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THE UNBORN

**HARRY RAPHEL
THURUTHIPURAM**



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Let the **SUPREME POWER** guard you

Let the **SUPREME LIGHT** guide you

Let the **SUPREME LOVE** envelop you

Also by Harry Raphel Thuruthipuram

The Unfathomable (2017)

The Serein (2019)

1

Death is the ultimate truth. Rajeev thought. Death is certain and that's what people know. People know very little about life but they live passionately each day to explore its possibilities. They survive each day to die some another day. They fear death even though they know it is inevitable. They fear what they don't understand. They don't know when death would appear in front of them with its sharp fangs and obscurity. They fear god, demons and death because they are all unexplainable. Death is the most powerful truth known to man yet unknown of its distinctiveness. The eternal truth! The truth more powerful than life itself. The truth no one wants to accept. Death completes life.

He came back here to die. He survived enough without any meaning for his existence. He decided he could decide his future. He could not fix his time of death but he was sure tonight would be the last page of his life. The place was set. What he doesn't know was he must see the next morning.

It was a day in the cold December month.

The time was way past dusk.

Rajeev and Naanu reached in front of an old house. They kept the luggage in front of the Tulsi - *holy basil plant* altar.

Naanu turned back to leave. Then after thinking about something he turned again to Rajeev. With a hesitation he asked him. "Are you sure you want to stay here for the night?" His oily black hair shook with each word he spoke. He was a short man, hardly above five feet high. He had a

thick moustache neatly cut. He was in his twenties and was energetic like a race horse.

Rajeev gave a demanding look. Naanu didn't see that. Rajeev asked him for the reason. "Why did you ask?"

Naanu looked around to be sure that no one is watching them or hearing them. Then he walked closer to him and with utmost caution he revealed that secret.

"There is a ghost roaming around in these parts."

Rajeev laughed. "How do you know? You are in this village for a few days now." *I would be happy if a ghost could kill me. At least I don't have to take any trouble.*

Naanu was waiting for Rajeev when he came to the village. It was few kilometers walk from the bus stop to that old house. The last bus to the village was at 6.30pm. By the time Rajeev reached the village bus stop the bus was already gone. They had to walk back as Naanu expected they would be able to catch the last bus. He cursed himself for not coming by a motorcycle. While they were walking, Naanu told him that he came here five or six days back. Naanu was an assistant, a new recruit for an advertising company. Rajeev was promoted by the company as chief operations manager of that district. This village came under his authority and he decided to stay in that old house.

Rajeev didn't talked much while they were walking. He was trying to evoke the village in his eyes. He was filling the air in his heart. He smelled the evening air. He felt the cool breeze caressing his hair and face. Naanu felt that Rajeev has lived here in this village before.

"Everyone in this village knows that. They warned me not to go alone at night. I thought the villagers didn't like me and wanted to get rid of me with ghost stories. Obviously I didn't believe their nonsense. One night I even saw her; that was the second day of my arrival. I was walking through this

path and I saw a woman wearing white sari. I couldn't see her face. I paced quickly and reached behind her. I wanted to know who she was. Suddenly she vanished. I was afraid. I knew the stories of the ghost were true. I ran as fast as I could. Last thing I remember was I hit somewhere and fell. When I opened my eyes it was dawn and many people were around me asking what happened."

He stopped telling his story. Rajeev was staring at him. It was getting darker. The nights here are really longer and darker in winter.

A twinkle appeared in between his lips.

"Sir." Naanu again said. "I am living alone. You can stay at my place tonight. Besides this house was unoccupied in years and is not cleaned yet." Naanu missed his family, his lovely wife. He got married a few months ago. His wife is staying with her parents hundred kilometers away from this village. Ever since he saw the ghost he was afraid to live alone but he was left with no other choice.

Rajeev thought that Naanu was too young to get married. "No. I will manage." His voice was stubborn. Naanu looked at him in disbelief. But the darkness was too obscure he couldn't see the emotions of his face. *This is the perfect place to end my story.*

"This is my number." He gave his cell number. "Call me anytime if you need me. I will be here within minutes."

"Okay, Naanu can leave. Thank you for your help."

"This was your house, right." Naanu remembered that this man specifically mentioned this home to say. *He should have been here.* He took a mental note to know more about him and this house in the coming days.

Rajeev didn't answer. He opened his bag and took out a cigarette from its packet. He lighted it and looked at Naanu's direction. "Do you smoke?"

He already was walking and reached a few steps afar. A torch in his hand gave him light in front of him. He looked back in between.

Rajeev watched him till the light of the torch disappeared in front of him.

Night thickened again.

Rajeev looked at that old house.

The house where Mridula was born. The house where she grew up.

It was an old house with brick layered roofing. The roofing was covered with moss, vines and small plants. A small verandah extending from both sides from two central concrete pillars stood between him and the wooden front door in the front.

Rajeev stood there and finished his cigarette. He could feel the cold and dark eyes of the night staring at him. Whether he was welcomed or not, he was yet to find out.

He slowly strode towards the house with his luggage. He kept his right foot on the first step. At the same time he heard a big sound on the western side of the house. A branch of a tree fell down with a heavy thud.

I like the way you are welcoming me. His eyes lit up.

Rajeev was still smiling. He kept his foot on the second step. From the east he heard a whoosh. It was getting stronger and he knew it was a storm.

He stepped on the third step. Like stones falling from the sky big drops of cloudburst plummeted down.

Rajeev didn't mind that. He walked onto the verandah. Wind and rain reached its full strength. It seemed like the nature has went crazy. Rajeev hesitated for a second. It was more than he anticipated. It seemed like he has nothing to do, everything was already been taken care of.

He kept his luggage there and moved towards his right. He searched for something on the wall in the dark. His hands found the switch board.

He turned on the switch. Verandah was aglow with light. Rain and storm stopped as if it never happened.

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The whole village came running. They were all worried and scared. From afar they saw, light in that house.

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2

Rajeev opened the front door. With some creak the panels moved inside. An ancient foul stink came out. It was unbearable but Rajeev seemed unmoved by it. He cleared the cobwebs with a broom and took his baggage inside. Then he locked the door. He walked towards the bedroom and saw a bed in the corner of the room. He walked towards the bed and stared for almost like an eternity. A lot of memories and emotions went through his heart. It was covered with thick layers of dust. The sheet was unwrinkled. He lay on the bed. It had a scent of a lady. Everything around unhurriedly faded away. He was surrounded by the vastness of void and a fragrance which froze his memories to a single point. Slowly he went into a mild slumber.

"You came." He heard a very soft voice. He felt that it came from deep inside a cave. He wished to respond but was incapable to speak.

He knew that a smooth hand was caressing his chest, warm breath patting his cheeks and a tender body is welcoming him. He enjoyed a serene kiss on his forehead.

"Five years ... I was waiting for you for the last five years. Finally, you came."

A soft whisper turned into a zephyr in his ears. He wished to reply something. He wanted to open his eyes and to see the origin of the voice. Only he knew he was beyond any dreams.

That voice, he knew he was being vanquished by it.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Even in his mild snooze he knew something moving away from him.

He took more time to rise up from the bed. He didn't want to.

He slowly walked towards the door and removed the lock. As he opened the door he saw a big crowd. He saw Naanu in between them.

"What happened?" He asked calmly.

"The rain and storm was heavy." Naanu said.

"So what?"

"This house is very old. It is incapable to withstand heavy rain." Someone in the crowd answered.

"But it is still unharmed."

"We saw light from afar. We just thought we will just check." Another person said. "No one has been using this house for last five years."

"It is so unusual to rain in this season." One person added.

Rajeev smiled at them.

"Did you have any difficulties?" Naanu's concerned enquiry came. Not only him but everyone can feel the uneasy stench coming from the house.

"No. Only problem is the dust but I will manage." Rajeev seemed unmoved of the stink.

Everyone was staring at him. Most of them felt that they have seen him before. They were trying to remember. This man, with unshaved face, long hair and his skinny body looked familiar. They were searching in their memories.

An old man in the group asked. "What is your name, son?"

His smile disappeared. Eyes were aglow with fire. Lips trembled. Like a whisper he uttered. "Rajeev."

The whole village was panicked.

This name was in the history of this village before five years. There wasn't fire with this name but love and compassion.

"No one should stand in this premise. Whoever will stay back will have to bear the consequences." Rajeev closed the door with a heavy thud.

The mob slowly moved away.

Atmosphere filled with their whisperings and thoughts.

"Look at him. He lost all his essence."

"He looks like a ghost"

"There is no doubt the storm came."

"What is in his mind?"

"Why did he come back?"

"He will destroy this village"

"How cannot he come back? She was waiting for him all these years."

"That's true, she made him come back."

"It seems the story will end today."

Only Naanu was left standing in front of the closed door. He stood there and stared. Then he also walked towards the crowd to hear what they have to say about him. He had too many questions to ask. The first was who is Rajeev?

Rajeev took a moment to calm him. He let out a long exhale. His eyes affixed on the bed where he lay earlier. He wanted the feeling to come back. *I can feel your presence, after all these years.*

Rajeev lay down again on the bed. Again he felt the same scent, an unearthly aroma of a lady. Once again the vastness of void surrounded him. Within seconds he was under a mild slumber.

“I was waiting for you.” He heard that serene sound near him. He heard the melody of glass bangles in the dark. He knew smooth touch of fingers on his chest.

“Why are you silent?”

I was waiting to hear this voice for last five years. His heart thumped with joy. And yet, he couldn't speak.

Those hands slowly moved up from his chest towards his neck.

He could feel something exploding in his veins. He could feel the rhythm of love in his heart. An unexplainable sensation enveloped his body. He has surrendered to the voice.

From his neck the fingers brushed his lips and breezed onto his hair.

He opened his mouth to say something. But the words were unvoiced.

Warm breaths fell on his face. A kiss rhymed on his lips. He was unable to move. He felt those lips moving all around his face like a fish. His face melted down in thousand kisses.

“Mridula.” In one of those moments he whispered. It resonated inside her ears. Her hands hold his head tight. Her

lips trembled over his lips in an unearthly kiss. A breeze of unquenchable thirst and desire embraced them.

"This moment ... I came back for this." He was free of his slumber. He could feel a female body veiled in transparent cloud over him. His hands slowly gripped around the form.

"We will be together forever." She whispered in his ears.

"Yes my love."

"Your body is mine, so is your soul."

He felt a zephyr blowing near his ears.

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Not too far away an infant screamed at an open ground. Heavy lightning struck at the centre of the ground and the soil split open and made a small opening. A tiny hand covered with blood and dirt slowly moved up. The scream became louder but was soon silenced by a horrific thunder.

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3

"I think I should be leaving now." Arun said.

"You are too drunk to drive." Alex tried to stop him.
"I will come with you."

Arun laughed. "You are equally drunk as me. So don't act smart. And besides, you are a pathetic driver." He couldn't open his eyes fully and his steps were unsteady. But his ego stood taller among anything.

"Do whatever you want. But remember I stand steadier than you." Alex didn't like the insult.

"Come on, we will race. Let me see if you are steadier than me." He was not ready to back off.

"Get lost you jerk. Go and die, who cares." He went back inside the bar.

"Hey come here you coward." Arun shouted. "Come on, compete with me you gutless swine."

"Stop it you both. Why the hell do you always want to fight after drinking, Arun?" Shah asked. He gently hit him on his cheek.

"I ... didn't fight, that bugger started it all." Arun tried to defend himself.

"At least let me help you to the car." Mohan offered.

"No man. This is not the first time I am drinking. I can manage myself. You guys worry about that fool. He says he is steady but he is afraid to race with me. He is a loser." He teased Alex. Then he screamed. "Alex the loser, go and hide under some pretty girl's skirt." He laughed maniacally.

"You mother f***ing idiot I told you to leave. If you don't go, I will punch you right on your face." Alex said. He was still at the entrance.

"Stop please." Shah was getting angry but he tried to regain himself. "Okay you leave now. See you tomorrow."

Arun shook his head and slowly walked away with his wobbly steps. His movements were erratic but they knew once he reaches his car he will be fine. How much drunk he is, he will drive. He has met with few accidents but he is stubborn. He will continue to drive until death.

"Alex you are a coward." He shouted in between. "You are a loser."

"Come on, we can have another round before leaving." Shah walked in front of them. They went inside the bar towards their table.

"No man, it's already late. We should be going by now." Mohan was in a hurry.

"There is always time for one last drink. We will leave at midnight and we have six more minutes." Shah encouraged them.

They were friends from childhood. Every weekend they meet and drink and eat together. Once in two months they are go for some long drives and end up at Alex's old estate at Munnar.

There, Alex's estate manager, Maruthu, a ferocious guy would have arranged everything thing for them. Chicken, beef, pork, fish, specially made liquor and even ladies for entertainment. But this time they were in a bar.

Arun walked in an irregular pattern measuring every inch of the trail until he reached his car. He slipped near his car but luckily two hands supported him. He looked back. He

had to adjust his vision to see the person. A beautiful looking girl!

Where did she come from?

"Can I help you?" Her voice was sweet.

"How can I turn down an offer from a young beautiful girl?" He started flirting.

"Can I drive?" She asked.

"Of course you can. Consider it as yours." He showed her the car keys.

She helped him inside the car and put on the seatbelt. Her breasts were purposely squeezed onto Arun and she knew he would definitely enjoy it.

She was attractive and young, maybe twenty or twenty-one. She wore a jeans and a top. She had thick bosom and Arun's eyes were affixed on them. Her straightened brown hair had golden ends. She was slim with tantalizing features. Her voice was sweet. She looked like she was from a good family.

Who cares? Arun thought.

"Where do you want to go?" He asked.

"It is up to you. You tell me." She smiled, beautiful, seductive smile. He saw her lips were wet.

Lusty dreams rise up inside him. *This is a golden chance. Why should I let it go? The earlier the better.* Suddenly a thought arose in his mind. *Why not here?*

The parking ground was empty save them. The watchman must be at the gate and no one would come here any time soon. Everything is perfectly in tune. The night is dark, the atmosphere is cool, and the ambience is silent and seductive.

"What are you up to?" He asked again. He came out of the car and stood closer to her at the driver's end. His hands were on her shoulders slowly riding down. She didn't even flinch as his hands almost reached on top of her bosom. But she stopped him. "Not here."

He was surprised. He wanted it here. He could not wait.

"Then why are you helping me?" Arun frowned.

"I saw you walking with unsteady steps. I thought I can help you. I know you as I am living nearby. I can also get home safely." She looked hopefully into his eyes.

He looked at her surprisingly. *How can you be so sure that you will be safe with me?* But he did not say anything yet he knew she cannot be trusted.

"Please." She pleaded with a snicker while chewing her lower lips. "Help me get home."

"I don't know you." He said. But he needed someone to drive and how can he reject a beautiful girl. Moreover he wanted her so badly.

"Does it matter?" She gave another sultry smile. "I know what do you want and I can give you that."

"Nothing else matters." He muttered. His eyes lit up. She helped his hand onto her chest for his assurance.

"Drive me home." He whispered in her ears.

She again unlocked the door and helped him sit in the front seat. He held her tight and he felt the sweet aroma of champak flowers (magnolia champaca). Their bodies were dangerously closer and he knew the adrenaline pumping in his veins.

Not here. He warned himself. He is not going to let her go alone to her house. She will stay with him. *Safe!* A sinister chuckle escaped him.

I know what you are thinking. But I have other plans for you. She thought as she walked towards the driver's seat.

"You drive. I will direct you." He winked at her and she throws a kiss back at him.

She started the car.

"What is your name?" He asked.

"Mohini." She replied.

Enchantress. Befitting name. He whispered.

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Joyce heard the clouds rumbling in the sky and the heavy rains pelting down. She quietly slipped out of her bed and walked towards the table. She saw the fluorescent dials of her clock showing it was past midnight. She opened the closet and took out a piece of paper from the drawer. Something was already written in it. She folded the paper and kept it on top of the table with a book over it to keep it safe from flying away. She then unlocked her bedroom door and walked towards the front door.

The sky roared aloud while she opened the front door. She feared if anyone will wake up because of the noises of the nature. Joyce walked into the downpour and welcomed the heavy droplets with her hands opened wide. She felt the pain of the water hitting hard on her skin but she wasn't bothered much.

This pain is nothing compared to the pain inside my heart.

Joyce looked back at her house for the last time. She was born here, she lived here but now she is saying goodbye. A tear from her eyes mingled with the rain.

I am leaving, this time not to return.

It was hard to move in the heavy rain but she moved forward. She was totally drenched within seconds. She walked to the road. Suddenly a huge spark bombarded near

her. She saw the path to her destination clearly. Rain and storm madly boogied around her.

She was unaware that two eyes were watching her. She didn't know that her life was about to change.

The wind was trying to hold her back but she was determined to go.

Nothing can hold me back. No one can stop me. This is my night. My last night.

She slowly walked along the road side unaware of being followed.

Someone whispered inside her heart. *Look back, there is somebody behind you. That person might interrupt your goal.*

The feeling was getting stronger as she stepped forward each footstep.

She halted and looked back. There was no one. Only the rain was showering down and the wind rattling the branches of the trees.

Somewhere far she heard a faint cry. But she wasn't sure whether it was actually a cry or just a whooshing sound of the wind.

Rain slowed down and she heard her name being whispered. She turned back and saw a woman veiled in a white sari advancing towards her.

As she came forward Joyce stepped backwards.

"No need to fear. I just want to talk to you. And I will leave. I won't hurt you." A sweet but enticing sound came from her.

Joyce was still doubtful but she slowed down her pace.

A branch of lightning came down between them and they both saw each other well.

She is perfect. Mridula smiled. I have found her.

Joyce couldn't believe her eyes. She only has read that there are seven people in this world resembling you. But she is now seeing one of her resemblance. A lot of questions arose in her heart.

Who is she?

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"What do you do?" Arun was trying to make a conversation going and build a rapport with her. He was slowly getting sober.

"I am a college student." Mohini didn't looked at him, her eyes concentrating on the road; dark and lonely.

He looked at her. *Yes you are.* He could see that.

"BA psychology." She continued, looking at him for a split second knowing his eyes were affixed on her. She was feeling irritated but she hardly showed it.

He just gave a buzzing sound. He has no interest in knowing what she studied.

"What are you doing here at night?" He knew many colleges girls become nocturnal birds to earn some pocket money for their personal expenses.

She didn't replied but gave him an inviting luscious smile.

"I would like to know." He insisted.

"I had a party. But my friends left unknowingly that I am stranded. Luckily I saw you." She explained.

Yes, today is my lucky day. And I am going to share my luck with you. A wicked smile tugged at his lips. It's been quite some time I had a college girl like you.

They both kept silent. He watched her like a wolf checking out its prey. She secretly enjoyed his stare knowing everything is going her way.

Then there was a cloudburst. The sky leaked gallons of water along with flashes of light. Heavy winds accompanied with monstrous sounds made the whole atmosphere scary. Even the vipers couldn't clear the front glass enough and she found it hard to drive. She kept going though lowering the speed of the engine.

"I can't see the road. How are you driving then?" He asked.

She pressed hard on the brakes. "I was about to stop. The rain is too heavy. I think we will have to spend the night inside the car." She looked at him.

"I don't mind staying in the car with a beautiful young girl." His eyes were scanning her.

Suddenly the atmosphere became calm. No winds, no lightning but a slight drizzle.

They both looked out, surprised.

"Where are we?" Arun voiced, unaware of his surroundings.

"I think I lost the way in the rains." She apologized. *Shit, how did I miss the road?*

"It is okay." He ran his hands over her shoulders.

She lowered her window pane and they heard a cry afar. They looked at each other. The squeal was loud and clear.

"It sounds like a baby." She found a way to get rid of this pervert and alert her friends. She needs backup.

"Yes. I too heard that." Arun said, uninterested.

“Please go and check out. It wasn’t far.” She wanted him out of the car to make a call.

They could now hear the cry clearly as it was closer to them.

“Someone might have ditched the baby.” Her voice was worried. “I don’t feel like leaving the baby.”

He cursed his fate and got out of his car. He walked towards the direction of the cry. He walked quite a few minutes towards the rear of the car closer to the shrubs but couldn’t locate the baby. Still he felt the cry is far.

Where the hell is it coming from? He wondered.

He cleared his way through the thick vegetation with his hands and entered into the woods. He strolled until he found a mud trail. He treaded forward towards the cry. The cry was getting clearer and louder. *I am close.*

Rain pelted down with full force and the cry was silenced.

He reached an open ground, vacant and wet. The rain has slowed down again but drizzle was still there.

He realized the cry has stopped. There was total silence. He looked around.

Nothing unusual. Was that all my thoughts? Is the alcohol creating all hallucinations?

He closed his eyes for a second. He recognized the place. *This is that same place.* Dread filled his heart. *It was here, I...*

He then opened his eyes. He saw, a thousand fetuses scattered all around the ground around him. A bloodied tiny hand of a fetus pulled his pants. *This is not real.* He whispered to himself. Fear was at its peak inside his heart.

He didn't know it was the silence before the storm. Then suddenly, a huge deafening cry of a thousand babies burst into his ears and scorched into his head. He never felt his body so light before. He was floating like a feather.

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5

They both stood in the drizzle for a long time, unvoiced.

Nature was becoming calm. There was silence. Then Mridula's question came, piercing through that silence.

"Where are you going?"

Joyce looked at her replica. *Why should I tell you?* But she was unable to resist her authoritative eyes.

"I am just going somewhere I don't even know."

"What is your name?"

"Joyce."

Mridula walked closer to her and scanned her. She was a bit shorter and the semblance was not more than seventy percentages. The features matched perfectly and no one would argue if anyone says they were sisters, Mridula being the eldest. Her breasts were smaller and skin pale and Mridula knew that she was untouched. Joyce would be in her early twenties, a college student most probably. But that doesn't bother her. *I'd have been thirty if I was alive.*

Joyce was also thinking the same. *Is she my sister?* But there wasn't any possibility as far as she knows. *This woman must be seven or eight years older to me.* Joyce was born when her mother was twenty.

"Don't worry." Mridula smiled. "We are not related. We are just coincidences."

Her eyes sparkled wildly in the night.

"What do you mean by coincidences? Who are you? Why are you following me?" She was confused and she needs answers to clear them.

"We are not blood related yet we are similar in our looks. It was destiny, mostly my destiny that made me meet you. How lucky I am? I was just looking someone to take my place and I found you, the perfect one to be me."

Joyce didn't understand a word she said. She was mystified more. "I am confused."

"That's better." Mridula whispered.

Joyce raised her brows. Her mind warned her. *This is not going to end well. Get away from her.*

"Who are you and what do you want from me?" She wanted quick answers so that she could be going away from her. Her destiny is calling her.

"I am Mridula." With a malevolent grin she continued. "I want you."

"What?" Joyce frowned.

It was getting more complicated. *You need to be going.* Her mind warned her.

"I know you are going to die. You want to jump into that gorge." Her grin grew wider. *I can't let you die girl.*

"How do you know all these?" The puzzle was getting intense and Joyce knew the answers won't be coming as fast as she expected.

"Because I need you for a better purpose." An evil growl came out of her mouth. "Tell me your story. Why do you want to die?"

"It's my life. I will decide what to do with it."

"I can help you." Mridula's voice softened.

"I don't need anyone's help. I know what is better for me." Joyce shrugged. *Death is all I need.*

"I won't let you die."

"Just leave me alone. You cannot stop me." She made quick strides back.

"You can't run away from me." She advanced further.

Both of them looked into each other's eyes.

