

Mystery Story

by Stephen Dirth

Emok had a problem. His teacher had assigned a mystery story project last week in his third hour creative writing class. He had to write the story by Thursday, two weeks later, over spring break. Easy, right? But unfortunately, a severe case of writer's block developed. Emok procrastinated, put off, and shoved aside the looming assignment as long as possible. Now it was Wednesday, the day before the assignment was due, and Emok had a problem.

Emok sat at an octagonal wooden table in his creative writing class. He had just exchanged written insults and childish caricatures with fellow classmate, Brodie Mote. He knew of the imminent mystery story project, yet still he ignored it by glancing about the room. Two girls sat beneath the blackboard, discussing in low whispers what could be anything from the project near at hand to their latest crush. John stared blankly at a piece of paper, his latest war novel resting on the desk beside him. Brodie was now deeply enthralled with a questionably titled fantasy adventure novel, and Matt Engel was happily chatting with Nassau.

Emok soon tired of room-gazing and slumped down onto the table, arms crossed and head down. Try as he might, he could not think of a topic for a mystery story. His mind would instead wander to such things as the Austin Powers movie he watched last night and the odds of any girls liking him.

Emok soon realized he was drooling in his mindless stupor and quickly sat up. He discreetly wiped up the small puddle with his sleeve and then looked about the room to see if anyone had noticed. Fortunately, nobody had neither seen nor cared about Emok's faux pas. He sighed with relief and pulled out a sheet of paper. Staring blankly at its blue lines, his mind considered the different possibilities for a mystery story. Almost immediately, the detective genre of mystery stories came to his thoughts. He thought of such legendary detectives as Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Zenigata, and Tracer Bullet. Perhaps a detective mystery would be the best way to go...

My name is Emok. I pack a .44, and I keep it loaded. I also got a 12-pack in the cooler, and it keeps me loaded. I'm a private eye. The work is tough, the clients tougher, but it pays the bills; specifically Bill, my dad, and Bill, the local comic shop guy. But I don't have time to talk finances. I had a case to solve.

I sat in my chair and propped my feet up onto the desk. This case was a baffler. It had started like any other case. A pushy old dame, went by the name of McGinnis, burst through my

office door like the cops have been known to do on occasion and told me to write up a file on some poor sap named Mr. E. I told her to take a hike, but she persuaded me with a little irritation called Mr. F-. Needless to say, I took the case.

I stepped out into the rainy streets to review the facts. As I plodded across dimly lit alleyways and side streets, the questions piled up like tax forms in April. What did McGinnis want with Mr. E? Who, exactly, was Mr. E, anyway? Why does anybody care in the first place? I needed answers and a drink. One of them I knew where to find.

I walked over to a little place I call the Water Cooler. It was right next door to the McGinnis dame's pad, but I paid no attention to this petty fact. I sat down at the bar and muttered, "The usual."

The bartender slid me a cool one, and I took a sip. Then I took another. Soon I had forgotten about the case, surrounded by discarded Styrofoam cups. Suddenly, I realized McGinnis barging into the saloon and snorting madly like so many of my customers have been inclined to do when I forget to work a case. She plowed her way to my stool, tossed my cup aside, and relieved me of my right to breathe with a massive yank to the collar.

"You've had enough water! Sit down and get to work!"

I was pulled from the stool by the disgruntled schoolteacher and introduced to her foot. She proceeded to practice for her chiropractic degree and finally tossed me aside like a monthly credit bill. When it was all over, there was a heavy metal prog band playing in my head with power chords and sick polymeric bass lines rumbling in the lower range. It took a ten-city tour of my brain and I had a season pass with front-row seats. Fortunately, halfway through the show, the lead guitarist let loose a ridiculous solo that turned out the lights.

I came to back at my desk. Ignoring the McGinnis dame's warnings, I once again slipped out onto the nighttime streets of the city. Mr. E was truly an elusive character, so I would need help on this case. Shoving my hands into my trench coat pockets and straightening out my bowler hat, I remembered an old friend from my days back at Mrs. Gardner's Snooping, Sneaking, Solving, and Slaying School of Detectivity. Her name was Helena, and I suspected her of harboring information on Mr. E.

I rounded the corner and arrived at Helena's apartment. I didn't bother with knocking, and swung open the front door. A nauseating garlic odor immediately filled my nostrils, and I reeled back in disgust. Pinching my nose and scanning the halls of her apartment, I noticed a large host of crosses and driving stakes hung on the walls. Helena had graduated from Gardner's with a Bachelor of Vampire Slaying degree.

I ambled throughout the darkness, feeling the walls for a light switch. When I finally found one, the lights merely flashed briefly and went out. After a few more seconds of blind searching, I spotted a red glow illuminating the floor from beneath the door to Helena's living room. I reached out and thrust the door open...

