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Introduction

This story is a flash fiction series inspired from the photograph captured by PhoTrablogger (aka Jithin). Each part of the series has been written by different person, hence the sudden twists and turns in the story.

Part I

Shadows loomed large around the old mansion. There was an eerie silence around it. The tall coconut palms swayed violently in the evening breeze, as if mourning over their isolation. Layers of dust encrusted the peeling, once brightly colored walls and fissured window panes bordered the enormous framework of the house. The shut doors ambiguously creaked in sorrow of its disintegration.

Maggy stood there, eyeing the dilapidated remains of the huge house, a tiny speck of tear peering out from one corner of her eyes. A waft of a cold breeze caressed her cheeks and she felt a cold shudder trickle down her spine. She took a deep breath and ventured forth, towards the rusty iron gates. It took her some time to open the lichen coated bolt and push open the gates.

'I hope Steve is home ...', Maggy thought to herself, as she knocked at the door, a little hesitatingly.

After knocking a few times, Maggy turned to leave when suddenly she heard footsteps behind the closed door. She turned around, as the door opened, only to be met by Steve, a tall, skinny old man, in his fifty's (though Maggy always felt he was much older than that!).

Steve inspected her through the rims of his spectacles and grinned all of a sudden, revealing a gold tooth, that gleamed from one corner of his mouth. Then, pushing the door aside with his gnarled fingers, he exclaimed, 'Oh ...it is you Maggy...you are early...Come on in...'

Then, lifting the luggage that Maggy had got along, he walked her into the living room of the sprawling mansion. Maggy followed Steve's bent figure, hobbling across the living room, and into a narrow corridor and then up a flight of rickety old stairs. The stairs creaked loudly at every single step. But other than that there was complete silence, the whole house seemed to be on a standstill...

Steve halted without warning, outside a room at the first landing. Having given himself the time to recuperate from the exhausting climb, he spoke with some strain in his voice, 'This is the room I have prepared for you. Hope it meets your requirements'.

After gauging Maggy's reaction, he added as an afterthought, 'I did think of allotting you, your grandpa's room, because I know you would want that so much, but you see, no body visits that room much anymore. Ever since your grandpa's mysterious disappearance, an year ago, his bedroom had been locked and secured to preserve all his valuable documents along with other things....Errr...I hope you understand dear...'

Maggy's face suddenly lost all color and she became pensive. Then suddenly, she looked up at Steve, faking a smile, and replied, 'It is alright...I know...I....' the lump in her throat refused to let her complete the sentence. But the tears that followed, conveyed her sentiments well.

Steve put a hand on her shoulder, trying to pacify her, but he knew how hurt grandpa's little girl was. It had been a year, yet Maggy had not been able to come in terms with the sudden tragedy that had befallen their family. Maggy was very close to her grandpa, and this was the first time since his disappearance that, she had managed to convince herself to visit his house.

But the purpose of her visit wasn't merely to revive old memories... It was much more than that...She wanted some answersShe was here for that..

It was ten in the night by the time Maggy finished with her sumptuous meal, prepared by Robert, the house cook. Robert was a young man in his late twenties, who had been employed by Maggy's grandpa, a few years ago. Once grandpa disappeared and was deemed dead, a year ago, Robert was asked to leave. But now that Maggy was here to stay, Steve had approached him to rejoin his post and to his surprise Robert had happily agreed....

At around five past eleven, Maggy finally retired to bed. As she lay there , staring at the ceiling , her mind a kaleidoscope of images and memories from the past , Maggy felt miserable ... How much she loved grandpa and what a wonderful person he had been....where was he now...is he actually dead?... With these thoughts, Maggy soon slipped into a deep slumber. But it was not for long....In the dead of the night a loud bloodcurdling scream reverberated through the rooms of the huge mansion...Maggy bolted upright in her bed, horrified.

Alarmed, and a little dazed from her sleep, she crept out of her bed and walked cautiously towards the direction of the sound.....

[By Sweety](#)

Part II

The night outside the house was filled with stridulating sounds from the crickets and the croaking of crows when Margaret opened her eyes as the loud shriek startled her from her sweet slumber. The full moon illuminated the dead night as the shadow of the tree's branches from the yard, swayed in enchantment on the yellow wall adjacent to her bed, and this too, was very unsettling. She breathed out her relief in a heavy sigh when she realised that it was just shadow. She has calmed down but the scream was too real to ignore and to go back to sleep.

"It must be an intruder," Maggy thought to herself. "No. Thieves are quiet! Don't be stupid Margaret," she shook her head as she said her thoughts out loud and scolded herself for being silly.

She flicked the switch of her bedside lamp only to find that the lights were out. The hard maple and birch wooden floor felt cold on Maggy's bare feet as she walked slowly and stealthily across her room and towards the door. As much as she would want to stay silent, the door betrayed her as it creaked loudly when she pulled the wooden door open.

"If this is a movie, this is probably the part where the audience would yell at the screen, telling the actor how stupid she is for going out of the room. Self-preservation should be top priority," she whispered to herself.

She was partially leaning on the wall for support and guidance as she walked along the long dark corridor. Her hand found a light switch along the way and flicked it but the power was still out. She was holding onto the wooden railings as she descended the stairs. The scream came from downstairs but she did not know where. Then she heard the sound of shattering glass from the kitchen. She felt her epinephrine shoot up. Her eyes widened in the dark. Her heart raced faster and she could feel it go up her throat. Margaret passed by the living room and picked up a lamp on a corner table for her to throw at the thief if it comes down to confronting him. "At least, I won't be too defenceless," she said to herself as she headed towards the kitchen.

The moonlight was bright enough to illuminate the half of the kitchen room. There was someone standing by the sink and he has something in his hand and it looked like a gun. He was tall and to Margaret, he looks like that he has a sturdy physique. She was observing him from the dark corner. She figured she could take him down whilst his back is turned from her. He won't even see her coming.

