

The Greate Journey of the Unnamed Man to the Land of the Unnamed Ghoul

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1

Thus he woke up determined to kill the ghoul. He gathered his things, many a great and small thing, some useful and some only unnecessary weight, and he glamorously embarked upon the path to the ghoul. A kilometer ahead, he remembered that he had forgotten to take his water bottle, and so returned and once again, he glamorously embarked upon the path to the ghoul.

2

Thousands of kilometers ahead, when his legs were weary of the way, and not himself but only the legs, he sat upon a rock in a jungle made of pure darkness and trees, and at last looked to see where he was. He was surprised to see that he could not see. He closed his eyes and found that there was a difference between the closed and the open eye, and so his astonishment was augmented and his mind in swirls at thinking that by shifting into another darkness, he could call upon himself either sleep or exhausted wakefulness. But alas, the swirls were in the sleep and thus the decision had already been made, no room for wakefulness, but perhaps, only perhaps, a dream of astonishment and choosiness.

3

At waking up, a rat on his side, on its back and with snores in the skies, flashing its bulging tum, was a quite curious sight. He stared at it, for days and nights, and realized that his left ear was gone. He touched the place of his ear, and looked at the tum, and saw the jutting shape of the lost one. "O, you rat o you, my ear is gone, and clearly, obviously, evidently, manifestly, plainly, your stomach has it inside!"

"Sod off," was the reply, and the sleepy rat walked off.

For forty days and nights, he was lying down, with a pond of tears under him, two thirds of his previous body weight. He had been dried out and death neared him. He looked back upon his life and found nothing. And so he teared again, the last drop of water and the last ounce of salt dripped down on the wound of his left ear, and he felt such pain that could have killed monsters and giants and demons and goblins and even the bogeymen, but not him, for he was powerful, and at the pain, he only jumped up and shouted. The startled birds on the pure trees above him shat themselves and the shit fell through the sky, into his mouth, and the water in the shit enlivened him again, and thus was our hero back on his feet, with a mission ahead, and all rats and ponds behind.

But only in his dreams. Twenty seven steps ahead, he saw the rat again, with the ear being showcased. Twenty seven other rats had gathered around it and looked at the tum admiringly. “Wow,” one said, “Ooh,” another added, “Flafa,” the third exclaimed. A fourth one, quite inquisitive and with a beard twice as long as a tree, asked to take a closer look. “But how, but how did you consume a question mark? How can that be, how can you become one with a question? How can your life, your essence be a problem, unsolved till your death?” Then he, our exquisite hero, stepped into sight. “It is I that have given the lowly rat his decided mark. That is not a question mark, it is my ear, and it is not to remain there for the lifetime of a rat. I shall take it and leave, or your houses will be trampled.” All the twenty eight rats looked at him for a moment, then together, in harmony, as if the finest symphony, said “sod off” and went underground. He became enraged and shouted to the earth and the sky, “You say sod off to me? You, the rats of the jungle sewages, the dirtiest and most disrespectful of the land, dare to the say sod off, to me, the most reputable of men?” The rats gathered in council to discuss the issue, and after a lengthy time and much argument one was chosen as their representative to give their response. The rat crawled upward from the meeting place, lifted its head onto the ground to see the man, and said, “Yes,” and was gone.

He now had little hope of regaining his left ear, and so decided to continue his path. On and on he went, from one tree to the next and from one part of the forest to an identical other, and after he'd passed many such places, he reached a parade. The queen was on a throne carried by one giant man, and a rough man of small size and expansive muscles was standing guard. The queen was looking around as she went, quite proud and quite old, and in seeing him, halted the parade and said, "Why do you not bow?" Our hero replied, "Why, I did not expect to see your majesty. I shall bow now, but why are you here, your highest of highnesses? This place is filled with vermin and wolves. It is not safe for such an important symbol of all unity and royalty and natural class system as you." The queen, looking somewhat irritated with him, pointed at the small man with muscles and said, "None shall ever pass Trankinpulush. He is my most trusted guard, and no wolf or vermin could even stand the obnoxious sight of him. Shall you bow now, or do you wish your head to be miles away from your body, on a stick upon my castle, the most honored your rotten soul can be?" He said to the queen, "But madam queen, that is not the most honored my soul can be! I am on a journey, a journey to slay the ghoul, and in victory much honor shall be showered upon me!" The queen laughed, for hours and hours, and at last said, with words broken with laughter, "You? You wish to slay the ghoul? But why, you cannot even slay Trankinpulush, the strongest of men, and he cannot defeat the ghoul!" He said he could, and the queen laughed again, and set up a duel. The giant man put the throne down and blew into a trumpet and the duel began. Our hero, with much delicacy and skill, ripped Trankinpulush apart with his bare hands, and turned to bow to the queen. The queen was impressed and ordered him, "You shall be my guard from now on. Now lead me to my castle!" Our hero replied, "But your highness, my path is different; I shall kill the ghoul. It is my mission and my most sacred aim." The queen ordered again, "Come with me or my carrier shall tear you apart!" He said, "But I will not," and the queen commanded, "Tear him apart!" But the giant man was also slain, such power our hero had. He bowed to the queen and turned to his path. The queen shouted, "But how shall I go back? There's much danger, vermin and wolves, and I can neither be carried nor guarded. Come here, I command you, and carry me home." The man shouted back, "Perhaps another time." The queen sulked, and our hero was gone.

