

# Arcane Rhapsodies



# Arcane Rhapsodies

*Poems by*

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**Arcane Rhapsodies**

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## Prologue – Arcane Rhapsodies

The theatre was silent as a winter's night,  
But Henry's eyes were burning bright.  
He silently mouthed the verses from the director's box,  
The audience grew wild and he smiled like a fox.

“Bravo! Bravo!”, the audience cheered on,  
Soon the velveteen curtains were drawn.  
Henry leapt from his seat and was soon backstage,  
He rehearsed with the lead pair, page by page.

A commotion on stage made Henry squirm,  
The stage hand struggled on stage, slow as a worm.  
Henry himself yanked the boy off stage,  
He gathered himself, he dismissed his rage.

All in all, the closing night was a success,  
Henry's tale of tragedy, his verses full of distress.  
Much praise did come his way,  
“Sir, when can we expect your next play?”,  
A reporter asked as Henry ended the curtain call,  
Henry's reply was interrupted by a sudden brawl.

“Vile Vixen!”, a woman cried, short of breath.  
She brought chaos, like the witches of Macbeth.  
Another actress sniggered and laughed aloud,  
Infectious as it was for the crowd.



Henry muttered a curse as he cleared his throat,  
With a booming voice, he began to quote.  
“What a thrilling night, we have upon us,  
Thespis himself launches his mischief thus.”

“Yes, we have had some peculiar scenes,  
Proof that the spirit of Thespis intervenes.  
It is a known fact among us theatre folk,  
Thespis is to be blamed for any practical joke.

For those who know not who Thespis was,  
The Father of drama, his mischief has good cause.  
Among the many virtues that Thespis depicted,  
Hubris was one that left many afflicted.  
So it is that *He* reminds us to pause,  
Not to lose ourselves in the midst of applause.”,  
Henry quickly turned the tides in his favour  
And so all the adulation, he did savour.

That week brought Henry much surprise,  
A critique reviewed him, sans any disguise.  
“The actors and the direction had flair,  
But for the playwright, I could not care.  
Even Thespis could not consume the verses,  
And so he did bestow his curses.  
The playwright failed to please,  
Elements missing from his melodies.”

So it is that Henry found himself at a tavern,  
Looking for ancient tales that he wished to learn.  
He hoped to draw inspiration from his travel,  
He wondered what mysteries he was bound to unravel.  
He gaped as the minstrel played unknown keys,  
Singing ancient, arcane rhapsodies.



## Jingwei's Quest

Shennong spewed hot winds from his mouth,  
He turned their sway from north to south.  
His daughter, the young Jingwei, sat by his side,  
She gazed at the sea, the wind picked up each tide.  
Her eyes grew big with wonder each time,  
She beamed at her father, his powers sublime.

Shennong taught man how to farm and what to eat,  
He tasted the herbs himself, whether bitter or sweet.  
He watched as the herbs moved in his transparent belly,  
He shook his head, the herb made him feel silly.  
He mulled over the effects of the stalks of green,  
“Pass me the tea dear, enough I have seen.”  
Shennong sipped the tea, his best known antidote,  
He dictated his observations as Jingwei took note.

“Come dear child, we have much to test,  
I have more to teach man, no time for rest.”  
He took her by the hand, together they soared,  
They flew over fields, the wind loudly roared.

The East Sea bobbed as they flew past it,  
Deep down, the Dragon King was throwing a fit.  
His torrential rain and an impending flood stood averted,  
Towards the barren south they had been diverted.  
His eyes grew red and his long whiskers unfurled,  
He boiled with rage, the water simmered and whirled.

“How dare he turn the winds to the south?!  
Just once I’d like to seal his mouth!”  
The Dragon King ranted and paced about his court.  
“Sire! An urgent news I have come to report.”,  
The sea serpent bowed before the Dragon King.  
“Out with it, what news do you bring?”,  
The Dragon King floated back to his crystal throne.  
“Shennong soars above us, he is not alone.  
The lands prosper and the villagers chant his name,  
They are grateful that our rains are tame.”  
The Dragon King’s eyes grew grim, his nostrils did flare,  
“Perhaps it’s time to teach man a little about despair.”

The Dragon King sniggered as he secretly spied,  
“Dear Shennong, for long my rightful place has been denied.  
It is time I become the absolute for mankind.”,  
Saying so, a gruesome plot he designed.

The sun shone brightly, a pleasant breeze swept the beach,  
Shennong and Jingwei were alarmed by a dreadful screech.  
Shennong flew towards the man that screamed in pain,  
The man begged for help, he spoke up with much strain.

Dressed in a fisherman’s attire, the pale man cried,  
“Oh! What wrong did I do to be caught in that tide?!”  
One moment not a wind or cloud was in sight,  
And then they came together, the weather did bite!”  
Shennong felt sorry for the poor man taken by surprise,  
He examined the man and eyed his supplies.

The man was too drained to talk anymore,  
Jingwei studied her father, a look of dread he wore.  
“His body is parched, I must brew some herbal tea.”  
He took to the skies and flew away from the sea.  
No sooner had he left that the beach was struck by a sheen,  
Jingwei bowed before the Dragon King, bound by a mesh of green.

He invoked his powers, together they dived into the sea,  
The Dragon King swam around her, helpless was she.  
He laughed as a vortex gulped Jingwei at its centre,  
The Crystal Palace beckoned, in great aplomb he did enter.

The creatures of his realm welcomed him home,  
“Jingwei must be dying to return to the land she used to roam.”  
The Dragon King smiled and looked at the unconscious girl,  
He beckoned the octopus, the blue rings on its arms began to twirl.  
He caressed the octopus till it began to drool,  
He petted it as he gathered its venom from the pool.  
“This will do very well.”, said the Dragon King,  
He knelt near Jingwei, followed by his underling.

When Shennong returned with freshly brewed herbal tea,  
He could find no fisherman, as far as he could see.  
He called out to Jingwei but her voice was not to be heard,  
All he heard were the shrill cries of a distant bird.

He sprang in the air and called Jingwei again,  
Shennong's hot winds soon attracted the rain.  
As he neared the sea on another side,  
Jingwei was washed ashore by a high tide.

Shennong rushed to cradle her lifeless form,  
Just as the Dragon King unleashed a massive sea storm.  
Jingwei lay frozen, her eyes pierced deep into the sky,  
Not a message, not a tear he found in either eye.

If Jingwei could speak, she would've said much,  
But she felt not a thing, not even her father's healing touch.  
All she saw was a bird that soared in the sky,  
She watched the sky turn black as she prepared to die.  
She wanted to warn Shennong that worse was to come,  
While he tried to revive her from a body that lay numb.

In his desperate attempts to save his daughter  
Shennong mixed the herbal tea with some seawater.  
He gulped down the mix before he gave it to Jingwei,  
The dark clouds clumped together, the sky turned gray.

Jingwei smiled and sat next to Shennong's lifeless form,  
The tides consumed her, into the Dragon King she began to transform.  
He laughed and laughed all the way to his Crystal Palace,  
"Oh! What a glorious day.", he seemed to hiss.

The real Jingwei lay still on the crystal floor,  
Pledging to someday even the score.  
A flurry of wings, the call of a bird,  
She watched it fight the elements undeterred.

The Dragon King had finally fulfilled his desire,  
No man ever dared to gather his ire.  
For who could stop the flood or turn against a tide,  
By the Dragon King's wishes, all men complied.

But one tiny creature stood up to his might,  
A bird circled the sea all day and all night.  
It gathered stones and twigs from the nearby land,  
It dropped them in the sea and played in the sand.

The Dragon King roared as the twig scratched his crystal sea bed,  
"Be gone Jingwei, while you still can!", he said.  
The bird screeched in defiance, stubborn in her quest,  
"Not till the sea is filled, shall I rest.",  
Jingwei uttered as her fair wings did flap,  
She warned one and all of the Dragon King's trap.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the myth of “Jingwei”.

According to the Chinese myth of Jingwei, the young princess was consumed by the East Sea at a young age. In order to save others from a fate like hers, she takes the form of a bird after her death and tries to fill up the sea. There are literary accounts that mention how the sea scoffs at her, claiming that she wouldn't be able to succeed even in a million years. Thereupon, she declares that she would continue to try not only up to ten but hundred million years or however longer it would take so that others don't meet an end like hers. Jingwei is thus considered a symbol of dogged determination and perseverance in the face of impossible odds.

Jingwei was supposedly the daughter of Shennong, known as the Emperor of Five Grains, a legendary ruler of China. He is believed to have taught the ancient Chinese the various practices of agriculture and herbal use. It was said that Shennong had a transparent stomach so that he could see the effects of the herbs that he tasted and in turn taught mankind about medicinal herbs and their properties. He was also said to be the creator of hot winds.

The Dragon King is believed to be the ruler of the ocean and other water bodies as per Chinese mythology. He has the ability to shape-shift into a human form, he holds dominion over aquatic life and lives in a crystal palace in the ocean. The Dragon King is usually associated with water related weather phenomena.



## That Night at the Manor

He observed the manor that night for long,  
He lay still, smiling, nothing could go wrong.  
One by one, all the windows grew dark,  
The man slowly sat up on the bark.  
The huge oak tree had provided him well,  
He felt a thrill, he could feel his itch swell.  
He tried to secure the premises one last time,  
A neglected garden adorned the manor with grime.

The manor was undoubtedly old,  
But he had heard of its riches untold.  
It was home to a trader of items rare.  
Some thought it was haunted, not worth the scare.  
But our man on the bark seemed not to care.  
He scratched his arm and wore his mask  
And gulped the mead from his flashy flask.

He carefully ran and slithered into the garden,  
As he strode, he felt the soil harden.  
The soil was cracking, all life had died of thirst.  
The man looked about and realized the worst.  
Not a window or door was left ajar,  
Instinctively, he scratched a scar  
That ran across his forearm  
And enhanced his rogue-like charm.

He pulled out his serpentine blade,  
Cautiously, with the lock he played.  
Before he could celebrate his work,  
The door opened with a sudden jerk.  
A woman stood sternly at the door,  
Flowing, velveteen night robes she wore.  
Petite, her make, and fair, her skin,  
“Where the devil have you been?”  
She glared and ushered the man in.  
He babbled gibberish, unable to relate,  
She locked the door and eyed him straight.

“Well, don’t just stand there,  
You almost gave me a scare!”  
She clutched her bosom and sighed,  
“Now, we have no reason to hide.”  
She beckoned him to come close,  
“That’s the end of our woes.”  
She captured him in an embrace and a song,  
“It’s over now, our love is proven strong.  
The water is warm, bathe away that brute.”  
The brigand thought it best to play the same suit.  
He headed upstairs to think it all through,  
So far he had not a single clue.  
He heard soothing songs that she sang,  
And then some noise and a loud bang.

