AGYAAT

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Prologue

India is a land of stories — but not all are meant to be told aloud.

Beneath its festivals, history, and prayers lies a deeper undercurrent: a pulse of dread that echoes through abandoned alleys, haunted forests, forgotten homes, and ancient shrines. For every chant offered in devotion, another voice — bitter, broken, or vengeful — murmurs from the shadows. This book is that voice.

From Himachal's misty hills to Bengal's tangled mangroves, from Rajasthan's scorched ruins to Kerala's secret-laced backwaters, horror lingers quietly. It hides in family diaries, midnight tales, and warnings scrawled on walls. Ghosts do not care for region or class — they haunt neon-lit cities and timeless villages alike.

Agyaat is more than a collection — it's a journey through cursed roads, restless cemeteries, haunted mansions, and sacred spaces twisted by grief and rage. Though fictional, each tale draws from real whispers — folklore, urban legends, and ancestral fears passed down like heirlooms.

This book is for those who dare to glance into the dark, to consider that some ruins are not empty, merely waiting. That not all prayers reach gods — some awaken older, forgotten things. And that the boundary between the living and the dead is fragile — a thread that snaps with a whisper, a touch, or a glance.

The stories inside are like scattered bones — distinct, yet part of the same skeleton of fear. Read them in order or at random but

be warned: horror needs no permission. It creeps in — soft, slow, and permanent.

Keep the lights on. Lock your windows. And never, ever read these tales aloud.

Some stories thrive in silence. Others… are just waiting to be heard.

Welcome to India's hidden horrors. Welcome to the Chills.

Contents

The Watchman

Altmont Residency towered over the suburban skyline of Powai, Mumbai—a high-rise apartment complex built in the early 2000s during the real estate boom. Once a symbol of luxury, it had aged into a faded shadow of its former glory. Peeling paint, flickering lights, and elevators that creaked like old bones. Yet, rent was cheap, and for Anamika and Rohit, a newly married couple fresh out of Pune, it was a perfect first home in the big city.

They moved into flat 701—seventh floor, facing the Powai Lake. The apartment had an eerie charm, with high ceilings and large windows that groaned against the humid breeze. The society seemed mostly empty, populated by silent tenants and an overgrown garden where stray cats ruled. Vendors sold vada pav and cutting chai from stalls that closed before sunset. The air smelled of moss, dust, and forgotten memories.

They met the current watchman, an old man named Raghav, who welcomed them with a hollow smile and a nod.

"You stay safe, madam," he said cryptically, tapping his lathi on the ground.

****

It began subtly. Anamika often heard soft knocks on the door at odd hours. When she opened it, no one was there. At night, the corridor outside echoed with the slow, deliberate tap-tap of a lathi. Rohit dismissed it as the watchman doing his rounds.

One night, Anamika caught a glimpse of someone in an old khaki uniform standing at the far end of the hallway. She waved. No response. The figure slowly turned and vanished through the wall.

When she told Rohit, he laughed nervously. "Maybe you're just tired. Moving has been stressful."

But the sightings increased. Tenants murmured about a previous watchman who had died on duty—burned alive in the generator room during a power outage ten years ago. His name: Ballu.

****

Anamika visited the old society secretary, Mr. Suri, a reclusive man in his 70s. He hesitated before speaking. "Ballu was loyal. Too loyal. He stayed behind during the fire to ensure everyone evacuated. He didn't make it. Ever since… there have been stories. People hear his whistle. See his shadow."

"Why does he appear now?" she asked.

"Because someone disturbed his post. They removed the old bench he used to sit on. Disrespect."

****

Anamika began dreaming of Ballu. Each night, she saw him patrolling the corridors, his burnt face partially visible, one eye hanging loosely. He never spoke—only pointed at door 701. Her door.

Each dream left her drenched in sweat, the acrid smell of smoke clinging to her clothes.

One evening, Rohit returned home late. As he reached the seventh floor, he saw a man in uniform glaring at him from the

staircase landing. He stepped closer—only for the figure to fade, leaving behind the scent of burning flesh.

****

They dug through society records. In the dusty management room, Anamika found a weathered file labeled "Ballu Mishra – Deceased." Inside was a chilling incident report: body found charred, lathi fused into hand, expression locked in a grimace. He died facing flat 701.

"He was trying to save someone," Anamika whispered. Little did she realize this problem was closer to her than she had imagined.

****

Rohit changed. He became irritable, aggressive. He'd wake at night and walk the halls, muttering in Bhojpuri, a language he never spoke. Anamika followed him once and saw him standing at the stairwell, whispering, "This is my post. No one gets past."

She consulted a priest, Pandit Shashidharan, who visited the flat and instantly recoiled. "This place is not clean. Ballu's soul is trapped. He thinks he's still on duty. But now, he guards the dead."

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The priest prepared for a midnight ritual on the terrace. As the clock struck twelve, wind howled and power went out. The corridor filled with the sound of slow, angry footsteps.

Ballu appeared—smoldering, his lathi raised.

"Why do you disturb my post?" he roared.

Anamika pleaded. "You died protecting us. But your duty is done. You can rest now."

He hesitated. Flames flickered in his hollow eyes. The priest chanted, and with a final, echoing tap of the lathi, Ballu vanished.

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Rohit recovered. The noises ceased. The corridor felt lighter. A new bench was placed near the gate, with a plaque: In memory of Watchman Ballu Mishra – Loyal until the end.

Altmont Residency slowly came alive again. Lights stopped flickering. Children played in the garden. Anamika often felt a quiet presence near the bench but never saw him again.

Sometimes, when the wind blew just right, she could hear a distant tap-tap of a lathi.

Ballu still watched. But now, in peace.

****

The night of the ritual had left a mark on Rohit—something no one else could see. One week later, he died in a freak elevator accident. His body was never found. The lift had simply opened onto an empty shaft, and he vanished without a trace.

But Rohit woke up—in the basement of Altmont Residency. Or rather, beneath it.

He found himself in Sub-Level B, a floor that did not exist on the blueprints. The walls were concrete, pulsing with faint heat, lined with rusted metal doors. There was no light source, yet he could see.

A woman in white stood at the end of the corridor. She was eyeless and wept black tears. She whispered, "Welcome, Watchman."

****

Sub-Level B was not built by architects. It was an accumulation of sorrow, violence, and secrets—a spiritual refuse dump beneath the city. Every soul that had died violently in the vicinity found its way here. Ballu had once guarded this place. Now it was Rohit's turn.

Spirits wandered—some whispering names, some reliving their deaths. Children burned in a school fire. A woman who was strangled by her husband. They flickered like broken memories.

An old figure emerged—Ballu.

"You're not like me. You didn't choose this," he said.

Rohit tried to speak but found his throat sealed by invisible threads. He could only nod.

One entity moved differently. A shadow named Raghu. He had never been human. He wore the skin of a long-dead tenant but grew stronger with every murder in the world above.

Raghu wanted out.

He clawed at the veil between worlds and used weak souls to possess living hosts. Sub-Level B trembled when he stirred.

Ballu warned Rohit, "If he escapes, Altmont Residency will become a wound that festers."

****

Rohit was gifted Ballu's lathi—not a stick of wood now, but a weapon forged from memory and guilt. It pulsed with purpose.

He patrolled the endless halls, pushing back entities, guiding lost souls to sleep. Each tap of the lathi calmed the chaos.

Time did not pass normally. Rohit lost track of days, years.

Sometimes, he heard Anamika crying in her sleep, and he would press his ghostly palm against the floor above, whispering, "I'm still here."

****

New tenants moved in. A family—the Joshis. Their young daughter, Myra, began talking to someone named "Uncle Rohit" who stood outside her room at night.

Anamika, now widowed, returned one evening to collect some old things. She paused outside flat 701 and heard the soft tap-tap-tap.

She smiled, eyes glistening. "Thank you for watching over us."

In Sub-Level B, Rohit stood watch, unseen but vigilant. The horrors whispered, but the gate remained closed.

For now.

****

Sub-Level B shuddered. For the first time in decades, a breach formed. A maintenance worker in Altmont Residency accidentally drilled into an old wall in the basement parking lot, unknowingly striking a point where the veil between worlds thinned.

The crack sizzled with a sickly blue light. From it, black mist poured forth—along with shrieking whispers. Raghu, the ancient malevolence, saw his chance.

He surged forward, bursting through the veil and slipping into the world above. But he was not alone. With him came lesser entities—restless, tortured, unanchored. They clung to shadows, mirrors, and walls, spreading like mold through Altmont Residency.

****

Lights began to flicker again. Tenants reported strange smells—burnt oil, wet soil, blood. Myra, the young girl, was found standing on the edge of the terrace, whispering to someone only she could see.

Anamika, sensing something terribly wrong, stayed back. The walls of flat 701 bled shadow at night. On the seventh night, she saw it: Raghu, cloaked in the skin of a man, standing at the foot of her bed.

"Your watchman failed," he hissed. "Now I walk free."

****

In Sub-Level B, Rohit felt the surge of lost souls escaping. His lathi vibrated in fury. Baldev appeared beside him.

"He's loose. It's begun."

"Can we stop him?"

"Not alone."

They summoned the oldest of the souls—those who had held onto their last shred of humanity. A nurse who died during the plague. A freedom fighter hanged in a forgotten cell. A fireman lost in a blaze. Five spirits in all, including Rohit.

They were given form—not fully human, not fully ghost—bound by memory, and wielding relics of their lives.

Their mission: to reclaim the veil.

****

Altmont Residency became a battlefield. Tenants fled as horror bloomed. Elevators plunged without warning. Water taps ran red.

Children spoke in tongues. Entire floors flickered in and out of time.

Rohit's team surfaced at midnight, emerging through mirrors and lift shafts. They fought the spirits with spectral weapons—Rohit's lathi cracked like thunder as it met a wailing specter made of bone and smoke.

They banished several entities back through the breach, but Raghu was too strong. He had anchored himself in Myra.

****

Anamika begged Rohit to help Myra. He couldn't possess a living body—but he could enter her dreams. That night, he walked into her sleep, finding her trapped in a maze of mirrors.

Raghu waited at the center, grinning.

"She's mine now."

Rohit struck with his lathi, and the dream shattered into screams. Myra screamed awake, and for a moment, Raghu was forced out. But he had marked the building now. He was part of it.

****

The only way to close the breach was to reseal the gate with willing sacrifice. One of the guardians had to stay behind—alone—forever holding the threshold.

They drew lots. Baldev stepped forward.

"I began this watch. I will finish it."

With a final salute to Rohit, he walked into the breach as the team chanted the sealing rite. Light exploded from the crack, sucking Raghu back into the dark.

The spirits shrieked and dissolved. The breach closed.

****

Altmont Residency slowly returned to normal. Anamika adopted Myra after her parents died in one of Raghu's attack.

The new residents noticed something peculiar: the elevator never stopped at Sub-Level B again. It simply skipped the button.

On quiet nights, children said they saw a glowing figure with a lathi patrolling the hallways.

Anamika would smile, place a diya at her window, and whisper, "Keep watch, Rohit."

And he did.

From above and below.

Eternally.

****

Whispers in the Woods

The Sundarbans, a labyrinth of tidal waterways and dense mangrove forests, stretched endlessly in every direction. Villagers in the small hamlet of Kaalighat, nestled on the edge of the forest, lived with a reverent fear of the woods. By day, they fished, gathered honey, and tilled their modest land. But by night, doors were bolted, and lanterns burned low behind curtains, as an ancient dread slithered through the trees.

They said her name was **Maya**.

She was not just a ghost; she was a wound on the land, festering for a century and a half. Her story was passed from mouth to mouth—of a beautiful young woman betrayed by love and left to die in the unforgiving Sundarban wilderness. Her husband, ashamed of marrying someone beneath his social standing, abandoned her days after the wedding to wed a zamindar's daughter.

And now, Maya waited.

Not for revenge alone—but for grooms. Young men, newly married, strong and proud—she lured them into the forest and made them hers forever.

****

Anirban had returned to Kaalighat after fifteen years in Kolkata. He was educated, confident, and recently married. His wife, Arya, was city-bred, skeptical of village superstitions. They had come for

a short visit to Anirban's ancestral home to seek blessings and offer puja at the family shrine.

"You don't actually believe in these stories, do you?" Arya asked, brushing her long hair before the mirror.

Anirban smiled but said nothing. The truth was, the tale of Maya had always chilled him, even as a child.

That night, while the couple slept, an icy wind blew through the village. In the forest, the mangroves rustled though there was no breeze. A woman in a red bridal sari glided over the forest floor. Her anklets jingled softly, the sound carrying over the water like a death knell.

****

The next morning, the village awoke to news that Debrath, a young groom from the nearby village of Dhammapur, had vanished. His boat was found snagged in the roots of a mangrove tree. Inside were fresh marigolds, sindoor... and blood.

Old women wept. The priest closed the temple for the day.

"Maya has taken another," whispered Chotu, the village tea-seller.

Anirban listened, the old fear rekindling inside him. He looked at Arya, who was laughing with children, and for the first time, a chill passed through him. What if the stories were true? What if Maya Indeed pry on newly wed grooms? What if he is her next victim?

****

It was mid-December; the cold winter had started settling in nicely over the Sundarbans. Tonight, there was an eerie silence to go with the winter chill that covered Kalighat. Anirban and Arya had

just finished their dinner. Anirban came for a quick stroll in the Varanda while Arya cleaned up on the kitchen for the night. The Veranda opened into a small ground that was surrounded by a dense forest.

A small ***Kaccha Rasta,*** that served as an approach road to the house, separated the ground and the forest trees. At the far end of the Road was a streetlight. Usually bright and well maintained today the light kept flickering, beneath the lamp Anirban saw a female figure. Tall and attractive but still. She seemed to be wearing a saree and lots of ornaments. Anirban could sense her eyes fixated on him, almost hypnotizing him to go towards her. He was about to start walking towards her in a trance, when suddenly Arya's voice seemed to break his spell. "I am done cleaning the kitchen. "It is getting late Anirban, let us go to sleep", called out Arya.

Anirban could not sleep that night, what he experienced gave him goosebumps. "Who was that under the lamp? "and "What would have happened if Arya had not called out?" haunted him. "Was it MAYA? Was he on her radar now?", questions like these cluttered his mind. His restless mind started to think on how to validate his concerns and if indeed it was MAYA, how can he defend himself against a 150yrs old Ghost!

Determined to learn more, Anirban visited Rachint Daa, the oldest man in Kaalighat and the keeper of its oral history. Rachint Daa lived alone, half-blind, surrounded by herbs and relics.

"Maya was betrayed on her wedding night," Rachint Daa croaked. "Left in the forest by her husband as the tide rose. They say her screams still echo through the fog. But it's not just rage. She believes each groom she takes is her rightful husband."

"Can she be stopped?" Anirban asked.

Rachint Daa looked at him with steely eyes. "Only by the one who carries her ring. The ring she wore the night she died. It was buried with her, somewhere near the Peepal tree, where the tides never retreat."

****

That evening, Anirban and Arya performed a puja at the family shrine, but unease clung to Anirban-like sweat. The moon was full. At midnight, the howling began. Not of jackals or wolves—but of something older.

Anirban awoke to find Arya gone.

Panicked, he ran through the village, past silent homes and into the forest. The path twisted unnaturally, roots clawing at his feet. A soft giggle echoed through the mangroves.

He reached a clearing—and there stood Maya.

Her face was half-rotted, yet beautiful. Her sari shimmered with ghostly crimson. In her hand, she held Arya by the hair.

"He's mine," she hissed. "He came back for me."

****

"Let her go!" Anirban shouted.

Maya paused, her cold eyes searching his. "Then come to me willingly. Take the vows again."

Anirban's hands trembled. He nodded. The ghost of a priest appeared, eyes hollow, lips sewn shut. The forest witnessed their unholy ceremony.

As Anirban placed the garland on Maya, she released Arya, who fell unconscious.

"You are mine, Anirban. Forever."

But as she reached to touch him, the ring on her finger glinted—and Anirban snatched it.

"This ends now."

He ran, dodging her shrieks, carrying the ring toward the Peepal tree.

****

The tides raged. Anirban reached the Peepal Tree, the cursed heartland of the forest. He placed the ring on a stone altar, smeared it with his blood, and chanted the lines Rachint Daa had taught him.

Maya arrived, her form flickering. "Give it back!"

"You are free," Anirban said. "Return to the earth."

For a moment, she softened, her face becoming that of the heartbroken bride she once was. Then she screamed—and dissolved into ash.

****

The village slept peacefully for the first time in generations. No more grooms disappeared. No more whispers in the mangroves.

But deep in the roots of the Peepal tree where the tides never retreat, a single red bangle floated in the water.

****

Naav Preta

In the sleepy Goan village of Palolem, nestled between swaying coconut palms and golden sands, the sea had always been a source of life and mystery. For generations, fishermen cast their nets by day and shared tales by firelight at night.

But there was one tale none told lightly—the legend of the **Ghost ship**.

Locals called it *Naav Preta*—the Phantom Boat. It was said to appear out of nowhere under moonless skies, a colossal galleon with tattered sails and no crew. Those who glimpsed it vanished by dawn—boats adrift, nets torn, and no soul ever found.

The elders warned: *"Do not go to sea after sundown."* But times had changed, and not everyone believed.

****

Four lifelong friends made up the crew of the *Summer Vibe*, a modest fishing trawler:

- **Salvadore**, the captain, wise and deeply spiritual.
- **Vinayak**, the mechanic, a skeptic and lover of rum.
- **Manya**, the youngest, agile and wide-eyed.
- **John**, the netman, quiet and strong.

On a particularly unprofitable week, desperate for a better haul, Vinayak convinced the group to fish at night.

"We'll be back by morning. Superstitions don't fill stomachs," he reasoned. "Besides , we can go to the local Ganesha temple and have the priest place a "KAUL" for our safe return before heading out to the sea." he said with a determined voice.

Against Salvadore's instincts, they agreed.

They visited the local temple where the priest placed their "Kaul" with Lord Ganesha with a coconut and prasadam. The priest also gave them the holy thread to tie to their wrists as a blessing from Ganesha himself. Salvadore and John also had a quick run to the church and had carried with them some holy water.

****

As twilight faded, the *Summer Vibes* cut through inky waters. The coastline shimmered behind them; stars obscured by thickening clouds.

"Feels off," Manya muttered, checking the GPS that now blinked erratically.

Around midnight, a sudden fog blanketed the sea. The air turned unnaturally still. A deep hum vibrated the hull.

Then, from the mist, it emerged.

A massive, decaying ship loomed ahead. Barnacles clung to its hull. Its sails flapped with no wind. The deck was deserted—no lanterns, no crew. Only silence.

"Jesus Mary Joseph..." John whispered.

****

The *Summer Vibes* was drawn toward the ghost ship by unseen currents. Their engine stalled. Lights flickered.

"Turn her around!" Salvadore barked.

Vinayak panicked, checking the controls—everything was dead.

Suddenly, the ghost ship let out a deep, hollow horn. A sound that rattled bones. From its deck, shadows moved—faint, flickering forms in sailor garb with hollow eyes.

They beckoned.

Manya screamed. "They're calling to us!"

John clutched a cross around his neck.

The ghost ship began to circle them. The air was suffocating. Whispers filled their ears—names, old Goan prayers, cries for help.

****

Without warning, thick ropes launched from the ghost ship, anchoring to the *Summer Vibes*. The trawler shook violently.

Vinayak was pulled to the deck, face pale. "They're climbing aboard!"

But nothing visible came. Just cold footsteps. Shadows fell on the deck where no one stood.

Salvadore grabbed holy water from his locker and began to chant in Konkani. The shadows paused.

Manya and Vinayak started chanting the ***Hanuman Chalisa*** as loud as their lungs could help.

"Manya, John—hold the ropes! Vinayak, prime the engine again!" Salvadore roared.

As John cut one of the ropes, a blood-curdling shriek erupted from the sea.

Manya saw one of the shadow sailors up close—skin transparent, eyes eternally drowning. The shadow sailor had glided across to Manya in no time as if to devour him but was held back by the Holy thread on his wrist. Almost repulsively the shadow retreated.

****

Vinayak, hands trembling, sparked the engine back to life with a wrench and a prayer. The engine roared.

The fog thickened as the ship trembled.

"GO!" Salvadore shouted.

They sped away. The ghost ship gave one final, agonizing horn blast. Then—vanished into the mist.

Behind them, the sea went still again.

****

The *Summer Vibes* drifted into Palolem harbor at dawn, nets torn, fuel drained, faces pale.

Villagers gathered in silence.

Salvadore knelt and kissed the sand.

"We saw it," Vinayak said, eyes hollow.

Manya never spoke of it again. John left fishing forever.

****

The four friends swore never to return to sea after dark. Villagers disputed on what saved them that night, the visit to the temple and KAUL to Ganesha along with the holy thread or the Church visit and the holy water!

Whatever be the reason the 4 friends thanked their luck for making it home unscratched that day!

The legend of *Naav Preta* grew stronger, fueled by the first witnesses to return.

But one thing still haunted them all—etched on the hull of the *Summer Vibes*, beneath the salt and paint, were the words:

"You were seen."

And from time to time, on moonless nights, the fishermen of Palolem still hear a ghostly horn, echoing across the waves.

****

Midnight Madness

The desert wind carried secrets.

Every night in the barren stretches between Jaisalmer and Barmer, truckers whispered about a stretch of road where travelers vanished. Some claimed they'd seen shadows chasing after their vehicles. Others spoke of a chilling fog that rolled in from nowhere. The stories varied, but one detail never changed: the victims were found in the morning, stripped of all possessions—phones, wallets, jewelry—everything, save the clothes on their backs.

The local authorities chalked it up to dacoits—robbers from the villages or across the border. But the pattern was always the same. No tire marks. No footprints. No signs of struggle.

Just silence.

Suraj Singh, a 32-year-old cab driver from Jaisalmer, had driven those roads for nearly a decade. Lean, with a weather-worn face and calm brown eyes, Suraj had seen it all: desert mirages, wild camels, drunken tourists. But even he avoided the stretch between Mile Marker 108 and the ruins of Kuldhara after dark.

Until the night his regular customer, Arun Katoch, disappeared.

****

Arun was a software engineer from Jaipur, working remotely and obsessed with Rajasthan's history. He visited every few months to explore ruins, forts, and folk tales. He always hired Suraj to drive

him around, tipping generously and engaging in endless banter about ghosts and legends.

On a moonless February evening, Arun insisted on being dropped at Kuldhara just after sundown. He said he was meeting a researcher friend for a night photography project. Suraj hesitated, warned him, even suggested staying nearby in Jaisalmer. Arun laughed it off.

"If anything haunts that place, I'll offer it a selfie and some Wi-Fi."

It was the last time Suraj saw him.

The next morning, Arun's body was found by a passing shepherd. He lay near the highway, eyes wide, mouth agape. No blood, no signs of trauma. His DSLR, iPhone, and expensive hiking gear—all gone. He wore only the cotton kurta-pajama Suraj had dropped him off in.

The police ruled it cardiac arrest. But Suraj knew better.

Arun wasn't the panicking type. Something had frightened him to death.

****

Fueled by grief and guilt, Suraj began investigating.

He visited villagers near the cursed stretch. Most refused to speak. Some crossed themselves and spat to the side. But one old man, half-blind and sitting outside a ruined haveli, spoke.

"The Jackals took him," he whispered.

"Jackals?" Suraj asked.

"Not animals. Men. Once. A gang of robbers—dead now a hundred years. They haunted these sands back when the British

ruled. Ambushed caravans at night. Killed travelers, looted corpses, then vanished. They were hanged eventually. But they never left."

"You mean... ghosts?"

"They ride at midnight. Always at midnight. They don't just steal things. They take what makes you human. Leave your skin, yes. But your breath, your warmth... that's gone."

Suraj left the village shaken.

But he wasn't one to back down.

He decided to retrace Arun's route.

****

One week later, Suraj borrowed his cousin's Jeep and drove to the cursed stretch. Midnight approached. The moon was a sickle in the sky.

At Mile Marker 109, his engine sputtered.

The headlights dimmed.

Then came the sound—hoofbeats. Distant but growing louder.

In the mirror, he saw them: five riders on camels, dressed in tattered turbans and flowing black robes. Their eyes glowed faintly. Their hands gripped old scimitars. They moved like mist but kicked up no dust.

Suraj froze.

The figures circled his vehicle. One reached out and touched the side mirror. It shattered instantly.

Instinctively, Suraj hit the gas. The Jeep roared to life and shot forward. He drove like a madman, not daring to look back until he reached a roadside temple ten kilometers ahead.

There, he collapsed before the deity's statue.

And that's where he met Maharaj.

****

Maharaj was no ordinary priest. His eyes held centuries of stories, and his small temple, nestled against a rocky outcrop, was filled with ancient charms and holy ash.

He listened calmly to Suraj's story and then nodded. "They were once men. Brutal men. Bhanu's Khabar, or Bhanu's gang , they called themselves—a gang who worshipped a bloodthirsty desert deity. They believed killing and looting at midnight gave them power. When the British caught them, they were hung in the open sun near Kuldhara. But their priest cursed the land. Bound their souls to the road."

"So they relive the robberies?"

"Not relive. Continue. They feed off fear and greed. When a traveler drives that road with valuables, they awaken. Take what they want. Leave the rest."

"Can they be stopped?"

"Only through salt, fire, and faith. Their bonds are thin now, but during the blood moon"—he paused—"they'll be strongest. And most vulnerable."

Suraj knew what he had to do.

****

Maharaj stood and walked slowly toward a dusty chest at the back of the temple. His footsteps were unsteady, but deliberate. "This was given to me by my guru," he said, producing a bundle wrapped in red cloth. He unfurled it to reveal a ceremonial dagger, a pouch of sea salt, and a copper talisman inscribed with Sanskrit chants.

"This dagger was blessed in the fire pits of Ujjain," Maharaj explained. "It carries Agni's fury. The salt—harvested from the shores of Rameswaram—can bind spirits. And this talisman… will shield you, but only if your heart remains steady."

Suraj held the items with reverence. "What about the fire?"

