

OPUS 175

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Deep in the midnight, the demons were dreaming,
dreaming of danger, and dark deeds and death;
deep in the graveyards the ghouls were all scheming,
meeping of murder with foul, foetid breath.

High in her chamber the empress was sleeping,
wracked by a nightmare from gods dark and dire
whilst, in the palace, the shadows lay deeping,
ebon and shifting before a fierce fire.

Frightened, she wakened and cried for her lover;
frightened, her maidens appeared one by one.
Huddled, she wept, and she tried to recover,
waiting for morning to bring the bright sun.

“What is the warning these nightmares are bringing?
What do they portend, oh sweet maidens dear?
Outside, the ghouls are all gathered and singing,
wrapped in the garb of the foul grave and fear.

“Deep in his grave was my lover alying,
deep in his grave with the ghouls gathered round,
somewhere above him a wailing and crying,
weeping and wailing whilst bright stars abound.”

None of the maidens could tell her the meaning,
none of the maidens would step forth and speak
whilst, in a huddle, the empress was keening,
huddled and frightened, her heart stricken weak.

Then at the egress there sounded a pounding,
heavy and solemn upon the closed door,
whilst all the maidens, their moanings resounding,
noticed beneath it a fresh pool of gore.

Then from the passage that led to the chamber
echoed a voice that resounded with fright:
“Summon no servant, nor sergeant, nor soldier,
news do I bring to the lady this night.

“News do I bring, that does tell of your lover,

slain does he lie, by a dark-minded man;
orders were given by one man, no other,
straight from the will of the emperor's hand.

“As he was sleeping, assassins came creeping,
struck in the darkness when foul deeds are done,
leaving his lover to waken weeping,
praying to see the bright rays of the sun.”

“Give me a token,” the empress then pleaded,
“bring forth a sign that I may touch and view.
By the great goddess, I swear what is needed
is something to show what you say is but true.”

Then, through the doorway, a figure did enter,
covered in wounds from which dark blood had bled;
then from the doorway the form did present her,
offered the empress his rent, severed head.

Then did her lover collapse in a huddle,
then did the empress, with screams shrill and high,
faint in his blood that congealed in a puddle
whilst in the midnight the bats all rose high.

Meanwhile, the demons were waiting and dreaming,
dreaming of danger, and dark deeds and death;
meanwhile, the ghouls were all gathered and scheming,
meeping of murder with foul, foetid breath.