“Heavens! You’ll be the death of me tonight!”  
She fearfully clutched at her cross tight.  
But he stood by the stairs, unflinching and still.  
“You’re drenched, watch out for the water you spill  
Just when all is spick-and-span.  
Everything went as per our plan.”  
She beamed at him but was met with a rigid stare,  
“A strange scent seems to be in the air.  
Dear, I should get you the lavender oil.”  
Her touch only made him recoil.  
She glared at him till a metallic clutter arose.  
She shivered as she heard the cawing of crows.

He had splashed some water on his face  
When the steel of the flask chimed at the base.  
With cloudy eyes, he observed it by candlelight,  
Something seemed to not be right.  
Crimson and brown smears it wore,  
He had not observed them ever before.  
He had figured it to be the grime,  
In which he had lain, preparing for the crime.  
He had splashed the water and cursed aloud,  
The water choked him, his vision had begun to cloud.  
He had felt himself struggle, gasping for air,  
He had felt a splitting headache,  
He had felt something inside him break.  
He had felt being carved by his own blade  
There he had been hiding, where they once played.

She covered her mouth and froze,  
“What’s that noise, I suppose?”,  
She whispered to him as she reached for a knife,  
“Have you no care for my life?!”,  
She glared at him and gritted her teeth,  
He stayed so still, like he forgot to breathe.  
He moaned suddenly, such that her ears began to ring,  
He spewed water like the garden spring.  
Struck by horror, she began to weep.  
“*Your affair, dear wife, had a cost steep.*”  
She looked up, her once masked husband she had let in,  
She began to shake her head as things began to spin.  
She cried herself hoarse to drown *his* voice.  
“With death, no mortal has a choice.”  
“No! No! No! This is all your ploy,  
Once again, with me you toy!”,

She tried to open the door but it was jammed,  
“We suffer together, for eternity we’re damned!  
I found you in *his* arms that night,  
Though betrayed, I put up a fight.  
You carved my arm with my own blade,  
You knew well that I would’ve never laid  
My hand on you so you struck me instead,  
And your lover *valiantly* struck my head.  
I knew he replaced the flask back at my belt,

You thought that all my cards were dealt.  
I thought no different, doesn't matter what I felt.  
I woke up when I began to drown,  
My luck seemed to have turned around.  
I reached for him and held him down,  
*I held him under, till the waters soaked his crown."*

"No! No! No! Your greed knows no bounds,  
You've signed me off to one of those loony compounds!"  
He ignored her screams even as it shook the rails,  
He quietly headed upstairs, followed by their pitiful wails."



**Note:**

The subject refers to a haunted manor and possibly the ghosts of the manor.

People often report sudden clamour, loud noises and creaking sounds in haunted houses.

Hauntings are attributed to the spirits of the dead and the effects of violent or tragic events associated with the building or location in question. The most scientific explanations for bizarre haunting experiences are misinterpretation of noises, intoxication leading to hallucinations, suggestibility among others.

There are ghost lores across the world that dwell on haunted properties and they have become part of the local folklores too.

## The Princess' Plight

Middle of the night, she awoke from her dream.  
She runs blindly and stops at the stream.  
The tears play with her hair and burn her skin,  
She curtails her thoughts, she is tempted to sin.  
She hurls curses towards the air,  
She wishes for an answer to her prayer.

“Am I to forever live with this woe?  
Left to applaud my husband's foe?  
Oh, how he must turn in his grave,  
Why must I contain the vengeance I crave?  
I dream we are together, night and day,  
My love is lost. My love you betray.  
Saying so, his vision fades away.”

She cowers from her reflection, its judgemental gaze,  
Tears well up as she knows only one cure to the malaise.  
Each tear drop trickles down to the stream,  
She feels her soul splitting at every seam.  
In a fit of rage, she takes to the water,  
She flays about herself as if to slaughter  
Invisible demons that torment her so,  
She chants mantras for the demons to go.  
Such is her fury that a whirlpool she makes,  
She riles up the fishes, she riles up the snakes.  
A serpent mother bites her to protect its lair,  
The venom spreads fast, her skin becomes far from fair.

She thrashes so violently at the rocks and stones  
That her long nails sharpen enough to shred bones.  
Her long, dark hair mingle with snakes and eels,  
A water spirit whispers, to her it appeals.  
“Oh furious one, why wreak havoc upon our lives?  
Must you attack us with those knives?”  
The spirit’s enchanting voice broke her spell,  
She gathered herself, on the grass she fell.

The spirit cradled her head in its lap,  
He sang to her as she began to nap.  
In the dream world, she met a fish,  
“If you answer my riddle, I shall fulfil one wish.”  
If you answer favourably, I shall direct you at will,  
To a warrior who is known to kill  
All evil, all unjust creatures of the land,  
His divine powers no one can withstand.  
Remember, I cannot bring back the deceased.  
Tell me now, what is that cannot be ceased?”  
She murmured, in the spirit’s lap she slept.  
“Fate... Fate...”, she uttered, as she wept.

The fish was pleased with her reply,  
The spirit wiped her tears as she continued to cry.  
He sang for her and stroked her hair,  
He felt for her, he tried to ease her despair.

“The warrior travels very near to this stream,  
I have seen him hunt, his powers are supreme.  
He will surely help you, if anyone can,  
He travels with a woman and a man.”  
That said, the fish and the spirit took leave,  
While she lay, a plan she began to weave.

She hides behind the trees as she gazes,  
“So, it is *Him* to whom they sing praises.”  
She spied on the party of three.  
“I doubt that Rama will ever agree.  
He, a valiant warrior, the protector of *Dharma*,  
Will surely refuse and remind me of *Karma*.  
My humble pleas for help will not be met,  
Like others, *He* will expect me to forget.  
There must be a way to appeal to his rage,  
To bring out the warrior within this sage.”

An ugly woman appeared from nowhere,  
She was dark skinned, with long, dishevelled hair.  
She had big eyes and talons for nails,  
She danced around the two handsome males.  
The two men promptly turned her away.  
“I am here with my wife, whom I shall never betray.”  
A charming woman stood by *His* side.  
The other male too turned her down and hurt her pride.  
All was going as per her cunning plan,



In mock fury, towards the wife, she ran.  
Before she could claw her, Rama's brother sprang,  
She felt the sting as his blade rang.  
Her nose and ears burnt like the sun,  
She revelled inwardly, her job was done.  
She yelled at them, "I shall not forget!",  
She ran off in the forest, her mind was set.

She races past the forest and the sea,  
Now and then, she laughs with glee,  
She remembers him, she plans to honour her oath,  
She would destroy the one she had come to loathe.  
Ravana, the King of Lanka and her eldest brother,  
Her husband died at the hands of no other.  
The desire for power was present in both,  
Why then did Ravana dislike Dushtabuddhi's growth?  
"Oh, brother, you tricked me that night.  
I shall never forget that horrific sight."  
The sweet smell of vengeance crept within,  
She had finally committed herself to the sin.

She wails all the way, till Ravana could clearly see  
"Oh brother! Look what they did to me!",  
She cried and rushed to his side.  
He was shocked to see her hideous hide.  
He ordered for the healers to tend to her injuries,  
She went on to tell Ravana of Rama's stories,  
"Oh brother! They all worship him to no end.",  
She sighed, she continued to pretend.

She sobbed as the pain shook her whole,  
She recounted Sita, her virtues she began to extol.  
“Such is Rama’s might and such is Sita’s allure.”,  
She talks of them and casts her lure.  
“They have dishonoured our clan,  
You must teach a lesson to this man.  
When I said that *You* are the Lord of the Land,  
They tortured me so that I be eternally damned.”  
By now, Ravana’s eyes were ablaze with hate,  
The Lord of Lanka, unknowingly, bit the bait.  
Before he left for the forest, he said,  
“Dry your tears, Minakshi!”, onward he sped.  
“Better wife or better sister to be,  
Oh, the ‘*Dharma Sankat*’ of Minakshi.  
Nay, no more, *I am Surpanakha*,  
The Princess of the Kingdom of Lanka.”



**Note:**

The subject refers to the plight of “Surpanakha”, a character from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*.

Her name literally means “sharp, long nails” in Sanskrit. It is believed that her birth name was “Minakshi”. She is considered as one of the catalysts for causing the war that led to the demise of her brother, the mighty demon-king, “Ravana” and the fall of the Lankan Empire. Ravana was supposedly responsible for the death of Dushtabuddhi, Surpanakha’s husband.

“Dharma Sankat” means a moral dilemma.

As per the widely accepted version of *Ramayana*, written by Valmiki, Rama was exiled to a forest for fourteen years and he was accompanied by his wife, Sita and his brother, Lakshmana. During their stay at one forest, Surpanakha is said to have tried to charm Rama and Lakshmana, but she was turned away. In her rage, she tried to attack Sita and was driven off by Lakshmana’s onslaught, who cut off Surpanakha’s ears and nose.

When Surpanakha returned to Lanka and apprised Ravana of Rama, he took off with his demon uncle, “Maricha”, to look into the matter himself. He ended up kidnapping Sita and whisking her away to Lanka. All this led to the epic war between Rama’s forces of good and Ravana’s forces of evil. Rama emerges victorious in the end. Rama is known to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and is considered to be a God and an ideal king.

## Jack-o-lantern

A long, dark road connected the two  
    Alongside it, many a tree grew.  
A weeping willow drooped, overcome by woes  
The eyes of the birch trees watched him close.

A lonely man, jumped over the fence  
    Full of mischief and bereft of sense.  
He toasted to the dark, moonless night,  
    He drank and clutched his flask tight.  
    He ran over the abandoned plains  
And took refuge where they once kept grains.

The man finally came to rest.  
    “Tomorrow, I depart for the west.”  
    He cradled his bag and happily smiled,  
He looked and felt most like a satiated child.  
He looked about once, to secure his hideout.  
    “‘They won’t find me here, without a doubt.’”

Jack relished in his tricks and ploys,  
    People, for him were merely toys.  
He was infamous for his games of deceit,  
Conning and cheating, he was quick on his feet.

So much had his ill repute grown  
To the Devil himself he’d come to be known.  
The Devil hid and watched him day and night,  
    He grew insecure and was filled with spite.

He had decided to erase Jack's name,  
He had to tarnish Jack's growing fame.  
That night had come, the Devil was close,  
"No harm to let him wind up this one, I suppose."  
Saying that, he waited to catch Jack alone,  
Jack's evil soul he wished to own.

That night, the villagers had gathered at the church  
And Jack craftily went there to besmirch  
The feast that they had prepared, collecting alms,  
Jack had furiously rubbed his itching palms.  
He had conned them and escaped the mob,  
"Pity, they had not much to rob.",  
He said as he heard a noise from the nearby plains,  
They were searching for him, some dragging chains.

