

Mad Melancholy

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Episode1

The barn door opened with a small creak and the man stepped in, his boots caked in mud, and water dripping from his pants. The clouded sky wept with grief; otherwise it was a night just like any other. The barn was dark except for the light of a single window fogged up with years of dust that had ingrained with the glass as if it was always a part of it. It was just a little slit of light that poured through it but enough for the masked being, once his eyes adjusted in it and once they did he stepped in completely and dragged in a heavy sack with him.

“You are just in time Doctor. Have you performed the task?”

The sack began to wriggle.

“Well that answers the question well enough. Are you ready for this job,” said the women who stood veiled by darkness over the upper floor of the barn. Her eyes however were visible; a vicious glow, a look, filled with wildness that would cause most men to shake with fear.

The Doctor opened the sack and lifted it upside down. A whole body fell, whimpering and struggling with pain as it hit the ground with a crash.

It was a girl. Her hair a wild mess and her eyes filled with fear and recognition; a betrayal was pellucid in them. Her mouth had been stuffed with a cloth; a trickle of blood ran down from the side of her head. She tried to talk but the cloth blocked her attempts to make a sound.

“Oh the great talker is finally in our grasp. But the irony my dearest is that you were always in our grasp. You knew it yet you did what you wanted to. It was no mere threat that we gave you; once you sign a contract with us you do what we tell you to do and nothing more. You become our slave just as this whole world will one day,” said the women veiled by shadows walking down the stairs. She walked until she was just an inch away from the lighted patch on the ground where her victim was lying looking at her with eyes that plead mercy and at the same time were filled with hatred.

“Little dove wants to talk, doesn't she? Well that's just what our mood is but, how can we trust you after what you did? Your betrayal leaves me little choice for any talking!” said the women and then she finally stepped into the pool of dim light breaking out of her veil.

She neared her face, her eyes fixed on her unblinking for a second. “Look at him! Isn't this the man you put your trust in?” She laughed and then she whispered in her ears pausing after each word to enunciate their effect, “Well you can see he betrayed you. I always warned you that a man betrays. He always does, it is his nature but then even if it is not true, the seduction of a woman can be so strong that even the most pious hearts may fall.”

She fixed her gaze at the doctor and ordered, "Do it."

The man picked up a butcher's knife and struck at the feet cutting the bonds tying them. Then before anyone could realize what was happening, he struck a severe blow on her nose causing her to bleed. The girl was motionless for a moment due to the severity of the blow then she began to wriggle with pain and in attempt to get away.

"There is no getting away Shanzah! Your time is up. I have decided to talk to you but it will be my own way," said the women reentering her veil and distancing herself from the violence by climbing the stairs back up from a position where she could enjoy the whole painful process that was about to happen.

The day was shrouded in mist and Halo Café was unusually quiet. With its plate glass windows devoid of shine and the sky throwing a blue haze over the Earth, made it look dull. A man dressed in a grey suit holding a walking stick stepped over the stairs leading to the entrance door and turned around to look at the spot of bright light in the clouds where the Sun was supposed to be. He turned back and opened the door with a swift push and with a graceful stride he moved towards a table beside one of the windows while signaling a waiter to attend him as he sat down.

The waiter hurried towards him as the man picked up the menu card and greeted him and asked for his order. The man looked towards him and said, "Good Morning to you as well, in fact, good morning to everyone in this town, they'll need all of the blessings today as dull as the weather is. How is your mother doing Fred? And I'll have a half fried egg with toast and a glass of fresh orange juice."

"Mother's fine, in fact she is recovering quiet well from her heart surgery."

"Well, tell her I said Hi and that pardon me for not coming to visit her. Things have been tough these few days."

Freddy's boyish face quivered into curiosity and he asked, "Everything fine at the Asylum?"

"Oh yeah, it's just some of the medical procedures that are being imposed these days by Dr. Oz."

"Incredible man isn't he? He has made quiet an impression over the people in the last few years."

"He isn't what he appears to be and one day the world will know about that. I've never felt I could trust him and this is coming from a man who works with him. Now am I going to sit here all day waiting for the break fast?" said the man frowning.

Freddy suddenly hurried away at the sudden sway of the mood saying, "I'll get it instantly Mr. Gary."

"And fetch today's newspaper as the breakfast gets ready," replied Mr. Gary in his stern voice.

He began to gaze outside the window, where the mist shrouded most of the view and the bluish aura from the sky made everything look grey.

Freddy brought him the newspaper and without saying anything he swiftly moved towards a couple who had just arrived in the café. Mr. Gary gazed at the sky for a few moments and then he picked up the newspaper skipping the headline which was about the special celebration party planned for Independence Day. He simply moved towards the forecast section which did not do anything to elevate his sunken mood but in fact caused him to snarl which resulted in the young waiter Agnis from nearly flipping the orange juice all over the table. Mr. Gary stared at her as she apologized shyly and white faced. She quickly set up his egg and toast in front of him and walked away. He wondered would this gloomy weather drive everyone else in the town in feverish rage as well in the next few weeks of its stay. He picked up a toast and took a bite of egg with it. Before he could eat it, his eyes got site of another news article and he shook the newspaper to straighten it and began reading it with great interest.

Peace Raped Again

Two more bodies of women known to practice the religion "Peace" were discovered raped and brutally mutilated on Sunday, 18th of November at 18:00 in house # 23, Kettlebury Street, Saffron Town.

The bodies were found naked, tied to bed in separate rooms of the house in such manner that there hands and legs had been spread over the bed, face towards roof. The bodies were mutilated gruesomely with both women having their privates burned and mouths stuffed with ash. One woman had her chest ripped open and stuffed with dead maggots. Both had their faces disfigured with acid that it was impossible to recognize them. The murder is similar to the Jacob Town Murder last week in which the body was found dumped in the trash box.

The women Sara Malik and Ayat Malik were sisters running a local decoration business, "Malik Ornaments and Wedding Decorations." Sara was aged 22 while Ayat was 19. According to neighbours and her relatives who are shocked by this incident, the two women were peaceful and lived a solitary life. Their parents had died two years ago in a car crash and since then both had been living on their own.

The incident has spread fear among the residents of Saffron Town. The investigating team of local police has determined the murderer is moving through a fixed pattern moving from town to town striking only women who follow the religion, "Peace" and so residents of neighbouring town are warned to keep an eye out for any stranger who walks in the town.

Gary smirked at the end muttered, "Yeah good luck with that."

At that moment his vision started to darken to red. He felt something dripping from his eyes and he touched a finger and held it near his eyes. Searing pain tore through him and he grabbed his head and screaming in agony he stumbled off his chair. The pain travelled down his spine to his crotch and he grabbed it writhing as if an axe had cut through him. Agnis and the couple in the café gazed in shock at the man while Freddie hurried over him shouting,

“Whats happening? Mr Gary?”

He tried to grab hold of him but Mr Gary was completely out of control. He held his crotch and rolled as if being burned alive.

“Agnis, call an ambulance,” shouted Freddie.

Agnis recovered and rang back to the counter. The whole café was filled with heart tearing screams and Freddie, body dripping with sweat on this chilly day, finally managed to get Mr. Gary’s hands off his pants and noticed a spot of blood spreading. With great difficulty he managed to unzip the pant and a fountain of blood erupted from it smearing Freddy’s face; he backed away in disgust and horror. Mr. Gary’s throbbing member was a bloody mess and unusually swollen. His mouth had started to spurt out sprays of blood. As Agnis began to turn around after putting the cordless back on the dial, his private gave a final throb and exploded and with that Mr. Gary came to an end.

The café door opened as the couple stumbled out shrieking and started taking deep breaths. Not five minutes later, the ambulance arrived and collected Mr. Gary’s body. The drive began to drive and the attendant sat on the backseat near the dead body and started dialing a number. He put the cell to his ear and could hear the dialing tone and a few seconds later the call was answered by silence.

“It is done, the rapist pig is dead.”

“Was it a good show?”

“You cannot believe, the concoction you brewed worked fantastically Dr Oz!”

The phone was cut from the other side.

“Jill! Jill! Wake up.”

I opened my eyes to welcome a blurry vision. I closed them and turned around in my sleepy state. My shoulder was grabbed and shaken so hard by my mother that I suddenly sat up straight in pain and covered my face with my hands as the bright light entered my eyes.

“Get up! You are almost late, hurry up.” scolded my mother.

“What... Oh yeah.... Yeah right, alright,” I said yawning and rubbing my eyes to adjust the vision.

I looked around after taking my hands of my eyes and looked around. “The Sun’s brighter than was expected.”

“You are in luck aren’t you? This beautiful weather’s completely against the forecast.”

I got up from the bed, feeling a shiver travel up from my legs as they left the blanket’s warmth, and entered the washroom.

I stared in the mirror. My face looked paler than usual, and my eyes were pretty groggy from sleep. Light from the small window entered lighting up my black hair and I ran my hand through it. Slightly oily; nothing that a small wash would not set right. I took off my trousers, nightshirt and undergarments and entered the shower. I swung the dial to full and it poured down heavy and warm, cloaking my body in a refreshing tingle of freshness. I folded my hands around my chest and turned my face up so that the whole water fell on my face, warming it up. I backed a little and opened my eyes to see cool crystals lit with light bath my body. I grabbed the shampoo and very slightly squeezed the bottle letting a small amount of shampoo fall upon my palm and then I rubbed my hands together to make a lather of the soapy liquid and rubbed my hair in it letting my fingers massage my temples and unfold any knots. Then I again entered the force of water and kept rubbing my hair until the soapy feeling was gone and my hair felt soft and silky like velvet. I picked up the soap and rubbed it around in my hands and when the lather was thick enough, I rubbed it around my upper body and armpits moving down to the waist, to remove any unpleasant scents left by the sebum and sweat. Feeling time ticking, I turned the shower off being thankful for threading away all my unwanted hair just a day before, I wrapped a towel around my torso and drying my hands with it, I picked up the hair dryer and turned it on to a low setting so that it dried off any droplets without messing up the silkiness of the hair. Then I quickly brushed my teeth until they felt white and shiny to my eyes with all traces of morning breath gone.

I entered my room and locked my door. I opened my drawers and took out a set of underwear, purposefully selecting black lingerie. I picked up my ironed red T-shirt and the black jeans, with a red flower embroidered on one leg of it and quickly dressed up. I brushed my hair straight and opened the door. I read the clock and it was (Holy God!) 10:00 hrs.

Time was really ticking now.

I had only half an hour left to gather everything and leave for Becky's from where our party of friends was to head off for camping.

