

Beta Reading Sample Project

RAW STORY DRAFT — “THE TRAIN TO TOMORROW”

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The night smelt of rain and rust. Lagos was awake, but not in the way cities are awake with neon lights and jazz-filled alleys. It was awake with horns that screamed endlessly, danfo drivers that swore at the air, and the breath of millions that refused to sleep. In the middle of this orchestra of chaos, Amaka dragged her suitcase across Ojuelegba bridge, wondering how the world could feel both wide and suffocating at once.

She was twenty-one, freshly graduated, with a ticket to London tucked somewhere inside the depths of her handbag. Her father had called it “a miracle,” her mother had called it “a chance,” and Amaka herself didn’t know what to call it. Maybe escape. Maybe betrayal. She loved her city, its colors and its people, but she was tired of living on the margins of someone else’s promise.

The suitcase wheels caught on a crack in the pavement, and she nearly stumbled. A man selling roasted corn whistled after her, “Fine girl, where you dey go this night?” She didn’t answer. She tightened her grip on the bag and moved faster.

Somewhere deep inside, she already knew: this night was not going to end the way she planned.

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The airport smelled of jet fuel and cheap coffee. Families clustered together, some crying, some laughing. Amaka sat in a metal chair by Gate C4, trying to look calm, though her heart pounded like a drumline. She texted her younger brother, “Boarding soon.” His reply came instantly: “Don’t forget us when you make it big, Amaka London girl 🥰.”

She almost smiled, but a voice cut through the airport speakers. “Final boarding call for Turkish Airlines flight TK632 to Istanbul.”

Her brow furrowed. Istanbul? She checked her ticket again. London Heathrow, with a connection through Istanbul. She had known, but somehow the thought of Istanbul suddenly gnawed at her. She had never been that far east, never even crossed the Mediterranean. She shoved the thought away and dragged her bag forward.

The flight was full. She squeezed into seat 34B beside a middle-aged man who reeked of cigarettes and perfume. He asked her if it was her first time traveling. She nodded. He said, “The first time always feels like falling off a cliff. You’ll get used to it.”

Amaka wondered what it meant to get used to falling.

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Istanbul glowed like a jewel dropped between seas. From the airplane window, she saw domes and minarets, roads bending like silver threads, and the Bosphorus cutting the city into halves that still seemed whole.

But something was wrong. Her layover was supposed to be four hours, but the screens flashed red: “London Heathrow flight delayed. Estimated departure: 16 hours.”

Sixteen hours. Almost a full day.

Her Nigerian passport meant she couldn’t just wander freely into the city without a transit visa. But then, a young woman in a red headscarf approached, smiling with practiced warmth. “You are stranded too?”

Amaka blinked. “Yes... my London flight.”

The woman introduced herself as Leyla. She said she had friends who could help, people who often hosted stranded passengers for a small fee. “Better than sleeping on airport chairs,” she said.

Amaka hesitated. She had been warned about strangers, about stories that started like this. But her back already ached from the metal seats, and her eyes begged for a bed. She followed.

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The taxi cut through Istanbul’s streets like a blade, neon signs reflected on wet asphalt. Leyla spoke quickly to the driver in Turkish, her words sharp and musical. Amaka caught none of it. She clutched her bag tighter, whispering a silent prayer that she was not walking into the kind of story people warn you about.

The apartment was small, the air smelling faintly of spices and cigarette smoke. A tall man with tired eyes greeted them. Leyla called him Murat. He offered tea, the bitter kind served in tulip-shaped glasses.

Amaka didn't drink much, but she accepted out of politeness. Her hands shook slightly as she set the glass down.

Leyla smiled, almost reassuring. "You are safe here. Tomorrow, you will go to London. Tonight, just rest."

Amaka wanted to believe her. She wanted to believe the world could be kind. But when she lay on the thin mattress in the corner, she noticed the lock on the outside of the door.

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She didn't sleep much. The city hummed beyond the window, but her ears strained for footsteps. Once, she thought she heard murmuring outside the door, men's voices low and urgent. Her heart rattled in her chest.

By dawn, she had made up her mind: she would leave, with or without permission.

But when she tried the door, it opened easily. No lock, no barrier. Maybe it had been her imagination. Maybe.

Leyla greeted her with bread and olives. "You see? Safe. Today you fly."