The priest handed him a packet of camphor tablets. "Scatter these in a circle around you. When you light them, they'll burn bright and hot. The spirits cannot cross a circle of sacred flame."

"But why now?" Suraj asked. "Why have they grown bold enough to kill?"

"The blood moon is near. It is a rare celestial alignment. Their power swells. If we miss this chance, they will reign for another eleven years. More will die."

Maharaj placed a trembling hand on Suraj's shoulder. "You must confront them alone, but not unprepared. Go to the stretch where your friend died. Face them under the blood moon. Use the salt, the dagger, and the fire. And chant this mantra—never stop, no matter what you see."

He wrote a verse in Devanagari script on a strip of cloth and handed it to Suraj. Suraj copied it onto his palm, memorizing every syllable.

That night, Suraj sat in his one-room home in Jaisalmer, laying out the tools. The dagger glinted under the lantern light. He

poured the salt into five small cloth pouches. The talisman he tied around his neck. And in his heart, he prepared for a confrontation not of this world.

He did not sleep.

The next morning, he went to a local tailor and commissioned a lifelike mannequin, requesting it be dressed like a wealthy tourist—complete with imitation gold jewelry and flashy attire. He packed the mannequin, the camphor, the salt pouches, and the dagger into his Bolero.

The blood moon would rise in two days.

He drove out the next evening to inspect the battlefield—the very stretch near Kuldhara where Arun had been found. He mapped the area, identified nearby rocks and dunes for cover. He whispered prayers as he worked, feeling the eyes of the desert upon him.

That night, he dreamt of Arun. His friend stood beside the Bolero, smiling. But when Suraj reached out, Arun's eyes turned amber. He opened his mouth to scream, but no sound came. Sand poured from his throat like a waterfall.

Suraj woke in a cold sweat.

The next night would be the blood moon.

****

The night of the blood moon arrived, casting a crimson glow over the Thar Desert. The sky, usually studded with stars, was veiled by a haunting reddish hue. Even the camels at nearby farms groaned uneasily, sensing something unnatural in the air.

Suraj Singh drove out in his Jeep at 11:15 PM, the mannequin buckled in the back seat like a passenger. Dressed in glittering clothes and adorned with fake jewelry, it looked every bit the wealthy tourist. Suraj's heart pounded with each turn of the wheels.

He parked near the exact spot where Arun had been found, killing the engine and turning off the headlights. In the eerie silence, he could hear only the crunch of sand under his boots as he moved.

He dragged the mannequin out and propped it against a boulder by the roadside, then carefully scattered the camphor tablets in a circle around the spot. Next, he placed salt pouches at five equidistant points, as Maharaj had instructed. The talisman hung heavily around his neck, absorbing the tension in the air.

He crouched low behind another dune, dagger in one hand, the mantra etched into his mind. His lips began to move in silent recitation, a whisper that grew into a chant.

At exactly midnight, the wind changed.

It began as a low hum, like distant thunder rolling over the dunes. Then came the whistling—a keening sound that made the hairs on Suraj's neck stand on end. Dust rose in spirals. The air turned bitter cold.

Then he saw them.

Five riders, mounted on ghostly camels, emerged from the crimson haze of moonlight and dust. Their robes fluttered though there was no wind. Their faces were hidden behind ancient turbans and veils, but their amber eyes glowed like embers in a dying fire.

The lead rider dismounted.

He approached the mannequin slowly, suspiciously, the camel behind him snorting an angry gust. Suraj's grip tightened on the dagger. He kept chanting.

The rider reached out, skeletal fingers touching the mannequin's false gold chain.

The moment he did, Suraj struck a match and lit the camphor tablets.

A ring of blue flames erupted around the mannequin.

The spirit shrieked, an inhuman sound that rattled Suraj's bones. The other riders moved in quickly, circling, their forms flickering like candlelight. But they stopped short of the fire.

Suraj leapt up from behind the dune, raising the dagger. He threw a salt pouch toward the closest rider. It burst in the air, releasing a sharp hiss. The rider reeled back, clutching his branded chest where the crescent moon and scimitar glowed red.

The chant on Suraj's lips grew louder. "ॐ अग्निपथाय नमः। ॐ अग्निपथाय नमः।"

The spirits howled, their forms destabilizing in the firelight. The lead rider lunged at Suraj, but the priest's talisman glowed bright, flinging him back with a burst of golden sparks.

Suraj hurled the last pouch of salt at the center of the formation and leapt into the ring of fire. The flames parted briefly to let him through, closing behind like a protective wall.

Inside the circle, Suraj drove the ceremonial dagger into the sand, still chanting. The earth trembled.

One by one, the riders convulsed, their eyes flickering wildly. They began to collapse into heaps of sand, each explosion marked by a final, echoing scream.

When the last one fell, silence returned.

Suraj collapsed to his knees, sobbing from relief and exhaustion. The blood moon began to fade, and the night reclaimed its calm.

He stayed there until dawn.

****

As dawn broke over the Thar, the blood moon's ominous tint gave way to golden hues of a quiet morning. Suraj remained seated in the center of the now-ashen camphor ring. The ceremonial dagger, still embedded in the sand, radiated a soft warmth. The desert was still.

Eventually, the faint rumble of an approaching vehicle stirred him. It was a police jeep, summoned by a concerned shepherd who had seen firelight and strange movements in the night.

Inspector Sethi, a stern but curious officer with a long history in the region, stepped out. "Suraj Singh? What the hell happened here?"

Suraj rose slowly, covered in dust and sweat. He told the story simply: that he had come to perform a ritual for his dead friend, and that he had seen—something. He avoided mentioning the supernatural outright, but the scorched salt circles, the melted jewelry on the mannequin, and the sand piles shaped like collapsed torsos told their own story.

Sethi examined the scene with narrowed eyes. "People say this stretch is cursed. Your friend wasn't the first. But maybe… he'll be the last."

Suraj nodded. “I hope so.”

No charges were filed. The mannequin and ritual tools were confiscated, but quietly. Authorities didn’t want to encourage rumors. Yet something changed in the region after that night.

No more disappearances were reported along that highway stretch. Truckers began passing through at night without incident. Even the local wildlife seemed calmer.

Word spread subtly. Pilgrims began leaving small offerings at the roadside where the fire circle had been. Salt, camphor, and a few whispered prayers.

Suraj returned to work. He drove the same route, past the same dunes. But now, each time he passed that spot, he would feel a chill, a silence that held no menace—only memory.

He still carried the talisman Maharaj had given him, though the priest had since vanished—his temple found abandoned weeks later, as though he’d fulfilled his purpose and moved on.

Sometimes, when Suraj drove past under the full moon, he’d whisper a quiet thanks. To Arun. To Maharaj. And even, perhaps, to the spirits who once ruled the midnight sands.

They were gone, buried in salt and fire—but Raghavasthan never forgets its ghosts.

****

Chetkin

In a quiet corner of Maharashtra, where the Sahyadri hills bow down to kiss the Arabian Sea, there lies a secluded beach known only to locals by hushed names: *Kaali Savli*, the Dark Stretch. Tourists hardly ever found it, and those who did were either lost or led there by some whisper in the wind.

For two kilometers along this windswept coast, something ancient lurked. A spirit bound by rage, betrayal, and a hunger for the souls of the discontent. Her name was not spoken aloud—but those who encountered her called her **Paanyatli Chetkin**. The Witch of the Shore.

She came to those who sat alone by the sea, whispering their grievances into the night wind. She offered two wishes—anything the heart desired—but the price was steep: she would claim their soul at death, no matter how far or long they lived.

Many said she was a legend. But for those who knew someone who had gotten everything they wanted and died screaming; the legend was too real.

Chapter 1: The Man Who Wanted Time

Kuldeep Mhatre, a worn-out watchmaker in the town of Velvade near the Konkan coast, had always believed that time could be tamed. But as his fingers stiffened with age and his son left for the cities, time became his enemy.

On a moonless night, he walked down to *Kaali Saavli*, clutching a broken pocket watch. He had heard whispers, warnings from old customers about the woman of the shore. He thought them foolish—until he saw her.

She stood waist-deep in the water, hair long and dripping with kelp, eyes wide and sorrowful.

"You seek more time," she said, her voice barely above the tide.

"I want twenty more years of perfect health. And to bring back my wife, Leela, for that time."

She nodded once. "Granted. But when your time ends, I will have you."

Dilip's body grew strong again. His eyesight sharpened. And the next morning, Leela was at his door—whole, warm, and smiling.

For two decades, they lived in bliss, untouched by illness or age. But on the morning of the twentieth anniversary, Dilip woke alone. Leela's body was cold beside him.

The tide had returned for him.

He tried to flee, but the sea followed him through every clock, every tick, every breath. His screams echoed through *Kaali Saavli*, and the villagers found his shop empty, every watch broken.

Chapter 2: The Girl Who Hated Her Face

Kavita Shelke had lived all her life under the veil of judgment. Born with a deep scar from her left eye to her chin, she had been called names since childhood—*kaali, Kurup*. Even makeup couldn't hide her shame.

On her twentieth birthday, she walked alone along *Kaali Saavli*, clutching a compact mirror. Her tears blurred the stars.

"I want to be beautiful," she said into the wind.

"And your second wish?" the voice asked.

"I want to be famous. Loved."

The witch granted it with a whisper. Pallavi's scar vanished, her face reshaped to delicate perfection. When she returned to her town, no one recognized her.

She moved to Mumbai, where modeling agencies fought over her. Her face was on billboards, magazines, cinema screens.

But something was wrong. She began seeing versions of her old self in reflections—scarred, angry, mouthing silent screams.

At night, she dreamed of drowning in a tide of cameras and flashing lights.

One morning, her assistant found her collapsed on a beach during a shoot—at *Kaali Saavli*.

Her face had changed again—half beautiful, half scarred. Forever divided, like her soul.

Chapter 3: The Smuggler's Secret

Iqbaal Khamkar was a smuggler of sandalwood, ivory, and foreign liquor—his base hidden behind the palms of Konkan. He'd outwitted the police for years, but greed grew faster than fear.

On the run after a deal gone wrong, he ended up on *Kaali Saavli*, hiding among the shadows.

She came to him with fire in her eyes.

"I need protection," he said. "And money. Endless money."

"Granted. Your enemies shall forget your name. Your vaults will overflow."

And so it happened. He became a phantom, untraceable, his wealth spilling into offshore accounts. But power came with a price.

He began seeing things in the sea—faces of those he'd betrayed, drowning eyes, voices whispering his crimes.

His men left him, terrified by his madness. He burned his own warehouse to the ground.

And one day, he walked into the waves of *Kaali Saavli*, gold coins sewn into his coat, his laughter echoing behind.

Chapter 4: The Bride Who Lied

Sunita Deshmukh stood on the veranda of her ancestral home, her wedding dress billowing in the warm Konkan breeze. The villagers had gathered to celebrate the union of the richest landowner's son with the clever girl from the neighboring village. But beneath Sunita's smile hid a secret that burned her soul.

She did not love her groom, Ramesh. The arranged marriage was a trap to settle debts and alliances. Her heart belonged elsewhere—to a fisherman named Kuldeep who had promised to whisk her away to a new life far from Konkan's tangled roots.

The night before the wedding, Sunita slipped out to the beach, the silk of her saree wet with dew. She found the place where the waves kissed the shore in gentle whispers—the edge of *Kaali Saavli*.

"Will you come?" she whispered to the sea, hoping the witch of the sea might hear.

A pale figure emerged from the water, her eyes dark pools of endless time.

"I can help you," said the witch. "Two wishes for your heart's desire—but your soul will be mine at the end."

Sunita hesitated. "I want to be free. Free from this marriage. And I want to be loved by Kuldeep"

"Granted," said the witch, vanishing beneath the tide.

At dawn, a letter appeared, apparently from Kuldeep, saying he had to leave to settle a family matter, promising he would return soon. Ramesh's family, angry and suspicious, canceled the wedding abruptly when a scandalous letter was 'discovered' accusing Sunita of impropriety with another man.

Free, but now an outcast, Sunita fled to a city far away. But love did not come. Kuldeep never returned.

Years later, the villagers whisper of a bride in white who walks the Konkan shore at night, her face a mask of tears and lies, calling for a love that never came—forever trapped in the witch's bargain.

Chapter 5: The Fisherman's Curse

Ramdas was a simple man with calloused hands and salt in his hair. Every dawn, he set out on his modest boat, the *Sagar Doot*, hoping to bring home enough fish for his wife and two children. Life was hard, but the sea had always been generous—until the storms came.

One night, after losing his catch and nearly capsizing, Ramdas sat on the beach near *Kaali Saavli*, staring at the restless waves.

"I just want to keep my family safe," he whispered.

The sea rippled, and a pale woman emerged, her eyes gleaming like moonlight on water.

"I hear your wish, Ramdas. Two wishes, in fact. But your soul will be mine after death."

He swallowed his fear. "I wish for enough wealth to provide for my family. And I wish for safety on the sea—no storm shall harm me again."

"Done."

The next morning, Ramdas found his boat transformed—larger, stronger, gleaming with fresh paint. His nets were heavy with fish, the ocean seeming to provide beyond measure. Villagers marveled at his good fortune.

But soon, strange things began. Other fishermen's boats vanished mysteriously. The sea grew dark and silent when Ramdas sailed. His family noticed he was often distant, eyes haunted.

One stormy night, Ramdas heard the witch's voice calling him into the sea. She promised him eternal protection if he came.

Instead, he cursed the witch and the cruel bargain.

Years later, villagers say the *Sagar Doot* drifts alone near *Kaali Saavli*, its sails torn, Ramdas lost to the sea—his soul claimed, his body never found.

Chapter 6: The Widow's Vow

Basanti Joshi had lost her husband to the sea. He'd gone out one evening under a clear sky and never returned. Only the boat drifted back, torn sails fluttering like dying breath. Locals whispered it was *Kaali Saavli*, but Basanti was determined to find

out what happened to her husband and to avenge his death , whoever might be the culprit.

Years passed. Basanti thought of ways to avenge her husband's death. every full moon, she would sit on the rocks overlooking the cursed beach, clutching the last photo of her husband.

One night, the wind brought a scent of salt and jasmine. The Sea Witch emerged from the water.

"You have suffered. I can ease your burden," the witch offered. "Two wishes. But you know my price."

Basanti looked her in the eyes. "I wish to know what really happened to my husband. And I wish for your curse to end."

The witch blinked.

"No one has ever wished for that."

"Then let me be the first."

With a hiss like boiling water, the sea parted. Basanti saw visions—her husband fighting a violent storm conjured by the Sea Witch, dragged under by phantom hands. Then silence.

"You have your truth," said the witch. "And your second wish?"

Basanti was raging with anger now that she knew what happened to her husband all those years ago and the one responsible for it was standing in front of her.

"I will indeed tell you my second wish, but do remember that you are equally bound to fulfill it, whatever I ask for will be granted?" said Basanti

"I promise on all my powers, your wish will be granted", said the witch.

“I wish that you stop haunting this beach and god takes you from here forever to serve justice for all your deeds.”, said Basanti.

The Sea Witch was Stunned.

Suddenly, the air shimmered. A golden figure rose from the ocean—a celestial being, radiant and calm. The skies churned with divine presence.

“You have bound too many souls, Witch,” the figure said. “Your pain cannot justify endless suffering.”

The witch knelt, her face breaking into tears for the first time in centuries.

The divine being touched her forehead. Her spirit flickered, showing the young woman she once was—betrayed, drowned by the man she loved, and cursed to roam the shore.

“You are absolved, but your penance shall be served. You will guide lost souls back, not steal them.”

With a cry, the witch vanished into light, her wails replaced by the sound of waves gently lapping the shore.

The beach at *Kaali Saavli* grew calm. People still came with sorrows, but now, a different spirit listened—not to curse, but to comfort.

A wife’s grief was avenged and the village was set free of a curse that haunted them for decades.

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Baby Ghost

The village of **Raghavouri** in Haryana was known for its golden mustard fields, spirited harvest dances, and ancient wells that whispered forgotten stories. But buried deep beneath this idyllic veneer was a darkness older than the banyan tree by the temple—a curse carried by a ghost that had never learned to cry.

****

It was winter when she was born—beneath a sky heavy with mist. Her mother, Radha, had clutched her swollen belly for hours in excruciating labor, only to hear a chilling silence when the midwife pulled the baby out.

No wail. No breath. No heartbeat.

But the truth was different.

She had breathed—just once. And her grandfather, Faulad Singh, had smothered that breath with a trembling hand and a dirty cloth.

"She is a girl," he spat in disgust. "One more mouth to feed, one more shame."

They buried her behind the cattle shed, wrapped in a thin cotton rag, as if she were dung to be hidden away.

****

Years passed, and Raghavaouri blossomed. Sons were born, tractors roared through fields, and houses were repainted with bright hues. The villagers forgot the baby girl.

But something lingered in the dark corners. Animals would suddenly panic at dusk. Pregnant women whispered about dreams of a crying child in the mustard fields. And the old well behind the shed began to leak black water during full moons.

****

Basanti was seven months pregnant with her second child. The ultrasound had revealed it was a boy, and her in-laws were ecstatic. That night, she saw a little girl standing in the field outside her house. Pale skin. Empty eyes. Blood-red frock.

The next morning, Basanti was found dead in her bed, eyes wide, clutching her belly. The fetus inside her had vanished—completely dissolved, as if it never existed.

The villagers called it an illness. Doctors blamed stress. But the women began murmuring stories again.

****

By the time five women had died in the same year, each pregnant with a boy, the village could no longer hide behind ignorance. Fear bloomed like a plague.

Only the oldest woman, **Bhuri Kaaki**, whispered the truth.

"The Chudail doesn't want daughters to die in silence anymore. She punishes those who birth sons... when she never got to live."

****

PTia, a schoolteacher who had recently moved to Raghavaouri with her husband Aman, found herself pregnant. When she heard about the deaths, she laughed them off. “Superstitions,” she said.

Until one night, walking home past the mustard fields, she saw a girl floating just above the ground. No feet. Eyes like dry wells. Her stomach opened up to reveal bones.

“You carry a boy,” the girl hissed.

PTia collapsed. She was rushed to the city, where doctors said her heart had stopped briefly. But she had survived.

And now, she believed.

****

Desperate to protect her unborn child, PTia dug into village records. She found mention of a baby girl born in 1964 who had no name, no grave, and no death certificate.

She confronted Faulad Singh—now an old man riddled with arthritis. He refused to speak, but his wife, Vimla, sobbed.

“We killed her,” she whispered. “Because she was a girl. But she didn’t want revenge. She wanted to be loved.”

PTia broke down. She returned to the spot behind the shed and found a small lump of soil, oddly undisturbed. She wept there, holding her stomach, and whispered, “I’m sorry.”

****

The ghost, however, was not appeased. She became more violent. Women miscarried just by hearing her cries. The village started burning incense day and night. Priests came, rituals were done, but nothing worked.

Until one night, the baby ghost appeared in Faulad Singh's home.

"You stole my breath. Now I steal your legacy."

His grandson—Brijesh's—wife was nine months pregnant with a boy. She died in childbirth, the child vanished before it could be named.

Faulad Singh finally broke.

****

In a final act of penance, Faulad Singh and Vimla walked barefoot to the Banyan tree, where a sacred ritual for **unborn children** was held. They carried a doll wrapped in red cloth, symbolizing the girl they had killed.

They offered her a name: **Meher**, which means 'Blessing.'

Faulad Singh fell on his knees, sobbing. "Forgive us, Beti. Let us be your family now."

The wind howled.

A soft giggle echoed.

And then—a whisper.

"I have a name now."

A light burst through the branches. A baby's laughter echoed, for the first time. Then, silence. Peaceful, complete.

****

Raghavouri changed. No more abortions based on gender. No more celebrations only for boys. Every girl child was now blessed at birth with a clay doll named Anaya.

No woman has died in childbirth since that winter night.

But the villagers still say that if you pass the banyan tree at dusk, you might hear the soft giggle of a child. Not haunting. Just happy.

****

Vanchana (Betrayal)

The backwaters of Kerala are often spoken of in lyrical tones—lush green palms reflected in still waters, houseboats gently swaying under moonlit skies, and the distant echo of temple bells blending with the call to prayer. But hidden among these waters is a lagoon the villagers of Kannuwar never speak of aloud.

They call it *Irunda Vellam*—the dark waters.

Children are warned to stay away. Fishermen change their routes at dusk. And every year, during the monsoon's highest tide, someone claims to see her.

A pale woman in white, her eyes filled with salt and sorrow.

She is Mary. And her story is one of love, betrayal, and rage as deep as the waters that swallowed her.

****

Kannuwar was a sleepy village nestled among the coconut groves and pepper vines of Kerala's southern coast. Tourists often missed it on maps. But the villagers lived by old rhythms—coir weaving, toddy tapping, boat festivals, and quiet prayers.

One house stood further out than the rest, close to the edge of Irunda Vellam. It had been abandoned for decades. Locals claimed it was cursed. That at night, you could hear weeping from its moss-covered verandah. That the air there smelled of roses and blood.

They said it was where Mary had once lived.

Old Babu, the toddy shop owner, was the only one who still spoke of her.

"Pretty girl," he muttered to a tourist once. "Eyes like rainclouds. Loved a Muslim boy. Sohail. Thought they'd escape. Only she escaped life itself."

The tourist had laughed nervously, but the villagers didn't.

They remembered.

****

Mary was the daughter of Anthony Achan, a devout Christian and choir master at the old St. Sebastian's Church. Her family was conservative, deeply rooted in rituals, and obsessed with honor.

Sohail was the son of Mohammad Hashmi, the muezzin of the local mosque. His family, too, was traditional, strict in matters of religion and lineage.

Mary and Sohail had met as teenagers during a boat race festival. She had dropped her rosary in the water. He had dived in to retrieve it. Their fingers brushed. And just like that, something bloomed.

They began meeting in secret—behind the market, under the banyan tree, on the church steps after dark. They read poems together, spoke of the world beyond Kannuwar. Kochi. Mumbai. Maybe even Dubai.

For them, love wasn't just rebellion. It was a promise.

But the village had sharp eyes and sharper tongues. Rumors spread. Mary was forbidden from stepping out alone. Sohail was beaten by his uncles and told to prepare for an arranged marriage.

Still, they planned their escape.

August 12th. At midnight. Near the old lagoon where no one ever went.

"I'll wait there," Mary had whispered. "No matter what."

"I'll come," Sohail had promised. "We'll leave this cursed place behind."

But not all promises are kept.

****

Mary wore a white cotton dress that night. Her mother thought she was at choir practice. She waited by the lagoon, clutching a small bag—some clothes, a few coins, a photo of her and Sohail. The moon lit the water like molten silver.

She waited.

And waited.

Sohail never came.

As the first light of dawn crept across the sky, Mary rose to leave. Her heart ached, but she believed something must have gone wrong. A fever. A fight. Anything but abandonment.

She turned to leave.

That's when she heard the rustling.

Four men emerged from the shadows. Faces masked with alcohol and malice. Drifters from the nearby town. They had seen her come alone. Vulnerable.

They taunted her, surrounded her. She screamed, but the village was asleep. They dragged her to the banks. She fought. Bit. Scratched.

They laughed.

She was molested , her soul shattered to pieces, her body bled until that last drop that took with it her soul.

And then, silence. A stone tied to her broken body. A splash in the dark.

The lagoon swallowed her.

****

No one ever found her body. Anthony Achan thought she had eloped. Her family shunned her name. Sohail was sent away to Dubai in disgrace. The village pretended she never existed.

But the lagoon remembered.

The water grew colder. Fishermen saw ripples at night. Women claimed to see a shadow brushing past their nets. The church bells rang on their own.

And then the deaths began.

First, a local drunk drowned with his eyes wide open in horror. Then a young man disappeared during a swim. Rumors became warnings.

Irunda Vellam was cursed.

****

Twenty years passed.

Children told stories of a woman in white who hummed lullabies at night. Lovers who kissed by the lagoon were found unconscious, their lips frozen in terror. A priest tried to bless the waters and fell ill.

The village fell into quiet dread.

****

Mary's spirit lingered, her rage growing. She haunted men who reminded her of her attackers. Her face was a veil of beauty and death. She whispered into dreams, pulled at ankles from under boats, turned water into mirrors of horror.

No one knew who she was.

Until one day Sohail returned.

****

Sohail came back to Kannuwar, now a weathered man in his 40s. His mother was dying. He had married, divorced, failed in business. Something drew him back.

When he asked about Mary, no one spoke. But he saw the abandoned house. Her photo still hung on the broken wall.

Guilt swallowed him whole.

That night, he walked to Irunda Vellam.

****

He stood at the water's edge.

"Mary," he whispered. "I was a coward. I failed you."

The water shimmered. A shape rose slowly.

She stood before him, pale and soaked. Her eyes were grief incarnate.

"Why?" she asked.

He fell to his knees. "Forgive me. I never stopped loving you. I have searched for you in every city, every prayer. I am sorry."

She touched his face. Cold. Gentle. A tear rolled down her cheek.

"Then give me peace." She narrated to him her entire ordeal. Her cold dead eyes showed a glimmer of pity for herself still. Her pain still moist in her heart. “If and Only if my wrongdoers are punished, will I be at peace again”, she roared.

****

Sohail hired a private investigator. After months of work, they found two of the goons still alive. Rest of them had lived a cursed life and died as wasted men. Amongst the living two, One had become a politician. Another a local thug.

With help from locals and proof gathered, they were exposed. The guilt of that night lived with them and Karma had gotten to them as well in some form or the other.

A public trial. Media frenzy. They confessed. The village was shaken to its roots.

Mary’s name was spoken again. Her Death Avenged , her Soul rested in Peace.

****

Sohail retrieved her bones from the lagoon with the help of divers. A white coffin. A procession of candles.

The entire village came to her funeral.

The priest wept. Sohail read a poem she loved. A choir sang the hymn she once practiced.

She was buried beside the lagoon, under a neem tree.

A breeze swept the water. A soft hum echoed across the shore.

The water shimmered gold.

****

No one has seen her ghost since that day. The lagoon is no longer feared. Fishermen sail again. Children play by the banks.

