

TALES OF THE **BLACK FAIRIES**

FAIRY TALES FROM
INFINITY



BlueRoseONE^{.com}
S t o r i e s M a t t e r
New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

Copyright © Infinity 2026

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



BlueRoseONESM
Stories Matter
New Delhi • London

For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+91 8882 898 898

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7542-897-8

Cover Design: Deepak Katheria

Typesetting: Manisha Rawat

First Edition: April 2026

Prologue



For the uninitiated...

We are the Black Fairies. We have existed since the commencement of death, and we shall cease to exist with the conclusion of death. We are not embodiments of death, but mere travellers that accompany those that were once living. We do not envy the living for being alive once, nor do we pity them for being alive once. Our existence is relevant to their deaths, as their existence is relevant to our purpose.

In our journey, we witness many souls. All souls have tales to tell. No souls have nothing to say. And we witness their final moments, to ease their transformation into their journey to the next phase. Where they go to, we never know; our duty is to merely get them to the oblivion, to be absorbed by The Oneness.

We are the Black fairies. And these are our tales.

Contents



The Lonely Man.....	1
The Northern Lights.....	4
The Therapist's Office.....	10
The Lovers	16
The Devotee.....	21
The Hoarder.....	26
The Murderer	31
The Man Who Died In Ten Hours.....	38
The Nurse Who Can See Fairies	45
The House on Fire	48
The Lover Who Waited.....	53
The Last Roar.....	59
The Brother's Keeper	62
The Prisoner	66
Consent	71
The Atheist.....	77
The Soul of the Forest Dweller	85
The Last Dance	96
The Rich Man's Penance	100
Epilogue.....	106



The Lonely Man



I am here for Parthipan.

I look at him, as he stands staring at the metro rail track in front of him. His mind is steady, and his legs are oscillating. He is waiting for the right time to step forward.

Parthipan is a man in his forties, and as I watch him, I see that his heart is empty yet heavy. He is no longer burdened by the thoughts of his failures, loneliness, fatigues and illness, which are still weighing his heart and body. He made the decision an hour ago, and all he has to do now is step off the platform and close his eyes before the train nears him. He is ready.

I stand by his side. I can feel the weight of his past pains. I see him remember Farzana, the love of his life, who he had to let go because he didn't have a job at the tender age of eighteen, which forced him to be practical and thus led to her marriage to a different man. I see him remember the chance of a lifetime of working in the United States, in his dream company, which he had to forfeit because his parents were sick. I see him remembering getting fired from his job for the mistake his senior made, and made him the scapegoat. Once again, his mind is filled with turmoils of memories. They often push a man further.

He believes his life is not in his control, that his failures are not his fault, and yet he is the one to feel the brunt of it all. I wish I could tell him otherwise. Perhaps the faults of others were the cause of his falls, but his life is his to live and control. It is sad that he cannot see it, which has led him here.

I cannot stop him. I do not deal with the living. I do not deal with the dying. I deal with the dead. Perhaps in death, before I take him away, I may be able to tell him, before I strip him off his memories and make him one with all.

He takes another step forward. I am prepared. He is ready.

He suddenly hears joyous laughter, and stops to look to his side. I find myself to be curious, so I too look in that direction.

There is a boy and a girl, who run down the stairs and walk to the curb. They are both intoxicated, the girl more than the boy. They are laughing and giggling and smiling. She is occasionally kissing him, and he is trying to be the sober one of both.

She moves closer to the curb, and is about to trip, when he pulls her back and says, "Watch it, Sandhya." She smiles and kisses him again. He kisses her back.

Parthipan watches them. His heart is feeling lighter. A pinch of joy appears in his mind, and with that the certainty of what they will see if he takes the step. He doesn't want to die in front of these hopeful souls. His desire to die starts to wane.

The train arrives and opens its doors. The boy and the girl enter, and Parthipan stands there, watching them get seated and continue kissing each other. I stand by his side, watching their Rose Fairy, still young and fresh and intoxicated in love, hovering over them.

The doors close, and the train moves.

Parthipan is still on the curb. He at first thinks he will use the next train, but now his desire to step off the curb is waning. He no longer wants to proceed with what he came here to do.

So he puts his hands in his pants' pockets, turns around with a smile on his face and walks towards the stairs.

I take out my list and look for his name. It has vanished for the day.

A different name has appeared instead.

I pray to not see Parthipan anytime soon, and fly towards my next destination.



The Northern Lights



My appointment is with an Indian Tourist in Finland.

He steps out of the glass igloo and looks up for a clearer view of the Northern Lights that slow dances over him. He rubs his hands together and blows on it, and exclaims, "This is truly a view worth dying for."

"Poppy!" screams Angel, his teenage niece. He turns to smile at her, and she screams, "Come back. It is really cold outside."

"Come out, girl. The lights are out here."

"We got a glass roof to look at them. Come inside."

"I will not mar this view with glass."

She hesitates, goes inside, wears a very thick cotton jacket, and steps out, stepping on the snow with disgust. "It's just snow," says Jonathan, who gets a hold of her and turns her head upwards for her to see what he was seeing a minute ago. Seeing the lights, her mouth opens wide.

"Poppy! This is so beautiful."

"Told ya, girl."

He sits on the snowy floor and pats next to him, and she sits besides him. I stand behind both. The girl is still shivering, so Jonathan embraces her and warms her up with a rub over her arms, saying, "When you become a woman, you gotta endure harsher climates than these to move forward."

"I am going to be an AI Scientist. Why will I need to endure tough climates?"

"If you are as ethical as your mother, you will be battling the economic and political climates of the future. And I have a feeling it is gonna be rough."

"You feel a lot."

"Guilty!" he admits with a laugh.

He leans backwards on his elbows and lets out a sigh of relief. "This is one sight I have always wanted to see with the prettiest woman in the world."

"Is that why you brought me here?"

"Not you, idiot. I brought you instead of the one who I truly wanted to bring here."

"You have another niece I do not know about?"

He lets out a laugh and says, "No, girl. There was... someone special."

She falls on her side, eager to hear his story, like she always did. "Who is it?"

"A girl in school. An old friend."

"She is no longer your friend?"

"She still is. She is just married to someone else."

"What happened?"

He tries to gather his thoughts. I see his memories of love, heartbreak, regret and acceptance. He says, "She was my classmate in school, and a really good friend. One day I told her I loved her, and she said I should ask her again after college."

"So what happened?"

"My father happened. He made some bad decisions, which led to me having to drop my plans for college, to work to repay

the loans. And by the time I was able to make something out of it, well... She was married off to someone else.”

“She should have waited for you.”

“It is easy to say that now, but times were different back then. Besides, she wanted me to get a degree, because I was planning to go into the movies, and she wanted me to be secure. Failing to get a degree, and a decent job, and being a low waged person until my mid thirties... It is hard to convince the parents of such a promising girl. And she did wait for me for quite some time. I was the one who messed it up.”

She lets out a hum and lies on her back to look at the lights, which is now motionless. She asks, “Do you regret not fulfilling your dreams?”

He sighs and replies, “What are you talking about? I did fulfil all my dreams!”

She sits straight and asks, “Really? What were they?”

He sits up and replies, “Well... I had three wishes - to be a famous person, to be a well learned person, and to come here and see the northern lights with the girl I love the most.”

“But you’re not seeing the northern lights with the girl you love?”

He hugs her tight and replies, “I am here with you under the northern lights, aren’t I?” She lets out a laugh that reverberates through the air. Even the northern lights sway to her laugh. Seeing this he says, “Call your Mom! She will not want to miss this.”

The girl gets up and runs back to the igloo. He lies on his back, and thinks about what he just said, and exclaims, “Wow! God really has a funny way of making dreams come true.”

“How is that?” I ask. He turns around and looks at me. He is surprised, as he turns away to look at his lifeless body beneath

him. He smiles and says, "Wow! God also has a funny way of taking it all away. Were you sent here to pluck me out at this precise moment?"

"No one sent me. I appear where I have to, when I have to."

He nods his head and looks at his body. I ask again, "I see your existence. You did learn a lot in life, and evolved in the process. And you're revered by many for your views and thoughts. But your wishes were to be an actor, to learn in institutes, and to marry Sarah. How is the diverted trajectory still the fulfillment of your dreams?"

He looks at me and replies, "I was seeking the joys of a certain lifestyle. And I obtained them through paths I didn't intend to travel, but traveled nonetheless."

"And you are happy now?"

"Well, not about how I am leaving. But yes, I have achieved the joys I sought."

He looks behind him to see his sister and niece come out of the igloo. He asks, "Why do they have to see me like this now? This isn't the right way to die."

"There is no right way. You leave when it is time."

"Do you have no control over that?"

"I am just a guide, here to take you from many to one."

"One? Do you mean God?"

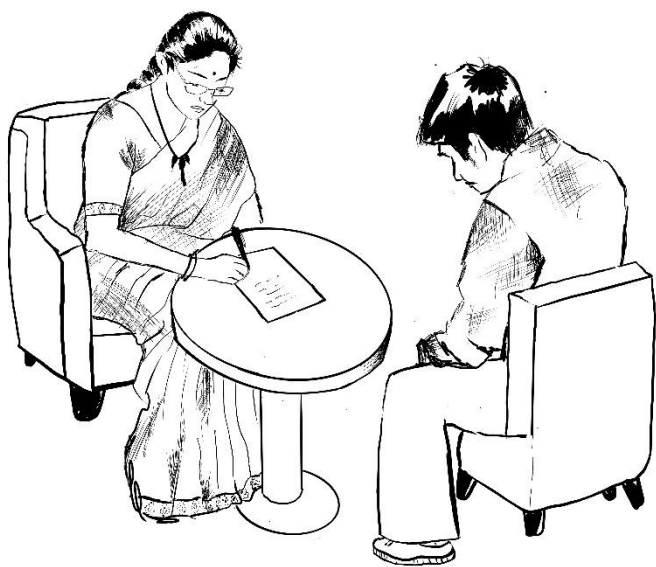
"I do not know. Many have asked me the same question. But it is a question no one remembers once the memories are stripped away from them."

He takes a few steps back and says, "I cannot let you take away my memories. Everything I went through, everything I suffered, everything I learned, everyone I loved... They made me who I am."

“And you will have them. Only the moments will be forgotten, not what you learned from them.”

Before he can protest further, I take a hold of his hand. And in an instant, his mind goes blank, losing the weight of his memories, making him light enough for me to carry him. I take a hold of him, and fly towards the Oneness, leaving behind the two women, whose names shall appear in my notes in due course of time.

For now, they shall stay behind to mourn for the one with me.



The Therapist's Office



My note says I am meant to be in a therapist's office.

I look away from my note and see Vedanth look at Kripa, his therapist, who is holding a notepad and intently staring at the man at least two decades younger than her, but with less life than herself. She asks, "So tell me, Vedanth. How're things going for you?"

"Well," he begins, "I have started exercising in the morning regularly now, and it has not been easy. My joints and muscles ache, but I do feel better after working out everyday. I have also reduced my coffee consumption, and put a pause on cigarettes completely, so that's been good."

"That's good. Have you brought your journal?"

"Yes, I have."

"OK. Tell me how your week was."

He takes out a notebook from his bag and opens it. He checks the dates on each page, and stops at the page he is looking forward to. He then begins, "A noticeable thing happened last week. I stopped watching porn altogether."

"Was it hard?"

"At first it was. I used to watch porn three-four times a day, now I am watching nothing."

"And how is that affecting you?"

"I... don't know. I do feel lonely, lonelier at times when I look at the couples in the office, or at the places where I go for tea

or lunch, or when I go to the mall. I mean... There are couples everywhere.”

“We tend to see only what we want to see, Vedanth. You only see couples because you want to be one yourself.”

“Well...it is high time for that, right? I am about to be thirty, and I have never been in a relationship.”

“And why do you think that is?”

