

A LIE TO DIE THE BROKEN STONE

**PART-I
INSIGHT ON HINDSIGHTS**

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INDIA • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA



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FOR
MY PARENTS
VIJAYKUMAR & VIJAYLAXMI

Contents



<i>Acknowledgement</i>	7
1. A Wave of Calm	9
2. Dodges and Daggers	38
3. The Delayed Arrival	64
4. Blacked Out to the Bloom	88
5. In the Wrong Hands	115
6. The First Appearance	140
7. A Disastrous Decision	166
8. The Lost and Found Ways	218
9. Journey to the Ninth Castle up a Hill	260

Acknowledgement



It's just me, myself and I.

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Chapter One

A Wave of Calm



“**M**om, good night... Con, Zabb, aunt, good night...”

Edward Pears wished them and went to his bedroom in the attic; his bed placed below the slanted glass ceiling.

He pretended to be relaxed and tried to sleep through but memories could not let him close his eyes. His eyes fixated on the wall, now a canvas. The lamp caused decor of birds and knickknacks to look like shadows of demons on the wall. The shadows wobbled and danced for the breeze passing through the vent above the wall lamp.

It seemed that he associated his memories to the shadows, turning around to break his attention from the wall. Fully alert, he could hear the clock ticking on the other side. Sleepless, he kept tossing and turning in bed.

He coughed violently, without a reason. Swallowing saliva to moisten the throat, Edward pulled his blanket aside and sat on his bed. Parched for a drink of water, he restlessly looked around his room for some; there was none! He got down from the bed and walked towards

the kitchen but abruptly jerked back and closed the door. Frightened, it seemed that he was concealing something from the people whom he wished, “Good night...” some time ago.

He turned off the bed lamp, to erase the shadows that attracted his attention. As shadows disappeared, the room was drowning in darkness; only glimpses of stars and moon above the slanted glass surrounded him.

Hopping on his bed, he desired an undisturbed sleep. However, his memories kept him company lasting like an uninvited guest and rendering him sleepless.

“Is it so difficult to hide a lie...?”

“Do they suffer till they die...?” He whispered with his dry throat. Between blink of eyes he caught the sight of shining stars and a full moon through the slanted glass above him. Being an astrophile and a selenophile, he kept gazing at them and whispered, “Dad, I name the tale, A Lie To Die...”

He gently closed his eyes refreshing his memories, now utterly vivid.

“Brace yourself, Edee!!!”

Edward, who sprawled on the shore after a disaster, blinked his eyes as he recalled those words. He blinked at the sight of a faded evening sky. The sound of ripples of water pricked his ears and birds warbled around..

Before he could wake up and see where he had landed, he saw somebody bend over him. An aura of mystery surrounded the man, complete with a long beard, a buzzed head, and green eyes. He said, "You two made it here!"

A frown encroached Edward's forehead; he didn't know who the man was. He was a stranger to him, perhaps as much as his surroundings!

Edward abruptly got back on his knees and asked, "Wh... Who are you?"

The man didn't reply. He just stared sideways, disapprovingly.

Edward followed his line of sight and saw a brawny figure, older than him, lying on the sand. Edward worried and skedaddled towards the latter and found his father, out of breath.

He fell on his knees and clutched his father's body, shaking it vigorously and picking up his hand to feel for pulse. His fingers felt nothing. Silence came over and death confronted him. Eyes enlarged under the frowning brows and teeth nervously biting his lips, he looked around for answers, "Where am I...?"

The stranger was still there where Edward had left him.

"Is there any hospital around here?" He yelled, addressing the stranger.

"No! Uh... that guy is dead!" The stranger shouted back in a weary tone.. Edward did not wish to believe the

stranger and kept on blowing air into his father's mouth, hoping he would wake up, alive and breathing.

The attempt to resurrect failed. Alas, there was no sign of life.

Edward had drowned his eyes. Perturbed, he could not stop biting his lips.

"He is no more, lad." The stranger said from where he stood. Edward paid him no heed and continues to strive for a miracle. His determination was no less than a doctor. He tried to suck water from his mouth and thumped his chest, however, could not succeed.

