

Squishy

by Joe Lyons

Martin named it “Squishy” for two reasons. The first reason was because it was the noise it made when it came out of the hole in his basement. The second is because it's what it did to Grandfather when he went downstairs after a night of drinking too much beer at the tavern. He won't be missed. He was far too cranky and lamented too much about wars he didn't even fight in. If Squishy hadn't done him in, it would have been someone else in town anyway.

Martin noticed the hole in his basement the day he moved into the house. It was the only house he could afford with the meager wages he made staging puppet shows on street corners for children and unemployed people. At first he thought it was a simple drain, but it turned out to be far more gruesome upon further inspection. It was fleshy, it puckered in towards the middle, and to say it smelled like death would be an unfair assessment. One has to assume that even the Reaper is slightly more fragrant. The hole looked like a part of the nether regions that one should never describe in detail to mixed company.

Before Martin could deal with the hole, using a plan that involved covering it up with a box that contained his more racist and unprofitable puppets, Squishy began to appear. It looked like a tentacle from an octopus, but it had scales and each sucker had a mouth that moved independently of the others. This, naturally, seemed oddly terrifying to Martin. Things went from oddly terrifying to just regular terrifying when an eye the size of a chamber pot appeared in the tentacle. It was green, reptilian, and it looked directly at Martin.

Martin overcame his inability to move when Squishy started to thrash at him. It struck viciously as it tried to destroy everything in the basement. Never before had so many puppets died in one place. Martin, having developed a natural agility after a lifetime of fleeing from thugs and other roustabouts, was able to avoid

Squishy's powerful blows and grab his father's axe, which he mainly used for holding doors open and occasionally used for chopping firewood. With two quick strikes, Martin chopped the tentacle in half, just below its eye. The lower half quickly retreated back into the putrid hole, while the top half dissolved into sludge that seeped into the stone floor and vanished. Martin stood triumphant for the first time in his miserable life.

Then it came back the next night and killed Grandfather before Martin could intervene.

It comes back every night now, just before midnight. Martin holds a quiet vigil over the hole daily to greet Squishy with a swift blow from his axe, before it and whatever creature it is attached to, can do more harm.

Unfortunately for Martin, it turns out there are worse jobs than being a street puppeteer.

