

DAY OF THE DRUID
by Knut Enferd

Words: 1025

A thousand sleeps she had slept, and more. Older than the land from which Gaar had come, and yet she was younger than he. He bent forward and pressed his lips to hers. They were warm and yielding.

"Wake up," Gaar whispered. Then, louder, "Wake up!"

Was she dead? It seemed to him that she stirred, and yet it might have been the flickering light which created an illusion. Now he ran his hand through her hair. His big hands slapped at her cheeks, gently at first and then harder. His voice was insistent, commanding.

Very slowly, then, her eyes opened. Blank and staring, they were, as she hovered on the brink. Gaar's will pulled her to life. The blankness went out of her eyes and was replaced by a sudden gladness.

"You came. I knew you would come."

She struggled to sit up and saw that only the veil covered her nudity. She blushed. Gaar turned his back, bent and removed the black robe from the crumpled figure on the floor. Over his shoulder he handed the robe to the girl. When he turned to her again she was sitting up, a trace of color still in her cheeks.

"Where are they?" Marna asked fearfully. There was loathing in the glance she threw at Glendyn's body. "There are many more. Where are they?"

"Up above," Gaar told her. "This one and another were left to watch you."

"Good. They won't be coming back for a long time. Now they are busy preparing the sacrifices to Be'al." Marna shuddered. "It is the feast of Beltane."

Gaar spoke quickly. "What sort of men are they?"

"They are not men. They are devils. A long time ago they came out of the sky in strange ships. They brought strange powers and a strange

god who demanded human sacrifices. My people were driven out, killed. I am the only one left."

"But why did they save you?"

"As a hostage, at first. And later because it pleased them to keep me as a symbol of the race they had vanquished. Every year I have awakened and they have used me as a mock sacrifice. And then they have put me to sleep again for another year."

"And today again?"

"For the last time. They have lost their power to act at a distance. And they grow afraid that I may call someone they cannot defeat. Their power is great now on only this one day when the sun comes directly between the two stones they brought with them from their mother world."

She started suddenly and Gaar stared at her. "What is it?" he demanded.

"I feel something. I feel danger."

* * * * *

There was no time to ask questions. Gaar knew she would not be wrong. This daughter of a lost people had a knowledge he could not fathom. He lifted her out of the sarcophagus and set her on her feet.

"We've got to get out of here. Once we reach my men and set back for the coast they'll never stop us."

They were running now, back along the corridor down which Gaar had come. Half way they went, and then they heard the voices and the feet that came toward them from above.

Gaar listened intently. There were too many. One or two he would have fought, maybe even a half-dozen. But this was the tramp of many feet. They must have found the body at the head of the Stairs. Gaar cursed his luck.

"We'll have to go back. Is there another way out?"

"No none. It was the burial place for the kings of my people before the Druids came."

And it looked like it would be his burial place as well, Gaar thought. But he had to go back anyway. He couldn't take a chance on the girl being hurt in a fight in the dark. Besides, that fellow he had killed had a knife. It would be better than no weapon at all.

The feet were close behind them as they ran. The girl was too slow. Gaar scooped her up and ran with her under his arm. But still not swiftly enough. They had been overheard.

He had barely time to swing Marna behind the sarcophagus and out of immediate danger. He bent and tore the knife from Glendyn's loose grasp. And then they were on him, a flood of black-robed figures.

Blood spurted as the knife in Gaar's hand flashed. A man screamed, and then another as Gaar's fist made pulp of flesh and bone. His hands struck blows like Thor's hammer. He made them pay dearly for every backward step he took. But they came on still.

They were too many for him. They forced him back until a cold wall stopped him. Then, by the sheer force of numbers they overwhelmed him. He went down under a torrent of blows that drove everything from his mind but the thought that he had failed Marna.

* * * * *

Daylight, and Gaar's head ached as consciousness returned. He seemed to be a single aching bruise from head to foot. After a while he realized that Marna lay beside him at the bottom of the stairs that led to the cavern mouth.

Light came down strongly, too strongly. It was long after dawn. A stray thought flashed across Gaar's mind: his men would be well on their way to the ship: Yet there was no use castigating himself. Marna would have died before they could have reached her if they had come in a body.

"I'm sorry," Gaar said, and tried to turn toward Marna. Leather thongs bound him tightly but he rocked back and forth until he tipped onto

his side.

"Not as sorry as I," she said, her eyes soft on his face. "If I had not called you would never have come."

"The only thing a Norseman fears is that he should die in bed," Gaar told her.