"Rise up, dad! Give me a sign, breath dad...!"

Dad, please! You promised, you'd be there for me."

Edward yelled and implored. His pleas fell on deaf ears.

"He is no more, lad!" The stranger repeated while coming closer.

Edward threw a glare at the stranger's side. "Just shut up, will you? Stay quiet!"

"Okay, calm down," the stranger tried to calm him.

"Quiet. Just stay quiet and wait for breathing." Edward patiently said it.

The stranger did not leave him there and said, "Take your time and grieve. I'll be waiting. As you still got to learn and do something."

“Learn and do something? What you mean? I would do nothing. Get out of my sight!”

Edward shrieked back at him.

“Take your time...I’ll be waiting.” The stranger walked aside to leave him alone.

“Waiting for what? You...” In fury Edward followed him and choked him from behind.

The stranger broke the choke hold, lifted Edward and pushed him down with all his might. Edward, now in a retaliatory mode, gave a fight back with his fist attempted to punch him.

For every attack of Edward, the stranger managed to put him down but didn’t hurt him.

“Don’t lose your energy, its precious here. Realise what you just saw.. I’ll be here anyway.” The stranger said.

A frustrated Edward punched himself on the thighs as he could not beat the stranger. He returned to the pale, lifeless body of his father.

It was a long night that hadn’t fallen swiftly. Edward’s eyes brimmed with tears, streaming down his fair cheek like little rivulets.

The night progressed; hours later, the sun rose crisper and clearer after the dim dawn. None of them could tell which day it was; they only knew that it was a new morning and a fresh day. Through the night, Edward had sat beside his father’s corpse, hoping to see a sign of life.

Nothing changed, except the sea. The tides engulfed the shore like a starving sea god. Fate had played out and it deemed fit that he would lose his father.

His tears dried up from a hope that never came to fruition; a hope to delay his father's death. He wiped away the residues of his sorrow, convincing himself that his father had perished. He stood up and walked to the stranger lying on the shore.

The stranger smiled seeing Edward's arrival.. Edward sought answers to many questions. Why had fate conspired this way? Why wasn't it him instead of his father? Would he ever be able to accept the verdict that fate had rendered him? He pushed such thoughts aside, resisting the urge to think out loud. Instead, he turned to the stranger, "Who are you?"

"I'm Abdal Malik." the stranger replied exhaustingly.

Edward disinterestedly nodded and scanned around.

"What do I even do in this terrifying maze of woods without my dad's presence and shade?" questioned Edward; his arms wide as if addressing the whole universe. "Don't worry I'm there here for you." Malik said.

"You, here for me? What brings you here?" Edward interrogated.

"I'm here on onerous job to save my home." Malik replied.

Edward had not noticed a sign of life and settlement around there, he again questioned, "Home here! Where is it?" He scanned again to confirm.

“Now that you got more words than tears to give away, tell me, who are you? Who brought you here?” Malik kipped-up on his feet while Edward frowned and said, “Perhaps you said, ‘I’m here for you.’”

Malik stood against and glared at him, said, “Your name, man!”

“Oh, Okay clam, I’m Pears... Edward Pears.” Edward replied.

“Who brought you here?” Malik began to probe him.

“A stranger called Lord... Don’t know more about it... You see that corpse? He is Von Pears, my dad.” Edward stuttered in his dialogue, diverting from the stranger to his dad.

“I understood, calm down. Lord! Well I think that we are here for the same errand.”

Malik nodded in an approving fashion, glancing at Edward’s skinny dorsal-palm.

Well, Malik had anticipated the arrival of Edward. Lord had sent the message of arrival through Agathangelos, the falcon; fearsome, swarthy, wreathe eyed creature.

That bird carried a letter written on papyrus, that read,

**“Malik, be at the coast on west as you’d
meet a guest too, so gird up your loins.
They may arrive before you set a
stage for their viability.”**

– C.C.S.

