

# Night Flowers

*by* Zofia Barisas

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The garden lies in deep darkness even in the noon of blazing day. A steamy pond lies still in wait for uncertain footsteps. Here aquatic green spiders, big as frogs, spin iridescent webs from leaf to leaf. Gigantic, ancient trees stand about like medieval knights. Their branches sweep the ground and the water with monstrous black leaves, from which emanates a fine, dense vapor that fills the garden with an eternal fog.

In this darkest, deepest part of the garden grow amazing giant plants, such as cannot be found anywhere else. The butcher guards the live seeds in a wooden casket at the back of the freezer, behind rows upon rows of hanging carcasses.

Flowers like tremendous Chinese lanterns, of purple velvet skins with deep red veins, grow in clusters at the farthest reach of the misty shadows. These swollen pods rest on the ground and from all around the bottom, roots thick as ropes reach out along the burning, steamy ground and penetrate the hungry, black earth where they intertwine with the roots of the mist trees.

Wrapped in each one of these huge shells, caressed by the velvet skins, live women with long black hair, so long that it twines itself around their feet in thick lustrous coils — women with brilliant yellow eyes, skin the color of polished bronze and lips as purple as bat's blood.

A mere narrow slit in the front of the giant pods, a vertical opening, allows to be seen mysterious beams like moonlight, pouring forth from the women's bellies. From here is diffused a sweet and humid perfume of honeyed flesh.

The butcher enters the sunlit part of the garden with a knife still in his hand and sits down with his back to the hot rocks of the wall to enjoy the last sunrays of the dying day. He remains seated,

motionless, eyes partly closed, inhaling deeply the honeyed perfume.

Darkness falls, little by little. The giant flowers open imperceptibly, so slowly that no movement can be detected. The butcher is waiting. A long time passes.

In the deepest, most hidden part of the garden, something is moving. From the bottom of one of the pods now black with night, a foot slowly emerges, then an ankle, the ankle restrained, wrapped tight in purple roots that hold it fast to the ground. Tiny little moons and stars of pure gold, encrusted in the nails of the toes, brightly glow.

The butcher rises. He walks towards the darkest part of the garden, towards the narrow openings where the light of the moon can be seen.

The bats, until now quiet, fly as if crazed, in all directions. From the throats of the frogs in the pond comes a terrible cry. A great wind rises. The black branches, with their enormous leaves, violently sweep the ground, barring access. The flowers of the garden tremble, wet with mist.

The butcher smiles.

