

An unforgettable nightmare



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It was a warm, sultry evening with no respite from the punishable heat that had driven everyone into the cool confines of the indoors. The mosquitoes were everywhere, trying to sneak into houses like unwanted guests. I sat alone my room and stared out of the window. With nothing much to do after my exams, I had too much free time on my hands but just could not get myself to go out and socialize with my friends. The heat was bad this summer and I prayed fervently, that the cool winds that heralded the oncoming monsoons, would blow through the trees in my backyard and rustle the leaves till they fell to the dry earth.

Mesmerised by the starry night sky, I suddenly found myself surrounded by a crowd of people, some young, some old, but all very strange. They had long matted hair, deep-set eyes that stared at me vacantly, and yes, they all had the same ghastly pale look about them. Who were they and why were they in my room? The young girl nearest to me held out her hand and beckoned to me. Should I or should I not? Who was she and what did she want? I took a hesitant step forward, then another, till I was by her side.

The first and most shocking thing that struck me as I stood by her side, was the stench - the unbearable, sickly cloying smell that seemed to pervade my whole being. It was strangely familiar and then I remembered. It was a childhood memory that had been tucked away in the far recesses of my mind. My father had died in a severe car crash when I was just 5 years old and I recalled suddenly the way he looked, all torn and mangled as they extracted his body from the heap of metal that had once been his car. That image I had pushed away till it was locked up at the back of my mind but the smell of death haunted me for many years.

It was only 6 years ago that I succeeded in erasing the sights and smells of that awful night. Now it all came flooding back, memories I so longed to forget. Death seemed to be everywhere, reaching out to me from the faces that stared at me, especially the face of the girl by my side. She reached out, took me by the hand and moved out of my room. Her fingers were cold and clammy like the hands of someone long dead. I walked by her side blindly till we came to a small room at the back of my house. It had been my father's workshop and had lain vacant ever since his death.

My mother and I had avoided that particular room, and in doing so, we shut out the memories of his untimely death. But now, entering his room, all the memories came flooding back. I felt myself being pushed further into the dark recesses of the room by the other figures who had followed us. I stumbled and tripped over a footstool and lay on the floor staring up in fear at the expressionless faces that stared down at me. They came closer and closer till I could smell their rancid breath. I opened my mouth to scream but no sound came forth.

Closer they came, closer, till one, then the other, reached out cold slimy hands to touch me. It was then that I was most afraid and I felt my throat constrict with terror. I squeezed my eyes closed. Was I going to die? Suddenly, I could breathe again. The air around me was pure and fresh. I peered between my lashes and saw that the ghastly figures had vanished, including the young girl who had held my hand. A flash of bright light passed before my eyes and a deep voice, assuring me that everything was fine, filled the room.

A voice so familiar, that my eyes flew wide open and I looked for him, my dad, but of course, he was dead and I was alone in my room. It was then, that I realized it had all been a dream, a really bad one, a nightmare. I was still in shock and covered with sweat. I got out of bed and walked into the kitchen to get a much-needed, cold glass of water. My mother stood there and smiled at me. I smiled back at her, thankful that I had one person in the world, who could make things better by just being there. I still wonder till today about the significance of that dream and yet wish that I am not haunted by another one again.