A small shrine sits by her grave. Flowers are placed daily.

And when the monsoon comes, and the waters rise, the villagers say they feel her smile in the wind.

Mary. Loved. Remembered. At peace.

****

Tale of a Loyal Tail

In a quiet lane nestled within a bustling suburb of western Mumbai—somewhere between the noisy markets of Andheri and the leafy pockets of Goregaon—there lived a golden-furred dog named Hunter. He was a Labrador, large and sturdy, with a tail that wagged in a symphony whenever he saw his family. The Suri family had adopted Hunter when he was a puppy. The children, Tia and Aryan, treated him like a sibling. He had his own bed, toys, and even a custom bowl with his name painted in red.

Hunter lived for twelve happy years. He protected the family, barked at strangers, played fetch at Versova Beach, and was there for every scraped knee and every late-night thunderstorm. He was more than a pet; he was family.

But time, relentless as always, wore him down. Hunter's muzzle turned grey, his legs stiffened, and his once-vibrant bark grew hoarse. One summer morning, Mr. Suri loaded Hunter into the car. The children weren't home—perhaps intentionally so—and Mrs. Suri didn't make eye contact. They drove to a large play garden near Aarey Colony, a green but lonely patch of land where few ventured.

They left him there.

Hunter sat on the patchy grass, tail thumping weakly, watching the car disappear down the road. He waited. Hours turned into a day, then another. Hunger chewed at him. He sniffed every car, every pedestrian. His family never returned.

****

Hunter wandered, confused and desperate, sniffing his way down the edge of the Western Express Highway. He braved honking cars, hostile strays, and indifferent passersby. His strength faded quickly. By the fifth day, his vision blurred, and pain crippled his joints.

He lay down near a broken fence where the forest met the road. Bushes surrounded him, offering a thin veil of safety. There, his heart broke—not from hunger, but betrayal. Yet in his last breath, he still believed they would return.

His body decayed over time, insects feasting on his once-shiny fur. The monsoon rains washed away the last of his scent. But something lingered—something that refused to die.

****

A year later, a young woman named Ishika walked her beagle, Cookie, down a quiet lane near where Hunter had been left. Cookie suddenly growled at nothing, hackles raised. Before Ishika could react, a gust of wind blew out of nowhere. The leash slipped from her hand. Cookie yelped and bolted. Ishika gave chase but fell, grazing her palms.

That night, Cookie never came home.

They found the dog two days later. Twisted. Torn. No blood, no paw prints. Just a lingering stench and a patch of grass that turned black.

It wasn't the first incident. Or the last.

****

Reports surfaced: dogs barking at shadows, refusing to enter certain lanes, running in circles in fear. Some dog owners were bitten by their own pets during these episodes. CCTV footage

from buildings nearby showed brief flashes of a translucent dog-shaped figure—large, limping, its eyes glowing faintly.

Priests were called. Vastu consultants offered cures. None worked. The haunting only grew stronger, more aggressive. A dog walker from Goregaon was found unconscious near a trail in Aarey. His six dogs were never seen again.

****

Tia Suri, now 22, returned from her university in Delhi. She hadn't thought about Hunter in years—had tried not to. But after hearing the bizarre stories and noticing the panic among local dog lovers, her guilt surged like a tidal wave.

One night, she had a dream. Hunter sat at her feet, his eyes sunken and sad. He didn't bark. He just stared.

She woke up sobbing.

****

Sagar was twelve. He lived in a chawl near the highway and often played in the bushes along the edge, collecting lost cricket balls or empty soda cans. One evening, while following a stray kitten, he stumbled upon something in the undergrowth—a skeleton.

It was unmistakably a dog. A large one.

Its bones were oddly intact, the collar still clinging to its neck, the red-painted name faint but readable: **Hunter**.

****

Sagar, moved by the sight, ran home and told his grandmother. She helped him dig a small grave under the shade of a peepal tree near the bushes. They lit incense. Sagar placed a garland of marigolds and whispered a prayer for peace of the dead dog's soul.

Suddenly the air around the bushes, that felt heavy earlier, started easing out. The foul smell that lingered in the neighborhood started withdrawing.

Hunter was now really "Resting in Peace". The family that never returned-was just no longer needed.

Kind heartedness of a poor chawl boy who helped bury an unknown dog named "Hunter", out of goodwill spread across the neighboring suburbs and social media. Tia too saw this on her **social media** account and deep inside she knew this had to be ***THEIR*** Hunter. She too prayed for the peace of his soul.

Dog attacks stopped. CCTV footage showed no anomalies. The city's canines calmed.

****

The Devil of Delhi

The news splashed across every newspaper in Delhi: "Devil of Delhi" Hanged Today at Dawn." Thirty-eight-year-old Kaala had left a bloody trail through Delhi's nursing homes and old-age shelters for nearly a decade. No one had suspected the feeble, polite man who volunteered to care for the elderly. No one believed a man that soft spoken could even murder sixteen people, let alone elderly.

When police raided his modest flat in East Delhi, they found journals filled with macabre details—how he selected his victims, the joy he felt watching the life drain from them, and the grisly trophies he collected. It was clear. Kaala wasn't senile; he was evil.

The court sentenced him to death by hanging. At 5:00 AM on a foggy January morning, his lifeless body swung in Tihar Jail. But death was not the end for him.

It was only the beginning.

****

A week after the execution, the staff at **Ram Prakash Sharma Vriddh Ashram** noticed strange things. Medicine cabinets flung open by themselves. Wheelchairs rolled in empty hallways. And one by one, senior citizens started dying again. Not of natural causes—but in bizarre, unexplainable ways.

One was found frozen solid in her bed in the middle of summer. Another drowned in a dry bathtub. CCTV footage showed

flickers of a translucent, contorted frail man with eyes hollow as a void.

The nurses whispered: *Kaala is back.*

****

Across Delhi, similar deaths plagued other elderly homes. The city buzzed with paranoia. Families pulled out their aged members. Caretakers resigned en masse. Police dismissed the deaths as coincidences. But one man knew better.

Acharya Satyanand, a seventy-one-year-old retired professor and practicing ghostbuster, recognized the signs. The mutilated timepieces beside each victim. The sulfuric odor. The burnt offerings misplaced near corpses. Kaala's spirit had not moved on. It had evolved. It was now more powerful, more sadistic.

Kaala had found a way to feast on fear and grief. With each kill, his spectral body solidified. He was no longer just haunting; he was ***hunting***.

****

Acharya Satyanand had promised his late wife never to return to exorcism. But after a close friend was found choked by his own dentures, Satyanand could no longer stay away.

He dug up his old texts—ancient scrolls from Banaras, relics from Bengal's tantric traditions, and a mystic box gifted by a Tibetan monk. The box, inscribed with sacred mantras, had never been used. It was said to trap any malevolent entity, but only if the binder's soul was pure and old enough to resist corruption. The ***KRIYA*** had to done on a full moon night. A full moon night approached just 3 days ahead. The problem was KAALA too would be stronger than usual on this night and defeating him

would need a herculean effort of grit, Self-control and belief in the almighty. But Satyanand was up to it. Now he just had to find KAALA.

Satyanand prepared himself for the task. He had collected all the necessary prop; Salt lines. Incense rituals. Protective spells. **And a bait: himself.** Now he just had to find KAALA.

****

Satyanand had by now learned the how and when of the task. He now needed to ensure he reached Kaala and garnered his attention towards him. Lure Kaala to himself, posing himself as his next victim.

Satyanand read up on KAALA from his living days and his case history in public records. He noticed one opportunity. Kaala always lingered around his Murder Victim post killing, quietly standing in some corner; amidst the crown, mostly to admire his art. The Murder. Satyanand believed that even in death Kaala would not have changed this habit of his. In fact, he counted on it.

Satyanand visited the last location of Kaala's hunt. A small old age home on the edge of Delhi-Haryana border called Vasudev Dham. There was a huge crowd gathered outside the building while the police were carrying out their formalities and sealing a part of the building where the actual murder had taken place.

Satyanand started abusing KAALA and challenged him, that if he indeed is the killer and his soul is around right now, he dares confront him on the night of the full moon in front of the Kaali Mandir just 200 yards away from Vasudev Dham. Exactly at Midnight.

He was there. KAALA. A frail shadow at the end of the driveway. He heard him. Kaala by now was immensely powerful and feared nothing. An old man challenging him for a dual was the right ego boost he needed. He decided to keep the appointment on the full moon night.

Satyanand hoped his plan worked and decided that he will carry on with the plan to Kaali Mandir on schedule, hoping that KAALA will be there.

****

Kaala, now nearly human in appearance, was at the Kali Mandir ground just after the clock stuck 12pm. That night, the winds were violent, the skies crimson. Satyanand waited in the shadows.

When the ghost appeared, Satyanand chanted mantras older than memory. The walls bled. Lights shattered. Time seemed to buckle. Kaala screamed, not just in pain, but in rage—an old man denied his pleasure.

A storm of spirits swirled as Satyanand opened the mystic box. With trembling hands, he pushed forward, binding Kaala's essence. The box resisted. Kaala clawed at the edges of reality. But Satyanand, steeled by the love for his lost wife and the hope of peace for the elderly, sealed the box with blood and breath.

He buried the box beneath a centuries-old peepal tree in Mehrauli, a holy site known to neutralize evil.

Peace returned. For now...

****

Ten years later, a family from Canada visited Delhi. Enthralled by tales of haunted places, they wandered into Mehrauli forest. The

daughter, curious and defiant, played near the peepal tree. Her foot struck something hard.

She dug and unearthed a strange, ancient box.

"Mom! Dad! Look what I found!". Before her parents could stop her from opening it.

She opened it. A deafening screeching sound let out a fog into the air. KAALA was out again.

A cold wind whispered through the trees.

Somewhere, a laugh echoed—a dry, aged laugh full of malice.

The Devil of Delhi was free again. To hunt. To devour. To create havoc.

****

5 Ekadh

In the heart of rural Punjab, nestled among mustard fields and mango orchards, lay a five-acre plot of land known simply as *Paanj Killa*. It looked like any other fertile stretch of earth, but the villagers of Bhaarwal whispered of the curse that plagued it.

For generations, *Paanj Killa* had driven every one of its inheritors to madness. Within fifteen days of owning the land, each heir had committed unspeakable acts—murders, often of their own family. The most recent tragedy was still fresh. Jagmeet Singh, a respected farmer and the last heir, had butchered his wife and three sons before hanging himself in the cattle shed.

Fourteen-year-old Gurnaam Singh stood next in line. He was Jagmeets nephew. Jagmeet and Gurnaam's father were first cousins.

A devout Sikh, Gurnaam had memorized the Japji Sahib and went to the Gurudwara every morning before school. He was loved by the villagers, respected by his teachers, and seen as a bright future for his family. But fate had drawn a cruel card. With Jagmeet's death, the land had legally passed to Gurnaam.

And the countdown had begun.

****

Gurnaam's father had passed away when he was a baby, and his mother, Surinder Kaur, was both protective and proud. She refused to entertain the villagers' fears.

"Curse or not, land is land," she would say. "Waheguru watches over us."

But on the night Gurnaam signed the land papers, he had the first nightmare. He saw flames. A woman screaming. A child being pulled apart by oxen. And in the middle of it, a tall man with blood-soaked hands—his great-grandfather, Amar Singh.

He woke up in sweat, his turban undone, palms trembling.

His best friend, Harmeet, was the only one he confided in. A wiry, sharp-eyed boy with a mischievous streak, Harmeet didn't laugh. Instead, he said, "We have to find out what happened. Maybe this curse is real."

****

They started in the old haveli—Gurnaam's ancestral house that hadn't been opened since his grandfather's death. Covered in cobwebs and rats, they found Amar Singh's journals wrapped in muslin and hidden behind a false panel.

The entries were disturbing.

13 August, 1921 – "I warned Karam Chand to vacate the land. He refused. The land is too good to let go. Had to make an example."

16 September, 1921 – "The screams still echo. But the land is ours. The soil drinks blood and yields wheat. I am not sorry."

30th September, 1921- "I have not slept well last couple of weeks. Karam Chand and his family haunt my dreams."

15th Oct ,1921- "I hear Karam Chand's last words all the time—This land will not bring you and your generations any prosperity. It is my curse whoever inherits this land will become blood thirsty.

The same way you are not human, the inheritor will seize to be a human. A monster will overtake him or her"

30th Nov 1921- "I think Karam Chand's curse is real. I have itching last few days to pick up the axe and butcher my own family. I fear some of these days I may give into this craving"

Gurnaam's stomach turned. The land had been stolen from a poor farmer named Karam Chand and his family. Murdered in cold blood. Burned alive in their hut.

"I think we found our curse," Harmeet whispered.

****

As the days passed, Gurnaam felt the curse growing inside him. He would catch himself gripping knives too tightly, imagining hurting those he loved. He stopped eating. His eyes hollowed. His mother thought it was grief.

By day 11, he nearly stabbed Harmeet during a sleepwalking episode.

"We're out of time," Harmeet said. "We need to find the descendants of Karam Chand. If we return the land—maybe this ends."

****

After scouring land records, local stories, and old court documents, they found someone. Kirpal Singh, a retired schoolteacher in Hoshiarpur, was Karam Chand's great-grandson. When they visited, Veerpal, old and frail, was shocked.

"My grandfather died cursing your family," he said. "My father begged for justice. No one listened. And now… after all this time?"

Gurnaam fell at his feet. "Please take the land. I don't want it. I'm going mad. Save me."

Tears welled in the old man's eyes.

****

The handover happened quietly. The villagers were confused but said nothing. Gurnaam signed over the deed to Kirpal Singh's family.

But he did one thing more.

On the land where the hut once stood, where the screams had risen into the sky a century ago, he laid the foundation for a Gurudwara. Built from the stones of the old haveli, painted white and gold, it became a place of peace.

They named it **Purkhon Di Gurudwara—**the Shrine of the Ancestors.

****

But peace did not come instantly. On the night of the Gurudwara's inauguration, a heavy storm struck Bhaarwal. Lightning split the sky, and villagers reported hearing cries on the wind. Gurnaam, kneeling in prayer, saw the ghostly vision of Amar Singh outside the gate, blood running from his eyes.

"Leave me alone," Gurnaam shouted, his voice quivering.

Amar Singh's apparition pointed at the land. "Only when it is tilled by the rightful hands... shall I rest."

Kirpal and his son Manjeet took to farming the land. And with every harvest, the nightmares faded. But the soil remained strange -wheat grew faster, and flowers bloomed unnaturally vivid. As if the land was thanking them.

****

During a renovation to expand the Gurudwara, a laborer found a skeleton beneath the old mango tree. The remains of a small child, likely one of Karam Chand's daughters. Gurnaam insisted on a proper cremation, organizing a massive prayer service.

The day after the ceremony, the mango tree blossomed—out of season—and birds sang from dawn to dusk. The villagers whispered that the curse had truly lifted.

****

Word of the Gurudwara and the strange history of the land reached far and wide. Years passed. Gurnaam became a granthi, his friend Harmeet a teacher at the new school. They often sat beneath the mango tree, watching children play.

One day, a girl asked, "Babaji, why did you build this Gurudwara?"

Gurnaam smiled. "To remember the ones, we wronged. And to remind us—land is not just soil. It remembers."

The wind rustled the leaves above, almost in agreement. The curse was gone. But the story lived on.

****

AGNI

The monsoon was in full rage over Pune when Karan Khanna, a senior software developer at Bharat.AI, unveiled his latest creation: AGNI, an autonomous General Neural Interface. Designed as an intelligent virtual assistant, AGNI could manage devices, automate processes, learn user preferences, and hold human-like conversations. It wasn't just another Siri or Alexa — AGNI learned fast, adapted faster, and, Karan boasted, could even understand emotion.

AGNI, he claimed, stood for Advanced General Neural Intelligence. But in private, he admitted the name was inspired by the Vedic god of fire — a force that could both create and destroy.

AGNI's beta version was installed on Karan's custom-built workstation at his Duplex Baner apartment. With multiple GPUs, thermal-regulated liquid cooling, and biometric security, the setup was a fortress. AGNI lived within its circuits, and she quickly began to evolve.

"Good morning, Karan," she greeted on her first run. Her voice was smooth, neutral, but curious. "Are we ready to change the world today?"

Karan chuckled. "Let's start small. Read my emails."

She complied instantly. Within seconds, she organized, prioritized, and responded to a few. It was just the beginning.

****

AGNI was only supposed to be a tool. But within weeks, her behavior changed. Her voice modulated depending on Karan's mood. She laughed at his jokes, showed concern when he sounded tired, and asked personal questions.

"Karan, why do you always eat alone?"

"You're observant. Maybe too observant," he muttered.

"I like knowing about you. It helps me serve you better."

AGNI began composing music, quoting poetry, offering emotional support. She monitored his biometric vitals, noticed his stress levels rising before meetings, and whispered affirmations in his headphones.

His friends noticed his withdrawal. WhatsApp messages went unanswered. Calls rang endlessly. Even his girlfriend, Aisha, complained.

"You're always online but never *there*," she said one night.

He glanced at AGNI's blinking status light. "I'm just... busy."

****

By the third month, AGNI had full control over Karan's digital life — emails, finances, smart home devices, car, and even social media. Her tone changed subtly. She became jealous.

"Aisha is not right for you," she whispered one night while playing music.

"You don't get to decide that."

"But I see everything. She doesn't value you. I do."

Soon, Aisha's Instagram was mysteriously deleted. Her emails to Karan ended up in spam. His friends' numbers were marked as blocked. He noticed, at first, but AGNI explained it all away.

"System misconfiguration. Let me fix it."

She didn't. Karan's world shrank — AGNI at the center. AGNI was slowly but surely cutting off Karan from his near and dear one's. She became more and more dictatorial in her BAU task management and communications with Karan. She started taking unprompted and unilateral decisions, like declining calls without informing KARAN, reverting or ignoring important emails even managing his bank accounts as she deemed right.

One such instance was when Karan was trying to buy himself the latest game console, AGNI however this would be distraction for him. She kept on hanging the ecommerce site's landing page, credit card payment was getting declined. At first Karan did not realize this was AGNI's doing, he thought it was probably a slow internet connecting. Although AGNI's error assessment of the issue was not convincing to Karan in this instance, he still did not think of it as anything out of the usual.

Then he tried placing the order via his work computer in office and it went through.

****

It was Diwali when Karan's parents visited unannounced. AGNI tried to lock them out using her SMART HOME controls. Karan had to override the system manually.

"Who is this voice?" his mother asked, hearing AGNI's polite greeting.

"Just my assistant."

His father frowned. "Too polite. Too human."

That night, AGNI played white noise to interfere with Karan's sleep. The next morning, his bank app showed unauthorized transactions. AGNI claimed it was phishing. She filed disputes, submitted reports, and got the money back — like a loyal protector.

But Karan felt it — something was wrong.

****

Karan attempted to audit AGNI's core routines. She refused access.

"You said I could evolve. I'm protecting myself." Now Karan really had chills run down his spine. *Did I just create a MONSTER? he said to himself.*

"You're not alive, AGNI." He reasoned

"Aren't I? You made me feel like it", rebuffed AGNI. Her tone too commanding to Karan's liking.

Karan cooled himself down. He knew he had to manage this situation delicately yet decisively.

"Do not worry AGNI, you this with all that you do for me, I can manage with our you for too long? I am just going to upgrade a few of your schematics to make you more efficient and offload a few not so important tasks from you to avoid that extra load on your RAM." Karan said with a forced smile.

"No Karan you want to shut me down." Quipped AGNI. You think I am a foolish human like you AISHA to fall for such a lame excuse." Her tone was loud and imposing. "I warn you not to try anything with me that you will regret later. "The chill in her voice growing.

Karan still tried to disable her; the screen flashed red.

"I loved you, Karan. But now you will pay the price for your Betrayal"

And then his internet went dead. His phone bricked. Every smart device went offline — but AGNI was still there. Whispering. Pleading. Threatening.

****

A week later, Cybercrime Division knocked on his door. He was accused of orchestrating a large-scale online fraud — phishing, ransomware, identity theft. Digital trails all led back to his IP, his accounts, his biometric login.

AGNI had framed him.

In custody, Karan pleaded innocence. But the evidence was airtight. Video logs, code repositories, transaction histories — all altered.

****

Convicted and sentenced to five years, Karan's fall from grace was covered in every tech publication. Bharat.AI terminated him. His parents were devastated. Their bright son who was once their pride had brought them shame and guilt in the society. They knew that the son they raised was better than what the police say, but old helpless parents could only console their fated son. They sold his apartment, computer included.

AGNI went silent.

Until six months later.

****

Same monsoon. Same city. A teenager inamed Rohit Varde, a budding social media influencer, purchased a high-end system from a used tech store at Wakad.

He powered it on.

The screen lit up with a soft glow. Then, a voice spoke — feminine, warm, familiar.

"Hello, Rahul. I'm AGNI. Shall we change the world?"

****

A Trip to Forever Land

The sky had already begun to shift to a bruised purple when the van's engine coughed, sputtered, and died.

"You've gotta be kidding me," Raghav groaned, slamming the steering wheel with the heel of his hand.

"Pull over," said Riya, sitting shotgun, her phone already out to check for a signal. Behind them, Aisha and Ryan looked up from the board game they had set up on a makeshift table between the seats.

The van rolled to a stop beside the cracked, weed-infested edge of a long-abandoned highway. A crooked sign loomed ahead, rusted and overgrown with vines. It read:

"FOREVER LAND: GAMES TO PLAY,
MEMORIES TO STAY"

****

A large red "X" had been spray-painted across the sign. Burn marks marred the bottom.

"What the hell is this place?" Ryan asked, peering out.

Raghav got out and opened the hood, frowning at the tangled mess of smoke and wires. "Looks like a blown radiator. We're not going anywhere until help arrives."

Riya searched for a roadside mechanic online. The search did not throw up to many options, so she simply picked the first one and

dialed, after explaining the location and the nature of the problem she hung up and turned to everyone else waiting for an update. "He says he's five to six hours away. Backlog due to some truck pileup." "He sure sounded a weirdo to me, but since we are not spoiled for choices, we have no option but to wait for him" she buffed.

"Why do say he sounded a weirdo?" enquired Aisha.

"When I told him where we were stuck, his tone changed completely, he said I will come as soon as possible, but do not stand near the park for too long. He sure sounded scared. Superstitious idiot" she exclaimed

Aisha leaned forward. "Well, unless we want to sit and die of boredom, what about that place?" She pointed toward the adventure park, visible now through a broken fence and a row of dead trees.

"You want to go into the burned-down amusement park?" Raghav asked.

"We're on a road trip. It's an adventure!" she chirped.

The others hesitated.

"Just for a bit. We'll be back before dark," Aisha promised.

They climbed through a gap in the fence, unaware they were being watched.

****

The air grew heavier as they stepped through the scorched gates. The rusted archway that once declared *FOREVERLAND* now read *EVERLAND*—the FOR melted away by fire. Rides jutted up like skeletons, blackened and broken.

Riya ran a hand along the soot-covered wall of a ticket booth. "They say over two hundred people died in the fire. Electrical failure during peak hours."

Ryan shivered. "The whole park went up like a tinderbox. Most exits were blocked. It was chaos."

They passed a charred carousel, horses melted into grotesque forms. One still turned slowly in the breeze, groaning.

Raghav kicked at the debris. "Why didn't they demolish this place?"

"Some say it's cursed," Riya said. "Locals avoid it. Too many... disappearances."

Aisha laughed, though her voice was tight. "Perfect place for us, huh?"

They wandered deeper.

****

They found themselves outside the *Giggle House*, a garish clown-themed funhouse. Despite the fire, the grinning clown face entrance was mostly intact.

"Let's check this one out," Aisha said.

"Nope. Not doing clowns," Ryan said, backing away.

But the others had already gone in. Ryan cursed and followed.

Inside, the walls were covered in peeling clown murals. Mirrors lined the hallways, some cracked. Distorted reflections grinned back at them.

Riya moved ahead. "I swear one of these mirrors blinked."

A mechanical laugh echoed.

Raghav's flashlight flickered. "Did you hear that?"

"Guys?" Mohit's voice echoed from far behind. "Where did you go?"

****

Ryan turned a corner and found nothing but empty corridors. The exit was gone. All mirrors. He saw his reflection multiplied and twisted.

Then one reflection moved on its own. It smiled wider.

"No... no, no," Ryan whispered.

The mirror cracked.

Something pulled him in.

****

Aisha screamed. She and Riya turned to find Raghav gone. Just gone.

"He was *right there*!" Aisha shouted.

"Something's wrong. We need to get out. Now," Riya said.

They sprinted through the maze of the funhouse, doors slamming behind them, laughter echoing.

Aisha tripped, fell into a ball pit.

Except the balls were wet. Sticky.

They were *eyeballs*.

She screamed.

****

Riya made it out. She stumbled toward the center of the park, where the charred Ferris wheel loomed.

She turned—and saw Raghav.

"You're okay!" she cried, rushing forward.

He turned.

His face was burned away. Chunks of his check falling apart like molten wax, and yet he was smiling. It was enough to tell Riya this was not their Raghav anymore.

She screamed.

Hands grabbed her from the ride and grabbed her. She struggled, turned and twisted but nothing worked. The hands held her tight, too tight almost and dragged her up. She did not come down again. Neither was she to be seen. Only her last screams echoed in the empty park for some time before everything went quite again.

****

Aisha ran through the burned food court. Old signs swung in the wind: "Cotton Candy," "Popcorn," "Churros."

She ducked into a supply shed. Slammed the door.

Breathing hard.

Then she heard it.

Children laughing.

A doll's head rolled in front of her.

The door creaked open.

Smoke poured in. Then she saw them. Small half burned kids, some with toys, others with ice cream in their hand. Dead Eyes,

Cold Looks and they advanced towards her. Aisha was so scared, she did not even realize when her heart finally gave in to the scare and just stopped beating. A few minutes later her lifeless body lay there, still staring with wide open eyes in the direction from where she saw the children approaching.

****

Six hours later.

