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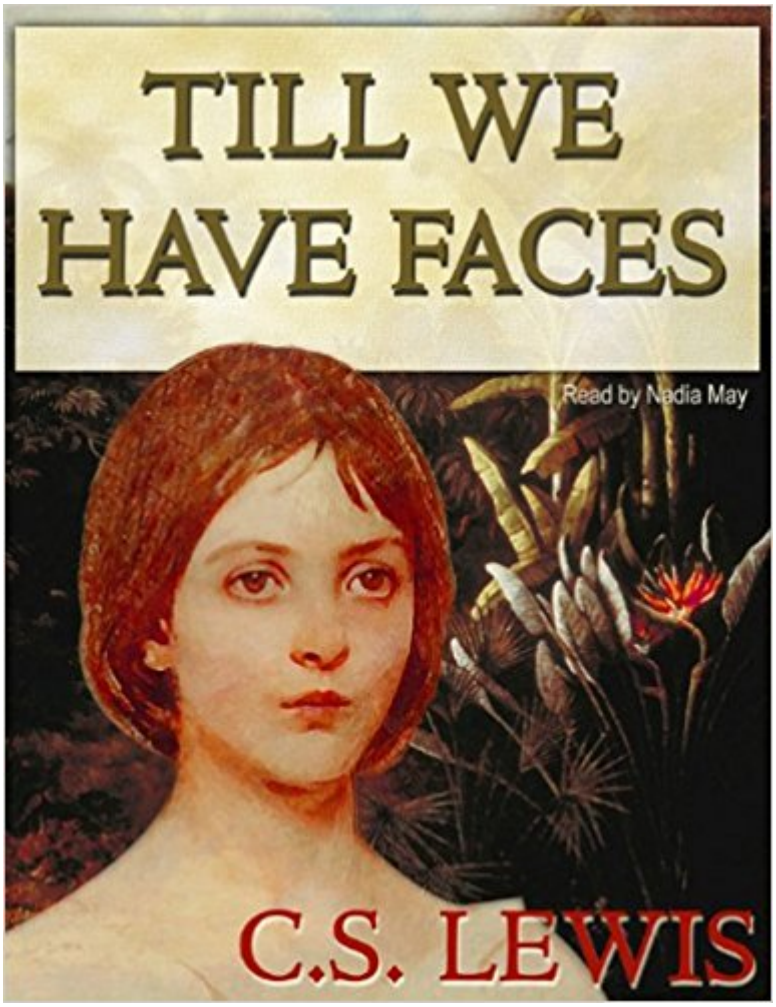
Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold



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Synopsis

C. S. Lewis reworks the timeless myth of Cupid and Psyche into an enduring piece of contemporary fiction in this novel about the struggle between sacred and profane love. Set in the pre-Christian world of Glome on the outskirts of Greek civilization, it is a tale of two princesses: the beautiful Psyche, who is loved by the god of love himself, and Orual, Psyche's unattractive and embittered older sister who loves Psyche with a destructive possessiveness. Her frustration and jealousy over Psyche's fate sets Orual on the troubled path of self-discovery. Lewis' last work of fiction, this is often considered his best by critics.

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Customer Reviews

At once more human and more mythic than his Perelandra trilogy, Lewis's short novel of love, faith, and transformation (both good and ill) offers the reader much food for thought in a compact, impressively rich story. Less heavy-handedly Christian-allegorical than Narnia, Till We Have Faces gives us characters who remind us of people we know facing choices and difficulties we recognize. This deceptively simple book takes on new depth with each rereading. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

''He always tells a good story, and this is a splendid, vehement one, full of stone and wind and spears in an old country, wet mist on the hills. ... seems to sum up most of what Dr. Lewis has been telling us for years.'' --The Tablet ''One of the most eminently readable pieces of fiction that has come my way for a long time.'' --Yorkshire Post --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable

edition of this title.

