

Lifeboat

The lifeboat tipped toward the stern, so that the water and blood at the bottom streamed away from the man at the bow. He held the flare with a trembling, freezing hand—a spark in the obsidian abyss that stretched above, under, all around. It would soon burn out. The last bubbles died somewhere behind him where the ship used to be. The man kept his knees to his chest, quivered from cold, shock, and horror. Sadistic waves splashed saltwater on his open wounds, where flesh had been ripped. He kept his head down, dreaded to look in front of him. The flare cast a flaky red light on the corpses of the sailors who had reached the craft. Chomps and slurps jumbled with the hissing wind. Every time something crunched before him, he flinched. If he looked up from the blood pouring between his legs, he would see the thing. More cruel proof of its presence, as real as death and pain. Near his feet, the face of a fellow sailor still displayed terror and agony. Another corpse lay in the middle of the boat with a gaping hole in his stomach. A pair of legs drooped on the gunwale like clothes hung to dry, the feet dragging in the restless water. And there was the thing. As it ate, its dorsal fin shook in excitement against the stern. It chewed slowly, let the meat roll on its tongue, the blood drip from its mouth. It taunted the man. Rubbed its absurd rows of fangs together, scratched the wooden bottom with the long bony appendix that grew under its webbed arms. Hard and sharp enough to pierce the hull of a ship. It wanted him to watch. Against will and reason, he glanced at it. At the shreds of his own flesh hanging down its mouth. He eyed down again, between his thighs, at the stump where his arm used to be. The thing gnawed sluggishly, relished. It would take its time to finish its meal.