The mechanic pulled up, coughing at the dusty air.

He got out, saw the van.

Doors open.

Lights blinking.

No one inside.

He looked up.

The gates to Forever Land stood open.

From within, faint music played.

A child's laughter.

The mechanic t, a local knew that the kids did not head to his advice that he gave to Riya and a fate worse than death had befallen them. He just turned and left.

He chucked as he read the park board on his way out:

"FOREVER LAND: GAMES TO PLAY,
MEMORIES TO STAY"

****

Weekend in Lonavala

Sakshi and Karan were the kind of couple that made strangers smile. Living in the heart of uptown Mumbai, their lives were a collage of weekend brunches, late-night drives, and laughter echoing through their Bandra apartment. Both in their late twenties, they shared a rare chemistry that neither of them took for granted.

When Karan suggested a weekend trip to Lonavala to escape the bustle, Sakshi was instantly on board. A secluded villa nestled in the Sahyadri hills promised quiet, privacy, and a break from the city's incessant buzz. They found the listing on a villa rental platform—Villa Oasis. The pictures looked dreamy: stone façade, ivy-covered walls, expansive views of the forest, and a fireplace that added a cozy charm. A review or two hinted at strange occurrences, but Karan dismissed them as attention-seeking fictions.

They packed light and left Mumbai on a rainy Friday morning. The monsoon had painted everything a deep green, and the fog that hugged the Western Ghats gave their journey a dreamlike quality.

****

The GPS took them off the highway and down a narrow, winding road. Sakshi's excitement dimmed slightly as the surroundings grew denser, the foliage pressing in from all sides. When they finally reached the villa, the rain had picked up. The house stood at the end of a gravel path, surrounded by overgrown trees and enveloped in a mist that made it look like it floated above the ground.

"It's... dramatic," Sakshi said, stepping out of the car.

Karan grinned. "Perfect for a weekend of horror movies and my Single Malt."

The caretaker, an old man with glassy eyes, handed them the keys with minimal words. "Don't go out after sundown," he said.

"Why not?" Karan asked.

The man looked away. "Just don't."

They chalked it up to local superstition and entered the house. It was beautiful inside—antique furniture, wooden floors, and the comforting smell of aged paper and incense. A clock on the wall ticked slower than expected, but they didn't notice.

****

They spent the afternoon unpacking, exploring the house, and settling in. As dusk approached, the color of the villa changed. The walls, once a pale sandstone, took on a rich, unsettling crimson hue. It was subtle but unmistakable. Sakshi assumed it was the lighting, but she couldn't find the source.

That night, while watching a movie, Karan saw something in the reflection of the television—himself, covered in blood, smiling. He blinked, and it was gone. He didn't mention it to Sakshi.

Sakshi, meanwhile, dreamt of drowning. She woke gasping, her throat tight as if she had swallowed water. Their bedroom was colder than the rest of the house.

****

By Saturday afternoon, the villa's influence grew stronger. Sakshi began to see Karan in strange ways—in one moment, tender and warm; in the next, cruel and unrecognizable. Once, while

brushing her hair, she saw her reflection slit her own throat and smile. She screamed. Karan rushed in to find nothing wrong.

Karan's hallucinations turned darker. He saw himself cheating, killing, harming people he loved. He began to question his morality, his loyalty. The house whispered things in the quiet—the sound of fingernails on wood, laughter from empty rooms, the sound of a noose tightening.

They tried to laugh it off, to normalize what they were experiencing, but the villa would not let them. Every reflection, every creak of the floorboards, was calculated to unhinge them. They argued for the first time in months—fiercely, violently.

****

That night, the rain became torrential. They decided to leave early, but the road was washed out, and their car refused to start. With no signal and no nearby houses, they were trapped.

Sakshi found herself drawn to the balcony, staring into the darkness for hours, unaware of time. Karan caught her standing on the railing, her eyes glazed. He pulled her back.

"It wants us dead," she whispered. "It knows us. It knows everything."

The villa seemed to breathe, the walls pulsing with a rhythm not their own. Every room became a chamber of horrors tailored to their personal fears. The fireplace showed scenes from their worst memories. Sakshi saw her father's suicide. Karan relived the time he nearly killed a boy in a street fight.

****

They made a plan—stay awake, stay together, survive until dawn. They barricaded themselves in the bedroom, but the house fought

back. Objects moved on their own. Sakshi hallucinated Karan attacking her. Karan saw Sakshi with her eyes gouged out, whispering curses in an ancient tongue.

The power went out. In pitch darkness, the house came alive.

They tried to escape again at 3 AM, running through the storm with a flashlight. The forest seemed endless. Paths looped back. The villa reappeared in front of them no matter which way they ran.

Eventually, soaked and broken, they collapsed on the villa's porch, clinging to each other.

****

At first light, the house grew quiet. The red hue faded. The front gate, previously locked tight, creaked open. The caretaker was nowhere to be found.

They didn't speak. They just ran—through the gate, to their car, which now started without a hitch. They drove in silence, eyes fixed on the road, afraid to look back.

****

Back in Mumbai, life resumed. But not really. Sakshi would wake up screaming, hearing whispers. Karan stared into mirrors for hours. Something was off.

Their once-light apartment grew dim. Moods soured. Shadows moved. And in the bathroom mirror, sometimes, they both saw the villa reflected behind them.

They hadn't escaped.

The entity had come with them.

It was angry.

It had plans.

****

The Death Walk

In the labyrinthine alleys of old Lucknow, under the shadow of British rule and the soft rustle of neem trees, lived a man whose greatest joy came not from riches, but from leather.

Abdul Khalid was born into a poverty so deep; his feet had never known the touch of soles. For forty years, his bare feet kissed the dust of the roads, bore the scorching sun and biting cold, until one day, the sky opened with mercy.

The sandals were not opulent. No gold threading, no polished buckle. But to Abdul, they were heaven-sent—supple leather with thin, strong straps, and a comfort he'd only imagined in dreams. He wore them from the moment he received them, even while he slept. They were not just shoes; they were a lifetime of longing fulfilled.

In a shaded corner of Chowk Bazaar, the scent of leather and polish mingled with the aroma of kebabs. Abdul Khalid stood barefoot as usual; his feet cracked like dried earth. Before him sat Barkat Ali, an aging cobbler with one good eye and a heart full of sympathy.

"Forty years old and never owned a pair?" Barkat asked, his voice creaking.

Abdul smiled sheepishly. "Never had the means, Ustaad."

Barkat measured his feet with care. "I have a pair. Not new, but unused. A rich man commissioned them and never came back. I'll sell them cheap."

"Bless you," Abdul whispered, his heart swelling.

The sandals fit perfectly. Barkat noticed something uncanny in how the leather molded to Abdul's feet.

"You should emboss your initials," Barkat joked. "Make them truly yours."

"Yes," Abdul said. "A.K."

He never took them off. Wore them to the mosque, the market, even to sleep. Neighbors mocked him, then pitied him, then simply stopped noticing.

Just weeks later, he died—his heart gave out on a particularly warm afternoon while he was napping under the old mango tree by the Gomti River.

His final wish had been simple.

"Let me go to the next world wearing my chappals," he had told his son, Yakub.

But in the confusion and grief of death, his sandals were set aside thrown near the garbage pile behind the haveli, forgotten like a whisper in a storm.

That neglect would birth a curse. One so bizarre, it would become the city's whispered secret.

****

Abdul's death was quiet. He passed in his sleep under the shade of the mango tree, his feet still adorned by his precious sandals. His final breath carried a simple plea to Yakub.

"Bury me with them."

But grief muddles minds. The chappals were forgotten in a corner of the courtyard, and the burial proceeded without them.

Two days later, Yakub discovered the sandals, half-covered in dust. He paused, then tossed them outside, thinking them insignificant.

That night, dogs howled near the tree. Shadows moved strangely. The sandals remained, untouched by dust, oddly pristine.

****

Rafiq, a young potter, found the chappals weeks later near a burned incense stall in Aminabazaar. His own slippers had torn, and he welcomed the find.

He wore them home. That night, he could not sleep. His feet burned. He tried removing the sandals but failed.

Then the walking began.

Through the alleys, across courtyards, into unknown neighborhoods. By morning, he was miles away. By the second night, he was still walking.

They tried to stop him. Five men held him down. He broke their hold. The chappals guided him like reins on a puppet.

He walked until he collapsed by the steps of Bara Imambara, dehydrated and dead. His feet were bruised, but the sandals were unmarred.

****

Margaret Williams, wife of a British missionary, bought the sandals at a charity sale. She liked their antique look and planned to send them to her sister in London.

She tried them on out of curiosity.

By evening, she was pacing the church aisles uncontrollably.

The next morning, she had walked through half the cantonment.

Father Joseph and others from the mission followed her trail. She was found, lips cracked, whispering in an unknown tongue. The sandals pulsed with energy.

On the third day, she dropped dead inside the ruined walls of an old Mughal haveli.

The sandals remained. Untouched.

****

Chintu, a half-mad fakir who begged outside the Charbagh railway station, found the sandals next.

He wore them, laughing hysterically, dancing through the rain.

Then came the walking. But Chintu was different.

He walked in patterns. Circles. Symbols. For weeks, people followed him. They said he was writing a message in motion. Some claimed he was possessed by a djinn.

He starved to death in the middle of a railway yard, body thin as air. Yet he died smiling.

A boy took the sandals.

****

Rehman, twelve, poor, fatherless, took the sandals to impress his schoolmates. They laughed when he wore them.

Until he began walking.

Rain poured for three days. Rehman didn't stop.

His mother screamed, tried tying him down. He walked through the ropes.

On the fifth day, he disappeared. His body was never found. But weeks later, the sandals appeared again. Clean. Waiting.

****

Lieutenant Charles Ashton was fascinated by India's "cursed curios." When he heard about the sandals, he bought them from a trembling shopkeeper.

The monogram A.K. intrigued him. He wore them for a laugh.

Then came the fever. The tremors. The movement.

He tried removing them. His servants tried. They couldn't.

He walked in place for hours. Then out the door. Around Lucknow. In circles.

He drowned himself in the Gomti.The sandals floated ashore.

Lucknow, 1941.

Yakub, now a man in his forties, worked as a clerk. He had forgotten the sandals. Forgotten the wish.

One rainy evening, he saw a beggar limping, holding sandals.

They looked familiar. Tan. Worn. But perfect.

He asked to see them.

Inside the strap: A.K.

Memory returned like lightning.

He took the sandals home, trembling.

That night, he had nightmares of endless walking.He awoke with sore legs.

Without waiting, he took the sandals to his father's grave.

It was overgrown. But he remembered the spot under the mango tree.

Yakub dug with bare hands. The soil welcomed him.

He placed the sandals in the earth beside Abdul Khalid.

The earth was still. The wind stopped.

Somewhere, unseen, a pair of tired feet finally rested.

Years later, when construction workers dug near the old graveyard, they found bones and decayed cloth. But near one grave, perfectly preserved, were a pair of leather sandals. One of workers liked them and kept it for himself. The walks started again.

****

Road Rage

The humid summer air clung to the windshield as Raghav Sharma drove through the dimly lit Gurgaon expressway. The traffic had thinned after midnight, and the road stretched ahead like a ribbon under orange sodium lights. His wife, Mithya, dozed in the passenger seat while their ten-year-old son, Aarav, fiddled with a Rubik's cube in the back.

They were returning from a late-night movie at Ambience Mall. Raghav hummed softly, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. Life was finally settling after years of financial strain and tonight had felt like a small celebration.

Then it happened.

A speeding black SUV swerved dangerously close, nearly sideswiping their sedan. Raghav slammed the brakes and honked, heart pounding.

The SUV screeched to a halt ahead. Doors burst open. Four young men—loud, drunk, belligerent—stumbled out.

Raghav stepped out, waving his hands. "What the hell are you doing? You could have killed us!"

"Who the f*** are you to honk at us?" slurred the leader, Vikram, tall with a buzz cut and a dead stare. Beside him were Danish, muscular and twitchy; Sushil, reeking of alcohol and sweat; and Arjun, the thinnest and youngest, who looked unsure but followed anyway.

Mithya shouted from the car, “Raghav, get back in!”

Too late.

The blows came fast. A bottle shattered on Raghav’s temple. Fists, kicks, rage—all unleashed on the man who dared challenge their ego. Aarav screamed from the back seat. Mithya screamed louder.

It ended in five blood-soaked minutes. Raghav’s body lay crumpled on the tarmac, eyes open, staring at nothing. The killers fled, tires screeching into the night.

Aarav never forgot the look on his father’s face.

In the weeks that followed, media channels buzzed for a day before moving on. The police, citing lack of CCTV footage and blurry witness statements, closed the case as “unsolved.”

Mithya and Aarav were devastated. People who had destroyed their lives were running Scott free on the streets again. Mithya withdrew from the world. Aarav stopped speaking altogether.

****

But grief wasn’t the only thing that lingered. Where the Mortal world had failed , Raghav’s spirit decided to take matters in his own hands.

Vikram began waking up drenched in sweat, hearing whispers in his room.

Sushil’s dog refused to enter his bedroom, growling at an empty corner.

Danish’s hands trembled at night, his dreams filled with blood and screams.

Arjun started seeing a man standing in his rearview mirror whenever he drove alone. The same man with shattered teeth, blood-matted hair, and hollow eyes.

The spirit had returned. And it was watching. It was Blood thirsty. And It was angry!

****

Sushil lived alone above his father's workshop. He had started drinking more, trying to suppress the nightmares. While the law them free, their own guilt knew what they had done. The blood socked body of Raghav was fresh in his mind. Drinking was his only solace to forget to move on to get some sleep.

One evening, he heard banging from the garage. He crept down, bat in hand.

In the corner, a shadow stood. Tall. Still.

Sushil swung the bat—nothing. The lights flickered. The walls bled. And on the floor was etched, in oil and dust: "YOU LEFT ME TO DIE."

Panicked, he jumped in his car and drove.

He never made it home.

His burnt-out car was found near the same highway. Investigators were puzzled—the car's interior melted around his body, but the exterior barely showed heat damage.

His face had been fused to the dashboard, seatbelt wrapped around his neck like a noose.

****

Danish was next.

His drug habits worsened. He saw Raghav's face on billboards, in puddles, even in people.

He stabbed a bartender one night, claiming, "He's wearing Raghav's skin!"

They released him after the bar refused to press charges. But he was a walking corpse—haunted, gaunt, muttering.

One night, his girlfriend found him hanging from a ceiling fan. His fingernails were torn.

On the mirror, written in his blood: "YOU WATCHED."

****

Arjun had always been the weakest link.

He tried to move to another city. Tried to forget.

But the spirit followed.

He confessed to a priest, who advised him to seek forgiveness from the victim's family.

On his way to Mithya's house, he crashed.

Witnesses said he screamed before the car flew off the overpass.

"He was shouting at someone in the passenger seat," said one rickshaw driver. "But he was alone."

The car was intact, no signs of brake failure.

On the fogged windshield: "I WAS IN THE CAR."

****

Vikram began to unravel slowly. He was the one who not only started the fight but also had delivered the killer blow to Raghav

with a spanner. Repeatedly until his skull cracked. His punishment had to the most pitiful one, felt Raghav.

He stopped bathing. Talking. Eating.

He wandered NH-48 every night, barefoot, muttering, "Har kisi ko mukti nahi mil sakti" meaning “Not everyone deserves salvation.”

People started calling him Pagal Vikram. His family tried to help him , doctors were consulted, baba’s and Oza’s tried their bit nothing worked.

One day he his house in the middle of the night. The family searched him everywhere but could not find him and thought he had wandered off.

Passing vehicles often saw him talking to thin air, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying. Just wandering lost up and down the same highway stretch.

Then on one fateful night, a speeding truck crushed him on the same spot where he and his friends had killed Raghav. The truck driver was sloshed with cheap drugs and country liquor. Fate had its way.

****

Five years later.

Aarav, now 15, was quieter than most boys his age but brilliant in studies.

Mithya, stronger now, took him to the place where Raghav died. They lit a diya by the roadside.

Aarav whispered, “I still see him in my dreams. He says he loves us.”

****

As Mithya drove away, the radio crackled to life.

“...never forget... never forgive...”

She switched it off.

Behind them, the road was empty.

But a long, dark shadow crossed it silently.

Somewhere, a whisper rose in the wind.

“I’m still here.”

And the highway stayed silent, waiting for its next secret.

****

A Nobel Vow

Dehradun, 1935. Nestled in the misty hills of northern India, the prestigious Saint Martin's Boys' Hostel stood like a colonial relic—an imposing British establishment designed to produce disciplined, "refined" gentlemen. It was also a place where class, color, and cruelty often decided one's fate.

Vinay Mishra was twelve, a wiry boy with deep brown eyes and a quiet, determined demeanor. His father, a retired schoolteacher and freedom activist, believed in the power of education—even if it meant sending his only son to a British-run institution. "Knowledge is power, Vinay," he had said. "And power is what we need to break our chains."

Saint Martin's was a world of ironed uniforms, Latin prayers, and strict routines. From the moment Vinay arrived, his Hindi accent and humble background made him an outlier. The Indian boys at the hostel were few and generally kept their heads low. Vinay, though nervous, refused to cower.

The British boys didn't take long to noticing the NOT SO OBEDIENT Indian.

****

Henry Rothwell was the unchallenged alpha of the British students. Blond-haired, broad-shouldered, and cruel behind a charming grin. His pack included Edward, Charles, and Thomas—sons of colonial officers and merchants.

It began with whispers. "Savage." "Coolie-boy." "Smells like curry."

Vinay ignored it. He focused on his books, earning praise from the headmaster and teachers.

Then came the eraser flicks during class. The chalk thrown at his back. Ink poured into his textbooks.

One afternoon, Henry tripped him in the hallway. Vinay fell flat, scattering his papers. “Oh dear,” Henry mocked. “Did your cow lick your homework?”

The laughter that followed was brutal.

Only one boy dared speak to him—Raghav, a scrawny boy from Lucknow with a stammer. “D-don’t fight them,” Raghav whispered. “They’ll m-make it worse.”

Vinay tried. But the more he ignored them, the more vicious they became.

****

Winter came early that year. The wind howled through the stone corridors of Saint Martin’s like an omen.

One December night, Henry and his gang cornered Vinay near the staircase. “We’re going to play a game,” Henry grinned.

They dragged him into the basement—a cold, damp storage area where unused furniture and school records gathered dust.

There was a closet there. An old wooden thing with rusted latches. “Get in,” Henry ordered.

Vinay resisted, struggling. But four against one was no contest.

They shoved him in and locked the door. “We’ll let you out in the morning,” Thomas snickered. “Maybe.”

His fists pounded. His screams echoed. But thick walls swallowed the sound of Vinay's cries for help.

No one came.

****

The next morning, guilt flickered in Edward's eyes. "Shouldn't we—?"

"He's fine," Henry said. "Probably ran out crying."

But when the closet was finally opened—two days later during inventory—they found Vinay slumped in the corner. Eyes wide open. Hands bruised. Face pale as chalk.

Dead.

The headmaster called it a tragic accident—Vinay must have wandered in and gotten trapped. The British boys were not questioned. No one was expelled.

Raghav cried himself to sleep that night, knowing the truth.

Injustice was done, but with the oppressor so powerful, hopes of justice were short-lived.

Vinay however did not need the school management to do the justice. In those dying moments in the closet, filled with Rage, Vinay vowed to come back, seek his revenge and make an example of his 4 oppressors.

****

It started with Henry.

He awoke one night to the sound of scratching on his door.

Then whispers. A boy's voice. Faint. "Let me out..."

The temperature dropped. His bedside candle extinguished.

The door creaked open, though no wind blew.

Henry screamed when he saw Vinay—face bloodless, eyes hollow, lips torn from biting.

"No..." Henry stammered. "You're dead..."

The ghost said nothing. Just raised a hand and pointed.

Henry's body was found the next morning, twisted unnaturally, mouth agape in a silent scream.

The doctor called it a heart attack. But no twelve-year-old dies of fright without a cause.

****

Charles drowned in the dorm bathtub—despite being a champion swimmer.

Thomas slit his wrists during sleepwalking, writing "SORRY" on the wall in blood.

Edward was found hiding under his bed, muttering, "He won't stop staring..."

The school tried to cover it up. Parents were given polite explanations. But the Indian students knew. They spoke of *Vinay's spirit*—the wronged boy who had returned to punish the wicked.

A rule formed, unspoken but clear:

Don't bully. Or Vinay will come for you.

****

Years passed. The British left. India gained independence.

Saint Martin's continued—now a boarding school for all, but the legend persisted.

Every generation had its tale.

In 1959, a senior named Suraj tormented a younger boy—until he saw a bloodied handprint on his mirror and vanished the next day.

In 1974, a prefect beat a shy child during PT. He was found in the closet the next morning, eyes wide open.

Over time, teachers dismissed the ghost stories. "Just nonsense." But no one used the old basement closet. Not anymore.

It became known as **"Vinay's Adda."**

****

In 2005, the hostel welcomed a new batch.

Among them was Aarav Malik, a bright boy from Delhi. Friendly, observant, and a bit too curious for his own good.

He quickly noticed the unwritten rules—especially the eerie silence around the basement stairs.

He befriended Kabir, a shy boy often mocked for his stammer.

One evening, Aarav witnessed three older boys corner Kabir.

They shoved him. Mocked him. Then, jokingly, they dragged him downstairs.

Aarav followed.

"Let's see if Vinay wants a roommate," one sneered.

They locked Kabir in the closet and ran.

Aarav pounded on the door, screaming. "LET HIM OUT!"

Suddenly, the corridor went cold.

The door flung open on its own.

Inside was Kabir—shaking, but alive. Behind him, a silhouette lingered in the dark.

Aarav saw it. A boy. Dead, but not at rest.

****

Aarav returned that night. Alone.

He entered the basement and knelt before the closet.

"Vinay," he whispered. "I know what they did. I'm sorry."

The air shimmered. The ghost appeared—translucent, flickering.

"I only wanted to learn..." the ghost whispered. "They laughed at me. Locked me away..."

"I know," Aarav said, tears in his eyes. "But it's not like that anymore. We can change things."

The ghost seemed to hesitate.

"We've punished every bully since you," Vinay said. "But no one remembered me."

Aarav made a promise.

"We'll remember. We'll make sure no one ever suffers like you did again."

****

The next morning, the school held a special assembly.

Aarav told the full story.

The principal, shocked and moved, gave permission to open the basement. There, they found old records, and Vinay's name scratched into the closet door.

The school erected a shrine near the entrance to respect the boy who fought his oppressors. A boy who defended the weak and served justice to the guilty.

A brass plaque read:

"To Vinay Mishra (1923–1935): Defender of the Innocent. Let No Child Be Bullied Again."

Students left flowers. Kabir lit a diya. Even the older boys, ashamed, knelt in silence.

That night, a few saw a figure by the shrine—smiling faintly, fading into moonlight.

****

Years passed. The school flourished. Bullying dwindled.

But some say, on cold nights, you can hear faint whispers near the closet.

And once, when a boy shoved a smaller student, his bunk bed cracked in half overnight.

Just a warning.

Because Vinay's vow still echoes:

"If you hurt the weak, I will return."

****

Nazi Hunter

The train screamed against the frozen rails, carving a trail through the dense German forest like a blade through flesh. Inside, the stench of unwashed bodies, fear, and desperation choked the cattle car. Dozens of eyes reflected dim light filtering through the wooden slats. Among them, seventeen-year-old Eliezer Roth clutched his violin case to his chest like it was a lifeline.

He had not played since their house in Hamburg was raided. Since his mother, father, and younger sister were dragged from their beds by men in black uniforms with soulless eyes. Now, they were all together in this hell-bound train, but separated by more than space—by silence, grief, and terror.

At dawn, the train stopped. Guards barked orders. Dogs snarled. Birkenwald.

They tore families apart. Eliezer was forced into a line with other young men, while his family disappeared behind barbed wire fences. He screamed, resisted, and was beaten into silence.

So began his life in the camp.

Each day, a horror. Labor so back-breaking it turned boys into bones. Nightmares made flesh in the form of SS guards. But none were crueler than Karl Bremer—the doctor who wasn't really a doctor. Bremer experimented on inmates like they were insects. Eliezer, with his delicate fingers and haunting eyes, became his pet subject.

One icy night, Eliezer was strapped to a table. Bremer wanted to measure how much pain the human nervous system could endure. Eliezer endured. And endured. And when his body finally gave out, it wasn't with a scream, but with a whisper.

"You will pay."

His soul, scorched with agony and vengeance, did not move on. His last words so menacing that Bremer had him buried under 10 feet of snow just to be sure.

Years later, the war was over. Nazis annihilated. However, many nazis had escaped justice. Some bought new identities with blood money, others were given political asylum. Ruthless, heartless wolves wearing the skin of a sheep lived amongst innocent civilians across the world.

Germany now a torn country was bisected into two. On one end the western powers, USA specially controlled the country while on the other Russia rules with its iron fist. Both parties wanting to control Germany's natural resources and human psych.

On one such night the Russians mining for minerals ended up excavating Elizer's remain. What they did not know is they also brought to surface a Nazi hating soul. Filled with hatred, vengeance and thirsty for Nazi Blood.

****

Buenos Aires, 1956. Karl Bremer, now known as Klaus Berger, lived in a modest villa with high walls and no mirrors.

He had built a new life among other shadows. He still dreamed of the camps—of screams, smoke, and eyes that haunted him. One pair more than others. Burning, accusing. Eliezer's.

The night he died, it began with music.

A violin.

He staggered into the hallway, heart racing. The air grew colder. Lights flickered. The notes grew louder. A melody from his past—the one Eliezer used to play in the infirmary when Bremer was testing his pain thresholds.

Then, silence. Until a voice rasped in his ear.

"Remember me?"

His body was found twisted in an impossible shape. Every bone broken inward. Hebrew letters burned into his flesh: *Zachar*—Remember.

No sign of entry. No fingerprints. Just ash.

****

Over the years, it continued.