"I found you and I can't let you go. My purpose is far more important than your pitiful life and your unpurposeful intentions." Mridula voice sounded like a threat.

"I don't care about your purpose. I need to go." She turned back and started walking. She took a few strides and looked back to see whether she is following her. She saw the path vacant. *She's gone.*

Joyce sighed and twirled herself to march ahead and she saw Mridula standing in front of her.

How? Her eyes grew wider with fear. *She is not a normal woman.* She came up with a conclusion.

The whole nature was silent. No wind, no rain and the road were deserted.

"Just let me go." Joyce pleaded in a trembling tone.

"Tell me your story. I want to know why you want to die."

"What relevance it has to do with all these?" *You are not an ordinary person. You must already know everything about me.*

"I will help you get revenge." *I can read your mind. Yes, I know everything about you. I want to make sure that you get rid of the very bondage of your past life before you take my place. I want to finish your story.*

"Revenge? I don't know whether I want revenge." *She knows. Why she wants to hear it from me?*

"Let me judge it by your tone. You can start now." She encouraged her.

Joyce had no other choice but to narrate her life. They walked together towards the gorge while Joyce told about her.

"His name is Naresh. It started as a casual friendship. As it grew older we realized our friendship is deeper than what we could fathom. One day he proposed and I couldn't say no." Joyce stopped for a while and sighed as if she was reminiscing the old days.

"Three years of deep passion and I introduced him to my family but then I found him trying to get away from me. I didn't know why but then I saw him with another girl. I thought she might a friend. With one of my friend's help I tried to find out who she is and the revelations he made was shocking. Naresh was engaged to that girl. Her father was a billionaire. He ditched me for a wealthier girl."

Tears fell from her eyes and Mridula understood the pain she was going through.

"I really wished to kill them both and end my life but ... I am ... I don't know how." She stopped crying and she uttered again. This time her voice was bold. "I want revenge."

You are my body and I am your soul. I am going to live through you. Mridula had a sinister smile tugged between her lips.

"Why are you helping me?" Joyce wasn't done yet. She was shivering with fear but she wanted to know.

"I am just doing a favour." She said. *To myself.*

"What do you want in return?" Joyce looked deep into her eyes but she couldn't understand what they said.

"You." Mridula was calm, her voice sweet but penetrating.

"What do you mean?" *Is she going to kill me?* She wanted to die but now fear arose inside her.

"Nothing, you won't understand." A soft smile and a slight jerk of head replied her.

"Try again."

"Let us concentrate on your revenge first." Mridula wasn't ready to reveal anything to her. She shouldn't know anything. She is only a tool, a medium.

"Tomorrow is their marriage. I don't want that to happen." Joyce said.

"It never will." Mridula assured her.

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait and watch."

"You are not a normal woman, are you?"

Mridula smiled. "You are right. I am a wandering soul. I don't know what happened to me."

"So that is why you contacted me. You want me to find out what happened to you. Or, how you died." She was getting a clear picture. "I will help you find out what happened to you. And then I will leave this earth peacefully."

Mridula shook her head. *I need you for more. You are going to live as long as my Rajeev lives. I want to love him through you.*

She thought about what she and Rajeev talked about earlier that night.

"Why did you leave me without saying a word?" He badly wanted to know it.

She didn't reply.

"Mridula, tell me."

"I didn't leave you. I was always here."

"People are calling you a ghost."

"I... Ghost... No... I am your Mridula."

"You are just a spirit."

"What happened to me Rajeev?"

"I don't know. I thought you left me. And now I can only feel your ghost."

"I waited here, for you. I tried to ask to the people but they ran away from me." Her voice was trembling.

She kissed him but she was thirsty for more. It wasn't possible. She didn't have a body. They lay on the bed not knowing what to do.

I have to find what happened to me. She decided.

She looked at Rajeev to see him in deep slumber and she decided to slip out of the bed, to go out of the village to seek answers.

And then she saw Joyce, her lookalike. Barring minor differences, she was perfect to replace her.

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Far away from them, Rajeev woke up from his sleep. He walked out of the house into the blinding darkness.

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Mridula smiled. "I am a wandering soul."

"So that is why you contacted me. You want me to find out what happened to you. Or, how you died." Joyce was getting a clear picture.

Mridula shook her head. *I need you for more. You are going to live as long as my Rajeev lives. I want to love him through you.*

"You want me in return." She continued. "I don't understand what you do mean by that."

"I told you that you won't understand. I just need you to accept me." Mridula was calm though her mind was turbulent.

"Are you going to kill me?" Joyce looked straight into her face. But because of the darkness her facial expressions weren't visible. She wasn't afraid of death but by a ghost she never anticipated. She wanted painless quick death. A string of fear entwined her.

"No, I will never do that. You should live." She pouted her lips. *I am going to live through you.*

"You need my body. Now the picture is clear. But I am unable to guess what you are going to do with it."

Mridula didn't utter anything further. *You are smarter than I thought.* She waited for her to say more.

"I will help you to find out what happened to you. You will help me to get my revenge. We are equal. So I am

not surrendering my body to you. After my revenge I want to leave this planet." She was adamant in her decision.

Just accept once and give me access. And I will be the one who decides whether you leave or not. She needed some way to let her inside Joyce's body, just one word of acceptance or a positive nod.

"If you want your revenge I want you to accept me inside your heart." Mridula tried to hide her eagerness. *Inside your body to be precise.*

"Okay." Joyce accepted willfully.

Finally. Mridula grinned sinisterly.

"You can have me. I don't know what you are going to do with my body but till I have my revenge I am yours." Her brain said yes but her heart was against the decision.

That was enough. No further invitation was required for Mridula. Her spirit form was inside Joyce before she knew what was happening, ready to explore every human desire. And poor Joyce, she did not have any idea of what she has done, she will never know. Her spirit, freed from her flesh will have to go to a place of no return and will have no knowledge of what is going to happen with her body. She will never know how and when her revenge will be done unless Mridula decides to keep her spirit along with her until the vengeance is fulfilled.

Mridula gently caressed her new body. She heard her new heart thumping rhythmically inside her chest. Her new skin prickled and everything she felt was indescribable. *Rajeev I am new and fresh now.* She had a sultry smile on her face. *Let's start again afresh. A new life. A new beginning.* She felt the unquenchable thirst for lust slowly spreading throughout the body. *Five years was a lot of time.*

Mohini looked at her mobile phone again. Network was dead. She really wished her friends to find her soon. *Come on guys. Please get me out of here.*

Winds have ceased but the drizzle was still there. Atmosphere was calm and silent. Mohini lowered the window glass and looked outside. She thought that it's been quite some time that he has left her. Darkness was heavy outside the car. Mist has started spreading the vicinity.

Shall I take the car and go? She asked herself.

At that moment a mighty lightning struck the earth. In that silver light, she saw a dot like image far away in the rearview mirror.

It might be him. She sighed with relief.

As she looked at it, the image grew bigger. It was walking towards the car. She genuinely prayed that he would reach as early as possible.

But, as it got closer, she realized that it was someone else. Small rays of light flashed in between. She looked at him, going into the woods, following Arun's footsteps. She saw a shadow-like figure behind the man. A dark silhouette of smoke!

A shadow at night? She doubted. She recognized it was a shape formed by the fog and it was moving with him. *This night is getting creepier.*

He was walking as if he was in a dream.

What's happening around me? She could feel the dread surrounding her. It was eating her from inside. Even in the cold weather she perspired profusely. Along with fear, an aura of excitement embraced her. As if in a dream she opened the door. She kept the car keys inside the pocket of her jeans and tiptoed behind the man. Flashes from the sky showed her the path.

Arun opened his eyes.

Where am I? What happened to me? He was lying on the ground.

All his drunkenness has been lost. His head was straight with full sense. He tried to remember the events happened before he collapsed.

Mohini, a baby's cry, and fetuses all over the ground... he thought he was in some fantasy world. He looked around. Even in the dark he recognized the place. It sends chills through his spine.

He never wanted to come to this place again. And yet, he is here. *Is it coincidence or has someone purposely took him here? Only Mohini could answer that.*

His head scorched in pain as if hundreds of nails were struck into it. He pressed his head with both the hands.

What the hell is happening to me?

He could feel the pain slowly fading away. He rubbed both sides with his thumbs.

Then he heard, cracking sound of the dry leaves. Someone was coming. He could understand that person is not so far. He turned and looked at the direction of the sound. A person, blinded by the dark! He couldn't see the face, but two yellow orbs of fire. Behind him, black smoke transformed into some shape was moving as if it was his shadow.

"Who is it?" He asked.

There was no reply.

He came closer to Arun and kneeled before him. A lightning struck heavily in the sky. Arun saw the man in front of him in the blue light. His face became blunt.

"You never expected to meet me again, right?" The voice felt like it was coming from a cave, disrupted but

majestic. "When you killed me, you never thought I will come back, did you?"

What the fuck are you saying?

"No, I haven't killed you. You are very much alive." Arun's voice was dead inside his throat.

"Shalln't I be the person to avenge my death?" A hard, rustic voice asked crittering like a thousand moths.

Arun was wondering where this was going. *Why is someone who is alive talking to me like this? I haven't killed anyone.*

He wanted to scream his innocence but as if someone has tied up, his voice was frozen. His tongue was cold and stoned.

"Revenge is divine and I am the angel who came to carry out the task of revenge. The unborn angel." The man in front of Arun laughed like thunder but he felt the voice is coming from behind, from the shadow.

Is he really dead? Is he a ghost now?

A chilly breeze caressed Arun as it passed through sending chills all over his body.

It stood up in front of him and the black mist moved vigorously creating curls behind the figure.

Arun tried to convey his message by shaking his hands that he hasn't done anything. *It's not me. I haven't killed anybody. Please spare me.*

She wanted to run away from there but she couldn't. She felt she is been glued to the ground and she could feel the fear engulfing her. She was clueless about the whole thing but she knew that whatever she was witnessing is unearthly and illogical. There cannot be any sensible explanation to this.

As she watched the man in the black cloak with all the dark fumes rises up. He torn away Arun's clothes and

raised him up from the ground by groping around his neck. She could see there was no resistance. He then threw the man down and Arun landed on his back. Then he grabbed both of Arun's legs.

Is he going to rip him into two?

She took out her cell phone from her pocket and checked. There was no reception. *Why aren't they here yet?* She wondered.

This wasn't what she expected. It should have been easy money. Just go with the guy and direct her friends to his home. A drunken guy is easy to tie up somewhere and they take whatever they can from his home and elope. The plan was so simple but it is now more than complicated. She was about to witness a cold blooded murder.

She was expecting her friends to come and pick her up but they were nowhere to be seen. They should have been tracking her GPS signal of her phone. Now she doubted whether they were even able to track her.

She heard a deafening scream and she saw the most horrifying sight of her lifetime which will be haunting her all her life.

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7

A new dawn was rising when she returned to Rajeev. She knocked the front door but got no response. Early sprinkles of light came down along with sweet chirping of birds. Mridula felt a never ending blitheness from inside.

She knocked again, this time forcibly and repeatedly. After a few moments Rajeev opened the door with ire clearly visible on his face of breaking his sleep. He looked at the girl and was surprised to see her close resemblance with Mridula.

Is she her sister? He knows that she doesn't have any siblings.

"It's me Rajeev." Her soothing voice came out and Rajeev knew he was willfully surrendering to it.

"Mridula." He called her passionately.

She wrapped her hands around his neck and let her lips brush his.

A black smoky figure looked at them from behind a tree. *Time for the next prey.* A whisper echoed around it. As Rajeev and Mridula entered the house, it disappeared into the morning zephyr.

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Sub Inspector Adam was an efficient police officer. He was thirty seven but unmarried. His wife as he often says is his duty. He was a well built man towering six foot tall with broad chests and well packed abdomen muscles. He works

out two hours daily in his personal multi fitness room he prepared in the first floor of his house.

The buzzing of his mobile phone woke him up. At first he thought it was the alarm but later he realized it was a call. He picked up the phone and looked at the screen.

Hameed calling!

Something bad has happened. His mind warned him. The time was only five in the morning.

"What happened, Hameed?" He asked anxiously.

"We found a dead body." His voice was shivering.

"Where?" He asked again uneasily.

"At the ground, near the old highway. It's a terrible sight, unbearable to watch." Hameed's trembling voice informed him.

How many terrible sights I have seen? What new this one could make?

"What are the odds Hameed? How bad is it?"

"It's worse. A male probably thirty years old lying in a pool of blood. He is naked and has been sheared into two. Not too far away we found a girl lying unconscious in the shrubs. We have shifted her to the hospital. Only she knows what happened here."

"What do you think?" He tried to figure the scene in his mind.

"I think he was attacked by a lone tusker. Adam we need you here."

Adam let out whistling sound. "I will be there in half an hour." *It is not as bad as you say.*

He walked straight into the bathroom. He looked at the mirror and asked the image. "Why did you go that way? That's an old, dilapidated and abandoned highway."

He felt something is not right. No one uses that path unless they were planning something else. *What could have been their intentions? Whatever they intended to do was failed because of a wild tusker.* He could guess only one thing. They both went there to have some fun but in between they were interrupted and he got killed.

The surprising element was he ever heard of any feral animals roaming around that perimeter. He took his eyes off the mirror and cleansed his face with water. When he raised his face and looked again he saw a silhouette standing behind him. He suddenly looked back but saw nothing. He stared at the mirror and there was no silhouette. *Fucking illusions!*

Too much of thoughts. He pouted his lips.

He suddenly felt that he is being watched. It was so strange he couldn't stop looking around. A wave of panic created an aura of fear around him. He never felt this way before. *This is unexplainable.* He wondered. A presence of someone or something haunted him.

He quickly freshened up and took his jeep with his eyes roaming around the house to see if anyone was really watching him. He started the jeep.

On his way he looked at the back seat as the feeling of someone sitting was getting intense. His concentration was getting disturbed and he almost collided with an oil tanker.

Sheer luck!

He was able to turn and twist the vehicle and the jeep just brushed the sides of the tanker. It was a close call. His heavy suspiration said it all.

Is there really someone with me?

He wasn't ready to believe in ghosts. He doesn't even believe in gods, ghosts had no chance. Yet he felt a mysterious aura close to him and he knew it was unavoidable.

Hameed was waiting for him at the spot. He walked with him to the place where the body was found. It was indeed a horrible sight. The man was torn into half till his heart. It was obvious he had a painful death. Blood pooled around him. His internal organs were seen outside.

"What do you think?" Hameed looked at his eyes.

"I don't know. I am unable to think after seeing this." He could feel the bile churning inside his stomach. *It's good that I didn't have my breakfast yet.*

"I definitely feel it would be a wild elephant." He said undoubtedly. Adam wobbled his head slightly as he partially agreed with him. He looked once again at the body. His vulture eyes scanned from top to bottom.

"Is it possible to tear someone like this without pressing one leg to the ground?"

"No." Hameed replied looking at the corpse. His brows took a half moon shape.

"Was the girl also naked?" Adam asked.

"No. her clothes were intact."

"Something doesn't match up. If it was a lone tusker one of his legs would have been crushed." Adam continued.

"Are you saying it is not an elephant?" Hameed interrupted.

"I am not sure. Whatever it was, there was more than one. They pulled him hard to tear him." Adam concluded.

Beastly fun! Hameed thought.

Black fumes shaped into an irregular form and slowly moved up the hospital wall to the fourth floor. It entered into the room through the open window and positioned itself onto the ceiling. Mohini opened her eyes to see two black smoky arms coming down towards her.

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“Rajeev.” A soft voice called out.

He opened his eyes. His goddess was standing in front of him with a cup of tea.

“You sleep like a baby.” Mridula said, smiling.

Rajeev was still staring at her, wondering everything is a dream. “You always said that.” After greeting her inside he went to bed to lay down but sleep took him over. In those two three hours he had the most peaceful sleep he could in five years.

She has bathed, and a sweet fragrance of coconut oil and the flowers she wore on her hair filled the room. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the aroma. She sat beside him on the bed and gave him the cup of tea. After he took the cup she slowly caressed his bare chest.

“Rajeev, I love you.”

“I still believe that I am in a dream. For the last five years I searched for you in every nook and corner of the world.”

“You missed the one place you should have searched.” She shrugged. “I knew you would come.”

“I should have come home earlier. I shouldn’t have left.”

She moved towards him and placed a gentle kiss on his lips.

There was a knock at the door. A voice called out.
“Rajeev sir.”

“Naanu.” Rajeev whispered. He slipped out of the bed after passing the cup to Mridula.

He opened the door to see him dressed for the office.

“Sir, are you not coming to the office?” Naanu asked, surprisingly. He didn’t see Mridula inside the house. After he heard about the stories of Rajeev last night, he wasn’t sure he would see him alive.

“No Naanu. I will join after a few days. I have some personal matters to take care of.” Rajeev saw a motor bike in front of the house. “Naanu, I need a new bike. Can you do that?”

“Sure sir. Either by today evening or tomorrow morning I can get you a new one. Which one would you prefer?”

“Royal Enfield.”

“It will be done sir.” Naanu assured.

“Thank you Naanu.”

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Alex woke up and waited for his morning tea. Black tea with few drops of lemon juice did wonders for him. His head was still heavy. He knew he drank too much last night. Each time he take a decision that he will control the urge and drink less but after three pegs the decision vaporizes and he ends up drinking limitlessly.

“You are awake.” Lia said, surprise in her eyes. “Do you remember when you came home?” She scoffed, while passing the teacup to him.

While sipping the hot lemon tea, he tried to remember about last night. As usual he ended up having a war of words with Arun. *Shit. I should call him now.*

Of the four friends Alex got married first. It was an unexpected proposal that came along four years ago. Alex's family was mourning the death of his brother Amnon when the proposal came. His family instantly accepted. They needed a change, something to cheer as Amnon's death was untimely and it crushed the spirits of everyone.

Alex dialed the number for the tenth time. But no one picked up the call. *Where the hell is he? I should have called him last night itself. That bugger will be still vexed with me.*

A police constable heard the phone ringing and he walked towards the car. The door was locked and he returned to the sub inspector.

"Sir." He called his superior officer.

Adam looked at him with his brows raised.

"A phone is ringing inside the car."

He waited to hear more from him.

"The door is locked." He informed.

"Check for the keys." Adam rolled his eyes.

"It might be in his pocket." The constable reported his helplessness.

"Break the window glass. We will know who is this unfortunate guy is."

"Yes sir." He went back to the car and broke the glass window with the wooden police rod. Phone was ringing again. By the time he opened the door and picked up the mobile the call ended. He looked at the live screen to see there are seventeen missed calls from Alex Thoppilan. He tried to open the cell but it was locked with some pattern. He decided to wait for the next call.

It will come, it has to.

Alex dialed Shah's number hoping that he will be able to get connected with Arun. *That bugger must still be angry with me.*

Shah attended the call and he said about the unattended calls. Though he wasn't in a mood for an early conversation, Shah laughed loudly.

"You have really pissed him last night." He couldn't stop laughing.

"He is naive, you know that." Alex defended himself.

"I know. Don't worry, I will call him and let you know." Shah disconnected the call and dialed Arun's number. He heard someone picking up the call.

"Hello." An unfamiliar voice greeted him.

He couldn't recognize the voice. *It's not Arun.* He looked at the screen to ensure he called the right number. *Yes it is.* Doubtfully he responded. "Hello."

He heard a polite request from the other end. "Can I know who I am talking to?"

"No." Shah's voice became rough. "Who are you? Why do you have this phone?"

"I am a police constable."

Oh shit. He has been caught for drunken driving.

"Can you please tell me who you are and what relation you have with this person? It is very important."

"I am Shah. Shahid Anwar. I am the *grama panchayat* – village council secretary." Shah decided to reveal his identity.

"Thank you sir. How do you know this man?"

Police and their irritating questions! "It's only a petty case, right. Tell the SI to leave him."

"Petty case? I don't think you actually know what has happened. This is a very serious issue." Policeman was not in a mood to back off.

"What is the problem? He is my friend." Shah sensed that the situation is more demanding.

"A man has been brutally murdered, and we think it is your friend." Finally he decided to say the truth. *Let him know it. He is thinking that it is some ordinary case.*

"What the hell are you talking about?" Shah shouted with disbelief.

"Can you please come and identify the person. If it's not him then he may somehow involved in this."

"I am coming." *It cannot be him. Did he murder someone? It could be an accident.*

"It is at the ground near the old abandoned highway."

Shah heard the call getting disconnected but he couldn't take off the phone from his ear. *Is it him? No, it couldn't be. Why did he go there? What was he doing there? As long as he thought about it he felt he was going mad. Who did he kill?*

As he was thinking his phone buzzed following with a sweet tone. He attended the call without even looking at the screen to know who was calling.

"Hey Shah did you talk to him?"

"No." He responded absent mindedly.

"No, why?"

"His phone is with a constable."

"What? Is he gotten arrested? Call someone and get him released."

“Come to the ground.”

“Which ground?”

“That very same old ground.” His voice trembled while saying that.

“Why? Are you insane?” Alex frowned. *I am not going to that ground again. It only carries bad memories.*

“He is there.” Shah replied in a low voice.

“What is he doing there?” Alex was shocked.

“Call Mohan also. Come fast.” He cut the call and quickly grabbed his car keys. He sprinted down the stairs and his wife and parents wondered why he was in a hurry.

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"We shouldn't be here." Mohan said. Uneasiness was clearly visible in his moves.

"I never wanted to come here again." Shah agreed with him. The air was discomforting around them. A withering stench of rotten flesh loomed over them.

"Neither does me." Alex shook his head.

They were standing near the white sedan owned by Arun. They parked their cars behind it. They recognized the car and its number.

Three Mahindra Boleros were parked in front the sedan and they were surprised to see that.

"What was he doing here?" Mohan stared at his friends' faces.

"Digging up the past, maybe." Alex muttered.

Mohan looked at him panicked.

"Where is he?" Alex looked into Shah's unemotional face while he was dialing Arun's number. The policeman immediately picked up the call.

"We are here." He said.

"Okay. Just cross the road and walk through the shrubs and into the woods till you reach an open ground. I and my senior officers are here." He cut the call.

I know where to come, I know that fucking spot.

"Come on, let's go." Shah walked in front.

"Do we have to go there? It was better if we could avoid this." Mohan's words wandered in the air.

While crossing the road they heard the alarming noise of the ambulance.

Mohan and Alex looked each other. They grabbed Shah's hands and asked in unison.

"What's happening here?"

"It is better to see than to explain. I too don't know exactly." He freed himself from their hold and moved on. Blindly his friends followed. They were silent till they reached the open ground. From afar they saw eight or ten policemen scattered around. Something lay on the ground covered by a white cloth.

"Is he dead?" Mohan's voice trembled. Alex's stature wasn't different.

The constable came forward and guided them to the sub inspector. He signaled the constable. He walked towards the corpse and moved the cloth a little so that the face was visible. The face wasn't damaged and they easily recognized their friend.

"Arun." They screamed.

Adam gave them some time. Once he felt they have regained themselves he asked. "Does anyone of you know what he was doing here?"

They shook their head with denial.

"What made him come here? It is almost one and a half kilometers away from the road." Adam asked again.

Once again they didn't have any answer.

This is the exact spot. Shah realized.

It was somewhere here. Mohan thought.

"What happened to him?" Alex asked in a very mild voice.

"We are not yet sure. But our primary assumption is that he was attacked by some wild beasts."

"Never heard about any wild animals here. Nothing reported here as I know." Alex couldn't believe that.

"One possible explanation is that he was stopped by an angry tusker. He may have run into the woods and at this spot the tusker caught him and killed him."

