BERNI WRIGHTSON

MASTER OF THE MACABRE
“Jenifer”

Originally Published (black and white): “Creepy”, issue 63, Warren Publishing, July 1974

Writer: Bruce Jones
Art: Bernie Wrightson
Editor: Bill DuBay

Submitted by: E.M. Tonner

Preface

I consider Jones and Wrightson’s “Jenifer” the greatest horror comic story of all time. If you can bring forth its better, you will have my undying gratitude. Originally published in 1974 deep inside Creepy issue 63, these ten pages were the darkest secret in horror comics for years. It was never a huge sensation, just a story in a magazine that you couldn’t forget. Reprinting the story in color nine years later (Pacific Comics) didn’t make the artwork any better, but it did expose the tale to a whole new generation. Dario Argento also brought a version to screen in 2005 for “Masters of Horror”.

Warning:

The following content is intended for mature readers. It may contain scenes of extreme violence, obscenities, nudity, sexuality and adult situations.

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NOW THAT I UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED, THAT THERE WAS A DEFINITE PURPOSE TO IT AT ALL, IT ONLY MAKES HER APPEARANCE THAT MUCH MORE MORRIFYING.

I NEVER IMAGINED IN MY WILDEST DREAMS THERE WAS ANY METHOD TO THE CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO MY FINAL PARTING WITH HER. IT WAS ALL SO SUBLIME.

EVEN THAT DAY IN THE WOODS, MONTHS AGO, WHEN MY HUNTING TRIP WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE SOFT, PLAINTEOUS SONGING SOUNDS. EVEN THAT SEEMED INNOCENT OF DESIGN.

THAT WAS THE DAY I FIRST SAW HER FACE, FIRST LOOKED INTO HER EYES, FIRST HEARD HER NAME...

DEAR GOD!
Hey, stop it. Drop the axe or I'll shoot you!

I'm warning you! Drop it!

Dear Lord, I've killed him! Why didn't he listen?

He's gone. It looks as though he was the one I heard crying...

His lips are moving. He's trying to speak!

C-Jenifer...

It looks as though he was the one I heard crying...
THE GIRL! I'D BETTER SEE IF SHE'S ALL RIGHT IN HEAVEN!

I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING SO HIDEOUS!

DEFERRED OR NOT, NO CREATURE DESERVES THIS.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DID WE HURT YOU?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND A WORD I SAY. OBVIOUSLY RETARDED. I'D BETTER GET HER TO THE AUTHORITIES.

BUT WHAT ABOUT HIM?

I'VE TAKEN A LIFER EVEN IF I'M CLEARED IN COURT. WHEN THE NEWSPAPERS GET HOLD OF THIS, IT'LL BE A SCANDAL! MY BUSINESS WILL BE RUINED!

OR IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?

OF COURSE! NO ONE SAW ME SHOOT HIM! I'LL TELL THE AUTHORITIES I FOUND THE GIRL WANDERING IN THE WOODS! IT'LL WORK! IT WILL!

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THEN I WAS BEGINNING TO ACT IRRATIONALLY. SOMETHING SHOULD HAVE TOLD ME, BUT IT WAS TOO EARLY. I WAS FAR TOO NAIVE... FAR TOO SANE.
The authorities did believe me. And no trace of the girl's parents or next of kin could be found. It was right after the judge had announced his plans to place Jennifer in an institution that I first fell in love. Upon me. Those black, incredibly compelling eyes...

**Jennifer:** Wait... your... honor... please... I... I'd like... to apply for... permission to adopt the girl.

**Jennifer:** You want to... (chuckle) adopt... her?

**Mother:** Marge... kids... this is Jennifer... she's going to live with us...

**Mother:** Marge... good idea...

**Mother:** Honey, I'm scared!

The next few weeks were a living hell for all of us, even Jennifer... despite the hideous distortions... wore the agony on her face.

**Jennifer:** I can't! Not while she's sitting across from me!

**Jennifer:** I'm... you've got to get rid of her! I don't want to seem heartless, but she's tearing apart the family!

**Jennifer:** What can I do? For God's sake! She trusts me! It would kill her!

But it was killing all of us, slowly, painlessly. Our lives became an endless nightmare with the strain of Jennifer's presence.

**Jennifer:** She bit me! The little bitch bit me!

**Jennifer:** You little monster! You disgusting little wretch!
My nights became riddled with insomnia; I lost weight, grew haggard.

I mean it this time, Joe. Either you get rid of her or I'm taking the children out of here.

Marge... Please!

I tried to find another home for Jennifer. I really tried! But Waldo's facade was lying. He'd began that awful silent pleading... those bulging protrusions that were her eyes would fill, and tears would start down her distorted cheeks...

Jennifer... Dear God...

Well?

I, they were over-crowded. I'll try again tomorrow.

But the tomorrow stretched into weeks. The weeks into months. Again and again barely speaking. The armour was unbreakable. The dam was about to burst...

If I just had the strength... if I could get rid of her without looking at her...

Oh, Lord!

Jim! What is it?!

Madge, stay back... don't look!

No, no, no! Oh, God no! (sigh)
There was no point in asking anyone to reconsider... no point in even pleading, so I didn't try.

You little horror, you'll pay for this. I swear I'll get rid of you somehow!

But I didn't get rid of her. I couldn't. Every time I tried, every time I threatened, she'd look up at me with those eyes. Then one night the situation approached insanity... the night she came to my bed...

Where did you get that night gown? Oh my God!

