Dream Eater

by Paul McQuade

It's hard to recall exactly when the Baku appeared. It could have been the night of the vampire orgy, or it could have been when I went deep-sea diving with a stegosaurus. It's been so long now, I guess it doesn't even matter.

I was terrified at first. The Baku is not a pretty thing: tiger limbs, monkey body, rhino ears and an elephant face. He was sitting at the bottom of my bed in the prayer position of a Bodhisattva, his cow-tail swishing back and forth with the sound of snare drums. He licked his trunk with a tongue just as long and stared at me. Expectantly.

I tried asking him what he wanted. Silence. I tried shoving him out the door but I couldn't shift him from his perch on the bed. Easier to move mountains. Easier to shift the world, solid place to stand or not.

Days came and went. Yellow, silver, dishwater. Rags of sky. The Baku stayed where he was, watching me with fat wet eyes.

Then one night, a particularly terrible dream. It could have been anything. I choose to think it was something spectacular. Either way I woke violently, thrashing my way out of sleep. I looked at the Baku, now a permanent fixture of my bedroom, only to see him move for the first time since he took up residence with me.

He unfurled his nose. Snout periscoping, writhing serpentine mid-air with the grace of curling smoke. The room smelled of incense. The grey trunk wrapped around a patch of air and I could have swore I saw something there - a substanceless shimmer, a spectral glitter. He put it in his little mouth, the black triangle of a mons pubis. And from the recesses of his monkey-throat, a strangely content gurgling sounded. Echoing all around the room like the trilling of pigeons.

The Baku curled up like a dog, nose to anus, and slept. I could no longer remember what I had dreamt. Dinosaur invasions, a line of lovers like many-armed gods. It could have been anything.

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I understood now what the Baku needed. I began to feed him. All the things I could think of - horror movies, cheese, salt, pickles, chilli. Vitamin B6 tablets washed down with warm milk. Anything I could do to grow little nightmares for my new pet. Only the most heinous, vile dreams could sustain him. Only the most wicked, the most cold sweat gushing, sheet tangling, heart rupturing nightmares pleased him.

It is hard to recall exactly when the Baku came; he has been there so long, in his chimera palace at the foot of my bed. He has grown fat now, and there are so many holes in my memory from where he has eaten my nightmares away. Sucked the fatty flesh off. Left just the pit.

He has grown greedier lately; I have felt him nibbling on the corners of my other dreams - a toothless kind of leeching. The colours fade. I grow more forgetful each day. The waking world just another dream.