

The Black Bag o' Death

Keith J. Bowers

This is a work of fiction. None of the characters are real people and any similarity is strictly coincidental.

It may not be reproduced, shared or transmitted for a fee by any party to whom the Author has not contractually granted permission.

The author retains all rights not explicitly granted within.

Published by Keith J. Bowers
kjbowers1@hotmail.com

Copyright 2006 by Keith J. Bowers

The Black Bag o' Death

The alarm rang in my ear as I rolled over and slammed it to get it to shut up. It didn't stop because it wasn't the alarm, but the telephone. Groaning, I picked it up, pulling it close to my ear as I tried to go back to sleep. When you worked third shift, daylight was your enemy and sleep your mistress.

"Keith?" The voice was urgent and demanding.

"Yeah?" My brain stumbled deciphering who it was. No fucking clue.

"It's Aaron. I have a situation."

Aaron had little experience with women, just like I did. Both of us were entirely too shy. While working at Denny's, he met Mary. He was a master fry cook, she was a waitress. The woman was married, had two kids and an abusive husband – the physical kind of abuse. Aaron was a sensitive guy, a lot like me. He felt the feminine vibe and got along well with women. He was one of those guys who had better friendships with women than he did with guys - they all knew he was genuine and on the level, but wouldn't have a relationship with him because he wasn't 'all that.' Young women don't look for sensitive guys that don't fuck around with their heads – no, they like the asshole who'll fuck and forget and maybe beat you senseless. It's the way of the world. Mary had married one, had two hell-spawn children with him and wanted out. Now. Aaron was her out.

I don't know how it all went down, but had Mary left her husband and moved in with Aaron and Ray. According to Aaron, they were in love. Whether or not I believed that was beside the point. My loyalty resided with Aaron.

"I need your help," he pled. "I need the Black Bag o' Death."

*

*

*

A little back story. There used to be a store in downtown Lancaster on Queen Street named DMZ. It was a punk store, with excess military gear from the Eastern Bloc. This was right after the fall of the Berlin Wall when every East German was trying to clean out their closets of everything Soviet and make a profit at the same time.

The owner had purchased hundreds of coats, blankets, boots, shirts, pants and bags from his East German contact. Seventy-five bought you a heavy trench coat. Sixty bought you authentic combat boots. Twenty-five got me a big black bag.

Made of heavy canvas, it was more of a satchel than a backpack. It smelled of gun oil but was clean and rested well on my shoulder. I always walked out of the DMZ happy with my purchases. Sadly, they closed their doors in the early '90s.

The bag hung with me for several years, until I moved out and into my apartment in Quarryville. During the Dark Period, when the Network was in quasi-operation, it became home for all the weapons I had collected.

I had loved knives for the longest time. Once I had disposable (sorta) income, I'd buy all kinds of knives and swords through Kevin at Steckel. He received a monthly catalog and he'd do the ordering. I got my first katana through him. Ray gave me a wakizashi as a Christmas present. Bought a pair of cool double bladed daggers. Throwing knives. More daggers.

As time went on, I had to put them somewhere. So into the bag they went. The pair of swords I had, the katana and the wakizashi, I strapped vertically to the bag. I put my old Beretta 92 pellet gun in there (hell, I was only twenty). It had served me well in Louisiana.

The black bag went with me during any operations of the quasi-Network, you never knew what might go down.

In time, the bag grew legendary. Someone christened it the Black Bag o' Death. The name stuck.

*

*

*

Aaron continued to blubber on about Mary and his situation. Clearly I didn't hear him correctly, since I was still half asleep.

"What? You need what?"

Aaron's voice was panicked. "Mary said her husband is coming over and he's going to kick my ass! I need a weapon! You have weapons!"

"Huh?" This wasn't making any sense.

"I need your sword, man!"

"Okay, okay. How much time do I have?"

"He gets off from Service Merchandise at 7. I need you to back me up."

Aaron had put out the call. I responded. I looked at the clock. 6:30. I had no time. None. Shit.

"I'll be there in fifteen."

