

Zen and Now

An Outtake From

G'narsh

The Troll, The Myth, The Legend

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Brett Paufler

{As follows is an outtake from G'narsh: The Troll, The Myth, The Legend. And if you enjoy these few pages, you just might enjoy the novel from which it was extracted.}

Zen and Now

Times are hard... times are always hard, but now -- after the war -- they are especially hard.

Zen... Zephyr... Z'hen...

The girl -- the stunning brunette -- muses over possible new names as she walks down the street. She has left it all behind, everything -- the war, her home, her past -- everything -- even her name.

I'd like to tell you more: about her childhood dreams, teenage desires, and even the family farm. But like I said, the war came and when it was over she left them all behind. They might as well not exist. Maybe they never did.

Did I mention that it's after the war?

Rather than live with the memories, she's decided to move on, start someplace fresh, and take on a new name. After another block she settles on Zen. It a good name, a crisp name, and a short name. More importantly it's the sort of name that says, Don't ask me my real name -- or anything else about my past. I don't want to talk about it.

Which is to say, for Zen, it is an exceedingly useful name. And having decided on a name, it is only fitting that Zen arrives at her destination: an old run down warehouse converted to a conglomeration of retail establishments and apartments. The pathetic excuse for a rooftop suite on the top floor is hers. I could say that it's a long story about how it was made available to her. But I haven't got the time. And I happen to have a knack for making things simple: i.e. easy to understand.

Let's start with the abstract.

After a war, or similar tragedy, it can be odd where the different refugees head. Some stay in the land where they fought. Others return to the land they defended. And yet others try to get as far away from it all as possible. Of course, some of those who wish to return home find that their old haunts are now... er, well... haunted -- by real live ghosts that will never die.

If that dear sweet girl -- Zen, as she is presently known -- were ever to be in the talking mood, she might tell you that she fell into the later category, but it seems unlikely that Zen will ever be in the talking mood. And so, you'll just have to take my word on it.

Having returned home from the war and then immediately deciding to move on, it did not take Zen long to consider that a college town -- maybe somewhere south that was far from the action and was therefore full of bright young kids who were bursting with life (having never seen the war) -- would offer the

most hope. An application here, a deferment letter there, and after a little help from the GI Bill... At 25 Zen was off to school for the first time. Maybe she'd make something of herself, pull her life together, and start to live again. That was the hope, but I suppose you had to go to class for it to work out that way.

More correspondences were sent. This time from the school. But there was no use responding. Zen was out, expelled for poor performance -- and/or lack of performance -- but along with the dismissal came another transmittal: an offer.

It was from a guy who called himself Harry. He said that he had been in her unit (back in the war), and that he had a place where she could stay while she worked out the details of her (re)enrollment with the school's administration. There hadn't been a Harry (that she knew of) in her unit (not ever), but she figured as long as she didn't mention this little fact to anyone, she had a place to stay.

And if I know Harry -- and I'm thinking I do -- his thinking likely took a similar turn.

If you try, you might be able to picture a -- war criminal -- investigator coming around asking Zen a question or two, "Know anything about a Harry?"

And Zen, tight lipped, holding her cards tight, saying, "He lets me stay here... You know," and then looking down averting her eyes right on cue, "on account of the war."

No one ever says anything more. No one ever gets charged. After all, by the end, it was hard to tell which side you were on, much less anyone else. If Harry said he was in her unit, he probably was, and if not, well then maybe he owed her something.

I suppose -- given the proper motivation -- you can justify anything.

The bottom line was, scratch that is: Zen doesn't think much of it when she's offered a place to stay, even if it's for free. Doesn't much think about it when she never sees Harry, never

meets Harry -- and for her part never even asks about Harry. She doesn't want to be the one to set that ball in motion.

See, I told you I could make it easy, simple to understand, and all crystal clear.

For the most part, none of this matters. I'm just a long winded guy. I like to set the scene. We wouldn't have lost that much if I had started by saying:

Zen is a beauty: a long, black haired beauty with strong arms, a fit body, and shapely legs. She works out -- like, a lot -- and when she is not running, lifting weights, or sneaking into the university gym to use the equipment, she dances on top of the roof where she lives.

Her apartment is a wreck. It's a spacious three bedroom with a restaurant style kitchen and a great room, but none of that matters (either). And even having said all of that (and tried to build it up), the place is still a total wreck. If the housing inspectors ever show up, they'll condemn the place due to the rotting walls, leaking ceilings, virtually nonexistent plumbing, and frayed -- undependable -- wiring. As if that isn't enough, (for some reason -- don't ask me why) the balcony doors are jammed open. I guess she likes the wind -- the fresh air -- and (of all things) the rain.

