is what I'm torn about – how do people know so easily?

I stop in front of my house. Every day I take this same route, and even when I'm engrossed in miscellaneous thoughts it takes me exactly eight and a half minutes.

Soft patter of raindrops against the window is the last thing I hear before slipping into a slumber.

* * *

The walk from my home to work would have taken me eight and a half minutes

too, if I hadn't run into Lisa.

I see her leaning against a chunky suitcase while trying to keep her backpack from slipping off. "Do you need help with that?" I ask.

She shakes her head, "Aren't you going to be late for work?"

I shrug and help her prop the suitcase against the bench; turns out its hind wheels are broken. We sit down on the bench, with the bags lodged between us.

"New place must be exciting," I comment.

She laughs, "Not really. I don't know, I'm not there yet."

I raise an eyebrow, "Really? You always seem so certain of things."

She swats the air with her hands, "That's the most inaccurate description of me that I've heard. If anything, I'm impulsive. I didn't choose my institute based on its rank across the state, I chose one that would take me away from this place. I'm scared – not because I'd want to come back, but because I won't. I'll keep running further and further away. I'm a drifter, Tim. I will never be able to keep a house."

She sounds frantic.

"Huh," I say, suddenly amused.

"What?" she asks.

"I was tossed back and forth among unwilling relatives and then three foster homes. And when I was finally able to settle down, I didn't want to leave. A part of me still doesn't. I sometimes think I'll finish my studies here. Maybe," I point across the street, "I'll open my own business. I don't want to be here for all my life but, it appears that if I take a step out of my safe sphere I know to be my home, it will all

disappear, and I'll be alone again."

"Here, hold this for me," she says, and proceeds to hang me a huge binder, a tub of cream, conditioner and a flask, before finally fishing out a pen and a piece of paper. She rips it down the middle and scribbles for a minute. She stuffs the things back inside, and hands me the scraps of paper, both of them.

"That's my address. Give me yours and we can write to each other. It will help ground me, and perhaps liberate you," she says.

"Oh I was thinking that—" I start, promptly emboldened, "I could come visit you. I mean, if you want. It will be nice to get out of town sometimes."

"Maybe we can do both," she smiles and stands up. I see a bus in the distance behind her.

I help her load the bag into the locker. Before she's about to board, long heavy drops of rain begin to descend. The sun shines overhead.

She furrows her brows, "You'll need to go to work. You can take my umbrella, I'll buy another."

"Nah, I'm fine. It's a Sunshower, see? There are no clouds, it'll stop soon."

I walk away from the now-empty bus stop. Beads of the bright, golden sun surround me. I catch one on my tongue. I had once heard someone claiming rainwater tastes sweet. They were right.

Upoma Aziz is a slouching, crouching, grouchy goblin with a hoarding addiction. You can reach out to her at upoma.aziz@gmail.com, but there is a possibility it will get buried under the mail she's hoarded.