As Jack prepared to skedaddle  
He was trapped by the Devil.  
"Not tonight Jack, it's time you come with me,  
Your sins account for a handsome fee."

Jack was nimble in action and thought,  
He had no plans to get caught.  
So he moaned and groaned a lot,  
"I propose to you a last plot.  
I shall readily come with you,  
But let us teach these folks a lesson or two.

They are out to get back at me,  
But I will go with them readily,  
And when they demand the coins I stole,  
You can take their form whole.  
When they go back with their alms,  
You can disappear from their palms.  
Oh what devilish fun it shall be,  
To play this scheme, such misery.”

Jack pleaded with the Devil earnestly  
The Devil couldn't refuse the planned trickery.  
Jack shook his bag as the coins jingled,  
The Devil turned and with them he mingled.

Jack jumped with joy and laughed aloud,  
He had trapped the Devil and felt most proud.  
Among the steals from the feast  
Was a silver cross, to tame the beast.

The Devil's powers were contained by the cross,  
The Devil knew he was now at a loss.  
“First you must promise to leave me be,  
Never to come back for my soul or my fee.”,  
He whispered to the Devil with a coy smile.  
“I promise. You are not worthwhile.”,  
The Devil growled and roared from inside,  
Jack took out the cross and kept it aside.

The Devil vanished without a trace  
And Jack escaped them all, he won the race.  
For many more years Jack lived by his whim,  
He stole and conned but he started feeling grim.

Tired was he of his nomadic ways,  
Running and hiding most of his days.  
He wished to be home, wherever it may be,  
He was ready to pay the highest fee.

He called for the Devil for one thing was sure,  
His presence, Heaven would never endure.  
The Devil appeared in his black cloud,  
“Take me now.”, Jack spoke aloud.

The Devil was sombre, he shook his head,  
“I have a promise to keep.”, he smiled and said.  
“All doors are closed for you Jack,  
I would suggest you head back.”

“But I am lost, I have no light.”  
Jack looked about in the dark night.  
The Devil threw a fistful of hell’s fire,  
“Take this light and do as you desire!”

Jack cradled the eternal flame of hell,  
He pondered long and searched for a shell  
For the flame that burned ever so bright,  
An eerie glow bobbed in the dead of the night.

He stole a pumpkin from a nearby farm,  
Just as a dog sounded the alarm.  
He quickly carved his face in the pumpkin,  
He skedaddled after setting the flame in.  
And so it is that Jack was known to be seen  
Rising back from the dead, that Halloween.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the possible origin of Jack-o-lantern as is believed in folklore.

It seems Jack is left to walk the lands by the light of hell's incessant flames because his soul has no place to go-neither heaven, nor hell. Jack-o-lanterns are associated with the holiday of Halloween and mostly seen as an evil face carved out in a pumpkin, with a candle placed in the hollow pumpkin for an eerie effect.



## The Pharaoh's Display

The curator examined the new display,  
The once great Pharaoh now quietly lay.  
His gold sarcophagus glistened with greater pride,  
Surrounded by his servants, ever prepared to provide.

He inspected the hundred Shabti standing tall,  
The stone figurines looked solemn, their stature small.  
Some carried a hoe on their back,  
Few wielded a sword, waiting to attack.  
Some offered a basket of succulent fruits,  
Few perused books to aid *His* scholarly pursuits.  
Some carried a water bowl, filled to the brim.  
Few shook the sistrum for a sacred hymn.  
Some played the harp, some played the flute,  
Few strung the lyre and one strummed the lute.  
On *His* left, a Shabti waved a long fan,  
The curator was pleased, everything was as per plan.

This was the saving grace that the museum needed,  
The curator had to make sure that he succeeded.  
He had organized for its patrons, a gala event,  
Through which he planned to proudly present  
The newly acquired articles of a Pharaoh's tomb,  
That had been long lost in the Pyramids' womb.  
He had himself supervised the men so hired  
To unearth the treasures that he desired.

“Sir, I must humbly warn you still,  
You are disturbing a tomb at will.”,  
Their native guide had reminded him again,  
But the curator had vehemently urged his men  
To collect the Pharaoh and his funerary wares,  
While the native man recited his prayers.  
The curator had sat with his reference text  
To decipher the inscription, his nerves flexed.

“Lord of the Lords, my Master and King,  
Act I must, at his bidding.”  
The Shabti had such inscriptions carved in its stone  
They all plead allegiance to the Pharaoh alone.  
The Pharaoh was still King, though he was dead,  
The Shabti were to toil in his stead.  
There were other interesting finds in the tomb,  
Riches, artwork, scriptures of destruction and doom.  
All was kept in the display as was instructed,  
All in all, the Pharaoh had been abducted.

The curator smiled like a Cheshire Cat,  
With a final look, he removed his hat.  
He secured the doors and locked the display tight,  
He intended to stay at the museum that night.  
He lit up the fireplace and lounged in his chair,  
It was all worth it, the price had been fair.  
The tiring expedition in the sand dunes,

The scorching, long and dry afternoons,  
The many bribes that had to be paid  
To get the permit, officials he had to serenade.  
The museum would soon be back on its feet,  
His business would soon be complete.

He called his wife and checked on his boys,  
He hung up soon and was rattled by a noise.  
He turned his attention to a packed, wooden box,  
Hesitant at first, he finally undid the locks.  
He opened the huge box and peered inside,  
“Misha, nowhere else could you hide?”  
He cradled his cat and petted its head,  
“You know better than to disturb the dead.”  
He examined the Sarcophagus hidden in the sand,  
“Tomorrow, the Pharaoh travels far, as I had planned.”

The cat kept busy while the curator soon slept  
Unaware that a gust of sand there swept.  
He opened his eyes when the sand was hurled at him,  
He woke up to find the room dark and grim.  
He struggled to find his footing in the dark,  
He slipped but finally he lit a spark.  
The fireplace lit up with greater force,  
He shook his head, his throat felt hoarse.  
As he turned, he gasped, he was taken aback,  
He was surrounded, they were all ready to attack.

All hundred Shabti looked solemnly at him,  
While one recited a prayer, a sacred hymn.  
He heard the sistrum shaking wildly,  
He felt himself fading mildly.  
Before he could think or react to the sight,  
He was blinded by a bright, white light.  
*He* came back just as dawn broke,  
*He* stretched his arms as he awoke.  
*He* walked to the open box and peered inside,  
“Ah, today I meet my Queen, my bride.”  
The curator wiped the sarcophagus clean,  
The sand was nowhere to be seen.  
*He* called his wife and spoke at length,  
“You, my dear and my boys give me strength.”

A few hours later, the gala event began,  
The Curator became the most sought after man.  
When asked questions about the display,  
He answered voraciously, without a delay.  
“Sir, the Shabti with the fan, it’s been moved.”  
“Yes, dear friend, of this, I approved.  
The fan-bearer, by custom, must be on the right.  
He holds a special place, his title speaks of his might.”

The curator welcomed his family as they made their way,  
He led them proudly to the Pharaoh’s display.  
They hugged him and kissed him for his success,

“Sir, your office has turned into a mess.”,  
The cleaner hurried to him with his cat,  
But as he held Misha, it hissed and spat.  
“It was clawing at the box for some reason.  
I’ve loaded it up to be shipped to Mr. Mason.”  
The curator thanked the cleaner and said,  
“Misha, you know better than to disturb the dead.”



**Note:**

The subject refers to “Shabti” and an ancient pharaoh coming back from the dead. It seems that the Pharaoh possesses the curator’s body in the end of the poem and takes over not only the curator’s life, but also his family.

Shabti are figurines that were placed in tombs in Ancient Egypt to serve the deceased as servants in the afterlife.

*Sistrum*: It was a sacred instrument in Ancient Egypt, originating in the worship of Bastet, played in religious dances and ceremonies. It has small rings or loops of thin metal on its moveable crossbars that produce jangling sounds when the sistrum is shaken.

## The Kitchen Witch

A young woman hummed a happy tune,  
“Ah! My ginger bread will be baked soon!”  
She cleaned her kitchen as she sang  
And rushed to the door when a tiny bell rang.

The town crier came to announce a contest.  
“Our King shall be the judge and guest.  
“*He* looks for zeal and cooking flair  
And hopes to taste delicacies most rare.  
*He* ordains that contestants register their name  
To receive an invite and the rules of the game.  
The prize of the contest is yet sealed  
At the end alone, it shall be revealed.  
His majesty extends a welcome to all,  
The contest will be followed by the citizen’s ball.”  
Saying so, he blew the trumpet aloud,  
Unaware were all that this was a shroud  
To catch a witch that was rumoured to be in town,  
Her presence made the King’s Council frown.  
Some said she was living in disguise,  
Some said she does not age even as time flies.  
Stories about her were whispered about,  
They left the King plagued with many a doubt.

The spy brought him stories from town,  
He spoke as he kneeled down,  
“Some say her bread would always rise,

Some relish her sweet plum pies.  
Some say her food could never burn,  
Some say she teaches those who wish to learn.  
She sells her dishes in different guises,  
They know it's her for she leaves surprises.  
A recipe or a charm she leaves in each dish,  
Some say it granted them their wish  
If they wish sans fury and spite,  
Their wish comes true within a fortnight.”  
Saying so, the spy went back to town  
But the Council still wore a frown.

“Sire, the dough she kneads is sure to rise,  
She beats it with her mind and brings it to size.  
She enchants the sweet plum pies,  
To fill the host with illusions and lies.  
She owns the fire and its flames,  
The food never burns for the sparks she tames.  
Those who are said to have learnt from the witch,  
Are left stifled with a silenced pitch.  
Who knows what spell they are under,  
The charms have also brought some thunder.  
Those who wished fell victim to her hex,  
We must catch her before she comes for our necks.”  
The senior council member spoke in a voice most grave.  
And then they thought of a great conclave.  
The citizen's ball and the contest would serve as bait  
And help the King save his state.

The Council listed down all the names  
Of registered contestants, to check their claims.

The spies worked night and day  
They tailed them in the fields and in the hay.  
They reported back to the Council and the King  
If they had any suspicious news to bring.

The contest began with the King's address  
And soon the contestants worked to impress.  
The King and his Council watched from afar,  
The guards had been warned to report anything bizarre.  
Three women were adeptly marked  
Over their lives suspicions sparked.

A young woman who hummed a happy tune,  
A mid-wife who was fond of the moon,  
An old lady born on a midsummer eve, in June.  
They were announced the finalists at the end,  
They presented their dishes for the King to recommend  
The winner after an audience with each.  
"I present French toast and baked peach.",  
Said the young woman as she smiled,  
"I present roast pheasant with spices mild.",  
The mid-wife let out a nervous sigh.  
"I present a blueberry-plum pie.",  
The old woman coughed nearby.



