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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Last Night on Earth

Prateek Sharma

Prologue

“Accept it Jake, you are no longer the same person you used to be.” She said to me.

I was on a porch in the college campus, delving in my smoke-break.

I had failed to take notice of her and couldn't drop the stick before she saw it with those stereotyped horrified expressions.

“Better apply it onto your own self. You'll probably understand it better.” I said, looking instead at the running traffic which seemed to move at ant's pace as I saw it from a distance spanned by a vast green field.

“We're no longer together and it's important that the both of us come to terms with it.” She raised her voice, irritated probably by my indifferent attitude which was pissing off a lot of people these days.

“You make it sound so simple.” I said, releasing a puff of smoke without disturbing the plane of calmness in my mind generously provided by the nic stick.

She remained quiet, looking away from me.

“What do you want from me?” I asked, trying to help her out with her supposed speechless state of mind.

“It's time for both of us to come to terms with reality. We are no longer in a relationship. I hope you know that.” She repeated, with a weird mix of sympathy and a subtle relief.

The bitch could never stop pretending to be nice, which by now I had known was a habit with her.

Wish I was as straightforward and less complex as her.

I puffed out another one. “You don’t have to remind me all the time. I know we’re done. There is no need for you to be doing damage control.” I answered flatly, not showing her any sign of emotions I was keeping from surfacing.

“I’m just trying to help you out. I can’t see you in this condition. You’ve even lost all your friends.” She stared in disgust at the cigarette stick dangling between my fingers, showering golden sparkles in the air as the wind blew.

Indeed, looked beautiful!

I turned to her and for her sake threw away the cigarette even though it was only half-burnt.

A precious dose of a mind-healer wasted!

“You’ve lost me forever now. Don’t expect things to be the same as they were before.” I growled a bit more aggressively than I’d intended to.

She couldn’t say anything and continued to stare at me. Beneath those pretentious eyes I could see the stone coldness that defined her.

“I know I don’t belong here but it’s too late now. You’ve let your demons cut loose on me to plague me for the rest of the time my sanity continues to persist. Your love has turned me into an evil, teeming with hatred and sorrow for the most part. I did everything I could do to stop it, baring myself for you to see the most vulnerable side of me.” I coughed, and then felt choked and turned away from her, feeling handicapped without the burning stick.

“I don’t know what to say. I just don’t know.” She cried.

Fake tears!!What do they say? Crocodile tears. Yeah, exactly that!

“You don’t have a clue, do you?” I smirked, “You fail to realize that the bleeding has begun as I bleed at the mercilessness of your dark, hollow beauty in this empty night celebrating the end; the end of sanity, the end of love and the end of us.”

I don’t know how I said that. It just came out. Spontaneously.

My mind felt pressured and reeled under it.
I grabbed it with my trembling fingers, feeling a deep, intense pain running
profusely inside.
“I hate you, get away!” I screamed in agony.
It was getting out of control.
I didn’t know what was happening.
Her figure in front of me was whirling madly like a tornado with ghostly images
bursting out on me.
“Oh my god, you are insane!” She cupped her mouth and started moving
backwards.
“Hey Gloria, this is the end. We’re all dying. The world is over. I’m leaving for a
safe haven. Join me. Earth doesn’t feel right anymore. Give me your hand baby?”
I laughed forcibly. A vile laugh.
No, I was not doing this. It was someone else.
I had to go Home. I needed to go Home. There were people expecting me to return.
Which home are you talking about?
Remember you found a new home which made you feel like never before. Nobody
cries for you back Home. They just laugh and laugh, spreading vibes of ecstasy all
around.
Take a step forward and escape to this secret peaceful place few of us will ever
find.
Of course bitch, I so wanna go!
I did and ran towards Home. Ran like a hungry dog after a bone piece.
Watched the streetlights flash by me, a gusty wind pulling me in, creating an
outburst of intense thrill. The happening night-life had surely lost its appeal to a
few other far more happening places in town.
And I was going to one. Going for the kill.

Finally, something to cheer about.

I reached Home in a flurry and waited to share my elation with someone- the monsters that lived inside my Home.

Home was special.

Home was glowing brightly in the dark of the night. Like I told you it was one of the few bright places left on earth.

Earth is on the verge of extinction I tell you.

I was laughing and gushing in my frenzy when I heard a loud, deafening roar. Just in front of me Home exploded, emanating out a blinding radiance which seemed to have a magnetic pull in it as I felt attracted to it.

“Welcome Home. This is where you truly belong.” A boisterous voice addressed me with embarrassing goodness.

Overcome with glee I let go of myself and fell into the sun of light, letting the heavenly light do all the healing.

“Home sweet Home” I cheered.

“Your Home is full of nasty monsters- all black faced with dirty saber teeth which gore into flesh and grab out your heart infusing it with their malevolent immortality. Soon you become that monster fed with the blood reproducing the seemingly petty sins and crimes of mankind.”

Enough said, I’m Home.

Deep Home.

Rescue me, someone! A voice inside me cried in desperation.

CHAPTER 1

The ominous night had set in the city, specked with the gleaming glow of the streetlights, bordering either sides of the paved road, aligned equidistantly. A green belt inconspicuous in the black of the night lay beyond the horizontal margins of the long-stretched road divided by an imperfectly pruned hedge. A score of speeding vehicles came in and went by from opposite directions, appearing from a distance like a pair of flaring meteorites rocketing past and then vanishing into a distant imperceptible creek in the voluminous darkness.

Jake was standing patiently on the divider in a space cleared of the bush for the pedestrians' convenience, watching the traffic buzzing past him in a flash, waiting for the traffic to clear. He hastily glanced at his watch; already late as it was, it now started to worry him. It seemed like he'd never make it home which was still several miles away.

Don't think that way. You are not a kid anymore. What's gonna stop you from reaching home on time?