"There are no elephants here." Shah said.

Adam nodded to his constable and he removed the whole cloth to reveal them the whole body. And they saw the horrible sight.

This is revenge. Mohan whispered for Alex and Shah to hear.

"We don't know the exact cause of death until we get the postmortem report. He had a girl with him. She was unconscious. We have shifted her to the hospital. She is unharmed but in shock. Only she knows what happened here exactly." Adam said casually to know their reaction.

A girl? They looked at each other's face.

It was her. Mohan's voice was dread filled. *She took him here. Now she got us here.*

"His engagement was fixed for next week." Alex told Adam. "But we are not sure whether it is her until we see her."

"Right. Let's move. We will go to the hospital and check on her. Let's hear what she has to say about this tragic incident."

Mohini looked up with dread filled eyes. Dark cloud filled the entire ceiling of her room and two hands like structures advanced down towards her. She knew that it is the same thing that killed the man at the ground. It has now come for her.

She was still in shock. She was unable to move and her mouth was unvoiced. She saw two sparkling spheres looking at her. A face like figure formed around them and came towards her. The smoky hands almost reached her neck and stopped.

The eyes sparkled brighter and twinkled twice. *The real prey is coming.* A whisper was unveiled.

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Dr. Gautam has attended many cases but this was a rare one. Everything looked normal, x-rays, scans said no internal injuries and yet he couldn't understand what is wrong. *She is in severe shock. But her brain waves are normal.*

"She is still in shock." Doctor said casually without even looking at him. He was going through some report cards. Adam waited for his next words.

"She went again through some tremors and it worsened her condition. Whatever she saw has rooted deeply into her mind." Doctor said while he raised his face and looked at the Police Inspector sitting in front of him. His face said it was hopeless.

"What do you think?" Adam became gloomy looking at his face.

"I don't know. But I have a conclusion." He took out a pen and started rolling it between his fingers.

"I will hear that." Adam hopefully waited for his words so as to get something to take this case forward.

"She saw the gruesome murder of this guy and the way he was killed really shattered her from inside. I think it is giving her nightmares."

I already know that. Tell me something new. A fruitless explanation. He knew it will be wastage of time sitting there.

"Are you saying she won't talk?"

"She really needs time to recover from that. Those memories won't be easy to erase from her. But for the time being stress is the last thing she would need. We better not remind her of those incidents whatever they are."

"How much time does she need?" It was his last hope. "She is the only witness doctor."

"We can't predict an exact time. Maybe days or weeks or months or even years." Doctor's reply was discouraging.

Adam sighed heavily.

"She will be in observation for next twenty four to forty eight hours. If there is any progress in her status I will let you know." He had to give something to him, at least a hope.

"Thank you doctor. Can I see her?" Adam tried to smile.

"There is no use. She is under sedation. It is better to see her tomorrow."

Adam shook his head and stood up to leave. He walked a few steps towards the door and stopped. He turned back and looked at the doctor.

"What if she murmurs something in her sleep? You said nightmares, right? So there is a possibility."

"I am not sure of that. But yes, there is a possibility. I will put a nurse to watch her."

"I would like a cop to be with her."

"Sure."

Adam walked out of the doctor's cabin and looked at the guys waiting outside the door. He shook his head to tell them that there is no hope.

The three friends looked at each other.

"Sir we saw the girl. It is not the girl he was about to marry." Alex told him. "We have never seen her before."

Then they walked away from Adam.

Outside the hospital Mohan whispered. "This is revenge."

Alex turned at him. "I am hearing this for the second time. Who's revenge?"

Shah also stared at both of them. He could see a hint of dread in Mohan's eyes. He feared something or someone.

Mohan whispered again. "You know what we did at that ground."

Alex laughed atrociously. "That is a closed chapter. Don't try to reopen it. That fool might have angered an elephant to become a hero in front of that girl and it did what it knows. You know how he acts after getting drunk. Let's go home and wait till the post mortem report comes. We will inform his family later."

"I can't believe that bugger is gone." Shah sighed.

"Neither could me." Alex looked at his friends. "I hope he will come back to fight with me." He walked swiftly towards his car so that others won't see him crying. He tried to stand strong but he knew it won't take long time to break him. They always fought for silly reasons but the bond between them was so strong. He is going to miss his best friend and brother.

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10

A dark cloud hovered over that house. It moved towards the blackboard tree (also called devil's tree) close by and a dark figure slowly enveloped the tree. The tree shook vigorously as if it was possessed. A pair of flaming eyes watched the house inquisitively. It clearly knew whom to target and was ready to strike. *Tonight we have something to do. Be ready.* A clandestine whisper echoed around the tree and once again it shook robustly.

She was busy cleaning the house. A new bliss filled the house. Rajeew stared at her with unblinked eyes. For him she was Mridula. Only Mridula. She doesn't even allowed any other thoughts to enter in his head.

The house was filled with her aroma. His eyes were filled with her. He only heard her. All his senses felt only her.

After five years that old house has finally awoken. Only he and his Mridula.

She walked towards him. A cold breeze enveloped them. Her lips sketched on his forehead. A kiss rhymed on his closed eyelids. A thousand kisses made music on his lips. Their bodies intertwined and not even breeze had a space between them.

They kissed like never before and a zephyr passed chills through their spine. A divine lust embraced them to deepen their hold and they couldn't free their lips from the most celestial union. Their veins were filled with unquenchable thirst. It was their moments. Finally an amalgamation of their desire filled souls. But the final union

had to wait. She had to get rid of Joyce completely. The body was not yet hers to the whole.

When Rajeev opened his eyes, Mridula was getting ready. He was surprised.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to attend a friend's marriage. I promised I won't miss it." She hid her sinister smile.

His thoughts didn't warn him that she is not human.

"I will join you." He sighed.

"No, my love. I want to give a surprise and that won't be possible if you come with me." She chuckled at some thought.

"But what will I do here all alone." He looked desperate.

"Please." She kissed on his forehead.

"On my lips too." He demanded.

She pressed herself onto his chest and kissed his lips. "Wait for me here. I will come as soon as possible. We have a long day ahead." She smiled wickedly.

"Are you planning to finish all the debts of five years tonight itself." He replied with a naughty grin.

"Yes." She winked. "Tomorrow is our fresh start. But this night will be a night to remember." She promised.

"This night won't be a night anymore."

"It won't. We are not going to sleep this night." A playful smile twinkled between her lips.

"Don't forget me when you meet your friend." He teased her.

"It won't take much long. I just have to pass a message, wish the couple and I will be on my way to you." She stood up from his body.

"I will be waiting."

"I know my dear. Haven't I given that promise I would definitely not leave you for even a minute. Five years were long wait and I don't want to miss you for a second. But promises are promises and should not be broken." She kissed on his bare chest.

A vague memory rushed into his mind.

It was a rainy day. A woman said; I will be back soon. I want to be in your arms tonight.

But she didn't keep her promise. She disappeared from his life.

She read his mind. "I don't know what happened that day, but I promise it won't happen again. In an hour I will be back and this evening and night we will be together. I will keep you busy all night." She bit her lower lips and he pulled her onto his body again.

Their lips met again and their tongue coiled like snakes. She didn't want him to stop and he wasn't in a hurry to let her go.

The cold zephyr once again surrounded them with an aura of lust and they felt it was irresistible.

"I will have to freshen up again." She whispered.

"I will help you." He replied while kissing the back of her ears.

"Just wait for an hour and you will be rewarded." She pouted her lips.

"That's not fair." He puckered his eyebrows.

"Love you." She didn't look back but she knew his eyes were following her. *I have some debts to pay.*

They both had a dirty smile tugged between their lips.

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As she walked inside the premises through the open gate, all the eyes were affixed on her. She was looking gorgeous in a sky blue chiffon sari with matching adornments.

Mridula decided to awaken Joyce inside her partially. She didn't want to give her full control as it could lead to lose the body. Joyce still has a tendency of suicide and once she retains her body she may go that extreme path.

Joyce. She whispered inside.

What are you doing with my body? She responded immediately.

That's irrelevant. We are here, at your boyfriend's house.

What, why are we here?

You said that you wanted revenge, remember?

I don't know what kind of revenge I want.

Leave that to me, I will take over when it is necessary.

What are you going to do?

Whatever is needed, you just wait and watch.

Joyce didn't reply. She had no idea what the spirit inside her could do. It has sucked into her body and now she has no power over her own outer shell. Ever her own mind and thoughts are been controlled.

Joyce, everyone is looking at us.

Not us, me. This is my body. Joyce wished to have her body back. She wanted to run away from here but

unfortunately the control wasn't with her. She was helpless. *I have been here couple of times. I know every member of his family.*

Mridula could know every thoughts Joyce had. She smiled inside. Yes, this is your body. *They are looking at you. It is because you are looking impeccable.*

She walked towards the house guided by the ghoul and whispers arouse around her. Naresh's family members wondered what she is up to. Will she create a ruckus? Relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours and many other people looked at her as if she is the bride. Auspicious moments for the marriage ceremony were getting closer. Naresh's parents were thinking about how to get rid of her silently.

As she entered inside the house a hand stopped her.

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Mohan sat at a corner of his room. He locked the room from inside and switched off all the lights. He preferred the dark and expected the darkness would save him. He didn't know he was drastically wrong. A dark cloud slowly moved down from the sky over his house. Two spheres glowed in the dark. The dark fumes slowly entered inside the room and shaped into a human form. The lights started flickering and he saw the fumes spreading inside the room and two hands like structures coming towards him.

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11

As she entered inside the house a hand stopped her. It was Naresh's mother.

"Come with me. I have to talk with you." She dragged her.

Joyce walked with her into a bedroom. Janaki, Naresh's mother quickly locked the door from inside and turned towards her.

"Why are you here?" Janaki glared at her.

"I... I want..." She stuttered. Mridula decided to take over. "I want to see Naresh and talk with him." Her voice was stubborn and Janaki was surprised.

"You already know he stopped every bonding he had with you. Today is his marriage. So you should leave now without creating any scene." Her voice said she was worried and she didn't want her here.

"Aunty...I..." Joyce stuttered again. "I told you I just want to talk with him and I will leave." Mridula spoke arrogantly.

Janaki was taken aback. In one moment Joyce was pathetic and out of words and in the next moment she became bold and persistent. She noticed the change in voice, it felt like she suddenly becoming another person.

Please don't interfere. Joyce warned Mridula.

You are unable to speak properly.

Can't you see I am trying?

You are only showing her your weaker side. It was the main reason you were thrown out.

"You can talk with him later, not now. The bride's people will be here anytime."

Joyce waited but didn't reply. She thought Mridula will answer. *Do it your way.* She willingly gave her the authority. *I will be a spectator. Let me see how strong a woman can be.*

Joyce did felt Mridula smiling inside. She knew the heat of vengeance starting to boil inside her heart.

"I will finish it before they come or else ..."

Janaki raised her eyebrows. "Or else?" She stared at her, frowning.

"It is better you don't know." She walked towards the door and unlocked it. Janaki wanted to stop her but she couldn't move as if an unseen hand has wrapped her in its grasp. Joyce climbed the stairs ignoring all the stares of the crowd. After entering Naresh's room she locked it from inside. Two of his friends were with him. They looked at her anxiously. Joyce was even more nervous to see Naresh again.

"Today is your last day." Mridula laughed with an evil tone.

She was someone else. She wasn't the Joyce he knew all these years. Joyce never talked aloud; she was soft like a kitten. Not even a stare of anger comes from her. Even her devilish grin was alien to him. Naresh couldn't stop staring at her eyes. There was anger, rage and all the malicious emotions inside her irises. But she was flawlessly beautiful.

You are not the Joyce I once loved. He said to himself. His friends were also in similar shock. *But you are such a beauty I wouldn't want to miss.*

Joyce was terrified inside. She never heard such a malicious laugh. And now that has come from within her. She is going to kill him. The lover side of her never wished that to happen but a novel secret side of her wanted to see him hurt but not dead.

Are you going to kill him?

Don't weaken me with your emotions.

I said I don't want this marriage to happen. I don't want to kill him.

Shut up Joyce. Just wait for his reaction.

Promise me you won't kill him.

I can't promise now. Situations can change anytime. Let him save himself.

"Joyce I still love you." He started.

Did you hear that?

"But this marriage is already fixed and I can't change that."

His parents put him in this situation. He is helpless. Joyce defended him.

Keep quiet and listen.

"Let's be together secretly." He smiled wickedly.
"Look at you; I am not blind to see how beautiful you are."

Joyce heard Mridula smirking inside her.

He wants you to be his whore. He has just lust for your body. He doesn't love your soul.

"I still love you. I don't want you to be away from me. I will give you all the happiness." He said while adjusting his *dhoti*.

"What will be the name of this relationship?" She scoffed.

"Not all beautiful relationships bear a name. But I am sure ours will be bound by love."

"Or only lust?"

"It doesn't matter as long as we are together."

"I don't want to be a subject of fulfilling your thirst." Fire lit up inside Mridula.

Joyce didn't say a word. She knew she can't. He broke her heart again. She remembered how eagerly he wanted to have a physical relationship. He wanted to use her before he leaves her. But somehow she resisted his provocations.

Naresh looked at his friends and some messages have been transmitted through stares.

"Let's not waste these precious moments. I want you Joyce. I have a longing desire. This will be my marriage gift from you." He smiled wickedly and advanced towards her.

Mridula smiled back and waited. He got closer to her and kept his hands on her shoulders.

"If you cooperate we all can enjoy." He leaned to kiss her. But a hefty blow landed on his left cheek and what he saw were only stars revolving and rotating around his eyes. It wasn't a woman's weak hit but it felt like a sledge hammer. As he covered his face in his palms he tasted blood in his mouth.

"I think you didn't hear me clearly when I entered this room."

His friends were running towards her but halted to hear her words.

"Today is your last day."

I support you. Joyce whispered. *He doesn't deserve to live.*

I know you will finally say that. Mridula chuckled.

"Are you threatening us? We are three, men and you alone. You think you can walk out of this room."

One of the friends stared at her chest and wetted his lips.

I am not alone. Joyce whispered. *Can we survive?* She shared her concern with Mridula.

Don't worry. I can handle this.

The lights in the room started flickering. Air moved violently around her. The ambience slowly changed vehemently.

She saw a hand flashing hard at her. She stood unmoved but raised her elbow to stop the blow. He screamed aloud as if he has been stopped by an iron rod. He felt his bone cracked, flesh damaged and pain scorched through his nerves. The other one kicked her hips but was stopped in midair. She twisted his leg and he lost his balance. Even after he fell she didn't let go of the hold but twisted even more. Naresh saw her hand also twisting along.

She is inhuman.

"Leave me." The guy cried.

Naresh took a flower vase and threw at her. It hit her and broke into pieces as if it was hit against a concrete wall. She smiled at him and then twisted the leg sharply. His calf bone shattered and protruded out of his flesh. Blood squirted out.

Joyce closed her eyes as she couldn't watch the blood.

You can't close your eyes.

I don't want to see.

I am taking over completely.

They are all yours. Leave me out of this.

With pleasure, but you will watch. I will make you watch and give you the satisfaction of revenge.

Her fist moved fast and crashed into the other friend's chest. His ribs were broken and the blow did heavy damage to his heart. His heart beats decreased and he collapsed unconsciously to the ground.

Naresh stood up trembling. "Who are you?"

Mridula smiled in return.

"Joyce I am sorry I tried to hurt you."

"She's gone." A different voice answered.

Gone? He stood confused.

"She is never coming back. Joyce has left you with me and my time begins." A sinister laughter followed the words.

She walked towards him and grabbed his throat and thrown him upwards onto the rotating fan.

His body was scattered. The flesh and blood were strewn over the walls.

Bye Joyce, this body is now mine.

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12

Fr. Abel suddenly jumped out of his bed. He was sweating profusely. He knew he has had a horrendous daydream. He tried to remember but wasn't able to recollect anything. Something was obscuring his memory. He slowly rubbed his salt and pepper beard.

Something is after him. His life is in danger. I need to meet him immediately.

He slipped out of the bed and turned the lights on. The clock said 4.38 pm. He draws a cross on his forehead. *O father, who art in heaven, holy be thy name...* He started praying.

He was forty years, an elegant looking man with broad chests and a fit athletic body. He used to work out when he was young and has managed to keep his physique enviable, courtesy of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

He quickly made some calls and arranged a deacon to take over the church duties from tomorrow and informed the bishop's house that he won't be available for next few days. He didn't give a conveying reply to where he was going but his words appeared to be of high significance.

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Lights flickered rapidly and he saw two hands like structures approaching him fast. There was no time to panic but yet he was terrified of the sight.

A lot of thoughts ran into his head and Arun's mangled body came before his eyes.

He guessed it right. Some ghost is behind them and it took his friend's life. Now it is after him. He had only read in

stories and watched in movies about ghosts and demons but this was entirely different. The smoke assembled together at a corner of the room and formed into a fetus. It was unbearable sight to see a bloody fetus with life. Its small hands and legs were moving and he saw its chest pumping. The scream was penetrating through his ears. It still hadn't a full human form as it was in a developing stage. Mohan has never seen a living fetus before in his life. His throat went dry. His eyes were blinded. He wished he was seeing a dream. Two small hands lengthened towards his neck and a deafening cry of babies filled the atmosphere.

His only choice was to run and he ran for his life. Within seconds he opened the door and ran towards the kitchen. The fetus again turned into smoke and it followed him swiftly. Mohan saw someone standing in the kitchen. He could see only the backside of the person. It was a man and Mohan felt he was familiar.

"Who are you?" His words stuttered out of his mouth. He looked back but no smoke was following him. It has disappeared. *Was it some delusion?*

There was no answer and the man didn't turned too. He asked again in a louder and bold voice. "Who are you and what are you doing in my home?"

The man turned his head towards him and smiled. "Did you forget me?" His voice was sinister and smile was demonic.

He recognized the person. He has seen him. This meeting has already been anticipated. But he never expected him in his home, not an untimely visit. *Is he behind Arun's death? Is he who takes revenge?*

"Why are you here?" Mohan stuttered again.

"I was waiting for this meeting for a long time." His smile grew more maleficent.

Fear filled every cell of his body. *What is he up to?* He knew the answer but wished otherwise.

"Why?" Mohan was shivering and sweating profusely.

"I want an answer. Why did you kill me?"

His eyes shrunk with fear but he found a ray of hope. *I didn't.* His voice was stuck and he had to say again after clearing his throat. "I didn't kill you. No one did. You are very much alive."

His laughter was aloud. "You killed me."

The voice was angry and Mohan saw fire in his eyes.

"You crushed my head with a stone. How can you forget that? You burned me alive."

His dread multiplied hearing those last words. He remembered hitting someone but it wasn't this man. He was never there. There was no way he would know that unless... His heart beat faster. ...unless he is already dead and he is a ghost. Black fumes made a wing like structure behind him which further strengthened his thoughts and doubled his fear.

Mohan clearly remembered that night, that godforsaken night at that ground where Arun had a horrible death. He knew whom he hit that night and what they did after that. He started it by hitting the person behind the head and making unconscious. They ensured that there was no one at that ground as it was abandoned long way back. They were waiting for that moment for a long time and they would never forget that night, it was equally delicious and horrible. They chose an unusual end to the night and it eventually erased all the deliciousness of the moments they had earlier. They were unable to savour the pleasure.

But not even a worm would have known what happened there that night.

Mohan stared at the person standing in front of him. He looked very much human. But the smoky wings were unearthly. *How did he know?* That question roamed over his head, like a wandering demon. Fright filled his heart but survival instinct rose over. He wanted to live. He didn't want a horrible death like his friend. He had just a single option remaining. Plea for mercy!

"I am sorry, it was a mistake." He pleaded. "You killed Arun, please spare me. I will do anything for you." He looked hopefully into his eyes.

The man in front of him smiled and it grew sinistrously wide. "I know you will do anything I want."

"Yes, anything you say. I am sorry I was involved in all that but I am innocent." He was trying to make a mental rapport between them.

"I hope you remember everything that even the night also witnessed. It was a horrific night." He secretly looked at his face to see his sentiments. But it was emotionless.

"And you are claiming to be innocent. Aren't you ashamed to betray your friends when death knocks at your door? You don't even deserve to use that word. Even innocence will get filthy. I remember that night when we were together at that ground. You gave me the worst death anyone could ever have." His voice was calm as if it was the silence before the storm.

"I am sincerely apologizing to you. I already told you I will do anything for you."

"Yes you will. You will die like you killed me. You will smash your head, crack it open and scatter your brain all around this place and I will watch."

He looked deeply into Mohan's eyes and as in a dream he moved closer towards the wall. He bends his back and

with full force slammed his head onto the wall. His forehead was ruptured and blood started flowing down. He repeatedly banged his head till he was unable to move his head. His head was worsely cracked, the skull broke, red fluid flowing down like a stream. The wall cracked and blood splattered in the gaps.

The man in black enjoyed the sight and he definitely liked the sound of the thuds. A deafening silence filled the kitchen. Mohan was struggling to stand erect. He was shaking, his legs were wobbling, and his sight was blinded by blood flowing from the big wound on his forehead. Flesh was torn off and the skin was hanging yet he smiled as if he has fulfilled his master's wish. He was really a mess but this wasn't going to stop any soon.

The man made a growl and Mohan walked towards the kitchen closet. He took out a knife and started scratching all over his body. He torn away his clothes and stood completely naked. In a few minutes he was just a blood covered flesh. There wasn't an inch of his body from where blood was flowing. Groans and growls came out of his mouth. His breath was fading and his legs were fragile. Knife fell down from his hands and his whole body followed. A thousand fetuses lay around him and a million cries filled the atmosphere. The room was full of blood and the sight was horrendous.

The dark man walked towards him. He caught hold of his legs and effortlessly raised him and smashed him hardly onto the ground. His head exploded and his brain splattered onto the wall and the tiled floor.

"You smashed my head and I have destroyed it." An evil echo filled the room.

He then kept his right leg over his head and with full force pressed it down. He heard the bones cracking and soft flesh crushing under his foot.

He looked at the shattered pieces with satisfaction and walked out through the kitchen door.

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Shah was approaching Mohan's house and he saw the silhouette of a man walking out of the gate. He couldn't recognize the shadow. *An uninvited guest.* He whispered. *What the hell he is doing here?*

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13

Rajeev looked at himself in the mirror. He has changed.

That decimated man who came to the village has now transformed into a lively man. His grafted cheeks fluttered. Eyes had a new spark. His skinny body was full with a new energy. He could feel his heart pounding with a new rhythm of life. He could see the old Rajeev reeling with strength five years ago standing across the mirror and smiling at him. The old man with vigor and glory grinned at the new man who was rediscovering himself.

You are doing well. He congratulated. Soon you will become what you were five years ago.

Rajeev smiled back at his mirror image. *I will. Now I have my Mridula back.*

He remembered that evening when he lost her; he lost all the essence of his life. It was their second wedding anniversary. As usual she went to her office. He took a leave for the surprise arrangements. No one was invited; he wanted to keep it for them. The interior was decorated and a thousand candles illuminated the room. No light bulbs were switched on other than in the verandah. A cake was set on the table in the hall which had an image inscribed of their wedding day, Rajeev and Mridula looking at each other into their eyes. He opened a small rectangular case and saw a new gold necklace which he was to present her today. Time crawled slowly and he felt like eternity. Unexpectedly rain showered down. He wore a cream dhoti with thick silk lining

and white cotton shirt. He dialed her when her office time ended.

