

A New Beginning

Cold wind blew relentlessly through the bleak, desolate township. A single snowflake, delicate and beautiful, drifted softly towards the concrete-covered ground only to be dashed away quickly by the wind. Endless concrete footpaths ran between houses, leading everywhere and nowhere. In the kitchen of an old brick house located in the heart of the township, a teenage girl stared blankly with her large unseeing eyes. She shivered violently, and quietly drifted towards the warmth of the fireplace.

Koda was small and thin. A thick woollen coat enveloped her and she pulled it tightly around her shoulders. Her blue hair swirled around her face caught in the wind. Her body blended with the room as if it knew that she was to remain unseen. Koda was born blind. Useless, worthless, a burden, she brought shame to her family. She was hidden away during daylight, given freedom only when the sun's rays began to dim.

She was skilled in hunting for food, collecting water and building fires. Endless hours of solitude had allowed Koda to access parts of her brain that others didn't use. She had explored every inch of the township, knew by the scent in the air and the rustle in the wind if the river was flowing or still. Others thought her to be handicapped, however Koda had mastered the ability to "see" actions around her even though her ability to visually see had never formed. Her brain was so finely tuned into the world around her that she dodged when someone would cross her path. She had even caught a ball when the other children were playing cricket in the street. She couldn't explain it but she had sensed when people were looking in her direction.

She heard them whispering about an evacuation, about the fertile new lands over the mountain that would be their salvation. The township had outlived its usefulness. It was no longer profitable. Seeds struggled to break free of the cold, hard earth. Factories lay dormant, mere memories of their previous exertions. No food, no work, no money... there was nothing left for anyone.

They thought she wouldn't notice if they simply left without her. So they did.

With nobody else here, it was time that she left too. There was nothing for her here except death. With determination, she set out for the mountain, hoping to catch up with the others. Snow was begging to paint the landscape a brilliant white. Skeleton trees with their bony fingers reaching in all directions were mirrored in the frozen rivers and streams. The tremendous wind whipped the branches and the snow into a frenzy that was intent of attacking Koda as she made her way towards the Promised Land.

She listened. Rolling thunder echoed around her as the wind began to increase in intensity and the land began to shake. In the midst of the raging storm, Koda allowed silence to close in on her and fill her senses. She forced herself to breathe slowly. She left her body and entered the world that kept her safe, the world she trusted. She entered her mind.

Koda took flight. She dodged falling tree branches, her small body ducking and rolling to escape debris that was whipped up by the wind. A cheetah, graceful and determined, she skilfully manoeuvred her way through the labyrinth, outrunning nature's fury until she collapsed from exhaustion.

Her body shook uncontrollably in the everlasting darkness. Her usually clear and coherent mind was a sea of fog. Her small and nimble body had begun to stumble like a newborn animal learning to walk. With the last of her energy, she managed to build a fire and huddled against the base of a

gnarled old tree, thankful to be alive. She wondered fleetingly if she would survive the night. Her rapidly beating heart and her trembling fingers were her only signs of life.

Koda's body tightened, her mind raced, she did not move. There was something wrong. She heard an awful noise that was filled with pain and sorrow. Once more, Koda engaged her gift of sight.

A small boy, face smeared with dirt and tears, cried out in distress. Upon seeing Koda, he clung to her and held on fiercely. Koda could sense his despair. The storm had isolated the sleeping townsfolk, than swallowed them whole.

"I am Koda, I will take care of you. Come." The small boy placed his grubby hand in hers and stared at her with trust and admiration. Koda felt a ripple of pleasure pulse through her body. For the first time in her life she felt wanted.

Holding his hand tightly, they walked, heads held high, over the mountain and down the other side. Koda felt the sun kissing her skin, heard the birds twittering as they flew from the tree. Smiling, warm hearted villagers greeted them as they emerged into the clearing. They listened in awe as Koda and the boy spoke of their ordeal and the tragic loss of lives.

Hailed as a hero, Koda became valued and a much loved member of the community.