

To thee of valor and honor:

I am an elven maiden called Rahasia. In the Hantu Valley at the foot of Gray Mountain, our village thrived in peace for many years. Our elders worked daily in the forest. Many of our young men studied and worshiped in the temple on the mountain. We made our homes in peace—but our peace is no more.

It was three weeks ago when the stranger, the Rahib, first came. He was a handsome man with broad shoulders. His deep-set eyes held a piercing clint that looked uncomfortably into one's soul. His voice was soft and persuasive, and anyone hearing it was almost certainly lulled into agreement. It was the consent of my father that the Rahib sought—and only to one end. My father refused him.

The next day, he came to me and dropped to one knee saying, "Rahasia, your beauty is fabled throughout this land. Almost as much as your father's wealth. To possess you I have traveled far, but your father is unkind. He refused me, though I brought many riches as payment for you. Surely you will not refuse to go with me." He grabbed my arm with an unbearable grip—I cried out.

My father heard me, and, in a rage, bound from the house toward the stranger. With one great rush, father drove him to the gates, and cast him forth.

On his knees like a common beggar, the stranger clung to the wall and uttered such a curse that the sky darkened and all the servants covered their heads in fear. In a deep, rich voice, he intoned an evil chant we could not understand.

He then vanished into the the forest. Under my father's hand, peace soon returned to my household. The curious visitor and his curse were forgotten—until I week ago.

One day, the young men who study at the temple and their teachers did not return to their homes. Their families became worried and went to the temple, but were driven away by the students, known as the Siswa. My father, who sometimes taught at the temple, went there to discover what had happened. He has not returned.

My father's wealth is also lost. I believe that his fortune was hidden in the lower recesses of the temple. It is hard to believe the treasure has been stolen, for it includes many distinctive pieces that anyone, near or far, would recognize. There was a beautiful translucent marble jar inlaid with gold trim and six jewels. There were, also, two birds of platinum, resting on blue cloth threaded with gold, that would sing a tune. The birds were to be my dowry, without which I cannot be wed. There is also an ancient ring set with black jade that matches the pendant that hung about my father's neck. He told me that anyone who possesses both can wield great power for good.

Nasan, my betrothed, knowing that his family would not allow his marriage to me, now a maid without a dowry, and fearing for my father's safety, also went to the temple. He, too has not returned.

Two days ago, the village council received a message. It was from the Rahib. He boasted that all the devoted Siswa who studied at the temple are under a spell that will not be broken until the village gives the Rahib three maidens, including myself. The council refused. That night, the Siswa attacked and kidnapped two other two maidens, Sylva and Merisa, but I escaped.

All of the villagers are in misery, for many of their sons are Siswa. Some people have begged me to give myself over to the wicked Rahib, but I dare not, lest I find that the he has lied, and will not break his curse on the Siswa. I fear that unless we are helped, I shall never again see Nasan or my father and my friends, Sylva and Merisa.

Someone must rescue them and the Rahib must be forced to remove his curse upon the Siswa. Anyone who helps us will be well rewarded if they succeed. Without help, I have no choice but to give myself to the Rahib and hope and pray that he keeps his word and releases the others.

*Rahasia*