She tiptoed her way towards the man whilst holding the lamp over her head, ready to knock him out. But her plan of being discreet came to an end when she hit the chair and she almost stumbled and lost balance. The man turned and saw her.

"Hey!!!" the man said as he turned around.

"Oops!," was the only word that came out from her dry mouth. She threw the lamp at the man's head before he could inch closer to Margaret or shoot her. The ceramic body of the lamp shattered as it meets with the man's head. He fell down with a loud dull thump on the wooden kitchen floor.

She leaned towards the sink to grab a knife but before she could do so, the man got hold of her ankle. She tried to free herself from his grip by kicking him but the man was very tenacious. She could barely move her foot but she was determined to free herself from him.

"Hey!" the man said as he yanked on her ankle. He somehow loosened his grip and Margaret managed to release herself from him. She was about to give him another good night blow on the head, with her foot this time, when the lights suddenly came to life.

"MARGARET!!! STOP IT!" the man said as he managed to catch Maggy's foot before it landed on his face.

Margaret gasped and her face softened when she realised who the man was.

"Rob?" she said in disbelief.

"Hi," he said as he relaxed and closed his eyes.

"I'm so sorry. I thought you were an intruder and I heard a girl scream," she said apologetically as she kneeled on the floor beside Rob and examined his head for a cut.

"Yeah? Ummm... that was me. Sorry I woke you up," Robert said and laughed awkwardly. He massaged his temple with his palm as he chuckled.

"I did not recognise you. You look different!" she added.

"I was fat. I know." His dimple showed as he smirked and looked at Maggy with his hazel eyes.

"You were just a wee chubby," she said unconvincingly.

"Chubby would be an understatement Maggy," he said as he laughed and maintained his smirk. Blood filled Margaret's cheeks and she looked away hoping Robert wouldn't notice her flush.

"What are you doing here in the middle of the night?" she said changing the subject.

"I wasn't able to eat dinner and join you because I had to go to town and get something. I came down to grab some snack before heading to bed," he said waving the banana on his other hand.

"OHHH! I thought you were armed with a gun," she said with a trace of embarrassment in her voice.

"Yeah? BANGGG!!! You're dead." Robert said as he held the banana with both hands like a pistol and pointed it at Margaret as he said that. She laughed at their silliness. "It's great to see you again Maggy. You're more beautiful than I remember," he said as he sat up whist looking into the glimmering colour of her emerald eyes. Margaret grabbed his arm which felt firm under her grip as she helped him sit upright and they sat with their backs on the kitchen drawers.

"Again, I'm really sorry about your head," Margaret said apologetically as she noticed a tattoo on his nape and the now more prominent bruise on Robert's temple. "I'll get some ice," she said as she stood up.

There was something about Robert that she couldn't avert her eyes off. He might be eight years older than her but there is that rule that is not written anywhere but is widely known that girls mature faster than boys. He saw her glancing at him from behind the fridge door and smiled. Margaret smiled back subtly as she suppressed her giddy emotions for him but her cheeks betrayed her again. She gave him the ice pack and started picking up the broken pieces of the lamp.

Margaret felt an icy breeze caress her nape and it made the fine hairs on her body stand up. It was in the middle of summer and the windows were shut. She turned her head and looked at Robert. He was sitting very still, pressing his back hard on the drawers as he held up his index finger over his pursed lips, telling her not make a sound. He turned his gaze on the kitchen doorway and Margaret's green eyes followed and gaped at a moving shadow that belonged to no one in the room.

Then in a blink, the lights died again leaving only a pair of glowing red eyes, floating in the kitchen doorway...

By Travelling Hat

Part III

Maggy felt her heart stop the second time that night. She inched towards Rob, as softly as she could, eyes fixed on the shadowy figure in the doorway. As soon as she had reached closer, Rob gripped her hand making her look at him. In the moonlight streaming through the window, she could see his eyes telling her to move slowly behind the door, near the cabinet which had been their secret hiding place years ago. They could see the shadow moving slowly towards the kitchen and hastened to hide as fast as they possibly could. It was impossible to move fast and risk making themselves known, for the old wooden floor was bound to creak if they put too much weight on it. Only the firm grip of Rob on her hand stopped Maggy from shrieking herself with fear.

Though it might be a good idea to scream, she thought. At least there was a chance that Steve would be alerted and come to rescue or the noise might frighten whatsoever was in the doorway. While she was thinking this, they reached the door of the cabinet. The cabinet door opened without a single sound. Thank heaven Steve has oiled and maintained all the doors or we would be goners by now, she thought while hurriedly entering the cabinet. Rob came quietly behind her and closed the door, keeping just a small gap to peep through.

It was difficult to see properly in the dark, though the moonlight helped a bit. Rob was the only one able to see through the gap, since Maggy was sitting behind him. They could sense the shadow form entering the kitchen. It was an eerie sensation, a hint of sound coming from the room. It certainly didn't sound like human footfall. Suddenly she remembered the stories of the mansion and surrounding woods told by grandpa to her as a teenager. She had been a fan of ghost and horror stories and grandpa had been the only source of stories. *And what grand stories he weaved around the house and the woods, she thought. Maggy had enjoyed those stories thinking they were all a figment of his very creative imagination. Now she was not so sure. Whatever glimpse she had of the shadowy figure and glowing eyes, certainly didn't seem human.*

Suddenly the kitchen was filled by the sound of crockery breaking and they could hear Steve's distant yelling sound coming close. Rob peered back and told her *It is gone. He too must have sensed the in-humanness of the thing*, Maggy thought hearing him as he slowly ventured out of the cabinet. She followed. Before they could make sense of the mess in the kitchen, Steve reached there and stood by, shocked looking at them and the mess. His looks all too well suggested that he thought these two as the culprits of the scene.

By Saya

Part IV

“What happened here?” Steve asked, placing a firm gaze on Maggy and totally ignoring Robert like he was not there.

Maggy stood, staring at him and entirely transfixed! Her mind was flipping with copious thoughts as she tried to find an explanation to what had happened.

