

THE SACRIFICE
by pwatson1974

The Freaky Tiki bar, “Anne! Hey, Anne!”

Anne looks up, a sarong wrapped around her waist, and a ludicrously overdone cocktail in her hand, “What?”

Dell slaps a pamphlet on the tall table.

“Jungle of Enchantment.' A tour? With all the norms from that cruise ship? It's just a buncha ruins.”

“Don't you want to expand my cultural horizons?”

“Ya're up ta somethin'. Ah ain't sure what but ya're actin' too innocent not ta be.”

“Me?” she replies innocently, a butter-wouldn't-melt smile on her face.

“Fine. Ah guess it will get it outta yar system. An' the boss ain't gonna letcha be unsupervised.”

“Don't I know it. I'm not a baby.”

“Sure ya ain't.” she picks up the pamphlet, “Let me get mah walkin' shoes an' we can get goin'. Ah'll leave the boss a note. Let's see if we can stay outta trouble today.”

The bus is crowded with tourists, sunglasses, sun-hats, and garish t-shirts and shorts predominating as it rattles along the pot-holed winding roads. The jungle breathes around them, macaws flying overhead to the click of cameras, monkeys chattering on the roadside. Dell stares out of the window as Anne leans in close to the guide, giggling at his patter, and steering his hands back to her waist and shoulder when they wander too far.

Eventually it runs into the parking space as the group sets off along the trail. “Done canoodling?”

“That weren't canoodlin', girl. That was just flirtin'. Got ta do somethin' ta keep mahself awake.” she pushes a palm frond out of the way as they follow along the trail. “An' ah've figured out ya're plan, an' it ain't gonna work.”

“Plan? What plan?”

They emerge into a clearing in the jungle. A large black stone altar stands in the centre of the clearing on a slab of stone. The silence around them is oppressive, even the insects cease their buzzing. The leaves above block out most of the sun, casting long waving shadows all across the grass. Smears of dark crusted russet stain the altar's surface, channels carved into the rock to take the blood away clearly overwhelmed.

“Oh, my, is that real blood?” a matronly woman asks, hand over her mouth as her husband's camera whirrs away.

Dell stifles a snort. “Rube.” she murmurs.

“Be nice.”

A rhythmic thunder comes from the jungle around them, a primal drumming more felt than heard, heartbeats quickening to match it. Then, a figure leaps into the clearing, a cloak of red, gold and green feathers flutters, a Tiki mask rising from the middle of his chest to high above his head. Someone in the crowd screams and others take it up. “Who dares profane this sacred spot?” he demands in a booming, echoing voice. “Infidels.” he draws a wickedly curved knife of obsidian. “Who among you will cleanse this place with your blood?”

Dell smiles wickedly and reaches up to push Anne forward. Unfortunately for her, Anne steps aside leaving her to stumble forward, out of the protection of the crowd. She looks up as the mask looms over her.

“The gods smile upon us! A sacrifice...” his voice changes as he looks down at you, “how old are you?” he whispers in a much more normal voice that barely carries.

“Six-sixteen.”

“Sorry, kid. No can do. Insurance won't cover it.” he rises up, “What cowards try to buy their own paltry lives with their children?!” the drums speed up, “The gods are now doubly displeased. Which of you shall appease them?” he points the knife at the crowd, slowly turning to indicate each of them in turn. Most take a step back.

Dell rubs the stone in her palm. Her eyes go black with shadows as she whispers “Anne, step

forward.” over and over. Anne blinks, shakes her head, blinks again, and takes a step forward.

“Aha! The real sacrifice is chosen.” he booms. Anne blinks, glares daggers at Dell and sighs, walking forward. “Yes, come to your fate, defiler.” the eyes of the mask glow a pulsing red.

“When we get back, ah will tan yar hide so hard for this, girl, yar ass’ll be visible from space.” she mutter darkly as she walks past Dell to the altar.

She extends her hand, letting herself be led up the step, cameras clicking from the crowd, glinting off the watch barely concealed under the cloak. She lays back on the smooth black stone. The priest raises the dagger up in both hands, holding it over her chest. Cameras click. He plunges it down, blood fountaining up. Anne screams. The crowd screams. He drags the dagger down and reaches in, pulling out a bloody lump of flesh that beats twice before going still. Anne’s head lolls towards the crowd, her eyes glassy, blood trickling from her mouth. The crowd screams again. The priest holds the heart high, blood running down his arm. A bird swoops from the jungle, snatching the heart up and flying into the trees.

“Come, spirits of the jungle,” he booms, “accept this sacrifice.” From the jungle monkeys, macaws, snakes and insects swarm out, covering Anne’s body in a roiling mass of fur, feathers, scales and chitin. Crunching and wet tearing sounds emerge before the whole mass disperses back into the jungle, leaving only blood-stained bones scattered on the altar. Many in the crowd turn away in nauseous concern, others continue to take pictures as if the macabre scene is purely for their entertainment.

“Oh, my God,” on matronly woman gasps, “she’s really...”

“The spirits are appeased!” the priest booms, “And it’s time for you to leave.”

“But...what about her?” one of the braver, or dumber, members of the party asks. The Tiki mask turns to face him, eyes glowing red. The crowd parts around him, not wishing to share in his obvious, and probably bloody, fate.

“What about me?” the mask booms as Anne pulls it away and shakes off the cloak of feathers, stepping out with a bow. Dell takes her cue, and starts the applause. It takes a few stunned seconds before the crowd follows.

“I told you it was a trick.” the same matronly woman nudges her husband, who wisely says nothing about the contradiction.

Anne carefully places the mask on the altar, arranging the bones on top and covers them all with the cloak, parrying questions as the group leaves.

Dell looks over her shoulder, to see the cloak shift and a figure that looks a lot like the guide slips back into the jungle.