"Mom, where's the breakfast?" I said looking at the empty dining table.

Looks like it was up to me to quickly feed myself and depart. I ran to the kitchen, taking out two pieces of bread and the bottle of Nuttela, where I quickly scrapped up the chocolate on the bread and stuffed it into my mouth. At this moment I was really grateful of packing much of my things last night but that was exactly what had kept me up late along with the excitement. Despite the refreshing shower, there was still a hair of fatigue in my head, a slight feeling of numbness as if everything was a dream. Thank Heavens, my mother had managed to take out a glass of hot coffee which I tried to gulp down in one breath and burned my mouth. Coughing whatever I had managed to sip in, I left the half filled frothing cup of coffee to find my mother in the home but despite there being only 2 rooms, a lounge and a drawing room, she was found nowhere not even in her toilet. I opened the door of the house and found her in the lawn.

"Mom," I cried out in chagrin, "I have to leave. Remember?"

My Mom turned around and I saw the tiniest of sparkle around her eyes as she quickly rubbed it off.

“Are you crying?” I asked concerned.

“Not at all honey. I’m sorry; I just got carried away in my thoughts. I’ll get your breakfast ready.”

“No Mom, I have eaten. But I think I should cancel. I can’t have you depressed behind me.”

“Honey, I am totally fine. Get your stuff. I’ll help you carry it to Becky’s. Besides it’s such a great weather, I might soak in a bit of Sun as well.”

“You were crying over Dad weren’t you?” I pressed on the issue again.

Her features relaxed and she smiled slightly but the tears in her tired black eyes were clearly visible; she had given up trying to pretend. “It was a similar day, your father and I met for the first time. He was a handsome young man in his early twenties. The weather today reminded me of those days really strongly.”

I looked at the thick white clouds and the sun shining through the huge gaps in between the pieces, lighting up the sky in a golden light while a distinguished sky blue was visible as well, it was a marvelous site, a perfect weather for blossoming love.

“You know I can stay with you if you want. We can have this trip again some other time.”

“No, my dear daughter, I don’t need to steal this moment away from you. I have enjoyed my share of high school; I can’t bereave you of this. Besides, you did a pretty hard job convincing me to let you go with a murderer out there stalking the neighboring towns these days. Go get your stuff and your cell is in my room charging. Make sure you have a clean pair of spare undergarments with you and please, redden up your cheeks a little, God! You look white as ghost.” said my mother.

I smiled.

“Hurry up!” she pressed and I went back in to get the stuff slightly reluctantly.

Truth was I did not want my Mom to stay alone. I knew she was inclined to have bouts of depression. There was a time when she was a complete wreck. My dad had died, or as the official statement said. As a matter of fact, he had gone out for work one day and disappeared without a note or a call. There was no friction between my parents. They had always been a happy couple, their lives wrapped in a sheet of everlasting love. My Mom, called all his colleagues but they denied seeing him at work that day. She filed an FIR but the police with all their resources failed to locate his whereabouts or what might have happened to him. Three days after the disappearance, the police only managed to locate one of his shoes, covered with traces of dried blood, hung up on a tree outside his office. Tests confirmed it to be his blood and he was filed as dead without any further clues to carry on with the search. My Mom was completely broken, a mess. Her face, once exotic and young, much like mine, seemed to have aged ten times quicker in that time and her weight dropped so much that even the tight shirts of her original slightly chubby figure were loose. She would sit by the window all day, a skeleton with skin, glaring at his photo without a care in the world. I would try to have rows with her but she would remain silent as if she had forgotten about me completely. Two times I attempted to run away but something brought me back each time and I struggled to

help her come to life again, finally she exceeded the limits of her medication and had to be hospitalized for a detox. It was a hard time, to visit her in the hospital everyday and see her cry in pain and desperation. I would cry with her as well and ask her if she loved me but she would just rock back and forth, face covered by her hands, head down.

At first the doctor's would say that she has little chance of surviving after the drug abuse she had gone through, she lay in her bed unconscious for two weeks in a coma and during that time, it was Becky and her mother who comforted me and took me to their home. Becky was just like a sister to me. Her father was one of the colleagues of my father and their friendship went back further to their university days; for him it was as if he had lost a brother and I was just like another daughter to him. He cajoled me and strengthened my spirits. Hope was rekindled when finally my mother started to regain her senses and came to the realization that she had a daughter to take care off.

Everyday, I see the same scene repeat in my mind, sometimes in sharp detail and at others as whispers. It was a similar sunny day, when she opened her eyes from sleep and saw me staring at her, my eyes empty of tears and a carefree expression on my face. A jerky hand approached me and touched my cheek to caress it. Tears emerged from her eyes and she said, "Your eyes! Just like your father's eyes. I am sorry, honey; for neglecting you. I am sorry for trying to kill myself. Just stay with me... Promise me you will never leave me."

After hearing those words and seeing life in her again, it was after many days that my eyes wept again and so did my heart's burden lighten up when we both hugged and cried. She was released three days later and we celebrated my 19th birthday. It had been a year since that terrible time but things had changed drastically since then. My mother was slowly coming to terms with father's death and my life was returning to normal as we set in to our new schedule. I would still stay close to her, avoiding any parties and college trips to stay with my mother. At first I had to keep a close check on her so that she does not attempt to poison herself again but my mother certainly had come to a realization and for me she had risen again. She would avoid my father's talk in front of me, knowing that it pained me as well to remember what happened to him but often when she thought I was not looking, I would find her staring at his picture and crying. It was the very reason, I wanted to cancel this trip but I guess I was being over protective and needed to give her some space so that she can learn to bear the silence of loneliness which she had to bear eventually.

I rummaged the drawer of my room and took out a medicine bottle, glared at it wondering if I was doing the right thing and then put it in my bag. My cell began to ring and I ran to unplug it from my mother's charger since mine was packed in my bag and answered the call.

"Hey Jill, We need to be there before twilight. Okay where are you?"

"Yeah I am just heading towards your home. Don't worry. I'm ready."

"Okay princess, whatever... just remember..."

"Yes okay.... No need to mention it."

I cut the phone.

Man this girl would drive me crazy with her punctuality syndrome.

I was the last to arrive at Becky who was dressed in a sky blue and white checked shirt with a bright red collar with a grayish- chrome coloured jeans. Julia, Georgina, Allen and Kelly had arrived there. I expected Becky to be frowning but she hugged me saying in her high pitched sweet voice, "Finally, Princess. I cannot believe you came."

"This is going to be your big trip, honey," said Kelly looking startling as always in her blonde hair, deep blue eyes, pink shorts, tightly fitting yellow shirt which left much her waist uncovered over which she wore a thin polystyrene jacket.

"You have no idea dear," said Becky smirking mischievously.

I nudged her and said, "So everything ready there."

"Yeah the boys have already departed and will be there most probably before us. They assured us everything was ready. Daddy also went to check the arrangements; the camp is going to be fun."

"So what are we waiting for?" I asked.

"Wow, you are really here, Jill," said Florida, Becky's mother coming out of the house, her Baby Blonde hair twinkling in the sunlight brightening her pale creamy skin. Becky was her spitting image except for the ocher eyes which Becky possessed and none of her parents had.

I returned her smile. "You look dazzling Florida."

"Thank you, Sweet girl," she said stopping to smile at me.

She continued, "Girls be careful okay. Don't wander too far from camp and never alone. Don't forget there is a killer on loose who particularly targets women. The town council has allowed this trip and you should be glad for it, so don't try to break the restrictions laid on you."

Oh yeah and there was the town council, I had nearly forgotten about. Town Candle Hearth had its own council run by certain families who had been here for ages. It was formed about 400 years ago at the start of the new constitution and the end of "The Great War". It had existed since excising decisions for the town people's betterment. The eldest person of the family and his spouse were usually the acting members. My parents had been a strong part of it until, well, all the things went to hell. Becky's parents, Kelly's parents and Allen's parents were members of the council; our families ruling the council since Gulliver Fog had founded it. The council had consisted of seven families and six of them were still the original lines while the seventh my own was the newer addition in place of Fog's family since he left no heir who would have continued the seat. Thus that seat came to "The Khans". Still that had been about two hundred and eighty years ago and we were as old as the original families of the town. Fog did leave an Asylum in the outskirts of town which was now under the care of Dr. Oz who performed therapy for the mentally ill and a little medical research as well. Dr. Oz had arrived at the facility only a decade ago but he was one of the rare people whom the council often consulted on different matters.

“The bus is here so Bitches let’s rock,” cried Becky and picking our load we got up the bus ,before Florida could continue her admonitions, and once we had settled it gave one loud roar and the journey began.

The camp was only a few miles from the town. Not far enough that you could not run back. High school seniors often went for camping there and it was old enough that even my grand father had camped there as well in his teens. I was visiting the camp for the third time in my life (previously once with father with on his friends picnics and later with both the parents during Junior School on a family picnic); it was the first time with friends, having avoided all previous opportunities due to my family problems. It was as if I was whisked away in some dream as I watched people, market, trees and trailers pass me in a blur. My path led us to the lush green fields of wheat and barley along with the brown strips of land where the summer crops had been harvested recently and I watched dreamily, the crops waving; bidding me welcome and goodbye at the same time from both sides of the bus. There was a deep ancient connection that I felt with these surroundings at that time; an old dream coming to life. There were a few birds flying in the sky moving through those curtains of golden light passing through the passages between the clouds. My mind was lost in a beautiful symphony; a piano being played with such peace that you would forget the gossip of the world around you. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and rested my head on the seat enjoying this beautiful day, free of the worry of my mother, my disturbing past and the experiences that I was about to have.

“Hey! Hey! Sleepy Head! Wake up Princess.”

I opened my eyes to see Becky bent below my face smiling.

“Someone had a rough night last night,” she said smiling slyly.

“Oh please Becky. How long was I asleep?”

“How long could it have been? We are here princess, Camp Greenfire... Woe to the one who gave it such a dull name.”

“Yeah that would have been one of our Grand fathers.”

Becky face palmed her self.

“Hey the boys are here already!” exclaimed Julia, her dress dark glossy black as always and her hair dyed blood red.

“Well they had to be and hey the bookworm came as well,” said Allen.

Kelly giggled. “What about Gale?”

“Ok. Ok Women.... Have some dignity and let’s go and see what arrangements we have to make,” said Becky ordering them and smiling, her face lit, an effect enhanced because of her baby blonde hair tied back in a ponytail.

She looked at me and there was another sly smile there.