"The stink! The putrefaction! What shall I do? How can I fly to the past, when all was in place and nothing stunk? How is the negligent bliss to come again? How can I be surrounded by the

spoiled nonchalance again? O sorrow, o misery, o grief!”

He searched the trees looking for the voice and found a dwarf under the leaves, crying in pain and staring at his hand. “Mr. Dwarf, why do you cry? What stink? What grief?”

“My hand! It was cut days ago, hit by an avalanche of apples. Those monkeys, those bastard monkeys, they threw the apples as they played on the trees, such violence, such violence, and I was here, under it. I tried to hide myself, but the apples were only too fast and too hard. Six hundred of them hit my hand in a moment, and it was buried under them, but when I pulled it out, only a shoulder came! I ate apples for days and days till I reached my hand. Here it is, rotten and reeking, and I am in woe! What can I do? My hand is cut! O sorrow, o misery, o grief!”

“But sir, do not beat yourself over for a hand! You have another left, do you not? At least, at the very least, you have an instrument to hold the token of your misfortune with! That's a cause for celebration, is it not? There shall be much joy! A feast you could throw, to show it off to the sad snails, to show them what they lack in life, and feel pity for them, and thank the gods that your hand is untouched!”

“I suppose I can. A feast. A party. But my rotten hand! What shall I do with that?”

“You could sell it to me! I am on a journey, on a road to slay the ghoul, and on my way shall be many a woman to woo. A dwarf's hand could impress.”

“Take it! Take it, it is yours! The stink would repel all guests. I have a feast to prepare! O joy, o fun, o merriment!”

8

At night, he was gently sleeping among the bushes and dreamt of little women slapping him wherever they reached. It was a sweet dream, as their slaps were soft and his logic and sense of sweetness was won over by the sleep. But it was not to last long, for only sixteen hours into his slumber, a voice made him jump and his head hit a branch, excited the birds to fly, and again gave him the vital fecal energy he so longed for. As his eyes adjusted, he began to follow the voice, stealthily and prepared to battle, but only found a rabbit beside a pond burping in its sleep. And so he returned to his hiding place and closed his eyes and dreamt of the joyful slaps of little women.

9

The next time he woke up, he did not see the blue sky or the black darkness before his eyes,

but rather the buttocks of a ferret. Frightened for a moment, he jumped up and weirdly shouted, and so did the ferret. They each took steps from each other, then turned and looked. The ferret tentatively asked, "Why did you do that? Have I done wrong to you? Or are you an old friend I do not recall and you have come back to haunt me with your brutish jests? Either way, please, please do not scare me as you do. I could have died, you see. My heart was beating too fast for physics to handle."

- No, I am neither an enemy nor a friend. I jumped and screamed like a thick child only because you were on my eyes, and that is not a sight I am used to. But why did you decide, of all the places in this jungle, to rest on my eyes?

- Your eyes? I was not sleeping on your eyes. I roamed all through the area, tried every tree and rock, and I found the softest and most musical. I do not know how you have swept under me with such delicacy.

- But I did not! The softest and most musical was me, my eyes and my body, the charm of a true strongman. My breath took you to sleep and my skin gave you warmth. You used my body, and you wish that I do not ruin your sleep? Why, you imbecile thing. I shall cut your throat and make you repay for the terror you caused me.

- But wait!

- What?

- Please, can I escape?

- No.

And so he cut the ferret's throat and had a gourmet's night of delight.

But as he ate and slowly began to find that it was his luck that had put the ferret on his face and not his misfortune, he realized that someone else was eating the ferret too. As he took bites and put the ferret back on a stone, other bites were taken as well, from the other side, so that when he took the ferret in his hands, it had marks on both sides. He was sure that he had concentrated only on one side, as he always did and was always told to do, lest others find him childish. He held it in his hands for a while, and it seemed quite still, as a dead ferret should be. He took a bite, and it was only his bite now. Nothing on the other side. But when he put it on the stone, other bites were hastily taken again. He took the ferret and said, "Is it you, stone? Are you eating my ferret?" He waited for a moment, until finally came a voice. "Maybe." He was furious and stammered with rage, "It is my ferret you foolish stone! I had to endure such feelings of enormous dread, and now

you're taking bites, as if it was your right? How dare you nibble at my supper! It is mine and mine alone, and you shall starve to death for all I care." There was silence again, but the answer came. "But it is my ferret too, you see." He was furious and demanded, "Why?" "Because if I had decided to be soft enough for the ferret to make me its bed, and had not diverted it to your face, you would not have been frightened by its sight and decided to make supper of it. Without me, you would only have a grumbling stomach now." He cried, "What? You say that simply because you didn't do anything, you deserve part in my savoury meal? You insolent rock! Then all the creatures in the jungle that may have been beds but weren't, or could have made different paths leading to places without me but didn't, or might have mated with the ferret to form a family and discourage his roving about but decided not to, should form queues to seize parts of the ferret in proportion to their possible power in changing the ferret's mind, should they not?" The stone pondered for a moment and said, "Yes, but you needn't worry about them. We can finish before they come." Our hero then looked at it for a moment, put all the rest of the ferret into his mouth, and strode away.

"Help! Help! Where is my prince, my white horsed hero, my future lover and my gentle-when-wanted and harsh-when-needed husband? Help! I am being attacked by a monster! Help!"

