

Evil Comes Calling

By James Barrington.

“Curse? What are you talking about, Emma?”

It was the eve of Jacinta’s sixteenth birthday, and she was excited about reaching that milestone because she knew that, amongst other freedoms, she would be able to go out with boys, just as her sister, Emma, did at sixteen, rather than having them visit under the watchful eye of her parents.

“It’s a curse, Jace. Believe me,” Emma said. “That’s the only way I can describe it. I didn’t believe it either, until I turned sixteen, but it’s real. I was warned, and I think maybe it made it a bit easier.”

“But why haven’t you ever mentioned this before?”

“Because I know you, Jace. You’re a worrier. If you had too much time to think about it, you’d be a mess by the time your birthday came around.”

Jacinta laughed. “This is a joke, isn’t it? A curse. I’ve never heard such rubbish.”

“It’s no joke,” replied Emma.

“Yeah, ok then, what happens to me?” she laughed.

“I’m taking a huge risk in warning you,” replied Emma, “but I want you to prepare yourself.”

“For what?”

“I can’t say. It would put me in danger.”

Jacinta looked puzzled. *Maybe 'curse' isn't what really Emma means,* thought Jacinta.

“Look,” said Emma, putting her hand on Jacinta’s arm, “all I can say is that the curse has been around for a long time. Something will come for you. It will take something from you, and then you will be free from it. I’m sorry, but that’s all I can tell you.”

Emma’s serious tone made Jacinta think there may be something in her words, but a curse? That’s only the stuff of movies. “You’re scaring me, Emma.”

She noticed a solitary tear in Emma’s eye, and her look of genuine concern and fear made Jacinta realise that her big sister was deadly serious.

“The curse seems to only affect the girls of the Darby family: our cousins and our aunts. I sometimes wonder if it’s affected the boys as well, but they don’t talk about it.”

“What if I’m not at home on my sixteenth birthday?” asked Jacinta. “What if I have a sleepover at a friend’s house?”

“Makes no difference,” replied Emma. “You have to come home sometime. If it doesn’t come on your 16th birthday, it will wait. There is no escaping it. There’s a rumor that some of our cousins stayed away for days and weeks. It made no difference. We can’t escape our fate. All the Darby’s homes are cursed, and not even moving house will help.”

Emma cast her mind back to the day after Emma’s sixteenth birthday. She recalled how quiet Emma was at breakfast, how she seemed distant throughout that day, but when she asked Emma what was wrong, she refused to talk about it. At the time, Jacinta put it down to ‘boy trouble.’

“Is that what was wrong the day after your birthday?”

Emma nodded. Jacinta began crying. Emma put her arm around her sister.

“It’s only one night, Jace,” said Emma, and her own tears flowed. “One night, that’s all.”

“What does it do to us, Emma? What will happen to me? What does it want?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“There must be something we can do,” pleaded Jacinta, looking into her sister’s eyes. “Can’t we tell Mum and Dad? They can stop it, can’t they?”

Emma shook her head, lowering her eyes. “It’s too powerful, Jace. It’s too powerful for all of us. When you feel its force and power, you’ll understand.”

Emma’s tears tracked down her cheeks and dripped from her chin. She hugged Jacinta tighter, and both girls sobbed into each other’s shoulder.

Jacinta lay in her bed, gazing at the ceiling, creating images of monsters and evil spirits in her imagination. The trees outside her window swayed and rustled in the wind; the moonlight behind them created shadows and dark, ever-changing silhouettes.

Is this how it will come for me? Alone and helpless in my bed? What will it do to me? What does it look like? Jacinta’s family wasn’t religious, but she put her hands together, interlocking her fingers and closing her eyes. *Please help me, God,* she prayed. *I’ll never ask for another thing, just please don’t let it get me.*

She curled her body into the fetal position and gazed at the window. The branches and leaves morphed into long, groping arms and clutching fingers. Jacinta shut her eyes tight. She imagined the wind calling her name, calling her to the window.

“Leave me alone,” she said in a soft, frightened voice, but it continued to taunt and mock her.

Jacinta passed unknowingly into sleep and into a dream.

Squealing with delight, five-year-old Jacinta, dressed in her favourite white, frilly dress, felt the cool wind in her long, blonde ringlets as she soared through the air. “Higher, Daddy! Higher!”

He father alternated between Jacinta’s swing and Emma’s as they flew higher and higher, side by side. On her forward arc, Jacinta could see the wide expanse of blue sky and puffy white clouds. As she swung back, she saw the playground, filled with other children running, see-sawing, and laughing. Her Mum sat on a picnic blanket, reading a book. She looked up now and then, smiling.

“Be careful, girls,” she called. “Hold on tight.”

Jacinta’s adrenaline ran too high for her to hear. She could do nothing but laugh and squeal. She reached the top of an arc, and as she descended, saw her mum and dad walking away. Emma walked with them, holding their hands. The sky grew darker as a black fog closed in from all around. Emma and her parents entered the fog. The playground was silent and deserted except for Jacinta and her rapidly vanishing family.

