

Moving Home

I never thought this would be the last time I'd see my old home, but I don't miss it.

The subtle blue of tranquility tinged into deepening blood red streaks through the sky. In the distance, smoke billowed from the tiny wooden carcasses. The faint, familiar silhouettes fell like charred matchsticks, crumbling into embers. We marched on, watching as it faded into the distance.

A stray shot rang out. Its echo cracked through the still valley behind. Unfazed, early daylight guided the exodus. A shrinking single-file queue of dots, held captive by the mountains, diminished into the dawn. Away from home.

"Where are we going?" I muttered.

"A better place, my dear. We are going to a better place."

Mumma. The grasp of her warm hand always told me everything was going to be okay. She tried her best. But it could not hide the hints around me. I looked up at the adults, lugging their bags. Paranoia, plastered on every person's pained expression. Scars bore their trauma: permanent reminders of why they fled.

"Why does no one look... happy?"

"They're moving homes, my dear. They're moving homes."

The queue of dots grew smaller and smaller. Some were picked up by trucks. Some could not pick themselves up.

"Where did the others go?"

A tear welled up in her eye, which she quickly blinked away.

“They found new homes, my dear. Gone- to better places.”

The soothing sound of choking diesel sputter approached. A towering lorry appeared over the mirage, piled high with hundreds of sacks sagging over its sides and crowded bodies poking out the roof. They pulled us up and the truck struggled on into the day.

The hours stopped. Time was eternity.

“How much longer is this going to take?”

“Not long, my dear. Not long.”

The weary sun bled into the embrace of darkness. The dum-dum drone of the dying motor finally ceased in the dead of night, giving way to the subtle wash and splash of the beach. One-by-one, the other heads climbed off onto the sand. One-by-one, they climbed on the boats.

I knew something was not right.

“Where are we going?”

“I- I don’t know, my dear. I don’t know.”

The frigid breeze froze my face. The boat bobbed and bounced on the unsettled sea. Salty spray stung my sun-burnt skin. Yet, I had the warmth of Mumma’s hand. I huddled into her embrace. It made me safe.

My eyes were heavy... My head nodded up and down... a cycle of dozing to sleep... until shaken into life with each spatter of mist and judder of the hull.

“Unmar- vessel, stop your en-.”

“Sto- engine!”

“Now!”

A stray shot rang out. Its piercing round punctured the raft. I roused.

“Wake up, Mumma! Wake up!”

Submerged. Water gushed over the sides; bodies spilled overboard.

Dazed. A glaring rescue light panned for thrashing water.

Cold. Her hands were as cold as the sea.