

The Long Run

1

They were scuffed, scratched and torn, but they were the best running shoes she ever had. White was now grey and the laces were frayed. She had won every race while wearing these shoes. It was quite difficult to part with them. In fact, she felt contrite for agreeing to donate them. Wanting to try them on one last time just to check if her feet hadn't actually grown, she struggles to slip the shoes on. They're extremely tight and it felt as if they were constricting her feet. Despondent, she kicks them off, it was almost as if they had let her down.

Her mother

walks up the stairs, a plastic bag in hand. "Did you say your good-byes?" Her mother teases.

"As a matter of fact, I did," the girl responds. "Where is this donation going?" She ties the laces together, then reluctantly dumped the running shoes in the bag.

"Africa."

And this is where my journey begins.

Cars speed by as I was set on the curb. The birds chirp and the sun sets. The cold wind rustles the plastic bag. After what seemed like forever, I'm tossed in a back of a vehicle.

Suddenly, the truck jolts and I tumble out. It's exceptionally relieving to be out of the stifling

bag. All around me are boxes and sacks. Rumpled clothes, colorful toys, and various shoes had

Written by Hajir Butt

The Long Run

also toppled out of their captors. The truck is dark, making me feel quite eerie. I wonder where I was going and why all these items were packed up. It's a mystery.

The truck comes to a halt. The back door swings open, revealing the starry night. Large vehicles with wings fly in the midnight sky. A man picks up the containers, loading them in a winged contraption on the ground. I'm dumped out of the bag and into a box. Wherever I'm going it is taking a lot of work to get there. Voices shout out at each other. Soon all is quiet and still, it is most unpleasant. The urge of having someone put me on and run fills inside me. I need that feeling of going up and down, hitting the ground with a soft thud. It seems hard to remember the last time I ran.

I always felt uncomfortable when placed in dim areas. When I wasn't out running, the girl's mother would put me in a closet. But when the girl took me out and when we sprinted on the track, the sun would shine bright and warm the day. Now that I'm waiting in the darkness with nothing visible and no sound, the memory of my last run comes to me. It was the time where we ran in the meadow. With the sun gleaming on the purple flowers that were scattered across the field. The pond that sparkled in the daylight. The farmer's horses that galloped afar

from us. Everything seemed to be moving. The rustling leaves, the rippling waters, the clouds above. The girl racing across the fields. The shoes that pumped below her, keeping her feet safe from the hard ground.

My bag glows bright in the rising sun. Erupting from the silence is a thundering noise. A whirring, deafening noise. I'm sure that this will be my end. I wait, but the horrid feeling of lurching backwards doesn't disappear. It persists on and on. Fear clenches me with a tight grip. Suddenly, I tumble forward, and the terrifying feeling vanishes.

Everything calms, but the droning sound still continues. It's a peculiar noise, and after a while its monotonous sound gets tiring to listen to. I have nothing to do but stay in the same position in the dark. Desperate for some movement, I hope that the box will shift, sending me forward or backwards. Waiting in the sickening silence is an unbearable thing. But I have no choice, so I wait.

I wait for minutes, hours, and soon a day. At least I think it's been a day. At the moment, I lose concept of time. The darkness seems to have consumed me, swallowing my thoughts. The humming noise goes on. I don't think it will ever stop. I start to ponder if I'm actually dead. If I am, this was not what I expected.

The Long Run

The lurching returns. Except I lurch forward instead of backwards. The vibrating rumbles louder. It lasts a few minutes, until everything stops. The door opens and I hear voices. Except they sound exotic than the ones before. I'm used to the way the other voices sounded, but these are unfamiliar. I become aware of the intense heat. Another difference from before. I start to think of where I could be. None of it makes sense. I'm picked up again.

Once more I'm set down. Everything starts to move. I conjecture that I'm in a truck, for the ride is not lurching me forward or backwards like it was before. Before. Not now. Each thing that mattered is from the time before. The girl is from before. My running is from before.

Brakes screeching, the truck comes to a stop. I can feel the sultry air through my box. The door opens and shouting voices fill the air. The box is nudged around, which sends me tumbling over. The voices slowly drown away. The box jolts up and down from the rhythm of steps. I'm set on the floor, then a young girl's face peaks into the box. She has a dark face, a bright smile, and sparkling eyes that light up when they see me. I'm taken out of the box and the girl ecstatically talks to her mother, who shakes her head. The girl looks dismayed. She sits crossed legged with me in her lap and unties the knot of my laces that bounded me together.

The Long Run

The knot that my previous owner tied to keep me from falling apart. It's as if untying the laces was opening the door of my new life.

Slivers of the scorching sun still sneak through the straw roof. The view I have is not a pretty one. The dirt floor of the hut is a mess compared to the immaculate floor of my previous residence. On the floor lies a mud incrustated mat, where the girl eats along with her mother who holds a tiny child. The child's skin is clinging on its bones. Its miniature hands grip tightly on the mother's threadbare clothes. The mother looks at her child with so much love. The girl stares hungrily at her food, yet she gives the bowl to her mother and says something in such a pleading voice. Her mother shakes her head but still the daughter shoves the rice in her hands. Tears stream down her eyes and her mother pull her in a tight embrace. The sight is unpleasing. I wish I could move away from this heart wrenching scene.

The girl bounds into the hut, bare feet. She sits, takes me from the floor and slips me on. Energy builds up inside me. She ties the laces without struggling. Once we are outside, the heat warms me. We walk until the small huts are in the distance. The girl crouches down in the runner's pose. She takes deep breaths, her eyes closed with concentration. It was exactly what my previous owner did before her run. Everything is hushed, only the sound of her breathing

The Long Run

6

can be heard. It seems that I can read her feelings. That she wants to run away from here. From the hunger. From the heat. From the tears. It all pools up inside her. But then her legs raise, and she runs. It is all released.

Her legs pump up and down. I hit the hard, dusty earth. It's different than the sturdy rubber track at home, but it feels better. The rhythm of her feet hitting the ground is like music to me. Every step feels glorious. I can feel her blood pumping, her powerful, strong muscles straining. Her form is the definition of perfection. The way she carries herself is confident. Her strides are firm. I can hear her breathing evenly, not once out of breath. Sweat dotted her skin as we slow down. The clustered huts are small specks. In the sky, the bright yellow sun sinks down into the horizon. The sky is colored with a vibrant orange. The girl's breath slows down as she closes her eyes, letting the warm golden sun touch her face. I miss my old home, yet, somehow, I feel content here with this girl and her peculiar land. I feel that I have given her hope. I came here for this reason. I came here for her.

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