An empathy for the weather and the elementals might explain her dancing (and what she did in the war, but as to the later she's not saying, and I'm not telling -- no one who really knows anything ever will), but if you want a hint, you should visit her around sunset.

Every day it is the same. When the sun is a diameter from the horizon, she lights a pair of large -- black and white -- candles that bracket the west facing doors. And then with a quick jump, she stands on the balcony railing before flipping herself up onto the roof. It's a flat -- gravel topped -- expanse and it gives her plenty of room to work her magic.

I like to let her warm up for a spell -- before I join her.

Watch as she moves by herself, as she twists, turns, and twirls. You really have to see it to appreciate her body, her moves, and that dress. Tell me you've ever seen a luckier swath of cloth -- tight in all the right places, loose, flowing, and insubstantial... nearly nonexistent -- in the rest.

I don't know what she would do if ever she was wrong... or maybe that is the wrong way to word it. Perhaps it is I who would not know what to do and she simply doesn't care -- or knows that I would do anything to prevent her fall... Whatever the case, whenever I arrive there is no time to think, for she has thrown herself into the air and over the side of the building. And it is up to me to catch her, hold her in my arms, and lift her high and safely away into the sky.

From there the dance gets a little squirrely. How do you dance in the sky? I blow her this way and that and spin her about. All I can say is that it gives me great joy to see her smile and to run my fingers through her hair. I know that she enjoys this. But I have come to watch her dance. So always, it is too soon (from her point of view) when I set her down again. I can tell this from her eyes.

Still, she runs, twists, twirls and jumps for my delight. But ever more throughout the evening, I must stand guard and blow her to the center. I fear it is but a game for her -- to see if she can get around me. I wonder if she knows how hard it is to double up and catch her as she falls whenever she manages to break through?

I say that... but is it true? It will be the end of me should I fail. So diligently, I hold her and as always lift her up high. I wonder if she knows how much I treasure these moments, when I can feel her, caress her, and run myself over her... curves.

These flights -- of fancy -- are of course more intense on days when my power is greater: when lightning flashes and thunder fills the air. But I will lie still all day long awaiting my love, so that I have the energy to lift her up high when her time has come.

Do not think that it has not occurred to me that our powers are matched -- equal and equivalent -- or that I am only able to provide the strength that she calls forth from me. As she tires, so do I... or perhaps, it is the reverse. One need not dwell on it. What does it matter?

Saying that -- and realizing the uncertainty, the doubt in the moment that it implies -- I know my strength wanes. It is time for me to blow gently and cool her off as she winds down. Her scent fills the air, as does her hair, and her long supple limbs, as she gives a last final -- playful -- twirl.

The sun has gone down -- perhaps hours ago. In distant windows, lights shine, and I can see those who would watch... and those who would join (me, her, or both). But it is not to be. She is mine and mine alone... as I am hers. I could not -- nor would I if I could -- tell you to what purpose she has put me. We do not talk of such things.

We do not talk about the war. No one does.

But in the long hours of the night, as she sleeps by the open doors of the balcony, under the watchful eye of the candle's Fire, in sweaty Water drenched clothes, on the bosom of Earth, I -- too -- will guard over her to keep her safe, hold her from harm, and make sure no ill wind blows.

The tale is poetic -- it flows -- and I could end there. But in the night, I must admit that I conspire with Fire. By his light, I blow softly across her body sweeping Water away... And when I say she sleeps in the bosom of Earth, this is but an exaggeration -- being on the third floor as we are. And do we not dance on the rooftops? And in the Air?

I guess what I am saying, is although it would be nice to say all is forgiven and all is forgotten or that I can even look beyond the occasional shower or bath. But when all is said and done, if she were to ever take up swimming or water ballet (an abhorrent thought, if ever there were), there would be another war... or at

least, a battle. I know this in my heart; and perhaps, so does Zen:
my moment of calm... before the storm.

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*If you liked this tidbit, please head on over to G'narsh for the full
length story. But before you go, I probably should mention
somewhere (so perhaps, here) that the above is a little side story in
that there Novella and hardly what the book is about... not one
little bit... not at all.*

*But then, stories made up of stories made up of stories are perhaps
the best kind of stories of all.*

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