

# The Painting

SHASHI KADAPA



The painting sits on my table, looking gross, looks childish. I can make out a hill, with forests at the foot, several animals, flowers, and natives. A yellowish sun hangs suspended between crimson clouds in a grey sky. Kathy, a troubled child who has come to me for psychological therapy has drawn it.

A creature with leathery scales on its back and stomach sits on a tree. It has a long spiny tail, with a sharp point, like an arrow head. The long beak has sharp teeth, the wings with muscular limbs end in talons, fiery saliva drips from the mouth. A man and a woman are impaled by the tail. They are gesticulating at heavens, arms akimbo, palms spread up, seeking protection. Natives lie spread on the ground, twisted, broken in death, their torsos dripping blood.

“Hello Kathy” I say to her, settling her on the psychiatrist’s couch.

“Hi” She replies. Then she again says “Hi”, waving to someone behind me.

“Who you are waving at Kathy?”

“At the troll.”

“There is no one here Kathy.”

“Yes, he is there.”

Then she runs shrieking at me, goes behind to grab the imaginary troll and falls. I help her up.

“See? I saved you” She shrills. “The troll was going to kill you with his tail and gobble you. Just like he ate my mama and papa.”

She starts crying, and rests on the couch in a deep faint.

She wakes up late in the dusk.

“What is this Kathy? I ask, pointing at the painting. “Did you draw this?”

“Yes. That is a mountain, forests, and the troll.”

“Who are these people?”

“That is my papa, mama, and people. The troll killed them and ate them. It killed the animals too.” She goes to sleep.

It is late night. A fog forms outside the windows, caresses the window panes, trying to ooze in. The street lights glow dimly in the sifting mists the light reflecting softly in the fog. Startled, I am reminded of the sun and crimson clouds in the painting.

I start reading some books, the painting glares at me and I pick it up. The scales of the creature are glistening, iridescent, weaving a shiny blurry web as they start flapping. I push it away, and it falls on the couch, sways and settles down, the creature glares at me.

“Too much work and strain. I am imagining things.” I mutter to myself and she sleeps

Kathy gets up, looking fresh. I gesture at her to sit on the couch, she flings the painting on the desk and lies down.

“Did you sleep Kathy?”

“Yes. But the troll is back. He is hungry.”

I hear her sobs and lean over. Her eyes are red rimmed from crying, oozing tears that turn to blood.

“Kathy, Kathy” I whisper in a soothing voice, and she stops, looking at me through her tears.

“The troll from the forest hunted them. It got the natives also. Now it is here.”

She drifts off to sleep. A nurse picks her and places her on a bed in the adjoining room.

I go about my work, dozing off. The sound of something flapping wakes me.

I curse in anger “pigeons, pests, scratching on the glass window, they want to get in.”

I turn to shoo them off, opening the window, drawing in the cold frigid fog into my breath. The cold wind bites through my coat, make me shudder. I turn back to work, too many reports and I start writing.

There! The sound of flapping wings. The sound and the wind are in my office!

I look around and see only turmoil, papers fly around, vases tumble down from cupboards, painting come loose and shatter. After a few seconds, the flapping sound is gone, a horrible stench fills the room. I glance at the couch and see that the painting has disappeared.

Something scaly and slippery brushes my neck, bruising and tearing the flesh. I turn around, my heart beats fast, and sweat pours down my face.

It is the troll. It hovers on my head, its tail around my neck. The mouth grimacing wide, the teeth sharp, shining,

with saliva dripping, burning my skin. The sharp tail is raised high, poised to strike.

I stagger into the attached room, where Kathy sleeps. The room is filled with trees, plants, a jungle, and a mountain, the attendants and nurse lie dead. The yellow sun glimmers among crimson clouds.

The troll flies to the tree, waves its tail sinuously.

I look at the face. It is Kathy, grinning at me, her teeth open, tail rising ....

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Procrastinator by profession and writer by passion. Author is currently working at Bangalore as a business manager. She started her literary journey by writing small pieces in Marathi & English local dailies at her hometown. She is an active member of Bangalore literary circle. She has been part of published anthology project by Half Baked Beans- "Chronicles of Homeland". Work takes her places & gives her an opportunity to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. These interactions serve as an inspiration for her writing.