

Night Worlds and the Tropical Hope Bird

by Brian Michael Barbeito

In the nights there was a sense of surrounding trouble, a trouble that had no name, but waited there and sometimes it seemed to whisper strange thoughts from the curtains and other times it waited in silence by the closets and corners. It never quite materialized, this vague and corrupt thing, and in a way this was worse than if it had. The boy had thoughts that raced and his heart was a propeller twirled in his chest. He had the feeling that something was wrong, and that he had been lost somewhere along a line, but he could not understand where or when or why. He felt placed in the world, the way a terrarium keeper might place a rock or watering dish or reptile somewhere.

Something had happened, something cosmic, something to do with origins. He did not know the specifics of these, yet the results of this happening were vague feelings that upon fruition turned to night terrors. Why was it so? Why. Why. Why. As his psyche struggled and the nights rolled out longer and longer, he would sweat and thirst, toss and turn, and try as he might for sleep, it was not forthcoming. Outside, but not twenty feet away, the itinerant wind banged the windows like waves against a tall ship in old pictures.

Some nights his mother would check in.

What is the matter? She inquired.

Not sure, but it feels as if there is something here.

There is nothing. Everything will be fine.

Ok.

And, she cautioned, don't forget to pray.

Uncertainty.

Isolation.

Intensity.

Dread.

Misplacement.

There was a nightlight, and nightlights in the hallway, and though these lit up a few feet, it was not enough light to make the night worlds seem any less strange or threatening. In fact, the odd shadows these small lights cast around the floor and walls made peculiar phantom like shapes that seemed to live on their own. What was more, the boy had one year been visited by an actual spirit, the spirit of another boy who had become lost on the after death journey. These were all things outside of the boy, and on the inside there were more intense worlds. He heard a loud vibratory buzz in his ears almost all of the time and could hear people speaking to him, warning him of things. He could not make out what they were saying, and sometimes the voices sang songs, but they were lamented, sorrowful songs, such as a choir might let out if it were told to sing a song of remorse or pity. What were these noises? What. What. What. One thing that sometimes helped to assuage the fears and sounds of the nights was the thought of a colorful bird, a bird that traveled through a tropical forest singing its own songs. The boy tried with utter simplicity to imagine this bird and the song it sang, and sometimes, though not always, this helped in some small way.

At times he would even talk to the bird and then to the unknown threat.

Are you ready bird? Yes, you say? All right then. Ghosts, if that is what you are, come as you may. I am ready and unafraid. Bird here is also ready and unafraid. I would like to see you. I would like to see you fight. Fight. Fight. Fight. I am here. And unafraid.

Through the years the image of the bird he had adopted in the mind's eye remained a faithful ally. Like old friends, the boy and the bird together had fought the vague fears of the nights. Eventually the boy had grown and the old turbulence of those post dusk hours was replaced by more realistic and orthodox concerns. Time itself had proven to be, if not a gracious host, at least reasonable and

somewhat magnanimous in its true character. It had let those cosmic evening tides level out some and the way was easier to navigate.

Lighter.

Daylight is strong.

Breaks the webs of night.

Stands well.

Lighter.

Light.

Well in the day.

Wellness.

Light.

As for the bird, it was hardly remembered save for fleeting moments here or there. But when it was recalled, it was assigned the status of guardian angel or at the least a kind and dutiful guide.