“Mummy! Daddy! Emma! Don’t go! Wait for *me!*”

Emma turned her head to face Jacinta. Tears of blood trickled from Emma’s eyes, and, without a word, she turned away and continued walking.

“Daddy! Please, wait! Don’t leave me! Come back!” She was still swinging too high to drop to the ground and run after them. The sky was now black, and the silent fog consumed Jacinta’s family just as she leapt from the swing and ran after them.

“No!” she sobbed, “Don’t leave me! Please don’t leave me!” It was too late; they vanished, and she was alone. The fog enveloped Jacinta, swallowing her up the way a creeping tide claims

a shell in the sand, and she found herself in complete, silent darkness, but for the sound of her own breathing.

Jacinta sensed that she was standing on a soft, cold floor. There was no light, only a cold, damp blackness. She stood rigid and terrified, staring into the nothingness of night. "Help!" she called. "Mummy! Daddy! Where are you? Please, help me."

Her words echoed back to her in the darkness. "Please, help me...help me...help me."

She wanted to run, but there was nowhere to go. She didn't even know where she was. She only knew that it was a bad place where she didn't want to be. She felt she wasn't alone, that there was someone or something with her, close to her, watching her. Though she couldn't feel it, she imagined something pulling her in toward itself, dragging her to something or somewhere she did not want to go. Some kind of unseen entity was drawing her slowly forward toward unimaginable horrors. She felt as if she was floating on air, propelled along by something. She knew not what. She fought against it, but it was no use. She could sense it coming closer. She felt an unseen face close to hers, studying her features. She imagined ghostly fingers in the pitch blackness stroking her cheeks and hair. She heard soft breathing, almost inaudible, but it was there. She knew it was there. She felt naked and vulnerable, and easy prey for whatever it was that had brought her there against her will.

Jacinta turned and ran blindly into the unfathomable darkness. She had no clue as to where she was, or of where she was going. She only knew that she had to escape. She ran and ran as fast as she could, but she couldn't get away from the unseen "thing." It was as if a magnet had captured her in its forcefield and was reeling her in like a doomed fish on a hook. Its power and energy were just too strong, and she was tiring and stumbling.

Suddenly, the ground gave way beneath her, and she fell. There seemed to be no end, just a black bottomless void devoid of light, devoid of God, and devoid of reality. Down, down she hurtled, through nothingness, through the vacuum of space, through the distortion of time. Her vanished world was no more than a vague memory: a lost concept. Jacinta's long, agonising scream fractured the blackness, almost bursting her own eardrums, and she landed with a painful *thud*.

Jacinta opened her eyes and looked up from where she lay on the floor next to her bed. She burst into tears as she realised she was safe in her bedroom. She had never been so glad to be there. The morning sun streaming through the thin curtains was warm, and Jacinta wiped the tears from her eyes and let the bright sunshine dissolve the shadows and monsters in her mind. She was overcome with emotion, and her tears began flowing again as she looked through the window, but they were tears of joy, as if this was the first dawn she had ever seen. Jacinta thanked her God.

“.....happy birthday to you.... Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray!”

Sixteen candles on the cake. Jacinta wished there were only fifteen, or better yet, seventeen. Then this day would have been long behind her—a distant memory. She looked around at the party guests: friends from school, laughing and joking, uncles and aunts who had travelled from

far and wide to celebrate her coming of age. Her mum and dad looked proudly at her, their hearts overflowing with love for their beautiful daughter, now becoming a woman.

Jacinta looked over at her cousins, four of them standing at the back of the group, singing “happy birthday” with the others, but there was no joy in their song. They looked at Jacinta as if this day was her last. They knew. It had come for them on their sixteenth birthdays and had taken something precious from them. They knew. This would be the last time they would see their cousin as a complete human being.

9 P.M. came and went. The party was over long ago, and everyone had gone home except for a few relatives who had travelled far and were staying the night. Jacinta sat on the lounge with Emma and her parents.

“It’s late, Jacinta. Aren’t you going to bed?” said her Mum.

“Just a bit longer,” Jacinta replied. “I’m not tired. Can I stay up for a while longer? Please?”

“Ok,” her dad answered, “but no later than ten.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

Her parents rose from the lounge and started up the stairs toward their bedroom.

“Goodnight, girls,” said her Mum.

“Goodnight,” they replied in unison.

“We should go to bed, Jace,” said Emma. “You can’t stay down here forever.”

“I can’t, Emma. I’m so scared.”

“It’s something that we’ve all had to face sometime or other,” Emma replied.

“Will you stay with me tonight? Please Emma? Please?”

“It won’t do any good, Jace. If it doesn’t come tonight, it will come tomorrow night or the next, or next week, or next month.”

“Please?” begged Jacinta.

Emma knew she couldn’t leave her sister by herself in this state.

“Come on, then. I’ll sleep on your floor tonight, but you’ll have to face it sooner or later. It’s your fate.”

“I want you to stay in my bed with me,” Jacinta said.