A royal servant took a nibble from each  
He smacked his lips as he hungered more peach.  
Finally it was safe for the King to taste,  
He ate the French toast and baked peach with great haste.  
He looked about and smiled at the young cook,  
“My senses are charmed.”, He laughed and shook.  
The young woman demurely bowed her head,  
“I propose a prize to you.”, He said.  
“Marry me if you are unwed.”  
The Council and the women were shocked,  
The young woman and the King’s eyes were locked.

Soon the castle was abuzz with preparation,  
The other two dishes were left untouched in the royal kitchen.  
That night the King craved something sweet,  
He went to the royal kitchen, looking for something to eat.  
As he looked about, he saw the dishes of the contest,  
Guilty, he remembered his unfulfilled quest.

He emptied the two dishes and found a note  
Hidden in the blueberry-plum pie, in a grain of oat.  
“Be weary my liege, you are in danger,  
She may hex you soon, don’t marry a stranger.”  
The King was startled as a servant kneeled down,  
“Sire, you have a gift from the lady of the town.”,  
The future Queen had sent spicy ginger bread.  
He sent the servant away, the note he re-read.

“I wish to warn you, no harm I mean,  
A humble kitchen witch I have always been.  
She learnt from me ages ago,  
Now her magical powers and ambition grow.  
If you eat even a morsel of this bread,  
You will be left as good as dead.”

He heard her voice nearby and turned,  
She stood there looking concerned.  
The King was angry and confused,  
“The Kitchen Witch? I am not amused.”  
He said as she reasoned with him for long,  
“I will prove to you that I am not wrong.  
Remember me as the Kitchen Witch  
Who watches over kitchens, poor and rich.  
Who watches over her home,  
Turning away evil if they nearby roam.”,  
She whispered and ate a piece of the bread.  
She closed her eyes as she felt it spread,  
The King stared at the rag doll left behind,  
He felt the hex lift, he was no more blind.”



**Note:**

The subject refers to a possible origin of the ‘Kitchen witch’, a custom mostly observed in some places in Europe. As per folklore, a kitchen witch is a hand-made rag doll resembling a crone or a witch, it is hung in kitchens and is believed to bring good luck and ward away bad spirits.

## Kali of the Kali Yuga

He whispers to me again tonight,  
His voice fills me with unimaginable fright.  
I shake my head and try to sleep,  
Soon, I can do naught but weep.  
He has me in his hold again,  
This evil that moves among men.  
Not again, not again, I try to fight,  
All is lost, the venom spreads from *his* bite.

A young boy sits near the ill man,  
He tries to calm him, the best he can.  
He watches the man squirm in turmoil,  
He carefully lights the lamp with fragrant oil.

“Another mortal, finally at my feet,  
Another opportunity for me to cheat.  
Dwapar, my friend, what do you suggest?  
Help me lead this mortal on his evil quest.  
Already he gambles to his heart’s content,  
Already he drinks to a large extent.  
His son, this lad who patiently sits by his side,  
Is beaten black and blue by him, observe his hide.  
He looks like us, his skin is burnt like ours,  
I like him much, his strength lies in his scars.”

“Kali, my demon brother, let this man be,  
I am bored with him, don’t you see?  
Let’s test the boy, he is bound to break,  
Let’s see if he can withstand the power of a snake?”,  
Saying so, Dwapar laughed and so did Kali,  
“What fun they are, men and their folly!”.  
The two comrades retreated into the shadows,  
They watched the father and son eventually doze.

I feel my heart and soul sullied by *him*,  
The embers of goodness almost dim.  
I know I shall be consumed in full,  
I fear I have no strength to withstand *his* pull.  
I whisper to my son to be weary of Kali,  
He who waits patiently, preparing his volley.  
The Lord of Kali Yuga resides under my roof,  
Alas, I can give my son no proof.  
I feel myself fading, falling into an abyss,  
I lose my senses as I hear a loud hiss.

The snake slithered near the boy,  
It sunk his fangs and beamed at his ploy.  
“Hey Vishnu! Lord, protect us all.”  
He spoke boldly, for a boy so small.  
“Look at this Kali.”, Dwapar spoke,  
“In your presence too, he dares to croak.”  
Kali growled angrily as his wrath grew,  
He took his real form, towards the boy he flew.

He lashed at the boy, to possess his mortal form,  
He tried to enter his body like a measly worm.  
Each time he failed and the boy recovered,  
He roared at the boy as he hovered.

“Oh Kali of Kali Yuga, you cannot catch me,  
I have observed all the rituals with utmost purity.  
Blessed am I that my father gave me a gift,  
His last token before you lead him adrift.  
I read the tale of a great, virtuous king,  
Hereby, King Nala’s story I sing.”

“The beautiful Damayanti had made up her mind,  
She had chosen Nala, their lives were intertwined.  
But you Kali, who reached the ‘Swayamvar’ late,  
From Dharma and Damayanti, you wished Nala to separate.  
You followed them to Nishadha and waited for long,  
Twelve years it took for you to catch him in the wrong.  
The great Nala forgot to wash his feet before his prayers,  
You took over his soul, inflicting him with nightmares.  
Nala lost everything on the dice Dwapar had charmed,  
His horses, his kingdom, the royal robes they once warmed.  
Outcasts, he and Damayanti suffered together in exile,  
And finally fate led them apart after a while.  
Many years of misery they suffered apart,  
But united again for they were pure of heart.  
You left Nala and took away the venom too,  
Hiding away in a ‘Bahera’ tree that nearby grew.

But you came back to haunt mankind again,  
You chose to be born among mortal men.  
You came as Duryodhan and Dwapar as Sakuni,  
You devised a plan only the divine could foresee.  
And so it is that Lord Vishnu returned  
Amidst the carnage, as mortals burned.  
Soon, *He* shall return to set order to your discord,  
Beware Lord Vishnu, Kalki shall rise with *his* sword,  
Upon his horse Devadatta, he shall chase you,  
You have little time to revel, maybe a year or two.”

The boy sat still while Kali glared at him,  
“I vow to prowl around you.”, his voice was grim.  
Dwapar sniggered but the boy stayed indifferent,  
“Hey Kali, your vow alone will not be sufficient.  
Before you left King Nala, you gave him a boon,  
Those who read his tale are safe from your malicious tune.”,  
The boy spoke up and Kali’s eyes grew crimson,  
Without a word, he slunk back from where he had risen.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the demon “Kali”, the reigning lord of the Kali Yuga.

As per Hindu beliefs, the world undergoes four yugas or ages: Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga. It is

believed that this cycle of four yugas repeats endlessly. Interestingly, the four names of the yugas are named so after dice throws in a vedic dice game, Satya being the best and Kali being the worst.

Kali possessed a great King, Nala, and led him to lose his entire kingdom, gambling on a game of dice. After years of misery and separation from his wife, Damayanti, Nala finally overcame Kali's power. He exorcised Kali to a Bahera tree, that produces nuts in its fruits which were used as dice in the vedic dice game. Kali offered a boon to Nala when he left his body. Nala sought a boon that whoever read Nala's story would not be unduly corrupted by Kali's influence.

During each cycle and yuga, Lord Vishnu descends upon the earth to vanquish evil. It is believed that we are currently living in the Kali Yuga where demon Kali reigns supreme. Kali Yuga is considered the worst yuga among all the yugas, one with the most corrupt and sinful humans. It is prophesized that Lord Vishnu will descend in his final incarnation as "Kalki", to drive away Kali. It is also believed that since the cycle of yugas keeps repeating, Kali always manages to escape to another yuga, to wreak havoc in every Kali Yuga.

## The Victim of the Night

*He* returned home in the dead of the night,  
He felt a fever burning him, ever so slight.  
*He* put away his long overcoat and hat  
That gave him a sinister guise of a bat.  
*He* removed his gloves with his practiced hands,  
Nothing could give them the slip, not even the sands.  
With a swift motion, *He* smoothed his long hair,  
That someone was spying on him, he was unaware.

*He* walked fluidly towards the fireplace,  
*He* rearranged the logs of wood at its base.  
The flames were born with a sudden flare,  
*He* settled satiated, in a large armchair.  
*He* closed his eyes and seemed to relax,  
The spy grovelled in the snow to check *his* tracks.  
He searched and searched but no tracks were found.  
He was interrupted by the howl of a hound.  
The spy froze as he ascertained its source,  
He concluded that it seemed distant and hoarse.  
He carefully made his way back to the window,  
He had wiped his tracks as he waded in the snow.

His subject seemed to be meditating still,  
*He* was woken up by a wail quite shrill.  
*His* eyes flew open but *he* didn't move a muscle,  
The spy shook as he felt a wind rustle.  
*He* was still unshaken, *his* gaze fixed,



*His* expressions seemed eerily mixed.  
Anger or spite? *He* looked most severe.  
The spy instantly felt a pinch of fear,  
The man's glare seemed to be near.  
He debated whether to give up and be off,  
Just then, he felt the urge to cough.  
He stifled it and dug into the snow,  
He prayed, hoping it would soon go.  
He struggled as the cough seemed to persist  
The wails were gone, he was embraced by a mist.

He tried hard to see through the window,  
He had lost his subject but he saw a distant glow.  
Two fiery balls gleamed where the mist was most,  
His instincts pricked as he saw them coast  
Towards him as he started to sprint away,  
The sudden blood rush made his steps sway.  
He ran for what felt like an eternity,  
He ran blindly, the mist could hardly let him see.  
It had grown thicker as time went by,  
Finally the assailant caught up with the spy.  
Of course, the spy could see *him* not,  
He rested a moment in his current spot.  
He wheezed and coughed as he gasped for air,  
Then he noticed the gleaming pair,  
Veiled behind the heavy mist,  
Their hold was strong and difficult to resist.

He felt himself sinking, sinking to sleep,  
He tried to fight as it pulled him deep.  
His eyelids felt heavy, his vision was obscure  
The fleeting seconds that he could endure.  
A feeling of doom had washed over him,  
He was in his room, unlit and dim.

He felt aghast as the room took a reddish glow,  
He saw the ceiling move, it appeared very low.  
To his horror, the walls and ceiling were closing in,  
When he tried to move, he felt his head spin.  
Just when he thought that his end was near  
He woke up, shaken, his vision was clear.

He felt confused and blinked his eyes,  
They caught him by surprise.  
A warm and gentle touch brought him back,  
“Oh John, we are lucky we live close to Dr. Black.  
He found you wandering in the snowstorm.”  
She wiped his face with a cloth lukewarm.  
“I think John is still weary from the night,  
But I must say you gave us all a fright.  
You were burning up when I found you,  
The wind and snow had turned you blue.”  
Dr. Black spoke as he felt John’s pulse,  
Something within made John repulse.