She said. "I left the office and will soon join you. I want to be in your arms tonight." He could feel the snicker tugged between her lips. But she never reached.

After half an hour he tried her number again but it went to the operator who said, *the subscriber you are reaching is either out of coverage area or switched off.*

Hours snaked off and she was never in coverage area. Candles burned out and the room was engulfed by darkness. He didn't know what to do, where to search but waited in the void of blackness. *Where are you?*

"Rajeev, I love you." Mridula said with all the passion she could have. She stood behind him admiring his looks in the mirror.

"I love you Mridula. I don't want to lose you again."

Even before he could complete the sentence her lips crashed into his. He holds her tight as if he doesn't want to let her go. He wanted her to be with him till the end of life. He wanted to get old with her and see their future generations. He wanted to be happy with her and their kids.

The thuds in their chests grew louder and single in rhythm. Sweet moans escaped her lips as his tongue crawled into her mouth and intertwined with her tongue.

She left out a heavy sigh of desperation as he released her lips.

"How long I waited for this moment?" He said.

She could understand that. She too was waiting, unknowing what happened to her.

Once again they realized that their lips were sealed in the ecstasy of a passionate kiss. He pressed her head towards

him and the kiss was long and ardent. Their eyes were closed, goose bumps filling up their skin and heartbeats getting into the sequence of synchronization.

"Today our new life starts." He muttered in her ears.

"Don't forget our past. We need, I need to know what I missed and how I missed."

Rajeev didn't respond.

"It wasn't fate that we were away from each other, but we were forced to be separated. I can feel that."

"I don't understand what you are implying."

"I didn't die a natural death. I think I was killed. And my reason of demise shouldn't go uninvestigated." She growled.

"Tomorrow we will start looking for answers. But tonight..." He tried to calm her. He waited five years; he could not wait any longer.

"Yes love, tonight we start afresh." She moaned. "We have to settle our five years of drought." She squealed with lust. She was longing to be with him. She waited in her spirit all these years.

He too has ached for her. He missed both his home and his love.

They started again with locking their lips and allowed the sensation to entwine themselves together turning into wild passion. It was just a matter of minutes for them to surrender themselves to the sensation of love and the unquenchable thirst of lust took over. They both unveiled themselves to each other and stared at with pleasure and satisfaction. Submission was the only thing that enveloped them and they found themselves in the sweetest union as their torsos intertwined like serpents. Groans moans and

whimpers squeezed out of them till the pleasure splattered out of them.

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Adam woke up early. He looked at the luminescent dials of the clock. It said 4 am. He took the bottle of water from the table and gulped a few mouthfuls. He could see the gore and blood of the dead man in front of his eyes. He had seen worse accidents but this was unnerving. *Some maniacs must be behind this.* He thought as he stretched his muscles. He looked at the folder kept at the table. It was details about Arun,

Arun, twenty nine years old had black hair and green eyes. He had achieved black belt in karate. *He can easily face three or four men on his own.* A businessman by profession, he is mostly into real estate and construction. He had his chain of restaurants and was running successfully. Illegal land dealings and property disputes have been reported against him but most of the cases had been compromised. *He is no saint. Maybe he deserved it.*

Adam closed the file. *We are lucky that the media doesn't know about this murder.* He thought scratching his head. *But when we hand over the body to the family, questions arise. How can that situation be handled?*

His mobile phone buzzed and he saw there was an incoming text. He read it. 'Come at once. I have the postmortem reports.'

I'm coming. Let me hear what you have to say.

He stood up and walked into the bathroom when the lights started buzzing. Brightness increased unexpectedly and he thought the bulbs were going to explode. He was blinded by the light. A white silhouette moved alongside him silently but he couldn't see.

He took a quick shower and dressed in pale blue shirt and black denims. He decided to take him motorbike instead of the jeep.

He didn't notice a white cloud formation above his cloud. It followed him all the way he travelled along the quiet road.

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Adam halted in front of the Iron Gate.

He saw three cars in the parking lot. A white Toyota Fortuner along with a white swift Dezire and a black Baleno. He recognized the Toyota Fortuner but wondered who would have come for the meeting in the other cars.

He slowly stepped out of his motor cycle to open the gate. After pushing it aside a little more he walked back to his bike and rode in. He put his bike next to the cars and his x-ray eyes scanned the cars to find out who they belongs to. He thought he might know them once he sees them. He was anxious to meet the unexpected guests. *They must be here for a reason and it would provide some vital information.* He thought.

He pressed the calling bell and *gayathri mantra* was heard inside. Within seconds the door was opened and Adam saw the eager looking face of Dr. Subramanian. His face looked like he hasn't slept all night. He was carrying out the autopsy all night.

That's unusual. He muttered under his breath. "What happened, Subru?" He was concerned.

Dr. Subramanian or Subru as Adam calls him was a short man of five foot three. He was chubby and his belly was protruding out a lot than his chest. His face was plump with a thin mustache and curly hair.

"I will tell you. Let Hameed also come." He replied in a calm but eager tone. It seemed he wanted Hameed this instant itself.

"Why him? That murder has happened within my station limit." Adam raised his brows. He couldn't welcome the decision of discussing this case with Hameed unless he knows everything firsthand. *Hameed can know later when I tell him. Till then it is my case and I should have the details.*

In fact the murder was happened within Adam's station limit but Hameed's station limit starts from there. Hameed's patrolling unit found the car first and they informed Hameed first.

"I know but his opinion could be important." Subramanian shook his head in random circles.

"Just tell me what is happening. Why are you complicating things? Is there anything special?" Adam was getting annoyed and Subru sensed that. Adam wanted quick answers and he loves to find solutions as quick as possible.

Adam, Subramanian and Hameed were classmates from school. While Adam and Hameed became sub inspectors, Subramanian became a doctor and is now a postmortem specialist. Their friendship was going strong and they always discussed everything and took others opinion so that they could work smoothly in each case.

"Yes. This is a clear case of cold blooded murder. It seems it was preplanned and a few people were involved." Dr. Subramanian didn't want to unleash Adam's fury so he decided to inform him about his findings.

"What makes you say that?" Adam asked in a semi interested semi unconcerned tone. *I already guessed it. I know it is a murder and cannot be done by a single person.*

"Come inside." Subru stepped aside so that Adam could get in.

They were still standing at the entrance door. Adam followed him into the dining room where two more people

were waiting. He saw them and his brows were raised in question.

What this drama is all about? Is there anything more? He knew them. One was from forensics, Augustine and other was finger print expert, Leo.

"Sit." Subramanian pulled a chair for him. Adam sat but it was evident that he was totally confused. *There are some revelations coming my way. Today this case could be solved.*

"Can you please tell me what is happening here?" He moved his face towards each one of them.

"The victim's heart is missing." Augustine started after a few seconds of silence.

"What?" Adam yelled. "Are we dealing with some organ traffickers?"

"I don't know how to say it, but we could only find finger prints of a single person." Leo said.

"Okay." Adam shook his head in harmony. *Subramanian said a few and Leo is saying one. This contradicts my intuitions.*

Leo continued. "We found a left hand print on victim's right thigh and right hand print on left thigh."

"Impossible." Adam couldn't fathom that finding. He was not a fan of that I-word but this disclosure would definitely make him say that. "How can a single person do such a thing unless he must be as powerful as a monster? Even if he is powerful no one can stretch their hands that enough to tear a man into two till his heart only clutching at his thighs." He shared his doubts.

"You are right but all my calculations reach at that point. Those prints are of a single person." Leo stood strong in his finding. "I couldn't find any other."

"What else can you say?" Adam glared at Leo.

"It's a male probably in the thirties, not more than thirty five." Augustine gave the reply. "I collected whatever DNA samples I could get. But all of them were of a single person."

"How are you sure that our killer is a male?" Adam turned towards Leo.

"Ridge density varies for male and female. It could vary with age also. I can assure you that it is a male but the age factor is a concern. I can only get an approximate age limit." He said confidently. "But Augustine confirmed that my findings are true."

"There is something peculiar about this case." Augustine frowned. "Why was he stripped naked before being ripped? Why wasn't he torn into two but only till his heart?"

"An old ground, an abandoned highway, uncharacteristic murder, unconscious survivor, there are a lot of mismatches. I can't believe that a single person did all this. That is unlikely." Adam sighed. *This is not going anywhere. It is only getting complicated.* "What else are missing?"

"Nothing else but heart. I guess that's why they torn him till his heart." Subramanian added. "There were no signs of struggle. He knew he was going to die and he accepted it."

"He was drunk Subru. I think she led him there and her group was waiting. She must be a decoy. She is the suspect, she knows everything." Leo said with certainty.

"Let me tell you he drank too much to protest." Augustine, the forensic expert interjected. He was young in his late twenties. He looked them through his spectacles. "The alcohol content was too high in his blood. If he wasn't

sodomised then why was he completely naked?" He paused for a moment and resumed. "A drunken man, allowed his captor to strip him and then getting ripped through his torso, breaking his pelvic girdle and tearing his tissues into two sections in the middle of the night. The FIR says that his bowels were out scattered onto the ground and his heart was plucked out. He was lying in a pool of his own blood." Augustine elaborated the scene.

"Then why she was left behind?" Subramanian raised a question. "If her friends did this murder why didn't they took her with them? They would know that she is a threat, a primary witness."

"What if some other people got there first even before her friends, maybe the real organ smugglers? It is possible that her friends couldn't get to the spot."

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15

"She was unharmed. No rape attempts, no external injuries but only shock." Adam recalled the doctor's words.

"The policemen found her hidden behind the bushes. She was completely drenched which says she was there all night. She was unconscious and when she woke up she was trembling. That's what Hameed told me." Adam said. Today we will find out her details and how is she related with this man. She has all the answers, I know it."

"At least we have finger prints and it is clear case of homicide. We have a motive." Leo supported him.

"Well that's a start." Adam shrugged.

Subramanian's phone rang suddenly. "It must be Hameed."

It was. He attended the call. They talked for a few minutes. After disconnecting the call he turned to his friends.

"There is another gruesome murder. His head was smashed and ruptured. It is now unrecognizable."

Adam's phone vibrated and he noticed a text message from Hameed. He opened and read it. *Adam, we have got a serial killing group. Our highway victim's friend has been murdered. Another horrendous murder. You better come here.*

"I need to go." Adam looked at the guys sitting at the table.

"Wait." Subramanian stopped him. "I have another case which might be of interest."

Adam gave him a puzzled look. *How did you know? Did Hameed message you also? Is that what the call was about?*

"It is another murder. Cruel, unbelievable and unreal."

Adam didn't take his eyes off him. *I know Subru, I too received the message.*

"A girl in her early twenties threw a man onto the ceiling fan. Well, you can guess what would be his condition. It was cold-blooded and his friends are witnesses. They say she had inhuman strength. She was unstoppable."

"Inhuman strength, that's absurd. Are we dealing with ghosts here?" Adam scoffed. *This one is new.* Adam thought. *At least there is a killer.*

"Everyone has seen the girl. If you find her and the links between these murders, I guess you can solve it."

"I didn't know about this murder." *You don't need to tell me how to work on a case.*

"It is not in your station limit or Hameed's too. You can call S.I. Rajendran and get the details. They haven't found the girl yet. It happened yesterday evening at his wedding party and the body came to my table for postmortem though it was only bits and pieces. I don't understand why people are becoming so violent and demonic. Joseph must be still working on the autopsy. I will tell him to share the details once the reports come." *If they want to kill why not a simple murder by stabbing or slicing the throat. Why do they enjoy the torturing?*

Adam shook his head. *There is something mysterious happening here. Three murders and an unexplainable way of doing it!*

"Adam, be careful." Subramanian's concerned voice followed him as he walked out of the door.

He started his motor bike and rode off. Again the same feeling haunted him. Someone or something sitting behind him. He could hear heavy but muffled breathing. It was ethereal.

The feeling of being watched made him sick. Someone is always ahead of him. He has to find him. He didn't want to lose.

He has fingerprints of someone; he knew a girl committed ghastly murder. He could guess the motive; organ smuggling. He now has a good lead to follow. His mind was determined. He was confident of nabbing the culprit as early as possible.

Suddenly a transparent mist enveloped him. He heard a heavy sigh. Black fumes swiveled around him.

Don't come in my way. An unearthly tone echoed around him. It felt like heavy inhalation.

The wheels screeched and the vehicle skidded on the road. It was like someone pressed the brakes but he was sure he was in control. *How the hell the disc brakes were applied or by whom?*

He fell off the bike. After a few minutes of grunting the engine came to a halt. He looked around but only could see the dark smog. The darkness inside was getting heavy and he found the scarcity of breathable air. He wanted to run out of it but his body was getting weak.

Revenge is divine. You are just a mortal and you cannot stop it. Another gush of wind voiced a fresh echo. He felt that the voice is scathing through his flesh.

"Who are you?" finally Adam spoke. "Why are you doing this?"

They killed me before I was born. A deeper echo voiced followed by a muffled growl.

He was slowly losing his conscious. The last he saw was two fiery yellow spheres staring at him.

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He opened his eyes to a familiar environment. He looked around and saw he is in his bedroom.

How did I reach here? His head was aching deeply.

He saw Fr. Abel sitting on a chair near the bed watching him. His face looked concerned.

"What happened to me?" Adam opened his mouth. He tried to think about the last moments before he passed out. He could recall two fiery eyes staring at him. He was going to meet Hameed. He remembered Hameed had informed him of a new murder.

"You were attacked by a dark force." Fr. Abel said in a calm tone.

"A dark force?" His eyebrows bent like rainbows. "You mean a ghost." His words were full of disbelief.

The priest shook his head. "It's a devilish force."

Adam scoffed in reply.

"I got it. You are finding it hard to believe." Abel smiled.

"This is twenty first century father, devils and ghosts are just imaginations. There are no such things. Those mythical things are extinct." Adam replied with puckered eyebrows. *This is nonsense.*

"Well, not to me. I believe in God and do believe in demons." The pastor asseverated.

"I don't believe in both." He sighed and looked away.

Abel stared deeply into his eyes. "Do you remember anything?"

"I saw two yellow eyes. They were burning and fire coming out. They weren't eyes but two balls of fire." Adam couldn't believe what he was saying. It is something unhappening that he is uttering, beyond imagination. He thought he had hallucinated at that moment.

Fr. Abel closed his eyes and thought for a while. *I never heard about such a thing. It seems like it has come from beyond the realms of life. This is twenty first century but Gods and demons exist. It is a tough task to make a non-believer believe but he has to try. The mysteries were always there, the secrets remained in plain sight but invisible to the ignorant eyes and minds.*

"How would you explain that?" Abel questioned him. *What you just said is beyond your belief.*

"I don't know. Maybe something unearthly. There has to be some scientific explanation or it was my crazy thoughts." He didn't know what happened and how to describe his experience. It was all of a sudden and heard susurrations. He felt powerless as he saw those yellow balls of fire. It was draining him inside out. Something warned him that he is in between reality and illusory, his mind was in a state of belief and skepticism. Whatever it was, he didn't want to believe it.

"We call those unearthly forces as dark forces with negative energy or simply ghosts or devils. They live among us waiting to strike and spread evil in our hearts."

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16

"I don't think it is a ghost. There should be a better explanation to this." Adam couldn't digest that a ghost attacked him. Someone played a cheap trick. Whoever he is, he didn't want him to reach his destination.

"Since when did you become an atheist?" Adam didn't reply. Abel continued. "You should turn to God. You need him badly."

"Don't worry brother; I can take care of myself." Though Adam's inner self doubted that. *You are the God of your life.* That was his motto. *The body or the outer shell is the holy shrine and the heart is the sanctum sanctorum. The soul is the power source and is divine, the true god.*

Abel is Adam's older brother. He is three years elder but they were friends since childhood. Abel decided to become a priest even though Adam didn't want that to happen. He didn't want to be away from him. He didn't want to miss his best friend. Abel was adamant in his decision. He wanted Adam to be strong without him.

He remembered they were religious and never missed a mass together. They always came first in the church and stood in front. *A lot has changed.* Abel thought.

He prayed silently. *God, forgive him for he doesn't know what he is saying. Enlighten him with divine knowledge and save him from all the darkness.*

"Adam, Christ is the true god and you can't deny that."

"I am not questioning your faith, but my belief is not like yours."

Abel gazed at his younger brother.

"Look I am not saying Christ is fake, I follow his teachings too. I accept his words, especially about belief."

"Yet, you do not believe in him. Why?"

"I now know the difference between facts and fiction." Adam sneered.

"Excuse me." His eyes narrowed.

"Leave it, Abel." Adam was in no mood to argue with his brother.

"No, I want to know what is in your mind."

"I believe in a supreme power that's unexplainable by words." Adam said matter of factly.

"We call it god." Abel replied, his voice firm.

"Yes, you call it god but I don't. I prefer to call it just a supreme power. And it is always inside you."

"Are you claiming you are god?"

"No, each individual has limitless powers deep within. Even all the religions say to look within you to find God."

"Do you even realize what you are saying?"

"I am sane and full of senses." Adam gazed at him. *You have eyes yet you won't see.*

"So according to you all humans are gods."

"Human being is just an outer shell. The divine matter of man is buried fathoms inside him."

They both didn't know where the conversation was going and how it is going to end.

"I don't know how to explain this but people are blinded by religion. When something unexpected happens they need something to hold on and you guys gave them irrational explanations of gods. You say God loves you but he always favours the rich and corrupted but troubles the poor and innocent. I don't know what kind of God is that and why humans should respect those God. For me all the good and evil is inside human heart and all the power is within him. He needs to utilize it well so he can be a better being."

"You are insulting the lifelong beliefs and blaming the Gods for sorrows and poverty."

"Man worshipped the forces of nature all over the world. Because those forces were beyond their knowledge and understanding. But the true power was lying inside him. Few understood and they created, invented machines to acquire power over others. The good and evil came out of him. People created religions to group themselves for good and then gods were made. Some evil minds used the religion to create blind faith for their personal benefits. There is a saying, all the fights were made for God, and no one ever waged a war for devil. There is only one god and that is love. Every religion created on earth is based on one principle, humanity. Unfortunately humans lack humanity. They never understand their true worth and the god they are seeking is buried within them."

"What has gotten inside you? This is blasphemy. You will go to hell for this."

"I am not afraid of hell. Both hell and heaven is here. Right now I am having a hell like situation here. I will find out what stopped me."

"You are fighting against some powerful evil forces. It came in my dream. I think it has now conquered your heart and soul."

"What?" Adam was surprised. *You are now making up stories.*

"Yes, that's why I started early and luckily I found you. I saw the dark cloud enveloping you and seeing me just in a nick of time it left you. You are lucky that a messenger of god came to your rescue. You need Christ, Adam. Only he can save you."

"I do believe in miracles father." He smiled. "I will find it and make it answer for the murders it committed. I know it is some human minds playing some gimmicks."

They both heard a snarl. It came from the hall. They looked through the door and saw a thickened mist slowly coming through. Abel started reciting prayers but it made no effect on the dark fog. Fumes spread out widely and they could hear whispering and rustling sounds and it echoed inside the room.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Abel's panicked tone escaped his lips. He did sense a presence of something obscure.

A heavy sigh was the reply. They heard muffled screams around them. A pungent smell of flesh along with fresh blood filled their nostrils.

The priest took out his rosary and a holy cross and showed it towards the voice.

They are impuissant. A dark malevolent voice whispered. They felt it was coming from abyss. Muffled screams of babies surrounded them.

A rumbling sound followed and they could hear a small wind generating inside the room. It slowly became

turbulent and shattered everything around. It threw them hardly towards the wall. Adam felt his bones breaking and Abel was lucky to fall on Adam.

Slowly the wind seized. The room was a total mess. There wasn't a single thing that hasn't been dispositional. Most of the items were shattered into pieces.

~~I will be watching unknownst.~~ They heard the echo fading away.

"I now believe in ghosts." Adam muttered under his breath.

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17

This is way too powerful than I anticipated. I don't know how to counter it. Abel thought. He looked at his brother. He was lying on the ground like an old sack, crumbled.

Abel heard his words clearly. "I now believe in ghosts."

Even at that moment a twinkle tugged his lips.

"Well that's a start. Now believe in God too." He replied. He checked where he is lying. He offered his hand but he refused. He wasn't in a position to accept that. Adam could feel the pain searing through his hands and he know it could be broken or at least suffered couple of cracks.

"Do you remember anything when it attacked you on road?" Abel asked eagerly. *What was that thing?*

"I remember one thing ... from that road incident." Adam raised his head and looked at the priest. He gritted his teeth in pain. His eyes were half closed. "It said ... it was killed ... before ... it was born. Does it ... ring any ... bell in your ... paranormal ... experiences." His voice came breaking and unclear.

Abel was doing some researches in paranormal experiences and exorcisms. Though he felt some mild occurrences he never encountered with such a great force. It was nothing like what he has ever researched or heard about or encountered with.

"How can that be possible? How can something never been born could be alive?"

"I have no idea."

"What is your condition now?" He asked in a concerned tone.

"A lot of bones might be broken. I can only feel pain piercing through my body. My entire structure is dismantled." He was finding it difficult to speak.

Abel could see how much he must be suffering listening to his words. He gritted his teeth hard in pain and his fists were clenched.

Abel looked around. It was indescribable. The room looked like a dumping ground. The closet doors were ripped open and clothes torn and thrown. Books were scattered. Mirrors and glasses were now broken crystals. Even the ceiling fan has come out of its hook but luckily it didn't fell on them.

This was a warning. Abel knew it. It just wants Adam to keep away from something. Well it has succeeded now. He dialed 101 for the ambulance and then to the police station. He stood up and checked whether he himself was okay. A lot of scratches and lines of blood but he felt nothing serious.

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"Someone is hunting us." Alex whispered in Shah's ears.

"Yes, I know who it is. I have seen him" He whispered back looking here and there to see no cops are watching them. If someone hears then they have to say why they are hunted. He himself doesn't know the person. He doesn't want to be a prey. He was always a predator.

"What? You know and you are not telling." Alex's voice was a little louder.

"Shh, lower your voice." He murmured seeing a few cop's stare is being flashed at them.

They were at Mohan's house still in shock. They couldn't even look at his shattered head which was now unrecognizable. The skull was smashed into smithereens and the brain splattered around the body. His body was full of cuts and blood clotted over them. His chest and belly was cut open and the bowels were out.

"How could someone be so evil enough to kill a man this way?" They heard a constable saying.

"There is surely more than one person. They could be under the influence of high dose drugs. Let's check if there is any robbery attempt. There must be a reason to kill." Inspector Hameed signaled his subordinates for a thorough search.

"There is only a single bastard. And he came only to kill." Shah muttered under his breath. Alex clearly heard his words.

Shah walked out of the door to get some fresh air and Alex followed. Out of the hearing distance of the cops, Alex asked Shah. "Who is hunting us?"

"I don't know." Shah gritted his teeth. "I saw someone walking out of Mohan's house."

"Are you sure he is the man?" Alex couldn't believe that.

He nods his head and told the whole thing he saw last night. As he approached Mohan's house he saw the man coming out of the gate and walking off. Shah parked his car inside the porch and went inside and saw the horrible sight. He immediately dialed police and then Alex. He then sped his car towards the direction the man went. He saw the man moving quickly and kept a safe distance to know where he lives. That man went towards the old highway and disappeared into the woods.

"I don't want to be hunted." Alex mumbled.

"Neither do I. Let's finish him. We shouldn't give him to the police." Shah grunted in a malevolent tone.

"For Arun and Mohan." Alex grunted.

"For Arun and Mohan." Shah clenched his fists.