His mind was flooded with a string of thoughts urging him to feel comforted and not fret despite everything that went disastrously wrong with his life; the never-ending sadness like a bludgeon battering through his already-victimized soul restricted his independence, gnawing away at his debilitating mindscape.

Maybe I can somehow forget all of it and start afresh. You never know when a miracle might strike and make it seem like nothing ever happened.

The number of vehicles on the road receded gradually as he stepped down the slightly raised platform that the divider was.

A wind blew off the settled sheets of dust; the environment now dusty and hazy.

Jake struggled to see through the clouds of dust, ensuring that the road was clear of the traffic.

And all of a sudden the road cleared up both of its running traffic and the momentary dust storm; deserted with not a single vehicle plying on it. He looked behind only to observe the same.

All cars suddenly gone and at the same time; now, that is sort of strange.

Thinking of nothing unnecessary further, he craned to look again in both directions and briskly crossed the road, reaching the cemented pavement, relatively dully lit in the absence of a row of several streetlights.

He strode faster along the faintly inclined pavement, quite justifiably feeling uneasy in the sudden desolation of the otherwise bustling street.

Why it that I think there is something drastically unholy about this night? Not that I believe in baseless superstitions, this is the closest I can get to believing them.

He took another step and stopped shortly, his gaze hesitatingly shifting to the darkness on the other side of the walkway. A peculiarly glowing ball of light rolled down a lone boulder.

Intrigued, he followed it and stepped off the sidewalk. The ball of light tumbled down an eroded slope merging into the dense greenery.

Jake slid down a narrow passage through the slope, carefully avoiding the haphazardly growing wild grasses as he went further down, nearing the dense undergrowth.

It was despondently dark by the time Jake was down, surrounded by a heavy rush of tall grasses and shrubs. The city was now a sufficient distance above the point from where he stood.

Gosh, what made me come down here and where is that ball of light?

Jake frantically looked around to spot the speck of light but it was all black. Nevertheless he could perceive a dully lit path going forward, deeper into the forest.

Where is the moon? Where are the stars? And still this light. What's with this night?

Doesn't even seem real to me.

The sky was black like it had never been illuminated. All Jake could do was taking a step forward.

He walked on the muddy path past the scattered trees and bushes. After walking for a few minutes, he stopped below a tree to make sense of everything around, choosing a healthy Oak tree with a thick trunk to lean upon. He glanced above at the engulfing canopy branching out profusely.

Creepy!

CHAPTER 2

Suddenly all the branches of the tree shook. Dried leaves and twigs dropping onto the ground below. A black swooping creature emerged through the tangled branches and nose-dived onto the ground with a loud thud. A black bat, apparently lifeless, slumped on a cushion of leaves.

Jake went closer and bent down to inspect to see if it was alive. As soon as he touched the nocturnal creature, it jerked and sprang up in the air.

Jake, taken aback, was on his feet, retreating backwards and watching an unbelievably gross transformation happening in front of his eyes.

In a few minutes, the lifeless bat turned into a fully clothed human who was now walking toward Jake, his gaze constantly fixed on him.

“Who the hell are you?” Jake asked.

The man’s eyes were blue, his complexion fair and was dressed in full black with a well built physique. He stopped and stretched out his hand, bearing a vague smile on his pale face.

Is it just me who is reminded of vampires at this moment? Oh yeah I practically forgot that there is no one around.

“A friend in need, sent from the heaven above to help you put out all your pain.”

The man spoke in a robotic tone with no emotions whatsoever.

“What on earth are you saying? Is this all for real? It has to be a dream.” Jake shouted.

“All you need is a true friend to make you feel better. You have been deserted by the ones you counted upon; rather selflessly sacrificing everything you could for them. As far as I’m concerned I’m just a faultless creation of your dreamscape which has come alive for you solely because you don’t deserve this.” The man said with a tone of sympathy.

With each word that the man was saying Jake found it increasingly difficult to believe everything that was going on.

How does he know so much about me?

“Just have faith and I’ll help you move on. Come with me.” The man smiled.

‘Do you have a name?’ Jake asked.

“That’s the only thing I’d have wanted to hide from you but then there is something uncannily innocent about you so I wouldn’t mind disclosing my name. It’s Tom.”

The man said sternly.

Jake thought for a while and decided to give him company.

I really don’t have anything to lose.

Jake went along with Tom, wary of his sinister sense of clothing.

I have never seen someone so obsessed with black.

“Black is the color that signifies blankness and how deeply you have been injured. You were probably never anticipating it to happen but when it did you were shaken inside out. I really want to do the best I can for you.” Tom spoke, as if reading his mind.

And it no longer surprised Jake. “Yes it’s true. As of now I want to lead a life where I’m alone and if surrounded by people, valued to say the least. I want to escape my reality.” He blurted out.

“Precisely for which I’m here. I’ll help you.”

“What can you possibly do for me? You look more like a creepy vampire than a normal human to me! What are you going to do? Suck my blood and turn me into one? Huh?”

Tom laughed. “You seem to have an innate sense of humor which in a way helps you survive these difficult situations in your life.” The smile ceased. “But now things will be different and you will no longer have to be a victim. Things will go exactly your way.”

Needless to say, Jake was captured by his clear line of thinking and felt desperate to be helped by him.

“Then do whatever you can. I need a friend. All my life I have wished for one. But don’t manipulate me.” Jake let out his vulnerability.

“I’m there.” Tom put his hand around his shoulder and smiled.

For the next few hours Jake strolled ahead with the man, with time, seeming less like the stoned figure he had been appearing like.

Jake felt more at ease and opened up gradually. “You should probably come home sometime. We can have fun or just hang-out.”

“Yeah sure. I’m always free.” He said.

How can someone be so nice? And why am I going on believing him when I don’t even know him?

Leave it. Doesn’t matter as long as I’m enjoying right now.