“I believe that the fever will subside soon,  
Just ensure he takes the medicine every noon.”,  
Dr. Black spoke softly as he got up to leave,  
John’s mind stirred, he knew not what to believe.  
While Dr. Black collected his medical equipment,  
John observed him discreetly, to his heart’s content.  
He looked paler than most of the townsfolk,  
Dressed in a long black hat and black cloak.  
He wore black gloves that couldn’t conceal,  
His strength and dexterity, his grip of steel.  
“Darling, I’ll be back, let me show the doctor out.”  
He looked at his wife and then looked about.  
No sooner had he heard the clang of the door,  
He jumped out of bed and tiptoed on the floor.

He stood in the shadows by the window,  
He saw Dr. Black tip his hat and go.  
*He* walked slowly towards *his* manor next door,  
*He* didn’t seem to mind the downpour.  
As if by some strange coincidence, *he* turned.  
*His* eyes found him, like embers they burned.  
He turned away in fear just as his wife was back,  
“Please let him help, you must listen to Dr. Black.  
Your illness must have some cure,  
He’s taken a sample of your blood to be sure.”

He wanted to tell her but couldn't utter a word.  
When he tried, his speech was terribly slurred.  
His wife looked at him, her eyes were teary.  
He ran and brought a pen and a diary.  
She tried to stop him but he went on to write,  
He had to share the horrors of that night.  
But as he wrote, his fears came alive,  
His letters were twisted, impossible to derive.  
He looked at his wife and then at his scribble,  
He rushed to the window, he wailed, fighting the drizzle.



**Note:**

The subject refers to a mysterious neighbour (and doctor) who appears to be a vampire.

As per folklore, Vampires are believed to be undead creatures, they are pale skinned, have superhuman strength, supernatural abilities such as controlling wild beasts and the ability to come and go in the form of a bat or as mist.

They are also believed to have hypnotic and paralyzing effects on their victims in some folklore.

## Grim & The Klabautermann

“Come on lad, fetch your pail,  
Deck oughtta be clean before we set sail.”,  
The gruff voice of the Captain woke him up,  
Grim grovelled in fear, like a little pup.  
The Captain and his crew soon took off,  
Behind their backs, Grim began to scoff.  
“Grim do this, Grim do that,  
Am I always going to be a gnat?  
Curse you old man for dying on me,  
Left me alone to pay your fee.”

Grim grumbled under his breath  
He dropped the grime to the depth,  
Adding to the murky waters around the wharf,  
He turned and found himself eyeing a dwarf.  
The man was dressed in bright hues,  
He winked and grinned, a sign of truce.  
His woollen cap sat lopsided on his head,  
“Ahoy there mate!”, in a gruff voice, he said.

A smoking pipe hung at his mouth,  
“Watch yer vessel on the south.”  
Grim knew not who this man could be,  
He saw neither a trick nor a logic he could see.  
“What? Who?”, Grim uttered, unsure was he  
“I’ll be back when ye most need me.”  
The dwarf whispered and vanished in thin air,  
Grim was befuddled, he pulled his hair.

Could it be that the sea had got to him?  
An illness or a curse, thought poor Grim.  
Now and then he felt he heard a rumble,  
The crew returned and the Captain began to grumble.  
He looked vexed for the ship was still a mess,  
Grim knew not whether to stay mum or confess.  
He took the Captain's tirade with a solemn look,  
He tried to talk but his nerves shook.  
The captain ordered Grim to get to work,  
Each crew member concealed a smirk.  
They had little entertainment on the sea,  
Sniggering and teasing, they took to the galley.  
Grim's head hung low, he felt wretched as a rat,  
Unconsciously, he began to chew the fat.

He scrubbed the deck while the crew sang,  
And before he knew it, the dwarf again sprang.  
Out of nowhere, the little man came by,  
Grim held his face and turned to the sky.  
The clouds, they seemed to move fast,  
The dwarf jumped and climbed the mast.  
Grim was scared that he was going mad,  
"Better not sail today, my lad!",  
The dwarf was now by Grim's side,  
Taken aback, Grim fell as he cried.  
A huge commotion followed his fall,  
Stuck in the lines, Grim tried to crawl.

The Captain and crew were filled with spite,  
For they would have to set the lines right.  
The Captain shook Grim with much force,  
“You weasel! You’ve set us off course.”  
Grim whimpered and tried to explain,  
“Tie him up, hand me my cane.”,  
The Captain was ready to cane the brat,  
“It was him, the dwarf, near the mast he sat.”,  
Grim cried as the Captain grew angrier still,  
“I’ve had enough of this devil.”,  
The Captain gave the crew a sign,  
All that Grim could do now was whine.

A single line bound Grim tight,  
The crew hoisted him and tossed him right.  
They dragged him through the other side,  
Keel hauling him, the hull scraped his hide.  
The barnacles roughed him up like thugs,  
The seaweed wrapped around him for hugs.  
Grim held his breath as long as he could,  
He was numb to the splinters from the wood.  
He wondered if it would be a fatal blow  
Or the murky waters that would end his woe.  
The waters were crimson and smelled of him,  
“There there, me lad. Hold on Grim.”

He saw a massive bubble floating nearby,  
The dwarf raised his little arms high,  
He smoked his pipe and held it out,  
Froth and bubbles, it began to spout.

It covered Grim and took him upwards.  
Grim grew dizzy but he could hear the sea birds.  
Finally the line came loose, setting Grim free,  
As he came to and waded, he could see  
A hole in the hull that could pose a threat,  
He swam towards an idle fishing net.  
He choked as deep breaths he took,  
Dragging the empty line, the crew began to look.  
They searched a while and then they stopped,  
They fixed the lines, some elevated, some dropped.

Grim held onto the ship and rested meanwhile,  
“Is this dwarf friendly or hostile?”  
Grim thought and closed his eyes.  
“Did it make the hole or is he just wise?”  
The bubbles around him sang again,  
“The Klabautermann lives to protect seamen,  
We stay hidden for the most part,  
Unless a doomed ship prepares to depart.  
We mend ships and your hearts as per our whim,  
Oh Grim Grim Grim, come and take another swim.”

Grim called out to his Captain and crew,  
They heard him and a line they threw.  
He lay on the deck for a long time,  
Covered he was, in his blood and grime.  
“A hole in the hull, we cannot sail.”,  
He coughed as his voice began to trail.  
They checked the hull and sat by Grim,  
The Captain had a change of heart towards him.



And so it is that Grim's fortunes soared,  
He grew in ranks and enjoyed his life aboard.  
The Klabautermann and Grim never met again,  
But its tales became famous among many a men.  
Such that its statue was placed upon the mast,  
To bring good luck as long as a journey would last.



**Note:**

The subject discusses the creature “Klabautermann” from German folklore.

The name “Klabautermann” itself pertains to rumbling or noise when broken down to German verbs. It is said to be a water sprite that may assist and rescue sailors and fishermen. They are believed to be experts at watercraft and their carving can be found on masts of ships as a symbol of good luck.

*Galley:* As per sailor’s parlance, it means Kitchen.

*Chewing the fat:* A tough, cured meat (usually salted beef) which requires prolonged chewing to make it edible.

*Keelhauling:* A form of punishment given to sailors. The sailor was usually tied to a line that looped beneath the ship, thrown overboard on one side of the ship and dragged from the other end. This resulted in fatal injuries as the sailor would get dragged along the hull, usually covered in barnacles and other marine life or the sailor would drown. It was one of the harshest punishments in the maritime world.

## The Lady in White

The owls cried for the night had come,  
Markus was awake, he felt quite glum.  
His friends had planned a great adventure,  
Into the haunted manor, they had planned to venture.

Yes, indeed, the manor was known to be haunted,  
Markus didn't want to be left behind, to be taunted.  
So when his parents' snores were loud enough,  
He got to work and left in a huff.

He sneaked away into the dark,  
In the distance, he heard the farmer's dogs bark.  
He knew his way to the haunted estate,  
He kindled his lamp and picked up his gait.

They had heard much about the ghost,  
Sighted around the old manor, near the coast.  
Some said she hurt them so much that they fell,  
Some said she put them under a spell.  
Children too had seen the lady in white,  
Often she warned them of the dangers of the night.  
She asked some if they had found the key,  
People wondered where and for what it could be.

Markus raced along the sinuous road,  
He braced himself for the night as he strode.  
He slowed his pace as he reached by the wall,  
He whispered and peered, he cried their secret call.

Again he heard the dogs bark as if to warn,  
But a moan swept him, its tone forlorn.  
He tried to discern from where it came,  
In the lamp, sputtered and flickered the flame.  
The moan seemed to engulf Markus from all around,  
Not a soul he saw, none of his friends he found.

He wondered if they had already ventured inside,  
He scaled the wall, the manor he eyed.  
The moan was fickle, it came and went,  
Sometimes in his ear, when his head was bent.

Markus whirled about with his tiny lamp,  
Expecting to meet the infamous vamp.  
He found himself staring at naught,  
He refused to give up the adventure he sought.

He clenched his fist and scampered on,  
He noticed how all the curtains were drawn.  
Not a window he found in which to peer,  
The clink of champagne glasses he could hear.

He swallowed hard as he found the door ajar,  
He found her seated at an ancient bar.  
She blew at the champagne glasses and they clinked,  
She looked at him, not once she blinked.

She looked like she was made of mist,  
She continued to vaguely stroke her wrist.  
She wore a wedding gown and a wedding veil,  
She rose suddenly, followed by her flowing trail.

Markus stood gaping, he stayed still,  
She looked at him and then perched upon the window sill.  
She sat there for long, her white robes flowing,  
Her hands moved as if she was sewing.  
Markus set down the lamp and sat at the door,  
All of a sudden, a piece of her gown she tore.

She rushed towards Markus, she flew out the door,  
Markus fell over, he scrambled on the floor.  
In the distance he saw her faint form,  
Over the coast, he could see the onset of a storm.

He rushed after her and hid behind a tree,  
Brooding and bent over the grass was she.  
He craned his neck to better his sight,  
“Hush Hush!”, she clutched a limp phantom tight.  
A fading form of a dying man he could make,  
Before long he felt the ground tremble and quake.  
“Leave me, save yourself, you must hide,  
He wants you back, he seeks his bride.”  
From nowhere, a hunter’s knife found his heart,  
The phantom groom emerged, she fell back with a start.  
While he mercilessly retrieved his hunting knife,  
Terror gripped her, towards the coast ran his future wife.

Markus held his breath, lest the phantom took note,  
Near the sea, he saw her push away a boat.

He heard the distant cry of a child,  
The phantom groom slashed at her, the sea seemed riled.  
While the boat bobbed up and down and headed away,  
The phantom bride and groom met with a fall in the bay.

Markus emerged from the shadows,  
They vanished, the boat too was far from close.  
The waves revealed no sign of the two,  
He looked about, not knowing what to do.  
A shadow in the distance caught his eye,  
“Hush, my child, you must not cry.”,  
The lady in white stroked his hair,  
She kissed his cheek and sang a prayer.  
The world swayed around him as he fell,  
When he awoke, his head hurt and a welt did swell.