The papyrus was rolled and held within the brown belt at Malik's waist, knotted upon his muddy white untucked shirt. Malik scrounged through his mocha duster leather coat adorned with a long chocolaty lapel. His black cargo pants and cowboy boots had gathered specks of dried sand. He placed his hands behind the coat to check the letter; it was hidden there. Malik took out his hand and did not utter a word about it.

Peeking at corpse, Malik whispered, "You look the same." The whisper could not reach Edward's ears and Malik's utterance seemed to reveal that he knew Von since ages.

He wanted to get away without wanting to disclose his secrets and started walking back to set the shelter as prescribed in the letter.

At the same time, Edward was still numb with plaintive tears, recalling old memories of his dad.

Time slipped by. The sun was overhead yet the two were unbothered.. Both were in same frame of mind and were drowned in similar states of exertion. Humidity penetrated the air. Famished, it got harder to remain in that dreadful state. Malik waited for Edward to get up on his feet and move on but Edward was in no mood to care about anything but his sorrow.

An indistinct Malik yelled, "Hey! Get back on your feet... nothing's going to happen... you must prepare for a funeral instead!"

But nothing changed...

Water splashed taking another mouthful of the shore.

Even after a while, Edward still did not move. All of a sudden, he felt somebody jolt him, shaking from left to right as if trying to wake him up from a deep sleep.

“Boy, you know what we are here for. You should rather focus on it!” asserted Malik.

“You don’t know what family is. You never been in this situation, I guess?” Edward asked tried expressing his sorrow.

“Oh, come on! You need to move on and what do I even have to understand?” Malik addressed in a compelling tone. “You only devoted your work so long.” said Edward.

“Am I supposed to sit beside you and cry?” Malik retorted.

“Shut your mouth, will you?” Edward contended and walked aside.

“Hey! My heart goes out to you.” Malik shouted. Edward stood there, pretending to ignore Malik’s angry outburst.

“You said family! Is your father the whole family? Haven’t you got a mother, brother or sister too?” Malik shouted again as he had to separate Edward from his father.

Edward again did not utter a word but he squeezed his eyes and recalled his memories; a bond of promise made with his father. He had kept his eyes shut, imagining their

boat in the midst of the ocean, reliving his father's words and the promise they made to each other. His throat was dry and carried a lump of sorrow. He remembered his father's words to him, "I cannot be certain about what awaits us hereafter But I want you to get through this and get home. Promise me that you will take care of my Princess, Zabb and Mom under any snag..."

You may marry the unordinary girl, but never let your family, especially the three, fall out of your eyes and hearts..."

Before he came out of his imagination, a familiar feeling had returned. He felt the rocky motion of the boat in the sea. He blinked to realise where he currently was and saw Malik shaking him from behind. He surprisingly hugged Malik who made him realise the promise.

"Uff..." Malik huffed behind the shoulders of Edward as he had finally convinced his companion.

"Good. Now c'mon, let's get wood for the funeral." Malik impelled him. They had planned to burn the body instead of burying.

Though Malik was there, Edward alone carried his father on his shoulders. The spiritless body was now decomposing. Unbothered by the stench, he trudged to some distance, puffing and holding his breath. He was exhausted and rested his father on the way and asked, "Can we him burn here?"

Malik replied, "Yes, we can. We are quite far away from the water."

Even though they were not that far, they were sure that tides could not reach there.

“Do we have only one axe?” Malik asked holding his axe.

“No, there is a box tied to my boat. It might have an extra axe.” Edward sounded exhausted and lay next to the corpse to restore his energy. He abruptly rolled away from the corpse as it had begun to smell like a rotten meat. Malik could also sense it standing away from the corpse as he held his breath and blew out air from his mouth to avoid the smell.

“Scavengers may be here anytime. If you wish to cremate your father’s corpse, grab the axe and get wood.” said Malik.

Edward, still lying down to relax under the shadow of Malik, was in no mood to work. Malik understood that he could no longer strain and said, “Okay, until I get an axe for you, relax. I’ll be back soon. I need you to come with me to get woods.”

