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The Gift of Sibyl

Owen R. Neill

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Abstract

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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!"