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He looked outside. Few ravens cawed sitting on a nearby bael tree (aegle marmelos). Dark clouds filled the sky and obscured the sun turning it scary dark.

The omen is bad. Something bad is about to happen.

He recited a few chants but his mind was still veiled by something unknown.

What is it? It is covering itself as if it doesn't want to be revealed.

"Lord, it seems like a disaster is coming." Narayan, a fifty year old man with cunning eyes and chiseled body looked at the sky. A sigh escaped his lips. He has seen many such signs in the sky before and he knows whether it is bad or not.

"Narayan, we have a visitor. He will be joining for lunch."

"Yes lord." Narayan politely shook his head. He looked at the six foot tall structure of the man standing in front of him. Sharp eyes and wide forehead, long raven black hair touching the shoulders, thick mustache with the ends twirled upside, strong and fit body, the man was truly majestic. But today he saw an unrecognizable worry in his face. He has never seen such an emotion in him. He was fearless and confident. The forty four year old sorcerer was too powerful and his name was enough to scare away even the mightiest demons.

Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri!

Narayan served his father Devadattan Namboothiri and after his death his is now serving the son. Undoubtedly son was greater sorcerer than the father. But now he is seeing a concern on this mighty sorcerer's face.

It might be worse.

"What is it? You seem so occupied and uneasy."

He winded his arms across each other. "Something is hiding in plain sight and yet I am unable to trace it out. It is there out for blood. Even the idols I worship are silent. It has no shape. I can see only a dark smoke, what is inside it is invisible. It possesses immense power. I don't know what it is and how to face it."

"Why do you want to face it?"

"You will know it soon. It is now headed towards us."

"Did we provoke it?"

"No, but someone did. It is sober as well as dangerous. We have to know what it wants. We have no other option other than to face it."

First time in his life Narayan felt fear. Sweat ran down from both his temples. He looked at his lord, unless for a few wrinkles of anxiety on the forehead, Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri was unmoved.

"What's to come won't stay behind. It has to come and it will. It only knows what it wants from us. Let's be prepared. Shambho Mahadeva (oh favourable great god)."

He walked inside and strolled to the sacred temple room. He had to perform some rituals. He needs to know who the intruder is and know how to counter the invisible force before it could cause damage to him and his loved ones.

He sat in front of the brick made open fireplace. Fire was already burning inside it. He offered some pure ghee along with bael leaves and crown flowers. Flames blazed ferociously and Brahmadevan whispered some spells to invoke his idols.

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18

Naanu was surprised to see Joyce with Rajeev. She smiled at Naanu. He arrived early in the morning to deliver Rajeev the new motorbike he has ordered. A Royal Enfield Classic 350.

It's good that I ordered the motorcycle. Rajeev thought. His mind was full of death when he came to the village. But now he wanted to live. He never thought he will get his lost love back and he would now cherish the life with her. He ordered the bike only to keep anyone suspecting of his intentions of suicide.

Naanu saw the change in Rajeev, as a new energy has jolted him up. He looked cheerful and well groomed. The young man saw child like enthusiasm and felt the aura of life around his senior.

How easily women can change a person! He thought as a smile tugged his lips.

Rajeev thought to reveal that Joyce is the ghost Naanu saw but then decided against it. *Every secret has its time to get revealed.*

"Breakfast is ready." Joyce invited Naanu. "Come inside."

Naanu was standing at the verandah.

"Next time I will definitely have, sure." He politely rejected as he was already late for work. He wondered when Rajeev would be officially taking charge of the promoted post. He handed over the keys and the papers to Rajeev.

As Naanu walked away, silence developed between them. Rajeev went to the dining table and started having his breakfast silently.

“What happened?” Mridula broke the silence. She stared at him, long and sharp without even blinking her eyes. Rajeev tried to read her eyes but the plethora of emotions were undistinguishable.

“Nothing, I am enjoying the food. Why did you asked?” He was confused seeing the mixed sentiments in her eyes. *Did she think that I didn't like the food?*

They were having breakfast in silence until she asked an untimely question.

“No, I don't want to know about the food. Rajeev I want to know what happened to me.” Her voice was demanding and he couldn't ignore it. But the truth is he didn't know.

“What do you remember?” He had to collect bits and pieces and join them together. He had to find out just like her. It was an enigma and they have to reveal it together. They didn't know something; a powerful dark force was watching them all the time. It was waiting for the perfect moment to uncover itself in front of them.

“My memory about it is blank. I can't remember what happened after our marriage. It seems like my memory has been erased.” She felt pain on her head as if she was hit from back. “Whenever I try to think about it my head hurts. I feel like my head is split open and my skin start to burn. I think I am stuck at some point of memory lane and I cannot go forward.”

“We have to find it.” Rajeev muttered under his breath.

"You tell me what you know?" Mridula encouraged him.

"You suddenly disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes. You went to work as usual, left the office in time but never returned. I didn't know where to look for you. Your mobile was switched off. Since that day I was searching you everywhere. I left our home two days later hoping you would be found somewhere else. I failed and returned here to see you like this. I didn't know you were here in a ghost form and roaming in and out of this village. If I knew I would have returned earlier." He decided to keep a secret which if she knows would make her devastated. "I have no idea how to find out what happened to you."

There is one long shot remaining, a dangerous way. He should know it. But before that I should warn him about the danger lurking above us.

"I need to tell you something very important." Mridula started with a preface. Rajeev looked at her curiously. "Sometimes I feel like we are being watched."

Rajeev's heart skipped a beat. "By whom?" He doesn't know what happened to them earlier but he doesn't want another shock in his life. After five years he got his Mridula back and he doesn't want to lose her again. *Whoever it is, are they trying to separate her from me again?*

"I don't know. There is a presence of immense energy outside our home. It's unwilling to get in but I can feel the rhythm of negative vibes. Something has drawn it here and I feel it won't leave anytime soon." Her voice was calm but they both felt the hidden gale underneath the serenity. She has to alarm him but not to scare him.

"Do you know what it is or what it wants? Why is it here?" Rajeev didn't take his eyes off her. She saw dread in his eyes. Fear of losing her, again. *It is not for me, I guess.*

"I tried but it is invisible or it is hidden, I can only sense the energy. It knows everything about us. But I am not sure whether it is friendly or not. Why is it here? I don't know. Whether it wants to destroy us or protect us, it only knows." She stood up and walked into the kitchen. She took a water jug and came back. She wanted to hide her emotions from him. "I think it knows what happened to me four years earlier."

"How could we get information out of it?" Rajeev tried to be normal.

"I am working on it. It is something soulless. It is just a mass of extreme rage hence provoking it is too dangerous." She wants to know what it wants. She wants to know what happened to her. Only then she could save her love.

"What do you have in mind?" Rajeev's eyes opened wide. *Are you going to play the dangerous game? Whatever it is I won't sit back and watch.*

"I will try to communicate with it. I will offer an aide for its quest." She said it so casual that Rajeev would never panic. *You can't do anything Rajeev. It is beyond your limits. Let me do it.*

"Don't you think it is hearing us now?" An abrupt thought raised in his mind. If it is hearing them now then they are inviting the trouble much earlier than they anticipated.

"Maybe. Though I can't feel the strength of energy now. Probably it is not here now. But we don't know how immense its power is. If it is too powerful and has limitless abilities it can hear us no matter how far it goes." She was blank; it's an undistinguished power source of destructive

momentum and unpredictable. She could feel the resource and sense the enormous strength but was unable to fathom the depth of its power. She had an impression that it could be unstoppable.

"How could we know we are safe?" Rajeev gave her a concerned look.

"We couldn't. But I feel like it doesn't want to enter the house. I don't know the reason." *Can I protect you? I am not sure. But it has to go through me before it could get you.* She resumed. "It could be waiting for someone or something."

"Someone?" He was taken aback. *Is there more, coming?*

"Or something to trigger it. I don't want to frighten you but I can smell blood, raw and fresh around it. It is thirsty."

"Is it a ghost?" He lost all hopes. He knew his happiness is going to be short lived.

"No. Something beyond the ghost world. I told you it doesn't have a soul."

"What is such a thing, so powerful but doesn't have a soul?" Fear turned into curiosity but his heart was already beating unbalanced.

"I don't know." She looked at him helplessly.

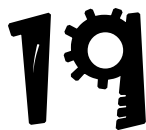
"I am an angel, a fallen angel." A deep whisper stormed over the abandoned highway. Seismic waves snaked under the terrain.

The ground ruptured and the long road cracked open and crumbled like a jigsaw puzzle further creating huge potholes and dents. The already dilapidated path developed more gaps. Soil pumped out through the cracks. A whirlwind shook the entire highway and dark clouds roared in the sky.

"Fallen angel." The whisper resonated over the ground along with the cries and screams of innumerable toddlers.

Sky poured thick deep red fluid.

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Hameed sat in front of his superior officer expecting what he is going to say. He was younger than him but has topped the police training and here he is sitting as the Commissioner of Police. He knew he wants to know about the recent murders which were making headlines in the newspapers. As usual pressure mounts up from the top towards the bottom. Everyone wants answers. Low level cops has to try everything, no matter whether they sleep or not, eat or not, to find clues leading to the murderer. He has nothing yet. He missed Adam. In these situations he would have answered better. Abel called him to inform that he had an extraordinary encounter with a ghost and he is now hospitalized.

“Do you believe in ghosts, Hameed?” His eyes were affixed on Hameed which made him nervous. He supported his head in his right palm and slowly circled on his perfectly cut jaw.

But for his surprise the question was entirely different. Was it a joke or a serious enquiry, he couldn't understand.

That wasn't what I expected. Are you mocking me sir? He tapped his fingers on his lap, his irises constantly moving around in its sockets. He stared at him with puckered eyebrows. No disrespect, he considered his senior is dead serious from his tone. “You mean Djinn? No sir.” *I only believe in Allah.*

"Same here." His voice was calm, with no emotions in it. "What do you think has happened to Adam?" His eyes pierced into Hameed expecting a perfect reply.

How do I know? I myself want to know. We only know what Abel has told us. I haven't even seen Adam to ask him.

He decided to keep quiet trying to keep up his stare with the higher ranked officer. But he failed. He lowered his eyes and looked at the name plate. Mahadevan I.P.S., Commissioner of Police.

"I think something has gone wrong between the brothers." Mahadevan decided to reveal what he thought seeing that his subordinate is out of answers. "Only Adam is injured severely while his brother has few scratches only."

"Yes sir." Hameed listened carefully.

"I think they were under the influence of drugs and I strongly believe Abel attacked him and he created such an atmosphere to make it a ghost attack."

Never. Abel is a priest. Adam never takes drugs and is stronger than Abel. Abel, as long as I know, hasn't used drugs.

"That's hard to believe sir. Adam don't even smoke, drugs is out of question."

"What if Abel is behind those killings?" Mahadevan's sharp gaze was unavoidable.

"He is a respectable person sir, a priest. How can he do such atrocities?" Hameed found it hard to digest.

"Just because he is a priest, we can't leave him out of this. What if a criminal is hiding under the cape? And Adam is also supporting his brother with that demonic story which further increases my suspicion. Is he trying to save his brother? Or are they both involved?"

What happened to you sir?

"I know I sound crazy but I found all this ghost story made up."

Yes sir, you really sound like you are out of your mind.

"But my gut says they are involved in it directly or indirectly, especially the priest. I checked his past and it doesn't seem convincing.

"Are you suggesting we should arrest Abel?" *This is not happening.*

"Yes. We need a thorough investigation. Try to find any connections or links between Abel and these people or with Adam. And arrest him before he could do any harm to the others."

It is not easy as you say.

"I just want to hear from you Hameed, you knew them from childhood. Did you ever felt weird about Fr. Abel?"

Quite a few moments rushed into his mind but he never thought that were weird. He was a womanizer in his college days. He was addicted to alcohol. But he left everything and embraced a new lifestyle, holy and disciplined. Now he started doubting Abel.

"I will send a team to find Abel, sir." Hameed said ignoring his question.

"Keep that arrest a secret. We don't need communal issues."

"Understood sir." *Let me meet Adam first. I need to know whether he has a story to tell.*

"Any details about the girl in the hospital. Her family, work, local guardians, friends, do we have anything."

"No sir."

"You guys are such a bunch of idiots."

Hameed felt ashamed of the insult but kept silent.

"By evening I want every detail I have asked for."

"Yes sir, you will." Hameed stood up and saluted his senior.

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"What do you have in mind?" Shah looked at his friend's face. There was only the rage of a bloodhound. Alex looked ferocious. His fists were balled.

"We will find him and kill him like we did earlier. The same way at the same place. We shouldn't allow that dog to taste our blood." His words were firm and stubborn. Shah heard his teeth stroking against each other.

"Where do we find him? We don't know where he lives." Shah asked helplessly. Alex is in rage and wants revenge but they didn't know their enemy's den. If they knew they could strike easily.

Shah found the similarities in the killings. His friends were tortured and killed the same way they did to her. He now knew how he would die.

"I think I know." Alex muttered.

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?"

"I guess so."

"But if we are going there we need to go through that abandoned highway and I am not going there."

"We have to, Shah. He killed our friends. His next target is us. We have to strike before he could. Let us go in a single car. He can't defeat us if we stick together. I am sure he will be at the ground. I want to know who he is and whose revenge he is carrying out."

Shah nods his head.

A dark voice resonated above the ground. ***"Come on,
I am waiting."***

*****_*****

20

"May I come in?" They both heard the voice followed by a knock on the door.

"Come in." Commissioner replied and Hameed eagerly looked at the door to see who the visitor was. It was Inspector Rajendran. He was in charge of next town's police station.

As he came closer Mahadevan said. "Take a seat."

"Just tell me what is going on?" Mahadevan looked at his subordinates. They sat motionless having no clue of the situation or how to deal with it.

I have to hear everything again. Hameed thought.

It was now Rajendran's turn to hear his superior's barrage of words for his incapability of solving a murder where everyone saw the killer but still police couldn't arrest her yet. Rajendran observed his senior officer raged with emotions but he decided not to say a word.

"Three murders in three different police station limits and a fourth attempt on a police officer and till now we have made zero arrests. And you guys are silent." He was really in a bad mood. His body language and voice clearly showed that.

"Have you read the newspapers? Two murders has been the talk of the town. Somehow we managed to hide the murder at the ground but we can't hold it longer. Those reporters will smell it soon and in no time every news channel and papers will be clutching at our throats. So before

that I need some answers and more specifically a culprit. At least that girl who killed the groom."

Rajendran decided to break the silence as both Mahadevan and Hameed looked at him. "Sir," He started in a low voice. "If our assumptions are right, that girl must be dead by now."

"What I needed was another unsolved murder. The day is going great." A mock sigh escaped his lips.

"Sir, what if she is behind all these killings?" Hameed raised a doubt after hearing the new murder out of his investigation circle.

"What made you assume that?" Mahadevan raised his eyebrows.

"First this murder is also done in an unnatural way like the murders happened in other circles also. Secondly as per his description ..." He pointed towards Rajendran. "This girl has some unnatural strength which strongly suggests that she could be behind other murders. What we need are the missing links."

Rajendran shook his head accepting what Hameed said.

"No, there are contrasts in these killings. The other two murders happened in secrecy but this one was in public in front of hundreds of people. And if these reports are correct, we have a set of fingerprints that belongs to a man. As Rajendran said earlier that girl could be dead by now seems irrelative to previous killings." Mahadevan opposed Hameed's theory. "And in your our autopsy reports both those bodies lacked heart."

Rajendran again shook his head agreeing to his senior officer.

“Sir we found a suicide note from the girl’s house. She left home at night while everyone was asleep. She never mentioned she would kill him. As per her letter she was so heartbroken and she wanted to die before his marriage. She was supposed to commit suicide the very night she left but I think she might have changed her mind. She would have felt jealousy thinking he would be happy after marriage, so she first decided to finish him off.”

Before he could complete, he was interrupted by Hameed. “Who is this he in your story and what relation he has with this girl?”

“She was in love with this guy. He introduced her to his family members but he ditched her for a wealthy girl and that was the reason behind the killing. His friends who tried to stop her were also seriously injured. They say she was ferocious like a lioness. We haven’t received any body yet so we guess she is still alive and on the run. We are trying to catch her alive but I don’t think so. Her revenge is done so she may have finished her life. We are expecting to find her body soon.” With a deep exhale he finished off.

“Forward her picture to all police stations. We need to find her before she does anything stupid. We need her alive.” Mahadevan ordered. “And Hameed don’t forget to take the priest into custody. We shouldn’t leave any loose ends.”

“Yes sir.” Hameed and Rajendran stood up and saluted him.

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Alex slowed down the car before the turn. They both looked at the warning barricade at the left.

This road is temporarily closed for maintenance. The letters has faded away. It’s been there for almost ten years now.

The construction of this seven kilometer highway took two years to complete. Within a year it was shut down because of the poor quality of work. The road became unusable. Lots of potholes developed and accidents became regularity. In a year close to fifty people has lost their lives. Government was work to close the highway for maintenance but the maintenance never happened. Opposition made ruckus against the ruling party and strikes and protests went on. District courts and high courts adjudged early repairs but it happened only in papers. News channels and media campaigns evaporated after a week after they got the TRP of that week and they searched for new social issues. New funds weren't allotted for the renovation and slowly the highway was ignored. Motorbikes and small cars sometimes go through the highway to save precious fifteen kilometers. Many secret trades soon happened as the highway was totally neglected. It soon became the hub for all sorts of drug trades, murders, rape and all other illicit efforts. Even the police decided not to interfere as they got their financial shares regularly.

Alex and Shah looked at each other.

"Are you sure he will be here?" Shah looked at Alex Thoppilan. He still had doubts that their predator would be here. He won't be waiting here. He won't expect his prey to run into him.

"Yes. We will start from here. He must be there at the grave. I don't know how the hell he knew everything." Alex replied. He sounded fierce. He changed the gear lever and slowly turned his car to the left and accelerated in between the small gap of barricade and a banyan tree.

A serene snarl raised above the ground. Storm flew over and the skies poured red slimy liquid. Trees rattled along with the wind. Branches shook vigorously. Dark smog spread across the entire ground with rage. Two yellow

spheres of fire appeared inside the mist. Tar on the roads were ripped open the path became unusable. A huge crack developed across the road but it was invisible from afar. A sinister laughter echoed above.

"I think he will be at his home wherever it is. He will be planning the next strike. I suggest we should find his home instead." Shah said. He was feeling something bad. He didn't want to go the ground.

"We will check here first. If he is not here we will search his home. Wherever he is we have to finish him." Alex looked like a rabid beast. They both didn't know where else to find this guy. But as powerful men in the society they had their ways.

Shah shook his head in approval.

The car moved slowly avoiding the holes and dips on the road. Far away they saw the change in the atmosphere. Sky was dark and it seemed raining. They saw trees shaking with wind. Dust flew along and created a barrier as if it wants to cover something.

"It doesn't look good. It seems unnatural." Shah voiced nervousness. "It is a warning that we shouldn't go forward."

Alex didn't raise his leg from the accelerator. He concentrated on the road and moved forward. "I know he is here. He is expecting us. Today everything will end here. It has to. This is the perfect place, where it started. He killed Arun here and we will finish him here." He didn't look at Shah.

Shah looked at him with fear in his eyes. He knew now there is no going back without finishing what they have came for.

They were two kilometers inside the highway and two more to reach the spot from where they can walk through the woods and shrubs and reach the ground.

Shah stared at the sky. It was becoming darker as they were getting closer. He saw the fierce nature of the wind. He saw the dark rains over the ground. He recognized that the water pouring down is blood red. Fear filled his eyes and heart and slowly covered his entire body.

*****_____*****

21

Fr. Abel drove in his brand new SUV. He admired its posh interiors. He is enjoying someone else's hard earned money. He knew how good it is to be a religious leader.

Just tell them what they want to hear. They will believe it anyways. Well, they don't have another choice. Convince them to bribe the Gods with money and the fools will do. They will spend money to make the Gods happy, but never care the fellow humans.

Apart from his twenty eight lakhs worth Jeep Compass he also owned two Royal Enfield Classic bullets and a Ford Endeavor. He had a bank account worth twenty lakhs.

Humans wanted a story to understand what they thought as enigma about the powers of the universe and the wise in the past created more than one. It developed in the course of time. Cultures developed accordingly and the wars made sure that the beliefs cannot be destroyed. Religions went through tests of fire and molded into strong pillars.

He needed to sell his vehicles as soon as possible smiling at the thought of why he has to do that.

Anna Mathew; a thirty year old damsel, mother of a boy but above that, his secret lover is waiting for him. They were having a secret affair for past two years and they now have planned to elope to a distant land away from all other external bonding. Her husband is working in the Middle East region and Abel got easy access to her heart and body. It didn't take much time to get into deep love and they couldn't keep themselves away from each other. But the society and his position as a priest was a blockade for their relationship.

Let me keep my brother safe from this devil first and then we will leave this country. He whispered.

Abel was frightened by the power of the unknown evil and he was sure it will attack Adam again. He had to make sure that it won't happen.

Adam's pathetic sleep in hospital filled his mind. *Poor boy. He was only doing his duty. What made it pissed with Adam was unknown.* He needed to find that first. What it wants and how to keep Adam safe from its fury? Either he has to destroy it or he has to help it in order to safeguard his brother.

He knew a man powerful enough to erase these threats. He knows it is better to destroy a demon rather than helping it. Helping a demon is risky as you have your hands stained in blood. An evil force will kill you once it feels you are unworthy after the job is done.

An unborn power! It doesn't exist but its strength is felt. How can that be possible?

He had no idea how could it happen. It is too powerful that even the rosary or the holy cross couldn't stop it. He should have had holy water with him. But he never thought he would be facing such an indescribable power.

He changed his path into an old muddy trail from the main road. He entered an old village. He opened the window panes and allowed the village breeze to enter and caress him. He could feel his nerves relaxing and his heartbeat calming down. He felt he has come to the right place.

After travelling for thirty odd minutes through the muddy lane his car halted in front of the wrought iron gate of a traditionally built mansion.

He opened the door and stepped out of his car. In a moment the whole ambiance changed. The sky darkened and wind started to blow. Dust and dry leaves flew in the air.

Abel now knew it has followed him here. He remembered its words.

I will be watching unknownst.

Fear filled his chest and he heard the thuds of his heart beating heavily. As he looked a proud looking man came out of the mansion. He drew some circles in the air and his lips were chanting incessantly.

Sky slowly cleared and the winds seized. The gate opened itself for him and he walked with unsteady steps.

Abel looked at the man standing in front of him.

Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri!

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"Where is Fr. Abel?" Hameed asked his subordinates.

"He was here earlier. I saw him going out an hour ago. I think he went somewhere." He replied politely.

Did he go to kill his next target? Hameed thought. Whatever respect he had for Abel was getting melted like ice. Once the thorns of doubt enter into your heart it is hard to dissolve. His Commissioner's words resonated inside his head. Abel's past is what he could think of.

Hameed was standing outside Adam's room at the hospital. Two policemen stood there as a precaution.

I have to find him before he could do anything.

Constable was waiting to hear his next orders.

"Commissioner has doubts on the priest. We need to find it as early as possible. The orders are to arrest him. It should be secret. We don't need any violence from the crowd if we take a religious leader into custody." Hameed whispered onto the constable's ears.

He shook his head. "Understood sir."

"Take someone from the station with you."

"Yes sir."

"Don't forget to inform me your moves. Try to locate him first."

"Yes sir."

Hameed wobbled his head as an indication for the policeman to go. He gave a customary salute and walked away.