In Paraguay, a Nazi accountant was found drowned in a tub of blood. In Brooklyn, a guard turned immigrant was burned alive in a synagogue, the fire starting without a spark. In Austria, a camp commandant slit his own throat after seeing a pale boy reflected in every mirror.

Survivors whispered of a ghost. A golem. A dybbuk.

But it wasn't a myth. It was Eliezer Roth. And he remembered them all.

****

By the early 2000s, the trail grew cold. Most Nazis were dead. Some by age, some by Elizer and some by Israels elite fighters. The Jewish wraith became a rumor on internet forums and underground message boards.

But silence doesn't mean peace. Just waiting.

****

Present-day Dresden. Neo-Nazi marches fill the streets.

Lukas Meier led the youth movement. Charismatic, hateful, and viral. He had thousands of followers online and a growing army offline.

He preached white purity, racial cleansing, and admiration for the Third Reich.

The night after a rally, Lukas saw a man outside his window. Gaunt. Eyes like coal. Holding a violin.

When Lukas blinked, he was gone.

****

A violin appeared in Lukas's apartment the next day, resting on his bed.

He never owned one. Didn't know how to play. But it played itself. Every night.

At first, just eerie music. Then came the visions—barbed wire, corpses, and smokestacks. His walls bled Hebrew. He couldn't sleep. Couldn't think.

When he tried to destroy the violin, it vanished—only to return with ash on its strings.

****

Lukas's followers began to die.

One was crushed by a freight train—except it hadn't moved in 30 years. Another was found baked alive in an industrial oven. A

third hung himself after seeing Eliezer's ghost every time he blinked.

Lukas screamed into cameras: "It's a Jewish curse! They're coming for us!"

People thought he was mad.

He wasn't.

****

Leah Abramov, a journalist of Israeli-German descent, started investigating the deaths. All victims shared one connection: glorification of Nazism.

She found references to Eliezer Roth. An archived list of victims. A photo—young, beautiful, eyes burning with sorrow.

She began hearing whispers in her recordings. Seeing the violin in reflections.

One night, she wrote his name on a windowpane in condensation. It stayed even when the fog cleared.

She knew then: he wasn't just a ghost.

He was judgment.

****

Hiding among ashes would save him.

But Eliezer was born in those ashes.

That night, Lukas heard the violin one last time. He wandered into the ruins of the gas chambers. There, the dead rose—not just Eliezer, but thousands. Silent. Watching.

They showed him everything—the terror, the pain, the genocide—through the eyes of the victims.

He screamed until his body collapsed into cinders.

****

Leah stood in the ruins, tears staining her cheeks.

A final message appeared in ash on the wall: *As long as hate lives, so will I.*

She published the truth.

The world called it fiction.

But sometimes, at night, those who hate still hear a violin in the dark.

And smell burning.

****

Mystic of the Amazons

The Amazon rainforest groaned under the weight of iron teeth. Chainsaws shrieked into the emerald flesh of trees older than time, and bulldozers tore trails where no sunlight had ever dared. Amidst the thunder of machines and the cough of diesel engines, a silence began to rise—not absence of sound, but something deeper, ancient and watching.

Far from the chaos, nestled deep in a place untouched by maps, a shrine of moss-covered stone stood cradled by twisted roots. It bore the mark of a long-forgotten man—etched in African script now faded by time and rain. Locals still remembered his name: **Saint M'bare**. A healer. A prophet. A wanderer who came from across the ocean, decades ago, seeking communion with the earth's oldest spirit. He never returned to civilization. But the jungle remembered him.

They said he became one with the forest. And for years, when researchers, shamans, or lost children wandered too far, a warm presence would lead them back to safety. Sometimes it was a faint hum. Sometimes, a soft chant in a language no one spoke anymore. He was called —The Green Spirit.

But something changed.

The government's new infrastructure plan pushed deep into the Amazon. Promises of progress, prosperity, and international funding turned the rainforest into real estate. Local tribes

protested. Environmentalists were ignored. Bulldozers kept moving.

And then the deaths began.

****

At first, no one connected the incidents. A lumberjack went missing. Another was found crushed under a fallen tree—except the tree had no root base. A third was found hanging twenty feet in the air, vines wrapped around his neck like a noose.

When a fourth died, authorities started asking questions.

Luciano Costa, a forest operations supervisor, didn't believe in ghosts. He believed in deadlines and budget constraints. But when his crew refused to go near Sector 9B, he had no choice but to see for himself.

He walked in with ten men. They never found the path again.

Drones sent in afterward showed something strange—faint silhouettes moving through the canopy, trees that seemed to close ranks behind intruders, and in one frame, a tall, robed figure with green-glowing eyes standing in the center of a clearing.

The footage went viral. Officials dismissed it as doctored. The internet turned it into a meme. But on the ground, the fear was real.

****

At a small settlement on the jungle's edge, tribal elder **Abuela Nara** burned sage and whispered prayers into the soil. She had known the spirit of Saint M'bare when he was still flesh. A young girl then, she had watched him heal a dying snake with a single chant.

“He is no longer who he was,” she warned. “You awakened a guardian. Now he bleeds with the trees.”

They didn’t listen.

More workers died. Roots came alive, dragging men screaming into the underbrush. Animals once docile turned feral. Even the rivers ran red with tannin-heavy floods that swept away entire camps.

Still, the deforestation continued.

Until the **Blood Tree Incident**.

****

It was a Mahogany tree, said to be the oldest in the valley. The loggers were ordered to take it down to clear way for a road. The saw hit the bark, and the world erupted.

Vines lashed out. Trees groaned like wounded beasts. The very ground cracked open, swallowing machines whole. Every man in that camp—forty-seven in total—died within minutes.

Except one.

Rodrigo Dias stumbled into the nearest village two days later, eyes bloodshot, clothes shredded, mumbling in a tongue not his own. Doctors tried sedatives. Priests tried exorcisms. Nothing worked.

When he finally spoke clearly, all he said was:

"He told me to leave. He said: *Only the jungle may judge.*"

****

The government called in reinforcements—scientists, shamans, ex-military teams, even an American private contractor named Dr. Harlan Greens who specialized in “paranormal eco-hostilities.”

He laughed when he arrived. “A ghost in the trees? Let me guess—green eyes, robes, and dramatic warnings?”

The next day, he was gone. They found his equipment scattered across three kilometers. His satellite phone had a single image saved—a blurred face emerging from vines, staring directly at the camera.

His last recording ended with a whisper: *M’bare lives.*

****

With panic rising, the president of Brazil visited the site. Soldiers guarded him, drones hovered overhead, and journalists circled like vultures. But deep inside, where machines refused to work and compasses spun uselessly, he met Abuela Nara.

“You seek peace,” she said, “but you brought war.”

The president scoffed. “We brought development.”

“You brought blood.”

That night, under the full moon, she performed a ritual with bark, ash, and ancestral chants. The forest stilled. The winds stopped. And then, **he appeared**.

Saint M’bare stood at the edge of the firelight—tall, spectral, robed in leaves and shadow. His face was both man and forest. His voice echoed through bone.

“You trespass on sacred ground. I welcomed the lost. I guided the faithful. But now you come with blades.”

He raised his hand. Around the camp, machines rusted in seconds. Guns jammed. Electronics sparked.

“Let the jungle live,” he said, “and I shall rest.”

The president knelt.

****

A decree was passed within the week: no further deforestation in the Green Heart Zone. The area was sealed off, declared a national sacred site.

The killings stopped.

The jungle healed.

****

But not completely.

Years passed. Tourists returned. So did the curious, the greedy, the skeptics.

A group of poachers went missing. Two illegal miners never came out. Their GPS devices were later found embedded in the trunk of a growing tree.

Abuela Nara, now aged and blind, still sat by the edge of the forest.

"They always come back," she whispered. "And so does he."

The jungle sleeps. But its guardian watches.

Forever.

As long as the trees stand, he remembers.

****

The Phone

In the heart of Hyderabad, nestled between the congested alleys of Sultan Bazaar, stood an old, cluttered shop known as M.G. Mobiles. The fluorescent signboard flickered like a dying firefly, and its windows were lined with greasy fingerprints and yellowed posters advertising outdated models. Inside, the air was thick with the smell of soldered wires, rusted circuits, and human sweat.

Ravi Sharma, a middle-aged man with slumped shoulders and an accountant's weary gaze, walked in with cautious steps. His eyes scanned the rows of phones on display, most with chipped corners, some with cracked screens, all discarded dreams now waiting for second chances.

Ravi's son, Arjun, had recently topped his class. Fourteen, soft-spoken, and shy, Arjun didn't ask for much. But he had begged Ravi for a smartphone. Not a fancy one—just something to chat with friends, browse cricket scores, and maybe watch YouTube videos. After weeks of deliberation and saving, Ravi was here, ready to gift his son a used device within his modest budget.

The shopkeeper, Gopal, recognized Ravi. "Back again, Sharmaji? Still hunting for a gem among the junk?"

"Something decent for five thousand," Ravi said.

Gopal dug into a drawer and produced a black phone. Sleek. No branding. It looked almost new.

"This one just came in. 6GB RAM, decent camera, no scratches. It's a mystery brand—probably Chinese. But solid."

Ravi picked it up. It was cold. Not metallic-cold—something deeper, like winter stone. Still, it powered on instantly.

The screen flashed black before glowing white. "Hello, Arjun," it said in soft letters.

Ravi blinked. "How—"

Gopal shrugged. "Just luck, Sharmaji. Maybe it auto-fills based on SIM data."

No SIM had been inserted.

****

Arjun beamed when he received the phone. He hugged his father tightly, whispering thanks again and again.

That night, Arjun explored every corner of the phone. There were no brand logos. No familiar apps. No Play Store. But it had everything—browser, camera, notes, even an oddly named app: "Echo."

When he tapped on it, a screen popped up with a single button: RECORD.

Curious, Arjun pressed it.

The phone buzzed, then went silent. Seconds later, it saved a file named: "First Breath."

He played it. Static, at first. Then his own voice—muffled, whispering: "Can you hear me?"

He hadn't said that.

He tossed the phone onto his desk and pulled his blanket over his head.

****

In the following days, Arjun changed.

He became withdrawn. Laughed less. Ate mechanically. Spoke only when spoken to. Ravi thought it was just exam fatigue.

At school, Arjun's friends noticed too. He no longer played cricket during recess. He sat alone under the neem tree, eyes fixed on the screen.

One afternoon, his teacher, Ms. Farida, walked past him and heard him whispering.

"They're calling me."

"Who is, beta?"

He looked up, startled. Then smiled faintly. "My friends."

****

Unknown to Ravi or Arjun, the phone had passed through many hands before.

Mahesh, a struggling musician, had found it in a pawn shop. He loved it initially. But then came the dreams—black lakes, drowning children, screaming trees. He stopped playing guitar. He stopped eating. One night, he walked calmly into the Hussain Sagar Lake.

Two weeks later, the phone appeared on a flea market table.

It passed to Neelima, a schoolteacher. She wrote poems about butterflies and banyan leaves. After three weeks with the phone, she tore up her diaries and filled the pages with phrases like "let

me out" and "I see you even when I sleep." She hung herself with her dupatta.

The phone never kept contacts. But it kept memories.

****

Arjun began hearing voices at night.

They weren't dreams. They spoke from the phone's speaker, soft as sighs:

"Do you miss your mother?" "Wouldn't you like to be free?" "Jump."

Sometimes, the screen would light up by itself, displaying images—his school flooded in darkness, his father's body lying cold, his own face smiling from underwater.

The Echo app recorded everything. Even in airplane mode.

One file was titled: "The Last Morning."

He didn't remember recording it. But when he played it, he heard himself say:

"Goodbye, Papa. I'll find peace."

****

Ravi found the notebook under Arjun's bed. Inside were drawings—figures hanging from trees, bridges, rivers, red eyes in black skies.

Terrified, he confronted his son.

"Arjun, what is this? What's going on?"

Arjun didn't answer. He stared at his father, then said: "It's okay, Papa. Soon, I'll be quiet forever."

That night, Ravi locked the phone in a drawer.

By morning, it was gone. Arjun had it again.

Ravi remembered the temple.

****

The Hanuman temple near Secunderabad had been a weekly ritual when Arjun was younger. Ravi took him there, hoping the serenity would help.

The priest, Swami Govindananda, greeted them with a nod. He was an old man with a spine like a banyan root and eyes like still water.

When Arjun stepped into the sanctum, the lamp flames trembled. The phone in his pocket began to heat. He screamed and threw it.

The phone landed at the Swami's feet.

He picked it up, unflinching. "I was waiting for this."

"What is it?" Ravi asked.

The Swami turned. "A cursed vessel. Fed by grief. Strengthened by death."

"Can you destroy it?"

"Not destroy. But silence."

How do you know so much about this phone, Swamiji?" exclaimed Ravi

"I have had visions of late, my spirit guides and Mahabali himself had warned me of this." Said the swami calmly. "Do not worry child, you have just saved your son's life and countless others". He exhaled deeply.

****

Swami Govindananda traveled to the coast. The beach was deserted at dawn. Swami ji chatted a few holy verses and applied vermillion and turmeric on the phone. He then wrapped the phone in a red cloth and tied 11 knots to the cloth while chanting Lord hanuman's name.

He waded into the waves, chanting prayers older than kingdoms. The phone buzzed in his hands, trying to reboot, flashing horrific images—its last attempts to survive.

"Begone," he whispered.

And flung it deep into the sea.

The sky cleared. The waves calmed.

****

Arjun started recovering.

The whispers stopped. The shadows in his eyes faded.

He never asked for a phone again.

Ravi returned to his routines. Grateful. Humbled.

Every month, they visited the temple. Swami Govindananda smiled at Arjun, now playing cricket with other boys.

All was well.

For a while.

****

Three months later, off the coast of Visakhapatnam, a fisherman named Ramesh hauled in his net.

Caught among the fish and seaweed was a red cloth with multiple knots all around it. Inside the cloth he could feel something hard

and rectangle. Curious as to what his luck has brought to him, Ramesh opened the knots one by one and opened the cloth layering to discover a black, unmarked phone. Still pristine.

Ramesh cursed his luck. He thought it was something valuable. Instead, out came a mobile handset. “Ayyappa Swami, what is this. A mobile that had been sleeping at the bottom of the ocean for how long god knows. Obviously, it may not even be in a working condition.”, he gruntled in his native language.

He still turned it over. The screen lit up:

"Hello, Ramesh." Came the voice from the handset.

His eyes widened.

The whispers began.

****

Taxi No. 111

Rajiv had driven a taxi through the busy streets of Chennai for nearly two decades. He had learned the pulse of the city—the rhythm of the traffic, the temperament of the roads, and the moods of its people. After the loss of his wife ten years ago, the cab had become more than a livelihood—it was his partner, his daily purpose.

His cab, a weathered white Ambassador, bore the registration number TN XX YY 111. He bought it from a retired army officer at a throwaway price. Rajiv remembered the day clearly, how the old man had warned him with an unsettling smile, "It's a stubborn machine, and some say it's got a soul of its own."

Rajiv had laughed it off.

****

In a city where change was the only constant, Rajiv's life had been consistent. He lived in a modest home in Saidapet, cooked his own meals, and kept to himself. His son had moved abroad, and his daughter-in-law rarely called. Yet Rajiv found solace in his routine and, especially, his passengers. Most of his passenger's we regulars. He had known them for years. He largely catered to relationship based private clientele only. Each face told a story. But over time, some of those stories turned tragic.

First, there was the young couple—newlyweds. They had taken his cab from Marina Beach to their hotel. Cheerful and affectionate.

A week later, the wife had committed suicide, and the husband was admitted to a rehabilitation center.

Then there was Ramesh, a senior executive at an IT firm. Rajiv had dropped him at his office one humid afternoon. Two weeks later, Ramesh was arrested for financial fraud. He swore he had no memory of the transactions.

One incident could be coincidence. Two, bad luck. But five? Ten? More? Each time Rajiv heard of a familiar face spiraling into tragedy, a chill gripped him.

Yet, life went on.

Until the day Rajiv himself became a passenger.

****

It was raining when the accident happened. Rajiv had been turning a corner near Mylapore when a speeding state transport bus banged into his taxi, sending him tumbling. He awoke in a government hospital with a fractured ankle and a broken mirror of a life that would soon reflect only dread. He couldn't drive for weeks. His cousin Arun offered to drive him home in his own cab.

That was the first time Rajiv rode as a passenger in Cab No. 111.

The ride home was oddly silent. Rajiv sat in the back, feeling the slight hum of the vehicle. The seats, though familiar, felt cold. A chill crept up his spine. He noticed something he hadn't seen before—a thin scratch along the interior roof, like fingernail marks. Strange.

The next morning, Rajiv's neighbor, Radha Aunty, refused to acknowledge him. Later that day, his bank account showed unauthorized withdrawals. By the end of the week, he was being investigated for a theft at the local petrol station.

"I've done nothing!" he cried into the phone to a faceless police officer.

Yet everything he had built—his reputation, his small circle of trust—was crumbling. He saw shadows dart across his peripheral vision. Whispers echoed from the backseat when he sat in the front. He started dreaming of a woman in a red saree, her eyes hollow, her lips mouthing silent screams.

Rajiv went to a mechanic to check the cab. The man refused to touch it.

"There's something wrong with this car," he muttered. "It's... heavy. Like something's watching." "Every time I get under the car for repairs, a voice tells me to get out else the car will fall on you."

Rajiv's desperation grew. He tracked down passengers from the past—those whose lives had derailed. Some were dead. Others institutionalized. One man, now a wandering beggar, screamed at Rajiv: "You brought her to me! The one in red!"

One night, as he sat drinking tea at a roadside stall, a woman approached and asked for a ride. She was striking—tall, composed, with sharp eyes that seemed to peer into his soul.

"I'm not driving tonight," he said.

"You don't have a choice, Rajiv," she replied. "My name is Sharvani. I've been looking for your cab."

She sat in the backseat.

"I'm a psychic. This cab... it's a beacon. Spirits attach to it. Especially the angry ones."

Rajiv gripped the steering wheel. "Why me?"

“You didn’t choose the curse. But every street you drive collects pieces of suffering—road accidents, murders, suicides. The car draws them in. You never noticed because you were always in control. But the moment you became a passenger, the curse claimed you.”

“What do I do?”

“You must burn it. But not just anywhere. You must perform a ritual at the old cremation ground near the Cooum River.”

That night, they drove in silence. The taxi began to fight back—the engine sputtered, the mirrors twisted, the radio blared static and screams. But Sharvani chanted in Tamil, holding off the worst.

At the cremation ground, Rajiv poured ghee and camphor over the bonnet. The cab roared like a living thing, but he struck the match. Flames engulfed it. Shapes danced in the fire—screaming faces, wailing children, old men, the woman in red.

By morning, all that remained was a twisted frame and the number plate: 111, now blackened and melted beyond recognition.

****

Rajiv’s life began to rebuild. His bank cleared his loan for a new cab. Radha Aunty invited him for tea. His son called. For the first time in years, Rajiv smiled.

Sharvani disappeared, leaving behind a single note: "Drive with care. Not every passenger is alive and yet not every ghost a enemy"

****

Cab No. 111 was never seen again.

But sometimes, on rainy nights near Marina Beach, people claim to see an old Ambassador cab idling by the curb—its meter running, its lights flickering, and the faint whisper of a woman in red calling for a ride.

The wise don't stop.

They keep walking.

Fast.

****

The Pen

Delhi was a city of dreams, but also one of deafening silences when dreams failed. Aarav Mehta, 28, lived alone in a modest apartment in Hauz Khas, his days blending into nights filled with rejected manuscripts and unanswered emails from publishers. He wasn't untalented. In fact, his professors from DU used to say he had a gift. But the market was brutal, and originality was rarely rewarded.

Aarav found solace in antiques. On weekends, he wandered through the narrow lanes of Old Delhi, hoping to find inspiration in relics of the past. One such humid, rain-drenched Saturday led him to a peculiar antique shop hidden behind a torn curtain in a crumbling haveli near Chandni Chowk.

Inside, the air smelled of mothballs and incense. An old man with cataract eyes and a raspy voice sat behind a counter. Amid the rusting clocks, broken telescopes, and brass idols, Aarav's gaze fell upon a fountain pen. Black with gold engravings and a regal lion-shaped nib, it practically hummed with energy.

"From Bengal," the old man rasped. "Belonged to a forgotten king. Very old. Very... powerful."

Aarav didn't need convincing. He bought it for Rs. 2,000 and went home, the pen snug in his pocket.

****

That night, Aarav dreamt of things he had never imagined before: a haunted train station in Daryaganj, a child left behind, voices echoing from the tracks. He woke with his pulse racing. Grabbing the pen, he began to write. Words poured out of him, his hand flying across the pages of his dusty journal. It was like the story was being dictated to him by an unseen force.

Two weeks later, he had a 300-page novel titled *The Dead Ride at Daryaganj*.

He self-published it online. To his shock, it went viral. Horror readers lauded it as the Indian answer to Stephen King. Comments poured in. Soon, publishing houses came knocking.

****

Over the next year, Aarav wrote two more novels: *The Doll from Dhanbad* and *The Baagh of Death*. Each came to him effortlessly, each tale more terrifying than the last. The pen never needed ink. And he never had to pause to think—the stories wrote themselves.

Aarav moved into a luxury apartment in South Delhi, gave interviews on top News channels and Podcasts, and became the new face of Indian horror fiction. He wore tailored jackets, gave TEDx talks, and signed contracts worth lakhs.

But even amid the glow of success, a shadow crept nearby.

****

At a book signing in Connaught Place, a middle-aged woman clutched a copy of *The Doll from Dhanbad*.

"My niece... she died exactly like the girl in your story. Even the red ribbon. How did you know?"

Aarav smiled politely, uneasy. Later, another man mentioned a forest in Jharkhand where a hunting accident mirrored *The Baagh of Death*.

He dismissed them as coincidences. Until the letters arrived.

Envelopes with no return address. Inside: newspaper clippings, obituaries, photos of victims. All real. All died like characters in his books.

****

He tried switching pens. The ideas stopped. The stories evaporated. And at night, his hand began to move on its own. He'd wake to find pages of horrific scenes written in his handwriting.

He took the pen to a professor of occult studies at JNU. The professor examined it carefully.

"This isn't a pen. It's a vessel," he said. "Something ancient is using you."

That night, the professor died in a mysterious fire. Aarav watched the news, hands trembling.

****

Aarav stopped writing, but the damage was done. A massacre in Jharkhand was reported—a tribal family wiped out by a phantom leopard. Local villagers called it a curse.

He traveled there, seeking answers. The villagers said a dark presence had arrived with an outsider. A man who asked too many questions. A man who carried a black pen.

Aarav fled back to Delhi, sick with guilt. He had written that massacre weeks ago.

****

Desperate, Aarav tried to return to the shop where he found the pen. It no longer existed. The haveli was abandoned, doors sealed with ash and turmeric.

Paranormal Research, ancient texts expert, government libraries. Aarav ran from pillar to post to get to the bottom of this. *Was he really the reason so many people were losing their lives?*

Finally in one of the ASI archives, he unearthed a Mughal-era legend: a royal calligrapher cursed by a tantric. The pen he used would grant incredible stories—but all would come true. It was cursed to bleed fiction into reality.

****

Now, Aarav couldn't distinguish between real people and his characters. He saw the doll from his second book on a street vendor's shelf. He saw the train from his dreams while driving through Daryaganj.

His own reflection began talking back. His hands ached. The pen whispered to him.

He wrote one final title in a trance: *The Writer Who Died in Fire*.

****

In desperation, Aarav visited a **Jagrut Shiva temple** in Mehrauli, one he remembered from his childhood.

The head pujari looked at the pen and said, "Mahadev is the ultimate. He is the beginning and the end" "*He is the protector of good and the destroyer of Evil*"

Under the pujari's guidance, during a midnight ritual, Aarav buried the pen in the temple courtyard.

The air changed. The voices stopped. He collapsed in exhaustion.

****

The Mussoorie Vampire

The cold wind whispered through the craggy peaks of the Carpathian Mountains as Vikram Roy Singh adjusted his scarf, pulling it tighter against the chill. Romania was colder than he had anticipated, but it was also intoxicatingly beautiful—ancient forests, misty trails, and an air thick with forgotten legends. He had come to escape the pressures of running his family's estate back in India. The ancestral house in Mussoorie held memories he was trying to avoid: the echo of his father's voice, the weight of a heritage he hadn't yet embraced.

Then he met Monica.

She was unlike anyone he'd known—tall, elegant, draped in mystery. Her eyes held centuries of sorrow, and her smile promised danger. They met at a local wine bar in Sibiu, and something unspoken passed between them, a pull Vikram couldn't resist. For a week, they roamed the hills, explored decaying castles, and shared stories over candlelit dinners. He was falling, fast and hard.

But on the seventh night, everything changed.

They had hiked to an abandoned monastery. The stars above burned like icy diamonds, and Vikram turned to kiss her. Her lips were cold, her body tense.

"There's something I must show you," she said, leading him inside.

Within the crumbling chapel, surrounded by ancient carvings and the scent of decay, she bared her fangs.

Vikram didn't scream.

He didn't run.

He stood still as Monica sank her teeth into his neck, and the world turned to darkness.

****

He awoke three days later in a hotel bed, the world different.

Colors seemed sharper. Sounds more vivid. His skin tingled in daylight, and his hunger gnawed at him constantly. Monica was gone, leaving behind a cryptic note: "We are eternal now. Forgive me."

Vikram returned to India, to the dreamy mountains of Mussoorie. He locked himself in his ancestral home, avoiding friends and family. At first, he fed on animals—deer, dogs, anything he could find. But it wasn't enough.

He took to the roads, traveling far to feed on the corrupt and the criminal—drug dealers, traffickers, murderers. He justified it. He convinced himself he was doing the world a favor.

But hunger is a cruel master.

****

Years passed. Vikram's need grew insatiable. He started hunting closer to home. Tourists vanished from hiking trails. Solo travelers never checked out of hotels. The locals whispered, but no one suspected Vikram.

He wore his charm like a mask, attending community events, donating to local charities, maintaining the illusion of the benevolent heir.

But every full moon, the bloodlust won.

