

Of Mice and Monsters

by

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WGA East

FADE IN:

EXT. GERMANY - BUCHENWALD CONCENTRATION CAMP - NIGHT

Tracer rounds pierce the sky, spotlights probe the black, reveal the silhouettes of long lines of allied bombers.

TITLE: Buchenwald Concentration Camp, 1945

Guard towers nested with machine guns trace the grounds of the camp with searchlights.

Rows of barracks, administrative offices, staff houses, and the crematorium with its high smoke tower.

INT. BARRACKS 9 - NIGHT

BOOTS on floorboards. A GERMAN GUARD(1), slapping his baton on his palm, walks the length of the crowded barracks.

A weak bulb, rocked by distant guns and bombs, swings on the fixture above, exposes vacant eyes in the bunks. These are the weakest of the weak, BOYS and OLD MEN.

He reaches a bunk where a weak and shivering boy, YOSKA, 14, lies staring weakly at the bottom of the bed above.

The guard crouches down, places his hand on the boy's arm.

GUARD(1)
(whispers)
You don't look well.

The boy turns away in despair.

YOSKA
It's no use. Please, let me be.

The guard reaches into his jacket and pulls out several loafs of bread, places them on the bed.

Vacant eyes in nearby bunks spark with hunger.

GUARD(1)
You must hang on, Yoska, not much longer!

YOSKA
What is the point, Mirela?

GUARD(1)
Promise me! Promise me you'll fight to live.

(MORE)

GUARD(1) (cont'd)
The allies'll be here soon, rumors are everywhere.

YOSKA
I'll try, sister. Please go, it's too risky.

The guard leans in, kisses Yoska on the forehead, stands and walks back amid the vacant eyes, a tear on his cheek.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

A bomb strikes somewhat close, rattles the rafters, showers dust onto the women.

DEANA, 17, gasps and stirs, excited. No vacant eyes here, but rather eyes full of life, eager to face the world, set in a rugged, confident face.

She looks to the bunk next to her.

DEANA
Mirela! Mirela!

A blanket completely covers the figure she addresses.

DEANA
Wake up! It's the allies, they're close, I can feel it!

No response.

Deana leans in and shakes the bunk. Nothing.

DEANA
Mirela!

Deana pulls the cover from Mirela's face. A petite Gypsy girl, dark and lovely as an enchanted forest, MIRELA, 17, lies perfectly still on her back, mouth open, eyes closed. She does not seem to breathe.

DEANA
Mirela!

Deana shakes her, sits up in her bunk, about to call for help, when she spots a MOUSE running over Mirela's blanket towards the girl's face.

Before Deana can react, it runs straight over the torso --

-- darts right into the girl's mouth, disappears.

DEANA
My God!

Deana places two hands on Mirela with the intent to shake her hard, but the girl jolts awake on her own, turns her eyes right on Deana.

Deana gasps.

DEANA
Are you ok?

Mirela takes a quick moment to get her bearings.

MIRELA
I'm fine, Deana, go back to sleep.

DEANA
But...

MIRELA
It's nothing. An old Gypsy trick, is all.

EXT. FOOD LINE - DAY

INMATES stand in line, haggard faces, bowls held before them. Deana waits with Mirela as a PRISONER ladles thin soup under the watchful eye of a GUARD.

DEANA
(whispers)
Tell me where you went.

MIRELA
What?

DEANA
Last night. When you left the barracks.

MIRELA
No one leaves the barracks.

They accept their soup and move to a long, crowded table.

DEANA
I wanna go. I wanna know how.

MIRELA
I was next to you all night.

DEANA
(interrupting)
Life is short here, there's no time for games! I know it was you. I wanna know how.

MIRELA

Out of the question. It's a trick for Gypsies.

Deana turns dark.

DEANA

I refuse to die here without tasting freedom. You'll tell me, or next time I'll see to it your mouth remains blocked.

MIRELA

You don't know what you say! People depend on me!

DEANA

Oh, please, what can a mouse do?

Mirela blushes, remains quiet, spoons soup.

Deana grabs her arm in excitement.

