

It seemed to be one of those interminable, sleepless nights for Shane. The three sleeping pills he had had seemed to be of no avail. Slumber was a bird of paradise hidden somewhere in a hideous jungle, outside Shane's realm. He tossed and turned hoping for a glimpse of the bird but fate had other plans for him tonight.

There was a dull thud on the door. The sound reiterated and this time it was the unmistakable sound of a knock. Shane heaved a sigh-party out of annoyance, partly of being relieved from the futile search of sleep. He expected it to be his roommate Lee. He had left a note saying he would be late. He was expecting his brother to come at around two thirty at night. Shane opened the door casually.

Shane screamed at the top of his lungs but what came out was feeble whimper because what lay in front of him was enough to shake a solid man. A mutilated body of his friend lay in front of him his throat was slit and the head clung to the body by a fringe of skin and some nerves at the back. Eyes protruded out of their sockets. The nose was shattered and there was blood all around.

The incipient sensation of horror gradually subsided to a level low enough for the cerebrum to resume functioning. The thought process was nebulous but it returned nevertheless. But indecision kept him paralyzed for few more moments. His eyes surveyed the body and it was then that he saw the paper held loosely by the hand.

It had only a sentence written on it in red - "Your time is up, Shane!" It was enough to send chills down his spine. It felt like a drop of water from melting ice rolling down his spine. The sensation left him paralyzed again. In the grip of fear and panic he slammed the door shut and snatched the phone.

The line was dead!  
He slammed the phone down in vexation and sat to contemplate the situation. It was 2:00 am in the morning. His phone was dead, he had a mutilated body at his door and a possible dead threat from an anonymous enemy. He could not see any palpable reason behind the truculent attacks on his friend, neither could he elucidate the meaning of the note in his hand. What he needed now was something to tranquilize his nerves. He took two aspirins to subdue the nagging headache, which and surfaced.

The house was empty. All the tenants of the other flats were out on vacation. The landlord was there, but Shane had seen him hideously drunk when he was coming up earlier in the night. His thoughts returned to the note. Obviously it was meant for him.

A person capable of such work of barbarism was in all possibility lurking in the

# Your time is up

By El Krypto



building for him. There was no one to turn for help to. As he pondered over his predicament the feeling of helplessness once again tortured his mind. The only possible relief he could see was an escape from the house.

He opened the door and reconnoitered the long corridor. He stepped out of the door without a glance at the body. He moved with the reticent movement of the cat and the wariness of a deer, constantly aware of a poignant source of danger. At last he reached the stairs. He rested for while to let his nerves cool.

Suddenly the stairs began to creak. The noise was from upstairs. Panic-stricken he ran down the stairs straight to the hall. Steady footsteps followed him. He ran frantically straight for the door. Just a few feet from it he stopped short in horror. The door was bolted and chained and a huge lock hung from inside. On the door smeared in blood were the words "Your time is up!"

With all the force he could gather Shane crashed against the door. His shoulders cracked but the door did not budge a millimeter. He turned around but it was too late. He was caught like a mouse in a trap. A shadow emerged through the doorway of the hall. Shane gasped when he saw the figure. What he saw a flagrant violation of reality.

The figure was a ghost from the past. It was Sam. No it couldn't be! Sam was dead.

He had shot him right through the heart! No one could be alive after that. It was long time ago. He and Lee were policemen, dreaded by all men who cared to get involved with them. Sam was a notorious criminal who had a life sentence in jail. He had escaped out of prison and gone into hiding. He was tracked down to the forest. Shane had asked him to give himself up at the count of ten. Sam had revolted by shooting at one of their men. The

last words Shane had spoken to him was - "Your time is up, Sam"- with that he had put an end to a deadly criminal. He shot him at the edge of a hill and his body rolled down. It was never recovered.

Now he was alive again- alive and lethal. Sam's eyes riveted into him. There was a calculating ferocity in them. The abominable figure advanced towards him. "Your time is up, Shane," he said in a strident voice. "So you thought I was dead! When you shot me you forgot that I have a heart on the right side on my body."

