

A man discovers a destroyed typewriter and a series of short stories labeled as the machine's last words to the world.

**The Goat-God and Other Stories:
Cautionary Tales For Peculiar People**

By Kalen Grace

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The
Goat-God
and Other Stories

Cautionary Myths for Peculiar People

Kalen Grace

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Table of Contents

Prologue	9
The Goat-God	13
The Quiet People.....	45
The Devil & The Jazz Singer	50
Balloon.....	67
Your Past Is Standing Outside The Door. It Would Like To Have A Word With You.....	72
Coffee, Black As Night	84
Gailexie's Doll	89
Sirens Of The Loveless	104
Rhapsody In Orange.....	111
Spring Cleaning.....	121
The Wind In The Wires	126
Epilogue	197

The Quiet People

...and so, once upon a time there was a girl. She was nameless, for she had no parents, and her only clothing was a hooded robe of the darkest storm cloud grey. Her existence was repetitive, but, having no concept of time, the repetition was not as obvious as one might think.

In fact her existence, such as it were, was spent doing one endless, all-encompassing task. She took care of the Quiet People, who slept eternally, and whose dreams were existence itself.

She and the People dwelt within a walled in garden, overgrown with dead vines and flowers too decayed to identify. Above them was the heavens, which moved swiftly, as if the stars or the garden itself were in constant motion. And yet, her black hair was never disturbed by the slightest wind, her pale skin never drawn tight with cold.

The Quiet People each sat on top of a tall, grey pillar. The pillars, and to some degree the people themselves, all looked identical. So much so, in fact, that she was unsure how many Quiet People and pillars there were in total.

Each man was fat and ancient, the size of their bellies only dwarfed by the length and volume of their beards. These beards wound around their bodies and around said pillars, and allowed the girl easy access to the men themselves. The

women's hair covered their rounded bodies in the same way, presenting some modicum of modesty.

Their faces were in a constant state of concentration, and she was forever wiping sweat from their foreheads. Occasionally, one or more of them would begin muttering in their sleep. At these times, she would sing to them, softly and wordlessly. They would then doze again, thus preserving all reality.

The girl did not remember being younger, or when things weren't as they were at that moment. Such things never crossed her mind. There had simply been no beginning, and there seemed to be no possibility of an end.

Having known nothing else, she was content. The Quiet People slept, and she watched the heavens rush by as she lay upon the dead vegetation that covered the garden's walkways.

But she was not ignorant of things outside of her sphere of experience, oh no.

For she, too, dreamed, although not as expansively or absolutely as the Quiet People. Her dreams were but stuttering, nervous lapses in consciousness. They showed her, as through a dark mirror, those worlds that the People had created.

She saw the creation and destruction of universes, of worlds, of planets and civilizations. She saw races born, races die, and others take their place. She saw newborns open their eyes, and the aged close theirs.

But these things happened in the blink of an eye; she did not see them as time passing. To her, time was not only non-existent, but also not a possibility.

For untold eons, things continued in this way, until one dream showed her something that changed everything.

She dreamed of a clock, although she did not know what it was. It was set in the upper reaches of a tower, and men, women and children stared at it in reverence as they passed it on the street. She was given the distinct feeling that their very lives revolved around it.

This alone did not give her pause in her slumber. But as her mind's eye continued to watch, the people themselves changed. Their clothes changed. Their attitudes towards each other changed. Their modes of transportation, their speech - everything seemed to be moving forward.

She had seen people change before; this wasn't what furrowed her once smooth forehead.

It was the clock. Except for the movements of its hands across the face, which seemed to go in a limited pattern, the clock itself never changed.

She awoke from this with a start, the clock's measured, ever-present ticking ringing through the webs of her mind. In the wakefulness that followed, the sound would sometimes return to her, as would the image of the clock.

Until finally, as she was singing to one of the innumerable men after he had cried out softly in his sleep, the answer came to her.

Existence, she realized, could be quantified and measured. All of her dreams were reflections of the dreams that the Quiet People were having. This meant that her dreams, and theirs, could not be either simultaneous or instantaneous.

In her mind, the image of a galaxy expanded, accompanied by the sound of the clock (*tick*, then *tock*). The galaxy slowed, as did the clock's sound, to a speed that threatened to become unbearable.

Suddenly, the girl knew time.

She knew boredom.

She knew the insignificance of everything in the grand scheme of things.

She knew that the Quiet People she'd cared for, for untold eons, were but fools, leaving the fate of existence itself at the mercy of their ancient, twisted imaginations.

And at that moment, the only moment she was ever to notice or to feel pass by her, she screamed.

Whether from sheer horror, or out of mercy for herself, is anyone's guess.

At the sound, the eyes of all the Quiet People opened at once. Tears poured down their faces, and their mouths opened to form words they would never speak.

For in the next moment, reality itself shattered outward, then pulled in upon itself with a suddenness that time cannot measure. It compressed inward until it could not, then reversed.

As it expanded outward again, the eyes of the Quiet People grew heavy once more, and the nameless girl's eyes opened to see the stars rushing by overhead. She bit back a scream, and let her breath out slowly. She'd had a most disturbing vision, one that she felt came from beyond the people's eternal dreams.

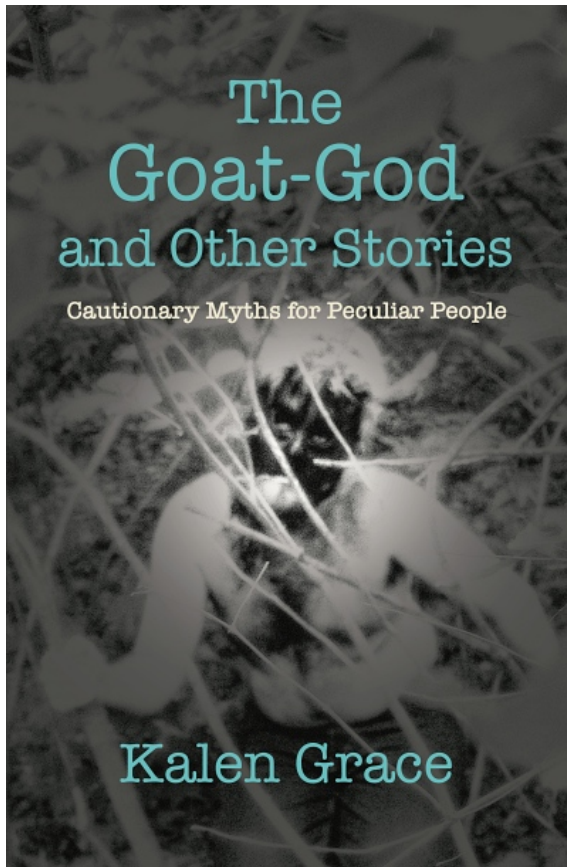
What bothered her most, however, was that she couldn't remember it. She pushed herself up, ready to check on her slumbering charges, and prided herself on not crying out when she'd awoke. Waking the Quiet People, after all, could destroy everything.

...and so, once upon a time...

*

Perhaps reality is just some remarkable dream the Gods are having.

If so, let us step softly, so as not to wake them up.



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