

Retribution

by,

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Genre:

Medieval Literature

Chase knelt in the green bush around him. He could smell the dampness in the air like fresh boiled goose eggs. Water dripped on his shoulder and ear from giant leaves above him and blood dripped from the gash on his cheek bone. The dripping made a constant melodious beat that mesmerized him. He crouched, staring between the bushes at a house built to blend into the landscape. Most people would walk past the house without noticing it was even there. But Chase had spent five years studying and learning everything there was to know about this house and the person who inhabited it. His name was Rancor.

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Rancor was the leader of the Malicho Ring. They were a group of bandits that dwelled in the Nefarious Timberland, which was a great jungle wasteland. To purge the Nefarious Timberland of the Malicho Ring was too great and costly a task for any ruler to attempt. The kings simply tried their best to keep the Malicho Ring from seeping into the cities. They looked upon the Malicho Ring as cockroaches: avoided when possible, disposed of when found, and forgot about when not seen. While this worked most of the time for the cities, it left the small towns and farming territories to the mercy of the Malicho Ring.

It was in one of these farming areas that Chase had his first encounter with Rancor. He had been out drinking at the only tavern in Prim. He stayed too long at the Rusty Nail, but the ale was good and they had the rare treat of a bard. The bard spent most of the night telling stories of wonder from all over the country. Chase had gotten particularly enthralled with a story about a beautiful maiden being rescued by a knight from her evil father. The more he drank, the more he envisioned himself being the damsel's knight, and he imagined what they would do after her rescue.

When he finally left the Rusty Nail, it was dark and he had a good mile before Chase

reached his farm. Being inebriated, it would take him a good two hours to shuffle home. He started to worry a little about his sister Puerile. Chase had been out late before but not this late. Chase and Puerile's parents had died ten years ago when Puerile was four and Chase fifteen. With his parents gone, Chase attached to Puerile, loved her, protected her; she became his whole life. He normally wouldn't have left her for this long, but she insisted that he give her more space to be independent. He had let her be alone and go places by herself for a short time on a few occasions. He had drunk in a little too much of the bard's stories along with ale and worried that he left her for too long. He moved toward home as fast as he could, but he was too drunk to move quickly.

As Chase reached the bend that turned toward his home, he saw a huge light flickering over the trees where his house was. Ale soaked, he didn't comprehend what was going on. He simply stood in amazement at the odd spectacle. The light slowly burned through the ale swab in his head and he realized the danger his home was in. Determined but not quite sober, Chase started running toward his burning house. He swayed to the right and ran into a log. With a yelp, he plummeted to the ground and hit his head on a rock. As he was losing consciousness, Chase heard Rancor's notorious deep mocking laugh—a laugh that would haunt his dreams always.

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Sunlight pierced through Chase's eyelids and made his headache burst with pain. The large lump on his head felt like a horseshoe nail behind his ear. Fuzzily he sat up and immediately coughed on the smoke around him. "It's true," he slurred. He stood up fearfully to look around. There was a haze of smoke everywhere caused by the pillars of smoke in the distance and a large pillar where his house should have been. Chase started to panic and he

moved quickly toward his house. When he finally came into view of the burned rubble, he fell to the ground. Next to the rubble of his once home was the body of Puerile, his baby sister, his life.

The anguish in his heart made him forget the pain in his head. However, the growing anger and hatred for Rancor would eventually dull the heartache.

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Chase felt a slight tingle as a salty tear ran into the cut on his cheek. Despite all the self-discipline he learned while training as a Ranger, Chase still could not keep control of his emotions when he thought of Puerile. Most of the time he pushed thoughts of her out of his mind to focus on seeking out Rancor. But now that he was so close to reaching his goal, Chase could not help but remember why he was there.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and a voice, “Do not falter my brother.” Chase looked to his right and deep into the face of his best friend; his family; his only family: Myrmidon. Myrmidon looked tired but determined. Chase felt a swell of gratitude toward him. Chase had trained as a ranger with Myrmidon and Myrmidon was the only reason he was here looking at Rancor’s home, his enemy’s home. They had to fight not only the Malicho Ring but the Nefarious Timberland as well to reach this point. They had saved each other’s lives countless times, and Chase knew he could not have gotten this far alone. This was Chase’s pilgrimage, and Myrmidon followed and sustained him. There was nothing that Chase could do to repay Myrmidon, but Myrmidon expected nothing in return.

