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The Black Eyes of Ulspruth-Dimot

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Abstract

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Additional Keywords

Story; Fiction; Lee Clark Zumpe

The Black Eyes of Ulspruth-Dimot

By Lee Clark Zumpe

A misty morning met the awakening village of Madichi. Dawn made pale the cloudy skies, and upon the breeze cascading down from the mountains was a subtle chill. The brooding men and pensive women of the village set about their chores, taking up their labors in the field and in the home and in the market. As the sun rose, limping up into the sky and away from the purple mountains, the mist slipped out of sight and night was at last completely behind them.

This was so, except about the peak of one solitary old crag. Coiled about the summit of this lumbering mass of jagged granite was a peculiar crown of mist, a wispy ring of clouds that seemed to encompass a small haven of darkness.

It was upon this mountain, within this darkness, that dwelled the thing they called Ulspruth-Dimot. No one knew what it was, nor from what infernal lair it had come, nor even how many eons it had nested there upon that peak; but most everyone in the village of Madichi agreed that it was something to be feared.

Few of the villagers that day bothered to greet a company of Iymeridians who came marching through the center of town around mid-morning. Clad in fine armor, with leather breeches and mail shirts, they streamed in off the long road to Ghatlynn and made their way toward the market square. From their sides hung dirks and longswords, and upon their backs were round wooden shields. Some of the red-haired giants carried great battle axes.

There was not a smiling face amongst them. Each and every one appeared grim and withdrawn, their moods somber and serious.

As the solemn procession glided past the homes and pastures and gardens of the villagers, there were some who frowned and some who muttered words beneath their breath and to the ground so that they could not be heard. There were some who shook their heads and some who simply turned away.

Rashybha and Tya beheld the legion as it trudged along.

“Another helping of silage for the Lord Atop the Mountain,” said the silver-haired haggard old woman named Rashybha. She was busy tending to a patch of vegetables outside her tiny cottage when she heard the steady tramp of soldiers’ boots on the gravel road. Having lived in Madichi for all her years, the old woman had seen the passage of a dozen such armies. “Just another feast for Ulspruth-Dimot.”

The other woman, a young maiden named Tya, leaned against a split-rail fence. She admired the handsome lads of the Iymeridian troop as her red locks tossed in the breeze. Upon hearing Rashybha’s comments, she grimaced at her elder.

“It’s not right,” she began, “To speak of them in such a way.” She turned toward her neighbor, who was squatting in her modest garden and keeping herself busy. “At least these brave men have the courage to face the Crawling Worm atop that mountain. The men of Madichi shudder at the very mention of that thing, and they cower behind their doors at night and keep their gaze from the mountain as though the mere sight of it could in some way bring to them doom! If only our village possessed the kind of courage that must flow through the blood of these heroes.”

“What does courage matter if their crusade is pre-destined to failure?” Rashybha met Tya’s gaze and the lines in her forehead deepened. Her empty eyes and pale face spoke of the ageless terror that haunted her always. “Can mere courage succeed where a hundred swords and a thousand warriors pure-of-heart have failed?”

“The death of a courageous soul is far more honorable than the withering demise of a fearful one.”

“Death comes to both the valiant and the fearful—why should one hasten it?”

“They risk their lives for you, do you not see that?” The red-haired young woman finally shrugged and turned back toward the Iymeridians. “Without the bravery of soldiers such as these, how can the village hope to survive another winter under the watchful black eyes of Ulspruth-Dimot?”

“You put too much faith in your beaming young lads. Look into their eyes as they shamble by and you will see neither pluck nor mettle; you will see fear, for they know well that death awaits them at the summit of that mountain.” The old woman paused and pursed her lips. Tya was a stubborn child, and her resolve was not easily shaken. “You seem to be full of energy and courage,” said Rashybha, “Why not join with your noble young soldiers and slay the Crawling Worm atop the accursed mountain?”

Tya had no response to offer Rashybha, but there was no doubt that she had heard the words.

