

The Order of the October Chaff

By Ron Koppelberger

The magic of quiet attire in twilight seasons and Fall address wore the melancholy of Halloween mists, the shadowy sensation of wistful winds and the throes of an aged bargain; Summer for Winter and Fall breaths of intermission, the moments considered the change from Summer to Autumn orange, tattered leaves blown in a heaping blanket of crumbling decay and cool airs of approaching snows.

The town of Hallowawe lay hidden in secret anonymity near the edge of Acres Woods; The surrounding vistas were well worn in harvest bloom, fields of sorghum and wheat cloaked the landscape between Hallowawe and Acres Woods like a great ghost of undulating saffron sky in the distant Summer sun. The houses were old with character and old fashioned regard. Main street lay in the center of Hallowawe, running East to West through the heart of the town. A Texaco gas station, the Prow Pharmacy and Hanson's Grocery among others lined the street with easy promises and simple satisfactions.

Race Case, his mother had believed his name was perfect for him. When he was a baby she found herself racing after his curiosity; he was always into something she had told him when he was older, "Race Case, chased ya all over the place." she had laughed. He considered his mother for a moment as he stepped into the Hallowawe Feed. He missed his mom. She had died about three years earlier. She hadn't suffered, she'd died in her sleep quietly and without exclamation. She was the reason he had moved to Hallowawe. His parents had been farmers until his dad passed. The farm had gone to seed literally after his death. Maybe he was meant for this life, the farmers lot he thought as he ordered seed from Barley Huss the owner of Hallowawe Feed.

"Near Winter now Race," he said with caution, "You aren't thinking bout plantin are ya?" he asked.

"Nope, this is for next year Barley; I thought I'd get a jump on it before the others, sides it's savin me money. Always buy my seed early Mr. Huss." Barley handed Race a receipt and said,

"Yer one of the good ones." Race grinned and said,

"See ya in the spring." as he walked out into the street where his truck was Parked.

The evening twilight was a portent of the Halloween season, children in costumes and candy buckets full of Beer Barrels, Hershey Bars and a scattering of pennies. The sky lay in orange silhouette on the horizon, frayed bleeding spears of crimson as Race drove East toward the farm.

The old truck, A Ford F-150, smelled of oil and exhaust. He turned the radio on as the silhouette of the setting sun shone in his eyes painting him in a soft amber hue. He had turned the radio to an oldies station; a song by The Doors was playing and Jim Morrison was commanding,

“Break on through to the other side.....

Break on through to the other side.....”

Race traveled the two lane road into the countryside. A flock of crows sat next to the road pecking at a dead raccoon and squawking, “Caw, caw!” Race rolled the truck window up muffling the sound of the birds as he passed.

Unwinding in a long reassurance of farm country vista, his property lay directly ahead, the curving dirt driveway flowing into the main road. The truck bumped and rattled in aged complaint as he turned off the main road onto the bumpy two-track. Trees, oaks and pines, lined the stretch of driveway for a quarter of a mile ending with a small three bedroom ranch and a two story red barn.

Race parked the truck and glanced at the burnt orange twilight horizon, tomorrow was Halloween. He rarely got any treaters nevertheless tonight was devil’s night and his mailbox was fare game; he didn’t think anyone would venture as far as the house. Last year they had smashed his mailbox beyond repair, he had replaced it with a brick and stone pillar with the box securely cemented inside. The evening sky was a bloody smear and drifting from distant points of life came the Oder of wood smoke, tintured crisp Fall air in seasons sure.

Race got out of the truck and listened; he had seen the silhouette, the shape of something fast and tall reflected in the glimmer of frayed indigo and saffron light, near the corner of the house, the far side near the Azalea bushes. There were fluttering shadows and an echoing whisper, a soft hush of sound like a swarm of flies, big bluebottle, buzzing in mass.

The front of the ranch was prefaced by a big bay window, the quiet yellow glow of interior lights shone through the part in the heavy drapes. Warm and safe he thought nervously. The yeowl of a cat in heat tore the silence in pointed wild wont. The buzzing continued a bit louder now and the shadows near the tree line called secret mysteries of fear. Maybe he should go back into town and get the Hallowawe police, maybe he should get the hell back in the truck and drive as fast as he could toward Hallowawe he thought as the shadows multiplied and spread out into the wood line near the edge of the house.

Race swallowed his fear and the trepidation that held him in place as he moved to the front door of the house. The stone steps were covered in a slick mess of crimson, blood, thick, viscous and fresh.

Race inhaled in shaky contemplations of death; devils night, was it animal blood, he didn't think so.

The shadows near the corner of the house shifted and swayed and Race made a conscious effort to ignore the buzzing sound and the whimpers he heard, the howling groans of some great goblin phantasm, the demon spirit of Halloween, in all souls confection, Candy and blood. Blood and dandelion weed, syrupy cotton tufts and black droplets of jagged leafy growth led to the side yard, he had used weed killer on the ragged grass but he was plagued with dandelion weed. The scattered weed sang copper near the edge of the walk, perfumed in dark stain and accented by the buzz of a million flies.

Race glance at the gray and ebony shadows at the corner of the ranch, whimpering he definitely heard a whimpering sound. What was the secret hidden behind the corner? Were they fearful conveyances of pain, injury, was someone hurt, perhaps a child, a babe in distress. He walked slowly to the corner of the house. The blood was smeared in scarlet palm prints on the wooden lattice trim. "Here goes." he said in a whisper to himself. Looking around the edge of the house he took several steps back.