I glared at her and trying to control her giggles she turned around and started to gather her things. I took a deep breath and got up to pick my load as well. I checked my watch, it was about 11:00 hrs. The weather had turned gloomy due to the thick clouds.

“Looks like it’s gonna rain,” I muttered.

The boys had gathered around the bus. There was Jack, Luke, Gale, Brad and Solomon, the book worm. They were cheering and waving. Kelly jumped of the bus and ran into Gale’s arms; he grabbed her from her slim and bare waist, spun her around in the air and pulled her into a kiss. Ignoring them, the others greeted each other. Solomon, thin and with a heart shaped small pale face, was as usual quiet and already walking away from the embraces and greetings. Becky hugged Jack last and said, “You must not be here very long. What’s the arrangement?”

Jack started speaking but my eyes had turned deaf. Perhaps it was too good to hope for and perhaps this camp wasn’t meant to be as special as I was hoping for. My vision started to water up even though I tried to control it. My chest felt heavy as well, as if someone had loaded it with stones. My vision blinded as something warm slid over my eyes.

The stones unloaded at once and I cried out, “Ayan!” in the most high-pitched girlish voice I could have mustered.

“Wrong answer,” said a made up deeply heavy voice.

I forced to turn around but the hands covering my eyes grabbed my shoulders and pulled me back into a soft warmth.

Ayan kissed my cheek sliding his hands across my chest and said, “You thought I will never come, love.”

I spoke and there was pain in my voice, “It’s just that we have been through a lot. I thought maybe you...” I could not speak further.

“Well whatever it is... forget about it... we’ll talk later.”

The strong warm hands released me and I turned around to see his beautiful face.

His blonde hair was perfectly straight as ever. His eyes were coal black and warm as always; filled with love. His lips, red and moistened were tempting but I resisted jumping into his arms. He wore a white collared shirt and a black leather jacket over it, the outline of his chest muscles visible on the shirt. He was perfect to me despite his slightly larger nose looking a bit awkward on his face which was clean shaved.

“I think we should show the girls their camps now,” cried Jake.

Ayan and I kept staring into each others eyes and a few moments later without breaking the mesmerizing gaze, “Ayan replied, “Yeah we should.”

We all picked out stuff, with the boys carrying most of the loads. "Ladies, as you can see, there are six cabins but we have settled three which is more than enough for us. We boys have settled our stuff in the fourth cabin over there; you should settle yours in that third one."

The cabins were lined in ring around a central circle of dry wood for camp fire. These were spacious to look at; made of wooden planks painted white, they looked quiet sturdy. There was also a specialized cabin for washrooms which were behind the central ring of cabins. There was a storeroom as well with all sorts of camp assortments in it.

The boys had selected our cabins side by side and Becky did not look too happy with this arrangement but she relented without an argument by picking up her bags and proceeding to settle in.

As I started to move, the clouds thundered.

All of us groaned. There goes our day because it was certain to rain now.

"Don't forget tonight. Meet me in the first cabin."

Ayan moved away as quickly as he had towards me.

I gazed at him, my heart jumping with beats of worry.

Ayan and I had been friends since kindergarten, but our friendship had nearly always been a little more. We were the special couple since childhood. Perhaps fate had been giving a clue when we had dressed as bride and groom at a school play, which our parents had enjoyed a lot and quipped about it often even when we had grown up. Then my life had fallen apart and I had run away a second time to "Town Mellowhearth" before the town council could announce my mother as incapable of taking my care and I was shoved off to some boarding house to learn work and complete my education. I was completely lost; I had no idea what I was going to do there when Ayan appeared as a miracle.

It was a bleak weather, storms ravaging the terrain. That day of December was too chilly to be outside. I was hungry even though I had eaten my lunch and was shivering so much from the cold that each step was an endeavor. I sat down on a pavement, too tired to move further, my hair a mess though my health was fine since Florida had made sure that I was well fed no matter what I said. It was from the private talks of Becky's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bill, that I had learned about the town council pressurizing for a final decision about my fate and instantly made the decision to run away. No way I was going to be instructed by a pair of old instructors who had no feelings for me and my troubles; or living with a bunch of troubled kids, who had become more freakish than stable living away from their parents in that dirty shack of a building. Often these had ended up at Fog's Asylum rather than a suitable place in the world.

My father's face flashed before my eyes and then my parents laughing and nudging each other as both struggled to get most of the blanket on a cold day. I remembered them wrapped in a shawl and

I myself, a little girl wrapped under my father's shawl, enjoying a family BBQ on a wintery twilight. I could almost smell those days and my eyes began to weep again when a finger brushed my cheeks wiping away the tears and I looked away to find my vision focusing on Ayan's face. He held out a hand and helped me get up.

"What are you doing?"

I did not speak but looked the other way.

"Jill, I am asking you? Was running away the only answer to your troubles?"

"What could have I done? I will not leave my mother, why doesn't the council leave me alone?" I said a little forcefully, the pain in my voice pellucid.

"Jill, honey, look at me," he said taking my face in his hands and turning it so that my eyes gazed into his, "you can't destroy yourself. I won't let you."

"I am already finished, Ayan. We are finished. There is nothing for us once the council decides to put me away from my mother."

He held my mouth with his fingers so that I could not speak anymore, "I love you... there is no way the council is going to let us part, I have asked dad and he will make sure of it."

Everything was lost to me on those three words and I started to cry, months of pain bursting out of me.

Ayan pulled me in his embrace and said, "Come with me its cold. The constitution may not allow us to be free due to lack of professional education but at this age we do have a few perks that can save us."

"I don't understand a word you are saying!" I said through my sobs.

"Marry me Jill. My father is ready for it and the council will be told of it as well."

I broke from his embrace, surprised. "Mother..."

"Won't have to know until you want her to... until she is ready. Don't worry honey, she will be alright and you can then make her ready for this marriage and we will declare it to her then."

I felt his hands clasping my fingers; he had slipped a ring in my index finger.

I was silent as we sat in his car.

We married on the same day in front of the council, but the marriage was to be kept secret from others. Only a few trusted friends knew and Becky was one of them and Jack as well. Ayan's father was the only member of his family on the council and was the current head. Our marriage was basically a certification since I was to continue staying with Becky even though Ayan's father wanted me to live with them but rest of the council thought it was better not to.

“Hey, little princess... where are you today?” said Kelly.

Lost in my thoughts I had sat on the bed to rest my legs.

I smiled weakly and said, “It’s nothing Kell. What about you? Enjoying the camp?”

“Of course... Gale is here and we have just begun the trip. You just wait and see how good it will be. I wish you had been with us previously too,” she kept on speaking in one breath.

“Oh no, you are not going to enjoy anything with this rain,” said Georgina.

A heavy downpour had begun and the pitter patter over the roof was dangerously loud.

“Will the cabin hold water?”

“I hope so, they have, this long at least and the council’s maintained it well until now,” said Becky.

“Okay Queen B, stop unpacking, come sit with me to discuss the day’s plan,” said Allen.

“In a minute Allie. Hold your horses, we’ll settle everything up soon.”

The rain was so beautiful; those little crystals having fun sliding off the leaves and like little bombs dropping over the grass forming a small pool. I stepped outside into the heavy rain and the icy water fell over me blowing my mind into a blast of freshness and the desire to jump back in dryness but I let the rain wash over me. It almost felt as I would burn away from the cold but I spread my hands wide open and started to spin around closing my eyes as the little crystals started to slide in my eyes; this was life and I was really enjoying it for the first time in ages. I had never felt a sensation like this, the smell of damp dirt and water, the coolness of rain; it was washing away all my fears, all my worries and bad memories.

“Hey look at Princess.”

I felt myself rolling my eyes. “Princess,” Becky had called me since I had performed the bride with Ayan in the school play. I was sure she would put that name over my gravestone as well.

“JILL AYAN ROSS! A PRINCESS TO BE REMEMBERED”

It was the funniest thought and I burst out laughing and the fresh water ran in my mouth and I gulped it down.

It had an incredible healing affect and I felt drugged by its taste. I opened my eyes as Georgina jumped in the water with me and we started to splash each other with the water from the puddles.

Reluctantly, others joined in too except for Queen B; until Kelly, shivering from the cold, went into the cabin and as Becky gave her way to go in, she grabbed her and pushed her in as well. Becky gave a squeal of mirth and then half laughing-half screaming, she joined the game as well, her day’s plan forgotten. I thanked God for at least once making her forget her punctuality syndrome.

It was just a glance towards the boy's cabin but I saw, Solomon, staring at us and even through the curtain of rain I could see something was wrong. I waved him but he did not answer it, typical "Book Freak" attitude. However, there was certainly something else, something completely wrong with him and then I saw it, blood gushing out of a grotesque gash in his head and trickling down in small streams on his pale heart shaped face.

"My God, Solomon, how did this happen," I screamed but there was no response.

In the cries and shrieks and the pitter patter of rain, no one answered my call.

Forgetting them, I ran towards Solomon, the rain blinding my eyes. I reached the stair steps of the boy's cabin but there was no one. Not a sign of Solomon or the blood that I had seen gush out of his head. A strange silence filled the air, even the noise of rain shrouded in it. I turned around and my heart beat quickened and so did the shivers which came with the feeling of terror. The girls were gone. At a slow pace, I moved towards our cabin, hoping that it was all a crazy joke, probably Brad's since he was the only one who found humour in macabre. Though it was just beside the boys cabin, the walk was taxing on my strength and my steps felt heavy; it was as if walking through water. My vision began to darken but I tried to hold my self together, even though my head spun. Heavy breathing filled the air and I could hear a faint cry; a cry of pain. Then the sobbing began.

What's happening? Whose There?

The words could not come out of my mouth; my throat felt sore and my tongue stuck. I tried to breathe heavily as the sobs continued. I had stepped down the boy's cabin and now was making my way towards the girl's cabin. Someone was breathing heavily in my ears, perhaps it was me myself but it was the only sound among the occasional sob and cry of a girl that filled my head. I could feel shadows in the trees watching me. I tried to run but my feet would not allow it and at a slow pace, I moved towards the cabin, hoping to find the girls hidden there to surprise me.

"How? How can they hide?"

Moans filled the air; pleasurable moaning along with heavy breathing.

I entered the cabin filled with darkness; the curtains had been drawn close. I switched on the light and a dim bulb sprung to life. I shrieked in revulsion as my brain deciphered the meaning of what I was seeing; it was Becky hanging from the ceiling; her neck cut open and thick gore falling on the ground into an ugly puddle.

No way! No. This can not be happening... Oh God help me!