"Hey, Helena, what're you writing about?" asked Emok.

"I wrote about a girl who gets kidnapped by pirates and somehow becomes a vampire assassin."

Emok frowned. There was no way he could use that plotline for his own mystery story, as Mrs. McGinnis would surely realize that he had plagiarized Helena's rather... unusual conceptual premise.

"It sounds, uh, great. I'll have to read it some time."

"What's your story about, Emok?"

"Oh yeah, um, it's about uh..."

Emok's mind raced. He couldn't tell her that he hadn't started yet, and he had ruled out writing a detective mystery (Too much of a cliché. Besides, he'd probably just end up plagiarizing Bill Watterson). Emok's eyes rolled across the room and eventually fell on Alicia. She was no doubt writing some sort of dark horror mystery. "Hmm," Emok thought, "a horror mystery..."

The black, mold-encrusted walls of the apartment let off a wretched stench of fulsome death. The rancid stink of garlic mingled with a million unearthly odors to form a truly rotten, loathsome scent redolent of puke and bile. A raven cawed, foretelling darkly the monstrous events near at hand. Poor, dear, unsuspecting Emok slowly edged open the door to Helena's living room. A shriek of terror rang out into the night from the eerily dark corridors in this eldritch house of eternal nightmarish horror.

"Helena!" gasped Emok, sweat streaming down his face creased with agitated fear. He ran into this abyssal trap, unknowingly fated never again to return to that realm known as the outside world.

Helena lie in a slump in the corner of the shadowy room. Rain tapped at the window like skeletal fingers tapping out the final rhythms of a dying life. A ghastly flash of lightning briefly lit the room, revealing shadows of the room's occupants; but Helena's body cast no shadow upon the floor. Emok did not notice this small detail which could have saved his life as he leaned over Helena's trembling form.

“What happened?”

“I...was...” Helena struggled to speak.

“What? What?”

Helena's form suddenly ceased to quiver, as if resigned from life. But then she stood up slowly and silently, secretly satisfied with Emok's fear and worry, her face masked with shadow.

“I was bitten.” She said simply and malevolently.

A sudden distant flicker of lightning revealed two glistening fangs curving out of Helena's mouth and a fresh wound dripping blood on her neck. Emok now realized the warning signs he had missed; he lamented his mortal stupidity as a chill crawled over his damned flesh – there was no escape now from the vampiress' lair.

Emok stumbled backwards and stared in horror as Helena lifted her head to reveal bloodshot eyes and a malicious sneer contorting her shriveled, pale face.

“No!” gasped Emok.

“Fool. You will pay for your ignorance of the mysteries of the night with your blundering idiot life!” Helena cackled. “But first... what did you write your mystery story about? Tell me, mortal!”

“Oh Demon! Why must you torture me so!?” Emok screamed, backed up against the wall, groping frantically for a cross that stood just out of reach.

“You didn't start it yet, did you? Ha! What buffoon you be! You shall now perish from this Earth in infinite shame!”

Emok made a lunge for the cross. He grasped it between his fingers and thrust it in front of him.

“I wrote a horror mystery!” He declared triumphantly.

“A lie!” Helena hissed. “If it is so, show it to me! Your inadequate trickery has no affect on me!”

“B-Back, Monster!” Emok stuttered fearfully. “The cross repels vampires! Everyone knows that!”

“Ha! A mere myth. It does not affect me. Now I shall feast upon your blood!”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!”

Dark fluids splattered across the floor as Emok's neck was slit by claws of unholy origin, his pathetic bluff mercilessly slaughtered.

“You seriously haven’t started yet?” Helena inquired. “You know it's due tomorrow.”

“No, I haven’t, honestly... When I get done I’ll show it to you, though.” Emok sighed.

Emok was whisked back to his seat by Mrs. McGinnis for talking, still without a clue on what to write. He had decided against horror, “Too dark,” he thought. Now what would he do? His gaze slid to Carley. She had a stack of paper two inches tall of what she had already written. Maybe she had something Emok could use deep in that pile. He leaned over towards her.

“Hey Carley, what’s your story about?” he whispered.

“Well, it’s about...” she stopped suddenly.

“Well?”

Carley pointed upward. Mrs. McGinnis stood towering over Emok, immeasurably vexed by his incredible disobedience.

“No talking! That is just one time too many I’ve had to get after you, Emok. Two weeks’ detention!” she raged.

The bailiff led the prisoner to his cell, pushed him in and slammed the bars shut. He chuckled at the prisoner and slid a key into the padlock. The lock clicked, and the bailiff strode away into the shadows. A single florescent light illuminated the prisoner, who sighed, pulling out a green harmonica to play once more the lonely jailhouse blues.