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Death Deceived

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Abstract

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Additional Keywords

Fiction; Death Deceived; Joyce M. Rattray

Death Deceived

by Joyce M. Rattray

I had been travelling in the mountains for months before I stumbled upon a practice I had not imagined existed.

The night was shadowy and dark; low clouds covered the moon. I knew it was unwise to walk through the mountains at night, for danger lay in wait beyond every step taken.

Presently, I came across a cabin tucked obscurely into the hills. Hoping to take shelter for the night, I knocked upon the door.

A gloomy-looking woman answered and stepped uncertainly out into the stillness of the night. She was bare-footed, and her dishevelled hair hung unbound over her shoulders.

I asked if I might warm myself by her fire. Nodding in agreement, she silently led me inside. I was immediately confronted with a horrifying sight! Lying on the dirt floor were three old and decrepid men. They were stripped of all clothing, and judging by their distorted faces, drugged insensibly!

Others were congregated around the fire; they were dressed in dark clothing, and they were mumbling unintelligibly. No one paid attention to the old men -- or to me, for that matter.

My hostess motioned me over to a corner away from the fire; it was there I made my bed for the night. But my mind would not allow sleep to enter, and I repeatedly stole apprehensive glances at the strange characters I was to spend the night with.

It wasn't long before several of the women rose from their positions around the fire.

"It's time," I heard one say.

With that, they began to carry the old men outside, one at a time, into the motionless night.

"What's going on?" I asked, as the woman passed by.

"Our men are no longer of use to us. They are old and sick. It is time."

Alarm brought me to my feet as I imagined grisly happenings about to take place beyond the threshold. I reached the door just as they were laying the men on logs -- exposing them to the bitter mountain air.

Several of the women began to howl, while others frantically scratched the ground with their nails. A black lamb was torn to pieces -- its blood poured into a pit next to where the men were lying.

They encircled the dark pit, wailing and chanting



in unearthly voices. They threw in roots, and seeds and flesh itself -- until it became a swelling froth.

I stared with hypnotic dread as I realized their lives were deeply interwoven with sorcery and black magic. I wanted to turn and run -- to leave that evil place, but hands reached out and clutched me, twisting around my wrists like handcuffs.

I struggled and fought against them, but I could not break free. Long, bony fingers plucked at my coat, and the creeping horrors crowded around me.

They laid me down beside the extended, lifeless shapes of the aged men. I went rigid with terror as I watched them dip their hands into the dark pool of gore.

With a demonic shriek they lunged forward and pierced the men's throats, allowing the old blood to exude -- then filling the spot with their pungent juices.

Before my eyes the beards of the men lost their greyness. The decay and emaciation vanished. The wrinkles in their hollow faces rapidly filled up in the fresh body.

My mind was terrified and disturbed into a frenzy. The very air around me had turned noxious. Their chanting grew louder, and I saw the clouds burst in the sky. As I watched, the moon turned red and fell from the heavens into the hollow clefts of the earth -- which opened to receive it.

The bodies of the men were spurned by the ground and lifted erect at the same instant. Their eyes were distended open, but remained not of one living, but of one dying.

And with the abandonment of rationality from my mind, I shrieked at the world: "Beware there are witches and fiends!"

THE GIFT OF SIBYL

by Owen R. Neill

In a Grecian jar carved holy by Apollo
the voice of Sibyl cries to all who ask,
"Sibyl, what is they wish?" A hollow reply
echoes through the shaded temple halls,
"I wish to die, I wish to die, I wish..."

Poor deathless creature who once in all her pride
sought only immortality's reward
for the joy and beauty she gave to all the world.
The gods were grateful for her long devotion,
benignly wished to give her something of themselves.
Apollo came in a dream one night and smiled
as he touched her lips with the stone of constancy.
"Behold, dear Sibyl, we have heard and grant your wish.
Welcome to your world now made immortal!"

At first she wore her life like gleaming pearls
and rolled the years like children hard at play.
Eventually they weighed like sweating packs
and left her breathless at lonely funerals.
Yet she lived on in slow and ceaseless shrivel,
her lagging spirit dying by degrees.

Her bird-like voice called vainly to the gods
who could not take back a gift once godly given.
So small she shrunk the people thought to help
by keeping her safe within an earthen jar.

They hung it reverently in Apollo's halls
where she could implore her god beyond all ears.

And there she lived her living death alone
until some merry child now tired of play
would come to amuse his idle youthful day
and call out loudly, "Sibyl, what do you wish?"
A voice like a far sounding echo would always reply,
"I wish to die, I wish to die,...to die!"