My vision had turned grey and I could feel everything spinning about me. My mind screamed with denial of my sight and I could barely hold myself up. I took in big lunges of air.

I began to cough trying to expel, the rotting air that had filled my lungs. I tried to run away but my feet refused to carry me and I tried to get hold of the wall. Fiery pain shot through my arm and I screamed thrashing here and there trying to break free of the grip that held it in which I was successful.

Sound of heavy breathing, this time not in my head and with painful groans, filled the room and I stared at the creature in shock, a burned torso, trying to step in the cabin. The burned legs were of little help to this creature and blood streams ran on the charred skin from the cracked head through which a bubbling brain was visible hanging out.

Please, no. Please no. No please no...Why me...

I tried to cry but my tongue was paralyzed and my feet frozen; as much as I tried to jump away, I could not. My mind had shut itself on any possible solutions of escaping; I had started to lose control over my vision.

The body, leaking with ash filled pus, breathing heavily as if dying, struggled towards me, slowly stepping in the cabin, and then, finally, I found strength to turn away from this repulsive creature and kicked the door closed, which snapped the body in half and the upper torso fell inside shrieking in a hoarse voice louder than before.

I turned around and there was Becky, her face covered all in blood, a devilish grin on her face walking towards me. I fell down and could not get up as she grabbed my throat in her blood covered hands. My senses were lost and vision was blinded and I was out of breath and my wind pipes were crushed by Becky's hands.

The room was burning, my eyes were burning and in that fire, I could see the eyes filled with dark abyss staring at me. I was screaming and I could hear a thousand other screams, people crying for mercy, for help. All around me, charred parts of body lay sprawled on the scorching floor. My insides were burning, my mind had caught fire but my heart was still cold and fire had failed to sear it despite its unbearable intensity. It was beating and with each beat, it sent agony pulsating through my burning body. Fire was eating me up.

Fire was everywhere...

I opened my eyes, feeling a soft warm, feeling on my neck and then the sound of kissing; it was Ayan.

"It's alright, baby, I am with you. We will be fine."

"But the blood... the fire... Oh my God, AYAN! I cannot tell you it was so vivid, so real, everything," I started to cry with relief that it was all a dream; a densely macabre dream one that will haunt my nights for a long time.

Ayan hugged me to his warm, wide chest. "You worry too much and I think it's getting to your mind."

"No it's not that. I am telling you, one moment I was here with everyone and the next I see Solomon sitting there," I said pointing at the boy's cabin's stair step, "He was bleeding profusely. I ran towards him and then and then..."

I could say no more.

“Don’t cry. Everyone is fine and Becky is super worried. You just collapsed out on the ground. I had to force them all to leave you with me since you muttering again. They just left now and no one is in any mood to play or do anything. Kelly even wanted your mother informed.”

“You did not!”

“Don’t worry. Becky convinced her that it won’t be a good idea.”

I stared at him, in his eyes.

“It was the fire again. It was the same fire.”

“I can understand. You need to relax, honey. Tonight’s special... remember. But I think you have caught a cold, it was careless of you to bath in the cold rain.”

“No I am fine.” I lied.

“No dizziness,” he inquired.

“Only a little...but it’s all probably due to the nightmare. Don’t worry I’ll be fine.”

I tried to get up and nearly fell down as I felt the sudden jolt of weakness.

“Are you sure?” said Ayan grabbing me.

“I think I’ll rest a bit. Besides, I had a rather sleepless night.”

“Hmm....Yeah you should rest, Here let me help you get to bed.”

He lifted me up in his arms.

“Is this our honey moon.”

He kissed my lips and said, “If you want it to be.”

“I was thinking more of mountains and the green pastures,” I giggled.

“How about we run away together?” he replied chuckling.

“No one will bother looking for a married couple,” I replied humorously.

We both laughed.

As much as I tried to sleep, I could not. The rain had not stopped, and the pitter patter was comforting to my ears. It reminded me of the little healing effect, the rain had on me. I gazed out from the windows, into the dense, green forest now turning dark, twilight was fading away. I had been unconscious for a few hours and this day had gone wasted and I felt guilty for it since it was all due to me. Perhaps, the feeling of euphoria that had erupted in my mind after a long time, the

feeling of true pure happiness after the long dark days had put my mind to rest and hence I had fallen into the realm of nightmare; the darkness of my past in the shape of a grotesque dream. I helped myself up from the bed; legs felt very stiff and I could feel the painful effect of ants crawling all over my right leg. I hobbled towards the door and opened it. I wondered for a moment that would these doors stop a terrible murderer from breaking in, there was after all a murderer roaming in the neighbourhood. Hopefully, he would simply take the main road; after all he was not going to be recognized by his face, was he? After all, this was not a slasher film and huge money had once been made by exploiting this terrible idea. The rain had nearly stopped and I saw Jack step out of the camp.

“Hey Jackie, what’s going on?”

“You are awake, thank heavens. Ayan just told about you. We were so worried but Becky said, it was probably due to your sleeplessness,” he replied flicking the fringe of his black hair away from his blue rabbit eyes.

“Yeah it most probably was,” I said pressing each word as if trying to convince him but the truth was that I was comforted by hearing these words..

“Everyone was planning to play “Snakes and Ladders” but the rain has stopped, so I was going to get the wood for the fire from the storage. We were planning BBQ and Solomon’s going to tell the camp fire story.”

“Camp Fire Story?” I asked twitching my nose into the expression of bewilderment.

“Yeah, its tradition, one of us has to tell a story beside the camp fire. It was what my Grand daddy used to say. Campers often indulged in vices during the camp and “Truth or Dare” used to be the main entertainer. The game often turned ugly so one of the campers decided to tell a story once during the dinner. The story turned out to be so intriguing that it simply became a tradition for campers to listen to a story after they had finished eating and its always an interesting experience because most stories are fresh and even if they are not, it is always enjoyable to listen to a known story again to remember, the mighty characters and the prideful tale.”

“So Solomon’s agreed to it?” I asked intrigued that the introvert had finally decided to open up a little.

“Its one thing he is really good at and we all have witnessed that in the school if not anywhere else.”

I could not agree more. It had slipped my mind but Solomon was certainly a talented story teller. However, I simply nodded at Jack instead of showing any deep appreciation for Solomon’s ability, the morning’s vision still fresh in my mind.

“I think, I’ll help you pick up the wood.”

Jack instantly raised his hands in a stop sign to protest, “No way. You are too weak, and I don’t want to burden you with this. Go on in, everyone would be relieved to see you. Ayan will feel better too, I guess. Quite a character he is; that man of yours.”

My eyes brows raised with wonder, "Why? What did he do?"

'Oh nothing, but at least the Kelly-Brad steaminess will remain cool for sometimes giving that their hormones don't kick in hard."

I giggled at his reply.

"You know, I think I should go and stop Ayan from badgering the couple. Let them sate their lust; the love birds, those two."

Smiling Jake departed for the store while I shaking my head and smiling walked towards the boy's cabin. There were shouts of "Ohh's" and "Noo's" and "Yaah's" erupting from that room along with the boom of music.

I opened the door and for a moment nobody noticed it and I saw all of them, bent over the board, throwing dice and waiting for their next move. How long it had been, I wondered, that all of us had enjoyed something together simply as friends. Everything had changed now though; relations between old friends were complicated now. Ayan had changed and I had felt it, since after marriage. I could feel him expecting something from me, always; a desire that was not present between us as a friendly romantic couple; where he was the one who usually tried to exceed my expectations. Ayan had not been happy with us being married and still living far away from each other. Each night, I imagined his mind bent over the thought of having me with him, to share his bed and his pleasure. Marriage had changed so much in both of us and sadly, we both had been running away from it. I could feel Ayan hiding something within him; something he wanted to say yet he could not; instead he kept showing me how he cared and loved me and even though I did not doubt his intentions, I could feel something wrong in the play he was putting up at the camp; it was all hidden in the gestures of his body which did not coordinated with him. It was only a matter of time, when he would not be able to bear the weight in his heart and then we would have to face the consequences; terrible or good, that would come of the un-bearing of this weight.

Allen looked up, first and in her sweet voice, the delicate looking, alabaster skinned girl waved a hand drawing other's attention towards me. Ayan smiled and I noticed again, the gleam missing from his eyes while his lips smiled at me. He was a beautiful male and could have had better girls in life but he had sacrificed himself for me and I felt guilty for not giving him the pleasure that was his by right.

"Hey princess, come here," Becky said, her pony tail of baby blonde hair open and her long hair falling down to her waist, "How are you? I was so worried. Did you take the medicine that I left for you?"

"Yeah I did," I lied, "And I feel loads better." I lied again.

"If you keep collapsing the entire trip, how will we ever manage to have fun," said Kelly.

"Hopefully, I won't," I said slightly irritated at the taunt I felt in her reply.

“Hey Jill, want to join in?” said Gale politely, his cheeks and lips red from lipstick, the colour of which matched Kelly’s.

“Its okay, you people enjoy, I’ll watch. Anyone besides me is feeling hungry?”

“Oh, yeah, I am!” said Solomon in his slightly high pitched tone.

I turned around surprised that he had spoken.

“Oh, beware the sorcerer speaks,” said, Luke, his green shirt wrinkled from lying on his belly.

“Aoooooo,” howled Brad, mimicking a wolf.

Solomon simply looked at both of them with an annoyed expression but with eyes that were dead.

His gaze certainly had some effect since, his energy gone, Brad simply said, “I think we should go and help Jack set up the fire; rain might come back, we need to cook before that.”

Luke and Brad, both red haired slender boys, left the cabin closing the door behind me after which they again turned flamboyant and teased Jake about something.

“Oh nearly there, you guys are pretty much fucked,” said Ayan.

I bent over the board; his flag had reached the 97 mark, now only one snake remained between him and the victory.

“Yeah we will see about that,” said Becky throwing a six and then taking the bonus turn to throw the dice.

“Your turn. Wolf,” said Brad, Kelly’s head resting on his thighs.

“Ayan shook the dice and threw it on the board with force.

The dice spun quickly coming to a stop at, four, one and six.....

“FUCK YOU,” screamed Ayan slamming his fist on the wooden floor. He had got a two and from 99 score mark, his flag had been taken to 80 flag mark and now Becky had a clear lead of 6 points. Brad was still behind Ayan, at the 74 flag mark and now was in hope for getting second.

Becky smiled.”Guess I am the lucky one here.”

“Yeah we’ll see about that, just hope you don’t end up on the same spot as mine.”