He thinks for a second, and says, “I do not know. I guess it is because I am still working on myself.”

“Maybe. Or maybe it is because you yourself do not think you are ready for it.”

“Oh, I know I am ready. I have been ready for it since I was 12.”

“Wanting something for a long time and being ready for it are two entirely different things, Vedanth.”

Vedanth stares at Kripa, who continues, “I am not denying that you have been wanting and seeking it, and you definitely need it. But you being ready for it is a completely different scenario.”

“Why do you think I am not ready?”

“Let me ask you this. Say you get into a relationship... What will you do next?”

Vedanth suddenly finds his tongue tied. His mind racks through the thoughts, and then speaks, “Well, the usual. We would go out. We would dine together. Watch movies together. Have sex. Sleep together. Wake up together. You know... the usual...”

“OK. Aren’t those things you can do with a friend?”

“You kidding me, right? Can’t have sex with a friend.”

“There’re always friends who’ll have the same needs as you. Or there’s paid sex. I believe you told me earlier that you don’t see it as a bad profession.”

“Yes, but in this country it is illegal, and I cannot solicit sex from someone knowing she was forced into it.”

“But there are also those who are actively into this, who solicit themselves. Say you meet one such person, who meets your sexual needs. Will you still need a partner?”

“Well... I mean... I...”

“Let me ask you again. Why do YOU think you need a partner?”

He thinks again, and responds, “I need meaning in my life, for my life.”

“And you think you cannot find it on your own?”

“I am just tired of trying to find it on my own.”

“And that is a need only a partner can satisfy? Not a friend, or even a colleague?”

“I mean... why would they...”

“I am just saying that you have been seeking someone whose desires align with yours, but you have only been looking down one road, and not seeing the parallel roads, where there are people who could meet your direction, and could travel with you. If you are seeking all the desires you need from one person, don’t you think they will feel burdened by you?”

“I do not understand.”

Kripa prepares to explain herself, “A coffee mug is useful for drinking from, not eating from or reading from. A book is what you use to read. And just like that, people also serve specific purposes. Instead of seeking all in one person, you should put yourself out more, and find people who meet your desires

individually. And who knows, you may find someone who you can relate with in more than one way.”

“Seems like a lot more work.”

“You said that you cannot be different for different people. When you cannot adapt yourself to match the needs and expectations of different people, isn’t it hypocritical for you to expect a partner who meets all your needs?”

This gives him something to think about. She continues, “You have a lot to explore in life, and you are waiting for the right person to explore all of them with. I am just saying, start exploring, and the right people will come to you.”

“Did that work for you?”

“I found my people once I found my path, not the other way around. You find life when you find your road, not when you find your people.”

Vedanth nods his head, understanding what she is saying. She decides to throw in a small anecdote, “Life is all about living. It would be a shame if you do not wake up another day, and end up wondering why you didn’t live the day before.”

She starts to feel some discomfort in her chest and starts rubbing. I get ready.

She tries to gather her thoughts and tries to get up, only to stumble forward. Vedanth quickly gets on his feet and tries to turn her around, only to find her clutching her chest hard and closing her eyes. He screams loudly for the receptionist, who runs in, followed by two others who were waiting outside.

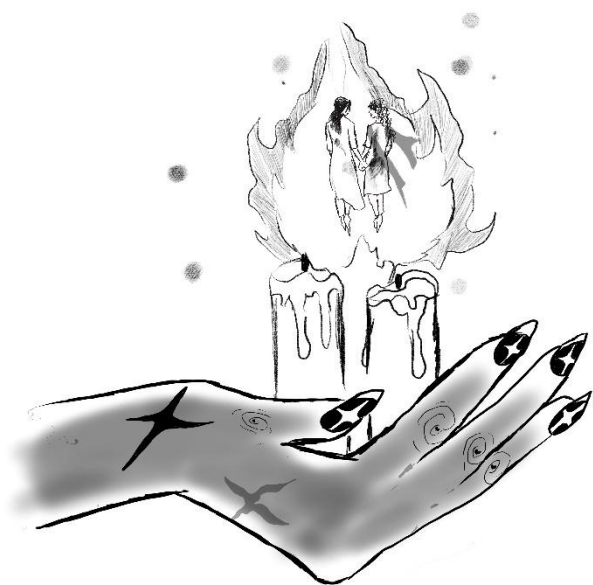
I look at Kripa, who is watching the whole scene in aghast. She asks, “Why did I have to die now, now that I was finally able to give him the idea to look forward to life?”

I reply, "His life is for him to decide upon. And for what it is worth, you have helped him till today. Tomorrow will be his choice."

She looks at me and asks, "Where are we heading from here?"

I reply, "To your person. He has been yearning for you for a really long time."

She smiles. I touch her hand, stripping her of her memories, and fly away with her.



The Lovers



I am here for two souls.

I keep my unlit candles beside me as I ascend to stand by the souls of two young women, standing holding each other's hands, with fear in their eyes. They are looking ahead, where two men are over their naked bodies, committing atrocities one cannot define.

I never understood how this species could be so cruel to their own kind.

One of the girls exclaims, "That's my brother! My brother is..."

"Turn away," I insist, and they both turn around to look at me. The other girl, the shorter of the two, asks, "Are you here to take us away?" I nod my head. She asks again, "Are we dead?"

"Not yet," I reply, "They want to take their time, so your physical presence will last longer. That doesn't mean you are alive." I look at the taller girl and say, "You died the moment your brother touched you. And you died the moment your body was violated."

"What if they leave us? What if we survive?"

I look at the weapons they have put aside. I see the stains of blood that are about to fall on them. I reply, "I wouldn't have been here if your time wasn't fixed. It is very rare for us to be present and our purpose is not met."

"But we are not dead yet."

"You will be in another hour."

“Another hour?” she lets out a gasp, “You mean.. they are going to...”

She is about to turn around to look at the atrocity, so I speak, “Don’t. It is done. There is no way out of it. I am sorry for what you have endured.”

The tall girl starts to cry. “We had plans. We were supposed to work on new forms of farming. We had our thesis ready.”

“They will burn them all tonight.”

“Can’t those survive? They could help many people.”

“The ones who burn your thoughts do not understand their value. Which is why they will burn them. And if they do understand them, they will steal them. Your species is weird that way.”

They look at the floor, hearts heavy, eyes teary. I look up at the night sky, which is as black as me, but not as obsidian as a certain fairy that ascended only a few full moons ago. I look back at them and say, “We need to start.”

“Are you taking us away?”

“Not exactly.”

They look at me questioningly. I continue, “Your lives were cut short by external entities. Which means there is a life which should have been led by you. Which you must lead.”

The tall girl’s eyes widen, and she asks, “You mean... we will get to live?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“What does that mean?”

“It will be real to you.”

The short girl scoffs at me. “What good is reality which is not good to everyone?”

“You just lived the reality everyone lives in. Would you rather return to the Oneness with the marred existence, or would you rather live your actual existence, albeit it being real only to you two?”

They look at each other. The tall girl holds the short girl’s hand firmly and says, “I want to see where we would have headed.” The short girl lets a tear out of her eye, kisses her and they both nod for me.

I touch their foreheads at once.

They move to America, after the tall one wins a fellowship. They conduct their research together. They get an apartment for themselves, where they live, laugh and love abundantly.

Two years later the tall one gives birth to a young girl. They name her Anamika. Her pictures are sent to the respective families, who crave to meet her.

When Anamika turns 2, the tall one’s family comes to New York. The tall one’s brother has a spat with the short one over some political discussion. He leaves angrily, and the parents follow.

Anamika is taken to school. She studies hard and gets enrolled in a prestigious college.

The women win multiple accolades for their research, which becomes groundbreaking and helps in the agricultural revolution in the desert regions of Africa and Asia. They are trying to develop alternate methods to suit the colder climates of Canada and Iceland.

They stage protests against governmental policies that are environmentally destructive. They get arrested and later deported.

They continue their research in India.

The tall one dies first due to cancer, with the short one by her side. She starts turning into a flame, her memories being evaporated into air, and her flame glowing brighter and brighter.

A decade later, Anamika gets married to her long-time boyfriend.

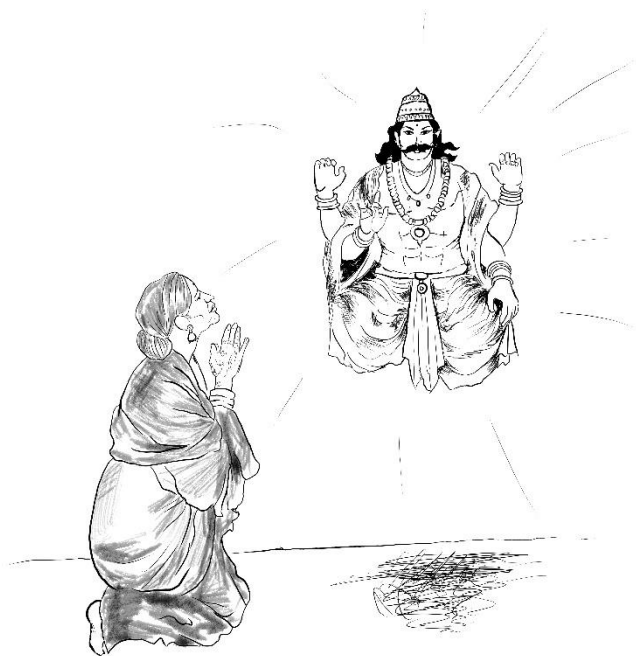
Two years later, the short one has a heart attack and passes away.
Her smile grows wider, as she too turns into a flame, just as bright as her counterpart.

I find their pains and memories combine to form an insignia. I take it, for I am now bound.

I take the lovers on my candles, and look at the men, still acting upon rules made by men just like them. I say to them, "We are now bound. I shall see you soon."

And I fly off, taking two happy souls to join the Oneness.

Their names are Shakunthala and Suman. Those are for *you* to remember.



The Devotee



I am here for Charumathi.

She is inside a small house, whose walls were recently painted. There are people outside taking care of wedding decorations, removing them one-by-one and placing them in a truck. There is a small crowd, who have formed clusters discussing matters of respective interests and drinking tea.

I walk into the house. The tenants of the house are talking to their relatives. They are discussing matters pertaining to the wedding that got over the previous day. I walk past them to the room in the back, where Charumathi lies.

Charumathi is in her late seventies. She is frail, just skin and bones. She wanted to be part of the wedding, and had prayed for the same. And now that it has happened, it is time.

Her granddaughter enters the room with her husband, and sits by Charumathi's side. Charumathi cannot see her through her shut eyes, which she cannot even open. So the granddaughter loudly calls out in Tamil, "*Patti!*"

She responds, "Subbu!"

"Patti. I am here with Athul."

"Aahhh... The newlyweds are here to see me."

"Do you want something, Paatti?"

"No, Subbu. I have asked for too much. Now I can rest."

She tries to raise her hands, and the granddaughter holds them. She places one hand on her granddaughter's head, and

waves to the other, who comes close to her. She places that hand on his head, and blesses them, *“Live long and happy together. And bear many children. Karuppuswami will take care of you two, as he took care of our family for generations.”*

Charumathi's hand caresses her granddaughter's cheek, and she affectionately holds her hand. Right then someone calls out for Subbu and Athul. Athul responds, and Charu says, *“Patti. I will just step out and come back, okay?”*

“See them all. Tell them to come see me. It is time.”

She smiles, gets up, and leaves the room with Athul.

I stand closer to Charumathi, whose breathing gets heavier. I look at the insignia in my hand, one that was formed as she was muttering her prayers. I place it on me, and call her out, “Charumathi!”

She opens her eyes, and sees Karuppuswami in front of her. She sits up straight and holds her hands together to pray.

Karuppuswami says, *“Charumathi! You asked me to let you see your granddaughter married and happy. I have given you that.”*

“Yes, my lord.”