Chase smiled slightly back at Myrmidon and gave a reassuring nod. He then turned his attention back to Rancor’s house. He was a wave of emotion. He felt anger and hatred toward Rancor, then a surge of enthusiasm at reaching his long pursuit of castigating Rancor for his villainy. He felt a slight stream of relief that everything was almost over and then agony at the

remembrance of why he was there. Chase flexed the arrow in the giant bow he held in his hands.

“Patience,” Myrmidon whispered, “he’ll come.”

Chase slightly released the tension of his arrow but not enough that he wasn’t ready to strike. Chase turned his attention back to watching for anything that twitched.

A few more sword sharpening moments strained on until the tall dark frame of Rancor stepped out of the house in the side of the hill. Chase sensed Myrmidon’s body tense for the moment of victory as Chase pulled the arrow to his eye. Chase chose the arrow because he never missed. At the moment of release, Chase heard a voice protrude from inside the house that punctured his concentration.

“Daddy,” a young girl ran out the door and leaped into Rancor’s arms.

A smile lit up Rancor’s face, and, for a brief moment, there was no wickedness, deceit, or mocking in his countenance. Then it was gone. He said seriously, “Tabhoo, you should not be outside. Quickly go back in; it’s dangerous out here.”

“Take him!” Myrmidon hissed.

Chase stared at the marvelous scene. Images of Puerile masqueraded in his mind as he looked at Tabhoo, and he could not loose the arrow. He saw that his goal—his enemy, everything he fought for, for five years—was within his grip. But as he looked at Tabhoo, Chase could not effectuate what he longed for.

Tabhoo went back into the house and Rancor went to the left down a path and out of sight. “What’s wrong with you,” Myrmidon asked harshly. “You can have anything you want if you make the necessary sacrifices. You have made the sacrifices to get here, now take what you deserve. Let’s go!”

Myrmidon slid out of the bushes, sword in hand, and started walking in the direction

Rancor had gone. Chase shook his head, stretched his neck to one side, then quickly and quietly followed with his bow ready. He would not falter again. Rancor was lucky, but he would not be so a second time. Puerile must be revenged.

As they reached the path Rancor entered, Chase heard a skirl noise then a clang. He looked down and saw a knife that Myrmidon whacked out of the air with his sword. There was a second and third skirl followed by a second clang and a thud. The third knife imbedded itself deeply into Myrmidon's chest, and he fell in a heap on the ground. Chase dropped his bow and arrow as he knelt beside Myrmidon's body. Tears involuntarily fell onto Myrmidon as Chase stared in shock, paralyzed at the thought that everyone he called family was gone. He no longer cared if he himself died. Chase was powerless to save any of them. Out of the dark he heard the mocking laughter that molested his dreams and took him back to Puerile's death. Lightning struck his senses and he shot an arrow in the direction of the laughter, then collapsed onto Myrmidon's body.

The laughter got louder and Chase stood up to see Rancor standing on the path in the front of him. Chase pulled another arrow, knocked it, and let loose. Rancor cut the arrow out of the air with another knife he held in his hand and laughed harder.

Filled with grief and despair, Chase consigned himself to death. He stared off into the distance and waited for a knife to fly into his chest, but the knife didn't come. Instead Chase saw a crack in the mocking visage of Rancor and then fear suddenly appeared. Curious, Chase looked to each side and could see nothing.

"Daddy?" Tabhoo's voice echoed behind Chase.

"Get out of here!" Rancor yelled.

It was too late. Before Rancor could finish his sentence, Chase had knocked another arrow, turned around, and shot. The large arrow carried Tabhoo's body ten feet back and she slumped to the ground without a sound like a toy doll. Satisfaction flowed into Chase. "Let Rancor feel the sting of loss," he thought and turned back toward Rancor.

Rancor showed no expression; he simply stared at his daughter's body. Chase looked down at Myrmidon and thought of Puerile. Smooth, cold, and hard like Myrmidon's sword, Chase knocked another arrow and shot it into Rancor's throat, a sure kill.

Rancor's corpse fell to the ground. Chase stared. "It's done," he said out loud.

After a few moments he heard the whimpering of a woman behind him. He turned and saw a woman holding Tabhoo's little body. Chase remembered holding Puerile in the same manner five years ago, wetting the ground with his tears just as this woman now was with Tabhoo. The satisfaction of killing Rancor drained as he watched the woman. "Sacrifices?" he whispered and peered down at Myrmidon. He knelt down, rolled Myrmidon onto his back, reached out his hand, and shut Myrmidon's eyes. He continued to hear the whimpering of Tabhoo's mother and asked Myrmidon again, "Sacrifices?"