DEANA

You take a guard, don't you?!

Mirela's tries to hide her face, which cannot lie.

DEANA

Do you understand what this means?! If you could teach some of us this witchery, even just a few, we could take enough guards to overpower the others!

DEANA

It's forbidden to use Gypsy magic for violence.

DEANA

Against them? The Nazis? Look what they've done to us!

MIRELA

It's forbidden.

Deana spoons soup into her mouth purposely. She thinks a moment, decides.

DEANA

A taste of freedom. No violence, just a taste. That's all I want.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Distant bomb flashes and the occasional passing of the searchlight brightens the room with intermittent clarity.

Mirela and Deana sit in their bunks facing each other.

MIRELA

You must lie perfectly still. It's best if you sleep. If you bite down, it's over for me.

Deana nods, listens intently.

MIRELA

When you're outside, find a guard who's asleep. This time of night it's no problem.

Mirela lies back and covers herself with her blanket.

MIRELA

It's very important that you must return to your body by daylight. Do you understand?

Deana nods as she lies back under her covers.

MIRELA

Now sleep. I'll come to you later.

LATER

Mirela lies unmoving with the blanket over her head.

Deana is on her back with the blanket up to her chin. Unable to sleep, her eyes dart nervously about.

Air raid SIRENS sound in the distance, the low hum of bombers.

A mouse appears on the bottom of her bed, by her feet.

She gasps.

It remains still a moment, watching her, then runs the length of her body, stops on her chest.

Deana's eyes fill with terror, then determination.

She opens her mouth just enough.

The mouse moves to just under her chin, hesitates, sniffs.

Deana trembles, but holds her mouth open.

The mouse darts into her mouth, its tail disappearing into the cavity as she closes her it.

Her eyes widen in horror a moment, then close. Her body becomes limp, breathless, her face a mask of death.

She lies still. Distant bombs unleash their fury.

A twitch at the corner of her mouth --

-- which opens, ever slightly.

A mouse pushes its way out.

Followed by another.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

The two mice scamper out, briefly look at each other, go their own way.

INT. BARRACKS 9 - NIGHT

Guard(1) walks between the bunks, the watching eyes different now, alert, hopeful.

He reaches Yoska, bends, holds his hand.

GUARD
Yoska, you look improved!

YOSKA
Thanks to you, sister, I'm better.

GUARD
(smiles warmly)
I'd never let anything happen to you,
you know that, little brother.

EXT. GUARD SHACK - NIGHT

GUARD(2) approaches the shack which sits at the head of the row of barracks. A GERMAN OFFICER lights a cigarette outside the entrance.

GUARD(2)
Could you spare a smoke, sir.

OFFICER
No.

The officer frowns, gives him one anyway, lights it for him.

Guard(2) coughs, unused to the smoke, avoids inhaling.

GUARD(2)
The bombing is light tonight.

OFFICER
Not a good sign. They don't wish to
hit their own.

GUARD(2)
They are that close? What will be done
with the prisoners?

OFFICER
There'll be no prisoners, corporal.

The guard thinks about this a long moment --

-- slowly raises his machine gun, unfamiliar with its use --

-- blows a burst into the officer's chest.

Guard(2) looks in awe at the gun, then rushes into --

THE GUARD SHACK

-- as a GUARD(3) hurries to reach his gun where it lies leaned
against a wall.

Guard(2) fires a long volley of ill aimed shots and kills him.

An ALARM sounds outside. Guard(2) takes a couple of guns from
the shack and runs --

OUTSIDE

He bends to take the Officer's firearm, runs toward the
barracks.

INT. BARRACKS 9 - NIGHT

Guard(1) gives bread to her brother and other inmates who
crowd around.

The ALARM sounds. He straightens with worry.

GUARD(1)
I must go.

Yoska grabs him by the arm.

YOSKA
Mirela, hurry, the sun is not long!

Guard(1) hugs him quick, and jogs the length of the barracks.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

The WOMEN stir at the ALARM and run to the window.

YOUNG WOMAN
What is it?

MIDDLE AGED LADY
An escape?