He ran toward the voice and found a screaming boy with a cat upon his face. Our hero cut the cat in half and lifted the boy by his hand in confusion. The boy jumped to hug him and he dodged and asked, "Why did you seek a prince and a white horse? Is that not reserved for the beautiful princesses with heterosexual dreams of a patriarchic past?" The boy cheerfully replied, "Yes, but no one would risk their life to help a homosexual boy on the verge of death, and so I had to make my voice more feminine and vow to bestow my body to the man who saved me. Of course now I shall not do that, but I thank you for killing that beast." Our hero pondered for a moment, and then with much keenness and acuteness of mind took the severed hand out of his bag and said, "Even with this? It's from a dwarf that I found in my adventures in the forest. I am much in need of sex. Please." The boy looked disgusted and said, "A dwarf? The sickly bastards. The world should be rid of all such unnatural creatures. I shall not forgive you for bringing a piece of them so close to me, and I wish to never see you again. Goodbye." Thus the unappreciative boy leapt into the bushes and was forever gone.

He was frustrated. He had not eaten in days, and had lost the one chance he had found for sex. And of course, now, when he could peacefully wallow in the casual misery, a fly appeared and began to buzz around his right ear. “How,” he asked it, “did you realize that my left ear was gone? Do you have perceptive abilities so strong as to distinguish between existent and nonexistent ears?” The fly kept buzzing about with enough variation in loudness to annoy him, and said, “No, I did not realize that at first sight. In fact, I reached you from your left, and you were unreceptive, which made my undeveloped brain think that I must now find another bait. But in returning to chase a poor tiger, I passed over your right side and you cringed, and so with the might of Pavlov's conditioning I was able to learn that you are an odd creature that must be irritated from only one side.” He looked at the fly in horror and, while still shaking his head and throwing his hands about instinctively, said, “A tiger?” and after a shocked pause began to sprint away like a madman running from a tiger. The fly tried to follow, but its zigzag path was too moronic and it was left far, far behind.

But since our hero was of the dumbest sort, he did not ask what direction he should take and sprinted straightly into the tiger's jaws. At realizing his mistake, he shouted from within, “Oh, great Tiger, would you let me out? Would you let me run freely, and be glad to be alive? Do you, the greatest Tiger of all, happen to be not hungry perhaps, or somehow not willing to eat the filthy human flesh?” The tiger spit him out and said, “Well, I must have a much better reason than the filth of your flesh. That has become a rather commonplace excuse.” He thought for a bit, and then tentatively replied, “Do you like piss?” The tiger said, “Well I certainly enjoy a good piss. But I do not have a particular liking for the piss itself. The liquid, I mean. Why do you ask?” He replied excitedly, “Why, I have piss inside of me! In fact, I do piss, as you do, and I shit as well, which I imagine you do not find very delightful. So if you eat me, you'd have to eat the piss and the shit as well!” The tiger said, “Piss *and* shit? You're almost a tiger yourself, aren't you? No, I do not enjoy the tastes of those. But I'm sure I can separate them from your tasty parts, can I not? I know that in tigers at least, the excrements are concentrated in a specific space inside the body. It's the same for you, is it not? Surely you can't have shit and piss all over your body, can you?” Our hero reflected for a moment and deviously replied, “Oh, no, ours is concentrated too, but not only in one space. We, the lowly humans, do not have such great anatomies as you Tigers, and so our awful parts are

all over the body, in several small spaces in every corner. It's a rather messy structure, but what can we do, we're humans." The tiger was disappointed. "Well," it said, "I suppose I can never bear to consume humans again. And I feel sick at thinking of all those I have devoured. I never thought of the excrements. Oh, the pains that knowledge brings." It turned and trotted away, cursing at itself for having ingested such distasteful meals. Once again, our great hero had saved thousands of men and women that were to come in the way of the tiger, and that with no other weapon than lies and shameless deception.

14

As he waded through the forest, a weighty tree fell on his foot. He yelled, "Ye o tree, why have you fallen on my foot?" But after a while, he realized that it was somewhat foolish to await an answer from a tree, and he walked on.

15

As he rested, he heard a wail. He sprang to his feet, prepared for battle, and looked around for signs of conflict, or some reason for the wail. But it was empty. The forest had only him and the trees and the stones. Then it came again, louder, and from above. He looked up and saw only the sky. "God, is that you?" A melancholic laughter was heard. "God? No, no, I am not god! I'm only the sky." He scrutinized the blueness and looked for the mouth, and found it among some clouds. "Then why, Herr Sky, do you cry? Is something awry?" The sorrowful laughter again. "Awry? All is awry. You do not know what it is like to be above all things, to be, in fact, almost what above means. You do not know the agony of being a seer of all. A man dies and I see. A woman wishes the inconceivable and I see. A child tortures oneself and I see. You near your death, and I see." He stared at it for a bit. "I near my death? But... Can you see what is to come? Are you a fortune teller? Or is it so evident from above? What is it, what death do you speak of? All near their deaths, so why do you mention mine?" The lips of the heavens folded into one another. Then they whispered, "The ghoul. You wish to slay the ghoul, do you not? Well, that is not possible, for the only chance you had was with a surprise, and now, since you have spoken to me and I, the Sky, have spoken of your goal, all the lands below me have heard that you are on a path to kill the ghoul. And so your one chance is gone, and the ghoul awaits you now, and it is to kill you. Awful, is it not? The agony one sees from these heights! The pains! The suffering!" Our hero looked afraid and confused, for even

