

In the Shadow of the Ancestor

Jak Alam

I was awoken from my slumber by the collision of my face with the seat in front of me.

Our Toyota HiAce had finally reached the village and was slowly making its way through the uneven and broken brick road.

Everyone else who fell asleep, including my sister-in-law, who sat beside me, had woken up as well.

It was almost evening, with some sliver of sunlight still illuminating the lake that the brick road went around.

One wrong move and loose dirt, and the four wheel would have fallen into the lake, which looked green and nasty with slime. I wondered if any fish lived in it.

The driver drove cautiously, though the car kept bouncing, but after a while the hard part was over and we came up on a patch of brick road that was smooth and even.

Soon, we were there, we had arrived at the ancestral family home.

It had been in my father's family for generations. It was a decrepit colonial house, looking like the residence of some horrible witch.

Unnatural silhouette of the structure forcefully imposed against the background of greenery. It felt both out of place and out of time.

It laid further into the village than any other house, so much so that it could be considered outside of the village.

Two of my cousins rushed to the car to greet us and help with the luggage. Our whole extended family seemed to have arrived before us.

One by one, my parents, my sisters, my brother, and my sister-in-law, all descended from the vehicle.

Upon entry, greetings were widely thrown and my brother's new bride was the object of much attention. While our rooms were getting unlocked and opened, my sister-in-law was ambushed by a crowd of children, varying from the ages of 3 to 8, asking for salami money in advance for tomorrow. The devious, little imps.

We stashed up our luggage and set up beds in the allocated rooms of the house. A bit of cleaning was in order.

Obviously, as the younger, responsible brother, I had to play star-assistant to my sister-in-law's cleaning efforts.

As I cleaned out the cobwebs in the corners, my sister-in-law called out to me.

She had a stack of yellowed papers in her hands, some looked like pages ripped out from an alphabet book with faded images and crayon doodles.

"Looks like someone was drawing here."

Out of the stack, she pulled out a paper and showed me. It had some drawings of some figures on it.

The drawing depicted some stick figures that could be considered as human, with one even wearing a tupi.

And in the middle of all of them, was this big thing in brown, with big red eyes and claws.

"Some creepy drawings," she muttered.

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The house was quite massive, but not very friendly to look at or inhabit. But it was what it was. A piece of family heritage that still stood with patches.

My family was accommodated in rooms on the 1st floor, while my sister-in-law was moved to a separate room on the 2nd, which had been refurbished just for her.

After all greetings were said and done, my middle brother instructed my dearest sister-in-law to always ensure that the heavy duty windows were closed before sundown.

She chuckled and scoffed at his instructions, but after further re-emphasizing by me and my older sister of the importance of following this instruction to the letter, she nodded in understanding.

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The first night was as expected. Cousins chatting around the dining room, the adults conversing in the confines of the master bedroom, my sister-in-law complaining of hearing voices coming from outside.

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The second night was almost as expected. After a busy day of Eid prayers, visiting the homes of neighbors and relatives, a lot of cooking, my sister-in-law complaining of lack of sleep and feeling like she was being watched and stalked by something.

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On the third night, as is custom in our family, my sister-in-law was brought up to the attic of the family home. The elders were in attendance. As was the Ancestor.

He was so big that he could barely fit himself in that cramped attic. He had to be in a squatting posture at all times.

As was to be expected, my brother's wife was distressed and mortified when she was brought before the Ancestor to receive his "blessing."

It was a custom in my family that whenever a new member was born or brought in, they would have to be presented to the Ancestor to receive his "blessings."

My sister-in-law had to be held firm and dragged forward by the elders. She had been rendered unresponsive upon laying eyes on the monolithic visage of the creature that defied any natural explanation.

I don't think there is any explanation for it. The Ancestor has been with the family for as long as anyone could remember. He is ancient. Even my fervently religious parents didn't think twice about venerating someone other than Allah. According to my grand uncle, my entire family line had descended from the Ancestor.

My grand uncle had a habit of not being forthcoming with all the exact details.

Despite the dreadful sight of him, the Ancestor felt like a member of the family to me.

Though my dear sister-in-law was of the opposite opinion; she screamed, struggled and begged me for help as the elders brought her within inches of the Ancestor's grasp.

He stretched out his right hand and brought two of its inhuman sized fingers to bear upon her head.

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As was usual, by the afternoon, everyone packed up and was ready to depart from the ancestral home. Rarely did anyone stay for more than three nights, due to work or other obligations.

Our ride arrived just in time for the sun to set. We hurriedly loaded everything up and double checked that the house was sealed shut.

The mood was jubilant among my family, except for the moods of me and my brother as we dealt with back and joint pains from all the luggage hauling.

My sister-in-law was most joyous as we departed, she even expressed to my mother how she wanted to bring her sisters next year. My mother happily obliged to the idea.

Evening came and the sun vanished, looking back at the house as we departed. Last I saw was a swarm of flying, blackish blotches engulfing the three story structure until the silhouette vanished into the distance.

Every night those things would come out of the woodwork and try to break into the house. And every night, the Ancestor would cower and whimper in the fear that they'd eventually break in.