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Birthday Curse

by

Vichida Vongvanij

An essay written as part of the Writing Programs

Academic Resource Center

Loyola Marymount University

Fall 2014

The clock rang loudly, signifying that half the day had passed. The brightly lit sunlight traveled its way past the window and through multiple gaps of the abruptly closed curtain into my beautifully decorated bedroom. The familiar tune of the clock echoed into my ear at the same time as the sunlight hit my eyes. For one quick second, my heart dropped, thinking I was in a foreign place; a second later I then realized I was safe. *This is not that time of the year anyway*, I thought to myself. I slowly pushed myself out of the king-size bed I was on while unintentionally resting my eyes upon the old picture frame I longed to get rid of. A rush of mixed emotions hit me, blinding my mind with unwanted memories of the past.

I was born with a curse, a bizarre deadly curse. Something bad will always happen to me on the 31st of October, my birthday. The degree of awfulness intensified year after year as I became older and wiser. On the day I turned thirteen, I woke up in the midst of vast falling snow and fought a giant wicked bear. On the day I turned fourteen, I woke up in the middle of an arid wilderness and fought a mutated frog. On my latest birthday, when I turned fifteen, I woke up in an old abandoned castle and fought an eerie looking spider. I woke up in distinct places every birthday and received a mission to either overcome these hindrances or die. The ultimate goal remained the same throughout the years. It was probably the simplest yet the hardest goal to complete—to do whatever I could to survive the 24 hours of my cursed birthday in order to come back to living in the normal world again. Despite how many times I tried to avoid falling asleep on the night before my birthday, I never succeeded.

Time flew by like falling leaves. I looked out the window, observing others' lives as the cars moved unhurriedly along the road. There were pumpkins everywhere, some carved and some weren't. Shops' and restaurants' front doors were decorated with manmade spider webs

and skeleton masks. Today was of course the 30th of October, the day prior to Halloween, the day prior to my birthday, and the day prior to my utmost nightmare.

Night emerged as the sky darkened. The blackness of the sky offered neither the appearance of the shimmering stars nor the trace of hazy clouds. The stillness of the air bargained no serenity to my restless mind.

“Sally dear, you should go to bed,” said Mom, whose voice broke through the silence and pulled me out of my own realm of thoughts. My mom is a modern day psychologist who deals with patients’ minds and behaviors. She is always busy; never takes a day off from work except when truly necessary. Although my mom and I rarely share personal time together, I am grateful that she made me her priority and took three dates off every year. To no one’s surprise, the three dates are 30th, 31st October, and 1st November, the days I needed her most.

“Your mom is right dear, you should rest. And don’t worry, everything will be fine. We will be right next to your bed,” said Dad who suddenly appeared out from my bedroom door, and walked hurriedly towards me with a huge cup in his hand. My dad is as active as my mom working as a computer scientist. He spends hours and hours researching and experimenting with complex technology. My parents have made it a tradition for them to take the three days off just to spend time looking after me, for neither one of them could offer me a reason regarding my birthday curse.

The smell of chamomile tea diffused across the room from the cup my dad was holding. The light familiar scent of the tea calmed me as I could feel my muscles relaxed and body became less tensed. My dad handed over a cup of hot chamomile tea to me as soon as he reached me. He looked slightly impatient when he ordered me to drink the chamomile tea from the cup he prepared. I drank from this giant cup every year on the night prior to my birthday. It made me

feel at ease even though I was frightened of what to come after I woke up again. My throat felt so warm after I drank half of the cup, so I handed the half empty cup back to my dad. He immediately pushed the cup back to me and I tumbled backward as a response to his unexpected action. Realizing that his action had startled me, my dad quickly recovered and composed back to his normal self. He kindly, yet forcefully insisted I finish the whole cup. Despite feeling rather full, I listened to him and finished the drink. Afterwards, I slowly walked back to my bed, feeling as light as a feather. It wasn't until the second when my back touched the surface of the bed did I feel a sharp pain piercing through my brain. I sensed bodies moving swiftly around me, I heard some voices whispering, and I tasted intense bitterness on my tongue. Then within the speed of light, pain squeezed all my senses into nothing but darkness.