“I think we were attacked by something.” Robert came to her rescue.

“Attacked?” Steve sounded shocked. “This mansion hasn’t been robbed in years! Where did the thief pass? Where was his escape route?” Steve hurried to the windows of the kitchen to check the window locks and found them all bolted tight.

“I don’t think it was a He or She, I believe it was an ‘it’.” Robert spoke again, placing an emphatic stress on his last word.

“What are you talking about,” Steve lowered his voice as he approached Robert. “You mean a wild animal was here?”

“I am not sure of what I saw, but I do know it was coming for us, and its eyes meant death.”

“I think you both have been hallucinating, where would a wild animal possibly come from in this time of the—

“I know what I saw!” Maggy didn’t allow him to finish speaking, raising her voice to buttress her point, and breaking her record splitting silence. “I know what I felt!” She broke down into a cry and as she fell to the ground, Robert caught her in his arms, holding her firm to his macho body.

Steve watched them for a while and then he spoke.

“Maggy, I think you should retire to your room, I would have Robert escort you, and that is if you don’t mind.” He said. “By sunlight we would investigate into the matter, I am sure you would realize by then that everything is fine.”

“Maggy let us go,” Robert said, raising her to her feet.

She allowed him lift her up and leaned on him as they navigated towards her room. She shot a quick gaze behind her back and found Steve standing at the entrance of the kitchen, there was a look in his eyes, something that didn’t make her comfortable; something with a trifle of suspicion. She tore her gaze away and concentrated on where she was headed.

“I know what I saw Rob, I know.” She said to Robert.

“I was there, and I saw it too,” Robert managed to say.

There were at her room door now, and as Robert turned to leave, she held on firm to his hand.

“Please, stay,” She said, “I don’t want to be alone.”

“Okay,” He replied.

In a moment they were lying side by side on Maggy’s bed, and as the clock in her room ticked on, she fell asleep and slid into a dream.

The burden of ignorance that swept through her was disquieting. She was in darkness and it was concrete. She could feel the weight of it; its strength, its supremacy, its power.

She was somewhere around the mansion. She knew it. But what part of the mansion was she? Where was she heading? Why was she here?

She let these questions run through her thinking faculty as she navigated through the passages that branched into different directions.

She tried to study the surrounding; looking at the markings on the wall, and then it hit her, this looked exactly like one of the scenes Grandpa had painted in one of the horror stories he told her, this was it! The dungeon under the mansion, the fantasy place grandpa had created in his stories, or was it all real? She pondered.

“Help me!”

The voice she heard broke her off her thoughts.

“Help me!”

She heard the voice again, she knew the voice! It was her Grandfather.

“Grandpa! Where are you?”

“Help me!”

“Grandpa!” She was running now, diving into different passages, looking frantically for her Grandfather, but as she dived into yet another passage, she tripped and fell.

The fall took forever! She could feel herself moving back into reality, and as she touched ground, she snapped out of the dream.

She opened her eyes to meet Robert, seated on the only chair in the room, and staring at her.

[By Moses](#)

Part V

You are now reading Part 5 of the story. Please read the parts that came before so that you can enjoy the story and understand the flow.

Maggy sat up in her bed abruptly, shaken from the vivid dream she just had and saw Robert, sitting in a chair opposite, looking at her speculatively. Dawn was breaking outside. She saw the trees of the woods take form in the growing light. The cold light of the day did nothing to dispel her fears or to allay her apprehensions. She pressed her fingers to her temples. She felt overwhelmed by the turn of events.

She had arrived in her Grandpa's mansion the previous night in the hope of uncovering his mysterious disappearance a year back. But, the bloodcurdling scream in the middle of the night and the encounter with a shadowy form had left her nerves frayed.

Maggy swung her legs out of the bed but moaned as she tried to stand. Robert jumped up to help her. Maggy felt a vague discomfort as he steered her with his hand at her elbow. The touch of his soft shirt sleeve evoked memories of a childhood when she and Rob played in the kitchen, in the house and in the woods near the enormous mansion. The look in his eyes as he appraised her were cool but she could not forget the warmth of his gaze just the night before.

Maggy freshened up in the bathroom hurriedly and changed her clothes. "I would like to go for a walk", she announced weakly. Robert excused himself, saying he needed to be in the kitchen to plan the day's meals. With trepidation, Maggy walked out of the side door of the living room to the large and now unkept garden. The fringes of the once magnificent garden were slowly being encroached by the surrounding woods. Her grandfather had regaled her with fascinating stories of the woods when she was little. With a start, she remembered her dream, where she was in the dungeon of the mansion. "Is there really a dungeon here?", she wondered aloud. Her sound sounded hollow even to herself.

Maggy walked on. In her misery, she hardly looked at the tiny wild flowers growing in the bushes. The birds chirped, but her ears echoed with the sound of her Grandpa's voice, calling for help. She felt as if she were walking in a dream. As the bushes grew denser and the trees blocked out light, Maggy realised she had walked farther than she had realized. She turned to go back. Trying to untangle her clothes from the thorns of a plant, she noticed strange marking on one of the tree trunks.

Surprised, she came to herself with an alertness she had not felt before. She reminded herself of the reason of her visit to the mansion. She had to find out what had happened to her beloved Grandpa. Brushing the leaves off her clothes, she looked around keenly. There was another tree trunk with a similar mark on it. And another... if it was a trail, it seemed to be leading deeper into the woods. She would lose her way, Maggy realised. "I must come back with someone, maybe Rob".

Her heart quickened at the thought of Rob. With brisk steps, she walked back to the edge of the garden. Some of the beautiful wild flowers were trampled! Was she careless while entering the woods? Or had someone else been here, after her? Following her?