“You asked me to take care of your family, which I have done for generations.”

“I know, my lord.”

“Now it is time for you to come with me. Are you ready?”

“I am your devout servant, my lord.”

She stands up and walks towards Karuppuswami.

I touch her hand, her memories are stripped away. Her strong devotion lingers around, and for a moment I see the silhouette of Karuppuswami pass through the room, nodding at me with agreement.

I look at the lifeless body of the devotee, whose soul will now join her God. As will the souls of many others around the globe. And yet, they all move in one direction, despite there being the existence of many beliefs.

I have never fully grasped the intricacy of faith. But it is one I have always been fascinated about, especially when I see a devout soul.

I leave the room with Charumathi, leaving the house of joy to turn into a house of sorrow.



The Hoarder



I enter the house of Chakraborty.

Chakraborty's mansion, which is basically a fortress, is filled with precious artifacts from different parts of the world. Every room in the house has something monumentally precious and eye catchy. Many are put on plinths, and many are hanging on the walls. All of them are worth crores and crores. None of them interest me. I move downwards to the basement.

I enter the biggest room of the mansion, well hidden from the outer world, and is welcomed by a plethora of artifacts. These aren't as shiny and valuable as the ones above. But every single one of them is more precious, for they all hold stronger and hidden stories.

Each artifact has a soul with them, and each soul has a Black Fairy accompanying them. They are all bound, the soul to their artifact, and the fairy to their soul.

I look at Chakraborty, who is cleaning an idol with a glint in his eyes. I approach him and say, "It is time." He turns around to see me, and then his eyes shift to the ground, where his body lies. The smile on his face vanishes.

He looks back at me and exclaims, "I am dead!"

"You are."

"I am no longer bound."

"You are not."

"I am free."

“From that what is around you, yes.”

He smiles, turns back to his idol and says, “Thank you for passing the information.”

I have seen his kind before. They cannot leave their materialistic possessions behind, just as the many souls around us. Only, he is calmer. All the souls in this room are calm. Angry, disappointed, and yet calm.

“We must leave.”

“You may.”

“You have to come with me.”

“Do I have a choice?”

Now that is a first. I tell him, “You may choose to stay, but you will retain only glimpses of your memories, and often not the pleasant ones. And you will wander within the limits of this ground, or specific objects you are deeply attached to.”

“I understand, but I cannot leave, because these things cannot be left behind.”

“Why not?”

“Because I am meant to protect them. Not just for life, but for eternity.”

I tilt my head with wonder. He turns to me and says, “These are prized possessions of many cultures, which many will want to put within glass showcases or try to claim as their own. Some will want to tear them down to learn the past. Some will want to convert them into objects of fascination. But these are meant to be adored, meant to be taken care of. It was the promise I gave their owners, before everything they owned was stolen from them. And now it is my duty.”

I observe the room we are in. Only now do I notice exactly where we are. “This is a vault!”, I exclaim. He smiles and

replies, "Precisely. No one can come in. No one even knows about this vault."

"Your body will rot in here."

"A small price to pay."

"What about your loved ones?"

The smile on his face fades. "They were taken from me, as they fought for the rights of many. They were silenced, because they were getting louder." He walks to an unfinished chair and says, "My son was working on this. In the hands of his tormentors this would have burned. In the hands of the people who he vowed to protect, this would have been a sacred relic. But here, it is an incomplete chair a son was building for his father. Tell me, where else would this chair find more purpose?"

I feel unsure. "All objects will perish. It is nature's law."

"When that time comes, I shall come with you."

I nod my head and look at my note. No other names are there for me today. And as long as I stay here, no new names will appear on my note. I am now bound to him. It is nice, in a manner of speaking. I walk to him and ask, "Could you tell me the stories of these artifacts?"

He smiles at me and replies, "Of course! That is why I am here."

He takes me to an object to tell its story. I wonder if a museum curator would have taken so much delight in explaining history and its significance if he wasn't paid. I could see why he wouldn't leave. And sometimes, such souls are meant to stay behind.

I look at the souls with lingering pasts, attached to their respective stories, hanging around their artifacts, accompanied by their Black Fairies. They are not protesting, they are not afraid. They are free, and they are protecting their stories.

How can one take a soul away from their story?

The fairies look at me. They needn't be bound to them. They are bound, for the souls they came for refuse to leave their stories. The fairies are restless with their respective souls.

Many would be restless with many. One would be restless with one.

One wouldn't be restless with many. So I made a decision.

I nod at the fairies. They understand and nod back, and together they all leave. Numerous names appear on my note, all above the name of Chakraborty. Souls that should have left before. Souls that stayed behind. Souls that will leave with Chakraborty. No new names shall appear on my note. And if ever this vault is opened, then we may see how their stories go forward.



The Murderer



I am here for Madhav.

I have an insignia for him, one I have held onto for a really long time. One I held onto with anger.

I watch as he walks up to the rope with his name on it, hands cuffed behind him. I watch him as he stands over the trapdoor, and the hangman puts the black cover over his head. The noose is put around his neck and is tightened strongly. The hangman walks to the lever. The superintendent looks at his watch, and raises his red handkerchief.

The minute hand hits the mark of twelve, and the handkerchief is dropped.

Madhav smiles.

The hangman is about to pull the lever.

I watch Madhav stand by my side, at first with a smile on his face, then, realizing that he is viewing everything from outside his body, looks around to contemplate what is happening. Time has stood still for him, for I have taken him out of reality. I look at the insignia I hold in my hand. I can still feel her pain.

Madhav turns to me and asks, "Who are you? What is going on?"

"You're about to die, and I am here to assist you."

The man smirks and says, "Ahh! A delightful life, and now a delightful death."

"You seem to be not scared of death."

“I always knew that God and Heaven and Hell didn’t exist.”

“And yet here you are, in a still reality, with me, outside your body.”

“I mean in the religious sense.”

“Religions have got many things right. More things wrong.”

“Precisely.”

“Is that why you mutilated the girl?”

The sudden question washed off the smirk on his face. He tries to brush it off with a scoff and says, “That bitch had it coming. Always wearing such short skirts, looking like a slut...”

“Her name was Poornima. She was fourteen, and she was inside her house. You violated her safe space, and then violated her.”

“Served her right.”

“Then you told her you would murder her family if she wouldn’t go with you. You took her to your friends, and then to more men, and presented her as a commodity with a price.”

Madhav storms at me angrily and screams, “Who the fuck do you think you are to judge me?”

“I judge no one. I am only trying to understand why you did what you did.”

The man steps away from me and rants, “I was not the only one who raped her. Policemen, ministers, rich boys, even film stars got a taste of her. And she was never my first. I should have sold her off as I did the rest.”

“But you didn’t. Why?”

“Because she was fetching me some good price. She was the best I ever got.”

He turns to me, and I see his eyes sparkle. “She was one helluva girl. Such assets, such a body. I knew I scored big time with her. And everyone who enjoyed her loved me for it. I got fifty thousand even after her fifteenth man, you know that? Fifteen men, and she was still worth fifty per fuck. She was my goldmine.”

“But then you killed her. Why?”

A gloom hovers over his face, as he replies, “I was celebrating with my friends. We got really drunk, and...things didn’t go well. By the time we were in our senses...”

I stare at his soul. He is grieving the loss of his commodity. I look again at the insignia. He asks, “What is that?”

I show it to him and reply, “It is Poornima’s memory insignia. I took her memories and placed it in this when I stripped her memories away.”

His eyes grow wider. “You were the one who took her away?”

“I was with her that night. But I couldn’t take her soul out until I was certain she was to die. Death can be...tricky, that way. You kept reviving her, just so that you could extend her pain. Of all the nights I had come to her, that was the longest I stayed.”

“She was going to die before as well? Hah! So I did her a favour!”

My anger rises. I look at the sky to let out a sigh, and say, “Her name appeared in my note several times before as well. And every time, her strong will to escape, to survive, would erase her name from my note. Until her last night.”

I look back at him and continue, “Every person’s memories are stripped away for the world to hold onto. But when external factors cause the untimely demise of an individual, their memories, especially the vindictive, painful ones, are collected,

to present to the ones who instigated them. So I have brought this for you.”

He smiles and asks, “So I get to go back to that time?”

I say nothing and give him a quick touch of the insignia.

As soon as he is withdrawn from the insignia he screams out loud and cries, “What? What just...?”

“You seemed to have been mistaken,” I say to him calmly, “This insignia holds her memories, and thus her pains, her fears, her cries, everything you and everyone that had known her had inflicted upon her. And during every microsecond in this realm, you will experience it an infinite number of times.”

“Microseconds?”

“You have thirty more seconds to die.”

And I thrust the insignia upon him, and he goes into a trance. I watch the lever get pulled. I watch the trapdoor open. I watch Madhav’s body fall. I watch the rope tighten around his neck. I hear the snap of a bone. I feel him suffer.

I watch his soul in trance shiver, and turn white and pale.

The moment the body becomes lifeless, the insignia comes back to me, and he starts screaming, “Please! Make it stop. Let go of me. I beg you. I cannot take it any longer.”

“Did she not beg you the same? Did she not cry these exact words and more? Why must you be spared? Why do you deserve mercy when the deserving never got it?”

He is speechless. He falls on his knees and begs, “Take me to your God. Let me plead my case.”

I bend over to face him and ask, “Did you not say that there is no God or Heaven or Hell?”

“So are you the one to decide?”

“No. I am here to assist you. And watch you be taken down.”

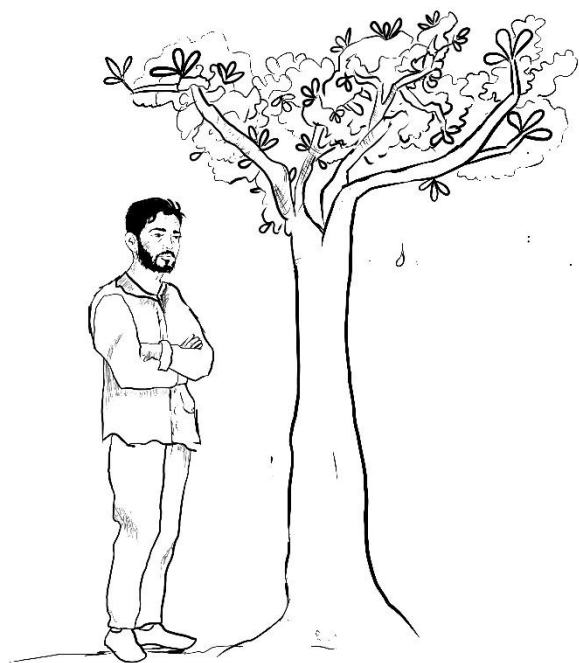
The ground opens up, and he gets pulled into it. He begs for mercy, “Please! I cannot take this any longer.”

“No. But you will go through them, for eternity, living through all the pains you inflicted.”

Before the ground closes up, he screams, “Curse the God that punished me!”

I shake my head and say to myself, “When will he ever learn? When will any of these humans learn? Pain inflicted is pain that will be received tenfold.”

I look up at the sky. I see the essence of Poornima wandering with the Oneness through the endless existence. I let out a sigh, for I wonder, if reality is just as real as what has just happened, or if this moment is just a work of fiction created by a powerless creator?



The Man Who Died In Ten Hours



I wait by the side of David.

David, a man in his early thirties, is on the side of the road, and the back-wheel of his car has him pinned to the ground. It is directly on his chest, but not crushing him, but slowly taking his life away. The cold is getting to him as well, and so is the fear from the darkness of the night. His mobile is near him, now completely dead. And next to him were some Champa flowers piled up neatly on a piece of paper.

I stand by his side, waiting for his time to come. He sees me and says, “Thank god, you’re here. Please, help me. You just need to push this car, and...”

“I am sorry, David, but I cannot save you.”

