

The Low will Fall Lower

By, Nathan R. Petrie

I stood on the snowy mountaintop, and a young girl, my age, stood before me—her hair whipping in the wind. She was beautiful, with long blonde hair. She silently pointed off to the right and I turned to look. Far in the distance were three towering mountains, reaching high above the clouds. Smoke rose from between them and as I listened the air seemed to carry the steady rhythm of drums.

Where was I? I didn't know. But for some reason it seemed to me that the girl that was with me did. I turned back to her, only to find that she had disappeared.

My head turned this way and that. Where was she? Where had she gone? She had been there only seconds before but now... now she was gone. I was lost in the mountains without her.

I saw where she had once stood, deep holes in the snow where her feet had been. Nothing led away from or to those prints. What had happened?

As I wondered, darkness suddenly overwhelmed me. The world instantly transformed itself, spinning rapidly all around me, and I saw the beautiful girl again. She was chained to a dark stone wall. But before I could so much as think, similar chains sprang down from the ceiling and entrapped me as well. The snowy ground disappeared, and we hung suspended in mid-air by unbreakable iron.

A skinny man walked in through a suddenly appearing door with a spear in hand. I soon noticed with horror that the man was not simply skinny but a skeleton. His head turned slowly and mechanically toward me. His jaw rotated and blood seeped from the marrow of his bones. His voice rang out like the screech of nails on a chalkboard.

"Ye who were once free now are not," he said.

Despite the conditions I snorted in amusement. We were chained up. Of course we were no longer free!

"The crimes ye have committed have spoken for themselves," he went on, "And the lad is to be hanged in the morning."

My heart screamed in horror as I struggled in the chains but my mouth remained silent. What wrong had I done? What had *we* done? And what was to happen to the girl? I thought of these things quickly, but my mind was more fully occupied with escape. Strangely, I was thinking clearly, like it was actually happening, although I knew it wasn't so. I was dreaming and I knew it. For every night I awoke at this same spot.

But not tonight. This time the dream continued on, though I begged it to end.

In another dark flash the scene switched to morning, the morning I was to be hung. The skeleton cut my chains even though I still hung ten feet in the air. I watched as my weakened body crumpled to the ground.

My dreams have always come to me that way, in which I see myself from the outside, and this was no exception. I looked on from afar as my body lay there in the dust, but I still felt the pain. It was sharp and lasted long, but the pain gave me no escape from the dream.

I then found myself at the gallows, standing in bold defiance of an enemy I knew nothing about. But somehow the face and posture of the me I was watching suggested that I *did* know what was going on. I wondered if perhaps I *had* committed a crime.

My eyes looked about, although the me of the dream remained in his defiant position. Surrounding me were mountains, monstrous mountains.

The charges began to be read off, and although I tried to hear the words, the skeletal man's voice was too muffled for me to understand.

Guards walked up, heavily armed and also made entirely of bones. On a stretcher between them they carried still more bones. They took these to what appeared to be an altar of black stone, and sat them down on top of it.

Some more things were said, and now I could hear what the skeleton was saying.

"The two children, by order of the Great Low, are to be hanged and stripped of their flesh..."

I heard no more; I didn't need to or want to. Terror worse than anything I had ever known filled my heart, and I had already almost died from the thought of the horror that was to come upon me. The skeletons bent their bony knees to the altar and, un-kindled, the bones began to smoke. The smoke rose high into the air, so high that it must have been visible for miles. Was this the same smoke I had seen earlier? Had it come from here?

I watched my figure look up and beheld the rope on which my body was to hang. A black garbed hand grabbed the rope and thrust it harshly around my neck. Then I felt it begin to tighten. It was uncomfortable, but I knew that the worst was yet to come. I had not yet begun to die.

Deafening drums sounded in fast paced rhythm and I knew they were counting the last instants of my life. A larger skeletal creature marched out dressed in a bloodstained purple robe. A golden crown of death sat upon his white skull.

His voice rang out with power.

"Ye who will die, who will meet the eternal Low, do you have any final words to speak?"

I looked on as the figure that was me spoke. And the drums continued.

"The Low will fall lower, and his head will be crushed by the High."

The crowd of bones began to roar in anger, but the soon-to-die-me continued on, "I go on not to the Low but to meet the great Conquering King who will soon rid you from this land."

The apparent skeleton king laughed terribly.

"Poetic words, my young friend," he paused, and the drums increased in speed and volume. He pointed right at me, "and now... you will die."

All I saw was the skull of the king. I heard the drums cease and the floor of the gallows open. I am proud to say that I did not cry for mercy, that I stood courageously in the face of evil. And this time the pain wakened me.

Was it all a dream? Yes, it must have been. But it had seemed so real.

I don't understand all that happened, but I am sure it was a dream, one that only stretched further into the strange tale than it ever had before.

But now I am awake. All around me is snow, and in front of me is the same beautiful girl from my dream!

She points to my right, and suddenly I remember one other thing that had happened in my dream. But before I can turn around. . .

She disappears.