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**EDITOR’S TASK**

**The Hermit**

He stands before the closed window watching subdued apparitions of snow falling to the ground below. It’s been intermittently snowing since his arrival three months back, but this week the snow seems to be making up for lost time. For a whole week, he’s been forced to postpone his daily morning jog. He discovered jogging after living inside his head for two months. Living inside one’s head is not child’s play. The things inside one’s head are so scary that sometimes one looks at the window of one’s room on the 4th floor, looks at it for a long time, and wonders what it will feel like to open it, plant one’s feet firmly on thin air and walk out into the snow. Inside one’s head one discovers are labyrinthine network of trepidations that one never thought existed.

One night, he woke up to find himself drenched in sweat. The cold hands of winter were fumbling about, undeterred by the caprices of a body that had suddenly whipped the September sun from God-knows-where and roasted itself until water began to drip from it in the midst of the night. Pathological fears began to stalk him, beginning with premonitions about the potential consequences of his drunken escapades in his final months in Chitungwiza, escapades that usually ended with him in a strange bed, in the arms of a strange woman, with no memory of what had transpired since the ten shots of gin he would have taken at exactly 12 a.m. It didn’t help matters that he consulted Google for answers. The diagnosis was the same, with a few reassuring medical opinions here and there.

One morning, he discovered a strange pain in his right abdomen. It was that kind of pain that does not call attention to itself; you only become aware of it when you stop to listen. Pain talks. Pain screams. Pain prances about, leaving the face contorted into a thousands fold mountains. But pain is also capable of tiptoeing into the body and hiding. During those times you have to look for it. Which is what he did. You have to unfurl layers and layers of the folds of your body to locate it. There it was, hiding in his right abdomen, hiding in such a way that even the brain was not picking the signals of its presence. He went to consult Google. The answers there reminded him of the many mornings he would wake up with beer cans strewn in his bedroom, cans bleeding slowly from the wounds of the previous night. He remembered how, during his doctoral years, the only thing that kept him going was the illicit concoctions he bought from the shebeen queen who ran a lucrative illegal joint in his street. That is how he had started patronising the bottle actually. He suddenly found his mind, two chapters later, collapsing under the weight of trying to find elusive nuances in the well-beaten path of research. There was no oasis in sight except the shebeen queen’s joint. Discovering alcohol at thirty made him regret all the years he had wasted as a church boy, all the pleasures he had missed because the religious programming that had limited his sources of pleasure to the occasional ecstasy that church music and speaking in tongues induced. After one quarter of whisky, he never looked back. Two years later, he was posing for photos while clad in a red gown, flanked by his supervisors. Seven years later, in a new country, away from the dust and melee of Chigovanyika, he discovered that sometimes you run out of things to do so that the only think that matters is waking up and heading straight for the refrigerator to retrieve a can of beer or a bottle of whisky.

When he discovered the pain, and when Google gave him the answers, he knew that those seven years were back to haunt him. When an uncle of his, his six-year drinking buddy back in Chitungwiza, died from liver cirrhosis, he drowned the sorrows provoked by his soon-to-disappear liver in what he regarded as his last moments of pleasure before the final exit. He had made up his mind to go out on his terms and not wait for the marauding liver sickness to leave him a skeletal wreck holding on to rotten threads of hope. Hope is more painful than death. Its weight will make you die every single day, a thousand deaths before the final death in whose bosom rest resides.

Without thinking further, he opened the window, jumped onto the sill, and walked out into the falling snow.