Jake felt a sense of victory. *I think I’ve gotten over it. This should be the end. Hopefully!*

“Hey, come on!” Tom shouted.

Lost in deep thought, Jake had been left behind.

“Yeah I’m coming.” He ran ahead near the treeless area which looked like a cliff.

Tom was standing at the edge of the cliff wanting to show him something.

Jake sped forward and stood alongside him, undeniably thrilled by what he was witnessing down below.

He pictured it all in fluorescent blue and green shimmering vibrantly, lit up heavenly.

Soon, the earth below him ceased to exist and found him to be floating into oblivion, all around surrounded by the sparkling colors, gushing through his mind, body and soul rejuvenating him completely.

Everyone cheering, laughing and smiling. This is what I exactly wanted to see.

Where had it gone?

Jake now visualized everything in flashes and glitters, throwing him back to front, cruising around him.

His mind occasionally felt sedated and his body failed to be in his control, flailing erratically.

He struggled to open his eyes to the overly brightening levels of the atmosphere.

As he revolved around in mid air he spotted Tom still standing on the cliff but in a different avatar. His outer clothing had been stripped off and he had burning sticks in his hand. He collected sticks one by one from the ground and lit them up.

Tearing off the cloth he wrapped them around the stick and threw them in the air toward the bottom of the cliff.

What is he doing?

Finally, the bright mist of lights cleared around him and for the first time he felt the pull of gravity.

A gust of wind pulled him down as he fell back on the cliff, just behind Tom. “Hey what are you trying to do?” he asked bewildered.

Tom turned back and smiled widely. “I’m creating ecstasy. Wasn’t the experience uplifting?”

“What the heck do you mean by ecstasy? Did you by any chance drug me?” Jake asked.

“The drug is only a supplement to build up for you a foundation. Once you are through that stage you’d never want to come back to the battered part of you.” He said calmly, rolling the twigs into the cloth pieces.

“Tom? Stop doing that. It’s crazy!” Jake yelled at him.

“Tom?” the man asked absent-mindedly.

“Yeah, isn’t that your name?”

“Ah I see. Tom, Dick, Harry, you can call me anything you want to.” The man who now didn’t have a definite name smirked to himself.

“Cut the crap, will you? I know you are a nice person and all this is definitely not you.”

“How can you be so confident mate? How well do you know me?”

“It’s just an intuition I had. You can get yourself out of this. This time let me help you out. Let’s put an end to all the shit and do something better. Even after all the stress I’m going through I know drugs ain’t the solution. Come on!” Jake urged.

“Don’t act like a prick. I’m not a fool here presenting you with options. You have to come here and smoke this shit in my hand. You get that?” The man neared Jake in a single stride almost magically and held him by the scruff of his neck.

“What are you doing?” Jake struggled to release himself.

“Don’t even try to escape. I’ll kill you if you don’t smoke.” The man’s eyes turned fiery red and his clasp tighter.

Jake gave up to the devilish grasp and knew he was helpless. The man’s fingers grew longer and claws jutted out of them penetrating deeper into his back as he felt the warm blood trickling down his back.

“Stop!” Jake cried in searing pain, feeling his body grow weaker and his senses numb.

He saw the man turning into a monstrous creature with spear-like black horns and two razor sharp fangs sticking out of his mouth, oozing out venom. The monster released his grasp on him as Jake blinked several times in shock and agony and fell on his back.

What have I done to deserve this? I have cared about everyone around me without harboring any sort of ill feelings. Why do I have to go through all this pain which grows like an invading virus with every passing second? I don’t want to die so soon. I want to live my life, change everything that is bad. Like others I too deserve second chances. But why this?

In no time, the monster charged ahead violently and tore into Jake’s chest with its razor sharp fangs, blood and saliva grossly dripping from them.

Jake struggled to breathe, already feeling the venom rushing through his blood stream. He gasped and gradually felt his body going numb. He made one more effort to breathe which he knew would be his last. But before he did so he saw his hands coming to life, rising up in the air, shooting towards the monster. He felt his body back on its feet too and surged ahead.

His hands grabbed the narrow neck of the monster, throttling him with multiple grips. The monster heaved out smoke through its nostrils and started vibrating erratically. Jake continued strangling him till he saw the internal contents flushing out of its mouth.

From where am I getting all the strength?

Jake was puzzled. He looked around him, taking his eyes off the dying monster. In a flicker his gaze shifted to an emanating bright source of light just behind him. The bright illumination was coming from two angelic hands of a female who looked nothing less than a fairy.

Soon, the monster collapsed in its bloody heap leaving behind only a few popping bubbles in the slimy mess.

Jake withdrew his hands and felt his body come to life. Miraculously, the wounds and stabs were gone and he felt fit as ever. Surprised, he walked cautiously towards the fairy-like female and observed her from head to toe. She had an impeccable milky white complexion with perfect features wearing a sparkling white gown glowing unnaturally.

“Now who are you?” Jake asked tiredly.

Is this fairy a compensation for the vampire cum monster?

What's this? Jake in wonderland!?

CHAPTER 3

“An alternative life for you.” The angelic female spoke softly, gently blinking her flawlessly cut eyes.

“Who the fuck are you? And why should I even trust you? I can’t go on trusting every goddamn person I meet! Just look at how it’s always me at the suffering end!” Jake was inside-out frustrated.

I’ve never felt so mind-fucked before. There seems to be no solution. Every road seems to lead to a dead end.

“Have you ever thought of falling in love? Sometimes it does heal a lot of pain.” The young beauty blushed shyly.

“You’re no one to comment or advise me on that. Thanks for saving my life. I’ve nothing to pay you back and considering that I never asked for your help, I’ve no debt whatsoever. And lastly; get your deceptive fairy bullshit out of here. Flick your goddamn magic wand and just fuck off.” Jake cursed.