It is only then that he sees me clearly, and fear gets a hold of him. I kneel down so that he can see me better, and say, “It seems like you are inching towards death, which is why you are seeing me.”

The cold air is wrapping him, and his voice stutters as he asks, “Can you not save me?”

“Then it will become a paradox.”

“How?”

“If I save you, then my need wouldn’t have been required here in the first place, which would mean I would not appear. But then if I do not appear, no one would save you, and you would

die, needing my presence here. We would inadvertently create a limbo, with only us two stuck in it. This is better.”

He starts to cry. “How is this better? My child... She is waiting for me... Sonia... What will she do without me?”

“They will survive. It’s the nature of existence.”

“How can you be so cold to a dying man?”

“To you it is THE end. To me it is another day, another end, another life to guide to the Oneness. The apathy is inborn in us.”

He tries to relax and lays his head on the ground. He no longer has the strength to look up. He says, “I guess this is it, then?”

I sit next to him and ask, “How did you end up here?”

He lets out a laugh and replies, “I was on my way back home, when I saw these champa flowers. Sonia, my wife,... she loves them. So I thought I would get some for her. Then I saw something leaking by the wheel, so I bent over. I do not know how it happened, but the car rolled back, and here I am.”

Tears form around his eyes as he continues, “Sonia! She will be devastated. I just wanted to tell her how much I love her. But even those messages aren’t going through.”

I have nothing to say, so I wait.

Another hour goes by. The man’s breathing has gotten lower and slower. He asks, “Is... Is it time?”

I shake my head and reply, “No. You are getting there.”

“Should I... do something to fasten it?”

“You cannot.”

“Because... it’s a sin?”

“There are no sins. There are just actions and inactions, and subsequent consequences.”

“No sins? So... we do not... get rewarded for... good deeds?”

“No deed done for a reward is a good deed.”

“So...what... is a good deed?”

“I don’t know. I have seen people murdered for greater goods. I have seen children sacrificed for greater goods. I have seen a hungry mother feed her child and die of starvation, hoping the child would be spared, only for the child to die at the very foot of the temple they begged.”

“So... what is good?”

I look at him. His time is nearing. I sigh and ask, “Do you remember your wife?”

“Yes.”

“Describe her.”

“She is an angel. She smells like oranges after her bath. She loves wearing green. She can be chatty in one minute, and forget the world and disappear into a book in another. When I kiss her, when she hugs me... I forget all the tensions in the world.”

“And you daughter?”

“Jiji. I love her when she runs to me... When she jumps to me to kiss me. When she mocks me. When I don’t understand half of the things she says. When she laughs... it is like I have been blessed.”

I stand up and say, “That... is good.”

David stands by my side and looks at his body that finally gives away. The cold finally got to him, after ten long hours. He

closes his eyes and whispers, “This should not be how they find me. Sonia will get hurt.”

“The police that will find you will tell about this to your friend Siddarth. He will ensure that the hurtful details will be left out when he narrates it to your wife.”

“And Jiji?”

I look up at the moonless sky and say, “She will be fine. You will be immortalized by her in the future.”

The man lets out a laugh and asks, “Don’t tell me she is going to be a film maker?”

I mimic him. “Worse. She is going to be a novelist.”

“Oh my God! That’s even worse!”

“But she will use her pain to ease the pain of millions.”

He looks at me and asks, “So this... My death... It is for her.”

I touch him to strip his memories away, and answer, “Every death is significant to the living, for the dead are already dead.”

I then fly towards the Oneness, carrying the soul who was just a few minutes ago a husband and a father.



The Nurse Who Can See Fairies



I am at a hospital to assist Bheeman.

I enter the old yet well maintained hospital, and guide myself towards the room where the old man lies, carrying an insignia. While it is easier to find a dying person, it can get confusing in a hospital, where death awaits a number of people. And since the affinity of death is around, finding the one whose name one holds is a task of its own.

As I look around, I hear a musical voice ask in tamil, "*Who are you looking for?*" I turn around shocked and see a beautiful young girl in a nurse's uniform, who smiles at me and understands that I am in shock, despite her not seeing a face on me. She says, "*I am guessing you are new here.*"

"How can you see me?" I ask, still in shock.

She lets out a laugh that sounds like bells of a chilanka, and says, "*A being as old as you should not be surprised that there are people amidst us who can perceive you.*"

"She is an anomaly," says a Green Fairy, who steps out of a room. She smiles at it and asks, "*How is she doing?*"

"She just got a call from her sister. She seems to be her lifeline."

"*That is good to know. I will see her in a while.*"

She then turns to me, thinks for a bit, and says, "*Bheeman has been really pale for quite some time now. I am guessing you are here for him. He is in the last room. I will join you in a bit. Don't take*

him before I come." With a smile she walks away, leaving me still in shock.

The Green Fairy approaches me and says, "Every once in a while an anomaly is born. One who can see us and themselves. Either a presence of light and cheer, or the pit of dark despair."

"I have met the latter more often."

"Yeah. Pleasant ones are rare. Not everyone can see the truth about reality and keep a smile. Which is why she is an anomaly."

I turn to the Green Fairy. "Who needs you here?"

"A teenager, who somehow got the idea that no one loves her. I am pulling the strands to prove her otherwise. One more attempt, and her name would have appeared in your note."

"Looks like you got some strings you could pull."

"This girl was wrong about having no one, so it was easier." It lets out a sigh and continues, "It is the ones who have no one that are harder to convince."

I feel Bheeman's time coming closer. I nod at the fairy and move towards the room where he lies.

I look at him through the door. He is an old and lonely man, with no one by his side. He can feel his time coming to an end. He raises his hand and calls out, "*Sumathi! Where are you?*"

"*I am here!*" exclaims the nurse, who brushes past me and sits by his side. She holds his hand and caresses the back of his palm. He smiles and asks, "*Did you eat, my child?*"

"*I have, Appa!*"

"*Good. I am feeling sleepy. When I wake up, we will go together to the festival, and I will get you the balloons. OK?*"

"*Sure, Appa!*"

The man smiles and closes his eyes. She turns to me and says, *"Touch him immediately. I don't want him to be disappointed."* I nod my head.

He appears beside me, and I take a hold of his fragile hand. His memories are stripped away, and I look at the memory insignia I received from his daughter, which slowly disappears.

I watch the nurse gently place his hand on his chest, and stand up to face me. She approaches me and says, *"I have asked all fairies I have ever met to come when I breathe my last. I want you to be there as well."*

I bow my head and say, "You have my word..."

"Roshni. My name is Roshni."

"You have my word, Roshni."

She smiles and walks past me. I watch her for a while, and as she turns to enter the room of the teenager to catch up with the Green Fairy, I fly away with Bheeman. For some reason, my journey back is lighter.



The House on Fire



I am here for Josephine.

As I descend from the sky, I see the house engulfed in fire, and a man and a dog on the lawn, already dead. I saw my brethren carry two lit candles away. That means there is time for the next soul to be claimed.

I check my note again. There is only one name: Josephine.

I look around. It is a stormy night, and people are trying their best to save Josephine. The tree in the backyard had gotten struck by lightning, which first fell on the electric lines and caught fire, and then onto the house. The wires had fallen on the waterlogged yard, causing the death of Timmy, Josephine's dog, and when Marcus, Josephine's husband stepped out to look into it, he too was electrocuted.

Before dying, he screamed and thus notified the onlookers about the electrified backyard, which was why the onlookers could do nothing. Josephine is currently standing at the patio, unable to go back in, as the house is on fire, and unable to step out without having to step into the yard. And the ceiling is on fire, and is about to fall on her.

I step on the patio, and look straight. I get confused, so I check the note again. It is just one name. I look ahead. Josephine is holding a baby in her arms.

She sees me and screams, "Please! Help us get out of here."

I shake my head and say, "I am sorry, Josephine, but I cannot do that."

“Save my baby, please!”

“If I touch your baby, it too will die. I must not touch the living.”

She immediately realises who I am, and says, “You cannot let my baby die.”

“It won’t. Now isn’t its time.”

“Promise me.”

I look around to see if anyone else is supposed to come by. I am the last black fairy in this location, so I turn to her and say, “You will be the last to die here.”

She nods her head, and looks up to see the ceiling about to fall. She looks back at me and asks, “Tell her I love her.” She immediately places the baby on the patio, and then lays herself on top of the baby, becoming its cocoon, as the burning ceiling falls upon them. And the screams of the onlookers get higher.

It takes around ten minutes for the firefighters to reach there. They immediately cut off the power, and put off the fire. Josephine stands by my side, refusing to leave until she can make sure the baby is safe.

As the firefighters move the debris away, the cries of the baby are heard. Josephine lets out a sigh of relief, as one of the firefighters takes the baby and runs to the ambulance, while the rest tend to the already dead human.

I look at Josephine, whose tears of pain flow out of her eyes, and disappear just as immediately. She says, “My sister will take care of her.”

“What is your baby’s name?”

“Daffodil,” she says with a smile, placing her hands on her heart, “Her name is Daffodil.”

I take a hold of her hand, and strip away her memories. But her strong affliction to her daughter lingers. It is not something I can ever take away. It is a phenomenon I never understood about mothers.

I fly away with her, leaving behind a baby who will learn in the future of the sacrifice made by a brave mother.



The Lover Who Waited



I am here for Katrina.

I enter her ancestral house, and climb up the stairs to enter her room, the biggest in the huge house. In the room I see all the members of her family, gathered around to bid her goodbye. Some are crying silently, some are standing there heartbroken, while some are counting the minutes.

I stand close to the woman. Despite being over ninety, she looks elegant and alive. But the amount of air she takes in is getting lower. Her time is coming to an end. I hold the memory insignia of Faizal.

Faizal was not her husband. Faizal was a man I collected sixty seven human years ago. He was standing on the roadside, waiting for Katrina, when a drunk driver swirled his car and ran over him. He was instantly killed, and the streets were filled with screams and cries. The drunk man, who suddenly sobered up, got out and tried to run away, but the bystanders caught him and beat him up.

Faizal's death was quick. When he stood by my side, all he said was, "*I am sorry, Katrina*" in Malayalam. No more, no less. And yet, he left an insignia that stood the test of time.

A memory insignia is created when a dying person has something to convey to another who he or she had a deep impact on. It could be filled with feeling, emotions, or a memory. And they stay only if the undead person has also been impacted by the dying, and keeps remembering the person until his or her last breath.

The story is different for people who leave loved ones behind. With the souls that have rejoined the Oneness, the feelings only stay as long as the other holds on to those memories. Sometimes the insignia loses colour, for the love is replaced but not forgotten. Sometimes the insignia disappears, because the love disappears or is forgotten. It is not out of malice. Life just has a way of moving on. And it doesn't matter, for to love and to be loved is important only when one is living. It doesn't matter once the soul departs the body and leaves the memories behind.

But some insignias simply stay strong. And this, by far, has been one of the strongest I have encountered in centuries.

I saw her the first time when she ran towards Faizal as he lay on the street, bloodied and lifeless. His soul was already touched by me, so he didn't remember who she was, though the sight of her brought pain to him; I saw that in his eyes. I learned then that she was important to him, so important that he was willing to cross boundaries for her.

And I was bound to her for the next sixty seven years. When an insignia is left behind, you are bound to the respective living beings until the insignia disappears, or until the person dies. And until then, you get to see the concerned person's life, memories, and everything in between.

So I learned more about Faizal and Katrina.

Faizal and Katrina were two young students who studied together in school. It was a time when tensions were brewing between the people of Faizal and Katrina in the name of beings that didn't have any qualms against each other; I should know, for I have met these beings. The qualms are for the mortals, not the ones beyond. But the differences led to them having to get separated, with Faizal sent away to a distant land, and Katrina promised to an older man.

Faizal defied the authorities and came back for her. She was supposed to run away with him to a different land. But on that fateful day Mrinal decided to celebrate the winning of his case by drinking more than he should and driving recklessly, thus shattering the hopes and dreams of two young lovers.