Maggy quickly entered the house through the small kitchen door. Robert was drying the dishes with a towel. Last night's mess had all been cleared away. The door of the cabinet they had hidden in last night was ajar. Following Maggy's gaze. Robert walked over to close the door. All of a sudden, Maggy heard a deep, rumbling sound coming from the cabinet? Or was it from beneath the wooden floor of the kitchen? No, she was not mistaken because the vibrations travelled through her body.

Shocked, Maggy looked at Rob but his expression was masked. “Rob”, she blurted out, “Is there a dungeon underneath the mansion”?

“Dungeon? No!”, he said almost harshly. Maggy felt lightheaded. As she swayed on her feet Rob shot out a hand to help her and she saw the crushed petals of the wild flowers on his shirt sleeve...

[By Sona](#)

Part VI

Margaret, had felt the safest in Robert's hands last night. It was almost funny, how even after looking at those wild flowers, Margaret still felt comfortable, warm and safe there.

There a million thoughts that ran through Margaret's mind. She didn't know whether or not to trust the gut that told her it was safe to trust Robert, and for all these years, her gut had never once been wrong.

She was snapped out of her thoughts when Steve came in to the kitchen making loud creaking sounds on the floorboards that were loose.

Steve gave Maggy and Rob an almost accusing look. He was furious with the two of them for how things had turned out last night.

Maggy not backing down her stare only straightening up cause she didn't want to seem feeble or wrong. She said, ' I'd like to have word with you Steve, now.'

Moving towards the Cabinet in which Rob and she had hidden themselves last night.

Steve was utterly confused, cause that was very unlike Margaret who had always been a sweet child never once commanding.

Maggy, asked Steve the same question she had asked Rob.

Was there a dungeon beneath the house?

Steve, too rickety to lie well, murmured out a few objections and denied knowing anything about it.

This gave away a lot more than Maggy was actually even prepared to know.

After a couple of minutes of thinking, she declared that she was going to go down the cabinet and find out what there was.

Rob and Steve, clearly unprepared, gently asked Maggy to not push the matter.

That, there was only a small room for storage down there and nothing more.

This made Maggy even more determined to go down there and find out for herself.

After several protests and haggling, they all decided to go down there together after lunch.

Maggy braided her blonde hair and got into a comfortable pair of jeans and top and got some torches to see clearly.

They all the started down at around 3 in the afternoon.

It was chilly and dark down there.

As far as Maggy could see, there was more to it than just one storage room down here.

It was like the labyrinth down there. A thought crossed Maggy's mind, *what if it was the labyrinth?* She brushed it aside, cause it was a silly thought she'd only picked up from one of her fiction books.

Just After an hour, Maggy felt tired, and Steve and Rob were on the lead. Maggy heard some shuffling behind her. She thought it was just Steve with his heavy boots and clumsiness.

And she felt a blow to her head and fell down to ground with a loud thud. The last thing she remembered seeing was her grandfather's face...

[By Manvi](#)

Part VII

A warm burn at the base of her neck woke her up. She rubbed at it for a moment before she realized she was laid out on a hard bench. She felt the cold, damp wood with her hand and all the confusion of the last day or so came flooding back. She was in a very dark room and could see nothing but a stale yellow light that came through under the bench in front of her. Terror kept her face down, but she could hear a shuffling taking place across the room.

"This is sick man," Robert's voice echoed off the cavernous basement. "I didn't agree to this."

"Shut up," Steve ordered. His voice was deeper, fuller and healthier than it had been earlier. It was the voice she had often heard as a child, ordering her back on to the sidewalk out of the flowers. "You don't want Frank to have to hit her again, do you?"

"He does it again, I'll kill him," Rob barked.

"Shh-" Steve said. "Calm down boy, Frank took no pleasure in assaulting the Misses either. She got the jump on us, all right? The ceremony was not prepared--"

"Damn your ceremony." Rob fired back.

She had to bit her hand from screaming. She couldn't believe Rob was even having this conversation. "Listen boy," Steve said, "a deal's a deal. You've been paid, right?" She could taste her own blood, as she bit down at this. "Now help us with this final part and it'll all be over, okay? Now reach down there and grab the man's leg and slip it into the metal slot there."

There was the sound of more grunting as the two men wrestled with their work on the other side of the room. Warm tears were now spilling down the side of Maggy's cheek, as she tried with all her might to suppress a scream.

"There. Great." Steve said. "You look wonderful Sir. Never better, I think."

"I am going to be sick," Rob said.

"Ah enough of that now," Steve said. "After everything outside can't be much left in you anyway. Now here just help me with these last two straps."

"No way," Rob said. "I am not touching him anymore."

"You ingrate," Steve said. "This is your benefactor, the honourable Sir William Somerset, who is responsible for every little favour and nicety of your pathetic existence, Robert Brittle. So please in final execution of your duties to the Sire, place his wrist into that strap. Please before Frank gets back--".

There was massive explosion as the door to the dungeon was slammed shut. It was followed by the slow shuffle of feet.

The shuffle was terrifying. Frank must have walked with a limp because every step was a loud slam as he tossed his healthy leg forward and then a rough slide as he pulled the other one along. She listened to this sick cycle as it flopped down the stairs. The sound of it on the hard rock of the basement was too much for her.

She exploded up off the bench with a belly ripping scream. It was kicked right out of her by the sight now before her. There was her Grandpa. He was in a classic black and white tuxedo and stood arms outstretched as if he was about to embrace his special sweetie. The mortician must have been a Master because her Grandpa now looked ten years younger, waistline gone and a full head of hair, just like Maggy liked to remember him.

There were signs though, signs that in her heightened fear stood out. The eyelids closed shut with jewelled clips, the tips of his hands patched with grey, which peeked through the smeared makeup on his hands, a loose lifeless hang in his posture, an unsightly bulge in his throat, all told her that Grandpa was definitely dead.

Worse still, in some sort of sick mockery, there on top of her Grandpa's head was a giant purple and turquoise, diamond encrusted fish head. His hands were stretched over a black base of granite that had a basin of water at the top. The whole scene was garishly backlit by candles and a single house light, which cast a web of sparkles in the water.