The young lady glanced up in surprise, a drop of tear spilling from her green-hued eyes. “I’ve never heard such bitter words for me from anyone’s mouth, not even from the mouth of evil. The only reason why I helped you was that I knew you didn’t want to die. You wanted someone to be there for you. Someone who could manage to pull you out of every crisis no matter what the circumstances are.”

“Just shut the fuck up. What is going on here? Why do I have all these bizarre creatures walking up to me and saying all sorts of asinine stuff to me? What’s your business with me?”

“Jake, this is not the time to question. Your life is in grave danger and you need protection. Just run to me and I’ll embrace you from all the threats that linger around you.” She addressed politely, subtly spreading her hands wide.

“Go away!” Jake said angrily with his fist clenched tightly.

The angelic beauty smiled again. “You fail to realize that you are talking to a tender female who is ready to sacrifice everything she can to uplift you from your miseries.”

“You know what? Sometimes I feel that I probably cope up better with these so called miseries. Freedom, escape and overcoming are something I have stopped thinking about. They are there only to give you a brief amount of satisfaction which is destined to die away only to make you feel more frustrated about your actual life; the real life with all the pain.” Jake felt exhausted to say anything further.

“Is that how you talk to a girl and portray yourself as? Don’t you wish to be admired by her?” She slowly started circling him.

Jake stared at her revolving image. The mild breeze sifted through her golden brown hair, each strand of hair appearing to glimmer in a flash. Her complexion was spotlessly clean and her white dress glowing heavenly. It was when she turned around that he also saw a pair of butterfly-like wings thinly attached to her backless costume.

She is incredibly beautiful. Jake had to shamelessly confess.

“Who are you? You are unnaturally beautiful. I’ve never seen anyone quite like you before.” Jake asked in genuine curiosity and admiration.

She glanced at him and blushed. “I like the way you addressed me. Do you really find me beautiful?”

Jake noticed a heart melting innocence in her voice and couldn’t stop himself. “Of course you are. Haven’t people appreciated you before?”

Her smile vanished completely and she stopped walking.

“What happened?” Jake asked.

She waved her hands in the air and her wings started flapping together. In no time she was air borne.

“Follow me.” She whispered as she flew towards a tree.

Jake ran behind her till she stopped and perched herself on a low lying branch of a huge Oak tree.

“What are you doing?” Jake panted.

“I feel protected sitting under this tree. I feel secure.” She smiled.

“Secured from what?”

“The vile world out there is too cruel and has only misused my naiveté, throwing me around, tossing me like something to be used and then discarding me.” There was mild grief in her voice.

Jake neared her and sat on the ground below facing her. “You are a fairy. You must possess magical powers. What is there to fear about?”

“Magical powers are there only to help others. We are prohibited to use them for selfish purposes.” She explained.

Jake thought to himself. *Will it be selfish if I ask for help? I might have made wrong judgments before but right now I feel uncannily sure about my intuition. I must try and lend her support. Real relationships always require a solid emotional core to keep them going steady. This is my chance to fight back and restore everything.*

“What would you want me to do?” Jake spoke after thinking.

Her eyes brightened up. “I want you to spend some time with me. Make me feel happy about all the good you think I am. Just be with me. In return I’ll give you back all the prosperity I can.”

Jake closed his eyes and let go of himself, lying down on the ground as the dried leaves floated around him.

The fairy stepped down and drifted through the breeze gently sitting on his legs. *She is almost weightless.* Jake smiled.

He raised his body and supported himself on his elbow. “I wouldn’t ask you your name. That way I’ll get to call you by all the beautiful names I can possibly think of.”

The fairy blushed and then smiled, covering her lips with the tip of her fingers. “I love your name. And I’ve started liking you too. I’ve never been given such privileges before. Being a fairy has its own limitations.”

Jake pulled himself closer to her, readjusting his position. He was now lying with his head resting on the fairy’s lap. “Give me the chance to loyally perform my duties. I’ll give you everything I can. I have a special place for good people in my heart. My heart is like an enormous container waiting to burst open under the pressure of the overflowing goodness it possesses.”

The fairy stroked her hands across his forehead. “You are very kind.”

“I know. But I’ve something to say. Now that I’ve trusted you, I beg please don’t leave me desolate. I’ll try not to do anything wrong from my side. I’ll lay my heart bare open for you, deep enough for you to extract all the love you want, not for abusing me. I’m still wounded because of all the miserable things I’ve had to go through. With you I expect some solace and to remain shielded from that stone-hearted world out there.” Jake was mellow as his wet eyes sparkled in the luminescence of the fairy’s glow.

“We both are from the same side of the story Jake. Just one leap of faith is what I ask of you. We will turn everything around.”

Jake took her hand and squeezed it gently, nodding in agreement. “You have me.”

The fairy flicked out her wand and circled it in the air. The horrendously dark night gradually brightened up, lighting up the vast green pastures and heavenly meadows stretched out on the hilly landscape.

Jake wandered in the paradise with her.

I don't know what I'm doing or why I'm doing this. But then I really don't have any other option. I'm only trying to take a different path to repair my life.

Later they came back to the Oak tree and rested under it.

Jake leaned his back against the trunk and the fairy reclined on his chest. "This isn't the real world, right?" He buried his face into her silky and fragrant golden-brown hair.

"Whatever it is, it is bound to make your life better. Just keep that in mind." She nestled her head in his neck.

"I love you." Jake whispered. He grabbed her from the back and turned her towards him.

"What are you doing?" She asked with an unnatural doubtful expression.

"I'm about to channelize some of my love to you." Jake smiled and brought himself closer to her, his lips inches away from her face.

"You shouldn't be doing this." She restrained herself.

"But why?" Jake didn't want to open his eyes.

"It's an open invitation to disaster." The fairy had just uttered the words when a loud thunder broke the serenity of the environment, the dark grey clouds replacing the shimmering sunlight in no time.

Jake opened his eyes and was awestruck. "What is happening?"

