

MUMMY

You think I drink like this because I likes the taste o' this swill? Fool. Damned fools, all of yous. I drink to forget. And you'd drink a thousand times more if you would've seen what I saw down there.

It was dark, and I was on the run. Things have already gone about as awful as they could – they jumped us as we rested, the savage fiends, and there was blood, so much blood and slash, slash! One by one they fell, their throats slit, death in their eyes. I was the only one left before I could think straight. I ran as fast as I could to get away.

Yes, another one! Keep 'em coming, boy and don't you stop until I tell you to or I pass out on this here floor!

Now where was I? I ran and I ran through these endless caverns and let me tell you, friend, there is no way to tell where you're going down there because everything looks the bloody same! The tracker who led the way for us could probably do it, but she was bleeding out somewhere far away. You've got the same sickly mushrooms, the same disgusting moss covering the same damned boulders and the same cave walls closing in on you all round, all around.

I ran and I ran – squeezing through narrow openings, ripping my clothes, climbing ledges like a maniac, jumping down from three-story heights, swimming across dank pools of dark water, never looking back. Think I got lucky – after some time there was no more pursuit, just shhh, all quiet. I could look around and exhale for a bit, you know?

My running got me into a preeetty interesting place. There was no more mossy cave walls dripping stinking slime, no more slugs swarming over rotting remains of some underground rat. I was in ruins of something that was all grand and majestic once – broken arches and toppled statues, with pretty patterns zigzagging all the stones. Now I'm not so good with all this history babble – the berk who was got killed the first back in the caves, hah! But even I knew you could fetch some shinies in a place like that, so I gots to work, I did!

Yes I got the coin for the drink, where do you get off asking me if I can pay, you sod? You know what I had to do for this coin? Here, have some! Miserable lout, greedy bloody bastards, all of you.

So after some digging I find this beauty of a chalice, you hear, all dusty, but once I wipe it off – it's gold, I tells you, pure god! And you know what I did, friend? You can guess, I can see you're a smart one. I got greedy. I grabbed the damned thing and I bagged it and I headed out the way I came, thinking about all the coin I'd get for it.

And then when I was just about to make it to the opening back to the caves – it emerged. You know what it's like to see your death? Of course you don't, fat and safe here behind your walls, by your fires. Not just knowing that this is the thing that's going to kill you, but having it look right through you and knowing that from this moment you may be walking and breathing but really you're just dying, losing the fight with death with every second that passes?

It stood there, this corpse, all wrapped up in these old scraps, all dried up and disgusting. And it saw me, I tell you, it looked right through me and I felt like screaming on the inside but I couldn't make a bloody sound, I felt my hair turning grey, felt like every fear I ever had was ripping my mind apart. The rations that I saved to not starve down here turned to dust in my bag and I couldn't take a breath. And then it reached out, its awful, clawed hand grasping, demanding I give back what was not mine.

The worst terror anyone ever felt took over my body and I turned and all I wanted to do was to dash like a madman, not seeing, just fleeing as far and as fast as I could, away from this horrible creature and the dread that it brought. I knew then that if I take that cup, no matter how much coin it fetches, I would never be free of this terror, of all the evil that came from that dead thing, all the evil that was pouring into my soul as I stood there. I knew, you hear me, that no matter how much I drink I won't rub that horror from my mind, not ever.

But all I could think of then was this urge to get away, to not be next to that monstrosity for a moment longer.

What choice did I have?

I ran.