Steve and Ron stood on either side of her Grandfather. Steve looked proud and Rob looked embarrassed. Terror sent another rumble up her throat, but then Frank came through the door. Her mind folded in on her. There was her Grandpa again, but like he had been when she had last seen him alive, bald, hunched over, pudgy around middle, but now he walked with a pronounced limp. He was in a tuxedo too and he looked right at her and smiled.

Steve burst into announcement. "All hail the honourable Lord and Servant of That which Defies Nomination and Explanation, Brother of our honouree tonight, Sir William Somerset, and Great Uncle to the Holy Transcendent (that's you Maggy), Frank Somerset!"

"Ah good she's awake," Frank growled. "Has she agreed to the ritual?"

"No Sir," Steve said. "I was just about to inform her of the duties."

[By Austin](#)

Part VIII

Maggy looked at her grandfather transfixed for a minute and then shuttling her gaze between a young bejewelled version and her grandfather, the one who was warm and cared for her, she lay confused, dumbstruck. What on Earth was happening! She wanted to shout and scream for answers, wanted to bolt right into the arms of her grandfather but looking at him growl at Steve made her skin crawl.

“Let us try to talk to her peacefully, this wasn’t in the plan”, Rob cautioned Steve.

“Isn’t there one thing that you guys can do? What am I paying you for?” Frank snarled and growled at Steve and Rob.

Maggy couldn’t fathom what had happened to her grandfather, who was this demon in his place? Not once ever did her grandfather talk rude to anyone! He couldn’t even hurt a fly!

“Let me handle it from here”, Frank declared and instructed Steve and Rob to leave.

Honestly for the first time ever Maggy felt that the presence of Steve and Rob who though had backstabbed her, would be comforting. Rob peeked a glance at her before he left, his eyes sorry. She wanted to plead and beg to not be left alone with a bejewelled man and a man who looked like her grandfather.

Frank pulled a chair that lie on one corner of the room and put it next to where Maggy lay.

“Hey sweetheart!” he cooed, making himself comfortable on the chair and traced her jaw, brushing aside the stray strand of hair that managed to free itself from her braid.

“Now, I know you have questions but you have to be patient. Are you not happy looking at your grandpapa? Do you remember at how everyone in the town had thought that I was a mad scientist because I spoke about reversing age, of becoming young again, of never facing the perils of old age. Well you see, I have achieved it! Though it wouldn’t be possible without a bit of witch-craft!” he told gleefully, rubbing his palms together.

Maggy could see a glint in his eyes, his smile laced with evil, there was something almost maddening about him. Her mind raced to all the times that the people of the town called him mad, that he was a rich man who had lost his marbles. For most of his life, her grandfather remains imprisoned in this massive house, disappearing for long hours in his vast property.

Suddenly the bejewelled man stirred, like he was coming back to life.

Maggy’s scream died in her throat.

“Grandpa”, she barely managed to squeak, paralyzed with fear, she kept silently praying that this would turn out to be just a bad dream.

“Oh! Don’t you worry about him. You see sweetheart, I need someone to offer themselves up for sacrifice, from the family. Won’t you do this little favour for your grandpa?” he asked her sweetly, like the times that he asked her for a kiss when he got her chocolates.

Petrified, Maggy could hear her heart beat in her ears and as the bejewelled man made his way to her, stretching out his hands, suddenly the entire world around her started spinning fast, her mind blanked out and all the sights around her blurred.

And a deafening silence descended.

“Then? What happened didi?” Faint and meek voices chirped in unison from under the blanket.

“Then, nothing happened. It is way past your bed time already. If you don’t wake up on time tomorrow for school then I will be scolded at for keeping you up. Now huddle close and go to sleep, or else Frank Uncle and the bejewelled man will come to get you. Hee ha ha ha”, Nita mimicked as she stretched out her hand to tickle her cousins.

Tucking her cousins into bed, she took a look at the photograph and let out a deep sigh. When did she grow up so big that she had to leave her family behind to cover stories about mysterious locations? A big fan of ghost stories and adventure tales, how she wished that something on the lines of the story she just narrated happened to her too.

She put the picture under her pillow and slept, lest she misses the train which was a ticket to the adventure that she had always waited for.

[By Wandering Storyteller](#)

Part IX

Nita remained busy throughout the next day and when she got back home, her cousins wanted her to finish the story. Nita completed the daily chores and then went about narrating the remaining part of her unfinished story. This is where she commenced-

Maggy was terrified that Frank has developed some magical potion as a panacea for eternal youth and now wanted her as a guinea pig for further confirmatory tests. She tried to reason out with Frank but all her request were in vain.

Maggy, "Grandpa it is not correct to interfere with the nature, what you are doing is unethical."

Frank replied, "This world doesn't differentiate between ethical and unethical as long as it serves the mankind, obviously the end justifies the means. Are you aware of the possibilities that will come our way if the trial I plan to conduct on you is successful? This will be a quantum jump for the mankind."

His eyes opened wide.

Maggy shivered as the fear of some unknown tragedy being struck ravaged her inner soul, she tried appealing to the goodness in her Grandpa which was overshadowed by the demonic being of Frank. Tears welled up in her eyes and Maggy dabbed the handkerchief to wipe them, clearing her throat she began,

"Rob dear, how can you support something that's so evil and is against the tenets of societal norms. Moreover where is the surety that nothing bad will happen to me? If something bad happens can it be undone."

Nita's cousins were listening in rapt attention as the story was entering in the uncharted domain.

Rob was transfixed as though he had no will of his own, he fidgeted in his pants and with pleading eyes turned towards Frank and requested, "Sir, what Maggy is saying is true, although we've helped you in your scheme of things but harming your own family for wicked purposes is not good. I request you to spare Maggy and take me instead for subject trial."

Frank appeared in no mood to listen and growled back at Rob, "You dumb fool it's for your betterment and that of society that I ventured into this field. How dare you question my selection of specimen for trial?"

