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Midnight's Soliloquy

Dipyaman Bhowmick

The hill looked steep and rugged – but I had to climb it. I was a mountaineer – schooled in the fierce art of climbing. As I looked set to begin the ascent, I had to draw up short.

‘Didn’t I hear a little shriek?’ I mused.

Yes, I had heard it. The sound again knelled softly but sharply against the still winter night. The place was in the midst of a desolate Irish countryside called Glendalough. Habitations were sporadic here – even the nearest hutment was an hour’s scamper. I had a cycle too, but on the way, its wheels had burst.

Again the sound drifted in the air...a little louder this time. It sounded like a child, but somehow it was a little less human to be a baby’s cry. The shrieks resembled that of the ceaseless low howls of dogs during frozen nights.

I felt stumped. Soon I realized that my breathing had become rapid. I felt that cold sweat was slowly forming; the pent-up fury of fear would manifest itself soon. I felt a little dizzy.

In my twenty years of mountaineering, I was yet to experience a mysterious occurrence. Many of my cronies had had many such occult encounters in the bland European countrysides. I had always made fun of them for being such woozy creatures. But secretly I had dreaded to experience such chilling events.

Part of my fears sprang from the fact that there was an old Irish legend had that it would be on the twelfth March of an even year during the second millennium that a spirit from a mountain would come into being. It would devour the first guilty person which it met, and then become immortal. In the hut where I had rested the previous night, the people had repeatedly tried to dissuade me from venturing out on the next night, at least.

‘But why?’ I had asked – incredulously.

‘It’s forbidden.’

I could not make them tell anything more except certain cryptic words which made little sense to me. But now I felt that truth would soon drape me in the scariest garment possible. Had I not always felt that whatever I do, no supernatural creature or force would cross my path?

This was partly because I had based my life on many assumptions. One of them was that I was born to succeed. So I never studied much and neither made many friends. Finally, the hard truth dawned on me that my life was turning awry. Thankfully I was always inclined to adventure. This paved my way to get admission into the prestigious Alaska Mountaineering School and excel there. My specialty was balancing.

But nothing prevented that low, deep screech from probing into my mind. It was for no ordinary reason that I had braved such odds to come out into this wilderness at such a night.

One day, my best buddy – Sullivan – and I had stumbled across some shreds of evidence suggesting the possibility of an exceptionally large gold vein buried under the Wicklow hills of Glendalough. We had set off together one bright day. But before arriving in Glendalough I had made it certain that it would be only me who would get the whole share, despite Sullivan having first found the information regarding the gold deposits.

To search for my companion now, one had to fish the deeps of the cold Irish Sea to look for the body of a forty-year-old stout lady.

I heard a distant rumble merging with the ghastly moan whose sound had increased. It was piercing my ear. I remembered the gold, but could not fathom how to dodge such invisible enemies and bag my reward. But what would I get in return? Guilt hit me hard now. For the first time, I reflected on the deed I had committed out of greed. My best friend! Hot tears rolled from my eyes, through my damp cheeks into the stepped-upon, blackened knoll below.

I looked at the mound again. Then the rains began...drenching me in cold waters evaporated somehow from the Irish Sea. The Sea too was crying. And then suddenly, as if by a miracle, the sound stopped!

‘Yes, I have defeated it; I have defeated it! And now...the gold!’ I almost jumped up in joy, thinking of a big house and a luxurious life.

Elated, I rushed towards the rugged hill – smoothed at the flanks, but steep to climb because of the stiff slope. I liked the difference. It seemed to signify that something was different about this place. Then I began mounting the hillock. But suddenly, as if it was like bait for me to bite, rumbling snow squalls attacked me from the front – and then, gradually, from all directions. I would have fallen now but for my evenly-tilted balance.

Then, as if to rub salt into my wound, I heard that sound again – but it was now heavier, louder...and more ominous. Torrential rains swept the entire landscape, and it seemed that the Great Flood had arrived, and would now drown me. Nature was displaying its vicious side. What a startling contrast it was now from the day Sullivan and I had first entered Ireland!

Certain of my imminent doom, I groped on; for it was best to try before I die. But that helped not. Nature stopped my efforts, again.

My ears were pained by the howling of the wind. My heart was biting. I thought of Sullivan – sleeping peacefully, perhaps, in the dark waters of the Sea. And where was I now? I forgot almost everything about myself. The secession of my brain arrived faster than I had expected. But faintly was I aware of the gushing forth of the dark, star-looted night sky and fast-moving surroundings as I tumbled toward the abyss below.

Biographical Note

Dipyaman Bhowmick is a final year Undergraduate English Honours student of the Department of English at Jadavpur University. He loves writing fiction. His academic interests include Gothic literature, ecocriticism and Victorian studies. He has presented papers on nineteenth-century Gothic in departmental and international seminars.