He shook himself and got up and stretched,  
He hummed the prayer, for it stayed etched.  
The horizon brimmed as it welcomed dawn,  
He rubbed his eyes, he let out a yawn.  
While he pondered upon the events of the night,  
He seemed to have spotted his father’s fishing site.

His mind raced upon all that he had seen,  
He wondered who the child could have been.  
He raced back to the manor as he continued to hum,  
He reached the manor as it gazed over the town slum.

He went searching, from room to room  
Though he faintly feared meeting the phantom groom.  
He ran past the broken glass, the cob webs and debris  
Till he was struck by her, distant was she.  
The phantom groom played the piano in the painting,  
While she had her eyes closed as she seemed to sing.

A dusty, worn out piano stood by the window,  
He wondered what happened between the lady and her beau.  
He checked the piano and wiped its keys,  
He undid the curtain and welcomed the sea breeze.  
He played the keys, he sang the prayer like she'd once done,  
"I knew that you would come, my son.",  
He gasped as the breeze whispered in his ear,  
He caught a glimpse of her before she could forever disappear.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the very common ghostly figure "The White Lady". World over, there have been numerous legends and sightings of the White Lady.

The White Lady is a type of female ghost usually associated with some local legend of tragedy. The most common theme of such legends is losing or being betrayed by a husband, lover or fiancé.

## The Lost Child

Jacob, the royal advisor strode fast,  
As the dark clouds began to cast  
A spell for the perfect storm,  
He wore his coat to keep himself warm.  
He smiled at the game he had caught,  
He had struck in a single shot.  
The day had been most exhilarating,  
The royal hunt meant a lot to his King.  
The King was once just a Prince,  
Jacob had been serving him long since.  
He reminisced about the many hunts,  
The Prince always had a penchant for stunts.  
So it is that the years had passed  
In *his* glory, the kingdom had basked.

His horse let out a disgruntled neigh,  
It had toiled enough for that day.  
Jacob shushed it as he petted its head,  
“The years catch up.”, he laughed and said.  
He looked about for a place to rest,  
He calmed the horse and stroked its crest.  
He led it towards a nearby lake he knew,  
The skies meanwhile thundered, darker it grew.  
The horse quenched its thirst by the lake,  
Jacob had decided to take a short break.  
In the vicinity, a small village lay,  
He knew he’d be able to arrange a stay.

Jacob sat by his horse, as it drank still,  
He dipped his flask and let the water fill.  
He watched the rings of water ripple,  
It seemed to dance with a gait most supple.

They arrived just as it began to pour,  
Welcomed by all for royal robes he wore.  
Jacob's horse was taken to the best of stables  
As Jacob was ushered to the best of tables.  
The innkeeper was at his beck and call,  
He offered Jacob the best room of all.  
Jacob was thankful and nodded his way,  
"I'll take what you provide and pay for my stay."  
After a commoner's lavish meal and drink,  
Jacob decided to try and catch a wink.

As he lay on the fresh and fragrant bed,  
He closed his eyes and thought of the day ahead.  
The long day had been hard on him  
And soon he felt himself swim.  
He felt like he was floating in the lake,  
One moment calm and then battling a snake.  
He woke up and shook off the nightmare,  
He felt a certain chill in the air.  
Jacob mulled over the restless night,  
He was glad to be rid of his plight.  
He thought it wise to leave at the earliest  
And so it is that the village bid farewell to its guest.



Jacob rode fast and was soon near the lake  
Where the day before, he had taken a break.  
The lake seemed different from the day before,  
The breeze around it seemed to roar.  
The water rings rippled, the water furiously bobbed  
Standing ahead, he saw a child who sobbed.

As he rode closer to the wailing child,  
He found her state to be strangely wild.  
She looked haggard, frail and thin,  
Mud and weeds adorned her skin.  
Her rags seemed old and outgrown,  
A neckpiece on her was all that shone.  
Jacob dismounted from his horse and called out,  
“Dear child, where have you been about?”

She seemed lost, she didn't utter a word,  
“Come close dear, I mean no harm.  
Come, take my coat, it'll keep you warm.”  
He held out his coat for the poor girl,  
Sobs and tears, she began to hurl.  
He spoke in a gentle, reassuring tone,  
“Come with me, you needn't be alone.”

She wiped her tears and cautiously stood,  
She knew that his intentions were good.  
He gestured her to come to his side,  
She seemed reluctant, the horse she eyed.  
He walked to her and ushered her on,

She tried to walk but her soles were worn.  
Jacob had no choice but to carry the child,  
She finally seemed calm, weakly she smiled.

She seemed very young, not more than eight,  
He wondered what would've been her fate  
Had he not chanced upon her near the lake.  
He felt his arms beginning to ache.  
He scoffed at his ageing bones,  
The child seemed heavy as a bag of stones.  
Subtly he studied the child he carried,  
Something revived memories he'd long buried.

His men returned with bad news,  
"The errands we ran reveal no ruse."  
Jacob was distraught with the situation at hand,  
The next day, a new King would be born to the land.  
The Prince's coronation was soon to be held,  
"This threat must be immediately expelled.",  
He said and his men rode away,  
The prince was crowned the very next day.

Jacob felt his throat go gruff and dry,  
Once again, the child began to cry.  
"I want to rest, I want to rest.",  
She screamed and beat Jacob's chest.

In the middle of the dark night,  
Two men grabbed her tight.  
They carried her off to the nearby woods,  
Carefully they hid behind their hoods.  
They gave her a potent mix to help her sleep,  
They bound her and threw her in the deep.  
The King's throne was forever safe,  
They had done away with the illegitimate waif.  
The Prince's past stood erased,  
While the King's crown he embraced.

Jacob looked down at the King's first born,  
How he had plucked away this thorn.  
He felt her weight weigh him down,  
He recognized the neckpiece and wore a frown.  
It belonged to the Prince a long time ago,  
Given as a token to a lady he used to know.  
Young love, rebellion and forgotten mistakes,  
*He* had gambled with heavy stakes.

Jacob shook his head and let out a sigh,  
If he tried to let go, she would begin to cry,  
She'd cling to him tighter and would gain weight,  
He could no longer hold her and stand straight.  
His back was bent and his feet he dragged,  
He was by the lake, worn and fagged.  
She would not stop till she could rest,  
She would not leave till Jacob finished the quest.

So it is that they found a man in the lake,  
All were shocked, no sense they could make.  
How could such a man drown by his own will?  
Jacob, the Master of a set of varied skill.  
The King was beside himself with grief,  
He was given a neckpiece found under a leaf.  
The King ordered for the lake to be searched,  
Many remains were found, as the lake lurched.  
He ordered them to be put to rest by a priest,  
Only a proper burial could calm the beast.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the concept of “Myling”.

As per Scandinavian folklore, Mylings are disturbed souls of children that are abandoned. Since they were abandoned or killed and usually not properly buried, they rose as ghostly creatures, their spirits yearning to be properly buried.

Some beliefs also suggest that Mylings grew heavier as they neared a graveyard or their place of rest so much so that the person carrying them could very well sink in the ground. They were also believed to lash out in rage if their host was unable to carry them to a grave.

## A Tale of Two Cousins

A distinct new wail took the fire by storm,  
A new one arrives, I can barely see his form.  
I am told that he was a monk who lost his way,  
For his 'Anantarika-karma', he shall suffer many a day.  
Oh to commit the most heinous of all misdeeds,  
Another soul, this hell now breeds.

I cannot curtail the flames that I hold  
But I listen to them, I hear their lives unfold.  
He screams in pain and I can only lend an ear,  
I whisper to him but he is struck by fear.  
“Forgive me but I must keep fanning the flames.”  
“I understand. Oh it hurts!”, he exclaims.

“The Fire breather of Avici naraka, the hell of hells.”,  
He faintly smiles at me and again he yells.  
Of the many beings, he intrigues me most,  
Alas! I cannot be a more gracious host.  
While his face contorts in great pain,  
Never again did I hear him complain.

My realm of hell in one of incessant fire,  
Punishing all for negative karma they acquire.  
I am a mere agent in the this circle of rebirth,  
Neither I, nor the divine, decide their worth.  
I am only the keeper of this hearth.

“Gautam, our Bodhisattva of compassion,  
I, Devdatta, I am, I was his infamous cousin.”  
He spoke no more, not once since that day,  
As he suffered, he continued to pray.  
Time and again, I reflected over his fate,  
I knew what had lead him to this state.

Devdatta was Buddha’s maternal cousin,  
Jealousy had always been his poison.  
From the days of their childhood,  
Devadatta desired to be greater than good.  
How his cousin had stood up for a goose,  
Forcing Devadatta to let it loose.  
Once for Buddha, a white elephant was brought,  
Out of envy, his cousin killed it with one shot.

Nevertheless, he joined Buddha and wise he grew,  
Over time many ‘iddhis’ he knew.  
He was praised highly among many a men  
Until jealousy poisoned him once again.

To win more alms and allies, he played a King’s son,  
He displayed his ‘iddhi’ and the young prince was won.  
He appeared on his lap as a child with a girdle of snakes,  
He calmed him down when he emerged from behind the drapes.

The Prince, Ajatasattu, became his ardent devotee,  
“Your father, our King, is unable to see,  
He aids Gautam despite Gautam’s old age.  
A Prince?! Huh! Where is your warrior’s rage?  
A canary in this golden cage!”

“You desire to rule, do you not?”,  
Little by little, Devadatta began to plot.  
“I shall win, if the Prince takes the throne,  
Gautam must die.”, he was maligned by that thought alone.

He wished to be the leader, the supreme one,  
He lost his ‘iddhi’ as soon as this thought he spun.  
But Buddha had himself refused to let him have his way,  
Devdatta meandered along hate, he had lead himself astray.

Not only did he coax a son to torture his father,  
But he weaved a plan that would lead to slaughter.  
He would kill Buddha with some help from the King.  
He spoke wildly, “Ajatasattu, great news I bring.  
Soon, Gautam shall pass through your kingdom,  
Position your archers as I say and *He* shall be overcome.”  
The King nodded and did as he was told,  
Not one but sixteen archers patrolled.  
Each was given a different road to man,  
One to kill the other, such was Devadatta’s plan.  
Not one was meant to live with the secret  
But when the time came, the first archer began to fret.

He gave up his weapons and confessed,  
Buddha welcomed him, of the 'Sangha' he was professed.  
He preached to him and sent him down another path,  
The other archers returned, all were saved from Devadatta's wrath.  
Buddha summoned all archers by his 'iddhi' powers,  
They joined the Sangha and showered Buddha with flowers.

The first archer did return to Devadatta and said,  
"I could not kill the supreme.", he lowered his head.  
"Then I must do it myself!", Devadatta declared,  
He stormed out and many schemes he prepared.