A YOUNG WOMAN(2) notices Deana lies still, seemingly dead. She touches her through the blanket, shakes gently --

-- then moves to Mirela, tries to wake her.

YOUNG WOMAN(2)
Ruth! Ruth! We've lost two.

RUTH, 40s, a stern woman accustomed to authority in the real world and assuming leadership in the barracks, examines the girls quickly.

RUTH
They were healthy yesterday. Must be plague of some sort. Call the cart!

INT. BARRACKS 1 - NIGHT

SKELETAL INMATES in ragged garments gather near the window. Most remain in their bunks, too weak to move.

Guard(2) SLAMS open the door carrying several guns.

GUARD(2)
Free yourselves, free yourselves!

He throws the weapons on the nearest bunk.

GUARD(2)
The allies are close, fight to live!
Fight, damn it!

He then turns and rushes --

OUTSIDE

-- sees two OFFICERS running toward the barracks.

He stops and fires an erratic burst into the officers, taking them by surprise.

The searchlight and a burst of machine gun fire arrive at the same time from the tower, hitting guard(2) in the back.

With a last effort, he dives to the shadow of the barracks,
lies at the base of the wall.

With his final breath, a mouse emerges --

-- scampers along the wall of the barracks --

-- runs to the next barracks, stops and sniffs the air.

Soldiers and guards prowl the lane between the male and female
barracks, lit bright by probing searchlights.

She makes her move, crosses to the other side --

-- reaches the female barracks --

-- runs to the door, stops.

The door opens, Ruth peers out to gauge the situation --

-- spots the mouse, and before it can react, she steps forward
and stomps it to death.

RUTH

No wonder there's plague in here!

Ruth sees TWO MALE INMATES pushing a cart towards her.

RUTH

Here, over here, hurry.

EXT. ROW OF BARRACKS - NIGHT

The mouse stays to the shadows, runs along the barracks walls.

A thin line of blue on the eastern horizon shows the dawn
approaches.

Hundreds of planes buzz high in the sky above.

She scurries by Barracks 1 as the door opens a crack, shows
INMATES armed and planning inside.

-- runs by the guard shack, is forced to retreat as a handful
of soldiers gather to deal with the aftermath there --

-- retraces her path along the barracks --

-- crosses the lane.

She runs under the two inmates pushing the cart, now heavy
with load, something covered with a tarp.

EXT. FEMALE BARRACKS - DAWN

Ruth and another WOMAN guard the partly open door, watching for trouble.

Planes ROAR overhead.

The mouse stops and waits a moment, glances at the growing line of white blue on the horizon. She can't afford to wait.

She creeps to the base of the barracks --

-- watches a moment --

-- scampers by Ruth's feet into the --

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - DAWN

-- and up the aisle between the bunks.

Ruth turns and screams.

RUTH

That little...get it! Get that mouse!

Some of the girls kick at it. One girl throws a shoe.

The mouse runs hard, reaches Mirela's bunk, climbs up --

-- finds the bed empty.

In the middle of the bed the mouse sits, distraught.

Ruth approaches with a broom, stands poised to strike.

The mouse eyes her, does not move.

Ruth closes in.

The distraught mouse just stares.

MIDDLE AGED LADY (O.C.)

Ruth! Everyone, come quick!

Ruth and the others all run to the window, crowd around it.

The mouse watches them a moment from the bed --

-- then climbs to the upper bunks --

-- runs a pole to a beam along the ceiling --

-- races the beam which runs the length of the barracks.

She reaches a small vent above the window where she can see outside to the camp, now lit by a golden sun half over the horizon.

Smoke rises from the chimney of the crematorium, bodies piled out front, more being carted in.

Waves of planes. Their silver profiles fill the sky, reflect the sun.

PARACHUTES. Hundreds of white parachutes in the distance.

A GUARD climbs down from a machine gun nest, abandons his post.

Officer CARS speed through the gates.

The work at the crematorium continues, black smoke snaking toward the morning sky.

The mouse watches through the horizontal slats, its thoughts inscrutable on its rodent face.

FADE OUT.