Seven minutes of this dice throwing resulted in Becky ending up at 98 mark while Ayan on 97. Brad had lost all hope after getting bitten by a snake and ending up at the 50 flag mark. He simply took Kelly and went back in the cabin to make out.

Becky looked at Ayan triumphantly and threw the dice. The dice came to a halt at six.

“Tough luck, huh, no use for this six now,” said Ayan.

"I still have a chance. Give me the dice."

Ayan threw the dice to her and she threw again this time slightly shaken. The dice came out a clear two ending the game.

"Queen B you are now, truly," I said.

"Forget the Queen, your King is here," said Ayan as he shook hands with Becky.

"Yeah sure, love."

The door opened and Luke stepped in.

"Ladies and Gentleman, Please step outside into the chill to enjoy the campfire's warmth and Chef Jack's special sizzling BBQ."

He gave a bow and closed the door.

Ayan wrapped a cloak around me and said, "Take care of your self. Come on."

Solomon was the first to leave the cabin and we followed after him.

Jack and the guys had set up a spectacularly blazing fire in a short time and had begun working on cooking the BBQ. As they started the wind the coal, I saw sparks fly and die out while falling to the ground. It felt warming to my eyes and I stared at the sparks. Luke was gently giving wind to the coal and as the coal burned, the number of sparks increased. They jumped out aggressively from the grill and then died out in a gentle sway. An image crossed my eyes, the charred skeletons, the hands sprouting from ashes waving weakly for help, the painful cries of men as they burned.

"Flame sparks. They interest you," said Gale in my ears.

"No I just found them comforting after..."

"After the nightmare, yeah I can relate the feeling."

The vision of fire flashed my eyes and horrified I looked at the sparks. The sparks had lightened up the dry grass below the coal pit and were now spreading in the wind that blew. My mind rushed and panicking, I ran towards the grill where Luke was winding the coal. I stamped my feet on the fire with force as if the fire would catch me, extinguishing it.

Luke gazed at me, his winding of the hand fan, reduced. "This fire could have spread, you know and we have wood around here. Lots of it."

He looked confused and said, "There was a fire there."

"Yeah man... you should be careful you know!" I said in a cutting tone.

"Sorry. I did not realize," said Luke going red as his flaming hair.

I turned back and sat with Ayan, my gaze fixed on the grill.

"You were saying something before," I said.

He did not speak. I turned my face sideways and saw his face sober, the hunger in his eyes visible. His face edged closer to my face but, as much as I hated to do this, I raised a hand and placed two fingers on his lips stopping his approach. The pain on his face was clear. He could have anyone and yet he had given himself to me and yet I denied myself to him. It was selfish of me; I could not ask him to suffer more because of my pains. Ayan simply turned his face towards the grill too and in a normal voice, he said, "Are you taking the meds."

I nodded lightly.

"The hallucinations haven't gone, have they." I could feel his gaze boring in me. I remained silent.

He simply got up and said, "I think Brad should have put up some music by now."

I turned around to watch him leave and then faced the fire burning in the centre of the camp.

"Things between you guys aren't working out, are they?" said Becky, her chrome coloured jeans blazing in the fire's bright colour. I did not realize she had been watching me.

"I don't know B. Sometimes, I hate myself for it but each time I try, it ends in a disaster." My eyes had filled with tears. "What if he left me B. What if he did not want anything from me?"

Becky hugged me. "No, my princess, don't cry. It'll all be fine in the end."

"I should have told Mom about this marriage but I did not want to upset her or leave her so soon. Now I feel him going away from me. Each time I look at him, each time he makes a move, its always reluctant. He knows always, my answer. I am afraid B. I love him and I am afraid of loosing him," my voice becoming whiny as a hard lump formed in my throat.

Becky patted my back trying to placate me.

"Don't cry Jill. Everything will be fine. Ayan can never leave you."

With my fingers, I removed the drops of water in my eyes and wiped my face off from the tears before any one saw else saw me.

Music began to boom through the atmosphere.

"Look he is coming back to you. You are being paranoid, princess but then I guess after marriage things change."

"You have no idea," I muttered.

Becky left as she saw Allen and Julia walking towards the grill with their plates and eating the steaming grilled chicken.

The camp had begun to boom with rock and roll; a music my mind did not want to taste at the moment. Ayan walked right past me without a look towards the grill. I gazed at him once and then

turned my head back towards the warming fire. The ghosts in the rising blaze were jeering at me. I wanted to stop basking in its heat but rather burn in it.

Let the ghosts of the fire consume me. Let them lick my body and be done with it.

Life was a nightmare that I did not want to enjoy.

“I brought food for you,” said Ayan placing a plate full of steaming chicken in front of me. I looked at him.

“What about you?”

“I thought we could share from one plate.”

The ache in my heart lessened a bit but it did not calm my grief. “Hey can you get the music changed.”

“Yeah sure.”

“Something calm and peaceful, love,” I replied my head bowed.

He started to get up and at that moment I grabbed his hand and pulled him into a kiss; a warm relief pumped through me and I was pulled into another world where the heat of the fire was blessing in the cold winds around me. It was for a few moments though since Ayan pulled away and stared at me, surprised.

A symphony began to play from the box; it was beautiful and painful, the music of flutes and piano played at slow and low notes.

“I guess your wish fulfilled itself,” he said with a weak smile.

“Ayan...”

“Hey, your meat’s getting cold and I got to find Solomon and get him to tell this tale of his.”

“But you...”

He interrupted me again, “Its okay, love, I’ll find something to stuff myself. I got to make some preparations.” He gave a slight wink and I got what he was referring and I smiled now seeing that old gleam for the first time in many days.

Jack had done a great job in marinating the chicken. It was spicy and delicious. “Hey Brad, fetch me a coke,” I said as he passed by.

He nodded and shouted, “YO, Jack boy, toss a coke here.”

Jack threw the tin at Brad who caught it gracefully and passed it to me. I caught Becky’s eye and smiled. She returned my smile looking calm and then returned to chatting with Jack. All

of us knew, both had a crush on each other but Jack was too afraid to ask her out while Becky was too haughty to try. For her it was the man who should make the first attempt.

The melody had picked up pace and was mesmerizing everyone in its sweet notes. A chilly air was blowing and the fire felt so good on the skin. I closed my eyes enjoying the heavenly feeling of happiness and calm.

“Where is the Book Freak,” shouted Kelly. I could see her dancing at a corner seductively. She was drunk, it was clear. “Hey, you guys brought beer, too?” I asked Julia who was passing by. She took her hands out of her black jacket and said, “Not we. It was Luke but it seems Kelly got hand of his stash. She is totally drunk.” Kelly had started shouting and calling for Solomon. “Tell her to shut up or else we won’t get to hear the story.”

It was up to me, I guess. “Come with me.” I said to Julia. A faster song had started though I had not heard it before. I walked with Julia around the camp fire towards Kelly. Gale looked at me and smiled. Ignoring his smile, I got hold of Kelly. “Hey Kelly, I think you need to hit the loo.”

“No! No! I WANT TO HEAR THE STORY.”

“Yeah but only if you quiet down,” I said.

“No, I want to dance and listen. Kiss me Gale.”

I raised my hand to stop him. “If you did not sit and wear something warm, you won’t get Gale.” I said the first thing that came to my mind.

“WHO ARE YOU TO TAKE GALE AWAY FROM ME?” she screamed raising a bottle of brandy to throw at me.

I suddenly backed away at her rage. I saw Becky running towards us with Allen and Georgina, who had been so stuffed with food, apparently, that she came behind at a slow pace, hand placed on her belly. Kelly began to laugh loudly and said, “Look at your face princess. Party, love; Party all night.”

Kelly was talking gibberish but her words left me disturbed and I could not reply her. She kept on laughing swaying her waist in a seductive style.

Becky and Georgina, finally forced her to wear her jacket.

“Hey everyone, listen up,” said Brad shouting from the other side of the camp. “Time for Camp Fire Story.”

“Yay CFS!!!” muttered Julia in a sarcastic tone. It made me smile.

“This time I present you Solomon, the book freak, the great story teller.”

“I saw Luke and Ayan dragging Solomon, trying to calm him down and make him come with them.”

“You know looking at him I wonder, how he even accepted coming with us all,” I said to Julia.

“Oh no, Luke told me that her mother specifically made him go. If it was not for his mother’s strictness, he would never come out. Poor boy, I actually believe that he is like this due to the weird strict rules his mother has.”

Solomon, an entity on his own he was, cut from this world and yet trying to live in it. It seems we were all trying to find a place in this world but in Solomon’s case seemed much harder. He had been with us since kindergarten and had always been a weird boy. We rarely saw him in any sports, in which he totally sucked. He never tried making friends, trying to live in a world of his own. He was shy in class and often when he spoke, it felt rude but I could understand that while he was actually trying to sound tough by taking that tone; inside he was afraid. He was afraid of this world and I wondered what made him like that. There was no doubt, his mother had always been strict on him, forcing him to study and outperform, forcing him to take part in all activities. She was everywhere to badger him until she stopped doing that and Solomon disappeared further in his shell. I had seen him sitting under trees talking silently and sometimes laughing. His small, pale, heart shaped face had always been sullen but it looked really nice when he smiled. I always contemplated on what made him so miserable. I wondered how that boy survived the constant badgering by his mother, the bullying of his class mates and the non responsive or non-appreciative behavior of his teachers. It was painful to even think about it and this boy was bearing it all and living his life. To say the truth, this boy was really brave in a way.

Ayan had finally made Solomon sit by the fire; he had gone back in the cabins after taking his food. I believe, I could sympathize with Solomon on a level; I had my own share of silence and seclusion as well but those were enough to drive me nearly mad. Solomon, however, seemed to have found a strong foothold in the darkness and had created a light for himself there.

Solomon cleared his throat, his eyes set in the flames that rose from the wood. “Okay so Camp Fire Story. Ummm.... Do you guys know that this is the place where the seeds of the Great War actually started? This place is supposed to be haunted by the souls of many of those who died here. “

“The Great War, will that be horrible enough. I mean its okay with the ghost’s story but has not been the topic of Great War leeches up already?” said Jack.

Solomon stared at Jack, his voice now came out with less doubt, "The story I will tell you, is different, true and uncovered. In fact much of it came from the journal of a Peace Follower, M Rafay. It's a story that truly reveals what caused all of the melancholy."

"Man. Are we going to listen to rant of hundred year old Peace Follower?" said Kelly in her drunken voice, "You know those Peace Followers; no body remembers them and what they say. They are afraid of only one thing, this." She laid a hand on Gale's crotch hard and he winced and smiled slightly sheepishly looking at me. Anger burned down me and I tried to stop myself when she again shouted, "That rapist, you know, teaching those women a good lesson before murdering them, trust me." She began to lick Gale's neck with her long tongue.

