

The Legend of Mary Rose Devine **by Tonya Madia**

On the eve of her wedding the yellow moon of October 1924 hung low in the misty sky. A cool breeze rustled the delicate lace curtains as Mary Rose Devine lay imagining in magnificent detail the events of the approaching day. The pungent scent of jasmine drifted in on the autumn breeze and along with the melodic chirping of the crickets slowly lulled the bride to be into a dream of her soon to be husband, Theodore Riddell. In the dream he came to her in a small circular clearing under a blanket of twinkling stars, his black, curly hair shining in the moonlight. They embraced and Mary Rose pressed her lips to his and inhaled his mesmerizing scent. With her eyes closed it felt as if the world had tilted and was spinning fast around her. To keep from losing her balance, Mary Rose opened her eyes and gazed into the endless pitch of two gaping sockets. She gasped as she realized that she was no longer wrapped in the arms of her handsome brown-eyed Theodore; instead she stood tangled in the embrace of a hideous corpse. Her mouth dropped open to let out a vocalization of the terror she felt as she stared into the endless black holes of the skull and though she felt the scream escape her trembling lips all she could hear was a strange chanting somewhere off in the distance.

The nightmare came to an abrupt end as a sharp pain raged through the back of her head. Before she could open her eyes, there were hands all over her tender body, pressing hard into her delicate skin and covering her wide, green eyes. No one stirred behind the bedroom doors of the large Victorian manor as she was carried off into the night in their merciless clutch. Mary Rose struggled against the unyielding grip as she was carried into the yawning woods that lay just beyond the garden gate. The jagged tree limbs scratched at her face and limbs as her captors brought her deeper into the menacing forest. The branch of an elm snatched some of her glorious raven hair as a keepsake and Mary Rose tried to cry out against the cold hand pressed against her mouth.

By the time her tiny frame was forced against a large oak, her heart was pounding furiously against her chest. She could feel a rope being pulled tight against her, binding her to the tree. When the cold hands were finally removed from her eyes Mary Rose frantically scanned her surroundings, seeking out her captors and hoping for a landmark that would give her a clue as to where she was. Realizing that she was alone in the small clearing of her dream she squeezed her lids back down over her emerald eyes.

Mary Rose had been told that this peculiar little clearing was a sinister, haunted place. It had been dubbed the Devil's Clearing by some of the locals who had ventured there the mysterious happenings reported over the years by an assortment of vagrants, hunters and drunks. Mary Rose had always scoffed at the legends, dismissing them as pure bushwa.

Mary Rose recalled a conversation she had one night at the Carriage Club, a local speakeasy. "Ah, tell it to Sweeny." She had laughed when some ossified patron shared his account of his visit to the spot.

“I’m tellin’ ya bunny, I’m not just beatin’ my gums; that place is haunted. I saw some kinda’ crazy green mist, looked like a skull just hangin’ there in the air. Then I heard some sort of chanting. That’s when I decided to blow outta’ there.”

Theo and Mary Rose had laughed about the story after, deciding they would have to investigate Devil’s Clearing together sometime. They quickly forgot about the tale and several months would pass before the idea to explore the place would present itself again.

One warm July afternoon they sat in her mother’s garden discussing going to hear some Jazz at the Carriage Club. Theodore had introduced her to his favorite underground nightclub over a year ago and the couple would often sneak out to dance the Tango, the Black Bottom and Mary Rose’s favorite, the Charleston, ‘til all hours of the night.

“Aw ish kabibble!” Mary Rose had laughed dismissively when Theodore had suggested that they seek out Devil’s Clearing instead of going dancing. “You honestly don’t believe the baloney that fella was sayin’ about that place do ya? Green mist and floating skulls? Theo, he was just tryin’ to lay one over on us.”

“I know doll, but it could be a real hoot, going there at night. Besides, we’ll be alone together, which will be good because I’ve got some goods I wanna lay on ya.” Theo pulled out a small white box adorned with a large, floppy red bow and held it out for Mary Rose. A smile spread across her face but as she reached out to accept it Theo jumped up and laughed.

“You’ll have to catch me if you want it doll! C’mon! Race ya to the Devil’s Clearing!”

Mary Rose chased him around a wide oak three times then giggled as she watched him jump over the fence and disappear into the woods. After searching behind every tree on the edge of the woods, Mary Rose called out “Okay Theo, you’re slayin’ me. Come on out doll and lay the goods on me.” Out of the corner of her eye she caught the white of his shirt wiz past a tree and she marched off deeper into the woods after him realizing now he was serious about racing to Devil’s Clearing.

Looking up Mary Rose saw the red ribbon that had formed the bow on Theo’s gift hanging from the branch of a large elm; swaying lazily in the breeze. The sound of a branch snapping under foot and a strong sense of being watched prompted her to move on.

