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Death on the Prowl

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It was meticulously dark at night; the cold wind made the leaves of misshapen trees rustle in a strange way— it seemed as if some comely creatures were moving helter-skelter to hear the howl of a deadly beast on the prowl— such a sound the leaves produced. Up above in the sky, there was something of strange nature: the moon was shining differently tonight; the stars appeared to be colluding with darkness in some evil design; the mist had cast an enticing blanket between the earth and the sky as if in an attempt to stop their sinful consummation. There were some eerie noises at intervals travelling from far-removed places where horror and sin might be the law of the land. In the midst of these grisly circumstances, a heavy vehicle screeched to a halt, sending waves of terror and suspense across this deserted forest. Out of the vehicle came two men: one of them was burly and menacing; the other was of short stature with penetrative eyes. They looked around, as if looking for some lost object.

‘This is the very place where I saw that thing, Omkar. I can’t be mistaken,’ said the man of short stature, as though referring to some mystical object.

‘Well, Laxman, this place is quite sinister. But I can’t wrap my head around this hypothesis that there might be a devil lurking behind the bushes,’ Omkar, the burly man, uttered in a languid tone.

‘You don’t believe me like others? But this is the very place where Joe stopped the car to attend to the call of nature. And right there, as he was stepping ahead to a corner, that monster lunged at him out of a bush, and devoured him at one go. That monster was half-human and half-bear— a grizzly bear, as far as I could see in the light emanating from the headlights. As he turned towards the car, I stepped on the gas and drove away as fast as I could,’ Laxman recounted the incident, totally lost in unusual thoughts.

‘I can understand what you are going through. I know your mental state at this moment,’ Omkar sympathised with him.

‘And the whole world thinks that I killed him— killed my best friend. The police treat me as a suspect. No one believes what I tell them. They laugh at it. They think that this is a fabrication. That’s why I have brought you down here, risking our lives,’ Laxman cried in frustration.

‘I am a trained hunter: I have killed hundreds of uncouth beasts. So, when you told me about this half-human and half-bear thing, though I didn’t quite believe it, it piqued my interest. Apart from that, you are a good friend of mine, and I want you to find out the truth. I know you can’t kill Joe,’ Omkar said, as the very thought of confronting a monster sent shivers down his spine.

‘Yes! Just think about it— why couldn’t they find his body? By the way, what are you going to do?’ Laxman asked in excitement and apprehension.

‘We will have to wait for a few hours if we are really down to finding out the truth,’ Omkar replied, looking deep into the unfathomable darkness.

As they waited for the monster to appear, the area surrounding them grew darker and darker as the night proceeded— the only source of light being the headlights. The chilly wind stung the skin; the hooting of owls penetrated the intermittent silence; the headlights flickered for an unknown reason; the nearby trees stood as threatening contraptions. They didn’t utter a single syllable during these hours, and a sense of horror loomed large. At 3 AM, Omkar got restless.

‘Let’s get back in the car and drive away. There is nothing to be found here. That monster must have been a figment of your imagination. It must have been a real bear, not some magical beast as you describe,’ Omkar spoke as he looked around once more.

‘I shan’t go anywhere unless and until I find what I seek. You may go if you please,’ Laxman retorted with mild protest.

‘Okay, I can wait through the night if you want me to, but you ain’t gonna find anything,’ Omkar articulated with precision.

As he said these words, there was a noise of someone crying in pain. They were startled, and concentrated on this strange noise. Out of darkness appeared a person with mutilated body and threadbare clothes. Both, Laxman and Omkar, were filled with terror, and retreated few steps.

‘Who the hell are you?’ Omkar shouted and took out his gun. Laxman remained silent; it appeared to him that he had seen this face somewhere.

‘Don’t you recognize me? I am Joe. I have been waiting for you, Laxman. I knew that you wouldn’t disappoint me. Here you are!’ he said with a trembling voice.

‘Yes, it’s Joe! How come you are alive? That beast ate you up,’ Laxman screamed, his feet going cold as ice.

‘He did eat me up, but here I am, back from the dens of sin, to take you back with me,’ he cried, blood trickling down from his eyes.

Before Laxman could say anything, three gunshots were heard across the expanse of the forest. It was Omkar who fired the gun. The person with mutilated face was lying lifeless on the ground. Omkar and Laxman rushed to the car and got inside in frenzy. As soon as Omkar started the engine, they heard a dreadful growl of some beast. He shifted the gears, but the car didn’t move, as they realized someone was holding back the car from moving forward. The engine roared, and the tyres squealed, but the vehicle didn’t budge an inch.

Five hours later, when the police reached the spot, they found the car and the gun. But there was not any trace of blood and gore. There was a peculiar silence in the immediate area, despite it being a bright morning when you get to hear the very sounds of flora and fauna in such places. It appeared as if everything there waited for it to get dark when evil would play hide and seek.