

CHAPTER ONE



Ever since he was a small boy, Charles Kelly had dreamt of being a comic-book artist. Although he had many wonderful ideas for stories, he lacked artistic talent. Simply put, he couldn't draw.

When he was a young university student in London, Kelly often visited antique markets. One day, while rummaging through an assortment of objects at one of the stalls, he discovered an antique fountain pen with a small green gemstone embedded in its barrel. The stallholder smiled broadly as he recounted a fabulous story about the pen and its mysterious jewel. The gemstone

had been stolen from a treasure hoard unearthed during the excavation of ancient Troy in the early 1870s. The stone was then smuggled to England, where it was used to decorate a fountain pen specially commissioned by one Alastair Grenville, a book illustrator in Victorian London. For a few brief years, Grenville enjoyed phenomenal success. There were persistent rumours in the artistic community that his good fortune was due to the remarkable pen that he used to create his artwork. One evening in the spring of 1877, the stallholder explained, Grenville mysteriously disappeared without a trace.

Although Kelly strongly suspected the man's story was designed to sweeten the sale, he bought the antique pen. Some weeks later, Kelly used the pen to doodle on a scrap of paper, absentmindedly rubbing the pen's jewel with his thumb as he drew. He was astonished to see a powerful drawing of a hideous face.

"I must be dreaming," Kelly thought to himself.

He then heard a strange voice inside his head. "This is no dream, Charles Kelly. I have been watching you ever since you bought that pen. My name is Karakor, and I can transform your dream of becoming a famous comic-book artist into reality."

"How do you know about my dream?" Kelly demanded.

"I know you better than you know yourself."

Kelly thought for a moment. "What do I have to do?"

"All you have to do is create a story where evil decisively triumphs over good," Karakor explained. "If you agree, I will grant you the artistic talent necessary to guarantee your success. From that point on, you will discover that you have the ability to draw all the wonderful stories swirling around in your head. But you must use the antique pen. If you do this, your achievements will exceed your wildest dreams."

"What's the catch?" asked Kelly.



"There is no catch," Karakor answered. "It's as simple as that. That's all you need to do. I'll make you rich and famous."

"It doesn't feel right," said Kelly. "I just don't know."

"You disappoint me, Kelly," said Karakor. "I thought you had more ambition."

The face on the page started to disappear.

"Wait," said Kelly, hurriedly. "I agree."

"You agree to my terms?"

"Yes," said Kelly, solemnly.

"You must write the story I have requested by midnight on your sixtieth birthday," Karakor added. "If you do not, you will wish you had never been born. Do we have a deal?"

"We do," said Kelly.

The face on the paper slowly faded away until only the blank page remained.

Within a year, Charles Kelly had acquired a reputation as one of the world's greatest comic-book artists. His comics went on to win awards around the globe. Kelly moved to New York and bought a large old house on Long Island. He built

a studio in the attic, where he continued to work for decades.

Charles Kelly's sixtieth birthday came and went. He felt relieved that Karakor had not returned as he had promised, and was convinced that the demon had forgotten their contract. One morning, he sat down at his easel beside the attic window, briefly glancing at the sailboats in the distance. He picked up the antique pen and began to sketch the figure of the Speck, one of his many superhero characters. But when Kelly looked down at his drawing, the hideous face of Karakor stared back at him.

Kelly abruptly stood up, stepping away from the easel. For a moment, the attic was deathly quiet. Then Kelly heard the ominous voice of the demon rattling in his head.

"The time has come," said Karakor. "You have failed to honour our agreement."

"No, I haven't," Kelly insisted. "I created the story you wanted."

"Then where is it?" Karakor demanded.

"Right here," said Kelly, picking up an oversized pad of paper. "I finished it last month. It's an extra-long story called *The Eclipse of the Superheroes*."

"What good is it to me sitting here in your studio?" snapped Karakor. "I want the whole world to read it. When will it be published?"

"Never!" said Kelly defiantly. "It doesn't have to be published. That wasn't the deal. All I had to do was to create the story, and I did."

Karakor flew into a rage. "I gave you everything!" he roared. "You would have nothing without me. Nothing! Your artwork, your success, your acclaim are all my doing! I'll tear you apart!"

"I'm not afraid of you," said Kelly, his voice shaking. "You can't kill me. I've fulfilled our pact."

Karakor glared coldly.


"Perhaps I won't kill you," he declared, "but, as I promised, you will wish that you had never been born!"

Kelly tried to back away but found to his horror that he couldn't move his legs. "What are you

doing?" he exclaimed, as he was steadily pulled toward his easel. He tried to shout for help, but no sound came from his lips.

Charles Kelly vanished.

CHAPTER TWO



KELLY'S CLASSIC
COMICS

As his dad turned onto Bayshore Drive, Sam took out his pocket sketchpad and began to draw a picture of the sea, speckled with sailboats. Sam's grandfather, the famous comic-book creator Charles Kelly, had mysteriously disappeared two years earlier. Although no body had been found, Kelly was presumed dead. Sam's mother, Diana, had taken possession of Kelly's Long Island house, and Sam was excited to be moving in. He liked the tree-lined streets, luxurious cars, perfectly