The fairy looked at him in mercy as a drop of tear fell from her eyes, rolling down her cheek.

Jake clasped his hand around her neck and kissed her on the lips. The fairy continued to cry, shedding incessant drains of tears.

He released himself. The sky grew darker and a heavy downpour splattered the ground.

Jake was stunned. As soon as the rains hit the ground it singed the green grass and set the trees on fire.

The fairy didn't stop sobbing and everything around him only grew darker.

"What is this?" Jake looked at the fairy.

"I'm sorry." She cried.

"For what?"

"I didn't tell you that I was cursed." She said remorsefully.

"By whom and why?" Jake asked, shifting away from her.

"I'm inherently a witch and all this fairy get-up is only a way to reform myself. I'm trying to pay off my sins but there times when I'm helpless and the witch inside of me seizes control."

With that time stopped. The rains stopped abruptly and so did the fairy's tears.

"I can't believe this is happening again." Jake retreated away from her. He felt a stinging sensation on his lips. As he touched his lips he was bewildered to see a bluish fluid oozing out of them dripping down his chest and hands.

"What have you done to me?" Jake just managed to mouth a few words before he felt the same sensation running throughout his body, giving it a faint bluish discoloration.

"You kissed my poisoned lips." The fairy spoke in despair.

"Please don't hold me responsible for this. There is someone else - a devil who controls me."

And the brief pause was gone as it resumed raining aggressively. The wings of the fairy dropped down.

Her white dress colored itself to pure black. The heavy torrential wind tugged at her golden brown hair, dismantling them. The glow from her eyes was gone. Her nails grew longer and sharper.

Jake was too lifeless both physically and mentally to speak or think and watched the nightmare helplessly.

The fairy turned witch fastened her steps toward him. Jake was lying down on the ground, thick bluish-red blood dripping from all parts of his body.

“Kill me if you want to be saved. I’m no longer in control of myself. You have to take charge now. Destroy me before I destroy you.” The witch bent down and engulfed his body with her clawed hands.

Jake pushed himself against the ground. The evil witch shoved her long pointed claws into the left side of his chest.

Jake howled in agonizing pain as she clenched his heart from inside, pulling it out of his chest.

A gushing fountain of blood spouted from his mouth and shot into the witch’s crooked eyes.

The witch recoiled and then charged again, digging her face deeper into his chest, drinking the overflowing blood and gnawing at his heart.

Jake somehow managed to clench a stone and hit her head with the pointed end, breaking open her skull.

She recoiled in horror and agony as jet black blood seeped out from her head. Jake jolted himself again and fell on her body. His blood leaked out and dropped on her bleeding scalp mixing with her own blood.

The witch squirmed in maddening pain. “You just poisoned me back; gave me a dose of my own medicine.” It was the voice of the fairy which was trapped inside the witch’s body.

“Heal your heart by bathing in the holy water in the puddle behind the Oak.” She squealed.

Jason staggered backwards on his back, losing oodles of blood with each exertion.

“Wait.” The dying witch shouted and lifted her wand. Flicking it twice, she aimed it at Jake, shooting forward a blinding bulb of light.

Jake was thrown back with a splash into a shallow puddle.

At a distance he witnessed the witch dying in a gross manner; jets of blood squirting out of her body, tearing her flesh apart till nothing remained.

'I hope you can go on strong.' Her voice was faintly heard before it died out completely.

He splashed the waters on himself with his gaunt hands and gradually felt the healing power.

The gaping wound on his chest started closing up and soon was sealed.

Jake stumbled to his feet and walked towards the tree, taking its support.

At the moment it feels futile to be alive.

Tired and exhausted, he tried to sleep under the tree.

“Sleep as much as you can because your life has now invited a bigger threat and this time there’d be no turning back. You killed our precious servants. Now, you’ll pay a bigger price for the ghastly sin you have committed.” A loud, deafening voice boomed through the forest.

Jake was startled and scrambled to his feet, frantically looking around.

“Run for your life, Jake. Save yourself if you can or just end the game” The same threatening voice echoed, loud and clear.

CHAPTER 4

By now Jake was prepared for all the unusual happenings and wanted to make sure that this time he made no mistakes. He looked around to search for articles he could use to defend himself.

A few Oak branches, pointed pebbles and long, sturdy thorns of the bushes was all he could obtain from his surroundings.

The voice was not heard again but Jake knew that it was only a premonition; something bigger and catastrophic was about to happen.

Stuffing all of the makeshift weapons in a sac extracted from a dead pitcher plant, he hid behind the trunk of the Oak tree, waiting for the inevitable to show up.

Without much delay, in sync with Jake's expectations the bigger evil finally made an appearance.

In an ear-splitting explosion, the earth shaking under the impact, a huge despicable creature emerged, becoming clearer as the glow of light receded gradually.

Jake draped the sac of weapons close to his chest.

"I see you Jake. Come out. There is nothing to hide. Let there be a real face off."

Jake saw the creature closely as it neared him, impeccably walking in his direction.

He possessed a body of a real human wearing a black cloak hugging his body tightly with stone-cold eyes and a pale, gaunt face. A string of assorted knives and pointed weapons hung linearly across his torso and two slimy tentacles sprouted out of his wrists, swishing madly in the air.

Jake got his nerves together and slowly shifted sideways, away from the protective trunk, making himself visible.

Jake was now standing off-guard fully visible to the evil creature.

"There you are my boy. You should know that patience is definitely not one of my virtues. I like getting things done quickly especially when it is something as one-

sided and clear as this.” The vile beast laughed riotously, his tentacles spastically striking at the grass around.

“Why do you want to kill me?” Jake managed to say.

The beast gave a wicked smirk. “Don’t jump to conclusions. You’ve to fight for all you’re worth. This is your last chance to prove your mettle, if in any case you still have it in you.”