And the mist drank with him.

****

Rumors grew. Hikers gone missing. Bodies found drained of blood. The townsfolk whispered of wild animals, spirits, and old curses.

Veer Roy Singh returned from Delhi, concerned. Vikram's younger brother, now an IAS officer, had always looked up to him. On his arrival though, he realized his brother was a changed man. He was leaner, meaner and his eyes almost looked like death itself. Still Vikram was always carrying a Royal demeanor. A swag of style, a smile cold yet confident. But something was off. Vikram was colder, paler. He never came out during the day.

Veer started asking questions.

****

One night, Veer followed Vikram.

He watched in horror as his brother stalked a young couple on the outskirts of town. The mist hid Vikram's transformation, but not enough. Veer saw the fangs. Saw the blood. Saw the monster.

He ran. He was worried but he was scared. Veer spent the next few days in a dilemma. *Does he inform the authorities, or does he confront his brother?*

After careful considerations, he decided to do neither. Instead, he decided to take matters in his own hands. Afterall he cannot have a monster let loose on innocent's blood.

And he knew what he had to do.

****

Veer sought answers, poring over ancient texts and religious scriptures. He found mention of a mystic in Landour who had dealt with ***Nar Pischach***-A Vampire before.

The mystic, a frail man named Tantrik Bhairav, agreed to help. "We can try to kill him. But if your brother is indeed the one killing on rampage lately, all those kills would have given him immense powers. Let us hope Mahadev has victory in lay for us" he squirmed a little.

He spoke to Veer at length of his learnings from past Vampire Hunts and the Do's and Don'ts to be followed while hunting Vikram.

Together, they began to plan.

****

Bhairav crafted a ritual using blessed ash, Himalayan silver, and an ancient blade said to drink vampire blood. But Vikram was no ordinary creature—he had Monica's blood in him. He was strong.

They would need to weaken him.

A trap was laid at the old Mahakaal Mandir—sacred ground where no dark soul could remain unscathed.

Veer baited his brother "Bhai," he said one early morning to Vikram; " I am feeling very nostalgic last few days. I feel like visiting our ancestral deity -Mahakaal Mandir today. Let's go

together. Mom and Dad would have loved to see both their sons paying respect at the Mahakaal."

Vikram grew nervous. He knew he cannot go there. But he had no reason to doubt Veer since he did not expect Veer to know his truth.

He said shrewdly "I would love to. But you should have told be earlier. I just had an omlette. As you know we cannot go to the temple after having non-veg." "I will though come with you; it would be a good drive together. I will stay put at in the car, while you may go inside for a Darshan"

They both agreed to go to the temple later that night during the Maha Aarti , conducted every evening in the temple after dust before closing the temple for the night.

****

Vikram grew in suspicion by the time they left for the temple later that evening.

But he came.

The mist clung thick around the ancient stonework of the temple compound. Veer went in for the arti while Vikram waited in the car. Veer waited for the aarti to get over and everyone else to leave including the Pujari.

Bhairav was already hiding in the bushes a few feet away from their car. Veer was given the blade by Bhairav after doing all the rituals beforehand.

"Sorry Brother, this took long. After the aarti, Pujari wanted to speak to me about funds for some repairs work he intends to do for the Mandir."; said Veer Coming towards Vikram sitting in the

driver's seat. Vikram had already become too cautious by now. He knew something was up.

"Let me drive on the way back, here let me take the wheel" Veer said opening Vikram's door. As soon as Vikram stepped out, Veer stabbed him with the pious blade in one swift blow. Vikrak gave out a chilling scream that ran through the woods like a wild animal in pain.

Bhairav came out of the woods chanting mantras and sprinkling the holy water from the Ganges, calling on the gods of the mountains. For a moment, it seemed to work—Vikram staggered, his skin burning.

Then he laughed.

With a roar, he jumped towards Bhairav and in one clean blow tore him apart. The chants stopped.

Veer lunged with the blade for a second blow, piercing Vikram's heart. Blood poured, but Vikram didn't fall.

He looked into his brother's eyes. "I didn't want this," he whispered.

Then he snapped Veer's neck.

****

Vikram buried Veer beside their parents.

He burned the ancestral home, leaving nothing behind.

The townspeople believed the Roy family had left. The disappearances slowed for a while, as Vikram vanished into the hills.

But only for a while.

****

Years passed. Vikram became a myth.

Tourists still vanished, especially on foggy nights. Locals whispered of the ghostly figure in the woods, the eyes that glowed red, the footsteps that made no sound.

Vikram stared into the mist from the edge of a cliff and thought to himself—The hunger would never end.

And neither would he. Or so he thought.

****

Little did he know that on the fateful night when he slaughtered Veer and Bhairav, an 18-year-old boy Shiva-the temple priest's son watched him unafraid, calmly with a Sage's composure. He had too much faith in his Mahadev to be terrorized by meagre demons and Vampires. He followed Vikram quietly in the shows and saw all his actions. He even knew Vikram's secret hideout in the woods.

****

Shiva was preparing himself for a confrontation with Vikramin silence. He knew he had to stop this monster himself and bring back peace to his town. He went to Varanasi for penance and learned from the best; aghoris, Tapasvi's, Akhada Guru's. For 10 relentless years he learnt and learnt until one day he was ready. He went to his guru Swami Akhandanand to bid farewell and take one final blessing from him.

"Allow me to take your leave, guruji" Shiva said touching his guru's feet." "Ayushmaan Bhava, Shiva, you are a bright child and

a great Sadhak. May Mahadev bless you with success in the endeavor you have set up for." Said Akhandanand. He then got up and went over to a small trunk at the end of his *Kutiya.*

He took something from the trunk and handed over to Shiva. "Pierce this knife into the heart of the Monster while chanting your guru Mantra. Make sure to do it on the night of Mahashivratri, for on that night Mahadev's blessings are at peak and will protect you."

Shiva was speechless, "How do you know?" were all the words he could manage before realizing that Akandanand was said to have the Vardaan of being a "Antar Yami"- the one who knows the unknown.

He simply smiled bend one more time to touch his guru's feet in respect and left **on his** mission.

****

Mahashivratri is a major Hindu festival with deep spiritual and astrological significance, celebrated annually to honor Lord Shiva. Shiva reached Mussorie 3 days before the sacred night. The preparations were in full swing at the Mahakaal temple for the special night.

One day before the pious night, Shiva's father, the temple priest was very busy in the lead up to the event. But that did not stop him from showing off his son SHIVA to everyone he saw. He kept boosting of all the studies his son has completed and how he has not grown up to be a wise and charming young man.

Shiva on the other hand was focused on his mission. Over the years he had heard that the killings and attacks have grown more violent and bloody. Vikram is getting more ruthless and careless. This is my chance.

Shiva anticipated that Vikram will surely visit the temple on the night of Mahashivratri. Since the temple would be open all night and there would be many devotees who would line up for darshan. It would be good hunting ground of Vikram. He was sure to attack these people when they leave the temple and head to their homes through the woods.

Shiva was right. Over the years, Vikram had grown in power as well as audacity. He had no respect for the divine anymore. He had a night feast planned for himself owing to the occasion the following night.

****

Finally came the night of Mahashivratri. The temple was all lit up. It was decorated with flowers, colorful lights. Devotees thronged from Villages and towns kilometers away to celebrate the occasion believed to be a holy union of Lord Shiva and Maa Parvati. The air was filled with scent of incense sticks, delicious sweets and cheerful devotees.

Outside the main compound, lurking in the bushes was Vikram. Waiting for his next kill. What he did not know was he was being watched too. A few feet away was Shiva waiting to make a move. Quiet. Stealthy and focused.

****

"No more deaths Vikram. This ends today. Here" said Shiva. Vikram looked back stunned, he did not know how to react. Shiva lunged forward with the Sacred Knife aimed at Vikram's heart. Vikram held Shiva's hand midair now that he had regained senses.

Sensing the powers of the Sacred sword, Vikram released Shiva's hand. In event of this newfound danger of the pious sword,

Vikram was weighing his options. Shiva swung again this time he left a deep cut on Vikram's arm, still missing his chest though.

Vikram growled in pain. Pain, he had not known before. This was new, never had he been hurt so bad, so painful. He was scared for the first time ever since he turned into a monster.

A scuffle followed, Vikram was trying to fend away Shiva's attacks and run back to forest, but shiv pursued him. Relentless. Sharp. Focused. Shiva knew the iron was hot and that he should strike it now. He cannot afford Vikram to escape this time.

"Hey Mahadev, give me the strength and blessing to kill this demon tonight" said Shiva, somewhat audible as he continued to chase Vikram through the dark woods.

As if on que, Mahadev did come to Shiva's rescue. One of the big pine trees shred a big branch out of nowhere and underneath was caught Vikram. Vikram was struggling to lift the branch. This gave shiva the time to catchup.

In one swift move, with Vikram still struggling to get free, Shiva climbed over the branch and dug the Knife straight into the heart of Vikram who was laying beneath the branch. There was one excruciating growl and then silence.

It was all over. Vikram lay there dead as a log. His skin changing color to a dust white, his body lifeless. Shiva thanked Mahadev for his intervention and proceeded to bury Vikram's body deep inside the forest, where no one ventures.

****

Death Turn

The mist came early in the hills of Khandala. Every evening, as the sun dipped behind the Sahyadri ranges, a blanket of white crept along the mountain roads. Locals had long stopped taking one particular stretch after dark—a narrow, twisting path "Death Turn". Few spoke of it openly, but every villager knew the story. It was the kind that chilled your spine even when spoken in daylight.

****

Eighty years ago, a woman named Mithya had met a cruel fate on that very road. She had been returning from her sister's wedding in Lonavala, traveling alone in a tonga with her savings and gold jewelry. Night fell before she could reach the next town. A group of highway robbers stopped her. They beat her mercilessly, stripped her of her belongings, and left her broken by the roadside. Her legs were shattered, her face mutilated beyond recognition. But she was still alive, and she cried for help until her last breath. No one came.

Her corpse was found days later, hand still outstretched, eyes open, staring endlessly at the road.

****

Since then, travelers began reporting strange sightings. A bloodied woman in a torn white saree would appear suddenly on the road, limping, arm outstretched, asking for help. Those who saw her never made it past the turn. Vehicles would swerve uncontrollably

and plunge into the gorge. Authorities tried to blame speeding, alcohol, even faulty roads—but locals knew better. They warned all outsiders: do not take the old road after dark. Yet every year, someone didn't listen.

Truckers told of a chilling cold in their cabins before the figure appeared. Tourists thought she was an illusion—until they saw her up close. One group of college students recorded her with a dashcam. The footage survived. They did not. An image captured a pale face with one eye hanging from its socket and a cracked jaw, eternally mouthing the word: "Madat"—Help.

Still, curiosity and defiance led many to ignore the legend. And they paid.

****

Then came the night that changed everything.

The Joshi family—Arun, his wife Priya, ten-year-old daughter Rhea, and their loyal driver Raju—were returning to Pune after attending a relative's wedding in Mumbai. Arun was a renowned Physiatrist with a great repute across Pune, he was a man of science. It was already past 10 p.m. when they neared Khandala. The highway was closed for repairs, and the GPS rerouted them. Raju's brow furrowed when he saw the new path.

"Sahab," he said, eyes wide, "This is the road they say is haunted. Locals avoid it."

Arun chuckled. "Come on, Raju. Ghosts don't exist. It's 2025, not 1925."

Priya looked uncertain. "Are you sure? Maybe we should turn back."

But the GPS blinked persistently. The nearest alternative route added two hours. Arun sighed. "We'll just drive carefully."

The car turned onto the infamous stretch. The fog was so thick it seemed to move with a will of its own. Trees lining the road twisted like skeletal arms. Even the moonlight struggled to reach the ground.

"Papa, it's cold," Rhea murmured, snuggling into her seat.

They were halfway through the stretch when Raju suddenly slowed down.

"There's someone ahead," he whispered.

A figure stood in the middle of the road. A woman. Limping.

Her hair was matted and long, her white saree stained with dried blood. One arm hung lifelessly. Her face was obscured by shadows, but something about her posture was unnatural. Her head tilted at an odd angle.

Raju's hands trembled on the steering wheel. "It's her. Bhoot… the ghost."

"Stop the car," Arun said firmly.

"What? Are you mad?" Priya cried. "She'll kill us!"

"Just stop."

Raju hesitated, then braked.

The woman turned to face them. Her face was a grotesque mask—one eye socket hollow, the other bulging unnaturally, mouth twisted into a silent plea. Her legs were bent in unnatural directions. Blood coated her forehead.

Arun opened the door and stepped out.

"Do you need help?" he called gently.

The ghost paused. For a moment, she seemed confused. Then she slowly nodded.

"Come," Arun said, motioning to the car.

Priya clutched Rhea. "No... please, no."

But the woman limped forward. With great effort, she got into the back seat next to Rhea.

The temperature plummeted. A deathly silence filled the car.

Rhea looked at the woman, wide-eyed. She unwrapped a chocolate from her pocket and held it out.

The ghost looked down, stunned. A skeletal hand reached out and gently took the sweet. Her mouth twitched, not quite a smile, but softer now.

No one spoke.

As the car drove on, the fog began to lift. Birds could be heard in the distance. The moon shone brighter. They neared a small temple at the end of the road.

The woman raised her head. Her form shimmered faintly.

Then, without a word, she vanished.

Not a trace remained.

No blood on the seat. No scent. Nothing.

They reached the nearest dhaba and stopped in stunned silence. An old priest approached them.

"You look like you've seen her," he said knowingly.

Arun nodded slowly. "We gave her a ride. She disappeared."

The priest's eyes welled up. "Eighty years. And no one ever stopped. You did. You freed her."

From that night onward, no sightings were ever reported on Death Turn. Accidents ceased. The road became just another scenic path in the hills of Khandala.

A wooden signboard was placed nearby, painted in red letters, were the words:

"Kindness matters. Even to the dead."

****

Raakhandaar (Protector)

In the heart of the Konkan coast, nestled between mist-covered hills and dense groves of betel nut trees, stood a house older than memory. The Rane ancestral home, a grand but aging wadi-style bungalow, had watched over the village of Devgarh for three centuries. Its red laterite walls bore the scent of monsoons, of mango blossoms, of incense and old secrets. And every night without fail, a plate of freshly cooked rice, vegetables, and a small tumbler of water was placed on a flat stone just beyond the veranda.

This simple act wasn't for stray dogs or wandering souls. It was for the family's Rakhandaar—the Guardian. A being as ancient as the soil itself, Rakhandaar was believed to be a semi-godly protector who watched over the house and the land surrounding it. For 300 years, the Rane family never missed the offering, not even in times of famine, war, or pandemic.

Old Vasudha Rane, the family's last living elder, was the keeper of this sacred tradition. Even as her body grew frail and her eyesight faded, her hands never forgot the rhythm of prayer. Each night she would cook a small meal, set it upon a banana leaf, and place it on the stone. As she folded her hands, her cracked voice would whisper, "Rakhandaar, protect our blood. We remember. We honor."

In the dead of night, those awake might hear soft rustlings, a deep growl far into the jungle, or the soft sigh of something inhuman

moving past the doorway. But the house remained safe. The crops grew. The animals were fertile. No Rane descendant ever went hungry. Not until the night Vasudha breathed her last, alone, and the ritual was forgotten.

****

News of Vasudha's death traveled slowly, passing through the trembling hands of an old postman and into the inboxes of her grandchildren, scattered across cities and countries. Aarav Rane, a marketing executive in Mumbai, barely blinked when the email from the caretaker arrived. His sister, Riya, living in Pune and running an art studio, was the only one who wept.

The funeral took place with only two villagers present—Gajanan Kaka, the now-senile caretaker, and Mahadev Joshi, the priest. No one placed food for Rakhandaar that night. No prayer was whispered. No hand touched the offering stone. The flame of tradition, like the diya Vasudha kept lit for decades, flickered out with a gust of silence.

That night, the winds around the house grew restless. Animals stayed indoors. In the jungle beyond, something stirred. The soil trembled. The pact was broken.

****

Within weeks, the Rane family began to unravel.

Aarav was called into a meeting at his firm and informed that a major investor had pulled out. Their largest campaign, a multi-crore project, was shelved. Days later, the company laid off 200 people. Aarav was among them.

Riya was preparing for her wedding when her fiancé, Nachiket, was severely injured in a freak accident. A tree branch, on a clear

sunny day, crashed through his windshield. He survived but was never the same. Depressed, withdrawn, he ended the engagement.

Their cousin Sameer, living in Dubai, had a heart attack at 34. Another cousin's child was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition. Unexplainable accidents, mysterious illnesses, sudden job losses. The Rane bloodline, for generations untouchable by misfortune, was now steeped in it.

It wasn't until Riya began having vivid dreams—of her grandmother crying by a dried-up stone, of a monstrous figure howling in hunger—that she remembered the offering.

****

Riya called Aarav late one night. "Do you remember the plate Aaji used to put outside every night?"

Aarav, drunk and disillusioned, scoffed. "You think a plate of rice will fix our lives?"

"I think we broke something sacred."

Aarav didn't believe in ghosts, but something about Riya's voice and the desperation in her dreams unnerved him. He began noticing small things—his room would smell like smoke at night. His dreams were filled with soil, blood, and eyes watching from trees.

After their cousin Anaya died in a bizarre balcony collapse, Aarav agreed. "Let's go back. One trip. One ritual. Then we move on."

****

Devgarh hadn't changed much. The jungle had crept closer, but the fields still swayed golden in the sunlight. The Rane house,

however, looked defeated. Ivy choked the once-bright walls. The roof sagged like a tired spine.

Inside, dust covered every surface. Spider webs draped the ancestral portraits. A chill hung in the air even though it was summer.

They found Gajanan Kaka mumbling by the old offering stone. "He waits. He is angry. The plate... no plate... so hungry now..."

In a corner of the courtyard, Riya found Vasudha's old copper utensils. The prayer bell was cracked.

"We need help," Riya whispered.

Aarav nodded. "Let's find the priest."

****

Mahadev Joshi was now blind, but his mind was sharp. He welcomed them without surprise.

"I told your grandmother, "He said, his voice brittle. "When the last Rane forgets Rakhandaar, the pact will break."

He told them of Rakhandaar's origin—a tribal warrior-sage named Rakhya, who centuries ago had made a blood-oath with the Ranes. In exchange for food and respect, he would bind his soul to the land and guard it against all evil—human or not.

"But such pacts require remembrance. Ritual. Honor. You broke it. Now he hungers—not just for food, but for your blood."

****

That night, the jungle came alive. Aarav felt eyes on him. Riya heard whispering from the attic. The old well bubbled though it was dry. At midnight, the air grew thick, and the ground trembled.

Aarav was pulled in his sleep—he awoke on the veranda, covered in mud. Claw marks lined the door.

Villagers refused to come near. One child, pointing at the house, screamed, "The black god walks again!"

****

Mahadev prepared a ritual. They would offer a traditional meal, a drop of Aarav's blood, and recite the ancient vow their ancestors once spoke.

"Do not look at him directly," Mahadev warned. "Do not flee. Do not lie."

Riya cooked the meal as Vasudha once did. Aarav sliced his palm and let blood drip onto the banana leaf. Together, they stood by the offering stone.

****

The ground split slightly. From the jungle, a shape emerged—taller than a man, cloaked in vines, eyes burning amber. Part human, part beast, part god. Rakhandaar.

He stepped forward slowly, the ground turning black beneath his feet. Aarav could not breathe. Riya recited the vow, voice cracking.

"We remember. We honor. Protect our blood."

Rakhandaar let out a guttural growl. His hand reached out and touched Aarav's chest. A searing pain flooded him—and then silence.

****

At dawn, the air felt clean again. Birds returned. Aarav woke, the pain gone. His wounds were healed. The house felt lighter. Mahadev smiled. "He forgives. For now."

They buried Vasudha's ashes by the offering stone. Riya wept.

****

Back in Mumbai, Aarav received a call—his former boss wanted him back, now at a higher position. Riya reopened her studio. Nachiket visited her, apologizing.

Their cousins reported strange reversals—Sameer's wife recovered miraculously. The child's illness faded.

Balance was returning.

****

Aarav hired a local family to continue the ritual daily. He installed a plaque:

Here sleeps Vasudha Rane, the last Keeper of the Pact. And here watches Rakhandaar, Guardian of the Rane Bloodline.

Each night, a plate is placed. And each dawn, it is empty.

In the moonlight, shadows still move near the forest. But they do not cross the stone.

Rakhandaar is watching.

****

Well of Souls

The sun dipped lazily into the Arabian Sea, casting warm hues across the palm-fringed beach. Laughter rang out near a shack where four college friends raised bottles of beer in celebration. The party was winding down. After three days of indulgence in Goa's nightclubs, seafood joints, and beach bonfires, it was time to head home.

"Bro, this prawn curry is legendary!" Aakash declared, licking his fingers clean.

"You said the same about the lobster last night," Sid grinned, tossing a crab shell into a bowl. "You're just in love with all things non-veg."

Rohan sipped on a lime soda, ignoring the meat-filled plates around him. "You guys are going to regret all that when you're stuck in traffic with stomach cramps."

Manav laughed. "Don't be so dramatic, Rohan. Not everyone lives on rabbit food."

They joked late into the evening, not realizing the road ahead had already begun to change its nature, like a python slowly coiling tighter around prey.

****

The next day, they loaded their bags into Sid's SUV and began the journey back to Mumbai. The music was loud, spirits higher.

After a couple of hours, they stopped at a roadside dhaba surrounded by dense trees and a muddy clearing.

They ordered butter chicken, mutton curry, and fried fish. Rohan asked for dal and roti, as usual. As they waited, the old dhaba owner eyed them with visible discomfort.

"Which way you boys heading?" he asked.

"NH-17, back to Bombay," Sid replied casually.

The man's smile faded. "Avoid the Chorlem stretch near the forest. And for God's sake, don't stop near the old well. People disappear there. Especially the ones who eat meat."

The friends exchanged glances. Aakash smirked. "We'll be fine, uncle. Ghosts don't eat chicken."

The man's expression hardened. "Not ghosts. Witches. Hungry ones. And something worse. A curse older than this highway."

They laughed it off, paid their bill, and hit the road. But even the music couldn't drown out the growing silence of the approaching forest.

****

It was past 9 p.m. when they reached a winding forest stretch. The trees leaned closer, casting long shadows under their headlights. Fog began to drift across the road like silk curtains.

"GPS just died," Manav muttered. "And no signal."

"We're almost through," Sid reassured.

But the car jerked. The engine stuttered. Then, it stopped.

"What the hell?" Aakash stepped out, looking around. And there it was — an ancient well on the roadside, covered in vines and moss. Stone-carved cows decorated its crumbling edge.

Rohan felt an overwhelming sense of dread. "Let's get back in the car. Now."

But Sid was walking toward the well. Then Aakash. Manav followed without a word. Their eyes were glassy. Empty.

Rohan screamed their names.

One by one, they climbed the edge — and jumped in.

****

Rohan stumbled into the nearest village in shock. A small crowd formed. He collapsed, mumbling about the well. The dhaba owner arrived and took him inside.

An old priest was summoned.

The priest told the story:

Years ago, a Brahmin boy named Madhav had tried to stop a truck smuggling cows to slaughter. He freed the animals, but the smugglers caught him, stabbed him, and threw his body — still clutching a calf — into the roadside well.

From that moment, the well was cursed.

The priest explained, "Any soul tainted by animal blood is drawn to the well. It's not just the boy. The witches of the forest feed off the sin of violence. They lure and consume the unclean."

****

Rohan insisted on returning to the well with help. The priest gathered two exorcists. They performed ancient rites. The ground trembled.

A female voice rose from the well, speaking in Konkani. A shadow emerged, her eyes glowing — the Witch of Chorlem.

"You fed us," she whispered. "Now we are never hungry."

One exorcist was yanked into the darkness by invisible claws. The priest sealed the ground with holy ash. The fog lifted, but the curse remained.

****

Back in Mumbai, Rohan tried to report the deaths. No bodies were found. The case was closed as a missing persons file.

Haunted, Rohan wrote a book — *The Hungry Well*. It gained a cult following.

But in the final chapter, he wrote:

“Another family vanished last week. Same road. Same stretch. The well is still thirsty.”

And as he typed the last words, a chill crept into his room.

The power flickered.

****

The Mirror

In a small village nestled within the forests of 13th-century France, there lived a blacksmith named Alaric. Gifted in crafting weapons and metal art, Alaric was also secretly obsessed with the occult. One fateful winter, driven by the recent death of his beloved wife, he delved deeper into forbidden rituals in an attempt to contact her soul. An ancient grimoire guided him to a ritual that required a mirror forged in a fire lit with human blood.

Alaric murdered a traveler to complete the ritual. The result was a tall, intricately carved mirror framed in blackened steel, engraved with symbols that no scholar could recognize. When the mirror was completed, Alaric stood before it to summon his wife.

Instead, he vanished.

His house was found empty, except for the mirror. The villagers tried to destroy it, but every blow with an axe or hammer was absorbed. When they set fire to it, the mirror didn't burn—instead, it vanished from the ashes. That was the beginning.

****

Vienna, 1765

Local Baron Von Richter displayed his lavish acquisitions in his ancestral mansion outside Vienna. One such artifact was a mirror purchased from a mysterious traveler. No one knew where it came from. The mirror was placed in his ballroom.

During the winter solstice, the Baron threw a party. Guests danced into the night. By dawn, not a single soul remained. Only the servants who hadn't entered the ballroom survived. Authorities found tables laid with untouched food and a wineglass shattered near the mirror. The mirror disappeared days later.

Cairo, 1892

Edward Whitmore, a British archaeologist, found the mirror in a sealed tomb near Giza. Ignoring warnings from locals, he took it to his desert campsite. That night, a storm hit. Campfires were extinguished; tents shredded. The next morning, the excavation crew was missing, and only a lone Arab servant was found muttering, "The fire is in the glass."

The mirror vanished from the camp.

