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**WOLVES IN THE HILLS**

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The sun had just sunk behind the hills, setting the horizon ablaze in pink. I popped my head out of the window and peered up the valley from the old mansion. There were no signs of my dear lady I was eager to welcome back to our dreary abode. As I patiently planted my gaze on at the desolate road with my head resting on my elbow, I caught myself nodding off.

“Oh! No! I must not doze off so early in the evening. Mum would be peeved, if I were to miss the dinner again”.

With no one in sight, as far as my weary eyes could see, I slipped into the kitchen to feed my hungry stomach. Indeed, the long trod through the woods from my school in the country side had left me dizzy. Unfortunately, I could not have anything to prey upon, since the little banana I had nibbled a while after lunch. I stretched up in vain for the cupboards that stuck high in the kitchen. My little lingering fingers tried opening its door with my entire body propelled by my instinctive toes.

“Oops! How stupid I’m!” The jar of biscuits tumbled down the shelf.

“Clink...” The shattered jar strewn around the kitchen winked at me.

Thus was eclipsed my earnest endeavour, in satiating my gnawing pain of hunger. Since my earnest effort got nipped in the bud so rudely, my stinging appetite seemed to vanish. I grudgingly retreated into the living room.

“If only mum had agreed to move to a smaller abode near the town...”

Actually, I was not fond of this old mansion with its many rooms lying empty. Besides, the daily drudgery to plod down home through the path meandering miles and miles through of huge oaks and towering pines from my school in the far end of the village just sucked my succour out.

Hence, I could not rid myself of the wishful thinking that had we lived near the town, she would have been home ages ago. Incidentally, I could never fathom why we lived so far away from the rest of the civilisation. Over these seven long years of my recognisable memory, I had been tempted more than once to slash the howling woods at one go with a magical sword on my way back from school. Indeed, that could have rendered my walk up and down much easier on my spine. And, certainly, it would have saved me from the mortal fear forced upon me by my mother’s everyday warning: “Beware of the treacherous wolves in the hills, my son”.



As I lay on the sofa staring at the massive mahogany chair in the study, suddenly, I realized that all my appetite had gone, but, now, the hunger seemed to pop up again. So, I ventured upon my next attempt. As I lugged the massive chair into the kitchen, the aged teak floor creaked for the whole world to hear. Filled with a sense of pride at my ingenious manoeuvre, I climbed atop the huge chair. This time, I opened the cupboard and tried to take something out. But, alas! I found my hand stuck with cob webs only.

“Why on earth did I toss the banana into the bushes without finishing it?” That banana which seemed so tasteless a few hours ago, appeared exceedingly delectable now in retrospect.

Having abandoned the hunt, I returned to my lookout near the window. Seated in silence, I reassured my troubled self with the same piece of wisdom that never failed to wipe my tears away: ‘Mum will return and all will be well’.

Meanwhile, the sun was long gone and there was still no sign of her. Even the short hedge a few yards off the window was gone now, as the foggy night lay enveloped in the glimmer of the crescent moon which played hide and seek with the dark clouds. My anxiety gradually worsened into agony. Eventually, my restlessness gave way to recklessness.

I leapt out of the window onto the lawn. Barely had I ventured into our own backyard than the wilderness had pounced upon me. As I pulled my body back on my feet, I found the grass standing tall reaching my shoulders. I trudged through the thick foliage, and walked out of the gate. A pause for precaution followed this demonstration of chivalry as I shrewdly squinted in either direction down the trail. I had always trusted my acumen to brave the dangers of the unknown. Pumped with the adrenaline that had my body in its command, I sprinted for the woods.

The terrain was rapidly slipping down under my feet as I ran deeper into the woods. I had always believed that as long as I kept going straight, nothing could go wrong. As I darted through the massive bushes, consciously reiterating this infallible logic to myself to rescue my mother, my legs were growing heavier.

“Oh my God, the wolves may pounce upon me any moment! They must’ve sniffed up my scent already”.

“Always remember, my son! When the going gets tough, the tough get going”.

But, it was the reverse of my mother’s belief that kept me going. As the fright got the better of me, I staggered into the thicket with my right ankle twisted into the mud.

As I found myself lying easefully still on my back in the cold breeze of the dark night, having drifted into a sweet slumber, a rustle defiled the hills of their silence. In the seconds that followed, I realized a distinct rhythm of strides with a pitch which progressed steadily. With the deafening movement heard so close, I realized it was too late to react being engulfed in an ocean of fatigue. Feeling hapless, I gave in to the solace of submitting to the Ultimate.

As I lay still in a state of surrender, in the pitch dark, a gentle touch enlivened me.



“Hello, the dinner is ready, my dear!”



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