

The background of the cover features a woman in a white, flowing dress with her arms raised in a gesture of praise or surrender. She is set against a backdrop of a dense forest, which is partially obscured by bright, vibrant flames that appear to be rising from the bottom and sides of the frame. The overall color palette is dominated by warm tones of orange, yellow, and red from the fire, contrasting with the cooler blues and greens of the forest. The text is written in a white, elegant cursive script, centered over the image.

*The Executioner
of Trece Forest*

Laura DiNovis Berry

THE EXECUTIONER OF YRECEP FOREST

Copyright © Laura DiNovis Berry

First Edition published August 2023

Published by Indies United Publishing House, LLC

Cover art designed by YaYa Designs

All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein.

ISBN: 978-1-64456-619-0 [Paperback]

ISBN: 978-1-64456-620-6 [Mobi]

ISBN: 978-1-64456-621-3 [EPub]

ISBN: 978-1-64456-622-0 [AudioBook]

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023938052



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

P.O. BOX 3071

QUINCY, IL 62305-3071

INDIESUNITED.NET

*The Executioner
of
Yrecep Forest*

Laura DiNovis Berry



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	10
Chapter 3.....	16
Chapter 4.....	21
Chapter 5.....	28
Chapter 6.....	39
Chapter 7.....	44
Chapter 8.....	52
Chapter 9.....	60
Chapter 10.....	66
Chapter 11.....	72
Chapter 12.....	76
Chapter 13.....	81
Chapter 14.....	85
Chapter 15.....	89
Chapter 16.....	95
Chapter 17.....	100
Chapter 18.....	107
Chapter 19.....	113
Chapter 20.....	117

Chapter 1

The Brothers

Whispers rustled in the dark spaces behind the impenetrable, old trees. Anicen's arms ran with chills as he realized their black gnarled roots stretched out into the soft, honey yellow grasses as if they were reaching to grab his ankles and drag him into the forest. He took a step back, bumping into his little brother, Capar. The younger boy shoved him and whined, "Watch it, Anicen!"

Anicen wrinkled his nose at Capar before giving the thin rope in his hand a quick tug. Marjorie the goat bleated at him in return for his efforts. Her dark brown ears flapped against her curled horns as she tossed her head obstinately. Anicen tugged the rope again to pull the stubborn goat forward.

"Come on, girl!" he grunted. Capar rushed to the goat's side, wrapping his arms around her smelly neck.

"She doesn't want to go into the forest! And I don't either! It's scary!" he cried. Anicen loosened his hold and tried to relax his frightened heart. While he wouldn't admit it aloud, he didn't want to go into Yrecep Forest either. No one from his village ever entered the forest as far as he knew. A foreboding aura emanated from the branches of those black trees. Intuitively, Anicen knew to stay away, but the strange cries, and sometimes what he thought were human screams, that would tear through the branches also served as a strong warning to keep clear.

"Yrecep Forest is a dangerous place," his father would always say whenever Anicen would ask him why the trees were black or what the dark shapes moving between them were. The village hunters never even went close to that menacing forest, and if their prey happened to make its way through the treeline, they gave up the chase. There was nothing worth a trek into Yrecep Forest, or at least, there hadn't been until today. Anicen squared his shoulders and tried to look resolute.

"Capar, Ma told us to hide until it's safe. The Vuglar raiders could be at the village any time now. We have to go into the forest. It's the only way the Vuglar won't steal Marjorie... or us," he admonished. Capar only stared down at his leather-wrapped feet and clutched the goat harder.

Anicen knew his brother would have much rather run off with the other village children and those too old to fight toward the big town, but Anicen had heard his parents whispering angrily. They argued back and forth about how best to keep their children safe.

Running to town for help would be a sound plan only if they had enough time to make the two day journey before the attack. But it was this morning, just after daybreak, that Rowar, one of the village hunters, had scrambled back up the hill and pounded on every door she passed, shouting, "The Vuglar are coming! Quickly, to arms! To arms!"