"GALE, WILL YOU TAKE HER IN THE CABIN AND PUT HER TO SLEEP." I shouted.

Everyone looked at each other except for Kelly. She coolly got up swaying to her sides in her drunken state and shouted, "Yeah, yeah Bitch. You and your Boyfriend should stop your fucking ranting. I'll rather have Gale take me to sleep then listen to some shitty story with you bitches. In fact you boy, could use my help getting to know yourself, heck you may learn a great talent to pleasure others."

Gale got up trying to shut her up and lead her to her cabin but she her reflexes were slow. As she left she said, "Hey you Book Freak.... Come to me in the night... I can really teach you a good talent."

Solomon had turned tomato red and even Luke looked a little red. I said, "Solomon, hey listen," but he got up and started a stroll back to his cabin.

I looked at Ayan and the boys. Ayan immediately tried to calm him down.

"Hey listen, forget her. She was drunk."

The boys tried to hold him but he started to throw a tantrum in a high pitched voice.

I tried to say something but nothing came to my mind. Finally, I said, "I would really like to hear what M Rafay's journal says. Is it even true?"

Solomon stopped his thrashing and looked at me. His eyes were cold and small. He said, "I found the journal in my attic and yeah its true since it is dated that far back and its jacket is really old. I researched into different things myself too to confirm if this was a true journal."

"Very well, then, why deprive us of such an interesting tale. You are a good story teller. Tell us what really happened in the Great War." I pleaded.

Solomon returned to his position and sat down crossing his legs. "The Great War began nearly 450 years ago and caused so much damage to technology, architecture and the people that even after 3 centuries we have not been able to catch up with the world at that time. The only place that has advanced is the capital, "Vercosa." Now we are part of this Empire with all these Town Councils and fraction of the technology that once humans possessed. The Great War was not just a fight among humans and resources. It was the age of Bioweapons and they were heavily used in this whole process resulting in severe disruptions in natural schemes of the world. 'Virula' was the pharmaceutical company that put an end to the whole war and finally became the centre of negotiations between different powers. Finally the powers decided to form a combined republic because of the damage that had been done in the world and thus Virula's status was changed and it became the Capital Vercosa of the Empire Claret Blood. We all know how the Great War had driven humans from their homes trying to fend themselves from the hordes of the creatures and deadly sick that walked their roads. Millions died in it and it is still said that ghosts of the dead walk the streets of the ruins of once great monuments of the "Old World." Everything has changed but there are some who still remember and will never forget, there are some who will pass on the knowledge to their generations so that they remember the lesson and protect the New World from another such peril that marked the end of the "Old World" Have you ever wondered, what is beyond the areas out of boundary of the Empire's vast wall? Have you ever wondered what started the Great War? Food? Water? Yes they are one of the reasons Man has been trying to enslave each other so he can have those necessities for himself but my friends "The Great War" was an accident and yet there are people to blame for neglecting the warnings."

Solomon raised an old battered diary like book in his hands and continued, "They denied the warnings of this man who had suffered and seen the face of man gone wild. He was the one who had seen humanity lost from the hearts of those he loved and had survived many painful ordeals. He who had suffered terribly and yet come out alive and deliberate to unveil the mask from the true culprits but none of those in Higher Power's took any interest. He was M. Rafay, from the Town of FFC, an industrial town that once stood in glory right where our Town Candle Hearth stands. Start digging up ruins and we will be discovering abandoned buildings, a whole city of underground industry that stood below the Town of FFC where secret research went in to the field of bio weapons. In those labs worked two professors, James and Kevin, who thought they could create a virus to take control over the whole world, to be masters of humanity. Impossible to believe but that one creation resulted in the destruction of more than one civilization and this man is not talking nuts. The tale is sad, filled with horrors unimaginable.

"They were five of them, Rafay, Oz , Zee, Rushna, Faiq and Hassan. One day they found themselves greeting an air of death that destroyed much of the inhabitants of town. The

irony, my dears, is that on such a night the town celebrated, unknowingly welcoming death with feasts.”

No body dared interrupt Solomon as his story, told in a high deep voice, despite Solomon having a high pitched tone normally, and with long spaces, began to take grip and start giving us chills and goose bumps even in the warmth of the fire.

“Rafay was one of the five who had seen the element of death, who had known long before what would happen if such an invention was released in the world but fear not for this narrator is not your villain; rather a poor soul who happen to stumble upon secrets he should not have known and escaped barely with his life. Though in grave words he tells us how that one ordeal changed him from within; each attribute of his body modified. There are no details of what happened exactly that night he found the two Professors conversing about their heinous plans but he mentions how the two met their demise at the same spot for their cruel intentions. It seems that Fate had planned something for the world and these two were the first to suffer it. The question that rises in my mind is; was the civilization of the ‘Old World’ so sinful, so deeply in darkness that fate decided to wipe it to near extinction using their bodies as a tool? I can tell you all I know of the five people who survived the nightmare of the town of FFC but beware for this tale runs long and has bits missing for the journal of M. Rafay with long age has at many places become Illegible.”

I looked at Ayan on the other side of the fire, his face sober; Brad and Luke staring in the fire wide eyes while listening to the story. Julia had a big smile to her face (I have always considered this girl to be a mystery), Becky was playing with her hair sitting with Jack, probably more focused on attracting him. Georgina and Allen were huddled together like sisters in a cloak to further shield themselves from the chill.

“He awoke, rising from his fever of three days and three nights, on a very bleak dawn. His parents gone, every lamp in his house turned on, he could not understand the reason that could have delayed his parents for so long in the night. Those were the cold days of winter, with a dense mist encompassing the milieu. He walked outside pondering over the matter of his parent’s disappearance and lack of response to his texts and calls. They probably had gone for celebration as well in the night. The mayor was going to make a special announcement and it was vital for his father to be there. He picked up his path when in the mist shrouding the faces from the fog, he noticed, a manly figure bend over something. Rafay called to him, ‘Who are you? What are you doing, Sir?’

“The man rose, slowly, with only groans and turned around without saying a word. It was as if Rafay was reliving the night when he had encountered the malicious scientists. The man who stood in front of him had blistered skin with dead like features. His mouth dripped blood and any remaining pieces of guts he had not chewed from the body lying beside his feet. His eyes had a thirst and as an animal approaches his prey, the man

approached Rafay with full swing of his arms trying to grab him but fear does strange things to a person; Rafay ran as he had run never before and it was the first moment when he began to notice the great changes around him.

“There were certain further horrifying incidents which Rafay encountered before his friend Oz stepped in the whole scenario. He had knowledge of things Rafay had never believed and it was from that moment, Rafay’s faith and his belief came into test. Life forced him to believe what he had denied as a fantasy tale, a cloud of dreams. It was a shattering experience when he began to discover how much he had been changed.

“There was something that this man has not mentioned; something that was done to him. There are areas in this journal which have been smeared with ink and cut purposefully to hide something. I wish I only knew but well to continue with the story. Rafay met Oz, who introduced him to the other survivors. Turned out , they were members of an agency, Bio Hazard Control and were there for long, searching for the clues that would have lead them to the lab and then they could have long stopped what ever evil was being brewed there using the scientific knowledge. Rushna was the mechanic, who could handle all types of machines and vehicles adeptly. Oz was leading the team, Faiq had just returned from a mission while Zee worked in the field with Oz. While illegal, the companies had dabbled their resources and research in genetic researches for long and thus BHC had long been foiling their plans for creating substances that would cause immense damage. This time however they faced defeat which paved its way to the Great War...”

“Okay, right. It’s enough I think,” said Brad, a grin stretched across his face.

“I have not finished yet,” said Solomon.

“I know and this tale will get absurd... I mean its okay, there were terrifying things that happened in Great War, but this.....”

“Brad...” said Georgina trying to interrupt him while the others laughed.

Brad ignored her, “This is just plain old, lunacy.... I mean Bio Weapons and Zombies.... What is this? Totally out of fantasy!”

“U know bro, u are right, I mean this Rafay guy should have been put in Fog’s Asylum for this wonderful tale if I were to ever get my hands on it in his time.” Said Luke

“Only there was no Fog’s Asylum at that time,” said Ayan chuckling.

Solomon got up, “Very well. Don’t believe me. How can I be so stupid to tell you this tale. One day you will learn, how scum moves deep below the sewers of this town, how the dead still walks in the ruins buried below this town.”

"I think your tale is interesting, Solomon but obviously it's just a tale, You seriously cannot trust some old book to be true. Dear!" said Becky.

Solomon glared at her, "But this was found in my attic locked away and hidden behind a panel. Who would hide something like that."

"Maybe he thought his lunatic tales might get discovered so he was just paranoid that they might not just burn him," said Brad again trying to keep a serious face.

The clouds thundered again.

"Hey okay, we will listen to what's left of this tale tomorrow," said Becky, "meanwhile Solomon you may get some time to polish it up a bit, okay. Now everyone, tomorrow a little bit of hiking to the lake so wake up early okay and Brad Early means Early, not 12:00."

"Yes Mam," said Brad and Luke saluting her.

Everyone smiled; these two would certainly drive Becky paranoid if left alone in one room.

Everyone said goodbye to each other and started to leave, with the boys left to pack up the tools back in the storeroom. I went to my room to fetch my toiletries and went to the washroom. I heard strange moans and screams and realized they were Kelly's. I checked behind the one of the nearby camps and eventually had to return red faced. It seems Kelly was not going to learn some modesty. Stepping into the washroom, I wondered how Solomon must have felt when Kelly gave him her lewd offer. The boy was stranger than most and his tales were even more absurd. It was almost disturbing to think, humans creating such monsters. There were so many tales about The Great War that you could just not count them; it totally creeped me out to think of dead walking just beneath our feet.

I took out the paste and parted my lips. The dim, white bulb of the washroom began to blink as I held the brush in air. A scream escaped my mouth as I saw a shadow rising higher behind me with each blink of the light and I turned around to find myself standing in a corridor. It was illuminated with a blinding light.

A woman in the white coat was walking ahead of me. I could hear sobs as if they were in another dimension.

"Doctor, Stop. Please Stop," I said.

The women turned around and said, "You should be asleep, why are you out of bed."

"My baby. Where is my baby."

"I am sorry..."

“Dr. please! give me my baby.”

“Do you really want to see him?”

“Yes. Yes I do. It’s a boy isn’t he,” I said.

