

EVANGELINE WALTON

the
abinogion
tetralogy

THE PRINCE OF ANNWN ✦ THE CHILDREN OF LIYR
THE SONG OF RHIANNON ✦ THE ISLAND OF THE MIGHTY

“Ranks with the best of
twentieth-century fantasy.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

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*The
Mabinogion
Tetralogy*



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Mabinogion
Tetralogy



Prince of Annwn
The Children of Llyr
The Song of Rhiannon
The Island of the Mighty



EVANGELINE WALTON

Introduction by Betty Ballantine



DUCKWORTH OVERLOOK

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Introduction



BETTY BALLANTINE

ROOTED IN THE oral myths and legends of Wales, the Mabinogion, which scholars believe was first set down, possibly by a single hand, before the mid-twelfth century, is the backbone and masterwork of Welsh medieval literature.

The original title, *Pedair Cuine y Mabinogi*, refers to the four Branches that appear in this volume, comprised of the loosely connected tales of Pwyll, Branwen, Manawyddan, and Mâth. The work was first translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1834–49, but perhaps the most prestigious translation, in more recent times, is that of Gwyn and Thomas Jones, published in 1949, just a century after the first English chronicle. Since then, various articles, monographs, commentaries, and papers of many kinds have analyzed, dissected, and ruminated over this monumental work, a rich source and subject for scholarly debate. (Indeed, it is evident from her footnotes that Miss Walton was herself a scholar of some note.) One side effect of this academic interest is that the form “Mabinogion” became commonly used for the Four Branches, rather than the contraction “Mabinogi.”

Be that as it may, until Miss Walton elected to do so, apparently no one had undertaken to tell the stories of the Four Branches in the form in which they must have originated, as fiery, passionate, and very immediate accounts of real men and women, historic figures set in a time when belief in the gods of air and earth, of fire and water, were vast, inexplicable realities in a world pregnant with magic, a world of marvels and wonders, teeming with strange creatures who might well be denizens of strange other landscapes, and who almost certainly would have monstrous arcane powers. One of the greatest gifts of magic is mystery.

Unfortunately, by the arrival of the nineteenth century, such a world of magic evoked Victorian images of fairies at the bottom of the garden, pure fantasy, a playground for children (and scholars, of course . . .). In fact, even in 1936, when Evangeline Walton’s magnificent Fourth Branch first appeared, it was ignored, its brilliant execution never recognized, and its author quickly relegated to obscurity.

In the mid-sixties, Ballantine Books, which had at last won literary recognition for the superb authors of its ground-breaking science fiction list, decided to embark on fantasy by publishing J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, long available in England as a “juvenile.” The welter of publicity that attended the appearance of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* in paperback reprint form spearheaded attention on what would become the equally famous Ballantine adult fantasy classics, including Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Trilogy*, the works of Ernest Bramah, Lord Dunsany, James Branch Cabell, George MacDonald, E. R. Eddison, and many more. It was inevitable that

research would eventually turn up the name of Evangeline Walton. But it was a long time before much more was known than just her name and the title of her first publication, that unforgettable, but nevertheless forgotten, *The Virgin and the Swine*. Where did it come from? Could there possibly be a link to the Mabinogion? Who was the author?

Evangeline Walton Ensley was born on November 24th, 1907, in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was a so-called “blue” baby and never enjoyed really good health. All her life, both as a child and as an adult, she had to cope with the after effects of silver nitrate treatments which left her with a ghostly blue-grey skin condition. Her odd appearance, no less than her frail health, necessitated a home education, beginning a lifelong reclusive habit.

She was taught largely by her great-aunt, Calista Fellows. Growing up in an adult household, and requiring to be “kept quiet” inevitably resulted in a heavy reliance on books; reading became the solace and joy of a lonely and imaginative girl. Her early reading included the popular fantasy writers of the time: characters from Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, L. Frank Baum, Lord Dunsany and the like, were her daily companions. As she matured she read the romantic poets and her interests expanded to medieval and ancient history with their heavy emphasis on witchcraft and fantasy. She became precociously well-informed and was encouraged to write, not only about the friends she made in books, but about those she created from her own vivid and active mind. Writing, too, became a habit.

Her bent was toward the magic and the fantastical but her burgeoning imagination was truly captured when she encountered the heroic myths of the ancient Welsh in the body of work known as the Mabinogion. Here was richness, not only powerful enough to rivet her interest, but a major work of treasure, explore, mull over, and savor. The myths, with a matter-of-fact acceptance of magic in the everyday lives of humankind, together with the fierce, tempestuous stories of the early Celts, the titanic imagery, the blending of gods and men—all proved to be an irresistible lure. The young woman determined to one day re-write the legends of the Mabinogion as historic fiction.

We do not know when she actually began to write what would become her major work, but in 1936 when she was twenty-nine, the firm of Willett Clark published the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion by Evangeline Walton under the title *The Virgin and the Swine*. An America just climbing out of the worldclass Depression was notably uninterested in fantastic legend, still the stuff of children’s books. Next, three loosely linked short stories appeared, based on the Breton legend of the submerged city of Ys. Nothing more was heard from Evangeline Walton until 1945, when August Derleth started his “Library of Arkham House Novels of Fantasy and Terror” with her gothic mystery *Witch House*. Eleven years later, Beuregy published *The Cross and the Sword*, a re-creation of the violent world of the Norse sagas.

