

The Ugly

There was a humble, quiet creature named Snote once who lived in a Biohazardous environment. That meant a lot of things. For instance, that bread did not taste much like bread anymore, that the sunsets became awfully strange over time, and that his lair wasn't quite what it used to be.

Now, he used to blame the grime and the dirt in his lair (it *was*, quite messy) on the Biohazardous environment and its pollution, but then he gave up, reluctantly admitting that it was because of that Ugly.

That wretched Ugly.

That horrible, deplorable Ugly, the Snote moaned to himself.

That cold-hearted Ugly who took everything the Snote had, and left him all alone one day. And surely, before the Ugly departed, he made certain that the den was well in a mess. Since then the Snote did not have the heart to clean it up.

Once in a while there were loud explosions. Especially mid-night. On those nights, the Snote would stagger out of his bed- dreams melting away, sober yet half asleep- and watch the sky. For the skies, they would wear the strangest of colors after the explosions.

On a few occasions, the Snote attempted establishing a garden outside of his lair, but the wannabe flowers that were deposited in the ground, would always die following the eruptions. He endeavored on using different methods to keep them alive, but the attempts fell sour; the appropriate fertilizer was administered, organic compost was munificently distributed, lemon juice was carefully squeezed fresh every morning and was dribbled in measured amounts on top of each flowerbed. Nevertheless, the situation had insisted on remaining stagnant.

And so, before giving up on gardening entirely, he then took a stab at growing vegetables. And for some odd reason, it worked. The vegetables did not die, and they didn't mind the explosions, apparently.

However, they did come out rather weird looking, and grew in somewhat ominous and unfriendly shapes and colors. The Snote didn't care. It was the only thing he had ever managed to grow, and he was proud of his weird looking vegetables.

There was one particular Eggplant bush that quickly became his favorite. For its progeny grew into the most odd forms. They were distorted, and indeed, looked like everything but eggplants. As a matter of fact, with time the produce began resembling letters, in a very abstract kind of way, but nevertheless, there was a surprising similarity, and as days passed, it became apparent more so.

The Snote took satisfaction in it. He spent all his evenings in the vegetable garden, going about nurturing and pruning, reading them stories. He could tell they liked it by the way they swayed from side to side, and he knew it wasn't the wind, for there was not much wind to speak of in the Biohazardous environment.

One day, a very hot day at that, the Ugly came back. The Snote was working in his garden at the time, weeding Biohazardous weeds (potentially dangerous organisms), watering the vegetables and dispensing some general tender loving care. He was laboring around the cucumber bush and when looking up, the Ugly was there- emanating self-pity, suddenly coy, making excuses, pleading 'to please understand', weltering in decadence, and holding two suitcases in his hand.

"You startled me," said the Snote, startled.

"I am back," declared the Ugly.

"What for?" asked the Snote.

"My feelings are back. I want to start over."

"It's too late," said the Snote. "I have already moved on with my life."

"I want to be a part of it again. I forgot how nice it was here," insisted the Ugly.

He was obviously resolute, and well, the Snote did miss him so very much. And so, he let him stay.

"Suit yourself," he said.

But the Snote felt somewhat lonelier when the Ugly was back. He felt betrayed and yet relieved that he was there again, at the same time. But he knew that it was all wrong, and he had enough dignity to finally tell the Ugly to pack his belongings and leave for good.

"You are leaving now," He told the Ugly. You are out, you are gone, from now on, you are on your own. And you take your cold heart with you from here, and never ever come back again."

Amen.

It felt good. And so bad.

And the days went by.

That wretched Ugly, the Snote kept groaning to himself.

But then, he awoke one morning, surveyed the clutter, and said, “That’s it. This must change. I must rearrange.”

And going about making changes is what the Snote did next. He proceeded to cleaning and rearranging until it was all shiny and spotless, and things made somewhat a little more sense. He took the entire afternoon off that day. He lay in his reclining chair wearing his Biohazardous sunglasses, and drank lemonade with a straw.

That night there were some explosions, and the skies roared and flashed with colors. The whole world shook, and he couldn’t sleep. He walked out of his spic-and-span den and watched the yellow-red-purple sky, and the orange lightings that torched it with radioactive fury for a while.