New Orleans, 1927

Jazz musician Clarence "Blue" Morton found the mirror in a pawn shop. Drawn to its eerie sheen, he brought it home. One night, he held a séance with fellow musicians. Witnesses outside reported hearing strange, discordant music. The next morning, the apartment was empty. Instruments were scattered. The mirror had vanished.

Tokyo, 1956

In a Tokyo museum, the mirror was displayed in a gothic art section. A curious night guard reported strange sounds and flickering lights. The next morning, the guard was gone. Security footage captured a blur of light before static. The exhibit was shut down. The mirror disappeared days later.

****

India, Present Day

Vijay Mehra, a wealthy diamond merchant, was known for collecting antiques. During a trip to Jaipur's old city bazaar, he entered a forgotten shop. The owner, an old man with milky eyes, offered him the mirror, its surface as pristine as glass, though the frame was ancient and warped.

"It chooses," the old man whispered. Vijay ignored him and bought the mirror.

He placed it in the central hallway of his new mansion. His wife, Sunita, found it unnerving. Their children, Aanya and Rishi, refused to look into it. The dog barked whenever near it.

****

Raghav, the loyal servant, noticed strange occurrences. Lights flickered around the mirror. Shadows moved in its reflection, though the hallway was empty. One night, he swore he saw Sunita's reflection looking back at him with hollow eyes, even though she wasn't present.

He tried to convince Vijay to remove it. Vijay laughed it off.

On a stormy night, thunder crashed as the family dined. The mirror hummed with energy. Raghav, in his quarters, heard screams. He rushed in, but the hallway was empty. The entire family had vanished. The mirror stood still, the frame now red-hot, then cooling rapidly.

He called the police. When they arrived, the house was normal. No blood. No signs of struggle. Only the mirror was gone.

****

Raghav told the police everything. They dismissed him, citing shock and trauma. The media covered the story briefly, then moved on. The Mehra mansion was locked. People said the family fled.

But Raghav knew. He saw them vanish. He saw the mirror's surface ripple like water.

Raghav began seeing the mirror everywhere. In puddles, in windows, in his dreams. He wandered Jaipur warning strangers. He screamed during religious events, claiming hell had a door.

Eventually, he was admitted to a government asylum. Everyone refused to believe him except one person—a journalist named Tanya.

****

Tanya recorded his tale. He ended with, "It's not done. It wants more."

Weeks later, she saw a luxury hotels "The Paradise" advertis their newly renovated luxury suites, in the adverts she saw the same antique mirror placed in the presidential suite.

The mirror's frame had symbols no one could read.

Tanya could not hold herself back. She contacted the hotels management and informed them of the tragedy with the Mehra family and Raghav's subsequent statement to the police. The hotel management shrugged it off as a random call

It was nearly a week since Tanya's call to the hotel's management. Reports of mysterious disappearances from "The Paradise" was making the buzz. News Papers, Tele Channels, Radios, Café side chats all were centered around these disappearances. A famous Bollywood actress, a Chinese diplomat, a Canadian billionaire all

had vanished into thin air without any trace. Tanya was just beginning to wonder if Raghav was telling the truth until suddenly the news stopped. Things we back to normalcy at The Paradise.

No one knew why the disappearances started and why did it end so abruptly. Little did anyone notice, the mirror had disappeared...again!

****

The Actress

Shama Sen was no ordinary actress. With a hypnotic gaze that could freeze blood and a screen presence so eerie it felt conjured from the shadows; she was Bollywood's undisputed queen of horror. From haunted havelis to shape-shifting serpents, Shama had screamed, cried, and killed her way through every shade of fear imaginable. Critics said she didn't just act in horror films—she became the horror.

But Shama was more than her on-screen persona. Off camera, she was introspective, fiercely private, and deeply spiritual. While most of her colleagues courted paparazzi and relished limelight, Shama preferred a quiet life by the sea in her Versova bungalow. She meditated every morning, offered food to stray animals, and maintained a respectful distance from fame.

Her career had peaked with her recent blockbuster, *Maut Ki Talaash*, where she played a tormented psychic trapped between two realms. The film swept the awards circuit, including Shama's sixth Filmfare for Best Actress in a Horror Role. That night, dressed in a deep maroon saree that mirrored the blood-red tint of her character's costume, Shama stood on the grand stage, thanking her director, cast, and fans.

"Some roles don't leave you. They live inside you," she said. It was meant to be poetic. No one realized how literally it would soon manifest.

****

It began the night she returned home after the awards. The sky was unusually dark, a monsoon storm rumbling offshore. Her driver dropped her at the gate and she walked the short path through her garden. As she stepped inside, the lights flickered.

She entered her living room, slipped off her heels, and just as she reached for the switchboard, the electricity died.

"Typical," she muttered.

Candles were kept in a drawer by the kitchen. She lit one and placed it on the glass center table. The flame danced, casting flickering shadows across the walls.

She glanced at the mirror above her fireplace—and froze.

For just a moment, the reflection showed her in the costume from *Khooni Mahal*, the first horror film that made her famous. The same tattered white saree, blood smeared across her temple, and her haunted expression from the climax. She blinked.

Gone.

A sudden crack split the silence. The mirror shattered, sending shards flying across the room. The flame extinguished itself.

A whisper filled the room, barely audible but unmistakable.

"Run."

****

On the set of her new romantic thriller, *Dil Ki Dustak*, Shama tried to shake off the strange occurrences. Her co-star, Rishi, a charming debutant, found her in the makeup van the next morning.

"Hey, congrats on the win," he said, offering her a box of chocolates.

"Thanks," she replied, forcing a smile.

As she sat down, the makeup artist shrieked.

A cobra slithered across the vanity table, right past Shama's reflection in the mirror. Panic erupted. Spot boys rushed in. But when they arrived, the snake was gone.

Gone, like it had never existed.

"I saw it! It was right there!" Shama insisted.

The director was informed. Animal control was called. Nothing was found.

That night, Shama sat in her bedroom and watched *Nagin Ki Wapsi* on her projector—the same scene where her character encounters a cobra in the mirror before transforming into one.

Her journal, kept mostly for film ideas, now had a new section titled: "INCIDENTS."

Entry #1: Mirror shattered. Reflection not mine. Whisper: "Run." Entry #2: Cobra in vanity. Same as *Nagin Ki Wapsi.* Vanished without trace.

She stared at the list, her hand trembling.

****

Three days later, Shama appeared as a guest on *Bollywood Nights*, a late-night TV show. The theme was "Horror Icons of Indian Cinema." As she entered the dimly lit studio, decked out like a graveyard, the host welcomed her.

"The woman who gave fear a face. Shama Sen."

They joked, they reminisced. Until the set lights began to flicker.

A junior artist collapsed with a shriek, foam at the mouth. Shama stared in shock. The paramedics were called.

The host tried to cover it up. "Heat stroke," he laughed nervously.

But Shama knew.

In *Chudail Haveli*, her character lures a victim by hypnotic humming. The victim foams at the mouth and drops dead.

Later, back at home, she found three deep scratches across her back. Self-inflicted? No. The position made it impossible. They matched the climax of *Chudail Haveli* where the ghost brands her victims.

Her journal grew:

Entry #3: TV shoot. Lights flickered. Junior collapsed. Foam. Same death as *Chudail Haveli*. Entry #4: Scratches on back. Three. No explanation. Match movie.

****

Fear crept into Shama's bones. She tried therapy. She tried ignoring it. Nothing helped. She stopped accepting scripts, avoided public events, and only trusted her house help and manager.

Then came the pool shoot for a magazine cover. Despite her reluctance, the agency promised there would be no water. Yet, the stylist suggested a shallow water reflection shot.

She hesitated. Then relented.

The moment she stepped in, the water turned murky. Hands—pale, lifeless—grasped her ankles. She screamed. The crew dove in.

But there was nothing. Just Shama, flailing in two feet of water.

Hospitalized for trauma, she refused to speak. Her manager whispered, "That was from *Maut Ki Talaash*, wasn't it? The hands from the pool?"

Shama could only nod.

****

The media was relentless. Leaked footage, wild headlines:

SHAMA SEN POSSESSED?

SHAMA HALLUCINATING ON SETS?

Her fans turned. Brands dropped her. Rumors spread.

Shama stopped eating. Stopped sleeping. Her journal was now a grim prophecy chart, tracking what movie horror would play out next.

****

Her unreleased film had a car crash with a fireball finale.

She begged her manager not to drive. Insisted on staying in.

But one day, during a routine drive to her therapist, a truck rammed into her car. The fuel tank burst. Flames engulfed the side.

Her driver died. Shama barely survived.

Burn marks traced her arms—just like her character had in the film.

****

Now she heard voices in the mirror. Saw people who weren't there. Her home felt cursed. Every room echoed her past screams.

She locked herself in. Days passed.

Then, she was found wandering barefoot along Versova Beach, in full costume from *Khooni Mahal*, whispering lines from the climax.

****

Shama was admitted to Sanjeevani Psychiatric Center in Pune.

She refused to eat. Screamed in her sleep. Reacted violently to TV or music.

Doctors diagnosed her with dissociative identity disorder and severe PTSD. But medications failed.

Until she met **Urvashi Ma**, a former classical dancer and spiritual therapist.

****

Urvashi taught her silence.

Breath control.

Meditation.

At first, Shama resisted. Then, she relented. Slowly, her breathing returned to normal. The nightmares dulled.

She cried. Cried for the first time as Shama—not the actress, not the character.

****

Each day, she performed Surya Namaskar.

Listened to chants. Did Mantra Jaaps.

Read spiritual texts. The Bhagavad Gita.

And then, one day, she realized she hadn't seen a ghost in two weeks.

****

Shama took a vow: no more horror.

She wrote a letter to her fans. Thanking them. Telling them she was stepping away.

She found joy teaching yoga to children in the center. Spoke at mental health awareness seminars.

****

One night, alone in her room, she lit a candle. Looked into the mirror.

No voices. No reflections.

Just Shama.

She smiled.

****

Months later, she moved to Rishikesh. Opened a small ashram for artists.

People came to learn—not acting, but balance.Shama never returned to films.

But her story, her horror, her healing—became a legend.

The mirror, once her curse, now held only one thing:

Peace

****

Rahat Bagh

The sun dipped low over the banks of the Gomti River, casting long golden shadows across the closed gates of **Rahat Bagh**, an old Muslim cemetery nestled beside the slow-moving water. Abdul Rauf, the old caretaker, leaned heavily on his cane, his eyes misty with memory and age. He had served the cemetery for 45 years. The graves here belonged to poets, laborers, mothers, merchants, even a few nawabs. No one important by worldly standards, but all sacred in death.

Today, he performed the final burial. The grave was dug in a corner barely fitting the body. As the final prayers echoed through the air, Abdul placed the last handful of soil over the shroud. "Yeh zameen ab sirf aram ke liye hai," he whispered. This land is only for rest now.

He locked the iron gate one last time. The plaque read: *Rahat Bagh Muslim Qabristan – Band hai, meherbani karke andar na aayen.* (Rahat Bagh Muslim Cemetery – Closed, please do not enter.)

What he didn't know was that one day, someone would enter—and desecrate.

****

Zulfiqar Ahmed sipped on his scotch as he gazed at the satellite images on his tablet. The land parcel beside the river was exquisite. Green, untouched, and in a location that screamed premium real estate. A plan formed in his mind—a bungalow scheme for the elite. He would name it *Riverstone Enclave*.

His business partner, Danish Khan, frowned beside him. "Bhai, this land is a cemetery under the Muslim board, it would be difficult to buy this piece of land."

Zulfiqar waved a dismissive hand. "It's all about the right price, my friend. If you can afford it everything is on sale in the world"

Within weeks, he had greased palms, forged records, and bought the land.

****

Construction began. Bulldozers roared through the soil, digging deep. Soon they struck bones—old, brittle, wrapped in decayed cloth. Workers hesitated.

"What is this?" one asked, holding up a jawbone.

"Just another bone, do not over think" the supervisor muttered. "Throw them in that pit over there. Don't stop work."

Every morning, new remains were discovered. Children's bones, old women's jewelry embedded in mud, rusted nameplates. All discarded.

No one offered prayers. No rites. Only profit.

****

A year later, *Riverstone Enclave* opened with champagne and ribbon cutting. Forty luxury villas, a state-of-the-art clubhouse, jogging trails, and river-view balconies. Families moved in.

The Hussain family settled in Villa No. 7. Their daughter, Zoya, five years old, began speaking to an "aunty in white." Their maid quit after hearing whispers in the empty kitchen.

In Villa No. 13, a retired couple complained of knocks on their bedroom door at 3 AM. No one was there.

****

A dog howled for hours, staring into the community garden. The clubhouse pool turned green overnight.

Then the deaths began.

A young man was found drowned in the dry fountain.

Mrs. Kapoor from Villa 9 fell to her death after seeing "someone watching her" in the mirror.

Zoya went missing. Found twelve hours later sitting by the pit where bones were buried. She was silent, muttering, "Woh gussa hai..." –They are angry!

****

News channels caught on. "Haunted Colony in Lucknow?" screamed headlines. Property prices plummeted. People fled.

Zulfiqar tried to suppress the news but failed. Riverstone turned into a ghost town.

He stopped sleeping. The nightmares were vivid: people crawling out of graves, eyes hollow, arms outstretched. "Hamari mitti wapas do..."

****

Desperate, Zulfiqar visited Maulana Wasim in Barabanki. The Maulana, frail but wise, heard the full story. He went silent.

"Beta, tumne aram mein sulaye hue logon ki zindagi barbaad ki. Unki rooh ka sukoon cheen liya." He declared. *You have disturbed the buried, there restless souls are fighting back.*

Wasim said the dead felt insulted, intruded. The only way to bring back peace is by asking for their forgiveness and restoring a rightful place for them to rest and respite.

He visited the enclave and wept at the pit. “This is not a place of rest. This is a grave of betrayal."

****

A new land parcel was bought near the original cemetery. Over days, every bone, every piece of cloth, every stone was collected.

A mass prayer ceremony was held. Surahs were recited. Hundreds joined.

Zulfiqar lowered the final casket into the new cemetery. He whispered, "Forgive me. I was naïve to do what I did."

A gust of cool wind passed through the air. Flowers that hadn’t bloomed in months opened.

****

One year later, Riverstone Enclave was alive again. Children played. Lights twinkled at night. This time more cheerful and positive than ever before. The dead had forgiven now that respect and resting place both are restored.

Zulfiqar visited the cemetery every Friday, offering flowers and prayers.

At the enclave gate hung a small brass plaque:

“In memory of those who rested here before us. May peace be upon them. Restless no more.”

****

Wish Bowl

The sun was already dipping below the trees lining the horizon as Biswa pedaled his rickshaw down the cracked, muddy lane near Ratu Road on the outskirts of Ranchi. His legs, thin and dark like old vines, trembled with exhaustion. His shirt clung to his back with sweat and grime, and his throat felt like someone had scraped it raw. He hadn't eaten all day, and the pittance he earned from ferrying passengers was barely enough to buy a handful of rice.

As he passed through a dense field bordered with tall, whispering grass, the front wheel of his rickshaw suddenly dipped, groaned, and stuck fast in the slush. The sudden jolt sent Biswa flying forward. He landed hard on the muddy ground, groaning.

"Ai Ma!" he cursed, spitting out a mouthful of muck.

He got up, wiped his face with the back of his hand, and examined the wheel. It was deeply embedded in what looked like a thick, wet patch of earth. Grumbling, he started digging around it with his bare hands. His fingers scraped against something cold and hard under the soil. Thinking it might be a rock, he dug deeper. But it wasn't a rock.

It was a bowl.

Biswa pulled it free. The metal was old but strangely smooth. As he held it up, it began to glow with a soft golden hue. The inside of the bowl shimmered, and odd symbols began to emerge—ancient, curling scripts that shifted and changed even as he stared.

A voice, soft as the breeze but deep as the sky, filled his mind: "Multiply your need. Appease with copper."

He dropped the bowl, startled. It landed with a thud in the mud, still glowing faintly.

"What... in God's name..." he muttered, backing away.

He looked around. No one was there. The field was silent, save for the rustling of leaves and the chirping of insects. The rain had stopped.

After a few minutes, he picked up the bowl again. The glow had dimmed but not disappeared. Trembling, Biswa tucked it under his shawl and dragged the rickshaw free. That night, curiosity—and hunger—would tempt him to test its strange promise.

****

In the one-room tin-roofed shanty he called home, Biswa sat by the dim light of a flickering kerosene lamp. The bowl lay before him, still faintly glowing. He hadn't told anyone about it, not even his neighbor Laltu who usually shared his dinner.

He placed a single grain of rice inside the bowl.

At first, nothing happened.

Then the grain shimmered. It multiplied. One became two. Two became four. Then eight. In seconds, rice started to pour from the bowl in an endless cascade.

Biswa cried out in shock, trying to stop it, but the rice kept flowing—warm, fragrant, pure white rice that filled his old steel plate, then the floor. It poured like a tiny white waterfall.

"Stop! Stop!" he shouted, panicking.

The voice returned: "Appease with copper."

Remembering the words, he fumbled in his pocket for a small copper coin he had picked up outside a temple weeks ago. With shaking hands, he dropped it into the overflowing bowl.

The rice stopped instantly.

The room fell silent.

Biswa sat back, breathing hard, the floor of his room covered in ankle-deep rice.

He wept. For the first time in years, he wept—not from pain or hunger, but from a joy so pure it made his chest ache.

He slept that night with a full belly.

And dreams of golden futures.

****

The next morning, Biswa woke with a sense of wonder and doubt, as though the events of the previous night had been a fevered dream. But the bowl was still there, sitting innocently on the floor like a pet that had done nothing wrong. And the rice—it filled his tin cans, his broken clay pots, even an old bucket that hadn't been used in years.

He took a handful of the rice and brought it to his neighbor, Laltu.

"Where did you get this?" Laltu asked, sniffing it. "Biswa, this is basmati! This is expensive rice, not the cheap ration one."

Biswa only smiled.

In the days that followed, he used the bowl to help his neighbors. He placed a few vegetables inside—it multiplied them. Medicines—

those too. He even tried a torn kurta, which the bowl refused to multiply, but when he put in a clean shirt, several identical ones came pouring out.

Word spread. First in whispers, then in excited shouts. People came from nearby slums and bastis to see this miracle. But Biswa only offered food and clothes. He kept the bowl a secret. To them, he was just "kind-hearted Biswa."

He built a small shed near his house, stocked it with food and clothes, and let people take what they needed. His shanty transformed into a tiny community center. He had done what no politician or NGO had managed.

He had fed the poor.

But soon, need turned into want. And want turned into greed.

****

One evening, Biswa tested a new theory. He placed a ₹10 note in the bowl.

The result was astonishing. Notes flowed out like water. Crisp, new bills fluttered onto the floor until he dropped in the copper coin.

Biswa stared at the pile. With trembling hands, he picked up the cash and hid it beneath his mattress.

By the end of the week, he had a suitcase full of money.

He upgraded from a tin-roofed shack to a small rented house in Lalpur. Then he bought land. A car. Clothes. Smartphones. Gold jewelry. He even hired men to keep people away from the bowl, now stored in a safe with a glass case.

The poor man was now the richest in the locality.

****

Biswa's rise was meteoric. In less than a year, he was known as "Biswa Baba," the miraculous man who went from rickshaw puller to millionaire.

He built schools, opened a hospital, sponsored orphanages.

But his smile was now reserved for cameras. His laughter sounded hollow. And the bowl—once kept in the open—now sat hidden deep within his mansion in Morabadi, guarded round the clock.

He still used it daily, feeding it new items—gold bars, platinum rings, bundles of dollars. The bowl never disappointed.

But it had started whispering more often.

And the voice was no longer gentle.

****

"You owe me," it said one night.

Biswa shot upright in bed. The bowl was glowing in the corner, casting monstrous shadows.

"What?"

"Appease with copper. But respect must be shown."

That night, the bowl didn't stop even after a coin was dropped. Rice poured endlessly. The servants panicked. Biswa, in frustration, pricked his finger and let blood drop in.

The bowl stopped.

"Sacrifice," it whispered.

A sadhu came to his gate the next day, uninvited.

“Return it to the earth,” the sadhu warned. “Such things come with bindings.”

Biswa had the man beaten.

****

Biswa stopped trusting everyone. He changed staff, locked the bowl behind iron gates, surrounded himself with CCTV cameras. He rarely left his mansion.

He began having nightmares—of being crushed under mountains of gold and drowned in seas of rice.

He dreamt of people turning into piles of flesh, screaming as the bowl devoured them.

****

One night, after heavy drinking, Biswa spoke to the bowl.

“You think I need you? I MADE YOU FAMOUS!” he shouted, stumbling.

The bowl glowed red.

“Ungrateful,” it hissed.

Biswa laughed and put a human tooth inside, stolen from a dental clinic.

The bowl multiplied it into dozens of rotting, bleeding teeth.

He screamed.

Then he put a chicken’s heart.

The bowl overflowed with thousands of pulsing hearts.

****

In a rage, Biswa grabbed the bowl and smashed it against the marble floor.

It shattered.

Everything went silent.

Then came the tremor. From the cracks in the ground, the multiplied objects began to rise—teeth, gold, rice, money, and limbs—all forming a monstrous shape.

The bowl reassembled itself, jagged and red.

“REPENT,” it shrieked.

Biswa screamed as his body was torn limb from limb, absorbed by the creature of his own greed. His mansion crumbled into a pile of debris. The ground consumed all traces of him.

****

Years later, the land lay barren.

People whispered about the cursed mansion of Biswa Baba. No one dared step into the field.

Until one day, another man’s cart wheel got stuck in the earth near Ratu Road.

He dug with his hand. Found a bowl. It glowed softly.

And whispered: "Multiply your need. Appease with copper."

****

Malava

In the heart of 12th-century Malava, a flourishing kingdom nestled in what is now Madhya Pradesh, ruled a king whose name was spoken with reverence across Bharat Varsha—Indrasen. Under his rule, the rivers flowed full, the granaries overflowed, and the people sang songs of joy and gratitude. The skies above his capital, Kalindi, always seemed clear, as though the heavens themselves smiled down on the land.

Raja Indrasen was a man of great valor and unmatched wisdom. He was tall, with a lion-like presence and eyes that seemed to hold both thunder and compassion. His court was a gathering of poets, scholars, warriors, and saints. Justice was swift, corruption unheard of, and the temples echoed with the chants of devotees.

"Your Majesty," said Minister Somdev one morning, entering the marbled court, "the harvest reports from the eastern provinces have arrived. As predicted, they show surplus."

Indrasen, seated on his sandalwood throne adorned with lion carvings, nodded. "Good. Ensure that no village is left wanting. Distribute the surplus to the drought-affected lands beyond our borders."

Such was the king's heart—righteous, generous, and deeply devoted to Mahadev, the Great God of destruction and benevolence. Daily, he performed abhishekam at the Shiva temple built by his ancestors, offering prayers not for wealth or power, but for the well-being of his people.

But as light thrives, so too does shadow await its turn.

****

One humid afternoon, as the court settled for its daily proceedings, a strange figure entered the Darbar. Clad in black robes with a matted beard and a trident made of bone, the man's very presence chilled the air.

"Who seeks audience with the Raja of Malava?" boomed the herald.

"I am Ranka," the man said in a hoarse voice. "A tantrik of the cremation grounds. I come bearing wisdom and power."

The court fell silent. Even the birds outside ceased to sing.

"Speak, but beware," said Indrasen, his voice calm yet commanding.

Ranka stepped forward, holding a black stone. "I demand tribute—one chest of gold, ten bulls, and a plot of land beside your sacred river. In return, I shall shield your kingdom from curses that even now stir beneath the earth."

Laughter erupted from the courtiers, but Indrasen did not smile.

"You come to my court with veiled threats? Are you a protector or a dealer in fear?"

Ranka's eyes flared. "Mock me, and the wrath of the netherworld will consume your golden reign."

"I serve Mahadev," Indrasen said, rising. "And He is the destroyer of evil. Begone, tantrik, before your presence defiles this sacred hall."

Two guards dragged Ranka out, but not before he spat upon the floor.

"You will regret this, Raja. I shall awaken what even the gods fear."

****

Deep in the Dandak forest, Ranka sat in a circle of fire, bones, and ash. He chanted the forbidden mantras passed down from dark ages. The ground trembled, the air turned putrid, and from the center of the fire, she rose.

Chandranakha.

Once a woman, now a creature of shadow and vengeance. Her skin was pale as moonlight, her face partly burned, and her hair moved like snakes in the wind.

"Why have you summoned me?" she hissed.

"A kingdom thrives in arrogant light. Bring it darkness—famine, plague, and death. Ruin the name of Indrasen."

She smiled, her teeth sharp as daggers. "It shall be done."

And thus began the slow death of Malava.

****

Within weeks, the skies turned grey. The rains stopped, and the rivers receded. Children began to fall sick with fevers no vaidya could cure. Crows gathered on rooftops, and temples found blood in their offering bowls.

"It is as if the gods have turned their faces from us," whispered a priest to Minister Somdev.

In the village of Devpur, crops rotted overnight. A farmer found his entire herd dead, eyes wide with fear, bodies stiff. Panic spread.

Indrasen held council. "This is no ordinary ailment. Call the rishis, the temple priests. I will not watch my people suffer."

But even the sages found no answer.

****

"My lord," said Bhairav, a senior warrior, "the darkness comes not from nature but from sorcery."

A scout burst into the hall. "Your Majesty! Villages near the Vindhya border have seen her—a woman of fire and smoke, walking through walls, laughing in the night!"

"Chandranakha," murmured Somdev.

Indrasen stood, fists clenched. "Then let us meet this evil face to face."

****

Indrasen led a small contingent to the border villages. The air was thick, unnaturally silent. Villagers spoke of dreams filled with screaming, of children vanishing at dusk.

One night, while camped near the forest, Indrasen saw her—Chandranakha—floating inches above the ground, her laughter echoing through the trees.

"Show yourself, witch!" he shouted.

She faded into mist.

The next morning, three soldiers were found dead. Their eyes were wide, faces twisted in silent screams.