I have read this book every few years. The latest time I read it was probably the longest gap in time since I first read the book -- and when I finally got around to rereading it, I fell in love again. I had forgotten about so much. I knew what happened, story-wise, but it was so much fun to rediscover the depth of character and themes and the powerful climax and brilliant character moments.This is a book I would highly recommend to anyone, at any stage of spiritual development. It tackles tough questions about belief in something more than the material, the problem of pain in our world, the dichotomy of the human heart needing both logic and emotion...I could go on and on.But the main character drives the themes! She is a flawed character -- highly flawed -- but because her flaws are realistic and relatable, she is also a sympathetic character and the things that happen around her give her narration credibility, even as she revels herself to be an untrustworthy narrator.In many ways, the novel is a fictional exploration of the deep ideas that Lewis touches on in many of his non-fiction works (Mere Christianity, The Problem with Pain, and especially The Four Loves). But it is much, much more than that. I consider this to be C.S. Lewis' best novel and, more than being my favorite novel by Lewis, the best novel I have ever read.

I first read this more than forty years ago, and though the sense of it remained, I'd forgotten the story almost entirely.It's not Lewis' easiest book, and his mixing of myth and Christianity (the latter never overtly expressed) makes it a sometimes difficult read. Nevertheless, it's full of insights about real love, truth, beauty and much much more. And it moves along at a surprising pace, considering the kind of book it is.Very oddly, the publishers have put a quote on the cover of this Kindle version that's not about the book itself, but about a different book. Lewis, in a footnote at the end of TWHF writes about the origins of the story in Apuleius' Metamorphoses. He notes that Metamorphoses is a strange compound of picaresque novel, horror comic, mystagogue's tract, pornography, and stylistic experiment. The publishers do Lewis' book some considerable injustice by using this as a kind of blurb for TWHF. There's certainly no pornography in TWHF, and little of the other three elements

I have always loved this book! I bought this for a friend to read. It's heart wrenching, funny, smart, and let me just say that C.S. Lewis can tell a story that takes you away! If you are looking for an adventure with meaning and soul, please get this book. Or just read this book - anyone! I, for one, love it so much.

The temptation for me was to rate this with 3 stars, and then with 5; so I went for 4. The story is cloaked in mystery and should be approached thoughtfully. It can be enjoyed on a couple of levels. In the literary sense, it is an interesting reworking of the Cupid and Psyche myth; and it is also an extended revelation of Lewis's keen interest in the Christian faith.If you are familiar with Orthodox icons, you will realize that the faces in them are all quite similar. And this applies even to icons of martyrs who are depicted with their executioners. The executioner is never portrayed in a gruesome or cruel way, but is usually painted to look very like the victim. The underlying theology guides the faithful in the way to look at others: to see the wonderful potential within each, to see the image of God in the depth of each, to remind that we don't know the end of the story as long as a person remains part of biological life in this age, to see Jesus's model of loving one's enemies. One might also recall how often we characterize ourselves and others by mentioning a hot temper, a gluttonous or manipulative tendency, and so on. In reality, these are not so much characteristics of a person as descriptions of one's fallen or undisciplined passions (meaning that they are changeable, movable, suffered passively -- and ideally disciplined, in maturity; but not actually part of the person).The point is that until we "pass over from corruption," we don't really know ourselves and others; we don't yet "have our faces." This is the theory underlying Lewis's story encouraging us to engage the spiritual warfare through the daily choices we make.

I don't know the story of a psyche and Cupid, so I cannot comment on Lewis' use of it for this story. I can say. However, that the singular quality which makes his works so desirable - their very desirability - is present here as well. I confess to being too simple-minded to have gotten nearly what the Cambridge professor originally intended, I am sure. I hope that keener minds can mine its depths. For the average reader, this is probably not the best entrance into Lewis. However, having said all of that, I cannot help but love this story. Why? Because as with every truly Lewis book, 'Til We Have Faces finally drops upon you the weight of glory that he loved so much. Whatever deeper meanings I missed, I caught this: the One for whose sake the earth and stars and sun exist is Himself the answer to our doubts, fears, and longings.

This book is well-written and as you would expect from CS Lewis, has many levels of meaning. If you are willing to read and think deeply, there is much to mine from this work. If you like an action-packed, entertaining book with little concentration required, you will probably want to skip this one.

One of my favorite books ever written. C.S. Lewis himself believed that this was his best work of fiction--better than The Chronicles of Narnia. It also happened to be the last work of fiction he ever wrote. The idea behind the book was conceived while he was still a strong atheist, but he finished it and changed it after he had become a Christian, making the book a very interesting peek into his perspective on his own conversion story. Fun, personal, spiritual, this is a book that more lovers of C.S. Lewis's writings must read.

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