After that, silence. Until the early 1970’s when Lin Carter, free-lancing for Ballantine Books, found a copy of *The Virgin and the Swine*—an entry for their now firmly established adult fantasy line. He began a search for the author. The original publisher was long defunct. The British publisher had no idea where she was. Ballantine Books advertised in the science fiction and fantasy media for several weeks, with no result. In response to my enquiries the Library of Congress reported no address for the author, and moreover, that copyright on this title had never been renewed. But I was in love with the work and determined to see it back in print.

Having tried all public avenues for discovery without success, I proceeded with plans for publication under a much more suitable title: *The Island of the Mighty*. The weeks and months went by and we were on the verge of publication, the books already printed, when the Library of Congress informed me that—so sorry—they had made an error: the copyright *had* been renewed, but they still had no address . . . A publisher’s nightmare. In the same week, we received a casual postcard from August Derleth mentioning that he had just come across one of our ads and felt he might as well

supply us with a 20-year-old address which, he noted, was probably not still valid.

~~We wrote anyway to the address in Tucson, explaining the circumstances—and bingo! We had~~ found Evangeline Walton.

I fired off a contract, accompanying it with a letter remarking that Miss Walton could not possibly have produced such a book and *not* have written anything else. (I was well aware that this Four Branch covered only a part of the original twelve-branched Mabinogion.) What had happened? What was the body of her work? What else had she written?

At which point, nightmare metamorphosed into a dream come true. Miss Walton replied that indeed she had continued to write her version of the Mabinogion (she could not bear not to . . .) but had stored the unpublished manuscripts when her first publisher had not even wanted to *see* any more material on the subject. She had assumed there was simply no interest in fantasy.

I was virtually overcome with excitement at being able to read three more manuscripts in this incomparable work, to say nothing of the pride in bringing them into print. And so, in due course, and after Miss Walton had checked and revised her early work, *Prince of Annwn*, *The Children of Llyr*, and *The Song of Rhiannon* were published to the delight of the many dedicated fans by now familiar with the Ballantine adult fantasy series.

I tell this tale of a publishing triumph in some detail because it gave me such joy, and in its own way, materially affected the personal life of a writer I admire enormously. For Evangeline Walton, so long ignored, had found her home in the science fiction and fantasy world. As a result of this belated recognition of her talents, she was persuaded to attend (face, neck and even hands heavily made-up) various fantasy and science fiction conventions. Although at first bemused, she was eventually delighted by the adulation of the fans who, well accustomed to the differences that constitute one of the most intelligent reading audiences in the world, were completely unfazed by the mask-like appearance of this extraordinary lady. She proved to be a merry and highly erudite companion, and as she became more accustomed to acceptance, abandoned the nuisance of much of the make-up to appear, comfortably, as herself. She even took to traveling, and visited the birthplaces of the legendary characters she had so admired all her life. So Evangeline Walton came into her own, winning awards and accolades in the fantasy world she had adopted as a small girl.

Recognition of her immense writing talents followed rapidly in the mainstream media. The prestigious *Saturday Review of Literature*, in a broad and definitive article on the phenomenon and popularity of fantasy writing, acknowledged her work (along with those of T.H. White and C.S. Lewis) as “. . . not only the best fantasies of the twentieth century . . . they are great works of fiction. Walton succeeds in creating an imaginary world that we believe *actually existed* [their italics] in this world of history.” And in *Fantastic Literature*, the editors describe the Walton tetralogy quite simply as “a work of genius.”

Evangeline Walton’s re-creation of the Mabinogion covers the Four Branches, the first being *Prince of Annwn*, a lucid, dramatic, and powerful narrative in which Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, encounters the Grey Man, King Arawn (Death) of Annwn, and undertakes to descend to his world to do battle with the monster Havgan whom even Death cannot conquer. Epic battle scenes are followed by a tender wooing of Rhiannon in a landscape magically transformed to the Bright World of Faery, which the lady proves willing to abandon in order to become Pwyll’s bride, at least for a “time.” Time in the Bright World has a very strange way with mortals . . .

The second Branch, *The Children of Llyr*, deals with the drama and tragedy of Llyr’s five offspring—great Bran the Blessed, beloved ruler over all the Island of the Mighty; Manawyddan, his wise, thoughtful and magically gifted younger brother; their sister Branwen and half-brothers Nissyen and Evnissyen. The latter two, born of rape, are destined to be the force behind the tragic events that will destroy Bran and all his people. Evnissyen’s wicked malice carries the plot to Ireland to witne

Branwen's bitter humiliation at the hands of King Matholoch, and the terror of the great Cauldron of Life in the battles that follow. This is a tale drenched in blood and horror "permeated with raw emotion, brute violence and human savagery, laying bare the evil in humanity." In the symbolic, but very real, persons of the twins Nissyen and Evnissyen, Walton makes brilliant and ghastly use of the age-old conflict between Good and Evil. Horror and high courage march hand-in-hand, each feeding the powerful impact of the other.

The Song of Rhiannon, the Third Branch, is a perfect counterpoint to the violence and rage of *The Children of Llyr*, from which only Manawyddan and Pryderi, the new Prince of Dyved, survive. The Third Branch explores the heart-wrenching pact between Manawyddan and Prince Pwyll, the Grey Man of the First Branch. The main themes here are the enduring strength of love and respect between partners and the dignity of humans whether noble or humble. *The Song of Rhiannon* is perhaps the most human of the Four Branches, despite being set largely in the Bright World of Faery. There is even some wry comic relief in the person of a bogey whom Kigva, Pryderi's wife, regularly placates with bowls of milk.