He went inside the room to see Adam awake. He sat beside him on the bed and looked at him. "What happened?"

Adam tried to smile. "You won't believe it anyway."

"Try me." Hameed scoffed.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Adam started with a preface.

Hameed shook his head. "Tell me something I would believe but no ghost stories."

"You can go Hameed. This case will be closed without any evidences."

"I won't let that happen." Hameed was confident.

"They will die and maybe more. You won't be able to stop it. I never let anyone escape from the hands of law but this is different."

"What is your role in this?"

"Do you doubt me Hameed? I have nothing to do with this. It is some kind of revenge. My brother once told me, revenge is divine. I don't know what the reason behind these killings is but I am sure something has provoked it."

"It?" Hameed stared at his friend. Another spark of doubt ignited in him. Abel has told that revenge is divine. So he must be carrying out the act of vengeance.

Adam shook his head. "I now believe in ghosts Hameed."

"Where is your brother now?" Hameed's voice was stern.

"I don't know. He was here earlier." Adam noted the change in tone.

"He is not here. PC told that he left the hospital an hour ago."

"He must have gone to seek help. He didn't tell me anything." *You are into something Hameed, what is it?*

"Tell me something I would like to hear Adam. I can help you and your brother."

Adam closed his eyes for a moment. He now understands what Hameed is thinking. *Abel is innocent. The ghost is real Hameed.* He won't believe unless he sees or experiences it.

"I am afraid I have nothing."

Hameed stood up and walked towards the door. Just before he open the door, Adam called.

"Hameed."

He opened the door and looked back.

"Be careful. Take care of yourself. I have experienced its power and it warned it will be watching."

He pouted his lips and walked out of the door. *Why are you making this so complicated? I could have helped you.*

At that moment he got a phone call. He attended the call after looking at the display.

“Tell me Suresh.” Suresh is a constable in his police station. He posted him at the entrance of highway just to see who passes through. He knew that the highway hides a lot of secrets.

“Sir, I saw Alex and Shah going to the highway. They were in a single sedan. I don’t know what they are up to.”

“Call station and get some guys there immediately. We should know what they are doing.”

“Yes sir.”

Abel must have called them. Is he in a hurry to finish things soon? It seems like that. He must have guessed police is behind him. No Abel, I won’t give you this opportunity. I will get you red handed.

He rushed towards the exit where he parked his Bolero. He needs to reach the spot soon before Abel could do his job.

The evil is inside a divine robe! Game over Abel!

*****_____*****

22

"Shall we go out?" Mridula looked into his eyes.

"Are you sure? What if it can attack us when we are outside? You said it is too powerful." Rajeev frowned.

"I know what I said. But we can't sit inside the house all our life. We have to face it." Mridula had things to do. She wanted to know how she died.

"Mridula I don't think it is a good idea."

"Let it come to us Rajeev. We can't live in fear."

You are a ghost. Do ghosts have fear?

"I have a body Rajeev." She replied as if she knew what he thought. He gave her a surprised look.

"I can read you. I understand your feelings and fears. I can know what all things hidden inside your heart." She chuckled.

"That's not funny." Rajeev pouted his lips.

"I am not a ghost now. My spirit is inside a new body and I am very much alive. I have most of my memories back. Now I am really a human with spiritual powers." She winked with another chuckle.

Rajeev didn't utter a word. He gave her a long stare.
Ghost or human, I want you by my side, always, forever.

"I want to know it, Rajeev. That thought is disturbing me all the time. And I know it has the answer. It is not coming to us, but we have to go to it. I need answers, Rajeev. I have enough powers to protect us." She tried to convince him,

more herself. She wasn't sure whether she could protect both but she promised herself to keep Rajeev safe.

"Okay, as you wish. How can I say no to you?" He accepted half heartedly.

Rajeev's eyes were veiled as Mridula never wanted him to see Joyce again. He saw only Mridula. She was his biggest weakness.

Within minutes they were ready. A new motorbike was parked in front of the house. Naanu left it for him when he came to get his leave letter. He has applied a long leave without mentioning the joining date.

"Where will we go first?" He asked Mridula while igniting the engine after she climbed behind him.

"Wherever you take me." She squeezed her soft breasts against his back and winds her arm around his chest.

Come to the ground. A voice, so authoritative whispered in his ears.

He nods his head and Mridula thought it was for her. His mind was out of his control and she couldn't know it. His mind was veiled from her grasp so that she couldn't prevent him from its control.

She looked at the banyan tree standing left to their house. It was surrounding this tree she felt the unknown presence. She couldn't feel anything now. *It is not here.* But she suddenly felt a feeble energy closer to her. It was so frail but she couldn't penetrate through to know what it wants.

The bike raced off to a destination guided by a dark spirit.

He dug himself into the chair. He went through the reports and statements repeatedly but found nothing worthwhile.

The murder has happened in his limits and as per the reports the girl killed the boy because he ditched her.

Rajendran looked at the fan rotating above his head. He thought even that air is not enough to calm him.

He needs to find her soon. She has committed a murder and she is nowhere to be seen. Her body hasn't been found yet. They checked the runnels, gorges, railway crossings, lodge rooms and everyplace where one would have used to commit suicide. All railway stations, bus stands and even airport were under thorough inspection; they didn't want her to run away into some safe house. Yet she was nowhere to be found.

Where the hell is she hiding? Is someone helping her?

Three newspapers of that day were lying on the table. It expressed and magnified the amazing strength of the girl. Tomorrow they will write about police not doing their duty.

She is poking fun at the incapability of the entire police force. He now knew his job is in danger. He called his subordinates to alert them more and to find the girl as early as possible.

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"Sir the nature is too wild. It is risky to follow them." A constable dialed Hameed and informed about the situation.

"I don't understand." He couldn't comprehend the situation. It was all normal fifteen minutes ago. Alex and Shah already have entered the highway. Whatever is going on, they know.

"You should see this. It's thunderstorm across the highway. Wind is blazing like crazy. Sky is shadowy like dusk. Rain is pouring heavily. And the pellets pummeling down is dark like blood." He signaled another constable to record the threatening nature while yelling through the phone.

"Are they still in the highway?" He heard the sound of cloudburst and thunder along with his subordinate's yell. He was concerned. He wanted them safe. Whatever be the reason of these murders he shouldn't want more victims.

"Yes sir. They must not have gotten out. My guess is they will be driving back." He yelled again.

"How sure are you?" Hameed want confirmation.

"Hundred percent, sir." He shouted.

"Okay. I am on my way." He disconnected the call and raced towards the highway.

The constable looked uninterruptedly towards the highway to spot them. After sometime he had a sight of the car returning through the highway.

As he looked he saw a huge tree getting uprooted and tumbling on top of the car. To his surprise the whole atmosphere went silent.

"Call an ambulance and a fire engine." He shouted to the other policeman.

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"Alex, stop." Shah screamed.

His right leg pressed hard on the brakes. "What?"

"Can't you see the change in nature? The sky is raining blood." He was panicking.

"I can see that."

“And still you are driving. Are you out of your mind?”

“What else can we do? We can’t stop until we do what are here to.”

“We can leave him here. If he is here he won’t be able to survive this tempest. In the mean time we can search his house.”

“Do you really think he will be at his home? Call our boys and tell them scan everywhere.”

“What if it is worth a search? We need to find him and know why the hell he is after us. Those lads haven’t seen this man. Only I know. No one knows where this bastard’s house is located.”

Alex shook his head. He changed the gears and took a u-turn.

You can’t go without my permission. A sinister growl thundered through the air. It spread the entire highway. Cries of thousands of infants screeched through the atmosphere. The whole nature surrounding the highway turned red and violent. Winds rattled the entire region. Even the huge trees tilted vigorously with the blow.

Alex slowly moved the car and suddenly a huge tree fell on them.

In that moment even the nature stood stunned. And then everything went back to normal.

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23

He tried to remember the face. *I have seen the face before. But where?*

He was standing by the side of the street and smoking a cigarette. His eyes were on the road to check if any policemen were coming. He didn't want to pay fine for smoking in public but he wanted to enjoy the smokes even though the warnings were skyrocketing. Government placed statutory warnings but never wanted to ban the production. That time he saw a bike passing and he saw a girl sitting behind whose face seemed familiar.

By the time they went out of his sight. He couldn't stop thinking. It was too familiar face and he wanted to know. The way she winded her arms around him told him they were too close.

Then he recalled, Joyce. She came at a wedding and killed the groom. He was there at the wedding. He heard the stories of love and cheating after the murder.

Who is the guy she is travelling with? Her new boyfriend? Did she kill him for this guy? Did he help her for revenge? A new question aroused in his mind. Who cheated whom?

He threw the cigarette away after he had enough.

The man started walking after picking up the mobile from his pocket to place a call to the police station. He was still thinking about the girl. How much guts she would have had to murder the groom? Not just that, she is now roaming around through the streets after a couple of days. He thought he should appreciate her daring. But more than that he was

thinking about the reward police has announced to whomsoever gives information about her.

Behind him he heard a thunderous roar. He looked back to see a black dog staring at him. It was panting, mouth open and the tongue was out, thick red liquid dripping from its fangs. It had red eyes and was quite larger in size. He heard the growl and its eyes were affixed on him. He knew it was a dangerous situation. He looked around; no one was to be seen. He took two steps back and the dog advanced two steps. The growl grew louder and he was afraid to move. The dog waited for him to make the move and he realized that. He stood fixed to the ground not knowing how long he has to wait that way. He wished someone to pass through.

He heard another growl from behind. He was afraid to look back but somehow he did. For his fear he saw another dog, grey and black in colour staring murderously towards him. He again looked in front and saw the dog has advanced few more steps.

He heard few more growls from the sides and saw more dogs approaching from each of the sides.

What is happening? He didn't know. He will never know.

As he watched the black dog was dangerously close. He had only one option unless anyone passes through this road but that has seemed a distant hope. He decided to run but he doubted he may not outrun them. And he ran as fast as he could. Behind him, the dogs.

He ran faster. He ran for his life. He didn't check through which paths he took to run. He was afraid to look back but he knew they were behind. Growls were heard above his heartbeat. He felt his legs tiring but he shouldn't stop. The beasts are ready to pounce on him. Their teeth ready to pierce through his flesh. He really wished he could

slow down. His heart was thumping faster. His lungs were out of oxygen. His calf muscles shrinking inwards. He used his mouth to suck in chunks of air.

Far away he heard sirens. He recognized it; police and ambulance. They are not far. His eyes sparkled with hope. He found a new wave of energy in his veins and sprinted forward as quickly as he can. He heard the barks getting bolder and louder and getting intense. He knew they are too close and the numbers have increased alarmingly. Afar he heard the sirens going away and again fear enveloped him. He wished at least someone would see him and help him.

By the time he entered the road he saw no one, it was deserted. His last hope was gone. His panting grew heavier but for his surprise he now heard nothing from behind. He halted for a second and looked back. The grey and black beasts have stopped and were staring at him. He took his time to breathe heavily. He was panting; he could feel the wear in his muscles. Sweat ran down his temples. He was perspiring profusely and in a matter of seconds he was drenched in sweat.

Why did they stop? He asked himself with surprise. He looked in front and saw the abandoned highway. He once again looked at the dogs and they were slowly advancing. He slowly walked with his stares moving backwards. The beasts were maintaining some distance but they were not leaving. He stood in the middle of the road and gazed both sides. It was vacant but as he looked he saw some dust from the far ends of the road. It was quickly advancing towards him. He crossed the road and the warning welcomed him. His fear multiplied as he saw what was behind the dust. Thousands of bison, black and fierce was running towards him. Both sides were blocked and he had only one place to go. Run through the old highway!

They took me here. He muttered in horror. There will be no one he could meet till he gets to other end of the highway and he has to run more than ten kilometers with the wild beasts running behind thirsty of his blood. Growls, snarls and roars filled the air and he saw the animals getting alarmingly close. He ran again through the highway road. It was really difficult to run through already dilapidated pathway and he ran into the shrubs. From there he entered the forest region. He was coming there first and he didn't know what lied ahead. He had no other way but once he entered into the forest he thought he could lose them in the woods. Then he saw through the trees an open ground that lay ahead. He can't go there; he has to find another way.

He found something, a tree, thin and easy to climb. He ran towards it and jumped onto it and climbed swiftly. He left out a huge sigh of relief. He climbed upwards and seated comfortably between the branches. He looked underneath him to see a sea of bison and feral canines staring wildly at him. The whole atmosphere went silent. He closed his eyes, his breathing still heavy and felt as if he is safe for the moment.

The sky was getting dark, and dark fumes slowly floated towards him. The monsters made way for the shadow to pass through and reach under the tree. It slowly climbed up and formed a shape and seated beside the man.

He felt something moving in front of him and opened his eyes. Two balls of fire were staring at him. He screamed. The tree shook itself vigorously and the man fell down in the middle of the blood sucking brutal animals. He saw his hands broken. Still somehow he stood up and ran again into the open ground and the dogs followed him. He reached at the center of the ground but was surrounded by innumerable canines from everywhere. He knew this is the end. He will be torn into pieces, sharp fangs tear his flesh and his blood will be sucked up. As he thought he felt the first bite on his broken

hand, teeth pierced into his tissue and waves of pain embracing his whole body.

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24

Fr. Abel sighed in relief. He rushed towards the man who saved his life. He was impressed by his power. *How soon did he clear the devil!* He now knew he has come to the right place. This *man can save me and Adam*. He looked into his eyes. It was regal and overpowering.

"I didn't know it was following me." He had to apologize. "Thank you for saving me." He showed his gratitude through his words. He left out a sigh of relief.

"Come in." The man welcomed him. "Narayan, a chair." He called to his ardent follower. His voice echoed inside the mansion.

He seated himself on his reclining chair. He closed his eyes and his fingers ran over the chain made with rudraksha beads. Without opening his eyelids he said. "It didn't follow you. It hasn't come here."

Surprised, Abel asked. "Then what was that, the heavy winds and the change of surroundings. I know it is unnatural. There was some unseen power behind that sudden change. I felt the sensation of some unearthly force."

"It was just a glimpse of its power and a warning." Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri was calm. He wiped his face gently with the open palm.

"It is warning me, right?" Abel looked at the elegant man in front of him. He felt an impression of divine charisma around him. Yet his heart was fragile with fear. The sorcerer opened his eyes at looked at the anxious face of the loyal servant of god.

Narayan came out with a chair. Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri signaled him to sit.

"Not just you, but me also. It is watching you. It is watching everyone who enters into its existence."

The priest's eyes lit up with fear. "It is dangerous. I am here for help. Please don't say you can't."

"I knew you were coming. I knew what kind of threat is after you. I tried to find it but something was obscuring me. Either it is stopping me or there is nothing. I can't find its origin."

Abel was confused. *Does that mean he will help or he will not?*

"It said it was killed before birth." Abel remembered Adam's words.

"An unborn force! That is impossible. Everything has to be born." The divine wizard rubbed his temples and forehead.

"I too never have heard such a thing. But considering its powers I have no other choice but believe." Abel said, voice trembling. *You have to help me. It is after my brother.*

"Maybe that is the reason I couldn't find its origin. If it is not born then from where it got so much power?" *It is beyond my knowledge. I have never encountered anything that hasn't been born, whether it is demons or angels or humans.*

"It feels like divine but with evil intentions. It is here for revenge."

"It can't kill unless it gets a body. It needs a medium to perform its tasks. We need to find whose body it is using. You were attacked, right but it didn't kill."

"How can it be destroyed if it isn't born?" Abel raised his doubt.

"As you said it is both divine and evil. Then it may possess undistinguishable powers from the universe. I don't think we could stop it. It will stop at its own will."

"I want to save my brother. It already attacked him and he is now in hospital." *It may come again.*

"We can't do anything but wait. I never learned to fight an unborn entity. You have to find some shaman or evil conjurer. My guess is they would be having scripts to combat against it."

"I don't know anyone of them."

."Neither do I. A hundred kilometers away from here there was an abode of evil magicians who performed black magic. Kulathoor mansion!"

"That mansion is destroyed. I heard everyone has died one way or the other." Narayan interrupted.

"Are you sure?" The master looked at his minion. He nodded his head positively.

"What about my brother?" Abel stared at them. *Please save him.*

"His fate is in his own hands." It was painful for him to say. No one has returned sad from this mansion. Today it will happen for the first time.

"There could be some way." Abel looked at him with hope.

He wanted to help but he knew he can't stop this unknown strength. He closed his eyes and prayed to his favourite deity. Lord Shiva!

Hrudaye shankaram dhyayeth

Devadevam jagathgurum

Karpoorasadrsham chandrashekaram

Shoolapaaninam

Trilochanam mahadevam dwibhujam

Bhasmabhooshitham

"We need to know its reason for revenge. We can delay the outcome but couldn't protect anyone. It will break all the barriers. If we try to stop it, we will be inviting disaster."

"How can we delay?" That was his only hope.

"By freeing the body from its grasp. There should be a reason that it is using that body. But we don't know whether it is using multiple bodies. Anyway it is not an easy task."

"If I could find the person I may be able to do it. I am hoping the holy water could stop him."

"It won't allow you. It will protect the body. You saw its power twice. But that was nothing compared to its real strength. It is suicidal to turn against it."

"Are you saying that we should remain silent and watch?"

"In a sense, yes. There is a possibility that once it have its revenge it may leave peacefully."

"Do you actually believe that?"

Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri smiled. "I would like to believe it that way. I sensed its power from afar. It could have killed us and destroy this whole mansion in a matter of moments but it just left after the warning. It is more divine than evil."

"You are saying it left at its own will." Abel's brows stood up. *You were also powerless against it? What made it so powerful?*

"Yes. I told you that was just a glimpse of its power and a warning to both of us to stay out of its way. It doesn't want to hurt us. As long as your brother won't provoke it he would be safe too. But if he has done anything against it then nothing in this world could save him."

"I don't know what he has done to provoke it."

"You talk with him. He must know something about it or why is it after him. My heart says he will be safe."

"I will go immediately."

"Wait, lunch is ready. Let us have it together."

Abel nods his head and walked silently into the mansion. *Adam, tell me you haven't done anything and it will leave you in peace.*

"I hope it won't come against us." Narayan voiced softly. Brahmadevan Namboothiri smiled at him. He too wished the same.

But they didn't know that it has set its fiery yellow eyes on them.

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25

Hameed looked enthusiastically into the video his subordinate has sent him. It was horrifying to watch the rogue nature. He could say that it wasn't a normal occurrence. It felt like the nature was controlled to someone's will. He saw powerful wind rattling through and shaking the trees and dark liquid pouring down from the sky and by the colour he realized that it was blood.

Is that the ghost Adam mentioned? Nature looked like it was possessed.

No he don't believe in ghosts. He only believed in one god. But he knows that what he is watching now is unexplainable. It is not a natural phenomenon. This is the month of December. The chilly winter season. Unexpected light showers may occur but not like this to any heavy extent. The sky looked sinister. He raised the volume. He heard some faint roars in between thunders. He suddenly saw something. He paused the video for a second. He looked closer and saw a dark form like a mist creation. He saw two yellow sparkling dots but he could not make out whether it is some person. The mist has spread horizontally and felt like a beast with wings he has never seen before.

Arun was definitely killed by a beast but not any rogue elephant or any man. Some animal he doesn't know, he needed a more clear footage to recognize the animal. The paused image was blurry.

Adam your ghost stories are fake. I know you were attacked by some animal probably trained by your own brother. It killed

Arun at the ground. He smiled. Are you afraid of your brother, Adam?

Hameed closed his eyes and involved in some deep thoughts. *So Abel is trying to eliminate Alex and his friends, why? What is the motive?* He had to find the reason for the murders.

He needs to dig out the past. He has put two cops for that, one to gather information about Abel and other about Mohan. They were supposed to call him by now but till now his phone was silent. They haven't got anything, he thought.

Media is booming with the news of the murders. They are making their own assumptions, political revenge, robbery attempts, goon attacks and more. They are mocking at the incompetency of the police force. Hash tag campaigns appeared in different social media. They want CBI aka central bureau of investigation to take up the case. His superiors are continuously asking about the progress but he could only say the investigation is going on with full flow and they are so close to catch the killer. Arun and Mohan were top guns, one being a business tycoon and the other ex-husband of a district magistrate. He felt it odd that no one including him recognized Arun was an ex-chief minister's grandson. Alex revealed the identities of both only after the death of Mohan.

As he was waiting his mobile rang. He looked at the AMOLED (Active Matrix Organic Light Emitting Diodes) display screen and saw it was one his constable who went on to check Mohan's background. He slid his index finger on the screen towards left to attend the call. "Yes Reneesh. What do you got?"

"Sir, it seems like this guy deserved to die." He directly opined without any introduction.

"Explain." Hameed knew he was about to hear some vital information.

"He had many businesses both legal and illegal. Money laundering, black money and drugs are to name a few. It is hard to get more details about him. But I think it could be the reason of his murder."

"Okay." Ex-husband of a magistrate with a criminal background! No wonder he was divorced.

"Sir I am with Ousep."

Hameed left out a soft sound but didn't say anything.

"Everything Mohan does is for Alex. They are directly or indirectly partners in most of the businesses. He is the center of all activities. But we have no proof. Alex knows who is after them, I am sure of that."

"Anything about Abel?" Hameed asked. He was eager to hear everything from them. If Reneesh is with Ousep they must have more information.

There was a pause as Reneesh handed over the phone to Ousep. Then he heard Ousep's voice. "For the record Abel is clean sir. He leads a luxurious life for a priest. He is doing research in paranormal activities. A few people said he does some kind of exorcisms."

Now he knew why Adam insisted with the ghost story. It is all a veil to hide the crime. Adam tried to stop Abel but he attacked him. He didn't kill him only because he is his brother.

"One more thing, sir. I don't know how much relevant this is but it could be a coincidence that Abel was a friend of Alex's brother Amnon."

"Was? As if they are not friends anymore." *It is a crucial element to connect them Ousep.* Hameed's eyes twinkled.

"Amnon was killed four years ago. The case was closed without any proper investigation, no arrests recorded. Speculations were Alex killed his elder brother for property."

"How close were Amnon and Abel?" *I can feel the motive now.*

"They were quite close. Amnon decided to give his possessions to charity and wanted to become a priest."

Hameed smiled. He got the motive. *Abel, I will catch you soon. What's your role in this, Adam?*

He was at the hospital. Alex and Shah have been admitted. They had severe wounds. A branch broke and pierced into Alex's thighs. They had many cuts and bruises as the window and front glasses shattered and fell over them. Alex was still in the operation theatre to remove the branch from his thighs. To take them out the car had to be cut as it got squeezed by the weight of the massive tree.

Media has been surrounded the hospital and reporters were doing live coverage but they were told that it was an accident. Hameed sat inside the doctor's cabin to avoid the questionnaire. They wanted to know why they went through the highway.

Well they haven't seen Adam yet. Hameed sighed. If they found out that the investigating officer has been attacked they would create more ruckus. Two policemen still stood in front of Adam's room.

How could someone be so violent? He asked the same question again and again inside his heart. He has seen both the bodies and also Adam's condition. It was brutal, devilish and unthinkable. It could not be done by any normal human. He needs to know whether Abel uses drugs.

He decided to call the commissioner and inform him about the findings and progress of the case till now. He could say that he has a suspect and he will catch him soon.

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A police jeep overtook him. He saw a policeman signaling him to slowdown. The jeep braked in front of him and a policeman came out of it. He gestured him to come out of his car.

"Please follow us to the station. We have some questions for you." The policeman was polite.