“I know I’m right. I’ve never stood for anything wrong. So basically I’ve nothing to be afraid of, not even death. There is nothing that can deteriorate my inner goodness and to prove that I’m ready to fight obnoxious beasts like you which you are from inside if not from your eternal appearance.” Jake said.

“Ha-ha, you still have it in you my friend. Now, we are talking, eh?” The final demon Jake had to confront laughed in a tone, capable of spreading only hatred and malice everywhere.

“This world with demons like you has challenged me, manipulated me and given me only pain and agony to savor. I’ve been trying all this while to let go of it, reducing the suffering but it seems that I’m not destined to rest in peace.

Now that I’m in my dreamscape the power is in my hands and I will take back everything that was snatched away from me. I might be destroyed myself in that process but not before I witness your destruction and die contently.” Jake regained his conviction and meant each and every word he spoke.

“You’re not suited for this world Jake. It is not always about being good. You have to adapt yourself and become like everyone else around, if the situation demands. That evil inside you sometimes needs to take control. You came face to face with your demons but you didn’t have the courage to face them and had yourself entangled in the vicious cycle of suffering. However it’s a bit too late now and only this warfare will decide the victor.” The demon spoke conclusively and jerked his body in preparation for the battle.

The two tentacles which had been waiting to attack charged on at Jake.

Jake pulled out two sturdy sticks and with both hands heaved them in two opposite directions.

The sticks in an instant collided with the lashing tentacles which coiled around them, shattering it into several fragments.

Without further delay they charged again and this time, with no mistake coiled around Jake's trunk, like a serpent twirling around him tighter with each breath he took.

Jake's free hands reached for the sac hanging around his chest and pulled out the long thorns he had plucked from the bushes, Grabbing a handful of them he stuck them repeatedly into the coiling tentacles, severing them as deeply as possible.

Yellow, slimy fluid gushed out of the coils as the tentacles loosened its grip and let go of Jake.

Before the demon withdrew his tentacles Jake attacked with the pointed pebbles, goring the tentacles up to half its length.

The demon grimaced in apparent pain and anger and drew the tentacles back which slithered back into a small hole inside his wrist.

"I underestimated you." The demon shrieked and detached the weapon belt from his chest, picking up a stab knife and a sharp glistening sword, advancing toward him.

It hit Jake that he no longer had any appropriate weapons to defend himself. He just stood there as the demon came within a few meters of him.

"I so wanted this one to be for you." The demon sniggered and thrust the sword into his abdomen; Jake falling on his back, holding together his punctured abdomen.

"You will gain nothing by killing me." Jake struggled to speak.

“Yes I will gain; a lot. There’d be no one to challenge me then. You with all your inherent purity and goodness stood as an obstruction in my path of menacing the world.” The demon grunted and pointed a sharp knife right above his left eye.

“Now there’d be no one. I’ll rule the world and infuse it with so much negativity that it’d take centuries for it to bounce back.” With that he shifted the knife toward his forehead and pierced deep into it.

To his surprise, Jake didn’t die and was still breathing, even after excessive blood spewing out of his torso and head.

“You were defied by one of your servants. She had me bathe in the holy waters which cannot be polluted by your contagious negativity.” Jake smiled weakly.

“This can’t be happening. I cannot be so weak. My power was limitless.” The demon cried out in utter shock.

“Well in that case you overestimated yourself.” Jake sprang up and clenched the demon’s wrists, piercing his nails into his flesh till he grabbed hold of the tentacle that emanated from it. Maintaining a strong grip, with all his might, Jake wrenched out the body of the serpentine structure.

The demon wailed helplessly as he saw the tentacles jutting out of his hands, lacerating out through his arm and chest alike. By the time the tentacles piled up on the ground the demon had been dislocated of his appendages and what remained was a dying torso.

“I didn’t know it’d be so easy to kill you beast.” Jake plunged out the sword from his abdomen.

“It might have been easy for you but I promise that this is not the end. You might’ve been able to deal with these demons that surround your existence, but the bigger war you have to fight is with your own self. You’ve gone too far beyond the horizon of sanity and getting it back is where your biggest challenge lies.” The dying demon spoke as he soon shrank into nothingness.

A horrifying realization masked Jake's face.

No, this is not how it should've ended. Everything was going perfectly till now.

What happened suddenly?

I can't be doing this again. This had to be the last time, I had promised.

Everything is collapsing.

Nooooo. .

A deafening thunder broke out and in a blink of an eye; Jake witnessed the destruction around him; a surging tornado sucking up everything that came in its way.

Almost immediately, Jake too was sucked in.

I see only black.

CHAPTER 5

Cassie had been searching for Jake all day long. He had been absent from college for more than two days and was nowhere to be seen.

She suspected what she didn't want to expect.

A few miles away from Jake's residence was an abandoned, wrecked compound obscured by tall grasses and bushes, discolored with moss, cobwebs and dust in abundance; Cassie started off for the dingy quarter.

She reached his residence first and rechecked. His parents had been out of town for a month and Jake was the only one staying home.

The house was locked and peeping through the small cracks in the windows she could make out that Jake had not been home for pretty long.

Her doubts now converged onto a single location which she knew intuitively would be the place where Jake could be found.

Taking a deep breath, Cassie drove down her car into the remote location through a rough, uneven road going through the woods.

The sky was becoming darker and visibility getting poorer.

Driving faster she reached within a few 100 meters of the familiar wreck she had once seen with Jake which he claimed was a perfect place for spending quality time together.

She parked the car behind an Oak tree and got down, warily walking toward the abandoned complex.

Spotting a broken window, she hid behind it and peeped inside.

The house surely wasn't deserted as ample noise and chattering was audible.

At last she grabbed sight of several young men congregated around a messed up table and scattered chairs, with clothes, shoes and accessories strewn across the floor.

She strained to see more clearly and saw the figure of a man reclined motionlessly on a wooden chair.

