

Here be Dragons

by Javed Hayat

Most nights while in his sleep, with his one good eye deeply shut, the old man can hear the whispers of the specter in the remote wanderings, holding the surrounding woodlands in its snare. The sound of it closing in, with the bones of the universe crushing in beneath its weight.

In the mornings to follow, he finds the random trails of impressions left on the patch of barren gray in the area surrounding his cave. Deep sulfuric impacts of colossal proportions glowing against the early morning sun.

Moved by a terrible childlike fear that clings onto us in the fog end of our lives, the old man rush back to hide deep within the recesses of the stone-age shelter of his abode. Spending days down on his haunches, shivering and mumbling incoherently to himself. At times, while deep in his fits, he bites onto the rosary beads that once belonged to his dead wife, while muttering the names of the ghosts that once meant shelter to him.

His starved fingers groping, fumbling into his cowboy leather saddlebag, gaping holes and all, taking out the yellowed bunch of parchments he has long discovered from his deceased grandfather's basement. Locked and forgotten in their revered family vault. The parchments look old, older than the world as the man have always known it to be.

He squints on the shapes, knowing it is no map; a set of drawings done in charcoal, partly faded with time and a little rough around the edges. The drawings have never failed to haunt him for as long as he can remember.

With his satchel turning dry yet again, the old man fights the urge to

drink for days on end.

* * *

He eventually creeps out of his cave and tip-toes his way to the nearby pond. His skinny frail physique bogged down by an invisible force with too much space around him. But it was the spaces *within*, which scare him the worst.

There is a reflection of a wide grin appearing on an old face against the calm watery surface, unveiling the dark holes between the random set of crooked teeth and bad gum. The expression on the face seems to be one of invitation; daring him to accept the challenge.

He recalls the countless nights he has spent staring deep and hard into the endless woods from the vantage point of his cave. He remembers watching in mute horror the blind spaces running deep between the narrowly lined pine trees becoming alive and physical. The drawings from the parchment materializing right before his eyes, resembling the shapes he has dreaded over for years from the parchments in his saddlebag.

The cold eyes with menacing jaws watching him, and large bat-like wings unfolding in a terrible slow motion, hissing and writhing, and then flying off into the night. *Into the spaces within.*

With tears in his eye, he scurries back into his sleeping bag, wishing for rapture.