Edward affirmed with eyes indicating that he would be back on his feet.

Malik hurried to prevent the arrival of scavengers. He plodded towards Edward’s disfigured boat floating on water that still carried a wooden box at its stern. Malik broke open the box with the help of an axe.

As the wood gave way, it revealed a pair of axe, swords, knives, flashlight with tinder, matches, sewing kit, first-

aid kit containing some seeds used as painkillers, grains and a survivalist gear including a map.

The grains inside the box made Malik beatified as his starvation had a solution. He gobbled up the bites of maize. He looked back to ask if Edward needed some. He did not get a response; turning aside his sight caught the dead body of Von. He then looked up and whispered, "Sorry..." He could see a solitary bird that looked tiny and high above in the sky.

Malik deduced that the numbers of birds would increase soon and deemed it necessary to cremate the corpse first and then get back to feeding themselves. He kept the maize in his pocket and rushed to Edward, yelling, "Get up!" while carrying an extra axe.

Edward's cognac coloured eyes amplified as tears evaporated from his cheeks. A bit of gaiety could now be seen on his face while his lips appeared parched like raisins left too long under the hot, dry sun.

Malik extended the axe towards Edward who stood up on his feet holding it firmly. They left the corpse behind and were on their way to reach the woods near the shelter set by Malik.

"Eat some!" Malik, sharing cob adorned with golden grains with Edward. "Lord left you a great backup."

"Yumm..." Edward nodded approvingly after the bite and asked, "Where is your family? Where are they now?"

Malik, pointed on the back side of his palm and asked, “Do you know this mark? I’m hoping that you do.” “Oh! Yes, I do, even I got it. Are we both here through the same Lord?” His face now bore a startled look.

“Yes, as I’m here to return to my family.” Malik clarified.

The mark borne by Malik and Edward stood as a symbol of identification of the territory they came from.

Edward finished the maize and threw the cob aside. Smacking his lips, he kept gazing at the tall woods descending towards the shelter.

“Should we have to put down this tall beast?” Edward perplexingly raised his eyebrows, smacking his lips again. “I’ve already put down couple logs for shelter, now we need a few more for corpse.” Malik grinned, displaying his pale yellow teeth and clarified. Edward puffed for that.

Both began to cut the wood into chunks. Edward asked, “When did you arrive here and how?”

“I have been here long back, and haven’t progressed much. This is a circuitous map, man. I ended up here on the west coast. Well there were no snags to reach here as I had Richard with me and a compass. Sailing and shielding, I reached here, except the dive in moon. I hope you know that.” Malik gasped and explained while chopping wood. “Yes, that moon moved and brought us here. Uh, only two of us survived but my dad could not.” Edward replied back and questioned, “Richard?”

“My sailboat! It was berthed in the north.” Malik clarified.

“Oh! Thank god! We have a life to return to but do you know the path?” Edward questioned while hitting the wood harder, cracking it up with each blow.

“Return! What are you talking about? You’ve just set your foot here,” Malik teased.

A cold wind gushed suddenly. It reeked of a fishy stench.

“Cole_mu_lele_lole”, a voice could be heard.

“What was that!, You heard that?” Edward wared.

“Yes. Let’s not waste more time.” Malik hurried to cut more slices of tall wood. “Carry as much as you can. We need to fire up before the body before the carrions arrive,” said Malik. Meanwhile, Edward was looking around for the strange voice.

He looked up, “Oh No! They are above us, a bunch of them have caught on the stench. Hurry, let’s get it done before this gets savage!” Edward shrieked and rushed, carrying the gathered wood. He clutched the wood tightly against his stomach, the strength of which resembled holding his father while he breathed his last. Malik followed Edward and dragged his back just before the carrions descended on the corpse.

Edward yelled, “Leave me! Move away!” He threw wood all over but it was late as the hungry scavengers had taken hold of the corpse. He scrambled and went rash on

Malik, who tried to hold him back. They heard a strange, disgruntling voice declare, “NDIZA!”