Finally, in *The Island of the Mighty*, the Fourth Branch, Walton reaches the apex of her re-creation of the Mabinogion. This Branch, the longest in the tetralogy, is divided into three Books. The chief protagonists who motivate the driving narrative are Gwydion and his feckless brother Gilvaethwyl together with their sister Arianrhod, a gifted sorceress, and their endlessly patient sire, Mâth the Ancient. Book I tells of the use of illusion to steal a number of the strange new beasts called "pigs" and of the seduction of the virgin Goewyn, both of which deceptions have long and dire consequences. Here, too, is the tender and bitter love between Gwydion and his sister, Arianrhod, who is certainly not the virgin she claims to be.

Book II deals with Arianrhod's son, Llew, and with the strange way in which Gwydion is forced to raise the boy in order to protect him from his mother. Book III is the poignant tale of an exquisite creature created out of flowers by Mâth the Ancient, to serve as wife to Llew and thereby to frustrate at least one of his mother's curses.

Each of the Books of the Fourth Branch is rich in detail. In this climax to the tetralogy Evangeline Walton pulls together the threads of prophecy, the tangled emotional cross-currents of her characters, the web of plot and sub-plot, and the long reach of narrative—all of which, woven together in a vibrant tapestry of words, place her Mabinogion among the greatest of mythic works. Throughout the Four Branches runs the fundamental theme of great change, of the conflict between the beliefs of the Old Tribes whose women were powerful and free, respected by all and "blessed of the Gods," for once they were the creators of life. For millenia mankind worshipped female gods; inheritance was always through the maternal line—a man's only sure blood-line was through his sister, hence his heir would have to be his nephew. The connection of one man in particular to birth was not recognized until the growing sophistication of the New Tribes raised a revolutionary possibility about conception. Like all revolutions, the new thinking brought major problems.

Old and sacred beliefs were not easily relinquished. But the new idea was driven by a deep need for acknowledgment of paternity, by the promise of dominance inherent in such a shift in power—and sometimes by simple greed. Much of mythology grew from the massive changes in culture that took place over the generations when mankind first began to suspect the truth about the origin of birth and combined their suspicions with a continuing reliance on magic, faery and sorcerous powers. Add to this the universal theme of Good versus Evil in the art of story-telling—for eons the mainstay of conveyed information—and you have a roiling broth of imaginative explosion.

Evangeline Walton's skills do not lie merely in retelling old tales, no matter how charged with excitement; her enormous gift is in creating completely credible god-like beings whose human vitalities, wondrous powers, and tragic weaknesses are, in the end, terribly human. Through the tale

of this remarkable woman, the myths are made real, and the people who live through the titanic events of their time speak to us, very personally, with poignancy and warning, over the centuries. —

Evangeline Walton was in love with the charismatic figures who moved through the high, historical drama of great change in a world of arcane power precisely because she was very much a woman of our time who recognized prophecy in these magnificent legends and—a sorceress in her own right—converted the ancient prophecies into the brilliant reality of her own words. In the end, this retelling of the Mabinogion is a great work because these are people and times she enables us to touch. We are enriched, and forever grateful.

Bearsville, 20

Prince of Annwn



BOOK ONE



DESCENT INTO THE ABYSS

In memory of a girl who loved all things Celtic and magical; I hope that she would have enjoyed this book.

The Hunter and the Hunted



THAT DAY Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, who thought he was going out to hunt, was in reality going out to be hunted, and by no beast or man of earth.

The night before he had slept at Llyn Diarwya, that lay halfway between royal Arberth, his chief seat, and the deep woods of Glen Cuch. And at moonset, in the last thick darkness before dawn, he awoke there.

He woke suddenly, as if a bell had been rung in his ear. Startled, he peered round him, but saw only a sight-swallowing blackness that soon thinned to a darkness full of things yet darker. Of half-shape and constantly reshaping somethings such as always haunt the lightless depths of night, and make it seem mysterious and terrible. He saw nothing that meant anything, and if he had heard anything he did not hear it again.

Then, sharp as an order, came memory: "*You have come to hunt in Glen Cuch, so why not get to it?*" "By the God my people swear by, I will do that!" said Pwyll, and he jumped out of bed.

He roused out men, dogs, and horses, he drove them forth with their breakfast only half eaten.

"I wish he would get married," grumbled one man, looking sorrowfully back at his food as he made for the door. "Then he would get up later in the morning."

"He would have here if our host's wife had been young and pretty," mumbled a second man, still chewing. "Then he might have stayed in bed till noon." Which was true, for Pwyll was of the New Tribes, among whom hospitality included the use of one's wife as well as of one's best food and bed. It was different with the Old Tribes, who did not know marriage and whose women slept with men only when it pleased them, although they often pleased.

But that morning Pwyll would not have stayed in bed if the loveliest woman in the world had been there with him. The *Mabinogi* says that it pleased him to go hunting, but the fact is that it pleased somebody else. The idea had been planted in his brain by another, one far older, more subtle, and more mightier. Pwyll, who liked to do as he pleased, whose wont it was to give orders, not to take them, never dreamed that he was being as obedient as one of his own hounds.

