

The background is a dark navy blue. In the upper left, there is a faint, light blue grid pattern. Scattered across the page are several thin, light blue circles of varying sizes. The title is centered in a large, white, serif font.

The Labyrinth of Dreams

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Prologue

IN the quiet town of Birgunj, Nepal, where the air hung heavy with the scent of marigolds and incense, lived a young man named Sagar Kattel. To the outside world, Sagar was an ordinary 25-year-old, working at a local tech startup and living with his parents and younger sister. But beneath the surface, Sagar's mind was a labyrinth of dreams and realities, each layer more intricate and perplexing than the last.

The Awakening

THE alarm clock's shrill cry pierced the pre-dawn silence, but it wasn't what woke Sagar. His eyes snapped open, body drenched in cold sweat, heart pounding against his ribcage like a caged animal seeking escape. The remnants of a nightmare clung to him like a second skin.

Sagar sat up, his trembling hands reaching for the glass of water on his nightstand. As he gulped it down, his eyes fell on a pair of glasses next to the empty glass. He frowned. He didn't wear glasses.

"Just a dream," he muttered, running a hand through his disheveled hair. "It was just a dream."

But even as the words left his lips, a nagging doubt gnawed at the edges of his consciousness. The dreams felt too real, too vivid. The sensation of falling, the screeching of tires, the sickening crunch of metal against flesh – it all lingered, refusing to fade like normal dreams should.

Sagar reached for his phone, his fingers hovering over Sachin's number. Sachin, his best friend since childhood, was the only one who knew about the dreams. But something stopped him from making the call. A part of him feared that speaking the dreams aloud would make them more real.

Instead, he forced himself out of bed and into the bathroom. The cold water splashing on his face helped ground him in reality – or what he hoped was reality. As he looked at his reflection in the mirror, he couldn't shake off the image of another face – his face, but not quite his – wearing those mysterious glasses.

"Get it together, Sagar," he told his reflection sternly. "It's just stress. It's not real."

But as he made his way downstairs, each step felt like a descent into uncertainty. The aroma of his mother's cooking wafted up, a comforting reminder of the normal world. Yet, even that seemed somehow off, like a familiar song played in a slightly wrong key.

His sister, Priya, was already at the breakfast table, her textbooks spread out as she crammed for an exam. She looked up as Sagar entered, her teasing smile faltering as she took in his haggard appearance.

"Daii, you look like you've seen a ghost," Priya said, concern creeping into her voice. "Another nightmare?"

Sagar tried to smile, but it felt more like a grimace. "Just didn't sleep well," he lied, not wanting to worry her. "Where are Mum and Dad?"

"Oh, Uncle Ravi called. They've gone to meet him," Priya replied, her eyes still studying Sagar's face. "Daii, maybe you should talk to someone about these nightmares. They're getting worse, aren't they?"

For a moment, Sagar considered telling her everything – about the recurring dreams,

the sense of impending doom, the growing difficulty in distinguishing between dream and reality. But the moment passed, and he shook his head.

"It's nothing, Priya. Just work stress," he said, forcing lightness into his tone. "I'm going to Sachin's place. Might be back late."

Priya opened her mouth as if to argue, but just then, the front door opened, and their parents walked in, accompanied by Uncle Ravi.

"Sagar! Where are you off to in such a hurry?" Uncle Ravi boomed, his jovial voice filling the room.

Sagar plastered on a smile. "Just heading to Sachin's, Uncle. Some work to catch up on."

His father frowned. "Work on a Saturday? Sagar, you need to take care of your health. Your uncle is here, why don't you stay and chat for a while?"

The walls seemed to close in on Sagar. He needed to get out, to clear his head. "Sorry, Dad, it's important. I'll catch up with Uncle later," he said, already edging towards the door.

As he stepped outside, the fresh air hit him like a wave, momentarily clearing the fog in his mind. He took a deep breath, trying to shake off the lingering unease. But as he walked towards Sachin's house, each step felt heavier than the last.

Little did Sagar know that this day would be the beginning of a journey that would challenge everything he thought he knew about reality, dreams, and the thin line that separated them.

The Collision

SAGAR'S mind was a whirlwind of thoughts as he walked towards Sachin's house. The bustling streets of Birgunj seemed alien to him, as if he were seeing them for the first time. Every face he passed seemed to hide a secret, every sound amplified in his hyper-aware state.

Lost in his thoughts, he didn't notice the motorcycle until it was too late. The screech of tires, a flash of metal, and then – impact. Sagar felt himself flying through the air, time slowing to a crawl. In that suspended moment, a strange clarity washed over him. He saw the rider's face as the helmet visor flipped up.

It was his own face staring back at him.

The world went black.

When Sagar opened his eyes, he was back in his bed, gasping for air. His hand instinctively reached for the glasses on the nightstand – the same glasses he had seen the rider wearing. With trembling fingers, he put them on, and the world shifted.

Suddenly, he was the rider, looking down at his own broken body on the street. Panic seized him, and he gunned the engine, fleeing the scene of the accident. As he rode, the city blurred around him, buildings morphing into strange, impossible shapes.

"Wake up!" Sagar screamed to himself. "This isn't real!"