A power rippled through the air; the surroundings quivering to the rhythm. His vision blackened for a moment and when he opened his eyes, he saw nothing but mighty feathers descending towards the ground. From the midst of it came a dwarf: round face, furry and hidden in hair, a punctured nose, ears that were squamous, a neck that was hidden behind a thick veil of long beard, dense curly hair that outlined the face with ringlets and protruding black eyes.

The dwarf’s right hand held a magical-staff that was only an inch taller than his height and a small bumblebee coloured mongoose in the other chunky hand. His vest stuck to his belly in a hugging fashion; a pouch hanging from the waist above the short black skirt. The bare foot dwarf muttered some strange words.

His arrival was crucial to save the corpse. It seemed that the dwarf has strong premonition about the events that unfolded. He knew the intention behind the arrival of Malik and Edward and their attempts to put together a funeral. A startled Edward crawled back while Malik moved forward and said, “I knew it would be you when Pears said he heard a voice. Thank you!,” said Malik. The dwarf, patted on Malik’s back with his stick. The mongoose pranced out of his hands and crawled towards Edward.

He was alarmed and did not move a bit. The mongoose sniffed at his shoes. His face shrunk inwards

as if secretly wishing that the creature didn't come any closer.

"Oh, boy...", dwarf nodded at Edward.

The dwarf waved his chunky hand at mongoose and it crawled to him.

"Hey, come on up. Don't worry, he is a friend of ours," Malik shouted at Edward gleefully.

"What do you mean friend of ours?" Edward inquired with an aversion. He got back on his feet and walked towards them holding a piece of wood in his hand. Standing behind Malik, he glared all over the dwarf, studying him intensely. "Bless me," blurted Edward., "The dwarf smiled behind his thick, mounted moustache and patted his back in a shy.

"The stench of rotting flesh fetched me here along with carrions. Without waiting further, the corpse must be-cremated before dusk," declared the dwarf who looked up at their faces.

Malik goes back to fetch remaining wood for the funeral while Edward kept staring at the dwarf in an astonished manner. "Collect them and bring them all. We hardly have a corpse to cremate", the dwarf shouted and blew air, that evoked Edward.

"Yeah. I'll get them. You be here guarding it." Edward quivered.

"Hey, who is that strange guy?" Edward murmured, moving close to Malik.

“Don’t know. He appears and vanishes on his own wish using that other-worldly stick. I am hoping you might know how to use that magic stick?”

“Yeah, I do. But we don’t have one now! Do you know to use it?”

Edward still whispering trudged beside him.

“We would not be here without it.” Malik replied.

“Hmm... How did you become his friend?”

“Uh... He did not frighten me at his first appearance but frightened me at his first disappearance.

He again appeared next day. I thought he is my imp.” Malik briefed. “Now, let’s not disgust him and thank him instead,” he added. They inched closer to the dwarf who was peeping at them through his palms.

Both brought sufficient amount of wood to burn the corpse. Sun was almost down, indicating that dusk had arrived. Not having nourished themselves they were barely on their feet with exertion and somehow managed to construct a pyre for cremation.

Edward fell on his knees in front of the dwarf and joined his hands before him and plead, “Is there a hope, miracle perhaps, that can bring my father from death?” “No, I’m sorry. I’m only an ordinary wizard,” the dwarf replied, shrinking his eyes and wiping his forehead. Malik could see pity in his deep eyes.

“We all can pray. May his soul rest in peace, RIP Von Pears.” Malik gave a eulogy and helped Edward back on his feet.

It was set for lighting up pyre, Edward looking at the burnt cheek of Von got frightened to burn his whole body. He abruptly put down his head to avoid the face and his sight caught the wrist bands on his hand. "Wait" said Edward. He took out one out of his four wrist bands, which represented four members of his family. He recalled that the bands were gifted to him by his mother before they departed from their hometown.

He put one band in his father's wrist sobbing "so... so...sorry dad, I co...cu...couldn't save you..., ma... ma...miss you da...dad, I love you," tears welling up and covering his cheeks. The other two could do nothing but empathise.

