

## SOUNDS OF THE DELIVERER

By **Sharkchild**

The cracking voice of the mild singer brought me back from the depths of a bizarre subconscious. I looked around at the rest of Dim Lit Coffeehouse. Spots of green hovered in my sight while my eyes got accustomed to the ambiance. Everyone else appeared to be awakened from the same archaic sleep. Eyes were being rubbed. Yawns were being subdued. For the entire song, the singer had been flawless and hypnotic with her execution until this moment when she unusually broke the perfection of her sound. Having felt quite drawn to the images in my mind, I recounted them while the song progressed on.

I was rowing a boat in a large pond while colorful fish swam coolly alongside me. The radiance from their scales flourished brightly amid the moon's immense light. My direction was unannounced, but my desires were ravishing. There was a sweet hum melodically perusing the soundscape of beauty. It rang and rippled across the surface of the water, softly slapping against my slow moving boat.

The performer ended her song. In delayed response, I clapped along with the rest of the audience, losing my place within the recollection of my reverie.

My coffee had grown cold, but I drank a couple of swigs, swishing each mouthful between my cheeks to thoroughly enjoy the flavor before letting it rest at the bottom of my throat. The taste hung profusely in my mouth and I could smell it with each breath.

I stood up from my small table in the corner of the room and headed for the stage. I passed by the singer that had just performed. She looked at me with a peculiar gaze, one that tried to communicate some unknown importance, but it was not the time to stop and start chatting.

The latches on my guitar case snapped louder than I anticipated, but everyone's eyes were on me anyway, and that was where I wanted them. I moved a stool to where the microphone was located and sat atop it with my antique guitar.

Without an introduction, I began to play the first few measures of my song. Every strum had long been ingrained within my memory and was effortless within execution. The pick in my hand was lightly held and it worked up and down the strings in fragmented unison.

Upon the approach of my first vocals, I licked my lips and brought moisture to my throat. I began to sing, but it all went awfully wrong. What should have been projected out—as a normal voice should be—was rather an inward muffle that echoed inside me, inverting down my throat in vibrations of discomfort. As I continued to sing with the same results, I looked out upon the crowd to see their response, but they, like I had been on the performance just before mine, were oblivious and unaware. They were lost in surreal capsules of dream.

There had been several strange tales passing around the local towns the few weeks prior to this evening. They spoke of similar venues that apparently had enormous crowds of people leaving their doors at early hours of the

morning. The people were said to have returned to their homes in disarray and uneasy confusion, having no idea how they ended spending the night at such places. I had thought those rumors to be absurdly concocted, but my doubts quickly changed.

Instead of continuing on with my song, I stopped. I had no desire to continue playing on under the unsettling conditions.

My expectation was that the people before me would return to their cognitive states and confusingly wonder why the music had ceased. I thought they would yell out at me in disapproval and cruel sarcasms. But that did not happen. Everyone remained as they were.

I stood from the stool, letting my guitar hang from its strap around my shoulder, and pushed the stool backwards. With annoyance, I spoke into the microphone, demanding attention from the audience before me, but my words were thrust down into my gut as if an invisible entity had taken the sounds like a tangible object—and shoved them down my throat.

I then tapped the microphone angrily to create those popping sounds that should drive anyone from casual slumber. There was an immediate noise, but then nothing, as if there had been a shorted circuit. The people remained unchanged, including the sound technician who had not altered any settings throughout the course of my short performance.

Leaving my guitar to its case, I walked off the stage and probed a man who was with a woman at a nearby table. Forcefully, I prodded his back with my fingers. Without any luck, I moved the harassing efforts to his head. His head only shook slightly with no change in his dreary demeanor. Even though the situation was in no way under the control of this man, I felt like punching him and sending him from his chair—kicking him until he awoke.

My mind was a blur of rage and frustration, but eventually I calmed myself and began to think acutely about the situation. It appeared to be the music that brought upon the tranquilizing effects. And strangely enough, the results were a steady progression throughout the evening of performances. It was only when the lady sang before me that I first noticed the blanket of tiresomeness draping over the room. Then, when I played, whatever had begun had taken one step closer to its culmination. The music was most assuredly the cause of the incredible predicament.