Sam was in a precarious balance of mind. Deep hatred and malevolence precipitated out from his eyes. Beads of sweat appeared on Shane's brow. A deadly lassitude had taken over him. His limbs refused to obey him. It is a wonder how one's senses abandons one at time of need. It was no time to panic. It was time to think.

A facade of nonchalance appeared on his face. Weakness was a fault to be hidden from an enemy. Consequences of signs of senile dementia would be fatal. Every move needed to be carefully measured and executed. Sam was an infatuated person. Careful maneuver of incidents could earn him his freedom.

He spoke out in a resolute voice, "Now Sam, lets not be hasty." His affable tone did not betray his latent fear-in fact it effaced the impression from his adversary's mind.

Sam spat out with unmitigated malice, "I have waited for this moment for a long time." He smiled sardonically. "Nothing can save you now." The strong aversion for Shane was evident in his voice.

"It was long time ago Sam. Can't you just forget it." Shane was stalling-but he did not know what for. He saw no way out of his predicament. Sam was armed with a revolver. He had nowhere to run to- he had reached the

cul-de-sac of life. Death was imminent. Any sudden movement would surely provoke Sam to shoot.

The sound of a car suddenly floated into Shane's ears. It triggered a sudden thought Flickers of hope gleamed in his eyes. There still may be a chance. He spoke out softly but firmly, "If you kill me Sam, Lee will kill you."

Sam broke out in hysterical fits of laughter. There was no doubt in his mind now that he was lunatic. His experience has shown that lunatics made the most lethal adversaries. A lunatic does not have the moral handicap of pain and fear. He does not hesitate.

"Lee is dead, Shane"  
"I say he is alive," replied Shane with conviction.

"Dead as a nail."  
"Then look outside."  
For the first time a nuance of hesitation crossed over his face. "Don't try to trick me, Shane. It wouldn't work."

"You have nothing to lose Sam. Just look outside." Shane began to pray. He had reached a crucial part in his plan. He had to be careful now. If he stumbled now, he would be dead in no time.

The doorbell rang.  
It was the sweetest sound Shane had ever heard- a blessing from heaven. It was strange that a faithless infidel like Shane suddenly began to think about God.

Sam was apparently nervous. His finger closed on the trigger. The hammer moved back. Shane watched every detail of the executioner's weapon in horror. His breath froze waiting for the fatal moment.

The doorbell rang again.  
The finger stopped in midway. The hammer locked halfway in the air. Shane marveled at the steadiness of his antagonist's finger. He thanked God for his adversary's steadiness. He even managed to smile within at the irony- his life depended on the prowess of his adversary. He was surprised at his light-heartedness at moments of death. Sam gestured for him to move. The gun did not waver an inch from him. He followed Sam's gestures without any remonstrance.

With the gun trained at him Sam opened the lock. His movements were slow and ambiguous. He pulled the door open and stepped back.

The face of Lee peered from behind the door. The shock was too hard to absorb for Sam. His face went ghostly white. The once hard face went through monumental changes. Veins and eyes bulged out from the face.

The gun cascaded to the ground and Sam fell-unconscious.

"Come on in Joe." Shane spoke out  
Joe was Lee's twin brother.

# I Shall Live

Told by : Lifa and Audi

By M M Chowdhury (Linkon)

I wake up to find myself on a wet mossy ground. I couldn't see a thing because it was pitch black. Slowly, very slowly, my eyes adjusted to the darkness. I could see that I was in a bamboo garden and started wondering how I got here. But the wind was blowing against my bare body. Where are my clothes? There by some rocks, wrinkled and red, was a piece of garment. It was then that I remembered what had happened to me. I shivered and wanted to cry out at the thought of it. I looked up at the heavens and cried out, "Oh Master of the Universe! Why have You let this happen to me? What was my crime. I got no reply but I had great faith in God, not like some other weak pathetic ladies. I knew He would answer me sooner or later. But right now, I was confused and angry.

