

Nightmare of Imagination

By Michele Venne

Cracking open the door, hot air laced with the scent of a burning match rushes out.
An echo of something comes from inside-words?-I cannot tell.
I am fearful and at the same time, curious.

Inky blackness.
Afraid, yet observing from a detached place.
I squeeze through the door and glance up, seeing nothing.

Behind me, the door is no longer there.
Twisting around, not sure where to go.
Movement, deeper shadows on the black walls, the hot breath continues to blow.
My logical mind tells me it must come from somewhere.

Hands grope and find a rough-hewn rock wall.
Feet shuffle along checking for holes or rocks to stumble into or over.
I tread upon a semi-level path.

Sooty shadows continue to move over the walls of the place.
Something passes close, spreading more warm air.

Whop-Whop-Whop

An unnamed stench activates my gag reflex.
I manage to swallow the bitter bile.

Shaking from my terror.
Stumbling along quickly-bumping my head once, now bent over in a half-crouch.

Eyes adjusting to the dark? No.
Red glows from down below illuminating an underground cavern.
I find myself balancing on a two-foot ledge, peering into the pit.

From the depths again comes:

Whop-Whop-Whop

Liquid fire fills the space below my rocky perch, gives birth to a creature.
I stare, mouth agape.

It rises from the scorching depth into the air, using the power of its wings.
Scales on the body.

Horns on the head.
Four eyes looking in every direction at once.
Front legs-arms?-ending in a kind of talon-tipped flanges.
Hind legs flailing as they clear the molten rock.
Tail whipping, spreading red embers.

Have I found myself inside a volcano-or some Christian Hell?

Massive jaws open.
A five hundred decibel cry, unlike that of a jet engine with the overtones of nails on a chalkboard.
Clamping hands over ears.
My movement catching the eye of the creature.

Head swinging in my direction.
Pressing myself back against the wall.
Rocks behind me dig into my spine.
Temperature causing sweat to roll down my temple.

Darker shadows skitter away.

A quandary-
 Plunged into darkness again away from this hole.
 Death if I remain.
I pick up a rock from the ledge, ending a life as a fighter is always more noble.

Head comes closer.

Whop-Whop-Whop

Fills my ears.

Open mouth-enough room to stand inside-reveals green phosphorescent spittle, a black forked-tongue.
Hurling a rock hoping to take out an eye, but bouncing off the snout.
Vocalizing its anger.

Newly spawned and unsteady in air.
Wings come close.
I grab, hoping to cause a tear, send the beast back to the womb.

Hand closing around leathery skin.
It pulls away, leaving me with a souvenir.
Talon sweeping towards me unseen.
Catching my knee, knocking me off the ledge towards the red-hot liquid below.

My own scream sends me bolt up in bed, heart racing, sweat dripping.
I look in my hand, and find a piece of hide.

It turns to ash as I watch, slipping between my fingers to dust the sheet.