

The Undecided Princess

by Carlotta

On the slopes of Mount Ikuvium lives an ancient civilization of semi-human creatures; they have a goat's body and a human head. This dual form is due to a punishment of the gods. At the head of this civilization there is a noble princess who, because of her perennial indecision, profoundly irritated Poseidon's weak patience. To punish her, he threw a curse upon the princess's people, who turned into half-human and half-goat creatures.

Nevertheless, all the creatures of this civilization at the age of 17 have the possibility of performing a kind of initiatory ritual, symbol of the compassion of the gods for the young undecided princess, which allows them to make a choice and change their destiny. The date set for the ritual coincides with the winter solstice. It includes three tasks: the first consists of leaving alone for a distant destination and spending at least three days and three nights there. The second consists of a struggle along the steep and inaccessible mountain paths with strange dark deities. For the last test young semi-human creatures have to jump off a precipice without seeing what's underneath.

The princess is now seventeen and, therefore, she has the opportunity to participate in the ritual. If she completes the tasks, she can free herself and her people from their condemnation. She faces the first test with determination, and despite the fear and the loneliness of those days, she goes back victorious. The second test is more difficult: her mind thinks she cannot do it, and this weakens her body which, instead, has the strength and balance needed. The effort she is asked to make is physical but also mental, and the struggle she has to face is more heartbreaking than she thought. Nevertheless, the princess overcomes it successfully.

At last, the third test totally destabilizes her; she remains immobile for hours in the grip of indecision. She hopes someone will make the choice for her, but this does not happen. If she launches herself, she could die, but if she does not, she will not have the slightest chance of ridding herself and her people of the gods' punishment. Probably what will come after will only be regret and a sense of guilt. Finally, the princess jumps into the void without thinking about it again, and suddenly she feels liberated from all heaviness. There is no death waiting for her, nor something terrible, but a new

world in which she is no longer a child, or a princess, or a creature of dual form, but a woman in all her splendor and beauty. The others arrive shortly after, enthusiastic and grateful. Poseidon sees her coming, and in a flash as fast as the fury of his ancient impatience, he falls in love with her.