the bravest and the most powerful have such feelings. “But the wail. Was that for my misfortune?” The sky replied, “Yes. Misfortunes abound, but yours was the most misfortunate, the most scarring of all.” He delved deeper into befuddlement. “But you had not spoken to me then. How was the ghoul to know?” The sky said, “But I was going to. How terrible it is to know of forthcoming ills. Awful, I say. Awful.” He said to the sky, “But if you had not cried for what was to come, I would not have spoken to you and it would not have come! Why then, why did you wail as you did?” The sky cried, “Do not deny the dreadful truths. The ghoul has heard you, and I have the right to mourn for all the deaths that I see. Before or after, what importance does that have? The suffering is the same. The horror. Oh, my dear child. My warrior. How wretched it makes me to stand and see your misery and be of no use. How wretched! I'll mourn for you. Your death may be in vain, but I'll mourn for you. Have trust in me, for I will, indeed, mourn for you,” and the lips were gone from the clouds. Our hero kept staring at the skies, mumbling loathfully and wishing he could reach the heavens and assault it with all his might.

16

As he cursed and walked away, two spiders came towards his face in the most acrobatic manner, clutching the webs they themselves had spun and falling on his face. He tried to dodge, but the spiders were on both sides of his mouth, and they were peering inside. He heard one ask, “Do you think it's inside?” and the other reply, “I do not know. It cannot be imagined that it should be inside. But it must be, for no other nook or cranny exists in this place. We must find out for ourselves. Let us dive in. Spin a rescue net for yourself, for there might be perils there of which we are unaware.” They spun the net and slowly descended, in awe of the shapes and intricacies they witnessed. But not for long, for our hero was too swift for them and swallowed them in a second, as quick as the quickest mercenaries, and the safety webs as well. He heard them scream in the acid of his stomach and curse at the piece of shit they deemed our hero to be, but no scream was enough to save them, the enemies of humanity, and our hero was, once again, the sole victor of another great battle.

17

For the past hour, our hero had been rubbing his stomach and congratulating himself on his meal, when suddenly the bushes behind him shook to warn him of something approaching. He

turned and was ready to fight whatever danger was to come, but when he saw the tiger, his alarm was gone and he held out his hands in welcome. The tiger jumped, in our hero's mind too gleeful to consent to the formal greeting and wishing to fully embrace the man, but in fact very much enraged. It pinned him to the ground and roared, "Why did you lie?" Our hero, despite his unmistakable braveness, stuttered, "What lie do you speak of, o great Tiger?" The tiger said, "The lie that you store your excrements in so many places that I must be disgusted at the thought of eating you. I met a man today, and when he asked whether I was to eat him or not and I spoke to him of human anatomy, he laughed for hours and said that it was not true, that it was almost ludicrous. And so I ate him and chased your footprints, and even though I am not hungry and I do not normally kill without hunger, I shall do so now, for you have tricked me, and death is what you deserve." Our hero, feeling his end near him, tried to make useless excuses until a bright idea came to him. He said to the tiger, "But why must he say that? Did he not realize that the only reason for his life was what you had in mind? Did he not understand that your image of human biology, whether a lie or truth, was what had saved him till that point?" The tiger replied, "I do not know. I suppose he must have been a fool." He then intelligently pointed out, "Yes, and do you wish to believe a fool, or an enlightened man who has lied to save himself and live on, what all evolution has taught us to do?" The tiger pondered for a bit and said, "I had not thought of it in that way. You are right. Why did I listen to a fool?" It stepped gently away from him and let him stand up. "Please, sir, accept my apologies. I should not have doubted you, for you are an intelligent man, and I must bow to you for endeavoring to survive." And the tiger bowed and shamefully went away, for no one, tiger or man or woman or dwarf, could wish to murder the great hero of our tale and end with anything other than shame or death.

It had been weeks since he ate the spiders. He was now starving and hunger had left him with no objective other than the self-serving kind. He, our most altruistic hero, had become a beast, craving the crudest of things. At last he saw a piece of bread, baked by whom he would never know, and cast beside a tree. He rushed at it with a grin and threw his hand to grab it and almost did, but then it was gone. He thought that perhaps it was only a dream, a mirage of his desires, but then saw something move away from him and he followed and jumped through the bushes to finally fall on the ground and saw a rat in front of him. Furiously he shouted, "The bread is mine! I am starving and that which you steal is my only hope. Give it to me, or I shall crush your house with my fists." The rat stared at him again, then looked for a tiny stick and calmly began to write something on the

ground. When it was satisfied with its work, it once again looked back at the man and leapt into a hole below the ground. He dragged himself towards the writing and read a “Sod off” and roared at the sky and wearily fell down. Our hero had fought the Trankinpulushs and giants and tigers of the land, but hunger was to be his mortal foe, his murderer, and the ally of the ghoul.