There was no time to make the journey safely. It was much more likely that after decimating the village, the Vuglar would rush after those escaping along the path through the open plains and carry them back to their mountain stronghold or cut them down where they stood. Anicen's mother and father had made their decision quickly. While a score of children and - grandparents fled toward town, they had rushed their children down the hill armed only with a small dagger, Marjorie the goat, and their burly yellow dog, Sweetness.

"The Vuglar won't follow yah into the trees. Yah'll be safe, my sons," their father had whispered into their ears as he clutched them to him before running back. Their mother gripped Anicen's chin and ordered, "Do not come out of the forest until yah hear our voices. Pa and I will come for yah."

Anicen could only nod, terror rendering him mute.

"Good boy," she had said. Then she too had turned and ran off to join her husband and the others as they made ready for the oncoming attack.

As terrifying as it was, on this day, Yrecep Forest seemed to be the safest place for the two boys. Anicen looked away from his brother and up the large hill they had descended a few minutes ago. At its peak, he could see the big thatched roof of the village elder's home, and he knew that behind it sat his little house of dried mud and hay where his mother had hung herbs from the ceiling and filled it with sweet smells just the day before.

He loved life in his little village. When the time for work would come, the villagers would sit outside their homes and sing with each other as they completed their daily tasks. As they used the long grasses of the plains to weave baskets and even hats, they would sing of the mysterious gods from the Long Ago who slept in the old Yrecep Forest at the bottom of the hill and of the frightening beasts who attended them. Anicen loved those haunting old songs, but Capar would laugh himself silly when the older villagers would break out into the playfully barbed ditties about their "lazy" cousins who had left the village to live in the big town.

“They can’t hunt or plow in spring, but they’ve taught their cheeks to sing!” On this final verse, the singers would always whirl around and give their bottoms a mighty whack. Whenever a lazy cousin did return to the village for a visit, this ditty was always performed in their honor. No songs filled the air today though, only frenzied shouting. Anicen and Capar could not make out the words, but they could feel the fear that tainted each muffled cry. Sweetness’ cold nose against his hand jolted Anicen back into the present. The dog licked his fingers gently, and Anicen tightened his gut. He pulled on Capar’s dirty night shirt haphazardly tucked into his knee length pants.

“Come on, Capar,” he urged. “Let’s go. It’ll be alright.”

Capar sniffled and rubbed his snotty face against Marjorie’s fur before looking up at the village one more time. Anicen waited for his brother to finish his silent goodbye. The boys and their animal companions turned away from their home on the hill and made their way into Yrecep Forest where the old gods slumbered. As they walked past the first row of trees, the air grew cold, and Sweetness’ ears perked up at sounds the boys couldn’t hear. The dog growled softly, but deeper and deeper into the forest they went.

Hours later, smoke rose from the village, and bodies were strewn about the ground. Thankfully, it hadn’t been an entire Vuglar raiding party that had come to ransack and plunder but only a group of juveniles taking part in a coming-of-age rite. Those who lived and returned with spoils would be greeted with open arms as adults in their community. Although Vuglar raiders of any age were fearsome in battle, the villagers had been able to scramble together an admirable defense.

Young Vuglar faces were sealed in silent screams by crude wooden pikes they had fallen on after being unseated from their steeds, large mountain lumes. These four legged beasts were a formidable sight with their dusky fur and antlers that their riders would sharpen into dangerous points made all the better for goring their foes. Many of the villagers suffered such a fate and yet, while it was smoldering and bleeding, the village still stood, silhouetted by the descending sun. Its color matched the blood streaked across the dirty faces of Capar and Anicen’s parents.

Down the hill they stumbled, panting and exhausted but relatively uninjured. They called out for their children with hoarse voices as soon as their feet touched the long grass just before the forest. They heard nothing. They cried louder and moved closer to the menacing trees. There was no sign of the boys, or the dog, or the goat.

Past the cruelly twisted roots and stinging branches, the parents limped, calling for their sons. They screamed and cried until the moon’s

glow transformed the trees' bark into mocking faces. Exhausted, the parents went home, but they came again the next day to search, and the next, and the next, and the next — until a year had groaned by, and the boys were declared lost to Yrecep Forest.