



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

Queensland Branch

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PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

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THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION

2021

Highly Commended in the Secondary Schools Division

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*Fate*

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## Yashodhan Rayani

### *Fate*

As we tear down the asphalt of State Route 63, bound for Peranga Farm, the wind whips the car's windows into submission—rattling, screeching, shrieking. The endless Outback drapes the road in a thick curtain of darkness. Cobalt blue lightning cracks over the valley; thunder booms. Rain leaks from the gloomy grey clouds—the same way blood pools from a wound. Sullen, the night's creatures snarl at us as we kick dirt up in our wake. Long claws, crimson eyes and bloodstained mouths, vermin lie in the shadows. If I were hunting today, I would seize the opportunity to snap their necks with my bare hands. I would relish the chance to watch the life drain from their eyes. I would lick their blood from my lips as they slid down my throat. Alas, this time, they are to be fed. To kill or to be killed. The poetry of fate: it's truly comedic.

Aaron's 2005 Holden Commodore growls, sputters, and spits. I stare into the inky black night; I can still see my grandfather's farm as if it were day. To the northwest of the farmhouse, the chicken coop. To the southwest, the rabbit run. To the east, the rifle shed—my favourite area. At least it used to be; now it's just ash. The police could only give me two things because the fire was still an 'ongoing investigation': Edmond's antique coin and his WWII standard issue Browning Hi-Power pistol. I wasn't to get used to it, though, as they warned me that the AFP would be over soon to collect it. I run my fingers down the barrel of the firearm and feel its silky steel sting my skin. Calm as the storm, I caress the mahogany handle—warm to the touch. Keeping it hidden from Aaron is far easier than I thought it would be. The night locks his eyes to the road—his headlights illuminating but a sliver of the darkness. It's only a matter of patience. *Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock* the clock sings. Destiny grants all of us our moment, but only the wise seize theirs.

"You alright, John?" Aaron asks—his voice as soft as flesh with empathy.

"I can't stop thinking about Edmond. Spending hours with him shooting rabbits was the only time I ever felt accepted as a child. Free to be me," I say, my voice as supple as a baby's bottom. As if I wanted—let alone needed—anyone else's approval.

“People are worthless; things are all that matter,” I whisper noiselessly as I roll the coin between my fingers. Despite all of its chips, scratches, and dents, it’s more valuable than Aaron could ever be. More valuable than any person could ever be. While people may leave you, may cheat you, may lie to you, things do not. They are unwillingly faithful to you until the very end. People must face their fate; things are eternal.

A pang of melancholy slams my chest: I miss hunting. I miss pulling the trigger and watching my prey falter, flop and fall. I miss the feeling of blood rushing to my ears; spit pooling in my mouth; adrenaline thumping as I gripped my prey. Taking a pest’s life felt liberating. What would murder feel like? Would I feel the same rush, the same satisfaction, or would it be greater? *Could* it be greater?

To stop my mind racing, I take three deep breaths and fix my gaze on the pearly-white moon through the window. The demise of the person sitting next to me is alluring, but I must wait for my time. “Patience is the price of success, John,” my mother used to say. *Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock* the clock chants, and I swallow.

“Once we get to the farm and look around, I’m sure you’ll feel better,” Aaron remarks.

I doubt that, but I keep my mouth shut. My arm twitches. It’s almost time. My fingers tremble violently in my pocket. Stay calm. Only three more minutes to go.

“I’m sure I’ll feel better, Aaron,” I say, trying to keep my derision buried.

“Thanks for helping me out, mate,” I continue, “I’ve really been feeling down, but you’ve helped.”

I can barely contain myself. My lungs feel like they’re about to burst. My heart thumps quicker. The time draws nearer. My guts feel as twisted as my thoughts. But I love it. Two minutes to go. Time to make preparations.

Surgically, I silently slide my right hand into my khaki pants and wrap my finger around the magazine loaded with 7.65×21mm Parabellum bullets. As soon as my fingers graze the cartridge, glee surges to my temples and races to my ears. I smile. I *have* the power to kill. It feels liberating. A beautiful, meditative calm washes over me, which untangles my guts and my thoughts. I slowly slide my left hand into the pocket of my jumper and, once again, caress the warm grip. Unconsciously, my left-hand clutches my grandfather’s coin and holds it flush to the barrel. One minute to go; my exhilaration is palpable.

I chuckle at Aaron. What a fool? How dare he think I need help? How dare he

think of me as weak? How dare he think that the death of my stupid grandfather would bother me in the slightest? Lusting for his firearm, I listened to that dumb old fool drone on for hours and hours about the war. He used to ramble on and on about blowing the heads off Frenchmen—a fissure of blood and screams. Judging by his grimaces, winces, and whines, he disliked the experience. I loved it. Not because of the violence, but just the notion that things could do that. Things could end the lives of millions of pathetic people. Sobbing, he told me about when he had to bury infants by the wheelbarrow.

“Innocent victims,” he said; “acceptable casualties,” I say. It’s almost time to make my move.

Five seconds.

Four seconds.

Three seconds.

Two seconds.

Wait. Let’s make this more interesting.

“Hey Aaron, let’s flip a coin.”

“For what?”

“Nothing, really. Just for fun.”

“Sure.”

“Heads or tails,” I say, keeping my voice as even as possible. “I’ll take heads,” Aaron says.

I flip the coin. It’s heads. Perfect.

I rip the Hi-Power out of my pocket and slam the cartridge into the well; the tang clicks in agreement. Frantically, I shove my left hand over the top of the slide, grasp, and pull back sharply until it stops. Fun fun time has arrived. I point it at Aaron’s head. Everything slows down. His eyes widen. His jaw gapes. Shock paralyses him. A dreg of mercy rises in my chest and chokes my breath; bloodlust soon extinguishes that. Eyes focused, I pull the trigger and feel a dash of fear and thrill race up my arm. Blood sprays the windscreen. His arms lay splayed over the dashboard. He is dead. Aaron is dead.

The steering wheel violently jerks to the right, and the car barrels into a tree. I survive. I am invincible. I am fate’s harbinger.

Calmly, my gaze wanders to Aaron's body. Euphoria fills every nook, cranny, and crevice of my body. My fingers tingle with excitement; my legs twitch in agreement; my heart beams cheerfully. Murder feels amazing. Murder feels enlightening. Murder is salvation.

Strangely, though, the palm of my left-hand burns: the coin. As I gently dislodge it from my sweaty palm, warm moonlight shines off of it in a thin, fragile ray. Queen Elizabeth II stares back at me; when I turn it over, her twin greets me. As the sharp wind of the night howls, my smile turns into a grin—like one of the great Milat himself. Destiny has spoken, and now the vermin shall have the spoils of time.

“Feeding time, boys; put it on fate's account!”