Out into the first feeble grey of dawn he rode, his hungry, sulky men with him. Soon the forest of Glen Cuch loomed before them, still black as night, mighty with the mystery and darkness that fill a deep forests. At its edge the men dismounted, for horses, like the sun, never could have pierced far into those depths.

Pwyll's horn sounded, and the dogs were loosed. For a space the huge beasts stood sniffing, reared-eyed, the hair on their backs rising. Then, with a great wild bellowing they were off. The black woods closed over them like gigantic jaws.

One man, looking after them, said uneasily: "I never saw them act quite like that before."

Pwyll laughed. "They have scented something. Let us go find out what!" And he charged into the

darkness after the dogs.

~~For a little while he could not see anything. He pushed and broke his way through dense undergrowth, snapping off branches, and getting switched by branches that he had not snapped off. He knew that his men were all around him, for he heard them lumbering as clumsily as he through the undergrowth, and swearing when they too got switched. But ahead of them all still rang the wild baying of the hounds.~~

This wood has always been thick, Pwyll thought, puzzled. But the last time I was here it was not nearly this thick.

Yet the belling of the hounds drew him irresistibly, that being which is wilder and more eerie and sweeter than any other sound on earth. He pressed on, heedless of torn clothes, and of the skin that was going with them. He listened so hard to the dogs that for some time he did not notice he had ceased to hear any sound from his men. *Well*, he thought, when he did realize his aloneness, *sooner or later you will all catch up with the dogs.*

But the way grew no easier and the belling no nearer, and presently it came to Pwyll that he had been fighting that slashing underbrush for far too long a time. Long ago sunlight should have begun to fall in bright patches through the green leaves above his head; daylight of some kind, at least. He began to wish that he could hear some of his men, no matter how far off, and to be ashamed of how much he wished it.

This forest must be thicker than any other forest in the world. It is certainly too thick. But She casts much rain last winter; that must be why.

The Welsh say, "She is casting rain," not "it is raining," and in Pwyll's day men still knew why. Rain and sun, crops and the wombs of beasts and women, all were ruled by that old, mysterious Goddess from whose own womb all things had come in the beginning. The wild places were Hers, and the wild things were Her children. Men of the New Tribes, Pwyll's proud golden warrior-kind, left Her worship to women, made offerings only to their Man-Gods, who brought them battle and loot. But now Pwyll began to wonder if those hunters were right who said that all who went into the woods to slay Her horned and furry children should first make offerings to Her, and promise not to kill too many. So folk of the Old Tribes had always done.

I do not know what You like, Lady, but whatever it is, You shall have it. Only get me out of here.

When he got home he would ask several women what She liked, all young ones. This plan cheered him, evoking pleasant images, but in that gloomy wood they soon faded.

Of a sudden the belling rang out fiercely, with the savage joy of dogs who are almost upon the quarry. But it was coming from the west, and the belling of Pwyll's dogs had always come from the east. Also it was not their cry. But swiftly the excited baying of Pwyll's hounds followed it; they too had turned west. The quarry must have changed its course; soon the two packs would meet! And that meeting could be bloody.

Pwyll could not run through those lashing brambles, but he crashed through them, losing more skin. His leaping feet flew above stones and roots that tried to trip him.

Ahead of him the forest seemed to open like a door. He saw a green glade, flat and open beneath the leaden sky. He stopped.

This place never has been here before. It cannot be a right place. Ought a man to go into it?

But then his own dogs came running into the far end of that glade, and his heart leapt. His mouth opened to call to them, but before any noise could come out of it a huge stag leapt out of the forest just ahead of him. Its tongue was hanging out, its eyes were mad with fear, and the strange hounds ran just behind it!

Their baying filled earth and heaven; it seemed to split Pwyll's eardrums. Before his swimming eyes flashed whiteness, whiteness that blazed like flame and shone like snow. Many bodies struck

him; swifter than the wind, colder than snow, they knocked him down and leapt over him, they rushed on after the stag. In the middle of the glade they caught it, and they pulled it down.

As he stumbled to his feet Pwyll heard its tortured death cry. He stood dazed, watching those white shapes tear at the brown body that still twitched upon the ground, the long legs that a moment before had been so swift and powerful jerking feebly as the fierce fangs gnawed its flesh.

The eyes and ears and the blood-dripping teeth of those strange dogs glowed red, red as fire, but their white bodies glittered more savagely, with an unnatural, deathlike brilliance of paleness. Blackness terrifies; it is sightlessness, it blinds a man and hides his enemies; yet the darkness within the earth is warm and life giving, the womb of the Mother, the source of all growth. But in snow or white-hot flame nothing can grow. Whiteness means annihilation, that end from which can come no beginning.

How long he might have watched that dreadful feeding Pwyll never knew. Silence roused him; deathly silence that was broken only by the joyous, yet still savage growling of the victors.

His own dogs were not making any noise at all.

They were still there; at the far end of the clearing they crouched shivering. Every hair on their bodies stood up as still and straight as grass.

They were picked fighters; never before had they been known to turn tail before any foe. Always before they would have leapt light-swift, an ecstasy of rending fangs and claws, upon any other pack caught daring to hunt in any forest where Pwyll hunted. But now they cowered and shivered, afraid to tackle those unnatural, death-white dogs.

Pwyll saw that, and he could not bear it. He was young—not quite three winters had he been Lord of Dyved—and pride was still stronger in him than discretion. Also he was a little afraid himself, and what afflicts ourselves is often what we most despise in others.

He looked sternly at his dogs. "Take that stag!"