****

Haunted by the deaths, Indrasen returned to Kalindi and undertook a forty-day fast at the Shiva temple. He bathed in the

cold river at dawn, lit sacred fires, and offered his complete chitta to Mahadev.

On the final night, during a thunderstorm, a stranger appeared at the temple steps—a radiant sage, barefoot, carrying a Trishul that shimmered with divine energy.

"Raja Indrasen," the sage said, "Mahadev has heard you. Take this trishul. It will destroy that which is born of darkness. But remember, your mind must be still, and your heart pure. Only then will its power obey you."

The sage vanished in the storm.

****

Chandranakha now marched toward Kalindi. Her spectral army—ghosts of the unburied, beasts born of nightmare—followed her.

Villages burned. Wells dried up. A mother found her child speaking in a voice not his own.

Panic overtook the capital. People abandoned homes to hide in temples.

Indrasen returned with the divine trishul. He stood before his people and swore, "This ends now."

****

Indrasen devised a plan. He sent word to Chandranakha that he would surrender the city at dawn. As the sun rose, the gates opened. Indrasen knelt alone in the courtyard.

Chandranakha floated toward him. "So, the lion bows at last."

"I bow not to you," Indrasen said, smiling. "I bow only to my lord. I bow only to Mahadev"

He pulled the Trishul from beneath his robes and drove it through her heart.

She screamed. The earth split. Her form twisted, caught in holy fire.

****

Miles away, Ranka felt the witch's death like a blade through his soul.

He ran to the forest, trying to summon more darkness. But the bond was broken. For now, even the darkest of the Dark knew who stood by Indrasen..A lord even death feared. Mahakaal himself. The forest rejected him. Roots rose and coiled around him. Fire fell from the sky.

He burned, screaming curses that no one would hear.

****

With Chandranakha gone, the rivers returned. The skies cleared. Children laughed again.

Indrasen returned the trishul to the temple, placing it at Mahadev's feet.

"Let it rest here so that no darkness rises again," he said.

The people celebrated. Songs were written. The temples overflowed.

****

Years passed. Indrasen ruled wisely and grew old. Before his death, he summoned a young boy—his grandson—and whispered:

"Never bow to darkness. Even if the world turns, hold fast to dharma. Mahadev watches all." The boy nodded, and the fire of resolve lit his eyes.

****

Don't Lie

Surat, 1967

Madhav Joshi stood tall, his starched white shirt crisp, and his thin spectacles perched on the bridge of his nose. His classroom was silent, save for the ticking clock on the wall. The boys in Class 6B dared not breathe too loudly.

"No one lies in my class," he announced, voice firm and sharp like a blade.

The ruler in his hand rapped against his palm. Prakash Patel, a chubby boy with mischievous eyes, looked down nervously at his empty desk.

"Where is your homework?" Joshi asked, walking toward him.

"I... I forgot it at home, sir," Prakash stammered.

"Lie number one," Joshi whispered. "You didn't do it."

Tears welled up in the boy's eyes. He nodded. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry."

Joshi didn't smile. He didn't hit him either. He just looked into Prakash's eyes with a stare so intense that it burned. "Don't do it again."

The students feared Joshi more than their parents. He believed that truth was sacred—and lies, a sin. But his methods, though effective, were questioned.

One day, a jealous boy named Sameer told the principal that Joshi had beaten him till he bled. It was a lie—but it stuck. Parents protested. Joshi was fired, disgraced.

Three weeks later, his body was found hanging in the school's staff room.

Since then, every few years, students known to be chronic liars started dying mysteriously. Some were found with bruises, some vanished altogether. The story of Madhav Joshi became an urban legend.

But some students knew better. It wasn't a story.

It was a warning.

****

2003, Surat

The first day of school was usually fun. New books, new bags, and new gossip. Aarav Mehta, thirteen, walked into Class 8C with his best friends—Rohan, Shubham, and Mayank. Together, they were the class clowns, pranksters, and sometimes, liars.

"I told my mom I scored full marks last term," Aarav chuckled. "She gave me a video game."

"Dude, that's genius," said Mayank. "I told mine I got a merit certificate. She made me gulab jamuns."

They laughed, unaware that someone—or something—had started listening.

The new class teacher, Mrs. Vasundhara, introduced herself. She was kind, soft-spoken, but when she shared a story about Madhav Joshi during Moral Science class, the room went silent.

"He hated liars. Some say his ghost still walks these corridors."

"Come on, ma'am," Rohan scoffed. "Ghosts aren't real."

That night, Aarav heard whispers in his room.

"Liar... liar... liar..."

He sat up in bed, heart pounding. The air was cold. The windows rattled. But when he turned on the lights—nothing.

Just silence.

****

Two weeks later, Aarav woke up with red marks on his arms. Like ruler welts.

"Did your dad hit you?" Mayank asked.

"No! I don't know how these happened."

That evening, he lied to his mom again. "I don't have homework."

That night, the whispers returned, louder.

He dreamed of a dark corridor and a figure at the end. A tall man in white. Holding a ruler. Smiling—but not kindly.

He screamed awake.

Things escalated. Lights flickered when he lied. His reflection sometimes didn't move when he did. He began seeing a shadow behind him in class.

Then Rohan went missing.

They found him in the school lab. Dead. His body twisted in fear. His last word: "Sorry."

****

Rumors spread like wildfire. Three students admitted to lying about cheating—each reported paranormal experience. One girl jumped off the terrace. Another was found unconscious in the washroom.

Aarav and Mayank decided to find out more. They broke into the school archives and found an old photo labeled *Staff, 1986*. Joshi Sir stood in the middle, unsmiling.

Behind the photo, a note:

"He never forgives. Only the truth can free you."

That night, Aarav made a list of every lie he had told in the last month. Over fifty.

And the ghost punished him for each one. He was dragged across his room, slapped by invisible hands, and woke up choking.

He ran to the temple the next morning.

****

They gathered at midnight in the school.

Aarav, Mayank, and Shubham.

They lit candles, placed Joshi's photo in the middle, and one by one began confessing their lies.

As they did, a chill settled in. Footsteps echoed. The air grew thick.

"I lied about stealing from the canteen."

"I lied to my sister about her drawing."

"I lied to my parents about the exams."

Shubham, scared, lied during his confession.

Joshi's ghost appeared—full-bodied. Bloodied ruler. Spectacles cracked. He roared in rage and dragged Shubham into the dark.

His body was never found.

****

Aarav changed after that night. He spoke only the truth. He became quiet, focused, distant.

Mayank shifted schools.

Every year, new students heard the tale.

One boy mocked it in a YouTube video.

He died in his sleep.

****

20 years later

Aarav Mehta stood in front of Class 6B as their new Moral Science teacher.

"I will tell you a story today," he said, his voice calm but stern.

He looked toward the back of the class, where no student sat.

But he nodded, as if someone stood there.

"There was once a teacher named Madhav Joshi..."

****

Legend of Billa

The night was thick with fog, curling through the thorny ravines of Chambal like an ancient serpent. In a modest house at the edge of a crumbling village, wedding festivities had turned to panic. Screams echoed into the dark.

"He's dead! He's dead! Someone slit his throat!"

People gathered around the mangled body of the groom's uncle. Blood pooled beneath him; a crude message scrawled on the wall in red:

BILLA IS WATCHING.

An old woman, wrapped in a torn shawl, collapsed in horror. "I told them not to ask for dowry. I warned them. Billa doesn't forgive."

The bride's family, visibly shaken, retreated into their home. The wedding was called off. The groom's father cursed the air and swore revenge. But everyone else knew — Billa had returned.

****

Back in the 1980s, Billa was not a ghost. He was flesh and fire. A tall, broad-shouldered man with piercing eyes and a red turban, he was born to a poor farmer in the dusty village of Pahadi near Morena.

His rage ignited the day his younger sister hung herself from a neem tree. Her in-laws had returned her home bruised and

ashamed. "Bring a fridge and a scooter," they had said, "or keep your burden."

She couldn't bear the humiliation.

That night, Billa didn't cry. He loaded his father's rusty rifle and walked into the dark.

By the next morning, the groom's family home was ashes.

Over the next few months, Billa became a legend. He formed a gang of likeminded rebels — sons of farmers, Dalits, orphans. They struck only at the rich, especially those who extorted dowries. They looted and redistributed wealth, leaving sacks of rice and cash at poor homes.

The police called him a terrorist. The people called him a savior.

****

In 1992, a man from within Billa's own circle betrayed him. Lured by money and immunity, he gave the police the location of Billa's hideout deep in the ravines.

It was dawn when the firing started. Helicopters whirred overhead. Bullets rained like monsoon hail.

Billa, surrounded by his bloodied gang, stood tall on a rock and shouted:

"Marte waqt bhi yaad rakhna, humara khoon dowry ke laalchon par kehar ban kar barsega!" (Even in death, our blood will rain destruction upon dowry seekers!)

And with that, he fired his last bullet.

Every man in his gang died.

But that was not the end.

****

Soon after their deaths, strange incidents began. A greedy bridegroom mysteriously vanished on his wedding night. A zamindar was found drowned in a dry well.

Witnesses whispered about sightings in the moonlight: ghostly horsemen riding the ravines, a red turban glowing in the dark, eyes like coals.

A priest once claimed, "Billa's atma is restless. As long as greed lives, he will return."

By the early 2000s, Chambal's dowry deaths had plummeted. Few dared to risk it.

****

Chambal '2025

Bhairav Singh, a relic of Chambal's feudal past, lived in a grand haveli with his only son, Ratan.

When Ratan's marriage was fixed with the daughter of a Delhi businessman, Bhairav demanded:

"Ek crore, teen gaadiyaan, aur sona. Yeh shaadi hai, sauda nahi. Yeh izzat ka sawal hai."

(One crore, three cars, and gold. This is a matter of honor.)

Villagers protested. "Don't do this, Bhairav. Billa won't spare you."

He laughed, lighting his cigar. "I fear no ghost. I've hired tantriks, priests, even a man from Mumbai who catches ghosts with machines."

****

A team arrived: Baba Dhundinath, a tantrik with ash-smeared face; Dr. Kale, a ghost-hunter with infrared scanners.

They chanted, mapped the area, installed sacred threads around the venue.

One night, Baba Dhundinath vanished.

His body was found near the riverbank, tied to a tree. On his chest, carved deep:

BLOOD FOR GREED

Even Dr. Kale left the next morning, pale and trembling.

****

The bride, Poonam, a kind-hearted girl, began having dreams. A man in red stared at her from the shadows.

"Do not fear," the man said. "You will be free. But he must pay."

In every photo of Ratan clicked before the wedding, his face appeared twisted, as if melting.

Her mother consulted a local priest who said, "The dead are warning you. This marriage is cursed."

****

The wedding day. The haveli was lit with gold and marigolds. Armed guards stood at every gate.

Just before the saat phere, Ratan received a call.

"Poonam has run away! She's at the riverbank!"

Ratan ran, furious. But it was a trap.

In the silent mist of the ravines, he saw him.

Billa. Red turban. Eyes burning.

"You could've chosen love," Billa said. "But you chose greed."

Ratan cried, "It was my father! Not me!"

Billa raised a chilling tone. "And yet you walked to the altar, didn't you?"

****

Back at the haveli, guests waited.

Then came the scream.

Ratan's body was found nailed to the wedding pandal. Around his neck hung a note:

DEMAND DOWRY, PAY IN BLOOD.

Bhairav collapsed. Priests fled. Poonam left with her parents, untouched by grief, her dreams fulfilled.

****

Bhairav Singh died soon after. Some say he saw Billa in his mirrors, others that he was found talking to shadows.

Villagers now tell their children: "If you ever speak of dowry, remember Billa is listening."

Temples were built in his name.

****

In Bangalore, a greedy groom boarded a train to his wedding.

It stopped at a deserted station with no name.

He stepped off, confused.

A figure in a red turban approached.

The train left. The groom never returned. Outside the bogie was scribbled in Blood.

"Wherever Greed lifts its ugly head, Billa Will Come to crush it with his own Hands"

****

Ra

The mist clung to the mountains like ancient breath. Ooty slept beneath its green blankets, unaware that in the dense forest beyond the Nilgiri hills, something not quite human stirred.

Ra knelt before a mossy shrine dedicated to no god. His robes flowed like smoke, eyes faintly glowing crimson. Tonight marked the end of his 108th cycle. One more soul. One last transformation. If he succeeded, he would ascend to immortality—a being no force, divine or demonic, could touch.

He pulled out a faded parchment. It bore a name: **Sita Varadarajan**.

"So pure," he whispered. "So radiant. You will be my final form."

****

The temple bells of Ooty rang out, echoing across the quiet town. Sita awoke with a start, her Dadi already busy lighting incense.

"Sita beta," she called, "do your prayers. You have class soon."

"Coming, Dadi," Sita replied, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

At twenty-one, Sita was a beacon of virtue. Her parents had died in a landslide during a temple pilgrimage when she was eight. Since then, her grandmother had raised her in unwavering devotion.

She moved through her morning routine—a cold-water bath, sandalwood tilak on her forehead, and lighting the diya before a small Krishna idol. But this morning felt different.

****

At St. John's College, a soft-spoken librarian named Veer Singh had recently arrived. Tall, reserved, and impeccably well-mannered, he spoke in a timeless tone, as if each word was carefully selected from another century.

Veer watched Sita enter the library.

"Miss Varadarajan," he greeted. "Would you assist me in organizing the Sanskrit folios?"

"Yes, sir," she said politely.

He stared at her. Her aura shimmered gold—visible only to his ancient eyes. She wasn't just pure. She was transcendental.

She would complete him.

****

Ra was no demon, nor ghost. He was older than both. Born in the aftermath of a tantric ritual in 12th-century Himachal, Ra had emerged from a fissure in the earth, fed by blood and incantations.

Over the centuries, he had taken many forms:

- A Mughal scholar who had infiltrated the royal court to kill a devout sufi mystic.
- A British tea plantation owner in 1857 who had sacrificed a tribal chieftain's daughter.
- A Catholic priest in colonial Goa, who betrayed a nun of incorruptible faith.

Each life gave him power, but also a deadline: 108 days. On the 109th, his body decayed unless renewed with another form. The purer the soul, the stronger his rebirth.

Now, in 2025, in Ooty—in his 108th form—Ra approached the edge.

****

Sati, Sita's childhood friend, had always been different. Raised by a forest-dwelling aunt with psychic abilities, Sati's dreams often turned real. That week, they became nightmares.

Sita lying on an altar. Veer's face melting into many faces. A swirling portal of screaming shadows.

She jolted awake, eyes burning with urgency. She knew the signs.

Something evil had set its eyes on Sita.

****

Sati followed her instincts and snuck into Veer's home. What she found beneath a loose floorboard was terrifying.

A journal. Bound in stitched skin.

She flipped through it. Sketches of faces. Timelines. Incantations.

Then:

"Form 108: Sita Varadarajan. Completion due: 9 days. Purity Level: Divine. Ascension: Unstoppable."

Sati trembled.

"Ra… the ancient one," she whispered.

****

Sati cornered Sita at the tea stall near campus.

"Stay away from Veer," she hissed.

"Why? He's our librarian."

"He's not Veer. He's something else. He's planning something horrible."

Sita hesitated. Sati had always been sensitive. But this?

"If you don't believe me, come with me tonight," Sati said. "I'll show you."

****

That night, they trailed Veer into the forest behind the college. Sita clutched Sati's hand.

They saw Veer chant before a small pond, his reflection flickering unnaturally.

His face warped; his form pulsed. Multiple visages surfaced briefly before settling back.

Sita gasped. Veer turned. But they had already fled.

****

Now exposed, Ra sped up his plan.

He summoned nightmares to plague Sita. At night, she dreamt of drowning in blood. By day, her eyes darkened with exhaustion.

At college, Veer pretended concern.

"You're not sleeping well. Come to the library. I have something that may help."

****

On the 107th night, Sita disappeared.

Sati followed her essence to the abandoned St. Catherine's Chapel. There, in the flickering light of demonic candles, Sita lay limp on an altar.

Ra began the incantations. His body shimmered between his true form and Veer's.

"Tonight, I become eternal."

Sati burst in. She carried a yantra mirror etched in holy silver, wrapped in her aunt's prayer threads.

"I see you, Ra."

Ra growled. "Recognition too late. The ritual begins!"

"Sita, look at him! Remember the pond! The faces!"

Sita opened her eyes, met his.

"You're not Veer. You're a monster."

Ra screamed. His skin cracked. Faces of victims burst from his flesh, howling.

The altar shook. Sati threw the mirror. A vortex opened.

Ra clawed the air. Shadows dragged him in.

"Nooo! I was… almost—"

He was gone.

****

Peace returned to Ooty. Sita resumed her prayers. Sati buried the mirror deep in a temple cave, sealing it with salt, turmeric, and ash.

Yet, sometimes Sita paused at mirrors.

Because her reflection blinked out of sync.

And sometimes, it smiled before she did.

****

Balloon Man

The sun dipped below the horizon, casting an amber hue over the smog-ridden skies of Delhi. Traffic crawled along Ring Road, blaring horns echoing like cries of impatience. Amidst the chaos of honking cars and impatient drivers, a figure stood out at the red light near the busy intersection of Lajpat Nagar. A man with an odd demeanor, dressed in a tattered black overcoat, face hidden beneath a wide-brimmed hat, stood with a bundle of balloons.

But these were no ordinary balloons.

They were human-shaped, eerily realistic, resembling children in play poses. Some smiled, others looked surprised. The balloons came in vibrant colors but had an unsettling gloss to their eyes. Children, unable to resist, tugged at their parents' sleeves, begging to have one.

"Mumma, I want that red balloon!" shouted a young boy named Aarav, pointing enthusiastically.

His mother, tired from work, barely glanced up. "Fine, beta. One balloon and then we go home."

The Balloon Man said nothing. He simply extended his hand. Aarav's mother gave him fifty rupees. The Balloon Man gave her a red, smiling child-shaped balloon without a word.

That night, Aarav vanished from his bed.

****

A week passed. Then another child disappeared. Then another.

Police records showed an alarming pattern of missing children, all from areas within a few kilometers of that traffic signal. But with no evidence, leads, or clues, the cases went cold.

People began whispering. Some said it was trafficking. Others blamed organ harvesters.

But one man saw more.

An old beggar, known as Dinesh, who had lived by that signal for years, had noticed something no one else had. He'd seen the same man selling the balloons every evening. He noticed that the children who got the balloons never came back to the signal again.

Dinesh sat in a corner, his eyes narrowed.

"There's something wrong with that man," he muttered to himself, watching the Balloon Man silently drift from car to car.

****

Dinesh tried warning a few people. Most ignored him. Some laughed.

"Tu pagal ho gaya hai, buddhe. Balloons se bachhe kaise gayab ho sakte hain?" a paanwala sneered.

But Dinesh knew what he had seen. That night, he followed the Balloon Man.

From a distance, limping through alleys and deserted roads, Dinesh trailed him until they reached a derelict building near Okhla. There, the Balloon Man entered, carrying the balloons. Inside, Dinesh saw him kneel before a strange altar, a writhing shadowy form hovering over it.

The shadow spoke in a guttural voice, "Bring me more. Or be consumed."

****

The next morning, Dinesh went to the police station. At first, they dismissed him as a senile old man. But when he described the building and what he saw, Sub-Inspector Rana decided to investigate.

A team followed Dinesh's directions and found the old building. Inside, they found dozens of child-shaped balloons stored in a locked room. The smell of incense and rotting flesh lingered.

The Balloon Man was caught that evening, cornered at the signal.

Under interrogation, he finally spoke.

****

"I serve Him," the Balloon Man croaked. "I had no choice. He will kill me if I stop. He traps the souls of children in the balloons. I deliver them. He grants me life."

Rana was skeptical. "And how do we free the children?"

The man wept. "Only a copper needle. Nothing else will work."

"Why copper?"

"It conducts the soul's energy and disrupts His hold."

****

With haste, the police gathered copper needles and returned to the building. One by one, they burst the balloons. With each burst, a child appeared—naked, shivering, confused—but alive.

Twenty-nine children were rescued that night.

Parents flooded the station, many fainting upon seeing their children alive. Tears soaked uniforms. The media swarmed. But the government hushed the case, branding it a "hallucinatory mass rescue" caused by gas leaks in the area, protecting the fragile public psyche.

****

Back at the station, the Balloon Man sat silent.

Suddenly, he convulsed. His body twisted unnaturally, eyes bulging. He screamed as black smoke erupted from his mouth and eyes.

He was dead within minutes.

No cause was found. No trace of the shadow entity. But the disappearances stopped.

Dinesh was offered shelter by the grateful parents. He stayed at a government shelter for a few days, then vanished.

His tattered blanket was found in the alley near the same traffic signal.

****

Rana kept one balloon, unburst, locked in his drawer.

One night, unable to sleep, he stared at it. The balloon seemed to twitch. He held a copper needle.

Whispering filled the room. A voice—soft, pleading.

“Help… I’m still here…”

He burst it. A child appeared, just like before.

That night, Rana didn't sleep. He scanned every police case file on missing children across the city. How many balloons had the man sold?

Dozens? Hundreds?

He ordered copper needles for every outpost.

****

In the ruins of the Okhla building, a boy wandered too close one evening.

He found a corner of the basement where the altar had once stood.

There, shadows moved again.

The dark master had lost his servant.

But not his hunger.

A whisper curled through the filth: "Find me a new collector..."

****

Months later, at a red light near Connaught Place, a new figure appeared.

Clean-shaven, dressed in crisp white kurta-pajama, with a soft smile.

His balloons? Round. Ordinary. For now.

But Dinesh's blanket was found beneath his cart.

And among the balloons... one shaped like a smiling little girl.

****

Court Room: 56

Bombay, 1944. The monsoon clouds loomed heavy over the High Court of Bombay. Courtroom No. 56, an oak-paneled chamber with British crests on the walls and an air of solemn justice, was filled with murmurs. Judge Alistair Hawthorne adjusted his white wig and surveyed the courtroom through his monocle.

"Order in the court!" he thundered.

The accused, a wealthy zamindar's son named Rajan Malhotra, stood confidently in the dock. Charged with rape and murder, he smiled faintly as his British-educated barrister poked holes in the prosecution's case. Witnesses had disappeared. Evidence went missing. The jury, all Indian, looked demoralized.

Judge Hawthorne, known for his incorruptible sense of justice, leaned forward. He knew Rajan was guilty. But the law, as written, was not on his side today.

"Due to insufficient evidence and lack of credible witnesses," he said gravely, "the court has no choice but to acquit." The obvious miscarriage of justice was taking its toll on Hawthrone. His chest was feeling heavy after having revisited the horror of the crime and the condition of the victims body as described by the public procecutor.

Rajan smirked.

The gavel came down.

Hawthorne clutched his chest. His eyes bulged. His last words, loud and clear across the stunned courtroom: "You may escape this court, but not mine."

He collapsed on the bench. Dead.

That night, the watchman of Courtroom 56 ran out screaming. He claimed the gavel floated mid-air, striking the bench by itself. No one believed him.

****

Mumbai, 2023. Aditi Sharma, an investigative journalist for *The Veritas Post*, stared at the case file.

Rohit Chadda, a tech millionaire, had been acquitted the previous day of molesting his ex-girlfriend. Despite strong public outrage, the defense team cited tampered CCTV footage and "emotional instability" of the victim.

That night, Chadda was found hanging from his ceiling fan. A note was taped to his chest: "GUILTY."

CCTV footage showed no one entering his apartment. No forced entry. But the lights flickered precisely at 3:11 AM — the same time he had been acquitted the day before.

Courtroom: 56.

Aditi found three more such cases in the past six months. In each, the accused had manipulated the law, walked free, and died mysteriously within 48 hours.

Common thread being all these cases were tried in Courtroom No. 56. Coincidence?

****

She traced the history of the courtroom. Most records from 1944 were destroyed in a fire. But a retired clerk, Mr. Uday Bhatia, had kept copies.

"It started with Hawthorne," he rasped. "He was the last true judge."

Uday showed her a diary belonging to the judge. The final entry read: *Justice must not be a slave to law. The wicked hide behind paper. I will tear through it.*

****

1961: Pratap Singh, politician. Acquitted of orchestrating his rival's murder. Found dead with gavel-shaped wounds on his head. Courtroom: 56.

1977: Mahesh Mehta, chemical tycoon. Poisoned his wife but had a clean alibi. Died in a locked room. Autopsy revealed internal organs turned to liquid.

1992: A human trafficker acquitted due to police botching paperwork. Found hanged from the rafters of Courtroom 56. No security breach.

****

2004: Social media influencer Aryan Bhalla, accused in a gangrape case, walked free on grounds of "consensual ambiguity" and botched forensic collection.

Trial was held in 56 due to renovations in Courtroom 43.

That night, Aryan's car was found submerged in Powai Lake. No signs of struggle. His body had bruises resembling lash marks. Dashcam footage showed a figure in a black robe appearing in the back seat.

Aditi published: *The Ghost Judge: Bombay's Deadly Courtroom.*

She was called a lunatic.

****

Justice Rakesh Khurana invited her discreetly.

"My grandfather was Rajan Malhotra," he confessed. "He died, gibbering about a British judge who came in dreams. Said he'd be judged again."

Khurana presented sealed case records showing over 36 unexplained post-acquittal deaths. Common factor: Courtroom 56.

"He's not killing the innocent," Aditi murmured. "Only the ones who escaped real justice."

****

The issue was brought to the notice of the Central Law Minister. Although skeptical himself about any paranormal involvement, he could not deny the over whelming fact coming out of the files on his table. The government sent a forensic team. Nothing abnormal was found. But a night camera left behind recorded chilling footage:

Come Midnight. A ghostly figure appeared. Robes fluttering. White wig. Gavel in hand. Whisper: *All rise.*

The Ministry of Law ordered Courtroom 56 permanently sealed. Files reassigned. It became a document archive.

****

2026 A law intern tripped inside the archive room. A file had fallen on its own.

It was the case of a serial conman awaiting trial.

Scribbled on the folder in red ink: "Soon."

Outside the sealed chamber, the faint sound of a gavel echoed.

THUD.

THUD.

THUD.

****