As the tension in the room rose the silence brought an eerie feeling of impending doom. Rob knew that if he had to save Maggy, some drastic action was needed. In a fraction of second he shoved Frank aside and grabbed Maggie by her hand to escape from her from her tormenting grandpa. In the blink of an eye Rob and Maggy were darting away through the alleys of old mansion. They were running for their lives without looking back, continued running till their lungs gave away, God knows for how long. They fell in a heap of cattle feed and went into deep slumber.

It was a sunny resplendent morning. The rain-washed sun of early autumn took the hue of pure gold. Its brilliance made Maggy look more beautiful. The way Rob's inconstant little heart behaved was embarrassing for himself but his gaze was fixed on Maggie who was an angel sleeping blissfully. He gently hold her hand and bent down to kiss her. His warm breath forced Maggie to wake up. She could feel Rob's moist lips on her forehead. His broad chest almost touched her petite silhouette.....

By Rashmi

Part X

“What happen next?” Nita’s cousin asked eagerly as she looked out the window, rain had begun to fall outside. Nita was pausing the story both for dramatic effect and the fact that she had no idea what happened next. She had no clue her hyper cousins would be so into the story.

She cleared her throat loudly, inhaled a deep breath, reached deep into her mind and continued...

Maggy smiled in her sleep. She rolled over and could feel the roughness of the hay. Her eyes burst opened and she bolted up, suddenly remembering everything from the previous night and how she’d come to be nestled among these hay. She glanced around and realized she was in the barn about two miles from the mansion.

Rob’s arms stretched high up in the air, his t-shirt pulled up revealing his lean abdomen. “Good morning.” Maggy said.

Rob turned around, a little startled, and smiled brilliantly. “Good morning to you too.”

“What’s for breakfast?” He blinked. “Oops, forgot.” She covered her mouth and giggled. It didn’t take long before they both burst into laughter.

Snap...

Their laughter ended abruptly when they heard that. Maggy gasped. “What was that?”

Rob pulled her up from the pile of hay they’ve been sleeping on. “Come on.” Quietly, they made their way to the back of the barn and hid themselves behind a thick stack of hay.

Footsteps entered the barn, sets of footsteps, Maggy could differentiate. She was sure she knew who they belonged to but she needed reassurance. She turned to Rob with pleading eyes. Can you see who it is? Her look told him. He nodded and slowly inched forward to get a look at the intruders. When he did, he immediately sprang back.

Maggy opened her mouth. Is it them? She was going to ask but Rob threw his hand over her mouth.

“Shh,” he whispered quietly and guided her out the back door.

The moment they’re out, Rob pulled his hand from her mouth and they broke off in a sprint. Rob was a quick runner but Maggy, on the other hand, was running out of breath. At the bottom of the hill, Maggy stopped, her hands rested on her knees. She panted. “Rob...wait.”

Ahead, Rob continued running but he soon realized Maggy was no longer behind him. Maggy? He thought, stopped, and looked back. Maggy was at least a hundred yards behind. She was kneeling on the grass, panting. His eyes shifted from her to something in the distance. Two figures stumbling toward her. Good lord, he thought. They’re coming.

Maggy stared at him as his expression quickly shifted to anxious and worried. He waved his arm frantically, motioning her to go toward him quickly.

Maggy turned around and gasped. Frank and Steve were staggering quickly toward her. She turned back to Rob who was already jogging toward her. She was caught in the middle. She picked her up and began jogging toward Rob but her legs were like jelly. Jeez, pick it up, won't ya. She urged her legs.

Her stomach growled from hunger and her heart pounded in her ears both from panic and exhaustion. She stretched her hand toward him but when they were just a finger away, she felt a triple sting in the small of her back. The remaining strength in her legs suddenly felt completely drained as everything before her swirled. Her knees fell on the grass as her eyelids drooped.

Faintly before the darkness gave way, she saw Rob fell to his knees as well, the end of three red darts stuck out of his left shoulder.

[By Yinglan](#)

Part XI

“Run, run. Don’t trail behind. Keep moving the beast won’t stop till we’re dead. All the scrapes on our knees will tell you where we’ve been. Where we have bled...”

Maggie woke up to a sweet song playing on the radio booming from the other room as the sun warms her cheeks whilst it made its way through the cracks on the wall in her cell, revealing dusts floating in the rays of the light. She tucked her hair behind her ear as she pushed herself and shifted to an upright sitting position. She then reached for the darts on her back. She screamed out in pain and then bit her lower lip to suppress her cry. Rob was still sleeping on his stomach in a bed attached to the wall next to hers with three darts sticking out of his left shoulder. Maggie stood with her legs still feeling silly as she went over to Rob to remove the tranquiliser darts.

Her fingers were an inch away from the dart when a voice from the other side of the bars startled her. “Hmmm... He should be awake by now. The darts are prefilled with Midazolam but Steve must have filled it with a higher dose,” Frank said trying to sound concerned. “I’m sorry we shot you too. That is the only way you will cooperate and sweetheart...” he said sweetly. “I need you to cooperate. Don’t try to escape this time because you won’t get away. I will make you comply,” he added with a stern warning.

“Cooperate? You’re asking me to die willingly! You’re completely mental!” Maggy shouted at Frank.

“You will comply,” Frank nodded as he smirked with a vile look dancing in his eyes.

“You can die trying or else I will kill you” she threatened with retribution.

Frank laughed atrociously before responding with what he thought to be a witty remark, “Silly girl, you can’t kill someone who’s already dead.”

“Please don’t do this, please” Maggy said clutching the cold metal bars as she pleaded him.

“I will soon find out how to make you comply,” Frank said as he turns away from Maggy and the cell.

“How will she comply?” Nita’s little cousin tugged the hem of her shirt when she paused her narration. She was looking at the photograph in her hand, a picture of the mansion. It has something written on the back that she didn’t notice before.

“Huh?” Nita said as she looked down at him looking a tad lost.