“He is in room number 13 on the first floor but beware this favor won’t do you any good.”

“No. I just want to hold him once.”

“No you can only see him. Go before the nurses realize that you are gone,” said the Dr. smiling strangely, her black hair looking white in the bright white light that blinded my eyes.

I turned around and limped towards the lift. Everything felt slow as if time was passing slowly. Fate wanted me trapped in those frames of reality where I was walking empty corridors trying to reach my destination. The bright light burned into my sockets and every where around me I could hear a women laughing as if they were very happy. There was sound of heavy breathing and these sounds drummed in my ears, someone had put a sad old symphony probably used in Asylum’s mostly to calm the patients. I tried to focus putting hands on my head but it did not work.

I felt a movement in my blurred image as I muttered “Thirteen.”

HAhahaha.

The person laughed in a woman’s voice. She was coming near me dressed all in white. I could feel her long hair tumbling to the ground, black as night. I tried to focus on her face but it was simply a futile effort.

Thirteen... baby... thirteen

The women laughed again and sound of grunting and heavy breathing filled my head. It was a melancholic situation, each of my step taking the effort of a hundred men.

“I cannot do this.” I cried in pain.

Thirteen... baby... thirteen.

Hahahahahahahaha...

Heavy breathing.... A woman moaning....

“Please... help me,” I whispered in all that noise at the approaching women trying to focus on her.

She kept on walking towards me and I noticed something sharp and edgy glinting in her hands. Fear and doubt filled me and I tried to ready myself to defend if this woman turned out to be dangerous.

She began to spin around me. My head began to spin and I finally saw something seeping in the whole vision as she neared me; a red coloured darkness it was.

“Have to.... Ha.... Have t....to”

Thirteen.... Baby...moaning

Heavy breathing...

Moaning.

The voices were becoming faded just as my vision faded out into darkness and I felt my body being released of my grip as the mind swayed away into oblivion.

Silence at last.....

THUNDER.... Pitter patter of rain.

I woke up in front of a dilapidated shack. Woods surrounded me and rain poured heavily. I could hear screaming as a boy ran past me.

“OZ.... Zee... Where are you?”

“RAFFFFFAAAAAYYYY..... STOP... COME BACK.” This time a girl’s voice.

Sound of low hum filled the rain and then I fell back as a motor bike, black and elegant, fired pass me.

I tried to speak but words just hung in my mouth. My vision was clear as ever, no more haziness. Where was I?

Rafay! Oz! Zee! The biker... the girl’s voice

They were all characters of Solomon’s story. Was it true the whole story? Was the horrific past a certainty?

I tried to call her when I saw people walking past me, their mouths hanging wide open and blood oozing out from some of them. The bodies had severe injuries as well but they walked relentlessly, groaning as they went. One of them approached me and I looked into this creature’s eyes and realized the dread that Rafay had felt as he had gazed into them. It was a nightmare, a mesmerizing death that hung in those sockets devoid of any feeling. Someone began to beat the drum and I looked at the dilapidated building where the sound

was coming from. I felt my gaze moving closer and closer to the shack with increasing speed and then again Darkness...

Thirteen....thirteen...thirteen...thirteen....

A Baby began to cry...

I opened my eyes slowly; it was a corridor as same as before but dimly lit, with green and white tiles covering the floors, hospital beds and stretchers lying in the way. I could see a figure lying on the floor; a body charred and black with ash. My stomach nearly retched everything out. Shivers ran down my spine looking at this burned body and I feared to step near it. Then I saw the chest heave and fall weakly.

Owannnn.... Ooowannnnnnnn...

The baby kept crying...

I should call the nurses but I could not. The baby was crying and the nurses would take me away.

Owannnnnn....Oooowaannnnnn...owannnnnnnn...owannnnnn...

I ran towards the end of the corridor, closing my eyes when a terrible scream erupted the hall and I opened my eyes to get a huge flash of gore in my face. Blood began to gush out of thin air at the point where the body had exploded in tremendous volume. A strong evil was at work and I could feel it clawing on my life as the Blood rushed towards me in the form of flood.

I ran for my life, terrible screams followed my steps. The corridor seems to get longer but I ran while the ear splitting screams increased. It was nearly going to grab me but the corridor seemed to increase on. I cried in fear and exhaustion while running and tried to run harder but my legs were buckling under exhaustion while I tried to keep my pace steady. The corridor was visibly lengthening up in my vision, each time I touched the edge, it increased a few meters more. I could not do this any longer and I tried the only strategy that came to my mind.

I leapt in the air and rolled away quickly as the flood of gushed slammed on the floor and a scream full of mirth erupted through the air.

Huhuhuaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.

A body without skin and only flesh crawled towards me and I closed my eyes at seeing all the blood and this skinned body still struggling to get to me. The laughter increased and

deepened in its sound. I dare not open my eyes until the silence was the only noise to my ears. I was shaking, with fear and exhaustion. What has happened to me, I wondered?

Squeak, Squeak, Squeak...

Alert and ready, I opened my eyes and was shocked to find a spotless corridor. A nurse was coming near. I had to run away from this place. I rushed towards the end of the corridor.

10...11....12... and finally.... 13...

My heart was beating like crazy. I hesitated to open the door. I wondered weather the baby will be their or not. Finally, I turned the doorknob. Each passing of a second seemed slow and each note of the beating drum seemed to be struck with it. My mouth was dry and my throat had a hard bulge stuck in it which I gulped down.

Owaannn...

Faint cry of the baby... my little Jackson...

I turned the door knob happily. A hulking figure stood blocking the view of the cot. It was a hooded figure who seemed to be bouncing a ball. In the darkness of the room, I could not recognize this person and I feared for a moment that this might be one of the floor wardens. I backed a little when the figure turned and threw his ball at me.

I had seen the dead eyes of the living, I had seen a whole flood of blood, I had seen a person, burned to death, which might be the most painful infliction for any living creature to ever suffer, but nothing could and nothing ever will match the cruelty of fate in this matter...

The rough little ball bulging oddly stared at me with two dark eyes as if blaming me for his condition. My poor little baby, his head cut from his body, bleeding and staring in front of me. My life seemed to leave me and I gazed at the hulking giant and whimpered in pain, anger and fear. There was a fire burning in those eyes for which there was no match. A strange darkness resonated from this figure as it hulked towards me. The darkness behind his hood seemed to encompass the world as the figure raised a huge axe and struck me.

“Woah, what was that all about?” I muttered.

I was sitting on the washroom floor, outside rain had begun and clouds were thundering. I got up and found that I had retched up all my food into the sink along with some blood. My head was spinning and I wanted to forget all that I had seen. Everything, even this place felt like a nightmare. I looked into my toiletries bag and found a bottle. It was the bottle of tablets that I had quietly brought with me without. I opened the cork and pulled out a handful of tablets and stuffed them in my mouth. The taste was extremely bitter but I fought my body the urge to spit them out. I put my mouth near the sink and turned on the

tap gulping down fresh, cool water from it along with the tablets. I packed up everything and opened the door of the washroom. I limped towards the cabin, Ayan had asked me to come, getting wet in the rain. The medicine had started to take its effect as I felt my head spinning. I opened the door of the cabin to find many candles lightening up the room.

“You came,” said Ayan delightfully.

He approached me and I grabbed his face.

My voice was heavy and drugged and I whispered to him, “Baby...I...love you...”

“Yes, love, I know.”

He did not understand (how could he?) and I muttered again, “Baby, I...love... you.”

I began to laugh and snicker.

“Forget about everything, my love. Here let me help you take off your load.”

I had been right about Ayan, his caresses were impatient as his hands worked their way down. His kisses were soft but wild, as they moved down my neck. I giggled but I could not resist anything now. It was a beautiful night; full of passion. Who knew it would be the last gift from my beloved husband; one that I will never forget.

Halo Café was open with hustle and bustle as if nothing had happened there at all during the day. The door opened and a woman dressed all in black walked in, her heels making a tip top sound as she approached the bar. Her eyes were a light brown colour and her fair face was exquisite to look at.

“One Red with Lemon,” she said to the serving man and he went to fetch her drink.

She looked around in the crowd of people freely. The serving man opened the Bottle of Red, the finest tasting beverage of Ventura Wing and poured the pearly drink into an exquisitely ornamental glass. A lemon was fixed on the edge of the glass and placed in front of her with a straw. She took out the lemon and squeezed three drops into the Drink. She puckered her red lips, placing the straw in her mouth and sucked, letting the cool liquid sooth her thirst.

She took out the straw and said, “So where is the boy.”

“The boy.... The boy is in the back of my car. He got off break early and I got a good chance to apprehend him,” said the hideously suited man beside her. He was wearing an old dirty

hat with a coat of orange colour with yellow and pink bubbles on it. His shirt was green and pants black. He wore a red tie.

“Any other witnesses.”

“Actually, yes... that bar girl... but she won't be a trouble. She does not want to believe what she saw and acts simply normal.”

“Those are the most dangerous people, you fool. I want her dead. Take me to the boy. I want to talk to him myself.”

“Yes that is fine, but are you sure it was what you were waiting for.”

“Oh yes, this matches my predictions perfectly. My ears had eluded the news of Oz's residence in this town for some time but now I see he has been to one of his tricks,” she said, sipping her Red again.

“So, should I order the kill.”

“Are you a fool, Gripa. He has been successful in hiding from me, for such a long time. All his life he has been trying to throw me off his scent and he has been very successful in his tactics. Do you think, he would not anticipate an attempt on his life? No, this must be done with careful planning and finesse.” She ordered.

“Yes Madame, we are yours to serve.”

“It is a high time that Sofia has her revenge once and for all from that bastard. Take me to the boy, now,” Sofia turned around sipping the last of her red and paying the cash when the door of the Café opened and in stepped a thin man, with graying hair but a very young face. Sofia turned back and said, “So he does leave that Asylum some times. I wonder what secrets he has been hiding in that building.”

“Oh! He keeps the security pretty tight so there is no way of knowing what goes on inside. Few people with valid cards or statements are allowed to enter and only in specific premises. Then there is a long list of doctors working there.”

“I have to escape without him noticing me, where is the back door,” hissed Sofia.

“Right behind the bar.”

Sofia approached the serving man and said, “I have to use the back door, can I leave? Because, there is a man stalking who is me and he just entered the café.”

The serving man spoke something in a rough language and opened the door to kitchens through which Sofia left glancing one last time at Dr. Oz who stood with another young man in white coat drinking a coke.