While Edward conveyed the last message on behalf of his family, Malik handed Edward with a torch to light up the pyre. Edward held it, out of strength and burned the pyre peering at his father's closed eyes.

"I will lead you... Mom, Con, Zabb, all will lead a life as you expected...I promise you dad...I will lead you," he yelled out in pain and in minutes fainted down.

Malik dragged him back from the burning pyre. The dwarf warned them to leave the place. He asked him to hide somewhere before the smoke brings them enemies. The dwarf disappeared in the light of flame and thick smoke.

Malik wasn't surprised at his disappearance and managed to drag Edward to safety and set forth towards the shelter.

Sheer exhaustion came over him and laid down. He kept blinking to stay awake. He remembered the wooden box and got up on his feet and barely walked till the wooden box in the fire light of pyre.. He found maize in it. "Thank God." He cheered.

He had the whole night to feed himself. He grabbed couple of maize out of the box and gobbled them completely. Then dragged the box to the shelter and tried to wake Edward with a faint voice but he was almost snoring.

Malik kept one eye open till dawn and then fell asleep as the sun rose.

It was their fortune that no-one visited there that night.

Edward woke up by the sound of chirping birds. He looked beside and exhaled with a blow from his mouth, "Uff..." as he was not alone.

He rubbed his eyes and glanced around, saw ashes wafting in air above the shore. His stomach gurgled when stood on his feet and trudged towards the ashes. He gathered a fist of ash and put that in a small metal box and tied the box to his black leather pants with a cord. His face was pale and sweat-soaked; palms sweaty with memories of past night glancing at the remains of the cremation and tried to avoid it and strode towards the tides. He relinquished his fear by looking at his shadow under the sunshine that was splashed by the tides; watching ahead and saw fishes hoping in and out of the

ocean. Gazing at the view, he shied and muttered, “Hell or Heaven, again...”

He could hear his stomach growling for hunger while he was glancing at his disfigured boat and let out a “Thank you,” in mild whisper.

He had grieved and strolled back to the shelter in search of food. He picked the remaining maize saved by Malik.

While later Malik woke up brushing his eyes, looked around for Edward, found his costumes beside him, widened his eyes in shock and abruptly crawled out of his four pillars wood shelter to look for Edward.

“Uff...” He was relieved seeing a dreamy guy in black boxers, playing with tides. Malik stepped ahead to join him but stayed back murmuring, “Let him be free.” He stepped back in the shelter and looked into the wooden-box (inventory) to set the preparation for their progress. He plucked the folded paper like a gentle petal below the sword handle in Edward’s inventory. Before he unfolded it, he kept it on ground and tried to get something from the costumes. He checked Edward’s brown long boots, black leather pant, loosely fitted white full sleeve shirt and hard Norfolk jacket, not coming across anything except the small metal box tied to the belt. He opened the box and sniffed it, “Ashes?” He kept it back and took out his map from his pocket. He first glanced through both the maps. He shrugged sitting on his knees looking up at disturbed sky. It seemed that the maps were different.

He soliloquy said, “Must have to wait for next receive.”. He said that because it was an astute decision to take for him. He wanted to send a missive to Lord through Agathangelos in the absence of Edward but did not have the spell to summon.

Few moments later he moved out of the shelter to stretch in the bright sunshine..

“Hey! Did you feed yourself?”.

“Yeah. I kept some for you also!” Edward screamed.

“No thanks pal. I am still full from late night.” He shouted.

Edward ignored him and walked out of the tides while Malik lay down tensed at the center of the shore. Till sun was overhead Malik basked in it, whispering, “If not Agathangelos, the dwarf? Hmm, he may help.”

Edward rested at the edge of the shore where tides were kissing his heel; he was pity on his mood, drawing shapes with his fingers, wrote, “THANK YOU DAD”

“Ouch...! Ah...” He shrieked and jerked on the same thank you note as he got pinched by a crab. He crippled on his feet yelling.

“What happened?” An indistinct Malik yelled. Meanwhile, Edward raised his thumb indicating he’s fine.