They looked at him beseechingly; they wagged their tails, begging him to change his mind. Their eyes said pitifully: "*Lord, we have always done your bidding. Anything we can do for you we will always do. But this . . . Do not ask it of us, Lord; do not . . .*"

And because he himself was afraid that they could not do it Pwyll was miserable; also their misery hurt him. And because he felt guilty he glared at them harder than ever.

"I said: take that stag!"

They cowered yet lower; they whined.

He never had struck any of them. They were his darlings and his heart's pride. Yet now he stooped and picked up a stick.

They could not bear that; death was less dreadful to them than his wrath. They moved, they advanced, tails down, bodies trembling.

Pwyll dropped the stick and drew his sword. He would not let them fight alone.

But when the stranger dogs saw them coming they backed away. With their nostrils full of the scent of blood, with their terrible, fanged mouths full of the meat and its good taste, they backed away from the hot, steaming flesh of their kill. Silently they went, their eyes gleaming redder than the bloodstained fangs, and to the watching man it seemed that those red eyes were mocking.

Pwyll did not like that retreat. No right dogs would have behaved like that. They should have fought; even if they knew that they were trespassing and were afraid, they should have shown disappointment.

Gingerly his own dogs approached the stag, but once they tasted its blood they began to tear joyfully, growling deep in their throats. Though from time to time they stole wary glances at those pale, shining strangers, who stood off and watched, silent at the trees.

Pwyll never took his eyes off the strange dogs. Their red eyes stared back at him with a mo-

undoggish straightness, with a glowing fierceness, an almost intolerable brightness; it took all his will not to look away.

“They are waiting for something,” thought Pwyll. He glanced over his shoulder toward the west from which they had come. But there was nothing there; only trees.

His heart leapt, then sank; there was Something!

A namelessness, a far-off greyness, not solid enough to be a beast, too thin to be fog . . .

It was moving! It was coming, neither swiftly nor slowly, but with an awful, steady sureness. Whatever shape was on it, man, beast or cloud, Pwyll could not tell; he knew only that, whatever it was, when he got there he would wish it was something else.

The bole of one enormous old tree hid it; for a breath’s space Pwyll could not see it, and then a Grey Man on a Grey Horse rode out into the glade. And Pwyll’s hand, that had leapt to his sword-hilt, froze there, and his eyes stared as if frozen in his head.

Both horse and rider were solid now. They looked bigger than they should have, and every part of them, hair and hide, hoof, clothing, and skin, was of precisely the same color. The same terrible, corpse-like grey.

All but the Man’s eyes.

Pwyll did not want to meet those eyes, but he could not escape them. Through their shining blackness cold seemed to stream through his blood and bones. Knowledge streamed with him, knowledge that he could neither understand nor keep. His brain reeled away from that awful wisdom that poured into it as into a cup, and overturned it, and was spilled again.

He could not close his eyes; he shuddered and covered them with his hands, to shut out those other eyes. He was glad, blessedly glad, that he could still move his hands.

The Horseman spoke then, and his voice had a note of the wind in it, of a wind blowing through a great space; in that it was like the baying of his dogs. But his words were ordinary enough.

“Prince,” he said, “I know who you are, and it is not a good day I give you.”

Nothing seems likelier, thought Pwyll, *than that you will give me a bad one. But I am a man, and I will not shame my manhood.* He threw back his head and looked at the stranger, and was delighted to find that now he could do it. Words or blows, these he could trade with any foe.

“Well, Lord,” he said dryly, “perhaps your dignity is so great that it is beneath it to greet me.” That was irony; these were his lands, and he was Lord of them, and the stranger had entered them unbidden.

But the other was unabashed. “By the Gods, it is not my dignity that stops me!”

“Then what is it?”

“By all the Gods,”—and Pwyll wondered if he were one of them and were swearing by himself—“it is your own ignorance and bad manners!”

Pwyll stiffened. His grey eyes had the glint of ice. “What bad manners have you seen in me, stranger?”

“Never have I seen worse manners than to drive away the dogs that had made the kill, and to scatter your own pack on the carcass!” Thunder rolled in the deep voice.

“If I have done you wrong,” said Pwyll quietly, “I will pay you whatever face-price is due your rank. I do not know what this is for I do not know you.”

Suddenly all became very still. No leaf moved, no wind stirred, the birds of the air hung motionless and the snakes ceased to slither in the deep grasses. Even the dogs stopped chewing, though their mouths were full of meat.

“I am a crowned King in the land whence I come.” The stranger’s voice was low, yet the wild vastness of the wind was in it, and something within Pwyll shrank.

“Good day to you then, Lord King.” He kept his voice and eyes steady. “What land is that?”

“Annwn. Arawn, a King in Annwn, I am named.”

Then indeed did great cold pour through Pwyll again, freezing him, blood and bone. For I understood.

Our world is one of many. The uninstructed group them all together in the lovely, capricious, even perilous realm of Faery, but Pwyll, being of kingly blood, had had some druidic instruction forced upon him. He knew that the Otherworld nearest earth was Annwn, the Abyss; that primal womb in which all things first took shape. There a horde of nameless beings had struggled up, through form after form, until after untold ages, they were ready to be born upon earth as men. There most men returned at death, only a few being able to go on to a higher, brighter place. "Every world has its Grey Man," his cousin Pendaran Dyved, the only druid he trusted, once had told Pwyll. "Only among us earth none dwells, because we are afraid to look upon his face. So he that dwells in Annwn is our Lord also. He is the gardener who tends every garden. He gathers the flowers and the ripe fruit, to make room for the new to grow. He fells the old trees, that the young trees may have room to grow."