“How will she comply?” the little lad repeated.

Nita smiled and sat down on the bed and with her little cousin. “Mark Fesseront, you are one curious little lad. Where is your twin brother?” she said whilst looking around the room for Mark’s twin.

“I will tell him what you are going to tell me,” he said showing much enthusiasm.

"We can't go back to the story without him. It would be unfair don't you think?" Nita said as she looked at the writing at the back of the photograph then to Mark.

"How will she comply?" Mark said as he clutched Nita's wrist, tightening his grip. She noticed the blood on his hand and the blood stain on the hem of her shirt. "I know you have a gift Nita. I have a gift too and I can tell right now that your brain just forecasted the answer to my question," he said as his face brewed a grimmer expression.

Nita glanced at the writings at back of the photograph and realised something when she turned it upside-down.

"Rob, are you okay? You've been doing that since you woke up," Maggy said as she peeked at what Rob was etching on the wall.

"I'm fine," he said flatly without looking at Maggy as he continued engraving the same words repeatedly on the wall.

"Can't you say and write anything other than "I'm fine"? I'm starting to think that you're going mental too," Maggy muttered as she settled herself on Rob's bed.

"I'm not crazy Maggy," Rob said in an almost whispering tone as he dropped the stone on the dusty floor. He took a step back as he marvelled at what he had written. "It's all about perspective. Sometimes you just have to see things differently," he added.



"IT looks bonkers to me Robert. THIS..." she said as she waved her hands to her surroundings.

"I know it looks crazy to you. It would have looked crazy to me too but it's not. Trust me Maggy. I know you have a lot of unanswered questions. I know some things and I will tell you everything I know" he said.

"I DID TRUST you Robert but you led me down here. Why? Why were you with them? And why did you have a sudden change of heart and decided to help me now?" she said with a shaky voice.

"I was supposed to protect you and I did a pretty bad job at it. I came from a family line of guardians called the Dark Tamers. We have sworn to protect the first Ellesmerian and her descendants. Maggy, you are a Royal Ellesmerian, the last of your kind," Rob looked deep into her eyes as he explained.

Maggy's forehead was creased with doubtful lines. She couldn't exactly wrap her head around what Rob was trying to say. "And what is an Ellesmerian? What happened to the others?" the crease between her eyebrows grew more prominent when she asked.

"The first Ellesmerian was the one who built Ellesmere and restored order in the land of what was once called, Dürth Vanwalden, the land of black magic. It's the realm beyond the woods," he said. Rob grabbed the hem of his shirt and lifted it off, revealing a more toned trunk and posterior as he turned his back from Maggy. "This mark on my nape, do you remember seeing it elsewhere?" he asked as he felt her finger trace his tattoo.

"It's the same mark I saw on the trees in the woods," she gasped and then gaped at Rob's tattoo when it gave a golden glow. Then more lines appeared all over his body. The once black phoenix tattoo on his nape was giving a golden burning glow. He turned to face Maggy and his chest, abdomen and even his limbs were covered with glowing golden shapes and lines.

Rob looked beautiful. Maggy could not help but admire the sight in front of her. "Did you wash the dishes in Ellesmere, too?" Maggy smiled as she playfully made fun of him.

"Maggy you must understand that in this world, magical or not, nothing is perfect. Even the Ellesmerian line was corrupted. Black magic penetrated the realm hundreds of years ago bringing imbalance and chaos in the kingdom. The Royal Ellesmerian line was divided. It was in King Peter's time when a traveller called Luna from a place called Pandora came to the kingdom. They said she was a beautiful woman with dark powers. She bore him a child. The truth can never be hidden in Ellesmere and the Queen soon knew about the child and she has ordered a search. She wanted to kill the baby but because Ellemerians are kind and forgiving people, she forgave the King's infidelity and she took the baby boy and asked a common man to look after the baby instead. She also bore the King another child, a girl, Ophelia," Robert paused as he shifted in his bed and grew more serious.

When she came of age, she inherited her parent's throne and not too long after that, she fell in love with a human she met outside the realm. She brought him into the kingdom and married him despite her parents' and the councils' words of warning. They had twins and soon after she gave birth to them, she learned that the man she was married to was —,"

"Her brother," Maggy finished.

"Yes, Ganymede! Luna even named him after the moons. He wasn't evil. He didn't have any magic. He turned out to be ordinary man" Rob added.

"And the twins?"

"It's where the division of the Royal Ellesmerian bloodline took effect. One of them was the bearer of the dark magic. They didn't know that until one of the twins, Carus tried to kill Philip, his twin. He believed that if he kills him, he will grow more powerful and he would no longer have to prove himself worthy of the throne," Rob explained as beads of sweat formed on his forehead.

"Which line did I come from?" Maggy hesitated to ask.

"We don't know which line you came from," Rob looked away. "Your great uncle Frank and your grandfather are not really twins. Ophelia didn't give birth to twins. One of them was a doppelgänger and that was Carus. Frank is your grandfather's doppelgänger. He convinced your granpa that they were brothers. He knew nothing about Ellesmere or him being an Ellesmerian until about a year ago when Frank came to him but he knew there was magic in him," he looked down at his feet. "I'm sorry I wasn't around to save him. Frank has stripped me from my powers," he said as his teardrops seeped through the fabric of his trousers.

Maggy placed her hand on Rob's and pulled him close to an embrace. "Sshhh! It's okay," she soothed.

"I will not let his death go in vain," he promised with firm conviction.

"What will happen if I meet my doppelgänger?" she asked.

Just when she thought she knew the answer to her question, Rob surprised her with what he said next. "You don't have a doppelgänger Maggy. Like I said earlier, you are a Royal Ellesmerian and you are the last of your kind," Rob finally looked at her again as he explained.

"What do you mean last of my kind? What about you? You're an Ellesmerian too! Certainly, I am not the last," she reasoned.