19

He was on his back and staring at the sun. Sweat was pouring down his skin, but he was too weary to move. There was a tired fear inside him, but even that had receded now. The sun spoke to him. “What is it, child? Has a rat left you in famishment? Are you dying of hunger? But is it not your own fault? Not your own stupidity that is causing you your death?” He was too jaded to show irritation, and so only replied, “How?” and turned his head. The sun looked at him warmly and said, “Why, for one, you embarked upon a journey to murder the ghoul, the one creature that not even the gods can kill. And you did not even bring canned food and bottled water for such extreme times. Were you so immersed in your pride? Were you so blind?” He murmured, “But this is the jungle... full of animals and trees... I thought food would be abundant... I thought I would be catered...” The sun laughed kindheartedly and said, “Well, the stupid must receive their blow.” He looked up at the sky, peered into the light, and fell to unconsciousness.

20

He saw an angel without a head approaching from afar. He waited, as if for millennia, for her to reach. He heard her speaking in a soft voice. He looked to see where the voice came from, as she had no head, and found that her armpits reverberated in such a way as to reproduce humans sounds and he venerated the complexities of her biological makeup. The angel said to her, “Are you ready for the other world? Are you prepared to see all things that you have never seen, and to never be in sameness again? Take my hand and we shall go. Take my hand and we shall move to the dreams that you have never dreamt, the wonders you had not the capacity to wish for, the beauties beyond your earthly mind. Let us step into the aftermath of your life.” He stared, stupefied, and after a while uttered, barely audible, “But how am I trust one like you? You are of the beautiful sort, and Gods, I have come to know, despise such beings. Perhaps you are only a divine quiz? No, I cannot come. I cannot attend your dreams and wonders and beauties. The magnificent shows are only to fool me, are they not? They are to deceive me into hell and drag me into the fires of my own sins, is

that not true? No, no, I shall not take your hand. I am of the virtuous ones. I shall not let you make me your prey. Go. Go away. I will not come.” There was silence for a time, then the armpits began to squeak. The angel took a rough step ahead, but he stayed in place. The angel took another, then roared as a monster would, not the sweet angel that she had seemed to be. She roared once again and leapt upon him, but was thrown away, such power the hero had. She attacked his legs, but was dodged and struck away. She screamed a nightmarish scream, for so long that he cupped his ears and uttered mad whispers to evade insanity, and then she galloped away, her scream with her, and he fell to the ground, unconscious in unconsciousness.

21

He opened his eyes once more, thinking it would be his last. There were no birds. He was to die, alone, with only his illusions. And to foster his faint dismay, a bear came along. He heard the steps, he saw the bear, and only a vague cry and an instinctive motion for defense came of him. Then he was still. He closed his eyes and accepted his faith with guilt, and wished for pain to be slower in coming than death. The bear reached him, halted to see if he was alive, and in finding that he was, said, “Sir, why are you lying on the ground? This is no place for you. There are wild animals, me one of them, and they wouldn't mind to gnaw at you as appetizer. You mustn't rest here. Find another place. Save your meager existence, little nitwit.” He opened his eyes and said, “Appetizer? Why, am I not good enough for you starving forest beasts?” The bear looked over his body and replied, “No, you are a sickly thing. An appetizer is the best use of you.” He lay again, thoughtful for a moment, then said, “Could you give me some food?” The bear said “Sure” and gave him a grilled rabbit filled with duck meat inside whom lay the carefully sliced pieces of a possum, and he devoured without a thought. He stood, shook the bear's hand, and walked away with a smile, reflecting that the sun and the angel each could easily find a private place and copulate with themselves. Our hero was alive again. He was saved, for if he was not, he would not have been our hero, but only a foolish dead man.

22

The next day, he woke to a bright morning with a jubilant sunshine and realized that the sun had burnt his skin. He thought for a second that perhaps it was retaliation for his obscene thoughts, but realized that sun was eight light minutes away and could not have read his thoughts. So he

asked, “Why, Sun, have you burnt my skin? It was delicate, beautiful, rough enough to convey manhood and soft enough to enchant, and now it is all painful and red. Why have you done this?” The sun seemed perplexed for a moment and then answered, “Oh, I apologize. I have mistaken the planets and thought you a weakly Venusian unfit for the world and meriting death. I shall freeze some water for you to put on your skin.” He said, “So there was no rupture in the layers of my planet that contributed to this? No greenhouse effect? I have heard of such things.” The sun laughed and said, “No, no. Your people are absurd. These opinions they hold! They disregard the plain justifications and make up their own silly tales! Can a sun not slip up from time to time?” He found the words quite sensible and nodded. Then he gathered his things and began to move, thinking that he must burn the ghoul when it is slain, for in the absence of a rupture, there was no excuse not to.

23

He stepped into a swarm of squirrels and crushed one to death. Before, there was a feast and much joy, but with his step came abominable silence. He lifted his foot and stared beneath. Blood and flesh, mashed onto earth. The squirrels all drooped, lowered their heads and progressed toward him. But they cared not for him, but the crunched bones and dead brains. They poured onto the dead body, and he stepped back, careful as to not squelch another one. When the horde of them moved to another place, there was no sign of the dead squirrel. They had each taken pieces of it and were now putting them inside a coffin, brought by whom he did not know, until no more was left and the coffin was closed. Then they lifted it on their heads and slowly moved towards him. In reaching, they stopped, paused for a moment, and then threw the coffin at his face to almost knock him down. The head of the squirrels stepped ahead, said “Get the hell out,” and he got the hell out.