"Noooo. This had to be the end!" The figure sprang up and screamed, swaying from side to side and eventually colliding against a wall, falling down heavily on his back; unconscious.

Jake! She clasped her mouth in shock.

"He is full, is he gone?" A tall man, whom Cassie recognized as one of her seniors, chimed sluggishly.

Another one spoke. "Yeah, he was way too amped up. Must say this guy is gonna go places. Man, I feel inferior." He laughed as he snorted a powdery substance paced near his wrist.

Cocaine! Cassie guessed with precision.

Not able to bear more of the drug abuse she braved to go inside.

Have to get Jake out.

Cassie reached for the entrance and went inside.

And she saw everything in full action as vividly as she had ever seen.

There was a flame burning under a hole in the table heating up a sheet of foil on which white powder- cocaine was placed. Nearby a man was down on his knees, rolling powder into small bits of paper, passing it along to his mates, who smoked it, getting bouts of highs.

“Hey hottie, why don’t you do a line?” He looked up at Cassie, offering her a joint.

“Look at all of us, chasing the dragon. Try it out for yourself.” He pressed.

“Beam me up Scottie! I see a white girl.” His mate laughed wildly, grabbing his groin.

Disgusted, Cassie kicked out at the person’s arm, knocking him over, running toward Jake.

He was lying unconscious, but his lips moved irregularly.

“Jake, get up!” She shouted.

His pulse was faint and he was barely breathing.

“Can’t get him up, can you?” The senior spoke out. “He’s been blowing for more than three weeks; the highest stage of lucid dreaming is what he wanted, talking about complex things totally beyond me. I was simply behind the scale, doing my simple job, to make things simpler for him.” He chortled, looking less drugged than the others who were heavily amped up.

“Oh my god!” Cassie sighed. “Has he slipped into a coma?” she asked, horrified.

“Possibly yes.” He rambled. “Fuck off now. Get your own if you want to.” He evaded and smoked freebase cocaine.

Not wasting more time, she took Jake’s hands and dragged him out of the compound, using all her strength to move him to her car.

“I hope I make it in time.” She started off for the nearest hospital.

Upon reaching the hospital, Jake however was partially unconscious, his lips still trying to murmur something.

The hospital staff carried him on a stretcher.

Cassie narrated his entire history to the doctor who ordered for immediate detoxification.

The cocaine had accumulated in his fatty tissues and had to be removed urgently. It was found that Jake hadn't eaten for a week and had never attained proper sleep. He has had a tough life in the past few months. A split-up with his long time girlfriend followed by a betrayal by some of his close friends. It may sound clichéd but he has been deeply affected by it. And the problem is that he is never willing to take it in his stride, there is always something else, some complex thoughts which he is trying to infuse into himself. He has been an emotional wreck since then, barely allowing anyone to come too close to him.

In fact his motive behind doing drugs definitely wasn't just attaining euphoria or being happy. Again it was something else which only he understands'.

For weeks, Jake was kept under observation. The medical detoxification had been completed and he was now undergoing a therapy of psychological and physical rehabilitation where his lifestyle and eating habits were being organized and regulated.

Jake was regaining his well being but remained unnaturally silent, only responding by faint smiles and nods.

Cassie met him when she was granted permission.

He was sitting back on the bed, staring blankly.

Don't worry, "I haven't told your parents anything. You know they'll be back in two weeks." She started a normal conversation.

"Thanks." Jake said in a low tone.

"Why did you do this Jake?" she couldn't help herself from asking.

"I don't know." He replied bluntly.

Cassie hid her desperation. "Whatever has happened has happened, now you are not going to do more of it? You get me?"

“I wouldn’t.” He said, drooping his eyelashes, avoiding looking into her eyes.

Jake was discharged from the hospital but his rehabilitation continued, only the frequency reduced to twice or thrice a week.

From Jake’s actions, Cassie knew he needed no one around but she held on to him, making sure that he was never left completely alone.

Jake was still not ready to open up or say anything or even justify. He remained silent for most of the time and spoke very occasionally.

“There is a small party at my place, just a few close friends. I’d be happy if you could make it.” Cassie invited him, knowing that the chances were few.

Jake looked away and thought for a while. “I’ll come, but at my own convenience.” He finally said.

“Do come.” Cassie smiled, pleasantly surprised.

CHAPTER 6

My house is totally messed up. Mom and dad will be here in a few days and I have to make sure that I get every small thing in place before they’re here.

They shouldn’t get the slightest of hint of anything that has happened down here.

Firstly I need to look out for all the places where I could have possibly hidden the coke.

I can’t believe I was so fucked up that I was so deep down into this shit. There are things which I don’t even recall properly. It’s like I don’t know whether they happened for real or was it just plain dreaming. Lucid dreaming as they’d call it. Movie concept, I know.

When did I have original ideas?

I have been dreaming on for so long that it feels like I was living in a fantasy world. Infact even now I feel the aura around me with all the unreal visuals and

sounds I experienced being on that ‘prolonged’ high. Those dreams seems surreal to me but the more I think the guiltier I feel.

I always wanted to escape the treachery I was going through. I couldn’t stand being vulnerable. I wanted to be something else. Something powerful.

It was just an ordinary day when I met this guy called Dirk who is known for doing all the illegal activities in college. My request to him was only for a handful of sleeping pills which I desperately needed but that motherfucker got me into chasing the Happy Powder which he asserted was a gift-of-the-sun.

I was only briefly lured but that brief moment of temptation did it. I was simply addicted and reached a kind of high I had never experienced with smoking or alcohol.

Yeah, it was delirium but far too irresistible too be stopped before reaching the ultimate high.

For two weeks I was smoking gun and visualized the paradise where I clearly felt and witnessed the demons of my mind. In my natural state I was confused and fucked up. But with coke, I saw things crystal clear with only two possibilities: This is what I exactly wanted.

And I got it.

But;

There is always a but.