"What questions?" The man slowly climbed down from his seat and stared at the constable.

"Hameed sir will ask you. Mahadevan sir may also join."

"Who is Mahadevan?"

"The Commissioner of Police."

"Can I come in my car?"

He thought for a moment and said. "Sure, just follow us." He signaled the jeep to move in front of them and walked towards the car and seated himself adjacent to driver's seat.

"Let us go."

Fr. Abel has no other options but to obey.

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26

It is still watching. She could feel its invisible stare. It is back again. Her mind became alert. The thought instigate fear inside her.

She looked back and saw a dark mist formation not too far away from them but it was keeping a safe distance and following them. She tried to communicate with it.

Who are you? There was hardly any response. She waited for the reply.

What do you want? Again there was no response.

She concentrated hard to connect with the dark force and she got the vibrations that it is listening.

What do you want from us? She asked again.

Blood. She heard a distant voice rumbling in her head. Her heart skipped a beat.

You can't do that. Just leave us.

I won't.

Why are you after us?

It remained silent. She looked carefully at the dark mist and alarmingly realized it was moving towards them swifter and the distance between them alarmingly decreasing.

Her panicked voice entered Rajeev's ears. "It's coming towards us."

"What is coming?" He was still in those precious moments which he had earlier with her and was reliving those memories.

"The dark force which abode on the banyan tree in front of our house, it is coming after us." Her voice was eerily disturbing.

He was back in senses. "You said it wasn't seen anywhere and that's why we are out having some fresh air.

"I think it purposely stayed invisible to lure us out." She could not think otherwise. Something must be stopping it from entering the house.

"What do we do now?" He was afraid to every cell of his body. *I will fight to protect you.*

"We should outrun it and reach our home before it gets us." She said gently so that Rajeev should not notice dread in her words. Little did she know that it could even enter the house also. It was waiting for the perfect time.

He changed into top gear and accelerated and the engine revved with high speed in a hope to outpace the unknown entity. Mridula clutched her right arm tightly around his waist.

She looked at the mist and in front of her eyes it vanished. A sudden burst occurred in the sky way ahead of them and the rain plummeted down followed by a deafening thunder. A flash of lightning rayed down and blinded them for a few seconds. When they were able to see again the dark cloud had already enveloped them. The motorcycle went off balance and out of control and ran off the road into the woods.

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Abel was patiently waiting while Hameed entered the cubicle.

"Hameed I need to go to the hospital soon. I need to know what Adam was searching." His worried request skittled through his lips.

Hameed smiled in reply. "What is the matter that you need to go in such a hurry?" He has to extract some vital information from him to solving the case. "I will tell you what Adam was searching. I am in charge of that case now."

"You know he has been attacked and it may come back again." Abel looked eagerly at him while Hameed absentmindedly seated in his chair.

So this is why you are back to see off your brother once and for all. "Why do you think he will be attacked again?" Hameed looked at the priest sitting in front of him with curiosity. They were sitting on opposite sides of a table. He rubbed his palms together. Abel was restless, he want to get out of there immediately. It seemed that Hameed doesn't want to leave him soon. He has found some common traces of a culprit.

He has to give an apt explanation to satisfy the policeman to get out of there but he only has a ghost story. "I don't know exactly but it has something to do with the case he is involved now. Only if I know I could do something." He paused for a second and asked. "Do you believe in Ghosts, Hameed?"

Third time I am hearing this question. And I have only one answer. "I know that father." He said calmly. He knew that he was close to solving the case. Audio recorder of his mobile phone was on and recording their conversation. "I don't believe in manmade ghost stories, father. But do you know Alex Thoppilan?" Hameed looked deep into the padre's eyes to see any hint of glitch. There was nothing.

"I don't know." The answer was immediate. *For me knowing this demon is more important.*

Surprised, he asked another question. "Does the name Amnon ring a bell?"

Abel's eyes lit up. "Yes. He was my close friend." Abel didn't know why he wants to know about Amnon. Amnon was killed years before and he heard that some family disputes led to the murder. The case was closed as police wasn't able to find any suspects or any clues. *What this has to do with Amnon?*

"You don't know Alex but you know Amnon." Hameed stated. Abel nodded. "Alex is Amnon's brother, who we believe has some hidden involvement in the murder." That was a new revelation for the reverend. But he wondered why has this come now and what has he to do in that.

Hameed resumed. "Two of Alex's friends have been murdered and Adam and I were investigating this case as one happened in his circle and the other happened in my circle. Alex and another friend have met with an accident and we think they are the next targets of the killer."

Abel listened carefully.

"We strongly believe that Adam was also attacked by the killer to stop investigating the case." He looked at the priest surreptitiously.

"No, you are wrong Hameed." Abel screamed. "He was attacked by an evil force."

Hameed calmly interjected. "You were there when Adam was attacked."

Abel wondered what he was implying. *Am I the murderer?*

"We assume that these twin murders were related to Amnon's death and the most suitable person to avenge him is you."

Abel stunned in silence. *What in the heavens are you talking about? You are making wrong accusations on a priest.*

"Be my guest father." Hameed smiled. *Let us see whether your fingerprint and DNA matches.*

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Mohini stared at the dark figure in front of her. She looked around. Everyone except her was asleep. She was in the intensive care unit.

Fear not. It said.

Still she was quivering in fear. She was having nightmares of that monstrous night. Doctors said she may not recover soon. She could see that. It keeps visiting her reminding her of that grotesque murder.

You will forget everything of that night. Your memory will be erased. Its voice was so serene and angelic.

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. Black mist formed a halo over her head and caressed her. She would now fall into a deep slumber while the mist will disappear. She would wake up as a new person and everything happened that night to this hour will leave her memory.

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Visiting hours ended at six pm. Second floor of the hospital was deadly quiet. There weren't much people on the corridor and many of the rooms were vacant. Two policemen stood outside Adam's private room. They were alerted to see off any intruder that comes their way. They never knew what kind of intruder would come after a police sub inspector and what kind of weapons they would carry. They only had wooden lathis to defend themselves.

Adam felt irritated to be in a bed but he had no other choice. Both his leg bones had cracks and the doctors advised

three months of complete rest. His right hand was broken, two ribs had minor cracks and lots of cuts and bruises. He looked up at the fan rotating above him as that was the only thing he could do. He called one of the cops inside. He signaled him to sit in the chair beside his bed. He started a conversation to avoid his boredom.

Adjacent to his room laid Shah. His head had a bandage, a plaster was on his left hand and a few band aids were on several places of his body. He helped himself out of his bed and walked into the washroom to relieve him. Suddenly the lights started flickering and he didn't know why that was happening. After a few flickers the light went off. He quickly came out of the washroom but saw the translucent darkness of approaching dusk already filled in his room. The silence was fierce and he could hear his own breaths. In between he heard another slow breathing.

He looked around and saw one of the corners is too dark as if some shadow has filled the space. He looked sharply and spotted some vapours rising and a silhouette of something moving along.

"Who is there?" His throat was parched, so was his voice. Image of his dead friends filled his mind and he felt dread filling his veins. He stood unmoved still staring at the corner expecting an answer.

Follow me. A whisper breezed into his ears. He felt it was a familiar voice.

"Mohan is that you?" He forgot that his friend was already dead. His eyes remained unblinked and yet he couldn't make out who was at the corner. He could only perceive smoke like movements.

Follow me. Again the whisper came.

The door handle twirled automatically and the door was ajar. He saw black fumes formed into a human form

moving out of the room. He followed it as if in a dream. The whole hospital was opaque and it looked like haunted and unoccupied. He felt like floating through the air. He saw no one and nobody saw him. As he was out of the hospital premises, everything at the hospital went back to normal.

Adam stared at the light as if he was in a dream and just woke up. He saw a constable sitting in front of him.

"I feel like I was blacked out." He muttered still trying to understand what has happened.

"I too felt the same." The policeman agreed with him.

So the feelings were mutual. I wasn't in a dream. "What do you remember last before you felt shutdown?"

"The lights were flickering." He responded immediately.

"It was here." Adam muttered under his breath.

"It?" He stared at him amused.

"Alex and Shah have been admitted here, right?"

"Yes."

"Another death awaits." He prophesied.

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27

‘Check the rooms; I think one of them will be dead by now.’ Adam was calm.

Iqbal, the fifty year old constable looked surprised. He could feel the silence of the hospital but never assumed a death at this hour. The silence was horrifying. He was only concerned about the safety of his senior officer and that was why he was posted here. But as a police officer he was bound to his duties and should protect the wealth and life of the people around him. The cop ran outside and went to check both the rooms. He saw Alex sleeping in his bed and his wife reading some book besides him but Shah's bed was vacant. He saw the washroom door open. He looked in there but it was also empty. There was no sign of him or his wife. The hospital allowed only one bystander for the night.

They must have gone out for a walk, or for a tea break. He thought.

He came back to the room and informed Adam.

‘‘Call Hameed, immediately.’’ Adam looked at the constable.

He was quick in action; his hands went into the pocket and took out his mobile phone. He searched and selected the number and placed the call. Even before Hameed attended the call, he handed over it to Adam. He went outside again and asked the other constable to go and check at the canteen.

‘‘Yes, Iqbal.’’ Adam heard Hameed's voice.

‘‘Hameed it's me, Adam.’’

Wrinkles formed on Hameed's forehead. He just shrugged.

"It was here, moments ago. I think next murder is about to happen." He said as he stared at the lights.

"What?" Hameed shouted into the phone. He couldn't fathom the news about the next murder. *How do you know?*

"Yes. We had a power failure and now Shah is missing from his bed. I think he has gone to the ground."

Hameed couldn't believe that. He looked into the prison cell and saw Abel sitting on the concrete floor. *How could that happen, the suspected murderer is here?*

"Hameed, be quick. You should save him." Hameed cut the call and quickly called some of his subordinates. *I do not trust you completely but let me check.*

Adam looked at Iqbal. He gave the mobile phone back.

"Iqbal I need to talk to Alex. I want to know what's happening. I am sure he has all the answers."

Iqbal stood reluctant.

"Get me a wheelchair." He ordered.

Other policeman came and informed. "I saw his wife but he is nowhere to be seen."

Iqbal signaled the other policeman to bring a wheelchair. They both transferred the superior officer into the chair and took him into Alex's room. Alex opened his eyes and saw the three policemen looking at him. His wife was equally surprised.

"Alex why is it after you?" He started.

Alex acted ignorant. "I don't know what you are saying." *I will get him before you could. I want to kill him with my own hands.*

"Cooperate with us Alex. Shah is missing from his room. He might have gone to the ground. We can save him if you help us. I don't know why it is so angry but it also attacked me just because I was handling the case. It said it was killed before it was born. What does that mean?"

What Mohan said is true. Alex thought. He was now sure Shah will also be murdered. *Why the hell did he went alone? Only Shah knows the person now.*

"It is not a ghost." Alex said. "It is a human."

Adam remembered everything about his attack and he was sure he never saw a man. Alex gestured to Adam to get everyone out of the room.

Alex told him everything about that wretched day and what they did. He knows he will be the last one and he didn't want to die. He wants the murderer to be caught before anything happens to Shah and rot the rest of his life in jail. He would later make arrangements to finish him inside the prison.

"So you think that man is committing the murders."

"Yes. There is no other possibility."

"Why is he after you? What relation do you have with him? Where can we find him?"

"I don't know. We thought he may be at the ground but were unable to reach. While returning a tree fell on the car. The next I knew was I was in a hospital. I think he might a relative of that girl, even husband and that is why he is trying to kill us."

You did a gruesome crime and you deserve this. Adam thought. *I now understand why it stopped me from getting in its way. Now Hameed is trying to stop it.* Fear filled his heart. He was not sure whether it was human or a ghost. Hameed is in danger. He called Iqbal inside.

“Call Hameed and say he is in danger.” He commanded.

Constable tried the call but the message was he is out of coverage area.

“Try again and again till you connect him.” His voice panicked. *I sent him into the mouth of death.*

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Shah was floating and he didn't know anything. His eyes were closed as if he was sleeping. After some time he reached the center of the ground. He fell down with a thud which brought him back to senses. He looked around. *Where am I?* It was all dark around him. He suddenly realized that he was at the ground. He was lying on the ground where he remembered had a grave. He jumped up.

I was at the hospital. How did I get here?

He saw two incandescent balls staring at him. It was yellow and looked like fireballs. Black fumes surrounded it and he saw the possessor of the fireballs. A dark silhouette stood in the middle of the fumes. It slowly moved towards him. As it came closer he saw the face. He recognized him. The killer who slayed his friends ruthlessly.

“You took me here?” He questioned him.

“Yes. I want to torture you for killing me.”

Shah was shocked to hear that. “I didn't kill you. I never did.”

“You set me ablaze even you know I was alive.”

“What the hell are you talking about? I have only seen you at Mohan’s house. Why should I kill you? I barely know you.”

“You put my burning body in a grave.”

Ignoring what he was blabbering, Shah said. “I am going. I don't want to hear your bullshit.”

He took his eyes off the black man and saw thousands of fetuses lying around him. They were covered in blood, moving and scrolling. Whimpers filled the air. Shah thought he was in a dream. As he watched he saw fire engulfing them and it surrounded him like a sheath. He knew he can't go without the fire settles down. Loud painful screams filled his ears.

He saw a hand coming towards him. It was black and husky and it had long sharp black nails. It grabbed his neck and tightened the hold. Already afraid, he struggled for air. That day came into his mind. He saw everything in front of his eyes and what he did. He now knows what is trying to get him. He twisted in its grab to escape but the hold was tight. His lungs longed for oxygen and eyes slowly protruded out and he knew he was about to die when the grip released. He coughed hard and tried to inhale chunks of air.

The dark hand pierced into his chest and he screamed his heart out. Pain was at its exalt. A heavy blow hit his face disturbing its features. Bridge of his nose broke and his ears were humming. Blood squirted out from his chest as the hand was taken out.

One of his legs was grabbed and he knew he was being raised and hammered down rapidly into the ground. His shoulder was smashed and his bones were broken. He screamed louder and louder. Pain erupted inside his arteries; his brain cells sent continuous alarms into the nervous system. He lay on the ground panting and groaning.

Fire has stopped around him and he heard soft whimpers again. He saw thousands of fetuses again. They grabbed his hands and legs and started pulling towards each direction. He screamed again in pain as his skin tore and ligaments broke. He was unvoiced with agony that the unassumable torture has brought him. He pathetically looked at the figure standing tall in front of his eyes.

"I think you are enjoying like you enjoyed that night."

He lay there like a dead meat, but suffering every bit of the torment. There wasn't a single cell in his body that didn't felt the pain. He felt his limbs broke off from the main body as the pulling became stronger. He wished he was dead, at least unconscious but it was far possible. His breaths were heavy. Blood puddled around him flowing out from every parts of the body. He could feel the lukewarm liquid under his own body. Deafening scream filled his ears and he saw fire once again around him. It slowly circled him and the round became shorter. Heat touched his skin and soon became unbearable. He knew his skin melting as the fire started to embrace him while a hand pierced through his chest and pulled out his heart.

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28

Mridula opened her eyes. Pitch black environment welcomed her. She would have been unconscious for a long time. It took her sometime to adjust her vision in the dark. She looked around to see Rajeev. She could see the motor cycle ten meters away from her. She stood up and closed her eyes. She concentrated to feel his presence anywhere near her. She sensed him lying quite a distance away from her. She could feel that he is unhurt. She rushed towards him. She woke him up and hugged.

"We are safe." She muttered.

"Is that thing still here?" He gazed into the dark.

"No, I can't feel its presence." She was alert. She used her powers to locate it but it was far away.

"Why didn't it hurt us?" He couldn't believe yet. He only remembers the black smoke engulfing them. It was warm inside and smelled death. He was completely blinded, his hands were shivering and he lost the control over his vehicle. He thought that this would be his last day. But they have survived unscathed.

"I don't know. Maybe something came in between." She was wondering what or who helped them. They have escaped from the mouth of death. They were unconscious for more than two hours.

"It will come back again, won't it?" Rajeev asked her, nervously.

Mridula shrugged.

"We can't live like this Mridula. You have to find a solution." *How scary my life has become? Why I am not allowed to have a happy life?*

"Rajeev you have to meet someone and ask his help. I cannot meet him. I am only part human. For me it will be suicidal."

"I will see anyone to save us both. Whom you are talking about?"

"Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri. He is the most powerful sorcerer I could find. He might be able to stop it. If he cannot then no one can."

~~I will meet him even before you could.~~ A voice whispered to itself. ~~Why can't you wait for your turn?~~

"I will meet him tomorrow." He assured Mridula.

"Let's go home." She helped him stand on his feet.

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What if Adam was lying? Suddenly a thought came into Hameed's brain. *What if he was making some plans to save his brother? Only two policemen are standing at the station.* Hameed became confused whether to go forward or return back to safeguard the police station.

Hameed was on his way to the ground. The Mahindra Bolero was driven by Reneesh. Ousep and Sreeraj sat behind. They were at the highway road where the path was dilapidated. They could only go slow avoiding the cracks and potholes. They heard faint screams of infants. They saw bright yellow light glowing somewhere and Hameed assumed it must be at the ground.

"Quick." He voiced to Reneesh. *I will go to ground first and then I should question Abel thoroughly. It is time for answers.*

He doubted whether he would be able to save Shah even if he has been attacked. Reneesh was doing good job at the wheels driving through a destroyed path. Suddenly Reneesh applied the brakes. The wheels screeched to a halt.

"What happened? Why did you stop?"

"I saw a black figure in front of the vehicle. It was like a moving shadow flickering with the wind."

They all looked outside. Nothing was there.

"The road is empty. Were you dreaming?"

"No sir." *I clearly saw it.*

"It could be an outline of some tree." Hameed calmly said.

Then they all saw dusky fumes slowly descending down and formed a human shape. Two balls of fire appeared and looked at them.

"Sir, it's indeed a ghost." Reneesh gently whispered. He was trembling in fear. He looked at others to make sure they were also seeing.

Don't come in my way. They heard those words clearly. It sounded like metal clang and felt like an echo coming from a deep tunnel.

Hameed saw that the description Adam gave suited it perfectly. Reneesh and other policemen waited for Hameed to say something. They wanted to leave.

"Who are you?" Hameed asked, hiding his fear.

Irrelevant. The reply came.

"I am a sub inspector of police. I want to know what is happening here." He chanted *Bismillahi al Rahman al Rahim* repeatedly.

Impuissant. Another echo reverberated around them.

"Sir let's go." He looked earnestly at his subordinate.
"We will come in the morning."

"Get out of my way. Thavakalthu alallah (Allah save us). I am not afraid of your magic tricks." He looked intensely into the fumes. It was only smoke and nothing else. He wondered where the sound is coming from.

Never come this way. A thunder rumbled in the sky.

"Go through the smoke." Hameed looked at the quaking Reneesh.

Suddenly a fetus landed on the front glass and it was obscured by blood. A couple more followed and the image in front went opaque. Then before they even realized the vehicle was raised into the air. It suspended in the air and started shaking vigorously. All of them shuddered in fear. Groans filled the midair. They started praying to all the gods they knew. "Allahu Akbar." Hameed screamed. But no gods came. The car was thrown as if it was a pebble and crashed onto a tree and fell down with a heavy thump.

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A red sedan braked in front of the police station. Leo, the finger print expert got out and walked into the station. He was a short dusky man in his mid-forties. Years of experience has created wrinkles on his forehead. He had a blue file in his hand. Two sentries stood at the entrance. Police station was silent. He went inside but saw no one but a priest inside the prison cell. He now knows the reason. The blue file in his hand had his finger prints to compare with which obtained from the murder sites. Unfortunately they didn't match.

Hameed's primary suspect will walk out of here free.

Leo called a sentry inside. "Where is Hameed?"

"They have went somewhere in a hurry. There had been some unusual incidents at the hospital."

That latest news kept Abel interested.

"What kind of incidents?" He asked expecting someone may answer him.

"They said there was some blackout."

Abel's heart skipped a beat. *It was there at the hospital. Is Adam safe?*

Everything is unusual about this case. Thought Leo. He was eager to meet the serial killer and wish to know how he looked like. As per the reports he must be a monster of a man.

There was silence as everyone was thinking something or the other in their minds. The silence was broken when the mobile phone in the sentry's pocket rang. A hit film song was heard aloud. He talked. Leo and Abel could make out that something worse has happened from the conversation and emotions. His voice was high pitched and he only asked questions. He cut the call and immediately dialed to the control room. Both Leo and Abel became shocked to hear what he said.

"There was an accident in the old highway. All four policemen injured. Reach there immediately."

Leo looked at him aghast.

He said. "Reneesh said they were attacked by some unknown thing. He doesn't know what that was."

"It's a ghost." Abel said from inside the cell. "It has attacked Adam and it is core of this case. I don't know what it has done."

Leo couldn't control his laughter and the sentry also joined.

“Whatever is unknown, people say either it is a god or a ghost.” The sentry mocked the priest. He was a young guy, a new generation boy in his twenties. It was obvious he would prefer science over religion.

“Those policemen will say the same thing, that they were attacked by some demonic force.” Abel defended himself. “Please get me out of here, I need to meet Adam.”

Both the guys stood unmoved.

The priest repeated. “Let me go. I am Adam's brother. You can call him to confirm that.”

They looked at each other. Leo placed a call to Adam. The call ended just three minutes.

He looked at the sentry. “Release him.” He knows that the fingerprints are not a match and there is no point in keeping him in prison. Hameed hasn't registered the arrest as he wanted to see the results first. The sentry was still unresponsive.

“Open the cell. He is innocent. I will talk to the commissioner.”

As the sentry opened the iron door to the cell, Abel asked. “Please tell me what the case all about is. Maybe I could help in some way.”

“I will tell you what I know.” Leo accepted.

*****_*****



The wind blew around the Thrithalloor residence. The clover tree on the north side shook with the wind. Brahmadevan Namboothiri stepped out as his forty year old brain felt that it wasn't a regular sight. It was an indication of something. *Second time this is happening!*

He knew in his inner eye, the arrival of a new person. He left the holy prayer room. He touched the rudraksha beads on his chest and whispered something vague. He seated himself in the reclining chair of the verandah. Narayan looked at him with concern. Brahmadevan Namboothiri smiled. "Fear not, it is not coming to hurt."

He was chanting something.

He could feel the presence. It was getting stronger.

"Narayan, go inside."

He was reluctant to go at first but didn't want to disobey his master.

Dark fumes formed into a cloud like shape above the Thrithalloor mansion. The sun was obscured and everything under the cloud went shady. Two yellow eyes looked at the man resting on his arm chair. Whispers and squeals filled the atmosphere.

An hour later, a motorcycle came through the gate and a man stood in front of the huge mansion. He looked at the majestic person sitting in front of him.

His eyes were closed. He held out his hands but said nothing. He body was mere present there but his mind wasn't.

“Rajeev, I'll come today evening or tomorrow. Everything will be okay by then. Go on, be brave. When I come I will have the answers you seek.”

Rajeev nodded his head. He turned and rode away in his bike. When Rajeev was gone, the black smoke filled the vicinity. Its yellow eyes looked at the men intensely.

_

Alex looked at the discharge papers. His wife, Lia went to clear the bills and came back.

“Let's go.” She said. They walked out of the hospital, Lia supporting Alex.

They both didn't know that Shah was dead. They were informed that Shah has been shifted to another hospital, a multi-specialty hospital in the city.

He looked at his wife. “I want to see him. You go home, I will be back.”

“I will come with you.” She was stubborn.