The bike swerved, and once again, Sagar felt the sensation of flying. The ground rushed up to meet him, and –

He was back in his bed, the glasses clutched in his hand.

Sagar's breath came in ragged gasps. He stumbled out of bed and down the stairs, needing to ground himself in reality. But the house was different – familiar yet wrong, like a photo negative of his home.

In the kitchen, he found Sachin instead of Priya.

"Finally awake, huh?" Sachin said, but his voice sounded distant, echoing as if from the bottom of a well. "You've been out for a long, man. The doctors weren't sure you'd wake up."

"Doctors?" Sagar croaked, his throat dry. "What are you talking about? I was just in an accident... or was that a dream?"

Sachin's face twisted into an expression of concern. "Sagar, you've been in a coma for two months. There was no accident. You collapsed at work, remember?"

Sagar's mind reeled. None of this made sense. He closed his eyes, willing himself to wake up from what surely must be another dream. When he opened them, he was sitting in a sterile office, facing a woman in a white coat.

"Sagar," the woman said gently, "I'm Dr. Sharma. You've been experiencing a series of nested dreams. It's a rare condition, but not unheard of. Your mind has created multiple

layers of reality as a coping mechanism."

"Coping with what?" Sagar asked, his voice barely a whisper.

Dr. Sharma's eyes were filled with compassion. "With trauma, Sagar. You were in a serious accident two years ago. The man on the motorcycle – the one with your face – he died. You've been struggling to accept that reality."

The room began to spin. Sagar clutched the arms of his chair, feeling as if he might fall into an abyss. "No," he muttered, "no, that's not possible. I'm Sagar. I'm alive. This is just another dream."

"I know this is difficult to accept," Dr. Sharma continued, "but it's important that you try. These nested dreams are your mind's way of processing what happened. Each layer is a different version of events, a different attempt to change the outcome. But you can't keep running, Sagar. It's time to face reality."

Sagar stood up abruptly, knocking over his chair. "No! You're not real. None of this is real!" He ran from the office, down endless corridors that seemed to loop back on themselves. Everywhere he turned, he saw flashes of his other lives – Priya calling out to him, Sachin reaching for him, his parents' worried faces.

He burst through a door and found himself back on the street where the accident had happened. The motorcycle lay on its side, its wheels still spinning. A crowd had gathered around a body on the ground. With a sense of inevitability, Sagar approached.

The face looking up at the sky with lifeless eyes was his own.

A hand fell on his shoulder. Sagar turned to see an old man, his eyes filled with an ancient wisdom.

"You've been running for a long time, my son," the old man said. "But you can't outrun yourself forever."

"Who are you?" Sagar asked, his voice trembling.

The old man smiled sadly. "I am you, Sagar. The you that might have been, had you lived. It's time to let go. Time to accept what happened and move on."

"But how?" Sagar cried, tears streaming down his face. "How do I know what's real anymore?"

"Reality is what you make of it," the old man said. "You've been given a gift – the chance to live out multiple lives, to explore different possibilities. But now it's time to choose. Will you keep running through these dreams, or will you have the courage to wake up and face the truth?"

Sagar looked down at the body – his body – on the ground. He thought of Priya, of his parents, of Sachin. He thought of all the lives he had lived in his dreams, all the possibilities he had explored.

"I'm scared," he admitted.

The old man nodded. "Fear is natural. But remember, death is not the end. It's simply another beginning."

Sagar took a deep breath. He reached out and touched his own lifeless face. As his fingers made contact, the world around him began to dissolve.

"Whatever you choose," the old man's voice echoed as he faded away, "know that you are loved. Know that you have lived. And know that your story will continue, in one form or another."

Sagar closed his eyes, feeling the last vestiges of the dream world slip away. He stood on the precipice between dreams and reality, between life and death.

And he made his choice.

Epilogue

IN a quiet hospital room in Birgunj, a monitor beeped steadily, marking the rhythm of a heart that had been still for far too long. A pair of glasses lay on the bedside table, reflecting the soft light of dawn.

Sagar Kattel's eyes fluttered open.

As consciousness returned, memories flooded back – not just of his life before the accident, but of the myriad dream-lives he had lived. Each one had taught him something, shaped him in ways he was only beginning to understand.

He felt different, as if he had lived a thousand lifetimes in the span of a heartbeat. The boundary between dream and reality seemed more porous now, less defined. But instead of fear, Sagar felt a profound sense of peace.

A nurse entered the room, her eyes widening in surprise as she saw Sagar awake. "Doctor!" she called out, her voice a mix of excitement and disbelief. "He's awake!"

In the flurry of activity that followed – doctors checking his vitals, his family rushing in with tears of joy – Sagar remained calm. He knew now that reality was just as fluid and full of possibilities as his dreams had been.

As his parents hugged him, as Priya clutched his hand, as Sachin beamed at him from the foot of the bed, Sagar made a silent promise to himself. He would live this life – his real life – with the same courage and curiosity he had shown in his dream worlds. He would embrace every moment, knowing that each one was precious and unique.

And sometimes, in quiet moments, he would put on the glasses that still sat on his bedside table. Not to escape, but to remember. To remind himself of the infinite possibilities that existed within and around him.

For Sagar Kattel had learned the most important lesson of all – that life itself was the greatest dream, and he was determined to live it fully.