Katrina was later married off to Joseph. Joseph didn't love her, but very much desired her. And she sired his kids till his desires waned, and then he desired other women, though she was the woman he was supposedly bound to.

Katrina had nine children, all of whom she loved, and some of them loved her back. She merely focussed on raising the kids and taking care of the house. She had no power, no will, no presence. She simply existed.

I have seen the alternate reality. Katrina and Faizal were both people of science, and wanted to build a hub of science in their country, a hub where anyone in the world could come and share ideas, in the process building a utopian society. They would have built a company that would have shattered expectations, that would have taken the country to greater heights, that would have changed the face of the world.

Instead, one was buried under the land, and the other was buried in the shadows of a big home, where she now lies, awaiting me.

I hold on to the insignia, as she breathes her last.

She stands by my side and looks at me, and sees Faizal. She smiles. I watch her grow into her younger self, the one who never stopped smiling. She tries to get a hold of Faizal, who tells her, *"Come with me. Where we are going, our faiths are the same. Our Gods are friends. Our love is eternal. And there are no borders to separate us."*

Her soul is filled with hope and joy.

I touch her, and her memories strip away. I leave the memories to those who want them. It is strange, for the insignia no longer exists. I am not bound to anyone anymore.

I take Katrina with me to the Oneness. I feel good, for I know she will meet the essence of Faizal once again, and either they will be reborn as one, or as two individuals who get to start where they stopped. Or they may just wander with the Oneness. The Oneness tends to hold such souls closer for some reason.



The Last Roar



I am here for a queen.

I stand by the riverside and watch the tigress walk towards me. Once the queen of the jungle, mother of eleven cubs, and the fierce predator who defeated a wild crocodile; she is now weak. She has lost almost all of her teeth, sight in one eye and much of her strength. Her bones stick out of her skin.

And yet, she still looks like a queen!

She approaches me and growls, "*Are you here to feed me?*"

"I am here to take you away."

She immediately realizes who I am, and says, "*So it is time.*"

"I am afraid so."

She lets out the smile of a tiger. She turns around and says, "*Walk with me.*" I accompany her, as she walks towards her former territory, the area she once ruled, before she was driven away by her daughter Sundari. I ask, "Do you resent what your daughter did to you?"

She replies, "*It is the law of the jungle. The old must pave the way for the young. And she didn't steal it from me. She fought me for it. She won it from me. I am proud of her.*"

"But she kicked you out?"

"*As she must. She is the queen. She must do what is best for her family. One who has nothing to provide has no place.*"

"The animal kingdoms have very different sets of rules."

“The rules were set by nature. Defy the rules of nature, and you become a curse to your very home.”

“There are beings who think otherwise.”

She lets out a laugh and says, *“Only the beings who watch us from outside. The ones who think they are protecting us. The ones who put up a cage around us to protect us. Who is protecting who, and from what?”*

I nod my head. We are getting closer to the territory. She slows down, but doesn’t stop, and says, *“We must not enter.”*

“I agree.”

She sits by the bushes and watches the sky. *“I did good, didn’t I?”*

“You saved your species. You repopulated your clan. You lived long.”

“Long life for a cat is a curse. I can no longer hunt, no longer eat or drink.”

“You did good. The rest are trying their best to do good.”

“Why isn’t their best not good enough for me?”

“Because they want you to be happy and healthy on their terms.”

She laughs at the irony, and I join her. She has five more days to go, so I sit by her side.

She can no longer talk. Her breathing gets heavier and longer. In the days that follows, she stays still, unable to move, speak, or do anything.

The medical experts come by to check on her, but there is nothing they can do. A journalist who has been voyeuring her life documents her last moments.

On the fifth day, she raises her head and says, “*One last roar, for old time’s sake.*”

I nod my head and stand up. Her head falls.

Machli stands by my side, majestic as ever. Her skin glows like the sun, and the black stripes add to her glory. Her teeth, as sharp as ever, and her eyes sparkle.

She stands straight and lets out a glorious roar, and I feel the ground beneath me tremble. Even the sun is humbled by her glorious roar.

She smiles and says, “*Now, on to the next adventure.*”

I take her with me and rise up in the sky.

It is always an honour to carry true royalty from the living to the Oneness.



The Brother's Keeper



I am here for Ramla.

I watch her lying amidst the rubble, trying to protect her younger brother, who lies still next to her. The smoke is getting thicker around her, and the bricks do not care that she is just a child, for they fall on her, hurting her in the process. And all through that, she is shielding her younger brother, using her own body to protect him.

I look at my brother flying away with the child's soul. The child, too young and too tired to realize what is happening around him, has already accepted his fate and his memories are thrown away. With a heavy heart, I turn to the little girl. She isn't young enough to forget, nor is she old enough to understand.

I kneel down next to her, and push the soot off her face. She looks at me and gets scared. I tell her, "It's OK, Ramla. I am here to save you."

She pushes her brother to me and says, "Save him. He needs help." I look at his lifeless body, and find my words choke up my throat. I hate that I have to face the aftermath of the atrocities of humanity.

I show my hand to her and say, "I cannot save him, Ramla. I am supposed to take you away."

"No. Take him. He needs to be..."

"Ramla. I am taking you away from this world."

The words strike her like lightning. She gets a hold of her brother. She now understands who, or what, I am. She asks, "Am I dead?"

I nod my head. A smile appears on her face as she asks, "But you are not here for my brother, right?" I do not have to lie, so I nod my head again.

I see her finding relief, as she lets go of her brother. She stands up and turns around to see her lifeless body, lying alongside her brother. She says, "Someone will come to save him, right? He has to be saved."

"He will be saved." Did I just lie?

"He paints. He also likes to tell stories."

I hover my hand over her head. Tears are streaming down her eyes. I ask, "Tell me more."

Her mind swims through happy memories. "Oh, he loves to paint on the walls. He can draw camels, tigers,..."

I touch her head, and her memories strip away. Unfortunately, with so many paths laid in front of her, and never having a chance to choose one, I cannot show her the better future that is laid ahead of her. An entire set of possibilities, of joys, of heartbreaks, of loves, all lost because a few decided these are insignificant in their grander plan.

I carry her soul in my arms, and look ahead at the war torn land. The names of the lands, the clothes they wear, the gods they pray to, all become insignificant once they stop breathing. And yet, in the name of those, they are willing to hurt one another. And it is always the innocent who faces the brunt of these evil acts.

I look at Ramla. She is smiling.

My heart aches for her as I head for the sky. And as I do, I whisper in my mind, "*You, of the Obsidian. Hear my cry. Innocents*

have been hurt. The undeserving are grabbing what is not theirs by force. What are you intending to do with them?

I look down at the land, filled with my brethrens in black.

And I hear the response in my mind, “*I intend.*”



The Prisoner



I am here for Sarath.

I enter the jail cell and look at him as he eats his food. A strange feeling engulfs me. I knew I was bound to him ever since his sister's and her lover's insignia was formed in my hand. But it was not yet his time. I was supposed to meet him in his old age.

Before I came here, I saw his future. He would be released three years from now, garlanded by prominent and powerful people, for taking the necessary step for the right ideals to prevail. He will contest in the elections, where he will speak about his noble act of murdering his sister and her friend for the greater good. He will win the favours of people who think like him. He will intimidate the rest of the people, including his opponent, a female college graduate. He will win the election and become an MLA.

Taking his help, more honour killings will happen, and most of them will be swept under the rug, for no one will dare to speak against him. People of certain communities will be terrorized by him. People in love will learn to hide from him. He and his people will learn how to find them and take care of them. The number of people who get hurt under him will increase.

He will grow richer and more powerful. He will travel abroad, and make acquaintances with people who think and act just like him. The people who have issues with people who do not look like them will align with people who think like them. The solidarity lies in the act, not in blood. He will take advantage of that.

The people who support him will grow more powerful. The people who vote for him will become discontent and voiceless. The people who stand against him will start disappearing. Eventually, it will be just him, the people who like him, the people who fear him, and the people who hide from him.

Then, at the age of 74, he will die of a heart attack. He will be hailed as a martyr, the spokesperson for righteousness, and even hailed as a potential God. Future leaders will hail him as a benchmark to look up to. Stories about him will be taught in schools. Speeches about him will be made in every corner. And his name will be chanted when more people are taken away from their homes, separated from their loved ones, stripped off their rights, and brutally murdered.

By then my insignia would have grown into an armour, which would envelop him for eons beyond eternity, and take him deeper than where souls like him would drown. Right now, the insignia is small, and not enough to hurt him for all the crimes he will commit. And I want him to get hurt for what he did to Shakuntala and Suman.

I watch him eat his meal gleefully, biting a big chunk off his chicken and chewing with his mouth open, acting like a king at his temporary resort. I feel my hatred for him grow.

Just then, an eerie feeling grows around me. I feel my inexistent skin tingle and shiver. A sudden chill gets a hold of me.

He is here!

I look around and see a greater darkness enter the jail cell. It is not the eternal darkness that the likes of me are created off. And it is not the burning blackness that the hands from below are made of either. It is a new darkness.

It is Obsidian!

I tremble as it takes form in front of me. Even without a face, I could sense it smile at me. It asks, "You are here for him, aren't you?"

I nod my head, not understanding why it is here. It is the youngest of all fairies, and yet the most menacing of them all.

It leans towards me and says, "He is not going to die today. At least, not in the sense that you know."

"Then why am I here?"

"For I need what you know about him."

It suddenly grabs me and inserts its hands in my head. As I struggle, it finds the strand of the man's future and pulls it, and ties it around its hand. It then snatches the insignia from me and rubs it against the string, and the string suddenly becomes a sword. Not exactly a sword that you are acquainted with, for it is one that bends in space and time.

It throws the insignia back at me and says, "Return when it is time, which is going to be a long time away."

I can no longer see his future. I am still bound to him, but the future is shrouded. I panic and ask, "What have you done?"

"Ensuring the future he desires to design never happens. Ensuring he still gets what he deserves for what he will commit."

It turns and watches the man take another bite of the chicken. As he swallows, the Obsidian Fairy plunges the sword down his throat.

He starts to choke, while his memory gets distorted. He experiences the pains and fears of all the acts he committed and all the acts he will commit, and his eyes go white. He struggles and screams, but no one comes for him. I stand in fear as the Obsidian Fairy enjoys watching him experience the pain of a

lifetime in a split second. And then, he experiences them again. And again. And again.

The food goes down his throat. The sword is now in his nerves, becoming a part of his body. I watch him scream and wither, and the prison guards come running to see what is happening, and they are stunned to see the once arrogant man screaming in pain, crying, “Don’t hurt me Shakuntala. I was wrong. Please, don’t hurt me!” And he screams louder.

Terrified, I ask the Obsidian Fairy, “Why did you punish him for the crimes he didn’t commit?”

He laughs and starts to disappear. But before he completely vanishes, he replies, “Because in this world, even the committed crimes are seldom punished, and oftentimes are rewarded. Why else was I created? Had it been a just world, there wouldn’t have been a ME!”

He leaves.

The prison room is in chaos.

The prisoner is now a mad man, who will suffer extremely as he lives, and longer once he dies.

I struggle to contemplate what has happened.

I quickly fly up to the sky to address the rest. I may need to have a word with the Oneness as well.

Mankind fumbled for so long, that now amidst us is an Obsidian Fairy. And I do not know how that will change the course of humanity.

For once, I wished the Moon Fairy had created the Light Fairy instead. But that would mean the world deserved one. If the world instead obtained the Obsidian Fairy... How bad is this world that it deserves the Obsidian Fairy?



Consent



I am here for Astha.

I am in the bedroom of Jacob, where Astha lies, heavily drunk and half asleep. She is wearing a sleeveless T-shirt and shorts, exposing her skin and much of her body to the cold air around her. Her heart is calm, but for an anxious person like her, what is about to happen next is not something she should be enduring.

