

From another world

A short story of love, loss, and the unknown. Based on true events.

by Lalita Vasu

The wind blew restlessly throughout the night. Above the Arabian Sea, monsoon clouds churned, plunging the Goan coast into darkness. Rain battered the red-tiled rooftops of the old houses in Vasco. Lightning bolted between the branches of swirling coconut trees.

Far inland, beyond the swaying coconut trees and winding hill roads, stood INHS Jeevanti Naval Hospital. Within its white walls, fluorescent tube lights flickered. Low visibility and the deafening sound of thunder made the atmosphere eerie. The air smelled faintly of iodine and rain-soaked earth.

In Ward B, Room No. 3, a lone figure sat upright in bed, eyes unblinking, sweat beading on his brow, staring out of the window. The fan was making a creaking sound.

Captain Ashish Sharma, 33, a decorated submariner and officer, a hero of the Indian Navy, was now a patient admitted to this hospital. Without wounds. No broken bones or visible injuries.

His eyes were glued to the window, battered by the storm, as if seeking something.

In a hoarse voice, he said, “Not tonight,” and cleared his throat. “Please... not yet,” he repeated. He seemed to be escaping from someone, but the room was empty.

And unseen by human eyes, wings stirred in the stormy sky. Their light flickered like fireflies. They appeared to be annoyed at his reply.

-A quarter century ago-

At twilight, little Ashish, covered in sweat and mud, returned home after playing with his friends. He was too excited to heed his mother’s request for a bath.

“Ma, you won’t believe what I saw today!” he burst out. “I saw huge creatures with wings flying in the sky. I tried to show my friends, but no one could see them. The creatures were calling me to play with them.”

His mother was slightly puzzled. “Ashish beta, don’t think too much. It could be the effect of those games you play,” she whispered and pulled him into a hug. Evil spirits and bad omens were common beliefs in those days.

Often, Ashish would come back with fresh stories about strange creatures. His parents, growing worried, took him to temples and offered prayers, showed him to tantrics and asked for their help to ward off the evil spirits. They hoped it was just a passing phase. And slowly, as time passed, the frequency of those incidents reduced.

-Cut to the present-

The young officer, who had once led stealth missions beneath hostile waters, was now broken in spirit. Nightmares consumed him. He slept in fits, muttering strange things.

Ashish Sharma's admission to the hospital had puzzled the doctors.

Dr. Ranjan Sen read the chart and shook his head in dismay.

Patient: Captain Ashish Sharma. Age: 33.

Diagnosis: Acute anxiety, visual and auditory hallucinations.

No evidence of head trauma or neurological disorder.

Normal scans, normal blood reports.

No medicine seemed to help. The therapy sessions yielded no improvement.

This, until the night she arrived.

Vivian D'Costa was a diligent and bright-eyed final-year trainee nurse with an enchanting smile. She hailed from the fisherfolk of Margao. She was the youngest of five siblings, and lived in an ancestral home on the beach.

Life for her was uncomplicated and peaceful. Her life's goal, serve the patients with her heart and complete the training. Then try to get a job in London.

However, life operates in mysterious ways beyond human comprehension.

That night, Vivian, covering for a sick colleague, entered Ward No. B. While passing room No. 3, she peeped in to see the patient. The rain hammered against the windows. The storm slammed the walls. Little did she know that this night would irrevocably alter her life.

And there he was, sitting up in bed, eyes staring at the black sky, looking sad and dejected. She tiptoed into the room and checked his papers.

She approached him softly.

“Good evening, Captain,” she said, her voice gentle.
“I’m Vivian. How are you tonight?”

There was no response for a considerable period. Then he muttered, “I’m... awake. Waiting...”

She checked his temperature and blood pressure, administered a vitamin supplement and urged him to sleep. He felt comforted.

Vivian began visiting Ashish every day after her shifts, bringing minor goodies like ginger tea, a magazine, a transistor radio, and some local Goan food from home.

Slowly, bit by bit, he responded. He started opening up to her about his trauma.

“What do you keep searching for out of the window?” she asked. “No one believes me, but I know it is true,” he said. “Sometime between twilight and early morning, they come here. It is mostly close to full moon or new moon days.”

“I am being approached by winged beings. Like big fireflies with piercing eyes. They say, Come with us; you do not belong to this world. It was a mistake that you got dropped here. After that, they just vanish.”

She listened, her heart heavy.

“Dreams?”

He shook his head. “No... they speak. The leader says... I belong to them.”

A shiver passed down her spine. Was she dealing with a maniac?

She listened to every word he said. In his eyes, she saw something deeper than madness: a fear, a loneliness, as limitless as the sea. Vivian knew he was telling the truth, but no one would believe him.

Somewhere in another universe, unknown to humanity, a group of ‘creatures’ much advanced than human beings was meeting. These beings were incredibly intelligent and could fly millions of miles. After much searching,

they seemed to have found their buddy on a planet called Earth. With the decrease in the number of their inhabitants in this universe, every lost comrade was an enormous loss. They had to bring him here. They formed a group to visit him and convince him to return to their world.

The story of the captain who saw fairies was circulating in the hospital. Other patients in the vicinity laughed. They felt he was crazy.

“Fairies chasing our captain!” joked Sonu, the ward boy, and all the surrounding people laughed.

Vivian did not laugh. She understood.