The heels of her shoes and the narrow dress line made keeping up a decent pace nearly impossible but she pressed on as best she could. When she reached the clearing she was surprised to discover that Theo had not yet arrived. “For cryin’ out loud Theo, where on earth are ya?” Mary Rose tilted her head to the side, straining to hear what at first sounded like a low humming, but then grew slowly into chanting.

“Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa.”

The sensation of being watched once again washed over her and she felt her body stiffen up and was unable to move from where she stood.

When Theo finally found her she was terrified and near hysteria, yet just standing in the middle of a strange clearing unable to move. His strong, protective arm around her broke the spell and Mary Rose let out a chilling scream. Confused Theo placed his hands on her shoulders and shook her gently.

“For cryin’ out loud Mary Rose, you got me all balled up. What gives?”

It had taken her the entire walk home to explain what she’d heard and felt and how the strange paralysis was like a crushing force against her body, especially her chest. Theo had chuckled and shaken his head.

“This should make ya feel better.” He gently placed the box in Mary Rose’s hand. She removed the now bowless lid to reveal the most beautiful pearl earrings she had ever seen.

“They’re *pos-i-lute-ly* exquisite!” She shrieked and threw her arms around Theo’s neck.

Mary Rose had spent the past three months trying to forget the occurrence but the nightmares had been persistent and every time she wore the earrings the memory of the frightening experience would come rushing back.

Now she was in this horrifying place again and she felt the paralysis starting to come over her once more. She struggled to shake it off and managed to twist her right hand free from the ropes. With her free hand she was able to work the knot that was pressing into her thigh until, finally, the rope fell at her bare feet. As Mary Rose began to step away from the tree and over the rope she found herself tied to the tree once more. Confused and even more panicked she managed to free her right hand again and work the knot until the rope dropped around her ankles. Once more she tried to step over the rope only to find herself bound yet again to the tree. The paralysis crept over her now and consumed her completely. The menacing chanting clouded her thoughts as she felt her body stiffen.

“Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa.”

Her eyelids closed and as they did Mary Rose felt the world tilt backwards. She was flat on her back now and though she was still unable to move she managed to crack her eyelids enough to discover she was lying in her bed. Out of the corner of her eye she caught the lace curtain blowing gently in the breeze and before her lids forced themselves down again she glimpsed the outline of a dark figure by the window. A gripping warmth

filled her chest and spread through her arms and face as her heart raced and the sound of her blood rushed through her ears. Though her eyes had fixed on the thing for only an instant, it was clearly not human. The outline of the head was too large, too round and the neck too long and thin.

What is it? I must open my eyes. I must move.

Mary Rose struggled against the pressure she felt bearing down on her chest. Her body felt as if it weighed much more than usual, though at the same time she felt as though she was floating. She heard the thing move and was aware of it standing beside her bed; leaning over her.

Dear God, what is it? I have to wake up, I must wake up!

But even as these thoughts raced through her mind Mary Rose was sure that she *was* awake. Almost sure. The floating sensation had her wondering if she was still in the grips of the horrible dream.

The thing was chanting again, and Mary Rose could feel its cold breath in her ear. “Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono...”

She knew she must force herself to move to break the spell. *Our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come...*

“Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa. Sono qui sono venuto pretendere la sua animaaaaa...”

Thy will be done...

Repeating the Lord’s Prayer over and over in her mind, Mary Rose resolved herself to move against the supernatural weight that pressed her into the bed. Finally she found herself springing straight up and felt a breathy groan pass her lips as the air was forced from her lungs by the sudden change in her position. The cool October air filled the room but Mary Rose was drenched in sweat and though she could hardly see through the darkness, she still felt the presence of the thing lingering near her.

Mary Rose swung her feet over the bedside and rose to turn on the lamp. The floorboards were cold against her feet as she crossed the room. The lamp released no light when she turned it on and Mary Rose found herself mysteriously transported back onto the bed. Confused, she crossed the room once more. The lamp failed to produce light yet again and Mary Rose found herself seated back on the bed. Resolved now to illuminate the room, she ran to the lamp and nearly knocked it over in her haste. Leaning back against the headboard in the dark room, Mary Rose drew her knees up to her chest and let out a sigh of defeat.

Am I still dreaming?

A hoarse chuckle came from the corner of the room and Mary Rose found herself lying flat on her back. The heavy floating sensation was on her again and she saw the large dark outline of the figure leaning over her as before. The being commenced with its ominous chanting and a new sensation was now moving through her, a draining, sucking-like sensation. It was as if the creature had a grasp on her soul and was pulling the very life force out of her body.

