

BEAS CHATTARAJ

"**J**ake! Wake up." Somebody was shaking him. He opened his eyes to see his wife looking at him, worried.

"Hey," he asked groggily, remembering a vague dream, slowly slipping out of his mind, "What happened?"

"You were having a nightmare, repeatedly saying sorry for something," Lizzie said to him. "You have been doing this for quite a few weeks now. Anything wrong?"

"Nothing," he replied quietly.

Lizzie did not press further. As a doctor's wife, she knew how much stressful her husband's job was. There was no room for even a tiny mistake. Constantly overworked to the point of exhaustion, it a miracle how Jake managed to pay attention to his family. "Fine," she said. "But you need rest. Take tomorrow off, Dr. Ackles can fill in for you. Just one day."

After a vague murmur of disagreement, Jake gave in reluctantly. He was tired. His patients will have to do without him tomorrow.

The morning was pretty much uneventful; his wife busied herself with household chores and cooking. The TV was on mute with the morning news. As he sipped his tea, the running headlines caught his attention. The police had busted an illegal research facility and discovered horribly mutated human beings and animals there last night. One Dr. Jenner had been arrested along with his unidentified associates. He turned up the volume.

... residents of that area have reported strange sightings and wailings coming from the facility. To know more gruesome details, watch the upcoming program *Misusing Science* with our very special guest Dr. T....

"What are you watching?" Lizzie came up behind him.

"What has happened to the world!" Jake hissed indignantly. "Experimenting? Bah! It is torture in the name of research. How can one justify this? These scientists should all be put to death!"

Lizzie looked at him calmly. "What about the animals? It has been going on for years! It's only natural that someday humans will also be experimented upon. Nothing is

surprising. I have been following the news for sometime. The police has been trying to raid this facility for years but did not have enough proof. Thank God it finally happened. They can finally put an end to all these atrocities. Do you know that the place is not very far off? To think the horrors unfolding right under our nose..." She trailed off.

The news channel was now showing its anchor having a conversation with the guest.

...So Dr. Trivedi, as a senior research scientist at Caltech and a former colleague of the accused what is your say in this horrific matter that has come to light today?"

"Well, Paul Jenner was an

exceptional scientist. He was one of the people who found a way to modify a harmless virus so that it could enter a mouse brain through the bloodstream and deliver genes to the cells of the nervous system. The virus could help researchers map the intricacies of the brain and holds promise for addressing diseases like Alzheimer's. We had such high hopes for him. But he was obsessed with his research. It crossed certain ethical boundaries. Paul did not like being confined. So he left. It was a decade ago."

"So, do you think the disfigured human and animal subjects that were found by the police had anything to do with his original line of research?"

Abhorred



"Certainly. As I told you before, Paul found a way to get genes across the blood-brain barrier and deliver them throughout the adult brain efficiently. I will explain for our viewers. The blood-brain barrier allows the body to keep pathogens and potentially harmful chemicals in the blood from entering the brain and the spinal cord. This semi-permeable blockade, composed of tightly packed cells is crucial for maintaining a controlled environment to allow the central nervous system to function properly. However, this resistance prevents drugs and molecules to be delivered to the brain through the bloodstream. Paul breached that resistance. He

wanted to do more than just map the brain. He wanted to control it, to test its boundaries. We haven't gone that far. It may be possible. The outcomes are endless."

"But at the cost of innocent lives?"

"Unethical human experiments have been conducted since ages. The experiments include deliberate infection of people with deadly or debilitating diseases, exposure to biological and chemical weapons, human radiation experiments, injecting people with toxic chemicals, mind-altering agents under the guise of medical treatment. All in the name of science. You cannot stop it. But you can prevent it. As men of science it's

Switching the lights on, he slowly approached the creature. It was a human being, or what used to be a human being. Its skin was bruised and burnt beyond recognition with patches of hair on its head. When it looked up, Jake saw a barely human visage covered with cuts, a chunk of the nose missing, and a wide mouth that was curved into a grimace. It looked like the demons from his dreams, a cruel, inhuman fiend.

constantly our goal to save humanity and we hope we don't lose our perspective in trying to do so."

Jake watched the rest of the show very carefully. He didn't know why he was interested. He just was. May be it was his scientific curiosity. Being a doctor in the suburbs wasn't that much interesting. It was the same old thing everyday. From when he was young, Jake was a voracious reader. He always wanted to know more. His parents had encouraged him to learn as much as he could. Of course, he was the only son who could make them proud. He had an elder brother who had run away from home and never came back. Jake did not like to think about it.

The day passed by normally but the evening brought forth a fresh piece of horror. Dr. Paul Jenner had killed himself in the police holding room by stabbing his own throat with a pen given by his lawyer. The entire scientific community had been in an uproar over the lack of police supervision. But that was not all. Among the half-dead subjects recovered from Jenner's facility, one had escaped the hospital and killed a nurse in the process. The town was on red-alert. Cops patrolled everywhere. The lunatic was still not found.