The flies, there was a shape swarmed in flies. A human sized mound completely enveloped by flies, a whirling shifting mass of winged green and blue bottle flies. The sound was deafening. The whimpering was coming from beneath the thick blanket of flies. He had to do something, but the flies, he thought cringing . He had to help.

Race touched the whimpering figure and a great cloud of inky black flew up like an explosion, buzzing madly. It was a woman, he could see she had long ravens black hair and full pouting lips. Her eyes glowed a bright neon green and they implored him, pleaded with him to help. She was dressed in a burlap dress, an old grain bag; it was covered in blood from the neckline to the bottom hem.

She moved her legs and Race noticed they were covered in welts, scratches and angry purple bruises. She grabbed his arm as he stood there in silent waves of shock. The flies were crawling into his eyes and mouth tickling his lips wildly. She pulled herself up with his hesitant help. "What the hell Happened?" he said through the buzzing swarm.

"Help me." she moaned in response, "The order, the order are coming. We'll have to get away, they'll kill us!" she said in a halting stutter of what was obvious terror.

"Come on, we'll go inside, " he offered as he held her up. "I don't know who's after you, but I have guns in the house. We'll be safe there." She took a few shake steps and whispered,

'Guns.....guns won't stop the order, they'll kill us both!' she groaned as

they moved to the front door.

Visions in ancient drama, the caste of flies followed to impossible conclusions of darkness. Race edged the front door open after finding the lock, with his help she stumbled through the door. Once they were both inside, Race pulled the screen door shut with a rattling metallic bang, the glass in the top portion of the screen door crawled with the blue flies. A few lingering flies found the freedom of the house but the majority had been held at bay outside.

She was beautiful, her features, subtle, soft, primal in flushed cheeks and glistening eyes of fire. He shut the interior door blocking out the cloud on the screen glass. She crumpled to the floor in a heap. A few errant flies buzzed around her face as she sighed in relief.

Race listened as she confessed the better part of her nightmare, her soul bared for him to see in confused gushes of fear and tremulous vision. He looked more closely at her thinking the blood on the burlap bag came from some horrible injury, she'd need a hospital he thought but after a quick survey he realized the blood wasn't hers.

"The Order of the October Chaff, they'll find us here! We're not safe! They'll kill us with magic's and the road to hell!" she said in halting unstrung fear. He listened to her labored breath, the sound of her terrified exhalations. The air was thick with the coppery odor of blood and something else, the scent of fresh cut flowers, lilacs and blood red roses. She looked at him and whispered, "Please help!"

The sound of an echoing howl, a thirsty exclamation, by the edge of the wood line, surrounded the house, flittered through the walls in a dull muffled screech. She began to cry, tears welling up in the corners of her almond shaped eyes, trailing to the hollow of her cheeks and spattering against her bruised legs. He couldn't help staring at her, she was the pinnacle of beauty, dark and enchanting the wants of a passionate embrace. He touched her cheek, brushing away the tear there; it was a damp silken droplet and before he could think he put the tip of his finger to his lips. The tear was warm, salty and tinged with the desire of a careless abandon.

The howling and the screeches continued outside, closer and more insistent.

"We'll have to leave now! They're near now...." she implored Race. He stood there staring down at her in quiet reverie, sated by her tears; magic illusions of Eden he thought. "Sweet, sweet siren, yer the perfect picture of love, the sure sense honey." She stood up on shaky legs. Grabbing his hand she said,

“We have to go!” the howling continued and the sound of high pitched screaming filled the air, the currents of October chill, the Halloween season and realms of the unbidden, by degrees and dire darkness.

Race pulled the heavy drapes away from the front window and peeked out. The woman screamed behind him and he staggered back a few steps. There was a face in the window coated in thick sheets of insect life, cockroaches, crawling and filling and spilling from his mouth. In the midst were a pair of scarlet rimmed eyes, bulging and wild.

There were four or five of them standing in a semicircle in the center of the front yard. The figure in the center was covered by thick mats of gray fur and two wolves stood guard beside him. The figure to his left was covered in waning tides of butterflies, monarchs and yellow buttercups, flittering, floating in clouds around her; he assumed the figure was female. The shape to the wolf’s right was horned like a twelve point buck and covered by thick ropey braids of hair, knotted in dreadlocks like a rastapharian. The last was winged like a raven, dark shadowy and screeching, the silhouette of a thunderhead in dark skies, momentarily illuminated to reveal thousands of ebony colored birds, ravens, like a tornado, circling in loud bands of sound, pulsing and haunting.

“The Order of the October Chaff. They’ll take me!” she screamed. The front window shattered and glass flew inward as a million flies filled the room and swallowed up the woman. She was a shapeless mound of black; shifting in commune with each other the flies buzzed and swarmed. Phantomlike she moved to the front door, step by step, the flies compelling her. Race grabbed at her in an attempt to restrain her. His hand came away in cloying gobs of flies. They were chocking him, filling his lungs, his mouth; he screamed and bit down, spitting as he crunched mouthfuls of the insects between his teeth.

The woman shifted through the glass door, opening it and stepping outside. Race collapsed in a heap of flies, smothering him with their want, their need, he fell unconscious.

Later that evening he awoke to the sound of children laughing and squeaking glass. He stood and looked out the screen door. He saw three or four small shapes running up the drive. Devil’s night, he remembered. They had waxed what was left of his front windows. He stepped outside as he began to recall the nightmare. The front of the house, it was painted in scarlet, in blood across the front of the house.

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Race paused, thinking. The scent of lilac perfume was in the air. A moth flew close to the front

porch light, fluttering, a half dozen or so, maybe more. One of them landed on him, then two, then more. He heard a howl in the distance. The moths came by the thousands and Race knew the order of the October chaff wasn't complete yet.

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