Once when Buddha was treading over Gijjhakuta's soil,  
Devadatta, hidden high up in rocks, continued to toil.  
He finally managed to hurl at Buddha, a giant rock  
But two peaks rose and served as a block.  
The rock smashed into the peaks as they grew,  
Buddha was struck by a splinter, his blood began to spew.  
The greatest sin of sins Devadatta did commit,  
To his misdeeds he continued to submit.

Once he came to know which road Buddha would take,  
He let loose a fierce elephant that made the ground shake.  
Though Buddha was warned about Devadatta's plan,  
He continued onwards and turned away every other man.  
When Nalagiri, the elephant, charged towards his enemy,  
Buddha approached him with love and harmony.



Instantly Nalagiri was subdued as Buddha petted it,  
Once and for all, Ajatasattu and Devadatta split.

Devadatta gained other allies and did not cease,  
He formed his own order and disrupted peace,  
Again he violated their 'Sangha', their religious order,  
He caused great turmoil and disorder.  
For many years, he continued to strive,  
Until he had not long to survive.

He wished to meet Buddha to set his guilt free,  
Buddha, however, pointed that it would not be  
For Devadatta was swallowed by the earth,  
To cleanse his sins, in 'Avici', he took rebirth.  
In his final moments, Devadatta had uttered,  
"I have no other, but Buddha as my refuge."  
And then the lands were swept with a deluge.  
Buddha had known that they would be unable to meet,  
And Devadatta, in another life would have Buddha's seat.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the lives of Gautam Buddha and his cousin, Devadatta.

*Anantarika-karma*: As per Buddhism, these are five heinous sins that lead to great negative karma. They are: patricide, matricide,

killing one who has attained nirvana (Arhat), wounding a Buddha and creating disorder in the religious community of monks and nuns (sangha).

*Avici naraka:* In Buddhism, Avici naraka is the lowest level of hell (naraka). It is believed that committing one or more of 'Anantarika-karma' will lead to rebirth in Avici Naraka. The reborn beings in Avici Naraka have to spend their time in this realm till their negative karma is exhausted.

*Iddhis:* The Buddhist term for psychic powers.

As per the Lotus Sutra, the tale of Ajatasattu and Devadatta has a positive ending even though both of them committed Anantarika-karma and are said to suffer in Avici Naraka for their crimes. Buddhism upholds that even evil-doers are redeemable, even if not in their lifetime. The Lotus Sutra goes on to suggest that they both are future Buddhas who have yet to attain their true qualities.

## The Witch's Well

The moonlight kissed the grass as she tread by,  
The stars lit the dark, night sky.  
Her long, flowing, ravenous hair swished,  
She had cast a charm as her customer had wished.

Her cosy cottage was a welcome sight,  
She set her lamp down and rekindled its light.  
All at once, her peace was shattered,  
She found her cat bruised and battered.

She shrieked wildly for the cat was dead,  
“It’s your turn next.”, an armed soldier said.  
Not an instant to lose, he had her bound,  
He was sure to be rewarded for what he’d found.

She bit his hands until she was gagged,  
He struck her, towards the forest she was dragged.  
The moon was witness to the woman’s plight,  
On the eve of that Walpurgis Night.

He unsheathed his sword, his eyes were cold,  
She mumbled her last words, the future she foretold.  
“I shall meet you again, reward you I must.  
A soirée awaits, it begins, only just.”

His mighty sword dealt the fatal blow  
That’s how the witch fell ages ago.  
The valiant soldier wiped his bloodied blade,  
The price of heresy, the woman had paid.

He said a solemn prayer by the sacred well,  
One and all would remember the day she fell.  
He removed her rings, her beautiful locket,  
He shoved her into the well, the jewellery in his pocket.

With a glint of greed and a dash of pride,  
Off he went, to his newfound fame he applied.  
The Walpurgis Night descended soon,  
Witches from across the land began to commune.

They revelled freely upon the Brocken heights,  
They chanted their spells and finished their rites.  
As the night began to draw to a close,  
By the sacred well, a young witch froze.

They all gathered around the sacred well,  
“Daughters of magic, we must invoke a sacred spell.  
Our sister is taken much before her time,  
The murderer must be punished for this crime.”

One by one, they said an ancient prayer,  
Each plucked out one strand of hair,  
Each wished aloud for their sister fair.  
Each gave her part of their souls’ share.

That Walpurgis Night, the slain witch did rise,  
Amidst her sisters’ mystical cries.  
The arcane verses of the spell made her undead,  
“Farewell till we meet again.”, they said.

The witches dispersed as daylight raced with them,  
The undead witch cast a spell for a hem.  
It stitched her wounds, it sewed her back,  
But no spell or stitch could dispel the black.

She felt a surge of rage and spite,  
She hungered blood, she wished for eternal night.  
For the day exposed her blackness to all,  
In the depths of the well, she began to scrawl.

She spent her day scribbling inside,  
At night her powers could not be denied.  
And so it is that on one such night,  
Her vengeance did more than bite.

Her rings and locket served her well,  
The soldier had offered them to a young belle.  
Like other nights, the witch silently eyed the couple,  
But tonight, she let out a chuckle.

The belle woke up for she heard the snicker,  
The candle flame began to flicker.  
She looked about, her dainty hands shivered,  
The rings gleamed, the locket quivered.

Before she let out a scream,  
A blanket of black took over her dream.  
When the belle woke up again,  
She found herself in the midst of armed men.

“Burn her! The witch must die!”,  
They yelled at her as she began to cry.  
“Blood for blood.”, the women joined in.  
And so the belle was burnt for the witch’s sin.

The shadows concealed her victorious pout,  
The soldier was dead, his belle was her clout.  
She revelled in the shadows as the belle lost her life,  
Little by little, she became the Mistress of strife.

She spent her nights watching the townsfolk,  
Many found themselves in trouble when they woke.  
She teased many a man who chanced upon the well,  
They began to wonder who or what in it did dwell.

The sacred well teemed with gifts of coins and alms,  
Villagers offered tributes with their nervous palms.  
Some said that their wishes indeed came true,  
Others were mute, the witch’s ire they drew.

Impetuous was the witch when she felt rage,  
Many moons did pass but never did she age.  
Many had fallen for her charm when she did show  
And soon they were consumed by hate and woe.

On Walpurgis Night, she could never be tamed,  
Blood and souls of many she always claimed.  
One Walpurgis Night, her prey bit the bait,  
And he slaughtered everyone on the estate.

Tick-tock, tick-tock went the clock,  
She came to him as the door began to unlock.  
My darling, what did you do?“,  
She kissed him as he turned blue.



**Note:**

The subject refers to the fable of witches and Walpurgis Night. The poem talks about a vengeful witch that wreaks havoc in peoples' lives, especially on Walpurgis Night.

‘Walpurgisnacht’, the German name for the night of 30<sup>th</sup> April is so called because it is the eve of the feast day of Saint Walpurga who was an 8th-century abbess in Germany. According to German folklore, Walpurgis Night is believed to be the night when witches meet on Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains in central Germany.

European folklore boasts of several legends of wishing wells. It was believed that a spoken wish would come true when wished by a wishing well. Wells and springs were associated with water, a life giving source and thus a sacred commodity. People often associated wells and springs with their deities.

It is believed that some Germanic people would throw the armour and weapons of defeated enemies into water bodies as an offering to their Gods.

The general superstition is that if a person drops a coin in a wishing well and utters his/her wish, the guardian or the dweller of the well shall fulfil that wish.

## Curtain Call – Revelations

“Detective, I cannot say I am happy to see you,  
But I shall help in my capacity on the case you pursue.”,  
The doctor smiled and shook hands with the detective,  
“I must crack this one, this ordeal nobody must relive.”  
He went on, “Have you received any new patients of late?”  
“Why yes, just yesterday, a foreigner was found in a terrible state.  
Henry came to us last night, bathed in blood and pond scum.”  
“And is ‘Henry’ housed right now at your asylum?”,  
The doctor nodded, “You want to meet him, don’t you?”,  
The detective sprang up, no better reply he knew.  
The detective looked restless yet triumphant.  
“Did you ask him what is his choice for a hunt?”,  
The doctor patiently heard as the detective talked,  
The detective filled him in on the case as they walked.

“Henry, tell me what you remember from last night?”,  
The detective asked him as Henry continued to write.  
The doctor and the attendants looked on patiently,  
“What happened at the hotel by the sea?”,  
“Henry, I need you to tell me if these people you knew.”,  
The detective watched him as his pupils grew.  
Peter, Greta, Emil...remember the people you slew?!”  
The photos of the victims were spread across,  
“Some found in the hotel, one near the pond, in the moss.”  
The doctor and the attendants grew wary,  
The detective pushed on, his eyes were fiery.  
For over an hour, they tried to reach him.



They knew the chance of success was slim.  
The doctor finally intervened, Henry was returned to his cell,  
“Maybe he too suffered some trauma at that hotel.”,  
The doctor said when they were alone,  
“He is a monster. After all, the proof I have shown!”  
The doctor sighed and picked up the paper Henry had used.

*“Ah! Yes, this will do me well,  
In this room, I sense a charming spell.”,  
The man closed his eyes and sniffed the air,  
“A pinch of berries and a hint of red pear,  
Haha! My mind is abuzz with tales of yore,  
I must weave this fragrance into my lore.”*

*The bellboy, Emil, stood staring at the mumbling man,  
He wore an expensive suit, its colour mildly tan.  
“Dear boy, do pay heed to my instructions,  
While I write, I detest any obstructions.  
I wish not to be woken, unless it stirs my soul,  
Now tell me lad, a good place for a stroll.”,  
The man looked eagerly at the young boy,  
Emil knew not how he could be so full of joy.*

*“Well, the sea is right across the road,  
Or a little pond which houses many a toad.  
But the tides are dangerously high these days  
And the pond is haunted, so my mother says.”,*

*Emil's smile faded and his face grew crooked.  
"What luck! The perfect chance to draw the wicked.  
Here, I shall carve my pièce de résistance."  
The man beamed and looked into the distance.  
The boy quickly slipped away from the room,  
Before his monologue, the man could resume.*

*The man was a renowned playwright,  
Travelling like a nomad to sharpen his creative insight.  
He wished to pen a most sinister plot,  
But he was struck by a monstrous knot.  
Unable to produce an epic, each time his pen froze.  
He longed for a muse to match his grandiose.  
And so Henry chanced upon this quaint hotel,  
It had an ancient heritage as far as Henry could tell.*

*Henry gazed and walked about the room,  
He opened the window, the tulips were in full bloom.  
"Oh! How thee burn my heart with passion!",  
He clasped his hands, around he spun.  
As he was walking by the balcony, he stood still,  
The sea churned, sea gulls swooped, their cries were shrill.*