I had almost killed myself. It had almost turned out to be suicidal.

And it’s self-comforting that even then I no longer feel sorry for myself.

Only disgust;

Pure disgust!

There’d be people who must have known by now, all the shit I was doing. When I’ll face them they’ll loathe me including the good ones.

Sometimes I feel I shouldn't face them anymore.

But again,

It's because I want only normal things to happen, going to such extremes is something I cannot do any longer. I can tolerate all kinds of shit as long as it is real but it has to be real. Real as hell!

And that reminds me that Cassie has invited me for a party and I must go. I'll be facing people after a long time and I have to prove to them that I'm still sound.

Have to get rid of the 'drugger' tag.

Don't know how hard its gonna be. But I will.

I can no longer bear being self-victimized.

Jake closed his diary shut and prepared for the night ahead.

He dressed up for the party, sorting out his room first and then taking a shower.

He pulled out his car and headed for Cassie's abode, donned in a sober party outfit.

CHAPTER 7

JAKE

I've to take over from here. This is my life and I ought to know what it is all about.

I've been dependent rather carelessly.

So, I made my appearance at the party. The arrangements were neatly done up with some light Pink Floyd music and occasional pieces of Jazz and soft rock.

Whatever it was, the music was surely meant to put people to sleep. Hell, the party was dead.

Cassie, dressed in a slack black jumpsuit, looked very unusual. How can someone wear a jumpsuit for a party? Damn them!

This was precisely why I was never too keen on going out with her. Her decent looks were rather marred by her weird dressing style.

She came to me- all enthusiastic and jovial, "I can't believe you made it." She hugged me.

"I wanted to." I replied flatly. I always had to be disciplined with her. One small act of friendly affection and she could mistake it for life-long love. Yeah, she was that kind of a girl. Totally crazy!

My presence at the party was met by some unpleasantly surprised and mocking glances to which I paid no attention.

As I spread my gaze across all the guests I also spotted her- The bitch who betrayed me. She was all gay and happy, burning up the dance floor with a couple of desperates going after the oozing hotness she flaunted so shamelessly. I couldn't believe she was the same girl I had been going out with for over a year.

Anyhow, enough said now. It's virtually impossible to stop this flow of emotions whenever I see her.

'Let her fuck in hell!' I said to myself.

The party progressed. I found Alex who was this really simple guy and had been a good friend for many years. I still considered him a good friend though, even after that incident which I don't want to recall.

Alex, dressed casually as usual hugged me directly. "How are you man? Where've you been?" I felt a warm wave of affection coming from him and I hated it. I had always wanted to run away from it.

“I’m fine dude.” I released myself. “See you at the dance floor.” I cut-off any further conversation and excused myself.

“Where are you going?” Cassie spotted me going out toward the backyard. I suspected she had spy cameras fitted in her lenses.

“I’ll be back”, I said evasively, but tried to sound as convincing as possible. Please, for heaven’s sake I didn’t want her following me.

“Are you sure?” she gave me a look a non-smoker gives when they know that the other person is going to smoke, wanting to tell the person- PLEASE DON’T SMOKE- It kills!

‘It’s not what you’re expecting Cassie.’ I said softly and smiled at her. And she smiled back. Duh! How couldn’t she?

I went out in the lawn and leaned on a tree. It was an Oak tree and gave me the creeps.

My cell phone rang. It was mom. I ended the call and decided to call her later. I checked my pockets further, realizing that I was wearing unwashed jeans. My fingers felt for something which felt inherently familiar. Several Marlboro cigarettes.

In a ghostly hallucination, I felt the sticks drifting up to my mouth, pursed between my lips, that I was flicking out the lighter, burning the tip and exhaling a near-perfect smoke ring into the rush of the cool breeze.

In reality however, I was immediately gripped with a nauseating sensation after I recalled all the chaos it had gotten me into.

I threw them away. Rather aggressively.

At a distance I pictured the dense woods across the road and the bleak darkness containing the demons I could endure no more. They made me helpless, like a battered man cringing in pain and asking for pity and mercy to find no one around, not even a look of empathy.

No I had to let go of that. This is where I felt weakened. I could no longer stand darkness.

So I mustered some courage.

And closed my eyes to conjure myself for a final moment of introspection.

Yes, I had been fucked up with some real sad shit but this wasn't the end of it.

There was probably more to happen and I had to make sure that I remained prepared if any such thing was bound to happen in future. It all sounded easier said than done and that getting back everything together would be one uphill task; I still had to do it.

There was a deep well of bitterness in me and needed to drain it off myself to make place for new things.

The guilt and shame were so powerful that it could tear me apart. I had never wanted this to happen. It was just an overwhelming tide which I couldn't resist. I was not weak.

I just lost my way for a while and now I had woken up.

I had two options- one was to letting me go deeper into the process of analyzing shit like an idiot, regretting it later. The other and the more pragmatic one was to take a different path altogether and defy odds by doing only what I believed was good for me.

I knew that I still had the animal intact in me. Nevertheless, this was the sanest animal I could become. I had become an animal long ago and that part of me is unchangeable. So, with this new and reformed animal I aimed for the betterment of my life.

I didn't expect anyone to feel anything for me. In fact I wanted no one taking sides on whether I was right or wrong. Morality was the last thing on my mind.

Maybe this wasn't even the end of it. Maybe I was still not free of my demons. Maybe all that shit was bound to relapse right on my face the next time. Maybe I deserved more of this.

But again.

Something told me that I still had a few ounces of courage left in me with which I could strike here and there a hand or two at least for a partial detachment from the suffering.

I could do it!

Finally, I promised to myself that this wasn't my last night on earth. I had to learn to fight through the night and make way for the score of wondrous nights that I had to look forward to.

But again...

Only on Earth. EARTH and only EARTH. Earth with all its Earthliness.

(This ending note is all full of clichés but then sometimes going by convention is needed just to give you that little push.)