It then occurred to me that if this same situation plagued other venues, then there would have been someone in the current position of myself—the last man standing. If there was such a person, he probably fled every time. Unable to call for help, or wake anyone, he would leave, abandoning the graveyard of sleeping souls.

Though I was no man of superstition or unreal beliefs, there was no denying the supernatural corporeality lathering Dim Lit Coffeehouse. And I suddenly hypothesized that the haunting task that had begun had never been completed, here or at any of the other locations. No one had done the job. No one had continued the music until the unseen mysticism achieved its climax.

I decided to do just that, to be that pawn—more out of curiosity than for any other reason. I was without family or love or any other mental tie that would form in me a longing for a better world, so I embraced the devices of dissonance—those things that disturbed and caused uneasiness. It was all over my lyrics. In the last ten years of songwriting, I had written nothing about

anything happy or non-depressing. In all actuality, I was depressed, and had no reason to be otherwise.

I returned to the stage with new vigor, livelihood finally dancing to my beat. I retrieved my guitar and mounted the stool once more. I placed the microphone and its stand to the side and began to play.

Every sound that left my unity of guitar and voice was manipulated in its entirety, warping in pitch and melody. It rang down my insides and rattled in my head. It spread across the room in raucous inconsistency. I kept playing; I kept playing even though there was nothing good to be heard.

Soon, the sounds I was making began to form a hum, and slowly, after each new song, it grew more beautiful and beautiful. The more the hum grew beautiful, the more I wanted to continue playing. I blended each song together, leaving no room for silence, desiring no separation from the magnificence of the sound.

As I continued playing, my eyes began to fail me and my mind began to takeover. I was on the rowboat once more, drifting on the sweet pond, watching the fish and the moonlit sky. For hours it seemed I was there, filled with domineering desire for something I did not understand.

With no appeasing of my desires, I grew delirious and began to grab up fish one at a time from the water alongside me. While they gasped for breath, I would stick my hand down their throats and pull out anything that I could grab. One at a time the fish piled up in my boat and the number of fish in the pond decreased. I did this until no fish remained. My hand was smeared in blood and sparkling scales, but still I was not content.

My boat finally reached a shore, where it slid snugly into the mud. The hum about me was louder and more beautiful than ever. Everything about me was full of want and impending need—but still I did not know for what. I left the boat and trekked across a barren landscape of wild grass, arriving at what I knew to be a grave with a large sculpture implanted at its head. The sculpture itself was quite grotesque, but what it represented was impeccably ordained. A man of heavenly semblance gripped a child. One of the man's hands held the child's head back and the other was almost completely withdrawn from the child's mouth, where it had just come from and held a tangled ball of thorn.

As I looked upon this artistry, I realized that the hum was much more severe beneath the ground of the grave. Ferociously, I began to dig with my hands, digging until my hands bled. There was a body beneath the dirt, but it was not in a coffin. I at first freed the legs, then the torso, and then the head. In shocking discovery, I found the body to be my own, and at this moment of revelation, the spirit of immediacy within me exploded in capacity. I took the head of my still flesh-covered body, held it back, and stuffed my arm down its throat, down until I could feel the thorns piercing my skin. I grabbed hold of the thorns and yanked free.

I awoke upon the stage of Dim Lit Coffeehouse with my hand coming out of my throat. In that hand, I held thick fluid and blood. My jaw, which was terribly dislocated, and my throat, which burned in its entirety, inflicted upon me a torment of pain greater than anything I had known to exist. I screamed under their curse and wished for nothing more than death if the pain could not be subdued.

Not but moments later, the entire coffee shop full of people began awaking from their ethereal sleeps and joining me in my screams. Each one of them awoke to find their jaws hanging and their throats eating them alive in burning misery. It quickly became a chorus of unmerciful torture that slowly fanned and waned in intensity, devolving into a cacophony of raspy moans, broken voices, and vomiting.

Even as I lied in a stretcher, the sounds of the mass agony echoed within my mind. Even under the pain, I could sense the bloods coating my arm. And even in my distress, I remembered seeing the multitudes of bloody heaps lining the tables in front of the coffee shop's patrons and knowing where each one of them came from.

There are many more to be saved, but only I know how.