"I meant you are the only Original Royal Ellesmerian left and of course I'm Ellesmerian but I'm not royalty, I'm a Dark Tamer, a guardian of the realm, protector of the Original Royal Ellesmerian family line," Rob said as he dropped on one knee and bowed his head in front of Maggy. "I will protect you until I have consumed my last breath.

"Ummmkaythanksss...", Maggy said as she giggled and added, "Let's not get too carried away," she smiled as she pulled him back to sit on the bed. "Thank god you lost weight or else I don't think I can pull you up from your knee," she added.

"Being fat was part of my cover," he said proudly.

"Frank is not an Original Royal Ellesmerian?"

"Nope. He wants to harvest your powers when you turn 20 but until then, he won't kill you. He would want to experiment on you. He has plenty of schemes devised under his sleeves. He wants to merge the Ellesmerian power with science." Rob explained.

"That's right Robert. I'm glad your true colours really came out," Frank suddenly interjected. "Maggy, sweetheart... how can you trust Rob? He's a traitor. He betrayed you. He betrayed me too. He will betray you again," he said questioning her decision.

"You murderer!" Maggy said accusingly at Frank.

"Come in here and fight me," Rob challenged him.

"Careful what you wish now child. I might give it to you," he cautioned as he rubbed his hands together. Maggy noticed that he was muttering something under his breath but she couldn't hear him or read his lips. He looked like he was moulding a scarlet coloured orb which he then threw towards Maggy's direction. Rob quickly pivoted and turned to her direction, blocking the orb but as soon as it made contact to his skin, he fell flaccidly on the floor, spreading the dusts around the cell. His body buzzed with electricity and the cell smelled of singed hair.

Then she felt the room move. She couldn't distinguish whether she was dizzy or if the floor was shaking. She looked at Frank who seemed to grow concerned when he felt the tremors too. He glanced at Maggy. In that moment they locked their gazes as they figure out if one of them was causing the increasing magnitude and intensity of the quake. Walls and the ceiling started to crack and in a blink, a flash of light came through it and what stood before Maggy, was a girl holding a photograph and a boy.

Maggy saw Frank's eyes widen in shock as he saw the boy. "You must be Frank Somerset. I had a vision about you," the girl said.

"What did you find out?" Frank said coolly eyeing her and the boy.

"She knows how she..," the boy looked at Maggy as he put the emphasis on his last word before continuing and turning his glance back to Frank. "...will comply," Mark said with glowing red eyes.

"I also know how to kill you and your doppelgänger!" Nita kicked Mark hard on the chest as soon as she saw Frank throw something like a red orb towards her way.

The scarlet orb didn't affect Mark but Nita kicked him hard enough to delay him from attacking her. He didn't even flinch or convulse like Rob did. Maggy sensed that he was evil.

Nita suddenly raised the photograph of the mansion for Frank and Mark to see as she tears it in two. Maggy gasped in shock as she saw the little boy's head crack in half as scarlet red light escaped the fissure. "The only way to kill your doppelgänger is to destroy its medium. This photograph happens to be the medium you used for Mark," she said victoriously at the now furious Frank.

Just as Nita was about to tear the photo into smaller pieces, her left arm caught one of Frank's red electric orbs. Her body fell next to Rob as it buzzed with electricity. Maggy quickly darted to recover the torn pieces of the photo. She then muttered, "PHYROS!" Blue flames escaped from her palms and she watched the picture burn in her hands. The room flashed a scarlet coloured light as Mark's body burst into flames before turning into ashes. Before the blinding flash, she saw Steve dragging Frank's body away from the scene but now both of them were gone.

Maggy stood perplexed as she tried to process the things that just occurred. She placed her palms on her cheeks and they felt warm. She picked up the stone Rob used to write on wall. She held it in her palms and stood in front of the barred gate. She closed her eyes as she muttered phyros in her head and she felt a sudden wave of warmth run through her arms as she released the flaming blue stone. It hit the metal with a bang as puffs of smoke filled the cell. The barred metal gate was barred no more.

Rob stirred and moaned in pain as he sat upright. "Don't move just yet," Maggy said when she noticed him.

"I'm okay. Help me get her up. We need to burn the place down," Rob said as he scooped himself and Nita up.

"I'll do the burning," Maggy smirked.

"Don't," Rob cautioned her. "You'll exhaust yourself and you will wear your energy out before we even reach Ellesmere. Frank and Steve might be around we need to hurry," he added breathing heavily. He was in obvious pain.

EPILOGUE

Maggy saw the memories burn in flames as it consumes the mansion. She said a silent prayer for her grandfather as she watched and stood in a hidden trail that leads deeper into the woods. The gloomy skies paled in comparison to the black smoke coming from the burning mansion. After the prayer, she turned her back and walked towards Rob and Nita, who were both sitting under the first marked tree that was in sight. She figured that Phoenix is the sigil of Ellesmere.

Rob and Nita stood when they saw her approaching. They must get on with their journey to Ellesmere.

“How many doppelgängers does Frank have?” Maggy asked Rob and Nita.

“I don’t know,” they said in unison.

“Mark has a twin brother. He killed him,” Nita said whilst looking at the blood stain on her shirt. “You summoned me at the perfect moment, Robert. I was with Mark when I saw the writings at the back of the photograph. I realised that Frank Somerset has anagrammed his doppelgänger’s name to MARK FESSERONT. He needs better anagramming skills,” Nita laughed along with Maggy and Rob as they trail deeper into the woods.

“Yeah he could have used the other anagram for his name,” Maggy added with a snide remark

“What?” Rob and Nita chorused.

“FREAK MONSTERS,” Maggy said and the three of them burst into a loud boisterous laugh as they walked their way to Ellesmere.

“Still... Your ‘I’m fine’ is the best way to say S.O.S. I knew it was from you when I turned the photo upside-down” Nita added.

“Sometimes you just have to see things that way,” Rob said to Nita. “You just have to see things differently,” he said as he smiled and winked at Maggy.

By James

**Thank
You**