

A Beast
Written by Guy Bass

Tuna first met the beast on a Sunday afternoon.

Sunday was Tuna's favourite day. He preferred to spend it alone, fishing on the sun-dried banks of the Bosphorus. No one really knew why he seemed to always choose his own company. After all, his two brothers spent almost every moment together. His concerned parents would often encourage him to play with his brothers but Tuna would always reply, "I'd rather go fishing instead." He even stayed away from the other fisherman on the riverbank – he kept to a quiet part of the shore that rarely gave up anything more than plastic bottles and old socks.

So it was that Tuna was alone on the banks of the river when he met the beast.

It moved slowly through the water towards him. At first he thought it was a large fish, then a piece of driftwood, then an oil slick. It wasn't until its grey, bony head began to emerge from beneath the water that Tuna realised it was like nothing he had ever seen. Its glassy eyes peered at him in expectation. Tuna could see the shadow of the beast's body under the water. It was huge; as big as a car. Its tail moved slowly back and forth three or four metres behind it.

Tuna's first thought was to run but something kept him there - an excitement, a strange giddiness. After a few moments the beast lifted its head further out of the water. It looked something like a giant wolf or crocodile but not quite like either. It had a gnarled crest and odd, fine tendrils flowing down its neck. The river bubbled as the beast breathed in and out, in and out.

Tuna instinctively reached into his satchel. He took the sandwich his mother had made for him and threw it into the water. The beast lunged its great head and Tuna saw a mouthful of jagged teeth before the sandwich disappeared down its throat.

"More," it seemed to say.

Tuna hurriedly gave the beast the rest of his lunch, but it wasn't enough. It wasn't nearly enough. "More."

"I don't have any more," Tuna replied.

"More," said the beast again.

"More," echoed Tuna. It already seemed clear that the beast did not mean him harm. If it did, he would be dead by now. No - it wanted something from him. Tuna felt as if the beast had chosen him. It had chosen him and no one else. He smiled and said, "I'll bring more next week. I'll bring you more next Sunday."

With that, the beast began to sink back into the river. Tuna stared at the water for an hour, but he knew the beast would not return, not unless he brought it more.

"More," Tuna muttered again as he made his way home. He decided straight away that he wouldn't tell anyone what had happened. He liked to keep secrets anyway and this was a secret like no other. He imagined what his brothers would think if he told them that he'd spent the day with the Beast of The Bosphorus. They would probably call him a liar and he would have to prove he was telling the truth. He would have to take them to the riverside. What if the beast didn't appear? Or worse, what if it *did*? What if everyone saw it? Then it would be everyone's secret, which is no secret at all.

Tuna spent the week gathering as much food as he could. He collected it, carefully, secretly, from cupboards or by hiding his own dinner in his pockets when no one was looking. By the end of the week, he had filled two carrier bags with food. Two bags. Would it be enough?

Tuna wasn't sure what he'd see when he returned to the riverbank, but the beast was already there waiting for him - he saw its dark shadow from the shore, and watched it drag its great, dark body out of the water as he approached. He wondered if anyone else had seen it but he sensed that the beast did not want to be discovered - except by him. He was different.

"More," said the beast. It had eaten both bags full – including the bags - in a matter of moments. "More."

"There is no more," Tuna replied. The beast huffed and gurgled, repeating "more" over and over. It seemed almost desperate. Finally Tuna added, "I'll try. I'll try and bring you more next Sunday."

Tuna spent the next few weeks gathering food for the beast, and every Sunday he would go to the river and the beast would feed. Then it would ask for more.

Tuna stole from home without thinking – his family's food was his food, after all. But it was not enough. He began to steal from children at school. Tuna had no real friends – he'd always felt different from the other children and he preferred it that way. He didn't want to be like everyone else. Everyone seemed to be the same - doing the same things, living the same lives. It was as easy stealing from one child as it was stealing from another. Tuna took money from their pockets and food from their plates.

Soon he began thieving from street vendors selling nuts and simits. Then he took from shops and markets. But four bags full was still not enough. Nor five or six or seven... The beast always needed more.

By the tenth week Tuna was running out of food and ideas - and had only managed to collect two and a half bags of food. He was less popular than ever with his schoolmates, who had caught him stealing on a few occasions; local shopkeepers had started keeping an eye on him or even barring him from their stores; even his family were getting suspicious - at dinner they watched him like hawks.

"What are you doing tomorrow, Tuna?" asked one of his brothers, suspiciously. "Fishing again?"

"Yes, fishing," Tuna replied, not looking up from his plate.

"Same as ever," said the other brother. "But you never ever come back with any fish."

"Ever," the younger brother reiterated.

"So what *do* you do all day, down by the river?" his brothers asked. His mother and father also waited for an answer. Tuna felt a single bead of sweat form above his eye. He imagined turning up with his paltry two and half bags and seeing the beast sink disappointedly into the water, drifting away forever in search of someone different.

Tuna suddenly looked up at his brothers.

"Come with me and find out," he said. "Come fishing with me tomorrow."

But in that moment, Tuna saw more than just his brothers. Much more.

Twenty bags full, at least.