

# The Ghost

*by* Javed Hayat

I stroll out to the front lawn, and find myself against the sea of grass, painted daubs within the frame of a distilled rock. My ears attuned to the starlets warbling on the twisted branches of the lone tree, flock of wings that find subtlety and shine in the rapture of creation.

It's a familiar neighborhood, where the tribal of sunflowers form a barrier between the neatly aligned houses against the beaten down sun melting into the nearby foothills. Nature slowly spins its wheels and the heavens turn upside down, while my shadow now slowly dissipates into infinity along the fence line.

This morning, I woke up listening to the clocks around the house that seemed to have gone louder and the walls quieter, walls that no longer echoed back the sound of my pleas for help. There was darkness on faces that do not harmonize with my recollection and have shown up at my doorstep in tears.

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Against the long lines of benches, I see people stranded in time and space. Holding hands while faced with the complexities of the birth and the complexities of the dying. The whorl of noises emanating from all around. Sharing the grief of the few, sounds of an odd prayer for the deceased. Shadows moving in circles, subservient to the laws of gravity still. Their eyes covered in three sheets of blind, finding its syntax in tears.

Most of them drawing little comfort from the sight of a great man in black robes verily summoning a door opening to the clouds. Like forming a rubric's cube against the Nature's sleight of hand.

It's a place where the diggers and the dead gather to drown their sorrows, sweet lovers break down in sobs, mothers hold onto their little souls and wean them with lies and half-truths while fathers feign quiet anger and despair. A space much abused by the alphas

and the omegas, the cadavers of the mind and matter, grown rotten and wiser with time and age.

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Outside, a naked man sits against the entrance of the church, collecting the beads that have fallen off the broken strand, his eyes squinting, and lips tremble in a prayer. Long hairs waving against the darker wind. He reminds me of an underling that sloths in slumber beneath the undergrowth at night, and endures a living in its fragile shelter.

A half-moon smile appears on a poorly formed face as he notices my stagnant figure in the middle of the road, stranded in my solemn confusion. Intrigued, I slowly march towards the poor thing. He gestures me to come closer, and whispers in my ears the names from the past, as if hoping to help my recollection. He spoke about my father and how we all must learn to drift given enough time. Down below, he said, downward where tired bodies go, to seek refuge in the drifter's universe.

He produces a familiar photograph, a childhood image from the long gone past, as if to affirm his extraordinary claims. Helping me to understand.

Hold my hand. He looks at me expectantly and now whispers in a hoarse voice. A webbed amphibious hand greets me with an air of expectation. The man's smile widens, and I see openings within the crevices of that gentle face, holes within holes of sheer darkness.

I walked away, as fast as the fear within would permit; vowing not to look back. The creature has begun to speak louder behind my back, the voice closing in against my ears the further I draw away from him.

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Back in my room, failing to hold my own against the reflection in the mirror. I burst into tears against the deaf walls, despairing for a crystal ball whose surface would mirror my past. In a span of just a few hours, my skin has started to shrivel with alarming rapidity and eyes have begun to dry out. Hairs thinning out in a rush. At this rate, I will begin to resemble my dead father in less than a week's time.

I skim through the cardboard boxes and find sheets of prescriptions from the last three years clipped together, little hopes we bought off the medical store counters. I was dismayed at how much time we have spent failing to see the scribbled hieroglyphs on the blank sheets for what they really were; ancient Sumerian symbols that herald our end.

My grief-stricken wife, as she enters the room appears as a mere silhouette of light, a hologram in my life now phasing out against the ever darkening background. And there is nothing I can do about it. Nothing at all.

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Tonight my wife sleeps beside the shadow of a memory, leaving the half burned cigarette smoldering on the ashtray by the side. While my little girl stands against the window facing the lawn, a forlorn figure with puffy eyes fixated against the dead space.

I had once dreamed of being able to hold onto her till the grey in my head grows wiser. The age being more than just a number you see.

In despair, I reach out to her, and it sends a cold shiver through her body. She winces and runs back into the house, and I realize that my soul no longer conforms to her physical frame.