*He was unsure where first to go,  
He noticed that the tides were faring low.  
And so he was soon walking on the sand,  
He marvelled at the sea, how it bathed the land.*

*He closed his eyes, the waves furiously roared.  
The salty waters played him, the sea gulls soared.  
He cautiously moved back towards the shore,  
“My pendant!”, he cried for an heirloom he always wore.  
He grew sullen and walked away,  
He hoped for better luck for the rest of the day.*

*He went to his room and took a hot bath,  
“Who am I to compete with Poseidon’s wrath?”  
He felt his spirit rise as he reminisced,  
“At a mermaid’s bosom it may rest, or the sand it may have kissed.”  
He whistled as the boy brought his evening meal,  
“A cup of hot glogg and a special jellied veal.”,  
Saying so, the boy left the room before Henry spoke,  
“Hmm. That is one strange young bloke.”  
Henry drowned the hot glogg and devoured his meal,  
“Such succulent flavours!”, he let out a squeal.*

*The sun had set in the few hours of his stay,  
He decided to explore the garden without further delay.  
“Sir, please do not feed the fish in the pond,  
And watch out for the catfish by the frond.”  
Henry nodded, waving the anxious receptionist away,  
He walked towards the screech of a lonely Jay.*

*Henry walked towards the nearby forest land,  
As the Jay jeered, the trees he scanned.*

*He followed the harsh calls of the bird,  
Till the wind in the trees furiously whispered.  
Finally, the bird came into sight,  
Its feathers were blue and bright.  
Henry stood still as the bird hopped about the pond.  
“Oh Mother Nature and her magical wand!”*

*The glogg had stirred Henry a wee bit,  
He applauded loudly, his imagination was lit.  
The fresh water splashed as a large catfish sprung out,  
Water trickled from its whiskers and its snout.  
To his horror, the catfish moved menacingly towards him,  
Henry began to run, he was chased near the pond’s rim.*

*“Mother Nature sure trumped me!  
I am trapped by this monster, no escape I see.”,  
Henry uttered, fearing that his end was near.  
To his rescue came a flying spear.  
The catfish was struck but it jumped into the pond,  
Henry knew not what else there spawned.  
He turned around and found his muse,  
Dressed in white, she wore no shoes.  
A fire bellowed in the woman’s eyes,  
“Thank you.”, he said, unable to contain his surprise.*

*“This is a strange place, haven’t you heard,  
Her blue eyes sparkled, he couldn’t bear a single word.*

*“I owe you the night. I beg you to dine with me.”,  
He was earnest but unsure was she.  
She thought for long and then finally replied,  
“Care for a swim?”, her mellifluous voice could not be denied.*

*Henry cared not for the catfish any more,  
He felt free in the water having shed the clothes he wore.  
The woman sat on a rock, watching playfully,  
“What is your name? My friends call me Henry.”,  
He swam close to the rock but she moved far,  
“I’m just the wish you wished upon a wishing star.”  
Henry laughed aloud till she spoke again,  
“You wished to be greatest, among all the men.  
And let’s say I can help you with that.”,  
She went on, eyeing him from where she sat.  
She lowered a necklace, down at Henry,  
“But I thought, it was forever lost at sea.”  
She placed the necklace around his neck and slid down.  
While she vanished, Henry began to drown!  
After much struggle, Henry broke out of the invisible grip,  
Before it could swallow him, he gave the pond a slip.  
He coughed out the water as he ran blindly,  
The Jay laughed at him from a distant tree.  
He gasped for air as he scrambled on his feet,  
Unsure was he of what he was trying to beat.*

*The receptionist, Peter, saw his guest wild and manic,  
He tried to calm him from his state of panic.  
“Greta, fetch some water and send John!”  
A woman brought water and soon she was gone.  
A few moments later, John was by Peter’s side,  
“Help me take him to his room.”, Peter cried.  
“The pond, she tried to kill me, that witch!”,  
Henry rambled on as his brow did twitch.  
They held his arms while he shook and shivered,  
That was the last day he was ever heard.  
For he grew quiet and got to his feet,  
“I beg you, my good folks, to keep this discreet.”  
He returned to his room, much to their surprise,  
Alas! They were all part of the lies.  
Henry bent over his journal with his pen.  
Words came easily, he was now the greatest of all men.  
He scribbled fiercely upon the delicate paper,  
A few hours later, he embarked upon a ghastly caper.*

He read it and got to his feet, “I must be excused.”,  
The doctor left, leaving the detective confused.  
The detective got up and chased after him,  
He knew not whether it was of concern or just the doctor’s whim.  
The doctor yelled at the attendants in the hallway as he ran,  
“Patient 51, Henry, get first aid as fast as you can!”  
The doctor feared the worst as he seemed to understand,  
That night why Henry appeared with a bunch of poems in his hand.

In Henry's mind, each poem was as vivid as reality,  
The doctor reasoned that he couldn't have known, or could he?  
Each poem was inspired by a life he took,  
The receptionist, the bellboy, the maid, the cook!  
They reached Henry's cell and undid the lock,  
They timed his death by the hall's overhead clock.  
"It's not humanly possible to hold one's breath!",  
The doctor agreed, "Yes, it is a most unnatural death."  
They searched him well, they found a hidden sheet.  
It was Henry's final poem, the *collection* was complete.



## Epilogue – In a Click of the Heels

Click clock, click clock, clickety clock,  
He searched for an inn, he continued to walk.  
He pulls out his pocket watch, he picks up pace,  
Nine in the night, still struggling to find a place.  
Not an inn in the town had a room to rent,  
He stops for a rest, the tall and handsome gent.  
He rested his suitcase on the road,  
It was dark and a single street lamp glowed.

The gent looked about and raised his hat,  
At the nearby stand, an old lady sat.  
She looked most regal, old, but full of grace,  
A veiled, black net hat hid most of her face.  
She eyed the gent, she made a pout,  
She brought her finger to her mouth.  
He shrugs and looks over his shoulder,  
“People go cuckoo as they get older.”,  
He mumbled the words as he resumed,  
Carrying his suitcase, he went on as he fumed.

Click clock, click clock, clickety click,  
His polished heels matched his walking stick.  
Click clock, click clock, he turned around,  
He heard another set of heels but nobody he found.  
He took a deep breath and resumed his stride,  
He walked faster for he felt he was being spied.



Click clock, Click clock, he whirls back,  
Not a soul, no footprints to track,  
The concrete pavement stretched further ahead.

He wipes his sweat, he begins to tread.  
Click clock, clock clock, clickety click he went,  
In his hurry, he walked into some wet cement.

“Oh, blimey!”, the gent stood, he felt helpless,  
He cursed aloud and complained of the mess.  
He throws his handkerchief, soiled as it was,  
He resumed his walk and tightened his jaws.

Click clock, click clock, clickety click,  
He was weary and frustrated with the trick.  
He pulled out his pocket watch as he walked,  
He used it as a mirror to see if he was being stalked.

Click clock, click clock, clickety click,  
All he saw was a distant shadow bent to pick  
Something from the road that he tread,  
“Must be a vile waif.”, he thought and said.  
No more did the journey bother the gent,  
The shadow still crouched on the pavement.

He felt the chill and it made him cough,  
He heard a muffled sound, he heard it scoff.

He took out his special strip of troche,  
It went into his mouth as he observed his pocket watch.  
The shadow was bent like many times before,  
The gent smiled, he wanted to settle his score.

Click clock, click clock, clickety click,  
He spat out the troche, he flung it with his walking stick.  
“Oh the bitter taste of this troche and mockery.”,  
He said as he laughed, he walked in a hurry.  
He pulled out his pocket watch and bent it slight,  
This time there was not a shadow in sight.  
“Hmm.”, the gent dismissed it aside,  
He saw a large owl coo and away it did glide.

Click clock, click clock, clickety clock,  
He felt a sharp pain, a stain grew on his left sock.  
He cursed aloud and dropped his suitcase,  
The wound in his leg begged for a brace.  
He eyed the bleeding gash till it made him sick,  
He pulled his scarf and tied it to his walking stick.  
He strapped it to his leg to help him walk.  
Clickety click, he went, click clock, click clock.

Click clock, click clock, he drags his weight,  
His leg throbs with pain, it refuses to abate.  
A cold breeze sweeps the road and the lights flicker,  
He feels the chill and tries to walk quicker.  
Click clock, click, something tugs at his hair,  
He turns around to see soot like dust floating in the air.

He jogs ahead, as best as he can,  
He is aware he is being pursued by a man.  
Click clock, click clock, clickety clock,  
When he sees his pocket watch, he gets a shock.  
Not a man but a shadow continues to follow the gent,

A mass of black, a dust of soot it lent.  
All around the gent, the soot began to set,  
He broke into a sprint, not knowing what he had met.  
The cloud of black followed, flowing swiftly,  
The gent knocked at the first door he could see.

“Somebody help! Please let me in!”,  
He shouted as the soot touched his skin.  
In a flash of a second, it swallowed him whole,  
He feels suffocated, he can smell the burning coal.  
He feels for a way out of the pitch dark,  
In the distance, he sees a flicker of a spark.  
Instantly he rushes to meet the tiny light,  
A little oil lamp burning in the middle of the night.

It's still dark though nothing feels the same,  
He is fascinated by the tiny flame.  
He looks about for a clue or a sign,  
He seems to be in a room of quaint design.  
Maybe someone had rescued him in time,  
He touches his head and feels covered in slime.  
He looks at his hand, covered in soot,  
He gapes at the mirror, eyeing himself from head to foot.

A creak of the door makes him swerve,  
He feels himself move, his body begins to curve.  
He cannot help but prostrate at the woman's feet,  
Setting down the lamp by the wardrobe, she takes a seat.  
The gent looks at her although bound to the ground,  
Terror struck as the lady from the bus stop he found.

Though younger she looked, she was surely that dame,  
“Shhh”, she says, she caresses the bright flame.  
She pulled out a pocket watch, she lay on the bed,  
“Try not to create a racket.”, she smiled and said.  
The gent yelled and screamed, shadows did flock,  
Not a soul heard his cries over the tick-tock of the clock.



**Note:**

The subject, Patient 51, Henry, was found dead a few hours ago, clutching this very poem at our asylum. We had found him suffocated in his cell. There seemed to be neither any struggle nor a sign of any foreign presence in Henry's cell. Yet, I cannot term his death natural in any way.

A handwriting analysis of the 13 poems that Henry was carrying that night and the one found next to his lifeless body confirms that they are written by Henry. However, I do wish I could collect some other samples of Henry's handwriting and compare them with the poems. It may provide some insight into Henry's state of mind before and after the incident.

The detective and the authorities have named Henry the main accused in their official report, citing him to be of unsound mind when he went on to massacre the hotel staff and its customers on the night of April 30th, a Walpurgis Night.

The total number of deceased in this case is now 14, including Henry.