And since subsequently, sleep was, as a matter of fact, lost, he walked into his garden and ambled slowly amid his deformities. The moon was full that night, and above his garden, the sky was just plain, beautiful, night sky. The Snote took a few deep breaths. The explosions ceased and it all became so very quiet suddenly. He lingered for a moment by the big, blue, cone-shaped peppers and smelled them. Then, habitually, he turned to look at its neighbor- the eggplant bush- and as he did that, realization suddenly transpired. And it was a very odd thing to realize indeed. He looked at the bush again, and at every letter-like eggplant, and thought back to three or four weeks ago.

Why, they are all the same, triumphantly he thought to himself. *Yes*, he mused, *it’s the same letters*.

For weeks now, he realized, the eggplants deformed into the exact same letters every time. Even after they were plucked off the bush, they still grew back into the same shape. The same letters.

Curious, he thought.

Slowly, he picked all the eggplant letters off the bush and strolled into his warren. He lit up a candle and spread them on his round stone table, and examined them carefully. There was a V, an E, an L, another E and an A. Five letters.

Quite intrigued (for this curious phenomenon was indeed intriguing), and fairly mystified, the Snote scratched his head, and tugged on his ear. Then he attempted to put the letters into words, and that is exactly, if you think about it, what anyone else would have done.

There were a few short words that did not really mean a whole lot, and a few that rang very French, or Italian if you'd like. Even though the Snote spoke neither. Following additional devising and failed attempts, the Snote, he couldn't help but think, *In the name of Beijing, suppose the bush is trying to tell me some thing?* He had seen strange things in the Biohazardous district before. It wouldn't have been *that* strange, if that were the case. Those kind of things happen when you live in a Biohazardous environment. It would actually make perfect sense.

Thus, he stayed up and undertook coming up with words. But nothing logical came to mind, not in any familiar language anyway. It was already too late, there was nothing to add, and he was weary, so finally, he gave up and went to bed.

When the Snote arose on the following morning, there was a peculiar smell hanging in the air. Now, to be fair, one must mention that bizarre smells weren't really all that uncommon. Odd or otherwise disturbing tings were usual aromatic guests in the Biohazardous environment. The bread could sometimes taste like everything but bread, and the water was awfully murky at times, and would smell like vinegar and burned oil. He was accustomed to different smells and tastes of things. But that morning the air smelled very bitter and dangerous.

And so, the Snote exited the burrow just to find that his entire yard was wallowing in black rubbery substance, which climbed on top of every rock and twig and covered everything with thick oil. It seemed to be crawling slowly, and as far as the Snote could see, it already engulfed most of the valley around his den, weltering around every tree. Promptly, the Snote ran to his vegetable garden, and was greatly relieved to find it black-stuff free.

Keeping his calm (that was one of his trademarks), the Snote rushed into his house and grabbed his garden basket. Then scurrying back to his backyard, he began

digging out his vegetable plants. He was swift and efficient, and managed to salvage all the plants before the black stuff got there to smother and exterminate.

The Snote entered his lair, and as he laid the basket and the plants on the table, shooting a glance at the eggplant letters that still lay there from the night before, it finally occurred to him.

LEAVE

Why, of course, that was the word the letters formed.

He looked outside his door- where the rubbery matter crawled slowly like a devil, suffocating everything- and it didn't require further consideration, for that was quite the gnarly idea. What a swell concept- to leave. Perhaps he needed a fresh new start somewhere.

Therefore packing up his belongings into a small suitcase, and bunching up his vegetable plants into the garden basket, he stepped into the oily river that clad everything black, and left. And didn't even look back.

He found a good little pond somewhere far from the Biohazardous area, sometime later, and settled down there. The vegetables liked it. He planted them by the edge of the pond, and he even managed to grow wonderful flowers that blossomed sweet and colorful and didn't die.

That was a welcome change, and it wasn't long before the Snote woke up one day, looked out of his window and his heart swell with a warm, comfortable feeling, the serenity of one who is in the right place. He felt, at Home.