And Arawn was the Grey Man of Annwn, the Master of the hounds of the Mother: Arawn, whose other name was Death.

Dizzily Pwyll thought: *Am I dying? But what happened to me? I am young and strong; I do not remember being killed.*

If he had been, surely he would have noticed something. But then why was Death here? He would not meet those awful eyes, he turned his head away, he looked hard and hungrily at the trees and grasses. Things he always had taken for granted, but that now seemed very precious, very dear.

Yet he felt those eyes. They burned through the side of his head, through his flesh, into his skull. Until at last he turned and faced Arawn.

"I promised you whatever face-price was your due. Take it, Lord King." He swallowed, but he said it.

The Meeting in the Forest



ARAWN SAID quietly: “No man may flee long from my hounds and me; we need no tricks to run him down. I do not seek your life, Lord of Dyved.”

“Then what do you want?” Pwyll felt dizzy than ever, but with relief now.

“All men’s lives are mine to claim when the time comes, so all men may be called my subjects. You know that one service is all I have the right to claim. So, needing another from you, I arranged this meeting.”

As lightning flashes upon a man in darkness, unseen hills and valleys blazing out of blackness into fiery splendor before his eyes, so Pwyll saw. He understood. Not by chance had he wakened and wished to go forth into the dawn; into that twilight dimness which is neither night nor day, and when, at dusk, Beings without our gross flesh find it easiest to show themselves to men. He had walked into a trap, and here was the trapper.

“You are right,” said Arawn, “I planned all.” And Pwyll knew that to this mighty Being thoughts were as loud as words; no secret could be hidden from him.

He said, “I should have known! When I saw this glade where no glade ever was before, I should have known that I had ridden out of my world into yours!”

“That is so. Nothing in your world but mirrors something that was first in Annwn. You walk now in Glen Cuch as the Mother first dreamed it, not as it is on earth.”

“But why bring me here? What on earth—or off it—can a man do for a God?”

“There is a Lord whose lands lie opposite mine; Havgan, another King in Annwn. Once he ruled the dead of the Eastern World as I rule the dead of the West, but now he moves westward. He sits in Anghar the Loveless, he wars on me always, he would be master of all. To spare my people I agreed that both realms should be staked on single combat, to be fought again in a year and a day, if we both lived. So we fought, and I slew him.”

“But then it is all over! You won, and he is dead.” Then Pwyll remembered that everybody in Arawn’s world was dead, and scratched his head. “I never have believed those old wives’ tales about people who died on earth going to the moon, and people who died on the moon going to the sun, yet anybody who dies in your world, Lord, must have to go on to one that is even deader.”

Arawn smiled. “True. Those tales of sun and moon are for children, yet some truth is in them, even as something of a man, though little of him is in his likeness in a mirror. It is not good to lie to children.”

Pwyll groaned. “You mean that although Annwn is not the moon, it is the moon?”

“It is the World of Middle Light, not the hard, bright place that earth is. My people are still much like your people; they know neither age nor sickness, but they still fight and slay one another, though

not nearly so often as you do on earth. They may have many births on Annwn, but when they learn enough they are born into the Bright World, of which your sun is but the shadow. Where another Grey Man sits as Lord, where no man lifts hand against another, though he may know other, subtler perils.

“That other Grey Man—is he your kin?”

“There are Beings who cast shadows in many worlds. We Grey Men may all be shadows of One beyond your imagining; Havgan may be one of the Shadows of Another.”

“I hope,” said Pwyll simply, “that whatever it is you want me to do for you is something I can do without understanding what it is.”

“The first part is only killing, which you have done often, whether you fully understood the deed or not. A year ago today I fought Havgan, and tomorrow you must meet him in my place. Meet him at the ford where warriors meet, and slay him if you can.”

“Lord, how can I kill him if you could not?”

“Against him I no longer have any power, and no champion of mine can do what I cannot. All the might of Annwn is powerless against him now. But you are called a bull of battle and a woe to your enemies—the savage, rough strength of earth may do what we cannot.”

“You think well of earth,” said Pwyll, a trifle stiffly.

Arawn smiled again. “Every rung has its place in the ladder. But I meant no offense.”

“There is certainly one good thing about earth,” said Pwyll. “When you kill a man there he stays dead. You have no more trouble with him, though his friends and kin may try to make some.”

“It is not Havgan’s friends or kin that will come against me tomorrow,” said Arawn, “but himself and him none can slay a second time.”

“That last is not queer. What I cannot understand is why he did not stay dead the first time.” Pwyll spoke lightly, but his head swam. What help could Death need in killing? And what would happen to men if—inconceivable thought!—Death himself should die?

“Build no hopes on that.” Again Arawn had read his thoughts. “Havgan too is Death, and if I fall he will slay as I never slew. All the worlds he can reach he will burn and tear and wreck. He will overturn the order that I have maintained throughout the ages, I the Firstborn and Servant of the Mother.”

For a breath’s space there was silence. Then Pwyll said quietly: “Tell me what to do and I will do it.”

Arawn looked at him, and in the measureless depths of his strange, sun-bright black eyes was sorrow and pity beyond man’s understanding: the pity of a man for a child’s sorrow, and the pity of God for his suffering creation. For the misery that he has caused all creatures by creating them, all must share, or be less than God or man.