“There’s no room,” said Emma. “I’ll be right next to your bed, okay? I won’t leave you.”

“Okay.”

Jacinta reluctantly walked up the stairs, followed by her sister.

“Can we leave the light on?” asked Jacinta, as Emma tried to make herself comfortable on the floor, using the large cushions from Jacinta’s bed to construct a makeshift mattress.

“Yeah, sure,” said Emma, punching her pillow into submission. The girls settled down, tried to relax, and waited for sleep to come.

The seconds ticked by. Minutes. Hours. Jacinta lay on her bed staring at the ceiling, watching a moth circling the light, trying its hardest to enter it, unaware that death waited patiently just inside.

Jacinta listened to her sister’s soft snoring. She tossed and turned. Her pillow was damp with tears as she contemplated her fate, whatever her fate may be. She determined to be strong, and she consoled herself with the knowledge that whatever was going to transpire would soon be over, and then she could go on with her life.

After all, she thought, I’m not the first in my extended family to be subjected to the curse. They had all survived, hadn’t they?

Jacinta looked at the clock on her bedside table. Midnight had moved into the past. It was 12.35 AM, a new day. It was no longer her birthday, and she felt a sudden glimmer of hope. Perhaps it wasn't coming for her after all. Perhaps the curse had run its course. She felt a cautious relief.

Somewhere in those early hours, Jacinta was finally overtaken by fatigue, and she slept peacefully, but her sleep was short-lived. Her eyes snapped open. The bedroom light had been turned off, and the room was pitch black. She couldn't breathe. There was something covering her mouth and nose so tightly and forcefully that she was suffocating. She tried to call to Emma, but couldn't make a sound. She felt the life draining from her body. She was rapidly becoming light-headed and dizzy. She thought she was about to pass out before the pressure on her mouth eased, and she sucked in a deep breath.

Jacinta's terrified eyes widened. Above her was a huge, dark figure with one hand over her mouth and the other hand on her inner thigh, stroking her from her crotch to her knee, gently parting her legs. She could not see its face, but she knew it was the devil. It MUST be the devil.

Jacinta struggled, but the figure was immovable and powerful. She struggled until she could struggle no more and just lay there, terrified by what was happening, and even more so at what might happen next.

The hand traced up her thigh, stopping at the edge of her panties, and then gently moved onto her soft mound and stimulated her through the fabric. Jacinta lay there, frozen, as the hand moved her other leg to the side. She wet herself from fear and felt the warm moisture beneath her butt and lower back.

Jacinta felt something hard and cold moving down her belly and realised it was a knife cutting through her panties, which were then slid from her body. Jacinta lay there, exposed, vulnerable

and helpless as the demon moved in between her legs. Its hand covered her mouth and nose and prevented her from making a sound. She felt something at her entrance, trying to force its way inside. She heard spitting, and then felt a hand applying the saliva to her opening, massaging it in, making her slippery.

Again, something was there and was slowly nudging its way in. Jacinta felt stretching, and terrible pain, and something giving way as she was slowly violated. She felt a painful fullness and the sensation of hair like steel wool rubbing on her lower abdomen as she was dwarfed by this huge being. In and out, back and forth, its hand still covering her mouth and the other hand moving over her body, roughly massaging her small breasts and moving under her butt, pulling her into its fat, grotesque body.

She closed her eyes and tried to run blindly through the darkness as she did the previous night, to that alternate universe. She wanted to fall once again, weightlessly, into that black, vast abyss where nothing existed but her mind, where there was no such thing as time and space, where nothing could touch her, where she could wake up next to her bed and let the familiar, warm sunshine dissolve her nightmare and make her whole again.

The demon was so huge compared to her own diminutive build that her face was squashed against its hairy upper chest. She could smell the disgusting stench of body odor, and even though its face was far from hers, she smelled its rancid breath. After a few minutes, its body stiffened, and the ultimate indignity was forced upon her. Jacinta lay there, terrified, as this monster sat upright and straddled her. The cold blade of the knife brushed across her cheek, and then moved down to her throat. The blunt back edge made a gentle slicing motion from her right ear, across her throat to her left ear.

Its face came close to hers. “Shh. Our little secret. Okay?”

Jacinta nodded three times in quick succession, her eyes wide and terrified. “Yes,” she whispered in reply, and the hulking creature rose from the bed.

In the blackness Jacinta could barely see her attacker, but she heard the sound of a zipper and a belt being buckled. Ashamed and broken, Jacinta covered her nakedness with the bedsheet. She turned on her side, pulled her knees tightly into her chest, and stared out the window.

The door opened, and Uncle Bill crept from the room, closing the door softly behind him. Jacinta gazed numbly through the curtains at the barely discernible, twisted, groping arms and clutching fingers of the trees outside silhouetted by the cloud-covered moonlight. Her mind was in a state of turmoil. Satan himself had come and taken her most treasured possession, and in its place had left his seed. The room was silent except for Emma’s gentle snoring. Jacinta lay motionless on the bed, her breath shaky, her eyes wide and unblinking, and stared into the night.