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The dawn of the following day sent night scattering once more into shadows, and into the deep hollows between the towering mountains surrounding the tiny village of Madichi. The rays of the sun streamed down over the crest of the mountains, bathing the valley with light.

But atop the nearby mountain, upon a broad rock-strewn plateau, a patch of mist refused to dissipate and a pool of darkness scoffed at the rising sun. While in Madichi the farmers tended to their crops and their livestock, and in the market square the shop-keepers took inventory of their stocks and prepared for a day of business, the writhing bodies of a legion of Iymeridians gasped and wept and prayed for the darkness to retreat.

Pitifully, the bloodied soldiers tried to drag themselves from the scene of carnage. There were a few dozen of them left, only a handful of the original contingent. Terror and fear mixed in their wide eyes. Masks of desperation clouded their faces.

Merciless flies swirled over a mound of carcasses as a river of steaming, frothy blood streamed from its base. Other corpses, mutilated and unidentifiable, were strewn across the plateau; their chests had been torn open, their organs had spilled to the ground, and their bones had shattered and jutted forth from bluish flesh.

It was onto this scene that a young, red-haired maiden arrived.

Tya picked up a sword from a dead warrior, raised it high in the air, and cried out the name of the cruel god.

“Ulspruth-Dimot! Here is one more mortal body upon which you may feast!” The surviving Iymeridians cringed. They spoke out, trying to silence her, trying to warn her, but she did not hear them. “I offer up this flesh freely, for I know someday you will eat so many mortals your belly will burst open and you too will suffer!”

The Iymeridians, convinced that Tya was either a fool or a lunatic, began to distance themselves from her. She stood firmly, swinging the sword in the air above her head, drawing circles in the darkness.

Soon, the mist began to stir and a cold wind thrashed over the plateau carrying upon its breath a horrid stench. All the wounded Iymeridians could think to do at that moment was scream, and scream they did.

If the sun yet shown beyond the boundaries of that mountain top, not a soul upon it would have known.

The mists parted as Ulspruth-Dimot slithered through the shadows. Tya caught brief glimpses of its form as it circled her over and over. Its skin was bony-white, the white of the full moon on high. Its worm-like body appeared enormous and bloated.

Tya heard the death-calls of the Iymeridians whose anxious flight had placed them in the beast's path.

There was an instant of silence before Ulspruth-Dimot struck.

And then, the yawning black pit of its mouth swooped down through the mist and hovered inches above the tip of Tya's sword. A ring of jagged teeth encircled its orifice and a foul darkness bubbled forth from its pithy throat and dribbled like slaver over its quivering lips.

All these things were terrible enough, but its eyes—

Its eyes were deeper and darker than any moonless night Tya could recall. They were the very essence of evil and hatred. They were the very color of dread. In those pools of black, death loomed.

It was the piercing horror of those eyes that had sapped young soldiers of their confidence and stripped proud knights of their valor, paralyzing them with fear and inducing fatal indolence and insignificance.

Yet, Tya did not falter nor tremble nor cry out. She stood before the awesome monster that had inspired such mind-numbing and life-draining fear amongst the villagers of Madichi, and she was not afraid.

In one sweeping motion, Ulspruth-Dimot swallowed the young maiden whole. As she slid down the slimy length of its throat, Tya took the sword and thrust it deep into the inner lining of the beast. She felt the blade sink deeper and deeper, and she could feel the sudden response of the monster.

It reeled back, sending the mists about it swirling. It coughed, sputtering up blood and half-digested bits of Iymeridians, vomiting bones and limbs and torsos. It thrashed to and fro, trying to dislodge the sword from within its throat, but its struggles proved futile. Eventually, it slumped forward and heaved up one last wail before dying.

Tya crawled from the great gaping maw of the monster and staggered back toward the village wordlessly. The mists that had skirted that mountain for eons were fading; and, the rock-strewn plateau that had known no hint of sun since the dawn of time now welcomed its light.

The Black Eyes of Ulspruth-Dimot closed forever.