“You rode into Annwn unknowingly, you took only what you thought was your right. Though your heedlessness made your entrapment possible, yet a generous host would claim no face-price. The deed, if you do it, must be freely done.”

“I pay my debts.” Pwyll’s chin rose proudly.

“You are too proud a warrior to fear Death. Yet you risk what you might think worse than dying. You ride into perils you cannot dream of.”

“Whatever must be paid I will pay it,” said Pwyll, “not for a stag’s carcass—that I think you should forgive me for—but because my world, as well as yours, is at stake. That much I think I understand.”

“Then let us swear friendship together,” said Arawn. “Make ourselves close as brothers. No man born ever has sworn that oath with Death.”

So they swore the oath, and Pwyll felt both awe and pride, he who now was Death’s sworn brother. Oaths had great power then; ages after the Welsh country-folk still knew of one so powerful that he whose lips took it might wither away and perish, however well he kept it.

“Now I will send you to my own place,” said Arawn. Pwyll started and once more the Grey Man

smiled. “Fear nothing. Tonight you shall sit in my seat and sleep in my bed, and the loveliest lady you have ever seen will sleep with you there. For my shape will be on you, and neither my Queen nor the officer of our bedchamber—not a man of all the men that follow me—will know your face from my face. So it shall be until we meet again, in this same spot. After you have slain Havgan.”

Pwyll could not help drawing a deep breath of relief. *So I will get back to earth.* This going down into the Abyss was to be only a visit, not a polite way of killing him, after all.

“Guard yourself well,” said Arawn. “Havgan is the mightiest of warriors and the wiliest. He has arms and skills such as I have never seen in all the ages, I who have been present at all the battles of me being Death.”

“Yet you killed him?” Pwyll began to wonder if he could.

“With one great blow. As you must. Your true ordeal will come afterwards; when he lies broken at your feet.”

“How can that be?” Pwyll was bewildered. “I will simply cut his head off then and make an end of it. Never have I dragged out any foe’s death agonies.”

His voice died, frozen in his throat by the awfulness of Arawn’s face.

“Then indeed you will be lost. Whatever happens—and your heart will bleed for him as for your brother, born of one mother—strike him no second blow. So I, a God, was beguiled. I saw only him; I heard only him; his agony seemed to tear my own flesh. So I yielded my will to his will, and he who does that has no more power against him forever.”

“What happened?” Pwyll stared in wonder.

“When he begged me to cut off his head and put him out of his pain I did it—and the head jumped straight back onto his shoulders and grew fast there. He leapt up and fought again as well as ever. Barely did I escape from him.”

Pwyll whistled. “That one,” said he, “is a bad enemy to have.”

“I have him,” said Arawn grimly, “and if he slays you he will have my people and my world. And soon, yours.”

“Well”—Pwyll’s grin flashed again and he shrugged—“some day an enemy who is on his feet may get my head, but I think that when dealing with one who lies at my feet I will always be able to keep it.”

“May that be true, Lord of Dyved! May your will be as strong as your arm—and both will need strength.” Arawn’s eyes were deeper than the sea, his voice had the rolling majesty of deep waters; of that ocean which, more than anything else that man can feel or touch, wears the likeness of infinity. “For my sake, and for your sake, and for the sake of all Gods and men.”

So Pwyll rode down into Annwn to kill the man whom Death himself could not kill. He rode the Grey Horse, and when he looked down he saw grey hands on the bridle, hands that were not shaped like his hands. He did not look down often, because the sight disconcerted him. He told himself uneasily: *Down underneath it is the same old stuff—the stuff that is me. It must be!*

But was it? In that wild moment when his whole self had spun round and round—when his skin had seemed but a heaving, whirling cover over Chaos—anything might have happened. His soul might have been torn loose and blown into Arawn’s body, and Arawn’s soul might have been blown into his. Few earth-born men of illusion and fantasy could reshape matter, they could only throw a false appearance, cloaklike, upon what they bewitched. But the King of the Dead must be a mightier magician than any born on earth.

I have my own soul, anyway, Pwyll comforted himself. *The druids would say that was the real me.*

He did not like the druids, he never had understood their Mysteries, which he believed they often

used to gain their own ends, but now that bit of their lore warmed his heart.

He had not understood at first that there was to be an exchange of shapes—something that would give Arawn the chance to take his body. He had said, troubled: “But my people—great fear and worry will be on everybody when I do not return from the hunt.” And the Other had smiled. “No, for I shall be there in your place. Not a man or woman in Dyved will know my face from your face.”

“But how will I find your palace?” Pwyll had scrambled wildly for objections. “And how would I know who was who if I got there? A King should know his people—”

“Give the Grey his head, and he will bear you where you should go. And when your people sleep, I will be with you again. I myself will be your guide, and the way to my palace shall be clear before you.”

And so it had been done, though at first Pwyll had felt as outraged as if some strange man had borrowed his horse or his hounds or his sword without leave, all the best of their kind in Dyved, and all cherished like beloved children.

My body too is the best of its kind in Dyved, he reflected. Many men have told me so, watching me practicing my battle feats. And so have many women, when I was practicing other kinds of feats.