24

Marching ahead and admiring the great symbolism of the squirrel culture, he reached a man with a hat upon which a dead penguin was tied. He saluted the man and asked him, “Why do you have a hat upon which a dead penguin is tied?” and the man replied, “Well, the sun is blazing, one must have a hat to shade one's eyes, isn't that right?” At which he said, “Yes, that is certainly right. I myself have hats of all sort at my home. Of the tall ones and the flat sort, of the colourful and the chic. But I have never seen a hat with a dead flightless antarctic bird as ornament.” The man studied him with suspicion and guessed, “You are not from my town, are you? This style has been 'round

for years now. Dead flightless antarctic birds enamour women and men as pastry enamours ants.” Our hero looked at him in contemptuous disbelief and said, “You haven't a life, have you?” and began to walk away. The man shouted from behind, “But I do. This is the basis of life. This is what we have evolved to do, to find the best of mates and procreate,” and heard the reply, “Yes, the best of mates, not your sort,” and saw our hero silently dance away at his superb remark.

25

“I am the dark lord of the valleys upon which walk rabbits so frightened of me,” a small man proudly announced. “You shall not pass.” Our hero looked at him, tilted his head, and said, “But you wear pink. That is not quite very dark.” The little man fumed and replied, “Times have changed, and so have perceptions!” And he answered, “Perhaps, but pink is not a dark colour. It is not right to don pink and call oneself the dark lord.” The man insisted, “It's a metaphorical dark. It means that I'm frightening and murderous, that I can kill with a blow, that all are filled with fear at my presence and scurry to their homes, that a whole forest bows at my feet. I am dark, without a need for blackness or cloaks, or roars from behind darkness to subdue and dominate. I am dark, and none have the courage to contest me.” Then our hero shrewdly replied, “But you're wearing pink.” The little man's face turned red and he shouted, “Yes, I wear pink and I revel at the contrast! At the power behind such sweet colours, at the terror that a man of such appearance can bring! I can step into the darkest feast of the most ghastly graveyard, and yet only hear the muffled screams of the escaping dead. That is art, that is beauty, the most aesthetic of horrors. That grimness of the brightest of colours that draws the deepest of frights. That is splendid. It's glorious..” After a pause, our hero said, “Yes, yes. You are truly in the right. You have excellent arguments on your back. But still, there is one thing you cannot deny, and it's that you're wearing pink. Pink!” At which the little man stomped away in indignation and left our great, magnificent hero giggling on his own.

26

Fleas brought an army of themselves down from the foliage. Fearing pestilence, he ran through the trees and branches and the fleas followed, till he tripped and tumbled to the ground. The leader of the fleas smirked and said to him, “You are our victim now. All my lads have bitten a poor infected rat we found, and now there's no escape for you, for your life is in our hands. But we have an offer to make.” The flea waited, and he tentatively asked, “What offer would that be?” The

leader sternly hopped on a slate and replied, “We have come to realize that by giving the infection to our victims, we kill them, and thus their good blood becomes old and unsavoury, and quite undesirable for later times. So we wish to make a deal with you, and it is this: if you agree to pour some of your blood into a cup each day, an amount enough to feed us all but not so much as to cause your death, then we shall drink only from that and leave you with your life. It is quite a fair deal I believe.” He pondered it for a bit and accepted the terms. “You shall have a cup ready for you tomorrow morning.” The two shook hands and the army of them left. But the next day, our cunning hero did not leave any cup and the fleas, being fleas, forgot about the deal and sucked a poor deer's blood and left it in sick misery till its death arrived. So bright our hero was.

27

He woke up to red-strewn hands and screamed, but at remembering who he was and what a wonderful hunt he had had the night before, he became calm. Then he heard another scream, and leapt to his feet to look for the perpetrator and the victim, but found only a parrot upon a branch, and became calm. As he set forth upon his path, he stepped on a creature that then splashed with blood and he screamed and so did the parrot, only to see that it was the remnants of his last night's hunt, and two consecutive sighs came out. He looked at the parrot with irritation and the parrot, in turn, looked at him in irritation. He roared at it and it too did a parrot's roar. He spit and it spit back, though his did not reach and the parrot's did. Then he took a menacing step toward it and it took one toward him and fell through the leaves and branches to the ground, and he gently picked it up and skinned it to have an elegant breakfast. And thus did our hero have such immense influence in the evolution of parrots, and saved generations of parrots from falling through foliage into the traps of men and forest animals from hearing the squeaking echoes of their own roars. Many in our time do not notice this, but this hero of ours did not only journey to the ghouls, but he was also the harmoniser of the species, the stabilizer of nature. Some even believe that he was an agent of the gods. But of course we regard such claims with suspicion. To each his own.

28

He saw bread crumbs on the ground. He said, “Oh, bread crumbs,” and took the bread crumbs. The bread crumbs led to other bread crumbs, and as he had nothing to eat but bread crumbs, he followed the bread crumbs. A flock of birds came down from the sky and said, “Those

are our bread crumbs,” and he answered, “No, not when I'm eating them.” So he and the birds contended and ran through the forest eating bread crumbs, hopping the roots and flying through branches in search of more bread crumbs, until they saw a brother and sister and found that they had consumed the trail of bread crumbs that were to lead the children home. They looked at one another, stealthily paced back into the trees without being seen and dispersed in shame at having eaten the precious bread crumbs.