She stepped out into the cool air and closed the buttons of her leather jacket. She walked towards the front parking lot where Gripa was waiting for her. She spotted him by a black Helza. Smiling she walked towards the car, 'Great old Helza... A few centuries ago, it was Mercedes that held the fame of this car. I prefer this one though; much more resourceful.

Gripa opened the back panel and dragged Freddie out of the car, gagged and bounded.

"Open him."

Gripa removed his gag.

Sofia bent on Freddie and said, "Tell me. Tell me what happened and I promise I'll help you."

"No one believes me...."

"What do they not believe you about?"

"I saw him... his I cannot say this...It was horrifying... It burst like a balloon. There was blood and flesh everywhere. I saw him die but no one believes me."

"I believe you my dear."

"You do," said Freddie smiling his confused face lighting up a little. "Good perhaps, you can start tell..."

Freddie's next words were drowned by a slash of knife which left him gurgling out blood from his throat which gathered in a silver tub.

"Is he young enough for the ritual to work, Madame?"

"Do I ever do an action without a reason?"

"No Mam. You know better."

Bring this to the address, I told you and dispose of the body before that." She stopped speaking and then again said, "And don't forget to kill the mother as well. We don't want any investigation stirring up so quickly. Do as if nothing happened. You know the drill!"

Gripa bowed his head. She seemed to remember something and said, "Who was that young Dr. with Oz."

“He is one of the newer ones. I don’t know his name though. I heard he was assisting Dr. Oz in a matter of great importance.”

“You want to get to Oz, this boy is the key. Do not kill him but apprehend him and bring him to me. I will question him and then we will try to make him ours.”

“It’s a fantastic plan. Oz would not worry about a young doctor being harmed and that would be his biggest mistake.”

“No. That may be exactly what he may think his enemies are thinking. Careful, Gripa. If Oz gets one whiff of the news that I am here, everything will fail and the whole game will turn back on me. I am warning you and heed you must, now I must leave; a matter of great haste awaits me.”

She turned around to leave and walked away from the Café in fast steps towards the woods.

Bright Sunlight illuminated the room when I opened my eyes. Ayan was no longer asleep but stood shirtless shaving in the mirror. I yawned and covering myself with the white sheet, I got up and said, “Wow... Sun hasn’t shined like this for a long time.” Walking Towards the windows, I remembered Becky’s warning and I said, “Hey what time is it? Becky’s going to be really angry if I miss this hike.”

“No one is coming to get you.”

“What?” I asked perplexed at his response.

“No one is coming to get you,” he replied.

“Hey be clear, love. Becky knew I was here.”

“No one is coming to get you.”

I smiled, “Stop messing with me Ayan.”

I walked towards him. The razor slid smoothly down his right cheek leaving a bloody line.

“Oh. There is a cut. Let me clean it.”

But Ayan did not give any response but kept on peeling the injured skin letting it bleed.

“STOP IT! IT’S GOING TO MESS YOUR FACE.”

Screaming in panic I grabbed his hand and he turned his face towards me. I took in a sharp breath. My eyes could not believe my sight, his face’s left side was profusely bleeding, the

skin hung loose below his face attached to the remaining flesh by a thin flap. It had been torn forcefully. My eyes went towards the sink, where the pieces of his skin were piled.

Flinging his razor, he calmly walked towards me saying, "No one's coming to get you. No one is coming to get you."

"No Ayan, No you cannot do this; it cannot be," I pleaded but he kept on walking at the same pace. I could not bear to look at his spoiled face, his neck red with blood. He kept on speaking the same sentence while I backed away slowly, my heart beating so fast that each of my muscle was shaking; adrenaline was being pumped in such a volume that I could barely breathe.

Ayan began to laugh as he slashed his razor in the air. Droplets of blood flew in the air and landed on the window.

"No, Please. Please." I pleaded.

He screamed in a high pitched voice and flung at me. His whole body exploded into fire. He collapsed with me and I struggled to throw him off. A wail erupted in the cabin with such a force that it threw me back and smashed the windows.

I opened my eyes. The light that filled the cabin was light blue; the sky must be cloudy. There were no broken windows, No burning body and no sign of candles or the bed Ayan and I had shared. The room was bare and dusty; as if no one had touched it in a long time. I looked around.

This hallucinations or whatever they were, were getting more frequent. A normal person must have taken his life by now. I could not understand what it all meant. Why was I having all these visions? The air inside was chilly, my moth churning out steam. I got up from the floor and found myself dressed in warm clothes. The door creaked open and a bright light filled the room.

I was sitting on a bench staring at the same dilapidated shack I had been to, the night before. Or was it just a few moments ago? Nothing felt real.

Calmly I stared at the door of the shack.

"I told you it was all real," said the echo like voice of Solomon.

I looked at him sitting beside me, his small face smiling. I smiled at him and we both got up and opened the door of the shack. People were whispering and speaking all around me though I could see no one, it was as is I was surrounded by lost souls.

Inside the shack, I felt a shiver run down my spine at the sight of the half torso that hung in the air. Each leg had been ripped and thrown at the sides of the room where they lay rotting. The girl's mouth was open from which a knife protruded. Her eyes had been burst open. It was a painful sight to see and I sat down on my legs gazing at the body. Her throat was cut from which fresh blood was oozing out. Blood oozed out of her eyes and nose as well yet the body was rotting for many days by the palor of its skin. My vision flickered to red and then back again.

Another flicker and I blinked my eyes.

I could see the faint image of a man hung up on a wall bound in shackles. Yet the vision was grainy and flickered continuously. I rubbed my eyes and heard the sound of the chainsaw. I whirled around wondering where such sound might be coming from. The door of the shack was open.

"I think you need to step out," said Solomon in his ghostly voice.

I did as he told and the door closed behind me.

In front of my eyes, a battle went on. It was a huge guy with a chainsaw, his face covered with a sack trying running crazily after the girl. I hid behind the bush.

Someone ran past me. The girl had fallen and the chainsaw was waving his weapon in victory.

However, the runner slammed into him at the right moment and the maniac missed his slash. The chainsaw man struck with his huge hand and the runner fell down. The hige man put his foot on his chest and slashed his chainsaw.

"Oz NO!"

My vision flickered at the blood that erupted from the body; the vision turned red to black and white with colours slowly fading back. Oz was under chainsaw maniac's foot; It was the same scene playing again. The maniac struck but this time there was a canon blast and I saw the biker girl sitting just a few inches from the scene on the motor bike, a glossy piece of equipment. Smoke emerged from a long pipe that protruded from the bike.

Two other boys walked in the scene; one thin and pale with a small beard, the other with chubby yet with strong arms.

I heard sounds of groaning and yet again my vision flickered and I saw biker girl up close; I had seen these features somewhere but I could not exactly match them up. I turned around to find a burned skeleton, steaming with fire crawling towards me. Blood seeped into my

image and I was in a room trapped around stone walls. Only a tube light glowed in the room. I began to scream and slam my hands on the wall.

Another flicker and I found myself in a room filled with fire. Drums began to beat and the whispers started in my head all over again. A flame leapt at me and before touching me, it exploded into a million sparks. I closed my eyes.

The vision was extremely bright. I could not see but outlines here and there. Snow was falling everywhere, I could feel it.

HAHAHAHA....

DHUM DHUM DHUM...

I was facing a hut whose front wall was only visible. I turned around and saw bright light everywhere. I stepped ahead towards the hut and saw outlines of a branchy tree.

HAHAHAHAH....

DHUM...DHUM...DHUM

The drum in my mind was beating slowly and I could hear screams of a burning women mixed with the laughing whispers of an invisible crowd. My image darkened and then brightened again and I saw red eyes floating in the light. Like greased lightning they approached me and the first gaze at them closing on me made me close my eyes. Someone was breathing warmly on me.

AAAAAAAAAAAAA!!! HAHAHA....

DHUM...DHUM....DHUM...

My head was splitting with all this noise. I wanted to purge a knife in my heart and put an end to it with all of this madness. I was back in the burning room, this time in the centre of fire, flames licking at me. I screamed with full force but the fire was not going to have its mercy on me.

A pole was erected in the centre of the fire and I could see a head protruded on it.

“My poor baby... Oh my poor baby...”

I was back in the camp, sitting around me were all my friends but not Ayan. Each of them had a strange smile across their face; an expression of madness. I could feel someone watching me from the darkness of forest. Maybe it was the rapist.

A shrill sound broke the silence, as if hundred nails were scratching a black board. I put my hands on the ears and cried. I opened my eyes and saw all of my friends lying around me in a circle in various states of undress bleeding from different parts of the body. I was confused and terrified; I turned around, without a clue of what I should do; my mind heavy with the sounds of heavy breathing, drumming and wailing.

Help me!

Vision flickered again and I was back in the stone walls of a prison. I shouted and slammed my hands on the wall.

Help ME!

DHUM...DHUM...DHUM

AAAAAAAAAAAAANH!

The melancholy continued and I shouted, "HOW? HOW CAN I HELP YOU?"

"The light turned off in the stone prison and I stood at the edge of a stony cliff, fire and darkness surrounding me. In front of me was a bridge aflame.

I did not step on it and far in on the other side, I noticed the man in shackles and gulping my saliva, I stepped on the bridge.

DHUM...DHUM...DHUM

HELP ME!

AAAAAAAAAAAAANH!

My head was spinning and I was in a stone corridor, various items of technology surrounded me. Huge pipes, big glass cylinders. I noticed a door sealed shut at the far end of the corridor. I walked towards it and it opened up automatically. My vision had turned black and white and grainy.

A liquid began to fill the room. It smelt like blood.

"What DO YOU WANT FROM ME? WHY DON'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?"

"You are being brought towards me. Help Me! Find Me! I know you can listen to me," said a voice, each word echoing in my ears.

The blood was drowning me and I could feel myself burning this time as I heard the last of the moans at the climax of everything. I was going to die, finally be rid of all this crap. Peace was going to flood my mind once it switched off. But at the moment, I wanted the fire to

stop burning. I wriggled in the blood with all my force rubbing my whole body, tearing my clothes.

Her eyes opened and she sat up screaming and flinging everything around crazily. Nurses clad in white uniform rushed to restrain her and a doctor injected her with something. Her vision was red and white; she could not understand what was going on. Who were these people? She wondered for a split second. The medicine started to take its effect and she calmed down.

“Finally! You woke up. I am Doctor Armaghan. Nurse note, she woke up exactly after a month of coma, immediately. Time: 2:30 PM.” He then turned to Jill whose whole face and body was wet with sweat. “Welcome to Fog’s Asylum.” He smiled.

(To Be Continued)

