



Night Theater

Vikram Paralkar

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In *Night Theater*, a disgraced surgeon faces a long night as three visitors arrive at his clinic door, greeting him with a macabre and otherworldly request. Before sunrise, the surgeon will question everything he thought he knew about life and death. Answers prove as elusive as to his visitors.

Saheb is dissatisfied with life. He works in a rundown government clinic, having been run out of his previous town for medical malpractice, but he doesn't feel that he deserves to be trapped in these working conditions. On a particularly brutal and frustrating workday during which a supplier arrives with polio vaccinations hours after mothers and children begin crowding the clinic, three deceased strangers walk in.

The strangers are a married couple and their eight-year-old boy who were robbed and stabbed to death as they left a fair. They long to return to life, and say that their wish has been granted by an official in the afterlife—with a catch. The family has to be physically repaired before sunrise; if they are, their drained, clotted bodies will refill with flowing blood.

There to assist Saheb with this most taxing surgical performance of his career are his pharmacist and her husband. As the dead await sunrise and their ultimate fates, the deceased man reveals a terrible secret to Saheb and his family.

Within the text, surgery procedures are prominent with medical details. Saheb's abrasive personality becomes more sympathetic as his backstory comes to light. The novel leaves important plot questions unanswered but ends on what the characters see as a hopeful note.

Night Theater is an imaginative novel that tackles questions about the purpose of life through characters who, when left to choose, find both pros and cons in the afterlife, too.

TANISHA RULE (January / February 2020)

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