“No.” He raised his voice. “I have some matters to discuss with him.”

She knew that there is no point in arguing with him. She gave the car keys of her Maruti Suzuki Brezza and left in a cab. He drove off the car towards the city hospital. It was fifty kilometers away. He pressed the accelerator hard ignoring the pain in his left leg. He had minor injuries only, bruises and scratches, but there were internal damages to his muscles.

He saw a man standing in the middle of the road and signaling to offer a ride. The man was wearing black clothes with a cap. He stopped the car beside him. Alex couldn't see the face properly as the man was standing sideways. He opened the door and without saying anything entered the car

and seated. Alex saw him now and an unknown chill went through his spine.

Doors were locked automatically and the engine started. Black fumes filled the interior of the car and it moved as if it was controlled by some invisible force. Alex sat dumbstruck, neither could he move nor could he speak. He was in a comatose condition. He could only move his irises; his eyes were fixed on the road. The car sped at its maximum. Fear and helplessness were his only friends. He wished if he had Shah with him.

The man beside him scoffed. "You didn't know, did you? Shah is dead. His body is in the mortuary, safe and well preserved but with no heart."

He was shocked to hear that. No. He screamed inside.

"I took him yesterday to the ground. With my own hands I crushed him and burned him. I will let you know how I did that because I am going to do the same with you also."

He couldn't plead. He couldn't scream. He couldn't do anything. He was in a paralyzed state though he could feel everything happening inside and outside of his body.

"It all started with you and it should end with you."

Suddenly Alex felt he could move his head. He looked at the man sitting near him. He saw two incandescent balls staring at him.

"What did I do to you Alex? Why did you kill me?" He asked the same question he asked to all the others.

"I didn't kill you. Believe me, you are mistaken."

"You did. I wasn't even born and yet you gave me the worst death."

“What?” Alex was confused. A grown up man was blaming him that he killed him even before he breathed his first air. “I don’t know what you are talking about. I don’t even know you.”

Car stopped for a moment. Wheels screeched to a halt. Alex heard a faint cry behind him. He turned his head as much as he could. He saw a fetus covered in blood. Its tiny hands and legs were moving and soft whimpers came out of its petite mouth. The fetus was roughly 7 months old.

“I was only this grown when you brutally murdered me.”

As he watched the roof of the car started leaking. Blood ran down and dripped from above onto his head. A pungent smell of decayed flesh filled inside. The whole interior of the car was filled with blood.

Alex felt like his head spinning. Bile churned up inside his abdomen and he puked in his lap. He vomited blood. His eyes turned in its sockets with fear which was paramount. The cry of the fetus sliced through his ears and he wished to cover his ears.

“Shouldn’t I kill you for destroying my life?” He was so calm.

“I don’t know anything.” He whined.

“You are acting ignorant Alex. You know I was there that night. But you ignored me.” He complained.

“I am sorry. It was a mistake. I ... I was careless. I ignored you ... forgive me. I will do whatever you want.” Alex now realized whom he was talking with. This man is possessed with something he doesn’t even know.

“Alex, the angels in my world say that revenge is divine. I will have it Alex. Promise me that you will enjoy every torment I give you like you relished my death.”

“Please please no. Spare me.” Tears of fear and helplessness streamed down from his eyes. “Me and my wife are expecting our first baby.”

“I know that.” The man said. “My parents were also expecting their first baby and look what you did. You killed both of us and shattered our family. I would be five years by now. You didn’t let my baby eyes open. But you don’t worry, your child will live. I won’t give you further choice of choosing between you and your baby.”

Car entered the highway but it took the right lane and crashed its way into the woods. Passing through the bushes and ramping over the grass it went straight to the ground. It stopped at the place where there was a grave once. His heart thumped quicker and louder inside his chest. Door was opened and he was dragged out of the car. He saw blood and burnt grass and flesh and the whole area bore the smell of death. It was unbearable.

He saw few dogs approaching them. They were larger and fierce than the ordinary dogs. He saw blood dripping from their razor sharp teeth. They barked at him. Blood and saliva splashed out of their mouth. The dogs stared at him and growled.

Alex looked at the man. *He is being controlled by the ghost of a fetus. Is that even possible?* He never believed in ghosts but he is now being hunted by one. His three friends have been brutally murdered and it was now his turn. He had no idea how he could escape.

He was lying on the ground. He saw black wings behind the man. It had quite large wingspan. Two long sharp teeth protruded out of his mouth.

He grabbed Alex’s knees by both hands and pulled harder until he heard a breaking sound. Alex groaned louder as his pelvic bone broke.

“Alex, I told you to enjoy. This is not how you enjoy.”
He smiled malevolently.

“Please let me go. I...” He twisted in pain. He could now move his body freely and he struggled to stand up. His skin and tissue between his legs were snaked open and blood ran down. The smell of fresh blood made the dogs go rabid but they waited for their master’s nod.

He looked into their eyes. That was enough, they came running and the larger one of them bites exactly at his pride. Dogs competed to tear him apart while Alex screamed in pain. He struggled to get them away from his body but all his efforts went in vain.

He made a sound and the dogs quickly backed away. They just vanished into thin air.

The sky became dark as it was night.

Alex lay with his body tear open. His pain transcended. He took heavy breaths, clenched his fists and gritted his teeth to bear with the pain. He screamed his heart out to cope with the pain. He never thought his desire would have such repercussions. He could only hope that the death would be near and fast. He didn’t want to be tormented further.

He saw the winged man carrying a heavy stone. He simply threw it on one of his legs. Alex yelled in pain as his bones broke and flesh ripped. He lifted the stone again and this time dropped on his stomach. Alex cried again in pain, blood splashed out of his mouth. He tapped on the ground and screeched. “Kill me please. I can’t it take anymore.”

The winged man kneeled near him and said. “Alex we have only started. Don’t you want to make the full use of your last day? Find pleasure in each moment Alex. They say revenge is divine. You started it Alex and it will end with you. I won’t let you die till you have your share.”

“Please.” Blood came out along with words. “Finish me, I am sorry.”

His eyes glowed wildly. He had a cleaver in his hands. He stood up and walked towards Alex’s unhurt leg. Cleaver went down multiple times and his leg was cut into small pieces. Alex could only scream and louder did he cry. He was soaked in his own blood.

Thousands of fetuses lay around him. The whole atmosphere filled with their cries and Alex felt his ears burst with the unbearable noise. Blood came out through his ears, nostrils and eyes. Rain plummeted down with heavy force and thunder rumbled in the sky. A high voltage lightning struck and his body jolted with the current. Even the nature was in no mood to spare him.

Rains ceased for a while. The man lifted the heavy rock from Alex’s body. He dragged him into a pit nearby. It was half filled with some liquid. He threw him into the pit. Alex was immersed in the liquid and it went into his mouth and nostrils. He gulped it. Alex smelled that it was oil.

“Alex, keep these with you.” Alex got hold the object he threw. It was a human heart. Two more fell into the pit.

Another ray of lightning plunged down and it ignited fire in the pit. Alex burned alive. Soil pummeled into the pit until it was completely covered.

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30

As he watched, black fumes filled the room. Adam looked at it with fear. It slowly entered into his body. A lot of memories went through his head. When the images faded out he fell down. He felt something leaving his body. After the smoke disappeared he called a police man inside his room.

“Call my brother Abel; I want to talk to him.” Iqbal stared for a moment and then took Adam’s mobile and placed the call. He left the room after putting it in speaker mode.

“In the name of the father, the son and the Holy spirit...” Abel raised a cross in his right hand and holy water in his left hand. His eyes were closed. He stood in front of the crucified Christ at the church altar. There was no one inside the church, doors were carefully sealed. Abel was half way through his exorcism when he got the call. He looked at the display and saw Adam’s name.

“Brother, it is over.”

“What do you mean by it is over?” Abel asked, surprised. *Did my exorcism worked?*

“It has fulfilled its revenge. I don’t think anyone will know the details.”

“How do you know?”

“It was here moments earlier. I saw Alex burning to death in my mind.”

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Sir it’s me Adam. ”

"Tell me Adam." Commissioner Mahadevan responded.

"I think we should close this case." He said matter of factly.

"Are you nuts? Or are you trying to save someone." Mahadevan was agitated.

"In a way yes sir. Whoever goes behind this case is getting hurt sir. No one would be able to solve this case." Adam knows that it would be difficult to convince this arrogant young officer.

"Four cold blooded murders, six policemen been attacked and you are saying we should let the criminals walk free. Do you know who all were dead?" He scoffed.

"You won't believe it sir, an unnatural force is behind all this and we can't stop it."

The reply was laughter. "You mean ghosts are behind all this. You need rest Adam. I will find competent officers and solve this case soon. I will catch them." Mahadevan growled.

"And for your information sir, a fifth murder has happened and the body is burned and buried under the ground,"

"How do you know there was a fifth murder?"

"You won't believe me sir."

"I will catch your ghost Adam."

"Then it will visit you soon." The commissioner heard before the call got disconnected.

_

They were surprised to see a car in front of their house. Out of it came a man with an elegant aura. He walked

towards them and they humbly offered him a chair to sit. They were expecting the man. Mridula tried to hide away from him.

“Rajeev, you talk to him.”

“Don’t hide Mridula, I know who you are.”

He understood what is in their minds and decided to speak first. “My name is Thrithalloor Brahmadevan Namboothiri. I am here as you requested.”

Rajeev signaled Mridula to get something to drink. But the guest stopped her by waving his hands.

“Do you know why we requested your presence?” Rajeev asked.

“Yes, I know you have a lot of questions in your heart. I came here to give you answers.”

Rajeev and Mridula looked at each other. They were still confused.

He looked at Mridula and said. “You have lost a part of your memory. I am here to give it back.”

Mridula was dying to hear that. Rajeev wanted to know how he lost her. They were eager to hear his words.

He closed his eyes for a moment.

“I am a sorcerer, but I am not here to perform any rituals.” His eyes were on Mridula. “Do you remember Alex Thoppilan?”

She tried to remember. “Yes. I worked in his company for almost an year.”

“He had a crush on you. Well, it was not just a crush, but a strong desire.”

“I had a wild guess that he wanted me. But as I knew he wasn’t a good man. He was a womanizer.”

It was new information for Rajeev. He wondered why Mridula never mentioned that.

"I never thought it was too serious. It could be a passing fantasy." She read his mind and gazed at him.

"Hmm, but no. His desire for you increased day by day. He was always watching you. Even after you left his company, even after your marriage he was following you. His desire made him so crazy that he couldn't stop ogling at you even after you had the baby bump."

"I was pregnant?" Mridula was startled.

"You haven't told her, do you?" He looked at Rajeev.

"No, I thought it would mentally break her. She couldn't remember anything after the marriage. I was worried how she would react when she couldn't remember what happened to the baby inside her." Rajeev didn't raise his head. He didn't know how to face her.

"You made a right choice." The sorcerer agreed to his decision.

"What happened to the baby?" Rajeev impatiently asked.

"It couldn't make it. That poor little thing was inside you, helpless."

Tears rolled down their cheeks. Mridula couldn't hold herself. She cried her heart out. Brahmadevan decided to be silent and give them time. It was their loss and they couldn't bear it. *Let them cry as much as they can.* He thought.

After a few minutes Rajeev asked. "Tell me how we lost our baby."

"Okay." He started.

“Shah, I want her. She is driving me crazy.”

“Who?”

“Mridula. There is not a single day that I don’t remember her. I want her so badly.”

They were sitting inside Alex’s estate. Arun and Mohan were silently sipping their glass of alcohol. It was a fine day and the four friends decided to celebrate the weekend as usual. They had all day to enjoy, drink and have some fresh meat to entertain.

Shah never seen him so passionate about any girl. “Well if you insist we will bring her here. We will also get to see her.” He smiled wickedly.

Mohan raised his head and looked at them. “Alex, she is pregnant now.”

“You know her?” Shah asked. Mohan shook his head. “Ever since his eyes were set on her, I knew he is not going to leave her. But I didn’t know it was this serious.”

“I don’t care if she is pregnant or not, I want her. Have you seen her grace after her being pregnant? She looks cherished.” Alex finished his glass in one single gulp.

Shah looked at others to know their opinion. They tilted their head agreeing in a secret decision.

Their glasses filled again and emptied into their bellies along with grilled chicken and fried fish.

It was just matter of an hour; they finished three bottles of whisky. They felt their heads heavy and their senses were out of control.

“I want her tonight in my bed.” Alex blabbered. All three of them heard.

“I know where she works. We can take her when she leaves for home.” Mohan ignited a cigarette.

"Let's get moving." Shah stood up and picked up his car keys.

"I will drive." Alex showed his open palms to Shah to hand over the keys.

"No, I will." Arun stood in between Shah and Alex.

"Both of you are not driving. I will drive. Mohan sit in front and direct me to her office. You both keep your mouth shut and sit behind. Is that okay?" Shah looked into their eyes. They silently wobbled their head.

Shah walked in front.

After two and a half hours of waiting in front of her office they saw her coming out of her office. She was wearing a yellow salwar kameez and her baby bump was clearly visible.

"She is beautiful." Shah muttered in surprise.

"Yes, she is." Mohan and Arun said in unison.

"We can't get her here. There are people around." Mohan raised a concern.

"We will follow her and get her at some stranded area." Shah told them his plan.

The car slowly followed her for almost twenty minutes till they got into an open paddy field. They looked around and saw no one except them and Mridula walking two hundred odd meters away from them.

"Be prepared." Shah warned them and sped the car towards her. It halted beside her and in a flash Arun opened the door and pulled her inside. Alex covered her mouth to stop her from screaming.

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31

"We got her." Arun yelled.

Shah took a sharp turn and accelerated towards the estate. Mridula tried everything to free herself from their grasp but everything went in vain.

"Go through that old highway. Nowadays no one comes there. We can save sometime and besides no one will see us." Mohan's eyes were fixed on the road.

"He is right." Arun supported.

They didn't have much time to waste thinking. Shah turned to the left and entered the highway. They saw the warning but gave an ignoring stare.

It was getting dark sooner than they expected.

The car accidently jumped a big pothole and for a moment they all lost their control. Shah pushed the brakes hard. Mridula was free from the grasp. She didn't need a second invitation. Before Arun could realize what was happening she opened the door and ran into the shrubs.

"Catch her." Alex screamed. "Don't let her go."

They all jumped out of the car and started running. The thick canopy of the woods scarcely let any light to fall on the ground.

She knew she couldn't outrun them but she used the darkness to hide herself from them. She ran deep into the woods until she reached an open ground.

They divided themselves and started searching her individually until Mohan saw a silhouette at the entry point

of the ground. He silently moved towards her, she stood there panting and unknowing what to do or where to hide. He reached so close to her, she heard a movement behind her back and decided to run again when he hit her hard with a rock he held in his hand. She fell down unconscious landing on her belly. Mohan grabbed her hands and pulled her along the ground towards the open area where the pale red light of the setting sun made a perfect ambience. Soon the others joined him. They stood around her body.

"I will go in first." Alex smiled wickedly.

Arun pulled her legs wide grabbing her knees. They took their turns to enjoy her subtle and weak body.

"We don't need her anymore." Arun announced. He stepped on her foot and stretched the other foot as far as he could. A muffled shriek escaped her lips.

"What the hell are you doing? She is still alive." Shah yelled at him.

"Kill her. Or else tomorrow we will be in trouble." Alex looked at his friends.

Mohan took a few strides and picked up the blood stained stone which he used to knock her down and started hitting again. He crushed her skull.

"Arun, go get the petrol can inside the car." Shah stared at her motionless naked body. "And there is an iron rod also."

"Why do you want iron rod?"

"To bury the residue." His voice was sinister.

Her body was full of bite marks and cigarette burns. Her head squashed and ripped open was covered in blood. Her fallopian tubes were broken and blood flowed through

her vagina. There was a slight movement inside her belly but no one noticed.

"She is still so beautiful." Alex glared at her with sadistic desire. He kneeled above her and once again tried to quench his thirst for lust.

By the time he stood up Arun came back with a can of petrol. Shah and Mohan dug up a small shallow grave. They moved her into the pit and poured the petrol over her. Shah lit his lighter and dropped into the pit. Fire burned like it was mad. The movement inside her belly got vigorous. They didn't see it as they were blinded by the fire. Once the fire went out they covered the pit with the soil. Then they left.

"I will kill those bastards." Rajeev jumped up with rage.

"No." His voice was so serene but commanding, Rajeev stood grounded. "They are already killed."

"What?" Rajeev couldn't believe that. "Who killed them?"

"Your unborn child."

They both gave him an unbelievable look. They couldn't accept what they just heard.

"It's true. It carried out its revenge and it used you Rajeev to kill them. In other words you killed them but you weren't aware of that."

"How could that be possible?"

"Heartbeat is present by four months of child development. Brain develops within five months inside a womb. By seven months it can hear and feel. That means it could know what is happening around and understands it through its mother. It understands your feelings, your

worries, your happiness, everything. You were killed while getting raped but it was alive inside you. Through your senses it knew what was happening outside. It was ..." He stopped for a moment. "...burned alive and buried under the ground. It killed everyone in such a way it was tortured."

His last words were unfathomable to them. It took them sometime to recover from the tremors and it kept on coming.

"Why didn't it contact us?" Rajeev's voice trembled.

"It kept you away from this only to keep you safe."

"Why didn't it avenged before? Why now?"

"It doesn't have a soul. It is half you and half Mridula. It was always there under the soil waiting for you two to meet. That happened just now and it came, though soulless, acquired a portion of your souls."

"So if I hadn't returned it would have to wait more years."

"You never came here by your will; it has brought you here Rajeev. It wanted to carry out the revenge through you. It already knew Mridula's spirit is roaming around the house. Its powers are immeasurable. It is an angel with a portion of human spirit and another portion of evil spirit. No one can mess with it."

"Where is it now?"

"It was always here. Mridula can feel it. But you were afraid of its unpresumable power."

"That was my child?" Mridula erupted. "I would have helped if it just gave me a sign."

"It was always watching you from there." He pointed towards the banyan tree.

Mridula and Rajeev looked at it eagerly. The entire tree shook vigorously to show its presence.

"I am leaving now. I had this task summoned by it and it is done."

They didn't say a word but folded their arms to show gratitude. Brahmadevan walked towards the car but before he opened the door he looked back at them and said.

"I forgot to say one thing. From now onwards you will look like Mridula and not Joyce. Your child is too powerful and nothing is impossible to it. It wasn't born otherwise it would have been with you in a mortal form. But soon it will be born again inside you." He looked at his driver. "Narayan, let's go."

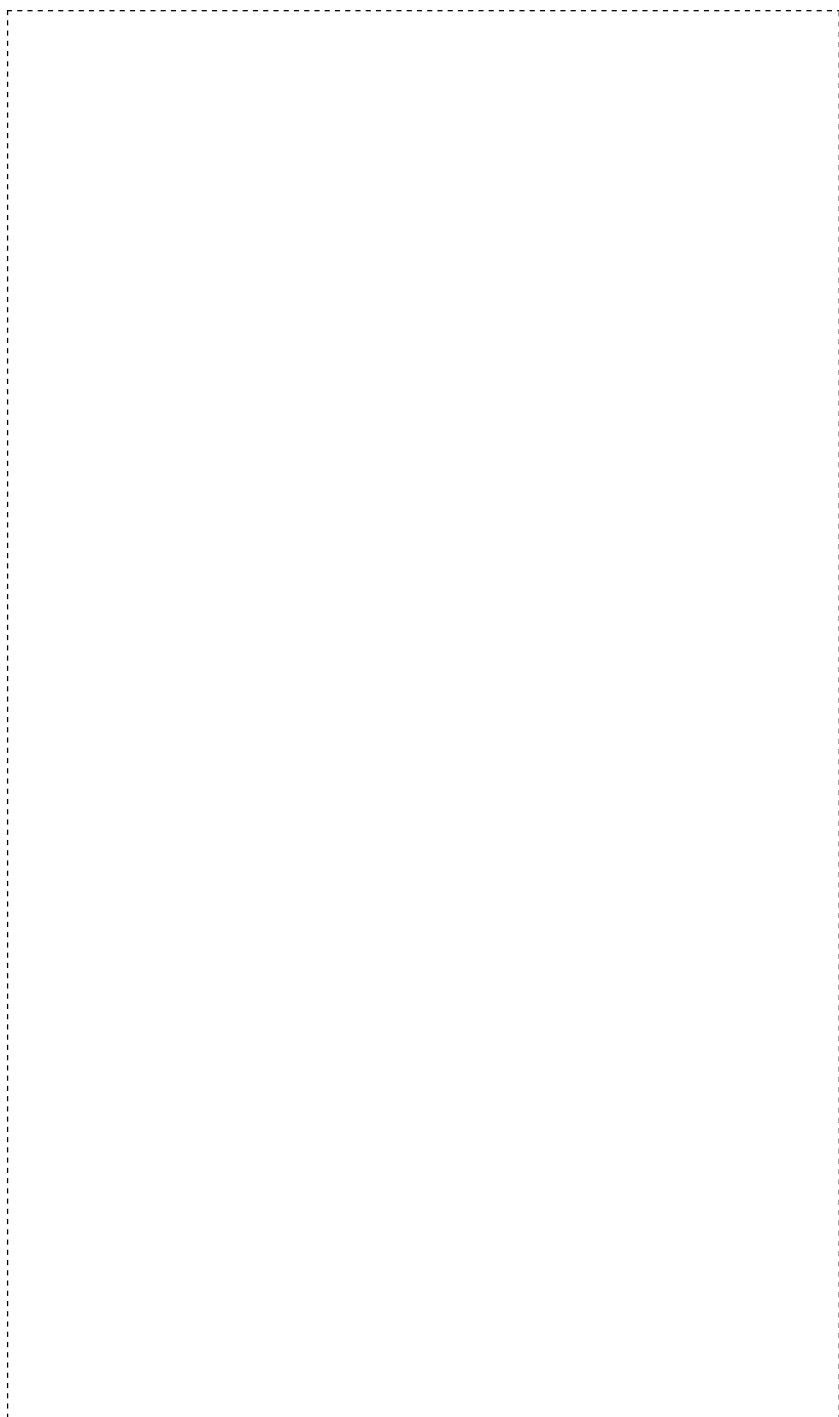
After they left, Rajeev and Mridula stared at the tree. They saw a dark mist forming into the shape of a fetus. Two yellow eyes sparkled and a soft cry of a baby resonated through the air.

~~I will be watching you unbeknownst.~~ A gentle echo enveloped them along with the zephyr.

As they walked inside the house Rajeev whispered into Mridula's ears. "Time to have our baby back."

Mridula knew what he meant. Rajeev's fingers raised her chin as his lips found rhythm with hers.

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About the author

Harry Raphel Thuruthipuram's first novel, The Unfathomable was first published in 2017. It was a heartwarming love story in which Albert tries to convince his love to Sara who loves him but refuses to accept it. She had her own reasons. Despite knowing it he didn't wanted to lose her.

His second novel, The Serein was published in 2019. A romantic thriller which sets in Goa in which Rex tries to save a woman from her abusive in-laws and her pathetic tormented life. A message from one of his friend's facebook chat and with the help of his colleagues he sets of for an undecided turn of events.

Ajania, The Unborn is the third novel. A horror mystery, in which an unknown dark force seeks revenge for its untimely end of life.

Harry Raphel is a mechanical engineer by profession but writing is his passion and hobby. He has written more than a hundred poems in Malayalam language and few short stories. He is single and lives in the beautiful village of Thuruthipuram in Kerala, India.

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