“Why are you dancing in the air?” Malik trudged to edge of the shore in a hurry and asked, “What happened? Why are you up on your single foot?”

“Ma...ma...Malik you got a round buzzed head. Can't you see it's a crab bite?” Edward mumbled in pain.

“Oh! Really, I can see it as a dance move pa...pa...pal” Malik teased him.

Edward pushed him away and dropped his foot in the warm water dabbling it. He soon closed his eyes and trying to channel pain through a shrieked face. Meanwhile, Malik goes crab hunting with his pocket knife. Time for lunch!

“I'm done with my lunch. What about you?” Malik asked as declawed the last bit of meat.

“No, it's mine. First it took hold of me,” Edward malcontents the situation.

“Well, it took hold of you but I took hold of it, I killed it!” Malik tried to play with his mood but Edward showed no interest and said, “Good hunt, enjoy your catch!” He shifted focus on his foot.

“Let's look for fishes,” said Malik. He walked in the tides trying to find and catch fishes but surprisingly couldn't find any.

Both were at the shore trying to find fresh catch but they decided to row the broken boat to some extent without any oars, handling it with just their hands.

“Go get the hook, arrow and maize from my inventory. Hook the maize to the stick and hold it stiffly while I hunt the trapped fish,” said Malik.

“I can’t. My leg’s hurt. You bring the tools and I’ll help in fishing.” Edward retorted.

“Oh, okay. I’ll save the crab and get the tools. You rest here.” Malik left.

Edward kept rubbing his foot to nurse the pain of crab pinch. Malik brought the tools with maize and empty big bowl.

They paddled the disfigured boat a bit deeper into the water. As planned, Edward held the stick with grains tied to it and dipped it in water. Malik waited to pounce.

“Well, it’s hell here. All fingerlings and no adults! It’s better that I take out this cob of maize before it goes.” Edward remarked frustratingly.

“Okay, let’s take a break,” replied Malik. They sat down in their boat in an attempt to relax. They kept scrounging and waited for a bigger fish to arrive.

“Oh! Big one coming, you see that? It... It’s taking over those fingerlings. Get ready!” Edward dipped the grain into water, hoping to attract it.

“Oh! Yeah, I see it. I don’t know whether my arrows can beat that or not but I’m ready for it.” Malik panicked and held couple of arrows in his palms and under his arms.

“Hit...hit...hit it...two more, yeah, you got it. We did it, good aim pal.” Said Edward and looked at the flooded blood surrounded their boat, he hesitated and commanded, “C’mon now jump in and get that dead

meat.” Malik smiled with his teeth and plunged Edward in blood water to get the fish. Edward soaked and got the fish back in boat and towed back to the shore.

Edward carried the big fish while the other carried a bowl full of water. Edward on his way back to shelter recalled the funeral while passing across the ashes of his father. He jerked back and stood shocked beside the ashes. Meanwhile, Malik reached him from behind and taunted, “Please, now don’t cry again.” He kept trudging forward.

Edward hurried behind him and asked, “Where is imp?” “What imp?” Malik replied in a disinterested manner and continued trudging. Meanwhile, Edward stood stiff and tried to recall the funeral a day back and wondered, “Was the dwarf real?”

He ran back to Malik and exclaimed, “Yesterday while gloaming, do you remember the carrion attack on my dad?”

“What carrion? No way, I didn’t even imagine. We just had a normal funeral, burnt your dad’s corpse on the pyre.” Malik replied provokingly. This annoyed him.

He looked at the wrist, counted, “one...two...three...another one?”

“You put it into the pyre with you father,” Malik said in a calm tone.

Edward muttered, “dww_arf...” With disturbed puzzled mind he ran towards the shelter and put on his

clothes except the heavy jacket. Meanwhile, Malik lit up two stoves to smoke fish and crab and continues to purify the saline water.

“The dwarf, is it a hallucination?” Edward murmured.

“I don’t know!” Malik failed to give satisfactory answers and this annoyed Edward even more. It was dusk by the time they prepared their lunch. Both had a herculean appetite, smacking on the fish and sharing the crab with water.