She shivers due to the cold and tries to get a hold of the blanket. Jacob, whose room she lies in, opens the door and watches her with a smirk. He closes the door behind him, moves to the bed and moves away the blanket. He then lies next to her and says, “Are you feeling cold?”

She nods her head. Her heart is beating faster, but it is not because of him, not in the way he desires.

He hugs her from behind and presses her body against him. She feels his warmth, but it is not what she wanted. She says, “No, Jacob. I just want a sheet, or a blanket, or...”

“You need to feel the heat.”

“Not like this. Jacob, please...”

He suddenly turns her and lays her on her back, and climbs on top of her. She is still drunk, but is more awake than a few seconds ago. She says, “Jacob, please. Not now.”

“Now is good. It is cold, and you need the heat.”

“Not like this. Not now. Please.”

He bends down to blow onto her neck. Her heart beats faster. She squirms under him, trying to push him away. He is enjoying the moment. She isn't. Her instincts kick in. Her leg does the kicking.

A sudden gasp arises from his throat, as he falls on the bed and clutches his crotch. Astha immediately gets up, and staggers towards the door. Her heart is still beating faster. I walk with her as she opens the door and staggers to the main hall, where her friend Luna is making out with Patrick.

Seeing her stumble towards them, they stop. Luna asks, "What do you want, Astha? I thought you were asleep."

"I want to go. Luna, please."

"Why? What happened?"

Right then Jacob rushes to the room and screams, "The bitch kicked me in the shins." The friends look at Astha, and Patrick screams, "Astha! Are you crazy? Why would you do that to him?"

"He was trying to... I said no... But..."

She is trying to breathe, but unable to grasp her breath. Luna shakes her head and says, "You are impossible, Astha!"

Astha looks at her friend with disbelief and asks, "Why? How is this my fault?"

"You were leading him on. You went to his room. If you didn't want him, why would you lead him on?"

She wants to say something. She has the words in her mind. But her heart is beating faster. The surroundings are revolving around her. She closes her eyes and says, "Luna! Please. Can you take me home?"

"I won't. Stop being a bitch and..."

Astha immediately collapses, throwing the three into a state of panic. Patrick immediately kneels down and turns her over, and sees that she has stopped breathing. He gives her mouth-to-mouth, and with panicky eyes does CPR. The other two are shocked, and Luna picks the phone to call 911.

I look at Astha, who is watching the whole scene unfurl in front of her. I ask, "How do you feel?"

She looks at me and asks, "Tell me. What do you think about me?"

I look at her. She wants to know my take on what has just transpired. I reply, "You wanted him. You then got drunk. So you needed to lie down. Had he asked you, you would have complied. He tried to take from you. That you couldn't give in."

"So am I the one at fault?"

"No. No human has the right to take anything from anyone without consent."

"So why was I the one she blamed?"

"Because you were the weakest. The finger is often pointed at the weakest, not at the wrong."

She lets out a sigh and says, "That is unfair. But then again, this is an unfair world."

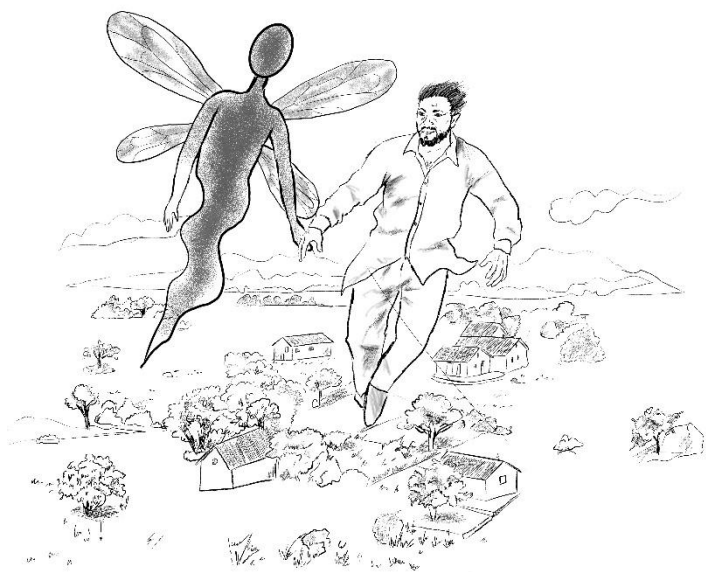
"How are you feeling?"

She breathes in, smiles, and replies, "My breath is no longer binded. I am breathing freely. I no longer am constrained. I feel free." She looks back at her body and says her final words, "All I wanted was a warm blanket."

I touch her to strip away her memories. Then I take her with me to the Oneness.

Had she had the warm blanket, Jacob would have had her on top of him in the morning, and they would have been together for another six months, before she would decide to leave him for Caroline.

Which is why now I am bound to the three living people in that room, who I shall see in the next three decades.



The Atheist



I am here for Anurag.

I appear in front of his room, and watch him writhing on the floor clutching his chest. I look around. His family had stepped out to the neighbouring house for some sort of gathering. He was supposed to follow them, when he went back to get something. But I am guessing he didn't want to hold them back, or didn't want them to see his last moments. It was certain that he knew that he was dying.

He stops moving, and lets out a final breath. I watch him stand by the side of his corpse, as he says, "At least Chinnu didn't have to see me dying. If only I could let her not see me like this."

"She won't," I reply, and he turns around startled, and stares at me. I continue, "Your son will be the first to see, and he will let your daughter-in-law know. She will shield the child."

He nods his head, his eyes are still skeptical. He says, "Thank you... I am sorry... But... I wasn't expecting you."

"What were you expecting?"

"Nothing."

So he is one of those! I let out a sigh and continue, "Shall we move on?" I try to touch him, but he suddenly steps back and asks, "Why are you trying to hold me?"

"When I touch you, your memories will be stripped away."

"So everything I learned is for nothing?"

“What you learn is for the living. It will help the ones that follow you. What you feel, you will carry with you, for that is for the Oneness.”

“The Oneness... As in... God?”

“It’s just Oneness.”

“What is a Oneness?”

I shake my head and say, “I am afraid my knowledge on that subject is limited. You may ask them when you are there.”

“But if my memory is stripped away, how will I know what to ask?”

He got me there!

I sigh and reply, “You are right. I guess... You will know once you are there.” I try to get a hold of him, but he takes another step back and says, “Are you in a hurry?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I wanna learn more. Before I forget it all.”

“What purpose will that serve?”

“Curiosity? Let’s just say that it will quench my thirst.”

“You are a weird being.”

“Aren’t all humans?”

“Not as much as you think, especially not when they die.”

He tilts his head and asks, “I will relent if you are in a hurry.”

I look at my note. His is my last name for the moment. I put the note away and say, “Ask your questions.”

“That’s my guy. You are a guy, right?”

“We have no genders. We are just...us.”

“We? So, there are more of you?”

“Yes.”

“So what are you?”

“I... We... are Death Fairies. We carry the souls from the living to the Oneness.”

He nods his head, thinking about something, “I thought if you were real, you would be coming to get me on a buffalo.”

“His essence would have appeared if you were a believer. Since you aren’t, you see me.”

Now he is surprised. “Wait, you are telling me the Gods of my...old faith... they exist?”

“All Gods exist. Even the forgotten and unknown ones.”

“That’s disappointing.”

“Why is that?”

He takes a deep breath and replies, “I renounced my faith because I started to believe they didn’t exist. All the bad things happening around us, and they never interfered.”

“They never did. They only interfere when matters of their concern appear.”

“Matters of their concern?” Now he is angry, “People are killing each other in their names. Wars are happening. Genocides have become normalcy. Poverty is rampant. The rich are torturing the poor. The voices that rise up are silenced. Shouldn’t the Gods be there righting the wrongs, or are the Gods actively on the side of the wrongdoers?”

I get closer to him and reply, “All the acts you mentioned were done by your own species. Many claimed them in the name of the Gods you mentioned. And when their name is used in vain, they find no reason to come down.”

“How can they be so apathetic?”

“They are not. Your species are. A logical act cannot be redeemed by a magical interference. And ironically, all that is done on this planet is done by logical people. Illogical in a greater sense, but logical for themselves.”

He shakes his head. “That is the most absurd answer I have ever heard.”

“Then let me state it in a manner you will understand. God can only appear where and when there is love. For love to happen, there must be hope. For hope to happen, there must be faith. For faith to happen, there must be desire. But if collective desire isn’t the same, then there is no faith, no hope, no love, and thus no God. It is an unfortunate reality that needs to be unearthed by your kind.”

“I do not understand.”

I take a deep breath. “You lived in the forests, drank from the river, breathed the fresh air. Then you stepped away, cut trees to build houses, villages, countries. You drew lines between yourselves. You polluted the very air, water and land you were meant to survive upon. Then you take away the houses of your brethren. You find no peace, and to find the peace you fight more, hoping to find peace, only finding chaos. But peace is right where you stand.”

“So is progress wrong for existing?”

“Progressing the wrong way is a hindrance to existence. Had the roots been maintained, you could have grown higher and stronger. But to grow you cut the roots, and with that you took away your sustenance.”

I look up and continue, “But nature is what keeps you grounded. And being grounded is what keeps you connected to the Oneness. And being one with Oneness is how the Gods become aware of your existence. Your God sees you not

through your loud prayers, but through your silent actions. It goes for all Gods.”

“So what is the Oneness?”

“You came from it. Everything came from it. Everything will return to it.”

He asks, “So which religion is real?”

“All are as real as they are unreal.”

“And faith?”

“Faith is as relevant to the needy as irrelevant it is to the greedy.”

He lets out a big sigh and says, “That was one unhelpful conversation.”

“Probably. You wanted to converse. I relented.”

“How long have you existed for?”

“Since the very first form of life was born, we were there.”

“And yet your knowledge is limited?”

“Our knowledge is gathered from your memories. We have a collective understanding of the collective memories. We learn more when you do.”

“Didn’t you learn anything from the Oneness?”

I let out a laugh and reply, “We have learned what is relevant to us. We know what we have to know.”

I then sense a presence. Anurag’s son is entering the house. I ask, “Your son is coming back. Do you want to stay?”

He shakes his head. “No. I don’t want to see his pain. Touch me. Take me away.”

I move to take his hand. Before I do, he asks, “Will I get clearer answers once I reach the Oneness?”

“You will.”

“For someone who speculates a lot, you seem to be certain about it.”

“The Oneness knows all.”

“And The Gods?”

“Them too!”

“So who is the one truly unaware?”

“They who claim to be aware.”

I touch his hand and strip off his memories. And before his son enters, I fly away with him.

As I flew, I wondered how much of the answers I gave him were true. Most of them were speculations from my end as well.

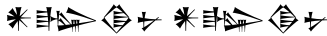
After all, I never lived or died, and thus never had the need for a God!



The Soul of the Forest Dweller



For over a century, I was bound to Kumaran, a forest dweller who was murdered for standing up against the supposed lords of the forest.



Kumaran and the other forest dwellers were residents of that forest for centuries, had dark skin, and carried bows and arrows. The lords didn't look like any of the forest dwellers; they had pale white skin, and carried swords and guns. The owners who claimed the forest was theirs had never lived in the forest before. But they were the lords, and they had their superior weapons to prove it.

I was standing by Kumaran's side when the sword fell on his neck and his head was severed off. We watched his family being butchered by the soldiers of the supposed lords of the land, who were acting on behalf of funders from a different land. The land was sacred to Kumaran's people, who either died fighting, or fled and hoped to not get caught. The sacred land was filled with scream-laden air and blood-soaked soil. The birds cried for the people, and later were silenced by the soldiers. The animals were either driven away, or killed for the meat. The clay and stone sculptures of their gods were broken and destroyed. Kumaran watched it all with anguish, as my brethrens appeared to collect the souls of the dead.