It was 9 p.m. Lizzie had gone upstairs to make sure all windows were locked, when Jake heard a crash at the porch. Shouting out to his wife to call the police hotline, Jake went to inspect the front door.

As he entered the living room he witnessed a scene that would brand itself in his memory for as long as he was alive. The door was broken, ripped apart from its hinges as if it were paper and there was a trail of blood leading to the mantelpiece. In the faint glow of the dying embers of the fireplace, Jake could discern a vague humanoid shape clutching a rectangular picture frame.

Switching the lights on, he slowly approached the creature. It was a human being, or what used to be a human being. Its skin was bruised and burnt beyond recognition with patches of hair on its head. When it looked up, Jake saw a barely human visage covered with cuts, a chunk of the nose missing, and a wide mouth that was curved into a grimace. It looked like the demons from his dreams, a cruel, inhuman fiend. But there was nothing inhuman about the words it uttered next.

"Jacob."

The voice was low and raspy, as if the vocal cords were badly damaged. The creature put the frame where it was previously kept.

"It has been a long time, brother."

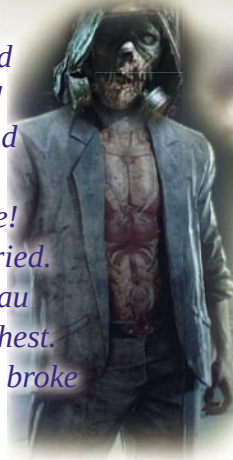
"Esau!" Jake replied, horrified. His past had come back to haunt him.

It had been a long time. Ten years to be exact. He was just seventeen then, with aims of going to medical school. Esau was somewhat difficult. He got low grades, had bad company, did drugs and came home late. Then he dropped out of high school. Their father was livid. Occasionally Jake saw his brother getting caned. But Esau always came out of it smiling. He wasn't afraid. The only thing he really cared about, was their mother.

Then one day, she was gone. Cerebral aneurysm. Esau became withdrawn after that. He stopped all his rebellious activities and started preparations for joining school once again. Everything went fine until Jake snuck in a joint in the house and got caught.

He could have admitted it but he didn't. He had an easy target. Why would he have to get into trouble? Instead he blamed his brother. Jake's father didn't even doubt him. And Esau received the worst beating of his life. He was accused of trying to sabotage

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his younger brother's life. That day, Esau ran away from home.

"Esau!" Jake said again, coming back to the present, "What... what has happened to you?"

Esau looked at him with his bloodshot eyes. "I have this madness raging inside me. Haven't slept for so many days. I wanted to come home for so many years. The doctor found me, promised to give a job and a roof over my head. Little did I know what his actual plans were. He kept injecting me with stuff. Kept firing up my brain till I could take it no more. I guess my brain isn't good for anything. Isn't it, brother?" Esau started laughing. Then he choked and started coughing up blood. Jake stood, rooted at his spot, not knowing what to do.

Esau continued in his broken voice. "He brought in more like me, naïve or homeless, I don't know. All I understood was that the doctor wanted to observe our brain while subjecting us to different environments. He wanted our brains to expand their abilities. He kept us in solitary confinement. Then he injected drugs in our blood to keep us awake. To see how far we go without sleep. You don't know what I saw, Jake. It was so terrible. It was as if something grew inside us and refused to be suppressed. A few people tore their organs out. Some died trying. Some did not. I am one of them. No drugs work on me anymore. No anesthetic. I can't feel pain anymore. Only this feeling that my brain will explode any moment."

"Why did you come to me?" Jake asked.

"I wanted to come home for one last time. No one loved me. I was abhorred by the very people I grew up

with. I was never needed here. I knew you were relieved when I was gone. Even those cops looked at me with disgust. I came back to see what's left of my family. Before I go mad, I wanted to see you, brother."

Something moved behind Jake. No! Jake thought. And immediately a gun fired. "Lizzie! Don't..." Jake cried. The bullet hit Esau squarely in the chest. And then all hell broke loose. Esau screamed. It was a hideous, appalling, ghastly scream. Then he rammed into Lizzie and threw her to the floor. The gun cluttered towards Jake's feet. Then Esau screamed again till his already wide mouth bled from the sides. Then he started tearing out his skin. Jake couldn't watch him. It was abominable. This was the madness he was talking about. The brain that no longer knows reason, nor its limits; the insanity that lurks within every sentient being, begging to be free every single second.

Jake looked at his long lost brother with regret. Pushed onto the streets, forced into years of torture and confinement and transmuted into a savage... a life he did not deserve. Esau could not come back. He was far too gone. With lightning speed, Jacob picked up the gun, and fired into Esau's head. Then everything went still.

It was true. Jake had abhorred his brother. He had hated him for so many years. But this disgust was born of guilt. It was his fault. Now as he watched his brother dead at his feet, he no longer thought him to be an abomination. The real monsters were the ones who had turned Esau into this.

He was one of them. Jake knelt beside Esau and sobbed. "I am sorry," he said, as his tears mingled with his brother's blood.

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