That's one of Margie's. Sonja, you stole it! Now get away from me! Get away!

Jennifer, no! Please!

Lord... Help me... Help me...

...Help me...
WHAT SLICE OF SANITY WAS LEFT TO ME SCREAMED FOR RELEASE. GRABBED AT ANY AVENUE OF ESCAPE...

IS IT A DEAL? WILL YOU TAKE HER?

I RUNNOW THAT'S BREAKING AND ENTERING... I COULD GET IN TROUBLE.

LOOK, IT'S MY HOUSE... I'M NOT GOING TO DESERT YOU! I'LL GIVE YOU THE KEYS! I CAN'T BE IN HER HERSELF... SHE... SHE DOESN'T TRUST ME! PLEASE, IT WILL WORK!

WELL...

I STAYED AWAY FROM THE HOUSE FOR THREE DAYS FEARING IT WOULD BE DESERTED WHEN I RETURNED. WHEN I FINALLY WENT BACK, THE KEYS WERE IN THE MAILBOX. THE HOUSE...

EMPTY! IT WORKED! I'M FREE OF HER! I'M FREE!

I'LL CALL MADGE! SHE'LL COME BACK... EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY AGAIN! EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE! THIS CALLS FOR A CELEBRATION!

AAAAGHHHH

HA HA HA HA
I SURGO THE CARRY MANAGER IN A DESERTED FIELD AND SELL MY BUSINESS AND THE HOUSE THE NEXT WEEK. JENIFER AND I HIT THE ROAD, NOT BOtherING TO CHART A ROUTE, RUNNING WINDFULLY FROM CONSTANTLY PURSUING MEMORIES. LIFE BECAME A SUCCESSION OF SHIVERY HOTEL ROOMS...

JENIFER, PLEASE! NOT TONIGHT...

WE FOUND A ABANDONED FARM HOUSE, I HIT THE BOTTLE, FORGOT ABOUT WORK. EXISTENCE WAS A WIPED OUT MONTAGE OF DEEP HOUND JENIFER’S SLOPPING LIPS AND CLINGS TALONS, AND LONG, LONELY WALKS AT NIGHT WHEN SHE’S AWARELY SLEEP AND LEAVE ME ALONE.

I’LL KILL MYSELF.
YES, IT’S THE ONLY ANSWER...

A PAPER, MAYBE I CAN FIND WORK, PULL MYSELF TOGETHER...

MACK: CHILD MISSING
POLICE FEAR VIDNAP.

OH LORD...
DON’T LET IT BE...

BUT EVEN IN HER SLEEP JENIFER KEPT HER STRANGE, PORTRAYED CHEER ON ME, AND EACH NIGHT AFTER MY WALK, I’d FIND A NEW SUPPLY OF WIDGT CIGS MYSTERIOUSLY WAITING FOR MY RETURN. SHE KEPT ME DANGLING ON A SLENDER THREAD OF ALCOHOL...
WHAT FOLLOWED WAS LIKE A DREAM. I REMEMBER RUMPING ALMOST MECHANICALLY THROUGH ALL THE EYES AND BACKS LOSS HEART WITH EVENING SHADOWS... MY MIND CRAMMED WITH THE SINGLE DRIVING DESIRE TO DESTROY JENNIFER...

I REMEMBER THROWING THE BRICK, GRABBING THE HEAVY OBJECT WITHIN THE STORE WINDOW...

I REMEMBER TURNING THERE ON THE STREET, SURPRISED TO SEE JENNIFER RIGHT BEHIND ME... STARRING AT ME... STARRING...

OH, DEAR GOD...
Then somehow we were in the woods, far far from our house, from any house, and I was tying Jenifer's hands...

And I just sat there quietly, nothing stirred, I stared at Jenifer and she stared back, for hours, until I heard the footsteps...

It was then I realized her full power, her full devastating potential...

I tried to scream, my hands wouldn't work, I kicked on my legs...

Jenifer, please! Please!

Don't make me...

Please!!!

Hey! Wait!

There was no way to explain... no time to explain... barely the strength to utter a single warning as her power faded and night closed in forever...

Jenifer...
Afterword

If ‘Jenifer’ were to have a knock against it as the greatest horror comic story ever, an argument could be that it was not of key significance to the industry. It didn’t launch any congressional hearings or spark a revolution. It did catapult Bruce Jones’ career in comics and provide the basis for a ‘Masters of Horror’ episode thirty years later, so it is significant to some degree. It’s also an example of Bernie ‘Berni’ Wrightson at his peak.

As a man, I find this story especially frightening. There’s an element of seduction that brings our instincts to their basest levels, directly into Jenifer’s clutches. From the neck down, she’s stunning. But it’s from the neck up where she’s most dangerous and terrifying. She uses men in a tragic cycle of mayhem and violence like her kin in mythology, the lamia and succubae. She preys upon the vulnerability of male compassion and passion for her own ends. This is the ‘damsel in distress’ formula as the trap. It is her actions that tell us that she is not a deformed human, but truly a monster. And we are powerless to stop her.

This is how ‘Jenifer’ strikes home. It is the tragedy of a hapless man trying to save a life. By this good deed, he begins a downward spiral, trapped by the woman he tried to save, used as a disposable pawn. I doubt this story hits the same notes of fear with women, which may be its only true criticism.

"Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps."

- William Shakespeare,
   “Much Ado About Nothing”

Discussion:

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Best Horror Comics Forum – “Jenifer”, Creepy Issue 63

We welcome your input.
Currently there are no trade paperbacks available.