Vivian had grown up in a small fishing village near Margao, where superstition and ancient wisdom co-existed with modern medicine. Her grandmother had been a respected herbalist, often called upon by villagers for remedies and counsel when science couldn't help. It was during those days, sitting by the sea, that she listened to her grandmother's stories of restless spirits, karmic burdens, and the thin veil between the different universes and developed a deep-rooted respect for the unexplained.

Vivian paid close attention whenever Ashish recounted his traumatic experience. Her rural upbringing and the stories of wise elders led her to believe him. Wounds like his often ran deeper than the body, and sometimes only those willing to believe could help.

Each night after her shift, she stayed with him a little longer. Her presence was like a soothing balm for Ashish.

Both looked forward to their evening meetings.

One rare clear evening, after her rounds, Vivian found him standing by the window, and the rain had finally stopped.

A faint moon shone beyond the clouds.

Vivian held his hand and asked, “How are you feeling today?”

“I’m tired,” he admitted. “But... you make me want to stay.” He pressed her hand.

Vivian’s body shivered as he touched her back. Feeling his breath, she whispered, “Then stay. Please stay with me.”

His fingers brushed her cheek, and he removed her nurse’s cap and let her hair down. Vivian didn’t stop him. He held her close and kissed her.

“Vivian... if there was another life...,” she stopped him midway.

“No, be with me in this life. I love you. Please stay for my sake.”

It was a night neither of them would ever forget. Etched in time.

Doctors saw a marked improvement in Ashish's health. Soon, his discharge seemed likely. Rumours of their relationship were floating in the wards.

However, fate had other ideas, and the dark shadows returned.

"They're here!" he gasped one night, thrashing in terror, sweat pouring. Trembling, he whispered, "They want me to go with them. I feel they will come through the ceiling. I feel the room will collapse on me." He held tight onto Vivian's hand.

Vivian held him through the long hours, whispering words of comfort.

"I don't want to go," he breathed between sobs. "Hold on to me," he said, holding her hand tightly.

Vivian spent the entire night sitting next to his bed, trying her best to comfort him.

The next day, Vivian requested Father D'Souza to come and pray for Ashish.

Father D'Souza was a kind old priest from St. Andrew's Church.

He prayed for Ashish. He said, "May God be with you, my child," and then he touched Ashish's head.

Ashish smiled at the priest.

“She is my hope, my life!” he said, pointing towards Vivian with a smile.

The next attack struck hard. The rain was pouring incessantly.

Vivian was going home. She raced towards Ashish’s room in the hospital, soaked through, skirts clinging to her legs. She stopped at the door and froze. There was a serene calmness settled over Ashish. Too calm to feel comfortable.

“She’s here,” he whispered, eyes closed. She has finally come to take me with her.

“No! Stay with me! We’ll run away. Just live!” Vivian was pleading with him.

He smiled. “I cannot run. My path is beyond this world. Forgive me. But I promise I will come for you.” He gasped for breath and could hardly speak. She tried to comfort him.

He kissed her hand. “You gave me more happiness in life than I ever dreamed of. But... our companionship ends here.”

Tears streamed down her face. His eyes closed, and with a final breath, he was gone. She cried inconsolably.

In the morning, life at the hospital was as usual, except for Vivian. She had lost her love.

The doctors found no cause of death.

Heart normal. Lungs clear. No toxins.

Vivian wept beside him, holding his icy hand.

Ashish's family came to take his remains to his hometown for the last rites. From a distance, Vivian watched him for one last time, tears still trickling down her cheeks.

It had been a month since Ashish had left this world, and Vivian had arranged for a memorial mass for him at St. Andrew's Church.

After the crowd was gone, she sat on the bench beneath the old banyan tree. Tears were trickling down her face.

Father D'Souza came up to her. "You loved him and gave him hope."

The sky was clear, and stars shimmered above. It was Christmas Eve.

Sitting on the bench outside the church, she looked up at the sky. She saw a flicker of light.

A bright light among the constellations flashed for a second.

She felt that a voice murmured. "Merry Christmas!"

Her eyes welled up. "I am waiting," she said as a tear trickled down her cheek.

That night, she dreamt.

A starlit space. Ashish stood before her, cloaked in light, wings on his back. "Vivian... I will come for you. I promise, wait for me."

The next morning, she was peaceful.

In her beautiful handwriting, she penned:

My dearest Ashish,

Last night's meeting was wonderful! You gave me love and hope. Among the stars, remember my continued search for you, and when my time is up... find me once again.

My Captain. My love.

Forever yours,

Vivian.

She folded the letter, kissed it, and placed it inside the wooden box where all her letters were kept.

Years passed. The sea, the stars, and time moved on. Vivian's hair turned silver, but her gaze remained bright, watching, waiting. She never married.

Her balcony overlooked the sea, and she spent her evenings listening to the music of the waves.

One evening, as the wind whispered and the stars shimmered, Vivian closed her eyes, clutching the last letter she ever wrote, imagining a beautiful life with Ashish. "Please, Lord, let him find me," she was praying with folded hands.

There was a knock at her door. She wasn't expecting anyone at this hour. She rose slowly and opened the door.

Standing at the threshold was a young boy, barefoot, hair wet, eyes shining. In her failing eyesight and the darkness outside, she could not recognise him.

He held a folded piece of paper. "For you," he said. "From someone who promised he'd find you."

The boy smiled, an all-too familiar smile, and turned away, vanishing before her eyes in a jiffy.

Vivian opened the note. "I finally found the way. It took time. But love... I'm coming back."

"Look for me... where the sea meets the sky at sunset. See you soon!"

Vivian stared out at the horizon, tears in her eyes, no longer from sorrow, but from hope.