Mary Rose tried to fight it off with prayer again, but found her mind too clouded to remember her verbal talisman. She could feel herself sinking into the bed as the thing roamed through her mind and ruthlessly sucked her energy. The chanting grew louder as Mary Rose's life force grew dimmer and it was the last thing she heard as the last traces of her vitality were snatched away from her.

The psychic vampire turned away from the lifeless body and placed its hands on its head, overwhelmed with the vigor of the life force rushing through it. Its form began to glow an eerie luminescent green and a raspy chuckle filled the velvety darkness. The malevolent entity had slowed the rate of its energy vibration for the sole purpose of feeding on the life force of the innocent girl. The psychic soul sucker had picked up on her vibration and vitality when Mary Rose had accidentally stumbled into the clearing. For the last three months the being had closed in on her dreams, trying to oppress her mind long enough to tap into her life force in order to completely deplete it. This was the method of feeding the entity had used for over a century.

In its physical lifetime the entity had been known as Portiare, a student of the dark arts who had discovered how to increase his magical powers by drawing out the life force of others. Portiare, a wealthy immigrant, had never been accepted by his small village and in his old age he'd retired to the solitude of the deep forest to practice his ancient rituals. During the full moon Portiare would bring his intended victim to the clearing and tie them to a tree while he performed his sacred ceremony, designed to drain their soul. The villagers had discovered his dark rituals and burned him at the stake in his sacred clearing. Though his body had died, his consciousness had survived, the essence of him remained; the energy of Portiare lived on! In the after-life Portiare had perfected the method and fed regularly on the innocents who had wandered into his sacred clearing. Feeding on the vital energy was no longer a question of increasing his powers; it had become necessary in order for him to manifest in this dimension. Now with the exhilarating sensation coursing through him, Portiare increased his vibrational rate and moved fluidly back to the clearing, where he could savor the wonderful warmth that filled him.

They found her in the morning, ice cold; her eyes wide with a horror burned permanently onto her face. The doctor had determined the cause of death to be a heart attack, brought on by fear. Fear of what, no one could decide. There had been reports that night of strange lights in the sky near Devil's Clearing. Rumors had been started by those who had been there; those who were all too familiar with the horrifying paralysis

and oppressive nightmares were certain they knew the cause of the young girl's death and were happy to share their theories with anyone who'd listen. Most of the town's residents had dismissed offhand the supernatural theories, but there were those who after hearing the strange tale, refused to go near the woods or even sleep on their backs.

Theodore had been unable to recover from the loss or to accept the bizarre tales of a paranormal predator. He took to the bottle and would often roam through the woods at night, searching in a drunken stupor for his beloved Mary Rose. On one such night Theo wandered in search of the clearing but was too drunk to remember where it was. Portiare had felt his energy and slowed his vibrational rate in order to manifest into the physical realm so that he might actually see his prey. The form that he possessed when he did this was not actually a physical presence but merely an illusion produced by the change in vibration. Never the less the illusion was always the same; a large round bulbous head, a long neck sticking out of a lanky thin torso with wide shoulders and an eerie greenish, misty glow. It was the image that Mary Rose had seen before she died. Hiding in the shadows of the forest he observed Theo stagger up to a tree and collapse against it. Sliding down the tree Theo held a silver flask up in the air. "Here's to you doll."

Theo removed from his pocket the red ribbon which Mary Rose had asked him to retrieve that July afternoon. She had worn it her hair often after that day, and it had been given to Theo, along with the earrings, as a keepsake. Holding the ribbon out and releasing it to the brisk winter wind Theo said, "Goodbye my love." He then drained the contents of his shiny container and began to hear what sounded like chanting before he passed out.

It was Mark Jamison, the son of the doctor, who'd found his frozen, lifeless body in the clearing on a gloomy December day. Mark's dog had been the first in the search party to catch Theo's scent, leading Mark to the clearing within minutes. And though it was obvious that Theo had frozen to death, it was odd to Mark how he was laid out. Flat on his back, with his arms stretched at his sides, his fingers dug into the earth and the same horrified glare his father had described seeing when he'd examined Mary Rose. The hair on his arms stood up when Mark remembered hearing that strange lights had appeared over the woods again, on the night Theo had disappeared.

Theo was laid to rest beside his lost love in the town's tiny cemetery and a joint memorial service was held in lieu of the wedding that would never be. Even today, some ninety years later, residents of the small town bring flowers to their graves, in tribute to the tragic lovers. Those who are brave enough to investigate the clearing report the same strange events, with the addition of one new thing. On nights when the yellow moon hangs low in the autumn sky folks have sworn that they have seen the apparition of a young man wandering through the woods calling out for his long lost Mary Rose while countless red ribbons dance lazily from the branches of the trees.

The sound of chanting never fails to make them run...if they can.