In the hour when the sun bathed through the woods replete, I began to regain my consciousness. Once again, my paled appearance flushed back into life. I pushed myself onto a standing position and began to carefully explore my new surroundings. I was encircled by nature: vividly colored trees and flowers. I had never woken up in such an environment saturated with so much life and energy before. This new sensation somehow scared me. I continued walking further into the forest, constantly turning my head from left to right. I walked under the burning sun for hours, and hunger slowly deprived me of my energy. Just then a bright red colored apple hit my eyes. My legs automatically moved straight to my first meal of the day. I picked up the delicious looking apple, and just when I was about to consume it, out of nowhere a group of birds came rushing above me and started chirping in a high, sharp, piercing noise. Group after group responded with an alarming speed and took flight right after they were done. Despite not being the bird itself, my instinct told me that the birds were warning one another of certain danger. I panicked, thus started picking up my pace towards the direction the birds went.

I spend hours tracking along the woods. My stomach growled loudly out of hunger and frustration; my body was debilitating due to the lack of energy. *Why did those birds rush away? I wonder. I am certain they must have been running away from something.* I thought to myself. *Thump thump thump thump thump!* And all of a sudden, massive crowds of cheetahs were sprinting crazily towards my way. Their slim paled brown bodies covered with black spots moved so swiftly in contrast to my body, which for a brief moment froze in terror and felt as heavy as a mountain. Without thinking, my restless legs started advancing forward with a rush of adrenaline. *I cannot run fast enough, they will soon surpass me and I will be eaten.* Horror thoughts ran through my mind and I couldn't help but feel terrified by these fast moving carnivores. I decided impulsively to turn and hide in the nearest cave, only to find out that the cheetahs were following my lead. Heart pounding, legs moving, and mouth grasping for more air, I could not decide what to do. Right then, rapidly pursuing the animals, a large group of native hunters appeared behind the crowds of cheetahs. For a moment I thought I was safe since these tribal hunters were human like me. But then I was wrong. The birds and cheetahs were running away from this group of monstrous hunters who from where they first appeared had mercilessly killed numerous lives. I clenched my fist and drove it deep into the ground to pull myself back into reality. I needed to focus. I couldn't afford to be seen by the hunters nor touched by the cheetahs. I was in a cave, and in front of me was a vast river with rushing steam. To stay or go; these were the questions I contemplated. Whether I am now lost in the woods of illusion or reality, I did not want the demons to haunt me in perpetual pursuit. I needed to fight and face my fear. Just then I decided to slowly peek out from the big rock I was hiding behind. *Hiss hiss Grrrrrr!!!!* This is where it ended. My shield of bravery reduced to nothingness as I peeked from the rock only to find the famished hunter, staring directly at my face, sat an inch away holding a

bloody knife. There was no time to scream. There was no time to cry. Without a second thought I ran and jumped into the nearby fast-flowing river, not caring about the fact that I could not swim. The abrupt change of surrounding temperature from warm to icy cold froze my body functions momentarily. I had neither control nor strength to prevent my feeble body from crashing downwards into the vast ever-deep sea. I gazed up at the sky once more before closing my eyes to whatever that was waiting.

“She is doing well so far. She surpassed her fear of the birds and the cheetahs,” said a woman’s voice.

“Now there is only one challenge left before she becomes the first subject to complete all fear landscapes and finally become the first mentally-trained human soldier,” said a male voice.

“She will face the hunter in three, two, one...beep beep beep beep BEEEEEP!!! The emergency alarm?! No. No way. NO!” screamed the female.

Distant childhood memories shimmered hazily in my mind. I remembered the old picture frame in my bedroom, disgusted by the existence of my own self in the picture. That baby, cursed baby, why was I born into this world? My heart tore from my chest with mourning as I thought of my parents who must have suffered raising a troubled child like me. But then...

“She cannot afford to die! She is one of the only five subjects who survived 15 trials and lived for 16 years!” said a familiar voice.

“You think I want her to die? She is our only hope to make it big in the science world again!” said another familiar voice.

“I shouldn't have trusted you. We shouldn't have sent her into such a high level of fear landscape. I told you her brain wasn't trained enough for that.”

“Stop blaming me and take her consciousness off that fear landscape!”

I heard the two familiar voices talking. I heard them call me a subject. For all this time I thought I was cursed from birth. For all this time I thought they loved me. All the stories they told me, and all the relationships I had. All lies. I felt as if my heart was severely scratched by gravel and rocks. I was just a mere subject; just a tool they used to fulfill their greed. I prayed for myself to eternally sink beneath the deep sea. No heartbeat. No love. No family. No life. And no more lies.