

Beetles in the Bog – a Biker Tale
By Kenn Hartmann

Somewhere I lost it. Staring at a single leaf against a starlit sky, scared shitless with my ass against an alley wall. I function OK; keep a job, learn to play a song on guitar & even pass as a member of society. Then she walks up. Out of a crowd of thugs why she picked me is a mystery. Then he walks up. He proceeds to tell his spooky tale. ‘I got hit by a tornado; it threw my bike in a ditch. I could have died. Luckily a mysterious girl in a car picked me up & left me at a café in town. Very spooky; nobody in town knew the girl.’ Then she speaks, ‘maybe the girl wasn’t from town.’ He looks at me for empathy. I say, ‘yu leff yr f’n bike on da highway?’ He leaves. She looks at me so I explain, ‘in my tornado story, every prick in town knows the girl exists & the townsfolk want to hunt me down with pitchforks & torches.’ Really? She asks, sarcastically uninterested. The townsfolk froth at the mouth & chant, ‘the Monster’s loose as an f’n goose, filled with whiskey & nasty frisky.’ The crowd lacks eloquence, huh? She asks. So I say, ‘a storm blew in, how could I hear?’ I just surmise what they said. I crack my throttle like an f’n whip & ride circles around a carnival mob amidst lightning strikes & thunder. Then a tornado appears.’ Just like that? She asks. ‘Well, it was expected; I blaze into the hoard mass & snatch the girl onto my sickle & sally forth throttle maxed wheelie-style into a funnel cloud.’ Quite Tarrantino-esque, almost a fairytale, is it on Youtube? She asks. I want to say a classic fairytale but mutter, ‘shh-eat, man; that whiskey-wah goooood.’ She whispers, ‘what-cha think baby, we roll down a dark dead-end road like yu always write about in yr stories?’ Hmm, no introductions necessary.

I figure she wants to see f’n bears. Or something; her claws dig into my ribs - oh yeah, that too. She says, ‘there’s no f’n bears in the city.’ I apologize; I didn’t realize I was thinking out loud. We’re at the edge of town, perhaps the edge of civilization. I pull up a gravel driveway into a midnight thicket of trees & charred remnants of an abandoned edifice. She says, ‘like Hotel Hell; should I be scared?’ I’m the monster



in this story, I tell her, what are the odds of there being two? She asks, ‘should I worry about some freak in a hockey mask?’ Hell, I say, why not worry ‘bout Godzilla? I hit the kill switch & shut the ignition, thrust into darkness our eyes yearn to adjust.

We creep into a starlit clearing, but my boots sink in muck & water. ‘Crap,’ I say, ‘we’re in a freak’n bog.’ This is a swamp, no bog, says she; there’d be beetles this big in a bog. She holds her hand against the dark sky so I can see the silhouette of her curled fingers. ‘That’s a big ass beetle,’ says I, amazed that in darkness, almost invisible against a stellar constellation, beyond her gesture I see a single leaf clings to the end of a dead branch. Again I ask, ‘what are the odds of there being two monsters in the same place & time?’ She just grins, her teeth glistening & her eyes aglow like a dying ember. Says she, let me introduce myself...

-Kenn Hartmann
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