

The Thing

by Javed Hayat

Mother isn't happy about what lies in the basement. The thing has come crashing down on us in the wake of whole lot of trouble we find ourselves in lately, while her husband's too busy selling his soul to the Devil up north, long nights at Freddie's getting hooked up with his usual gang of troublemakers and card dealers.

'It ain't gonna rain money.' She reminds him for an umpteenth time. 'It never does with a game of Hearts, or with your sorry bunch of sweet little Ponzi boys. '

Tonight, a look on dad's perfect pair of gambler's eyes says maybe it just has. It makes you wonder if his business of faith is any different from the most regular church going folks in town. Both have an enduring capacity for keeping hope. His normally revolves around a deck of cards or instant divine interventions resulting in huge sums of cash; latter because the old man often gets himself into all kinds of mess when it comes to matters like money management.

But as things turn out, or don't turn out, makes you believe that God doesn't care much for gamblers, nor for men who bring back home things from the East End River, things they don't understand.

The image of my father carrying the creature on his back, and shoving it at the rear of the truck will stay with me in the years to come. Later on, I figured that all he had at the forefront of his mind is to squeeze some extra bucks on the side. Being short on dough is one season the old man never misses out on whole year around. It even outgrew his horror of discovering something so ... so grotesque.

While the vehicle rode back home past the waves of endless grass, through the sandy paths of our quiet little town, an air of mutual

agreement is formed between us, bonded in troubled silence. My younger brother Bobby's pale as a ghost, and the old man's face a dark silhouette. It was just a bad day for fishing.

A fight ensues that night at the dinner table. But in retrospect, I figure we were only acting out the way a bunch of ordinary people do when their little lives are touched by something that even remotely smacks of supernatural.

We were just two curious small town boys preying on our own fears that night, sneaking into the basement while things continue to get bitter and louder at the dinner table.

The creature lay sprawled across the large wooden desk, staring back at us with its set of three round opaque eyes on the top of a large reptilian head. Long hands looking oddly human in shape, covered with tough, shiny scales, hands that go running on either side of its robust eel like shape. Its granite skin with the keeled ridges was cold to the touch, electric and hard. Frozen.

If there is life in this thing, it's colder than the worse of winters we get on this side of the world.

I hear Bobby's voice struggling for breath, mumbling he would be damned if the thing in our basement didn't look a thousand years old, if not more. His words have echoes of eternity for most nine years old out there.

An air of panic intervene our endless fascination with the creature, as the loud thumping sounds of hurried steps fall on our ears, closing in, followed by a string of human noises.

I look back at Bobby, his wide blue eyes staring at me. A dark

shadow on his round baby face also tells me that he isn't entirely convinced if the thing is dead in the first place. Because even the folks buried in the town's only cemetery have a way of coming back from time to time. Nothing lies dead for too long.

We exchange a glance, a moment of fear and excitement, followed by a secret acknowledgement of a part we share, a part that wants the creature to raise itself from the desk, and the worse to happen.