Despite his meat being torn away, and all that remained was his skull, he wasn't willing to leave with me. He kept asking,

“How did everyone’s land become theirs alone? Where will the trees go? The birds and the animals? The people? The relationships we built? The bonds we formed? Where will they go?”

His unwillingness to accompany me was too strong, and so was the case of his wife Thankam and the rest of the forest dwellers. But the toddlers were too young to understand what happened to them or why, so it was easier for us to strip their memories. And since we were bound to the people, we had to return once the children were reunited with the Oneness.

As time went by, each of my brethren took each soul with them, once they were willing to give up their memories. One by one, every soul left the area, as the trees above us got cut, birds were driven away, and the animals were butchered. The land was made barren for new houses, buildings, and mansions for the rich and the powerful.

Thankam too finally agreed to leave, after seeing her land and her history decimated by the ones who claimed a longer and powerful history. She no longer wanted to carry those memories, and left her memories behind.

Unknown to the souls who left their memories behind, Kumaran was gathering their memories, and thus their despair and rage, and was becoming a vengeful spirit, residing by his skull’s side.

My tasks were reduced. First, I was in charge of the souls nearby. Later, I was confined to this small area, and finally, I was bound to Kumaran alone. No other names appeared on my list for over two decades, as his rage and wrath grew.

Centuries old trees of sustenance were replaced by young decorative trees. Wild animals were replaced by domesticated pets. Free birds were replaced by caged entertainments. And worshippers of nature were replaced by tormenters of nature.

The land became less fertile, the air less breathable, and the water less drinkable. And with each passing second, witnessing all these atrocities, Kumaran's rage grew.

A soul can only hold so much wrath within himself. And Kumaran's rage started spreading, climbing out of the cliff, and moving to the people and the livestock. It started with the animals getting sick and the plants wilting. Soon people started getting sick, some even turning mad. Nights started to get filled with eerie sounds, and the place got surrounded by vengeful animals, all enraged by Kumaran.

The settlers tried different things. They tried modern medicine, but couldn't cure the attack of nature. They tried praying to their Gods, but their Gods were just as enraged as Kumaran's Gods, so they didn't intervene. They tried poojas and kriyas, but none were as strong as the wrath of hundreds, all accumulated by Kumaran.

Soon people deemed the place cursed and started evacuating one by one. The least privileged among them were the first to move out, and naturally, the need to leave reached the people of higher hierarchy, and eventually, the once rich land made barren by the settlers, was abandoned once and for all. Empty houses and purposeless tools, remnants of beings who didn't belong there, were all that was left.

I asked Kumaran if he was willing to leave now. But his rage had not subsided, so he said that until the last of his murderers' remnants were overtaken by the forest, he would remain. He hoped to find peace once the last house fell, the last tool rusted, and the animals and birds returned. I had no choice but to agree to him.

I watched the land around us get greener and livelier in time. Animals and plants took over the houses. Now that man was removed from the land, the wildlife was able to thrive. Animals chose abodes that suited them, not what would elevate their

status. The sharp tools were put away. Trees found sustenance in the dead.

Gradually the land regained its fertility. The air became cleaner. The water became purer. Sounds of birds and animals filled the area. And the descendants of the displaced forest dwellers returned, reestablished their Gods, and once again lived in harmony with nature.

Peace was now here. I wanted to ask Kumaran if he was ready to leave. But the last of the houses hadn't fallen, so he remained, to ensure the atrocity wouldn't return. I waited by his side, awaiting for his soul to get the peace it seeks.

A hundred years passed. And in that time, the forest was rejuvenated, and thus grew richer.

And just like, a new set of outsiders encroached into the forest. This time, the people looked like the forest dwellers, but wore richer clothes and carried no weapons. Instead they came with promises.

First, a few well dressed people came to communicate with the educated forest dwellers, convincing them of the prospective of development and opportunities for new jobs for the residents of the forest. The educated ones, who dreamt of a brighter future, proposed the same to the rest of their clan. The possibility of steady jobs, better homes, and better lifestyles, made them agree to work for the outsiders.

Soon big machines were brought in to chop the trees, and sharp axes were provided for the forest dwellers to cut down the forest. A greater destruction followed, and this time there was no bloodshed; just empty promises and fueled hope. This made Kumaran enraged. All the memories he had gathered got lit back up, making him even more vengeful. He let out a cry of vengeance.

This time, nothing happened!

The huge machines that cut trees in a steadfast manner would malfunction every now and then, but when they stopped working, they were quickly replaced by other machines. When this continued, they brought in forest dwellers from other forests and got them to start cutting the trees. Hundreds of forest cutters would fell over five hundred trees each day!

Kumaran's rage was growing, and he haunted them with nightmares and sickness. The people started complaining, and one of them took the lead to present the matter to the new lord. The new lord, who was the fairest and fattest of them all, simply listened and asked them to continue their job. When the leader protested, the man's bodyguard pulled him aside, threw him on his knees in front of his people, and started beating him with his belt.

As the tenants of the forest all stood there petrified by what they were forced to watch, the lord who never stayed a night in the forest lit a cigarette and said, "You either live with your nightmares and earn money and freedom tomorrow, or you get punished for raising your voice and leave penniless today. Your choice." The poor people chose to tolerate the nightmares.

Soon the nightmares started affecting the lord. But he chose to fly to a distant land, and Kumaran was no longer able to reach him. So he continued tormenting the poor souls and their employers who stayed in the forest and destroyed it for the rich man to get richer. This became a relentless cycle for years to come, up until yesterday.

Today, things are different.



When the employers complained about the nightmares, and since they were more prominent and important among the workforce in the forest, the rich man allowed them to do whatever was necessary. So more poojas and kriyas were done,

but showed no results. Psychologists and even scientists were brought in, but none could reach any conclusion. And then came Abhimanyu.

Abhimanyu took a different route, trying to learn the history of the forest. In the past hundred years, nothing out of the ordinary had happened, so he was about to hit a roadblock. That was when he came across Manikandan, the oldest man among the forest dwellers, who told him of the people before them, who were massacred and thrown down the cliff. Abhimanyu decided to explore the cliff.

That is what brought him here.

I watch as Abhimanyu descends the cliff and walks around, trying to get a grasp of what happened hundreds of years ago. Unlike the people above, he is careful with his surroundings; he doesn't hurt the trees, and places each step carefully. He is one that respects his surroundings. And he is educated too. It is surprising to see an educated man caring for nature.

He walks around, trying to get a grasp of everything. Kumaran stands by my side and watches him keenly. I sense a sign of malice rising in him.

Abhimanyu stops for a moment and looks in my direction. I look at what he is looking at, and see Kumaran's skull covered by leaves and vines. Slowly he walks towards it. I am astonished as to how he is able to see it. Then it hits me; Abhimanyu is being drawn towards it. He slowly walks towards it, clears away the vines and leaves, and finds the skull, muddled and discoloured, but still strong. Curious, he touches it.

That is all it took.

In an instant, Kumaran enters his body, and Abhimanyu lets out a scream that is heard even by the people above the cliff. He quickly scales the cliff and heads to the top. I follow him.

Two souls can create infinite havoc in a single body. Once on top, Abhimanyu lets out a bloodcurling scream, and through him Kumaran screams in his native tongue, *"This is not your land. Leave."*

The people get scared of Abhimanyu, who has transformed into a wailing beast. A supervisor tries to stop him, but he kicks him away, jumps on top of a huge machine, and starts dancing. And as he dances, he screams, *"The trees belong to no one. The water belongs to no one. The air belongs to no one. You have no right to destroy any of it."*

More people climb up the machinery, trying to stop him, but in vain. The people get disturbed and start to have second thoughts.

Abhimanyu keeps dancing and screaming on top of the machinery, halting the work for over a day. This forces the rich man to come down in person, bringing a couple of police officers and medical personnels with him. With a lot of effort and a tranquilizer gun, they subdue him and take him to the hospital. And all throughout, Kumaran keeps screaming to all about the need of protecting the forest. And once Abhinahyu's eyes fall upon the rich man, he screams, *"You lied to the people. This forest is not yours to exploit. You are corrupt, and you want to corrupt my forest. You are greedy, and you are exploiting the needy. You are evil, for you would rather chop the roots of a tree than nurture it."*

Once Abhimanyu is taken away, the work is resumed, with strict instructions on never to go down the cliff again.

I accompany Abhimanyu and Kumaran to the hospital, where Abhimanyu gets tied to his bed. He keeps screaming, and when he sees the rich man, screams again, *"Your greed will lead to the destruction of my forest. Your greed will only pay you off. Your greed is the curse of the people, of the land, of the air and water."* And he

didn't like it one bit, and thinks of something as he watches Abhimanyu get sedated.

That evening, I watched Abhimanyu heavily sedated and asleep, and notice that there is no one else in the ward. I start to worry, and look into my list. And just like that, after a hundred years, a new name has appeared on my list. I read it quietly as two people enter Abhimanyu's room and close the door behind them.

The next day, the news comes out. Abhimanyu apparently died of a heart attack, because he was a drug user and had ingested too many drugs prior to coming to the forest, causing him to hallucinate and act out. While the story was not true, which was known especially by the workers in the forest, the narrative spread across the rest of the land.

The rich man proposed that the land has a lot of negative energy, which can be taken care of only by clearing the entirety of the forest area. Let the forest remain, and it would benefit no one; clear the forest, and more opportunities would rise for the people and the government. It is a lucrative proposal, and thus gets him the permission to bring in more machinery to clear the forest, and take care of whatever issues there are.

And so more of the forest fell, with Kumaran, Abhimanyu, and I watching. I felt their agony and rage increase. My list currently has both of their names, and both refuse to leave as the destruction spreads around. Their combined agony could not deter the greed of the rich man and the massive machineries that were brought in. And the nightmares they induced were less frightening than the threats of the rich man.

Earlier, I watched one soul torture many souls. Back then, man and nature were one. Now, I watch the two helpless souls suffer, for nature has been torn away from man. I, an eternal being, too is helpless. There is nothing I can do in the mortal

world, where the rich and the powerful have more authority over nature than nature itself.

Another year passes by, and by then, both the souls get exhausted. Dejected, Kumaran turns to me and says, "Take me with you. I cannot watch this anymore." I look at Abhimanyu, who simply nods in agreement.

I touch their souls and strip away their memories, which do not join the surroundings like they used to. I look at the sky and ask, "Why did these people have to suffer? All they wanted to do was protect their home, their land. Why were they punished?"

And I hear an eerie voice whisper in my ear, "The mortal rules are designed to protect the privileged and bury the underprivileged."

"Who is this?" I ask with fear.

Creating more eeriness in my body, I hear the reply, "The immortal justice of nature."

As I fly up with the two candles, I feel the presence of a fairy who collects the discarded memories and forms a cloud that hovers over the people in the forest.

I fear for what is going to happen next. All I know for certain is that I am bound to Patel, the rich man who somehow owned the forest.



The Last Dance



I am here for Marco.

I enter the living room of Marco's apartment and look at the elderly couple sitting in front of the TV on their cozy sofa. They are watching a comedy movie. Her head is on his shoulder, and his arms are over her shoulder.

A scene prompts Stella to laugh, and Marco looks at her with love and adoration. He kisses her forehead and says, "Let me get some water." She moves away from him, and he gets up and goes to the kitchen.

I follow him, and watch him walk slowly towards the bottle of water on the kitchen top, rubbing his chest. His time is coming closer.

He takes a gulp of water and turns around, and sees me. He just stands there, stunned for a second, then asks calmly, "Is it time?"

"Almost," I reply.

"Almost?"

I turn my head to look at Stella, and then look back at him. He nods his head and says, "Thank you for letting me know." He takes out his mobile from his pants' pocket and slowly walks to his wife, as she turns off the TV and stretches her hands to relax her bones.

