

The Dark Mosquito
by
Darren Kasenkow

First published 1998 by Paroxysm Press.

I was sitting where I normally do at night, down this alley off of the mall, at the back of some shops where there is a little bit of shelter. It was drizzling, not raining, not that I could care less anyway. There were still people here and there that would wander past the end of the lane but no one bothered turning their gaze towards me, or should I say us. I was in the company of a little kid, couldn't have been more than eleven. He was annoying but somewhat better than my barely lit shadow. Somewhat.

He was sitting in the alley when I got there, smoking a cigarette, long hair pinned against his face, water droplets trickling down his cheek. I should have told him to fuck off there and then, only I noticed a full pack beneath his raised legs. Which of course deserved *some* courtesy. I didn't say anything when I sat down next to him. He stared at me for a few seconds, like someone looking through a butcher shop window.

“Wanna' smoke?”

“You're too young to smoke,” I snarled.

“Wanna' smoke?”

What was I supposed to do? What would you have done? I took a smoke off the little shit. There was something so degrading about the whole situation it made me sick. It tasted good. The drizzle didn't seem to matter as the smoke passed through my mouth to drift off into the darkness.

“What's your name kid?”

“Kid.”

“Fair enough. Why aren't you at home in bed? An alley's no place for a kid.”

“Here's as good a place as any. Why aren't *you* at home?”

I drew on my cigarette. What was I supposed to say to that? That I had no home to go to? That right now I *was* at home? That he shouldn't be asking fucking questions? I just stared at him a little while. He had two or three jumpers on, a pair of tracksuit pants that looked far from adequate, and a pair of steel caps. Like a small clown, really. I threw my cigarette into a distant puddle. I really didn't need any company tonight.

“You warm enough?”

He looked me up and down before answering. “Warm enough.” There was a small smile on his face. “I need you to do me a favour.”

“I beg your pardon little man?”

“I need you to do me a favour.”

“And what might that be?”

“I need you to tell me a story, a really good fantasy story, so I can go to sleep.”

“You're not going to get any sleep in this piss stained alley.” I stared down at him with what I guess you could say a sliver of sympathy. “Go home you little shit.”

“I can't unless you tell me a story. And I'll bet five cigarettes that you will.”

That struck a nerve. Five cigarettes. I mean, I could have just taken them from him, his whole pack, but there was something not right about that, something that God could hold against me. I didn't need that. Five cigarettes, for telling some little kid a story to kill his home sickness, to make him forget about the beatings or whatever the fuck he was running from.

“A fantasy story hey?”

“Yep. And it has to be good.”

“Why does it have to be a fantasy story? Why not a horror story, or a love story?”

“I want fantasy. I need to sleep tonight.”

I didn't like the sound of his voice, didn't like what was happening. I had never seen this kid before, hadn't talked to anyone for days. He acted as though he knew me from somewhere, which was impossible.

Then the thoughts started invading.

“Come to think of it, I know probably the greatest fantasy tale ever told. Only it's also the greatest secret ever kept, and I can't just tell anyone.”

“Tell me.”

“It's not as simple as that. I have to be sure you want to hear it, want to *live* it.” It felt

as though the alley was closing in on us, like sleep taking over drifting thoughts.

“You can trust me. I'm only a kid.”

“That doesn't mean much to me. Gimme another smoke.” I threw wispy patterns into the drizzle once again. “How about if I offered you the chance to actually go on a fantasy adventure, I mean really *live* one, experience one. Would you go?”

He looked up through the mist to the sky, to the neon kissed ink, and then looked back at me, cold, stale, skeletal.

“Where would I be going?”

“To a magical place. To a place of fantasy, a fantasy you could never dream about.”

“And how would I get there?”

I couldn't help but smile. He was on the edge and didn't even know it. I couldn't have stopped now even if I had wanted to. Which I didn't. He wanted fantasy and so did I. He wanted sleep and I could give it to him.

“I have the key.”

“Let me see it.”

“Eagerness will ruin the spell. It's not as simple as just showing you.” I looked around, checking for any curious stares, and moved a little closer to the kid. “I have to be absolutely certain that you won't be scared.” I expected him to look a little nervous, but his eyes stared back at me wide, mesmerised. The hurricane had begun in my stomach, the lightning in my temples.

“I won't be scared.”

His voice was quiet, almost a whisper. The drizzle was growing heavier. Was it tears of a God that fell so delicately from distant darkness?

“Do you believe in angels, with crystal eyes and wings of gold?” I whispered into his ear.

His eyes closed, his head tilted towards the night sky. “Yes.” He was barely whispering.

“And would you swim in warm oceans of glitter, filled with dazzling mermaids and dolphins that could speak just like you? Where the beaches would be giant cities made of sand and glass, and the only doorways are so high in the heavens that you

have to float up to enter, carried by the wings of timid dragons? And would you walk the golden pavement that guides you through the mountains, where the devils are caged and hang swinging from the trees, trapped forever? If I offered you the chance would you go?"

A crack of thunder shook the alley walls, and I knew it was open. I could feel the razor blades slicing through the nerves deep in my spine.

"Give me a cigarette."

His eyes flew open, still staring up at the sky, then slowly moved to the pavement between his legs.

"You don't really have the key, do you?"

"Give me a cigarette." It was frustrating to light it in the rain.

"I'd give anything to walk along that path you talked about, with the things in the cages. And to swim in glitter. Please show me the key, show me how to get there."

I smoked my cigarette as slow as I could. My spine was just about sliced in two, nerve fibres flapping in the rain. Thunder shook the walls once more. It was time to give him the key.

"When you get there, and you go for a swim, you'll probably meet a dolphin who wears a strange looking hat made from barbed wire. When you see him, tell him the Alley Man sends his regards."

The sound of his skull crashing into the wall was muffled nicely by the rain, like a hidden melody in some fantastic symphony. The bullet hole looked strange, with no blood gushing from within. At least his eyes were closed. I hate it when they just stare and stare, like they're frozen and not dead.

I looked into the packet. There would be enough cigarettes to last the night, to warm the lungs. However, this alley wasn't going to do for the night. I would have to sleep somewhere else. Never mind, God will provide, as I have done for it. When the seven bolts of lightning weave an electric web and remove the boy's body from the alley, I know I am closer to be free. And perhaps I will feel a bit warmer than now. The mall, now that the night has matured, is completely empty, except of course for the outlines of the dead trees which you can just make out in the darkness.