29

Sorrowful, he trudged through the woods and mumbled to himself, “I have made children the baits of a wicked witch. I am the most foolish murderer of this forest.” The birds slogging beside him, anguished as well, nodded, “You are, indeed, brother. You're a murderer, and you are foolish.” He glared at them and said, “You killed them as well. Don't act as if you're the judge of me.” The birds replied at once, “Oh, we do not. But we are only killers, not foolish murderers. We have no intellect whatsoever. We only live on instinct, the instinct to peck at bread crumbs. But you, sir, are very much intelligent and independent from the absurdity of the world. You have morality, you have a mind, you have liberty and discretion. And yet you ate as if you didn't. That, I am afraid to say, is a sign of utter foolishness.” He stopped his trudge and said, “But I had no evidence. How could I have known that some bread crumbs were to be the savior of children? It is their fault, those nippers, for not letting the rest of the forest know what they purported to do.” The birds tilted their heads and uttered with irritation, “So you blame the children for their death? That is where you have stooped?” He shouted, “I did not kill them! I did not! They were to die anyhow. I erred, but that does not turn me into a murderer or a fool. Then the trees must be at fault for killing a man caught in a wildfire, and an axmaker for the gory crimes of a madman!” The birds calmly replied, “Don't absolve yourself of accountability. You have murdered two kids.” Our hero broke down in tears. The birds stared while the brine flowed towards them, and then, from the trees, two kids emerged. The wailing ceased and he and the birds gazed at the children, one of which was saying to another, “Yes, we'll track the footsteps of the idiot who ate our trail,” and they disappeared among the trees of the other side.

30

The heat was once more upon him. “O, heat,” he entreated, “Please, get off me, keep some

distance. I am in need of the water you draw out of me. The salt, the nutrients, are essential to me. Please, keep away. I cannot push you away by force, I cannot assault you, for you are encompassing. And so I ask earnestly, please, do not come my way.” The heat said to him, “But I suck the poison out of you. I am pure energy, you can harness me if you wish. I am the reason of the light with which you see. I cannot go, for then too much would be lost.” He implored again, “Nay, nay, if you withdraw only a bit, only so much to drag the spring weathers back to the land, I would not lose so much as you reckon. Please, o heat, I near my death with each drop of the sweat you deem so valuable. Be gone and I shall live in peace.” And so the heat drifted away and ice and snow came in its place, so harsh as to cause our genteel hero to cuss with determined lewd vulgarity and cause the snow to be for once glad at capturing the voices and reflecting utter silence in their place.

31

It had now become so cold that the white bears were appearing on his path. One came from the other side, sauntering in opposite direction, and in reaching they exchanged greetings. “Are you a polar bear?” our hero asked. The bear replied “Why, yes, yes, I am. That has been our name for generations and ages.” He asked again, “But you are now not in the pole. Nor will your children be there.” The bear pondered a bit and said, “Yes, but that is the home we emerged from. That shall be my children's land of ancestors. One cannot forget their past.” He told it with scrutiny, “But your children shall not know what pole and polar mean. They shall not know what their old, pitiful forebears had been thinking in their mussed minds when they chose such random vowels and phonemes to call themselves with. In truth, you may inspire legends and superstitions of an Adam and Eve of a bear named pole, from whom all other bears have descended.” The bear sat reflecting once more and then quietly said, “They can learn their history though. Can they not?” Our astute hero at once answered, “No, no. You have no system of writing through which you can relay your history, and you are too dim to pass on oral traditions.” The bear sighed and said, “How awful,” and walked away slumping and sorrowful.

32

A deer bounded on his path. “Dude,” it said with grace, “I'm being chased by this panther of sorts. Will you help me?” Our great hero sat on a slate, pondering for a bit, weighing all the aspects and sides, as a wise man should do, and at last looked at the deer and replied, “No.” Then the deer,

in its dignified, elegant manner, said, “Cocksucker,” and leapt away.

33

A serandeloun coiled around him and hissed, “Extract your bones and leave them here. Then your meat can go away.” Our hero stared at it for a bit and said, “But my meat cannot go away by itself. I am much in need of the bones, or else I shall become nothing but some jelly tumbling away.” “Oh, I understand,” the serandeloun replied. “But I still need your bones.” He thought for a moment, then stepped out of the coil and said, “Well, you are not around me anymore, so there is no need for me to obey and fear you. I have escaped.” The serandeloun then opened its wings and threw itself upon him and whispered, “Give them to me or I shall crush the life out of you.” He then contemplated, “But you don't want crushed bones, do you?” And it said, “No. I prefer if you took them out yourself.” Our hero then replied, “But I will not. And they'd be useless to you if you crush me. So you must leave.” The serandeloun then said, “But that would be a rather weak gesture, would it not?” At which he confidently uttered, “No, not at all.” The serandeloun then nodded, came down, and slithered away.

34

“How, say, have you wandered into this land of no ice cream?” the inspector asked. Our hero innocently replied, “I was only going after a ghoul. I had no... I had no intention of distancing myself from ice cream. I was not aware at the time of this lack in this location.” The inspector seethed, “You were not aware? How could one not be aware of such obvious deficiencies? I'm afraid your defense is awfully weak. You shall forever rest tied to chains and sleep upon blades cutting through your skin, and scream and beg to get out.” He muttered, “But there are no chains and no prison in the icecreamless land,” and heard from the inspector, “Then run off, you savage boor.”