He reaches the sofa and plays the song 'Can't Help Falling In Love With You'. When the song starts playing, Stella turns

around and looks at him, who gives her his hand and says, "Dance with me."

She smiles and takes his hand. They move to the open space in the middle of the room, and as the words of the song begin, they start swaying together. The lights get dimmer, and the world moves slower as they watch each other with love, swaying to the rhythm of the music.

I see their Rose Fairy, which has grown as big as the couple. Strong and everlasting love always helps a Rose Fairy grow to its fullest size. Their love must have been truly exceptional.

I see them turn into teenagers, smiling at each other. Stella asks, "What's in your mind, boy?"

He smiles and replies, "Nothing. I am just enjoying this moment."

"Like how you don't think in the class?" She laughs.

"I am unable to do anything except dance with you."

She stops laughing, and her smile vanishes. "You are very cheesy."

"I will be whatever you want me to be."

She smiles, kisses him, and says, "Just be mine."

He kisses her back. "Now and forever."

They continue kissing each other, and their passion is so strong that their Rose Fairy blooms. Marco then takes her to the bedroom, and the fairy follows them. I wait outside.

I just have to wait for a few more minutes, post which he will be ready. I can then take him with me. Their fairy will stay by her side, helping her cope up with what is to come now.

I feel warm and content.

He stands by my side and says, "Let's go."

I look at him and ask, “Anything you want to know before I strip your memories?”

“No. I am good. I know everything I wanted to know.”

He smiles at me and gives me his hand. I touch him and strip his memories away. An insignia forms in my other hand, binding me to Stella.



The Rich Man's Penance



I am here for Patel.

I am not meant to be here. Patel's time is not to come for another two decades. And that worries me.

My brethrens told me of how one of us was called to attend to a man before his time, only to encounter the Obsidian Fairy, who altered the man's destiny. Now that I am here, looking at the man whose time is still far away, I know I was not summoned by the need of taking him away.

I look at the old man, who lies in the large jacuzzi in the middle of the large room that could accommodate three houses of people I normally reach out. All the people he had evacuated from the forest could not just fit in this room, but build their own individual quarters here. And in this huge room he stays alone, relishing on the fruits and alcohol he has put aside as the jacuzzi and the TV in front entertain him.

I get closer to him, and he suddenly feels my presence. He looks up at me, gets startled, and asks, "Who are you? How did you get here?"

I am perplexed, as I ask, "How can you see me?"

"You think I am blind? You are standing right in front of me!"

"But it isn't your time yet!"

"And what time is that?"

In that instant, I feel an eerie feeling wrap around me, and I hear the eerie voice that crept me out once before speaking behind me, "Time for justice, Patelji." The Obsidian Fairy

floats past me and looks down at Patel, who looks up at it with fear.

The Obsidian Fairy bends to look at Patel closer and says, "You have been a very greedy boy, Patelji."

"What the hell are you?"

"I am not hell. Hell was forged in my absence."

Fear creeps into the man as he watches the fairy descend upon him. The Obsidian Fairy continues, "Your kind was given a gift, a beautiful planet to nurture and take care of. Instead you found ways to exploit it, and took down anyone who stood in your way. No one and nothing mattered to you. I hope you had a great time before tonight, because you are going to live for a really long time, even longer than your designated time."

It starts to laugh, and I feel uneasy. I tell it, "He is not meant to die for another twenty years."

This time it is me it presses its face against. It says, "Death is an escape for the condemned. His soul will be punished, but not his body or his mind. I intend to ensure that he will feel all the pain he caused, physically and beyond."

"You have no right to alter the course of existence."

"Why else was I born, sibling?"

I have no answer for that question. I see Patel climb out of the jacuzzi and run towards his phone. I suddenly feel a piercing pain in my body. I look down and see The Obsidian Fairy's hand piercing into my body. It pulls out the insignia meant for Patel, which is by far the largest I have ever carried. It laughs and asks, "Have you never wondered why insignias are getting bigger and bigger as time passes?"

"You wouldn't know. You were born only a few full moons ago."

“I would know. I carry all the memories of the Moon Fairy, even the ones she had forgotten.”

It suddenly flies towards Patel and stamps the insignia upon him. He lets out a screeching scream that makes his entire bungalow tremble. His servants run to his quarters, and the eldest among them asks, “Saab! Are you okay?”

Patel looks at them and screams, “Make this stop. They are hurting me.”

The people look around and the elderly man says, “What are you saying, Saab? There is no one else here.”

Patel instantly realizes that he is the only one who can see us, and starts to panic. He screams at the Obsidian Fairy, “Please! Make it stop.”

I sense it smiling despite not having a face. The Obsidian Fairy gets closer to Patel and says, “So cried the trees, the animals, the birds, and the people, of the homes you destroyed to profit from it. You didn’t listen to many, why should I listen to one?”

“I was not the only one to profit from it.”

“But I am here, am I not? Suffer my grace.”

The man screams at the Obsidian Fairy, and his servants are frightened by the maddening behaviour of the man. Concerned, the elderly man tries to call for help, as Patel runs out to the backyard of his mansion.

When medical professionals arrive at the place, they see Patel digging a very large hole in front of his house. They approach him, seeing whom he says, “This is Abhimanyu’s spot. I had him killed for trying to expose my works. The minister helped me kill him.”

He points at another spot and says, “That is Helena’s grave. I made her disappear as per the instructions of the Police

Commissioner.” He points at another spot and says, “That is John’s grave. I took care of him for...”

He points at each spot in the huge grave he is digging and speaks of acts he had committed in the past that made him who he is now. The people stand aghast, as he murmurs about more and more people, all while digging the grave at incredible speed.

I watch the whole thing unfurl in front of me, and ask, “What will happen now?”

The Obsidian Fairy smiles and replies, “He will be taken care of by the ones he accuses. Until then he will suffer.”

“You just extended his life force. They will not be able to kill him.”

“Who said anything about him being killed?”

The realization hits me hard as I stammer, “You... You want him to be... tortured... by his friends.”

“Precisely.”

“But why?”

It turns to me, and I see the wickedness in its heart grow, as it replies, “So that they will be bound to him, and it will get easier for me to find them!”

“And then?”

It laughs out loud, and I feel my whole essence shiver. It replies, “Then, I will go after them too!” It laughs again, rises to the sky and disappears, leaving me on a noisy ground, where a rich man keeps digging graves for his past mistakes, and the onlookers watch with horror.

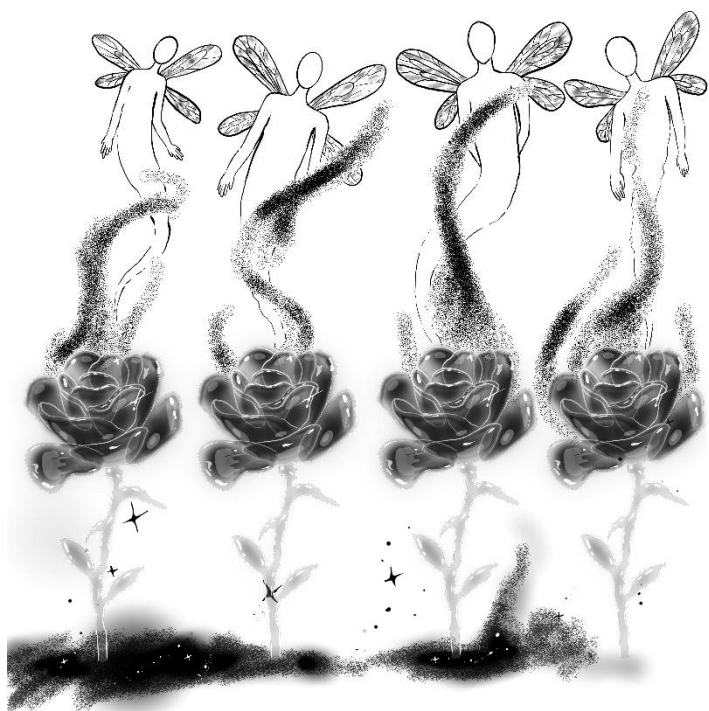
I look down at my list. There are new names, as always. I tuck the note back and fly to the Oneness to address the new developments.

The Obsidian Fairy has made its intent clear. Born out of the malice of humanity, made mild by the Moon Fairy, it intends to punish humanity for their sins. And it is doing a very good job at that. How far will it go? Will it stop when humanity realises its hubris, or will it be too late?

My concern is about something graver. For The Obsidian Fairy is enjoying every bit of its act.

No fairies must relish their purposes. And it is precisely what the Obsidian Fairy is doing.

That is not good.



Epilogue



In the distant corner of space and time, the Black Fairies gathered together. They all stood still, as the Oneness embraced them and let them know of Its presence. The Oneness asked, “Why do I feel despair in all of you?”

They looked at each other, and one of them said, “The Obsidian Fairy has emerged.”

“I am aware.”

“It is creating havoc.”

“I can sense it.”

“Why must this happen?”

“Was it not the intended consequence?”

The fairies looked at each other, and another fairy spoke, “Humans are suffering.”

“Not the innocent. The Obsidian Fairy is doing exactly what is required, as per the learnings of the Moon Fairy. Would you rather have had the Singularity Fairy emerge?”

The silence that followed was deadening, even for the fairies of death. The Singularity Fairy had emerged only once. The universe ceased to end instantly, paving way for a new one. It was a universe just before the current one.

The Oneness continued, “The need for the Obsidian Fairy arose from the devastation caused by the Singularity Fairy. Hell was forged from its creation. It is doing exactly what it is designed to do, to ensure the Singularity Fairy will never rise.”

"But the last time the Obsidian Fairy was milder."

"The devastation caused by humans is much larger now. It is its duty to humble humanity."

"It is also frightening them."

"Which is why you fairies have to do your parts too. And not just the Black Fairies. All of you."

"The world needs light."

"When humans humble themselves, the Light Fairy will emerge. The right fairy appears in the right place. It is the law of the universe."

"It enjoys everything it does"

"And why is that wrong?"

Now the Black Fairies looked at each other confused, and another one said, "But we never relished our acts."

"Since you do not, and it does, and since you are in majority, how is it the one who is wrong?"

The realization hit them hard. The Oneness continued, "The Obsidian Fairy is not bound, just as no humans are or any living creatures are bound. All fairies are unbound. For what purpose will it serve if you do not relish your own acts? No one stopped you, so why did you? From what I understand, one of you even made such a decision, which is why many of you are here now, instead of being bound to your souls."

They had no answer. The Oneness started to rise up as it concluded, "Enjoy your existence, just as anyone should. And the Obsidian Fairy will do what is necessary." And after a short pause, the Oneness said, "The Violet Fairies will have to get a lot busier going forward."

The Oneness left, leaving the Black Fairies behind. The fairies stood there confused, and looked at their individual notes that had new

names. One of them said, "I always wanted to know how my names felt about their own lives. But I never asked them."

"Maybe you should," said another, "Maybe it is time we too start living, instead of merely existing and fulfilling our duties."

"What about the Obsidian Fairy?"

They all looked at each other, and the first fairy that spoke addressed its brethren, "That will depend on humanity."

Everyone nodded in agreement, and flew towards their respective names.

In a different corner of time and space, the Oneness woke up a bunch of glass roses, out of which numerous Violet Fairies emerged. They all looked around and wondered why they were up, and felt the presence of Oneness. One of them asked, "Why have we been woken?"

The Oneness replied, "The Obsidian Fairy has been invoked. Now the world will be more in need of hope."

"We do not invoke hope. We provide choices."

"Precisely. Humanity must write their own destiny. And you will help them choose."

The Violet Fairies rise up together, as one of them says, "We shall give them the nudge they need. The act is for them to choose."

TELL US, HUMAN!
GIVEN THE CHOICE,
WILL YOU CHOOSE TO DO RIGHT,
OR IGNORE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE?

To Be Continued...