They sat down after their satisfactory meal to discuss their progress. Malik had various thoughts brewing in his large head. “Map...” Edward interrupted and again muttered, “dww_arf..., who had square ears...”

Malik laughed at him at the sound of “dwarf,” as he had fooled Edward.

“Don’t worry pal, I know him. Indeed, he was the one who helped us.” Malik said convincingly.

Edward in a fury picked up the sword beside him swiftly, pointing the sharp notch on Malik’s neck.

“Okay, clam down pal. I’ll...I’ll pay for you. What do you want?” “Your life.” Edward threatened him for his play.

“Okay, you got it pal, let’s play this!” Malik cheerfully nodded his head. Edward looked shocked. Challenge was put forth that he will be handed the sword while Malik had to defend without a shield.

It was dark out and visibility was a distant dream. Edward proposed a postponement but Malik refused and accepted to grapple under the light of fire.

Both looked intense and walked towards the shore with a lamp and set a low fire on the for visibility. It was a handicapped battle in fire camp.

Both took their positions; Edward held the double handed sword and Malik stood without any protection.

“You ready?” Edward asked lifting up the sword. “Always pal,” Malik nodded.

Edward slightly swung his blade at the centre of Malik’s body who smoothly evaded the attack. Edward did not try to attack his upper body and instead, tried swinging down below his waist. Malik jumped every time to evade the attack.

Edward had tried all his basic actions and moves possible. Surprisingly, Malik dodged them all without a single wound, stunning his opponent. He was frustrated with his attempts to harm and went hard on him. However, no harm was done.

“You’re the greatest fencer I’ve ever seen.” Edward said with a faint voice and bowed on his knees in front of Malik, keeping his sword down.

“Bad attempt! You did not impress me with your moves. You got more to learn,” Malik complained on his attacks.

While Malik exhibited freestyle with the sword in open air, it made Edward keep his mouth wide open.

He asked, "Is this what I got to learn?"

"Not exactly but it's necessary." Malik replied.

"So, when do I start?" Edward excited to learn the new art.

"Tomorrow morning!" replied Malik cheerfully.

"We got another night to rest." Edward chuckled.

They exhaustingly lay down on the shore and did not will to trudge back to shelter.

While Malik was worried about the progress they were still left to make, Edward was awestruck by the nature around him and began beating the sword with a shell; creating music, he sung...

**"it's a nightmare living without you
Is a nightmare...oh...oh..."**

"Wooh! Great vocals. Living without who pal?" Malik interrupted.

"It's all dedicated to Von Pears!" Edward drums, bowl and sword and continued his song...

**"oh...oh...living without you is a nightmare...
It's my first night as I don't remember my last night,
in which you were out of my sight, when I saw you in my
last sight it was a giant high fight, though I
sense you, as I got you beside me from
my first sight...yeah, from my first sight...
black up, blue floating down, all I see
is beauty around along with the magic**

sound...

**Oh...oh...we all pray that you just stay as
a favour for our pray...it's been a long
day, as we did not find many prey
without you it's a nightmare, we all pray
that you just stay as a favour for our pray
Night sky, sharp stars shining up, I'm seeing
you in my blind eyes as star rise, moon's
clear I can see your face in there,
burning fire, flames up, smokes up, I see
you snapped up, as they both mix-up,
buzzing all, all I'm hearing is Von call...
Yeah, it's a nightmare without you is a
nightmare...we all pray that you just stay
as a favour for our pray...
Many woods no mark in on any woods,
I'm lost here in fear and tear, without
your presence here, I can just sense you
here yeah, I can sense you here
It's scary here; we came far alone, for
your princess right, don't worry I'll lead
the path for her happiness on every side,
I just reside as you be beside on every snag
that we come upon, though no clue of
occupation or home loan, don't worry
I'll lead it right...yeah, I'll lead it right
I lied to you, I tied you, I fooled you,
though you graced me now I killed you,
though you bless me in my destiny**