That was optimistic of me. They lived outside Millersville and it usually took a good half hour, maybe forty-five minutes during rush hour. I could do it in fifteen if I pulled out all the stops. I was legend for getting someplace quicker and faster than anyone else. I was a Navigator and damn proud of it.

Aaron had a lot of bravado - he'd tell you to your face that he'd kick your ass. But Hubby may have been short - I had seen him at the place where he worked. The man had assisted me in picking out the engagement ring I had gotten for Nancy. He had ferocity about him, the kind that you see in all wife beaters. Between Ray, Aaron, John and myself, he wouldn't be a problem, but alone, Aaron might be hard pressed to save his ass, much less actually win a serious hand to hand conflict with a cuckolded husband. So Aaron, being the sensible one, turned to weapons.

I rolled out of bed, dressed and grabbed the Black Bag o' Death. It was bulky with the two swords strapped to it, but I had to say, it was cool as shit. Heavy too.

I slid into my black trench coat - East German Military surplus courtesy of the DMZ - and laced up my black combat boots. The boots were from some hip hop store at the mall, they were fashionable with the gangbangers back in those days. I calmed myself, pushing myself into the state of mind that would allow me to commit the acts of a non-conformist. The attitude of the day was 'Fuck it'.

I walked out the door, slung the Black Bag o' Death over my shoulder and walked out of the apartment.

A kid played in the community playground directly outside my door. A little boy, maybe eight or nine, stopped rocking on one of those horses on a giant spring and stared at me. I ignored him as I walked by, his mouth gaping open.

“Are you going to kill someone?” he asked.

“Maybe.” I threw the Black Bag o' Death into the trunk and got in. It sucked rollin' in an Escort – a beige Escort to boot – especially when you're tryin' to be a gangster. But it didn't call attention to itself - it wasn't black, tinted or fast – which probably kept me out of jail many times.

I smiled inwardly as I pulled away, amused at the sincerity and near fear in the boy's words. Now that was what I wanted. I wanted to be seen as dangerous, that I was like all those bad boys that the women swooned over. Respect. All anyone wanted was validation.

I popped the clutch and hit 222, doing seventy-five by the time I hit the tunnel.

*

*

*

I pulled in at 6:46. I was late. Maybe I was slipping, but I put those thoughts out of my head. Plenty of time to get our game faces on, to determine how we were going to handle Mary's husband. I wanted a piece just because I hated men who beat the shit out of women. Never could understand why you'd beat someone you're supposedly loved. Wished I had a gun. Three months to go and I turned twenty-one. Then those credit card offers would begin looking like a cheap hooker. Easy and fun.

Opening the trunk, I pulled out the Black Bag o' Death and slung it over my shoulder. Darkness settled over the apartment complex, the sun falling behind the hills. Death and murder flowed through my mind. I had learned on my trip around the United States what I was capable of doing if pushed, so I knew that I had to rely on Dark Keith and turn off any morality that I had.

I reveled in the darkness, knowing that my clothes were as black as my soul. It was time to make someone pay. A friend had been threatened. I was pumped. It was time.

I flung open the sliding glass door to Aaron and Ray's apartment and stepped inside. Aaron was nowhere to be seen. Ray sat on his massive overstuffed chair, lounging. John stood in the kitchen roasting hot dogs over the gas stove. I heard a low rhythmic thumping coming from the back hallway. Like a headboard banging against a wall.

"Where's Aaron?"

"Fucking Mary. Can't you tell?" He slammed his fist against the wall a couple of times. "Wouldn't be so bad if I hadn't been laid in months."

So he was getting fucked, good for him! He might die tonight, what better way to go?

"What's the game plan?" I pulled off the Black Bag o' Death and drew the katana. I began to untie the peace cords that kept them from being drawn from their scabbards. "Who wants what? You want the wak?" I eyed the baseball bat in the corner. "Or are you sticking with the bat?"

"The fucker backed down," Ray said, his eyes never leaving the TV. "Ain't comin'."

All my armor came down in an instant.

"Aw!" I whined like a lover rejected. "Fuck!"

No blood, no pain, no adrenalin rush...

Dejected, I turned around and walked back out to the car, tossing the Black Bag o' Death in the trunk.

Fuck this. I was going back to bed.