35

He ran through the trees and fell panting upon the ground. A heroine picked him up. “What is it, mister hero? Who follows you to such depths?” The hero replied, “The inspector. I did not know

there was no ice cream here,” and she said, “Of course there is not. Avoid the inspector, and you shall be fine.” They smiled and the fear fled in cowardly fright. The two spoke of their heroic deeds and adventures, and they cooked bloodstained animals and laughed through the night. The hero gifted her the dwarf's hand and the heroine to him a leprechaun's left testicle. They cuddled and kissed and even engaged in awkward romantic penetration. Then they asked of their destinations. “I go for the ghoul.” “And I for the ogre.” “But they lie in opposite sides.” “Yes.” “Then we must part.” “Yes.” “Then this is farewell.” “Yes.” “I see tears.” “And so do I.” “How utterly awful.” “How terrible.” “What can we do?” “Leave.” “Then let us.” “Yes, let us.” And so they parted ways and after then all they had to be certain of their love's existence outside their minds and littered imaginations was a cut hand and a single testicle.

36

In sorrow he walked through the woods. “O love, what shall I do? With whom shall I lie again? How shall I feel the warmth and the contentment that only she has e'er made me feel? This parting is misery. This is the wretchedness that Adam and Eve must have felt on setting foot here. O love, how abominable you make me. I feel as if trodden upon by a herd of giants. How awful you make me.” Love replied, “Piss off. You chose to follow some undefeatable ghoul, not I.” He said, “But it is what morality commands.” And love retorted, “You follow morality now? How deplorable you've become.” Morality answered, “Nay. My subjects are of the most glorious and the least deplorable. They are not like yours, fluttering around like moths and burning themselves for no higher truth and finding some foolish romance in it to escape into.” Love boiled, “At least those moths of mine have some heart and live through life rather than deadly follow foolish instructions thrust upon them from such pitiful beings as you.” And as they argued over who is the better of the abstract concepts, our hero became bored and shouted “Shut up,” and they shut up.

37

He stepped upon a ladybug, but the ladybug held his foot and bent it so the joints could not take the force and the whole body fell. He asked the ladybug, “Are you Japanese?” and it answered, “No, you racist pork. Can I not learn the oriental martial arts without having their ethnicity?” He hastily replied, “No, no. I did not mean that. It is only that we, the humans, the most advanced and intelligent form of life upon Earth, have only recently learned the tricks of spreading cultures

efficiently. So how have you ladybugs so rapidly exchanged so much of your cultures?" The ladybug studied him for a moment and said, "Telephones." He exclaimed, "Oh," and it answered, "Yeah," and he replied, "Alright."

38

His shadow grumbled, "It'll be noon again." He was startled and said, "Why do you speak?" It replied, "The tree shadows and bush shadows are awfully boring. Not much can be discussed with them." They sat silently for a time, until he asked, "So, what if it's noon?" and it answered, "I become small." He asked, "And what if it's night?" and it proudly replied, "I become half the world." The hero pondered for a bit. "Then if you span half the world, can you tell me of the ghouls' location and condition?" The shadow shook its head and said, "No, no. I have signed a confidential disclosure agreement, and I cannot tell you of such things." "That's too bad." "Indeed." Then they sat together until an ant's shadow passed by and our hero's shadow pursued to woo her, and he was left alone.

39

He squatted, but nothing would come out. He tried quite hard, his hardest. His muscles were in their mightiest and all the air inside him was being blown out, but only air. He pushed once more, with all his force, and nothing still. He fell down in despair and muttered to himself, "Nothing will come out. I shall implode."

40

On a rather bleak day, he set out upon his path. A new morning. How insignificant. And yet our hero passed through the trees unstirred by the absolute absurdity of the novel sameness. He waited for absurdity to speak with him, but it did not. And so hours later, he camped till another day.

On the another day, gravity reversed. Not for all creatures of the land, but only for him, our hero, and the ghoul. On the sky, there were no trees and ponds to separate them. They saw each other through the emptiness. The ghoul was now in his sight, and he in the ghoul's. It then launched towards him, as if unleashed. It had heard from the sky that there was a man coming with the intent to slay, but that was of no significance. The ghoul would stomp upon all the living near it, it would demolish life; there was no need for such petty excuses as his intentions. And now, there was none but him. It did not matter if he was here to slay or only by some foolish mistake. All the same, he was to be torn apart by the ghoul.

They clashed in the middle of the sky. One strike by the ghoul, one to take the life out, dodged by the hero. A throw of a punch by our hero, barred by the gigantic ghoul. The clouds mingled into their battlefield, made all the war into haze, and in the moment of reckoning, when the outcome was to be decided, both combatants looked at the even higher skies. "Writer," they both pled, "Which one of us shall die? Which of us shall be victorious? Write the words and so we shall be." A command was sent through, "Fight on. The order will be known." And so they fought on, scarring one another, one gaining whip hand only for the other to steal it, and thus superiority being tossed around. They fell down, the two of them, exhausted and with much blood shed, onto the sky, and beseeched once more. "We are weary, o Writer of this land. Our blood rains onto the ground. We implore, tell us, say what we shall become." Another answer came, "You both are of great strength, of unparalleled skill, with dexterity unknown in all lands and oceans. But alas, this tale has been spun with the hero in mind. And so, I am rueful to say, the ghoul shall become dust, lost among history's rust." The two obeyed and the ghoul showed grand defense, despicable enough to win the hero his heroism and the ghoul its malevolence, and so the journey ended with a butchered daemon, a weary man, and a winding path back.