At the airport, Leyla hugged her tightly, too tightly. "Sometimes people must meet at crossroads," she said. "Maybe you and I will again."

Amaka boarded the plane to London with relief flooding her veins. Yet as the engines roared, she couldn't shake the feeling that she had just stepped into a larger story, one that began long before her and would end long after.

Part Two: Beta-Read & Edited Version

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The night carried the scent of rain and asphalt. Lagos was alive, but not with the usual cinematic glow of neon lights. It throbbed with horns, screeching danfo brakes, and the breath of millions who refused sleep. Amid this orchestrated chaos, Amaka tugged her suitcase across Ojuelegba Bridge, feeling the city both vast and suffocating.

At twenty-one, freshly graduated, she held a plane ticket to London—a promise of a new life. Her father had called it a miracle; her mother, a rare opportunity; and Amaka, caught between excitement and doubt, didn't know what to call it. Perhaps escape. Perhaps destiny.

The suitcase wheels caught a crack in the pavement, and she stumbled slightly. A street vendor shouted, whistling at her, "Fine girl! Where you dey go this night?" She ignored him, quickening her pace. Deep down, she felt an unsettling premonition: tonight would not end as planned.

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The airport smelled of jet fuel, pastries, and cheap coffee. Families clustered together, some laughing, some crying. Amaka chose a metal chair near Gate C4, trying to appear composed as her heart raced. She texted her younger brother: *Boarding soon*. His instant reply: *Don't forget us when you make it big, Amaka London girl 😊*.

She almost smiled. But the announcement cut through the air:

"Final boarding call for Turkish Airlines flight TK632 to Istanbul."

Her brow furrowed. Istanbul? She reread the ticket. London Heathrow, with a layover in Istanbul. She had known this, yet seeing it in bright airport letters made her stomach twist.

Beside her, a middle-aged man with the scent of cigarettes and cheap cologne asked if it was her first time traveling. She nodded. He smiled faintly. "The first time feels like falling off a cliff. You'll get used to it."

Amaka stared at the window, imagining what it meant to get used to falling.

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Istanbul appeared like a jewel strewn between two seas. Domes and minarets rose from streets twisting like silver threads, the Bosphorus cutting the city into halves that seemed to pulse in rhythm with the waves.

Her layover should have been four hours. Instead, the board flashed red: “London Heathrow flight delayed. Estimated departure: 16 hours.”

Sixteen hours. Nearly an entire day.

Without a transit visa, she couldn’t leave the airport. Then a young woman in a red headscarf approached, warm and confident.

“You stranded too?” she asked.

Amaka hesitated, then nodded. The woman introduced herself as Leyla. She offered a solution—her friends would host stranded travelers for a modest fee. “Better than sleeping on metal chairs,” she said with a wink.

Amaka weighed caution against exhaustion. Her back ached. Her eyes begged for comfort. She followed.

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The taxi navigated Istanbul’s slick streets, neon reflections scattering across wet asphalt. Leyla’s Turkish flowed fast and musical to the driver, while Amaka clutched her bag, praying she hadn’t walked into a nightmare.

The apartment was small, scented faintly of spices and faint smoke. A tall man with tired eyes welcomed them. Leyla called him Murat. He served tea in tulip-shaped glasses, bitter and fragrant.

Amaka took a tentative sip, her hands trembling. She tried to reassure herself—safe here, she told herself. Leyla smiled knowingly. “Rest tonight. Tomorrow, London.”

Yet when Amaka inspected the door, she noticed a lock on the outside. Her stomach clenched. Maybe precaution. Maybe something else.

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Sleep evaded her. Istanbul’s heartbeat hummed through the thin walls. Murmurs outside made her start, men’s voices low and urgent. Her mind spun scenarios—some plausible, some absurd.

Dawn brought cautious courage. The lock, upon inspection, was absent. Perhaps her imagination had betrayed her.

Leyla greeted her with fresh bread and olives. “See? All safe. Today, London awaits.”

At the airport, Leyla hugged her tightly. “Sometimes people meet at crossroads,” she whispered. “Perhaps our paths will cross again.”

As the plane ascended, relief flooded Amaka—but a lingering sense of a larger story gripped her: one that had begun long before she existed and would stretch far beyond her comprehension.