There, with the drear mists of the Underworld rising about him, he grinned, remembering old prowess, old delights. But not for long. He had his soul, but he wanted his body too, the strong, warlike young flesh he was used to and proud of. It had been a bad moment when Arawn had whistled, and Pwyll’s dogs had followed him without a backward glance at Pwyll. It is a queer thing to watch yourself walking away from yourself.

Well, I will have his things too, just as he has mine . . . What will she be like, Arawn’s Queen? I shall have the better of him there, for I have no wife for him to sleep with.

Not that he really meant to touch Arawn’s Queen. Courtesy had compelled Death to offer her, just as courtesy would compel Pwyll to refrain from her. A man was expected to sleep with his own men and wives; that was the best way to keep a tribe strong, filling it with the sons of its leaders, of its mightiest men. Pwyll deflowered every well-born bride in Dyved on her wedding night, and some that were not wellborn if they were pretty. If ever the High King of the Island of the Mighty visited Pwyll, he would sleep with Pwyll’s Queen—if there was such a person then. But Arawn was not Pwyll’s man, but his equal and more. To take advantage of his generosity would be an ungentlemanly act.

And if the lady is the same color as her Lord it will be easy to be a gentleman, he thought. Though of course I will be seeing her through Arawn’s eyes . . .

Or through eyes made over to look like Arawn’s. There it was again. He would have liked to be sure that he still had his real self, all of himself. Also in battle a man does best with his own familiar weapons, and Pwyll would have liked to be sure that he had his own good, well-trained muscles. He sighed.

He had hoped soon to use those muscles in profitable earthly combat. Great Bell the High King was failing, and with him might die the peace that for many winters his strength and his justice had kept between Old Tribes and New. Bell was of the Old Tribes, so his heirs would be his sister’s sons, the Children of Llyr, but in secret his own son, Caswallon, was already wooing the Lords of the New Tribes with questionable promises. “Help me to seize my father’s throne before Bran, son of Llyr, has planted his big behind there long enough to grow strong. Then you shall be as the King’s brothers, you shall lord it over the Old Tribes. Over those weaklings who think themselves mightier than you, though when your fore-bears swooped down like eagles upon the Island of the Mighty, they were not strong enough to drive them back into the sea.” To Pwyll, Caswallon smelled like a traitor; a man whose own people were his people, he should always think them the best of all, whatever they were. Yet so should follow father, and Dyved was a little land now; the New Tribes never had been able to take a hold of it. Pwyll wanted seven more cantrevs, and he could get them out of Caswallon the Cunning if he

moved quickly, before the new King grew strong enough to forget his promises.

But will I get back now in time to help Caswallon? Earthly time is different from Otherworld time, wish I had asked Arawn about that. I wish Arawn would get back . . .

The mists about him were growing ever more chill and drear. He had given the Grey his head, and any horse should know the way home to his own feeding trough. Yet if this was the way to Arawn's palace it was not a pleasant way.

Then it seemed to Pwyll that he heard something. A sound so far off, so eerily mighty, that he could not give it a name.

The Meeting on the Moors



IT WAS no right sound. Pwyll stopped his Horse, he listened, straining his ears, but now the cloud greyness smothered all sound. Nothing broke it, none of the myriad tiny sounds that weave themselves into a living tapestry to cover the forests and fields of earth. To fill the houses of men at night. Pwyll strained his eyes, but he might as well have been blind. He opened his mouth to call out in challenge but the mists rushed into it, cold and slimy, like half-solid hands trying to claw their way down into the warm solidity that was himself. He shut his mouth again, rather fast. Something might indeed come at his call, but would that something be good to see?

He shook himself; such feelings were unworthy of a bull of battle. “Am I the Lord of Dyved? Soon you will be calling for my mother like a little girl waking up in the middle of the night with a bellyache. He did not say “bad dreams”; somehow they did not seem like things that should be mentioned, here. “Well, go ahead again, Grey.”

The Grey of Arawn went; this time he sped forward. Quickly, purposefully, he galloped through the mists. Pwyll felt the hard, powerful body under his knees, but there was none of the warrior comradeship he had always enjoyed with his own chestnut stallion, his dear Kein Galed, that Arawn had now. He had always told his chestnut where to go; now he was going wherever this strange Grey Horse chose to carry him. And it seemed to him that they were heading toward the place from which that mysterious sound had come.

There was no sound now. They galloped on and on through grey sightlessness and grey soundlessness. Until Pwyll began to feel that he would be glad to hear anything, any kind of a noise at all. And then he heard it.

It was a great chopping noise that struck the deathly silence as a blow strikes flesh, and several great grinding noises followed it. Soon there was another crashing chop, then more grinding. Many carpenters and woodcutters working together, Pwyll told himself firmly, might make such noises.

Though if those were saws—he cringed as another grinding noise seemed to drive through both his ears and down into his stomach—I never have heard saws I liked the sound of less . . . Ow! That must have been a great tree! For there had been another mighty chop.

On earth carpenters and woodcutters seldom worked together, but this was not earth, and where people were Arawn’s palace might be. These could be his workmen: Death’s workmen.

They sound like it. The noises were setting Pwyll’s teeth on edge, though he would not admit to himself that they made his flesh crawl. He listened intently as the Grey sped on. *They are keeping time like musicians, but they certainly do not sound like palace musicians. I do not believe any King, dead or alive, would have them in his hall . . . They are not only keeping time, all those noises sound as if they were being made by one Thing!*

For a breath’s space he wavered, his hands tightened on the bridle. But the Grey clearly wanted

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