Babu, the local terrorist of our neighborhood had an eye for me for years now. But I was already promised to somebody else. We would get married as soon as he returns from abroad after finishing his studies. He is handsome, loving and caring and I could not think of anyone else other than him.

The worst nightmare of mine and many other girl's came the day I was returning from my best-friends birthday party by a rickshaw alone at ten 'o' clock at night. Suddenly out of darkness the Satan Babu and his two friends stopped my rickshaw and forced me into a microbus after beating up the poor rickshawpuller. They cuffed and gagged me and when the Microbus finally stopped the untied me. Babu took my hand and took me to a bamboo field. He started kissing me and rubbed his filthy hands all over my back. The thought of what he would do to me, the odor from his body made me faint.

Then when I woke up, well you know the rest. I stood up with great difficulty but finally managed together up my clothes and got dressed. The villagers of the village helped me to a bus and one young boy accompanied me to my home. The thought of how I would face my family made me cry but I haven't done anything wrong. It is that bloody satan Babu who should cry, not me. Still I cried.

I got off the bus and told the boy to go home, but the sweet little angel insisted on accompanied me. First I went to the police station to file my complaint. They had my clothes tested and my body. After some hours my parents came to pick me up. I thought they'd shun me but instead my father hugged me like he would never let go and my mother cried, we all cried.

Two years passed since the incident, I am happily married with him. But Babu is still lurking around somewhere out there probably pouncing on some helpless victim. The police promised that they would catch him. I don't think they ever will. I see them chatting or drinking tea with Babu like old pals. Now I don't rely on justice but God's Justice.

Last week I read that Babu was shot dead by some unknown assailant in a newspaper. I didn't want Babu to die, I wanted to see him get justice but instead he got Justice. Babu is down but five more will take his place. I wonder if the world is ever going to be safe from these monsters. I look up at the sky and get my answer and a sly smile forms on my face.

# THE STRANGER

by Mahdin Mahboob

The following incident took place about four to five years back. It was mid July and was a hot summer's day. Both my sister's summer vacation and mine had started and we started enjoying it. Then, one day, our father told us that he was going on an official tour to Chittagong. As usual, I wanted to go with him, but he said that it was an official tour, and he would be back in two days only. One fine Saturday morning (I remember the day so well because soon after 'Baba' left, my favourite weekly sports magazine 'Sportstar' was delivered by the paperboy) Baba left for Chittagong. After that, we had our breakfast and were watching the television when suddenly the doorbell rang. Shonamoni (my mother) went to see who it was and through the eye-hole of the door she saw a moderately old man, with a long white beard and grayish hair, standing with a pair of coconuts in one of his hands and a green bag on his other hand. He was wearing a brown 'Punjabi' and a once-white pajama. My mother, not recognizing who he was, asked, "Who's there?"

"Bouma, I am Motaleb", came the reply. My mother, still cautious, asked back, "Who's Motaleb?" The man replied, "I am your father-in-law's cousin's wife's brother." My mother, not yet sure of what she was doing, opened the door. The man hurriedly got inside and said, "Bouma, it's so nice to see you again. It's been a long time since the last time I saw you, during your marriage. Take these," he said, handing my mother the age-old coconuts.

The old man said that he had come to Dhaka for some treatment. He had made the 'wise' decision of choosing our house, because we are his "closest" relatives in Dhaka.

Shonamoni got scared. When night came, Mr. Motaleb was given the guestroom to live in. Shonamoni went downstairs and told the guard to remain alert. The guard put an extra two locks on the door and promised my mother that he would keep awake for the whole night. Mr. Mohiuddin, a retired army officer living on the second floor, (our flat was on the third floor) loaded his gun and was prepared for action. Sobhan, our boy servant, slept beside the guestroom with a thick stick in his arms. We seemed well protected.

The next morning, Baba phoned to say that he had arrived in Chittagong and that his job was over, and that he would be returning on that day. Shonamoni told him about Mr. Motaleb. Baba told her that he was speaking the truth. Whew! For a while there we thought that there was a burglar in the house.