



The Tale of Tylluan Lwyd

C.Vincent Jonas



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cvincentjonas.books@gmail.com

So there I was; dead. I killed myself. Ironically though, it was only after my body had been taken away that I really started to contemplate my death. Staring at my rotting corpse had not caused the situation to really dawn on me in a way one might expect. With my body gone and nothing but time on my hands, or an absence of time, the separation started to slowly sink in for me. I was no longer a physical being but I was aware. I had also been stuck hanging in midair since my death. "So now what?" I said to no one. "Shouldn't there be some kind of light or something?" Maybe I didn't get one since I committed suicide. I had lived within a typical religious culture but I had not been devout so I wasn't really sure what to expect. I had hoped for nothing; oblivion. I didn't want a peaceful slumber. I wanted neither heaven nor hell, nor any shred of consciousness. I wanted to altogether cease to exist. But there I was. I may have been lost in reverie indefinitely had I not been shaken to attention by the sound of a great whooshing coming through the door from outside the room I was in. It was rapidly oscillating and deep. It sounded like an animal. It sounded like an animal sniffing but it was so loud. Suddenly it stopped. I would have held my breath out of fear had I been living. I watched the doorway, enraptured, when a low rumbling sound split the pregnant silence. It was like an idling motorcycle that soon revved into a deep snarl. Something shimmering slowly stepped into the doorway. It was an enormous hound the size of a pony! The hound was shimmering white except for its pointed red ears. Its head was tilted down with teeth bared and eyes fixed directly on mine as it slowly stepped over the threshold. In a flash, the hound leapt and snatched me into its gaping maw. They were the jaws of death and everything went black in exactly the way I had hoped it

wouldn't. I was aware of the infinite darkness surrounding me for what could have been an eternity but I had no way of knowing, as time was a concept that no longer had any substance. Eventually there was a piercing flash of scenery that appeared out of nowhere and I was lying on my back staring up at the jaws of death. A peaceful and soothing voice assuaged my fear as it called out "Come, Dormarth" and the hound stepped away toward its master. The master patted the hound on its massive head while I quickly jumped to my feet and oriented myself. I stood facing the master, sizing him up. He was about as tall as me and was very fair, pale even, except his face was blackened around his icy blue eyes with what looked like ash. His shaggy hair and beard framed his face like a mane that shimmered like Dormarth's fur. Crowning his head were stately white antlers with each jabbing point blackened with ash as well. He was wrapped in a cloak of vibrant feathers. "Do not fear," the master announced. It was strange that I felt calmed by his voice despite his unsettling appearance and the presence of his great beast. "Who are you?" I asked, trying my best not to stammer. "I am Gwyn," he stated kindly. "I am master of the hunt and of this land. This is my huntsman, Iolo," he said as he gestured toward a similarly fair man. Iolo appeared much more well kempt and lacked the ash and antlers. He wore a blue cloak instead of feathers. "And you have already met Dormarth, the finest of the Cwn Annwn." Gwyn then looked to me. "Who are you?" he asked in return. I thought for a moment. A question had never seemed so foreign to me and I didn't know how to answer. "Who am I?" I asked rhetorically while I gazed hard at nothing. My gaze shifted to Gwyn's face which wore a bit of a knowing smirk. "Who am I?" I asked more aggressively than I was wont. Gwyn chuckled and his grin widened. "Do not worry, my friend, things will become

clearer to you in time." "No!" I said adamantly. I softened. "Please," I squeaked more desperately. "You are Tylluan Lwyd!" Gwyn's voice thundered cheerfully. "You are my death omen." I smiled and laughed nervously, feeling confused. When Gwyn didn't offer a punch line, the edges of my smile sagged and my eyes became serious. I couldn't help but stammer a little this time. "Are you..." I managed. "Are you God?" I whispered. Gwyn smirked sympathetically as if he thought the question was cute. "I am King of Annwn, Chief among Fair Folk. God is here, but not in the way you might imagine. Come, let us go now. The Council is waiting to see you." Anticipating my protest, Gwyn added "You will find patience goes a long way toward understanding." The scenery shifted around us into a twisting mist that rose from the ground and settled to reveal a building of iridescent glass. "This is the Hall of Acquirement where you will meet with the Council," Gwyn explained. "I will continue the hunt while you confer. The hunt is anchored to the arrow of material entropy which requires my continuous attention, but Annwn itself does not share this experience. As such, two physical beings may perish together and I meet them separately, years apart for me, but at the same time for them and this does not violate natural law. I will continue the hunt for a thousand years or more while you are in the Hall of Acquirement. I will also be here when you return in a few moments, then you and I shall continue the hunt together." My expression was blank. "Go now," he said. A smokey, twisting mist rose up behind me. I turned and could see the bowels of the Hall of Acquirement through the cloud of slithering tendrils of mist. The tendrils gently wrapped around and enclosed me. I suddenly found myself standing on the other side of the mist, inside of the Hall of Acquirement. I was standing amidst six wizened elders who were all cloaked in purple. They appeared translucent and ghostly. For a

brief moment, I felt a sense of reluctance rise up in me as I stood in the presence of authority. "There is no judgement here," one of the Council said knowingly. "You have been through much and there is much to discuss, but there is understanding and peace always." "You are Tylluan Lwyd, death omen of Gwyn ap Nudd," continued another. "By the Fates, you always have been, but understanding is requisite." "But who was I?" I asked. "I had a family. I have memories. Oh, there are so many memories it makes me dizzy. I don't know who I am in them all. I don't know what sequence they should be in." One of the Council stopped my rising panic. "You have had the countless names and faces of innumerable overlapping lives. Now we are to connect with and examine everything you have ever felt or caused another being to feel, so that you may calibrate to an ethical compass. Your lives have been easy and your lives have been difficult. You have suffered as a victim. You have caused others to suffer. In many cases, you have been your own victim and perpetrator, and aspects of your lives were put into motion by you against you, come what may. We will experience all of it together." "What authority do you have? Who even are you?" I demanded to know. This certainly sounded like judgement coming on. One of the Council answered placidly, "Everything is voluntary but requires consensus. There is no authority the way you imagine. You don't answer to us, though you are beholden to your peers in your soul group. We are the elders of your soul group. There are other elders like us who guide other soul groups. We are older than the eons of this universe as you know it and have lived many lives. The number of lives you have lived across the millennia is but a moment for us. We are powerful, as you surmise, but we are, for all intents and purposes, part of the natural universe and identical to you as well as every soul in Annwn. Your dead are among the ranks of the Fair Folk but a

majority of them have never lived as a physical being. Nor have creatures like the Cwn Annwn. You are powerful too, Tylluan Lwyd. As powerful as any other essence of God, but you must obtain perspective in order to be of service in the material and unseen worlds. Understand there is no such thing as good and evil in the sense that you imagine it. You learned differently in each life with many seemingly conflicting and contrary ideas. It is time for you to see the bigger picture, all at once, rather than each individual fragment of a lifetime. You will know that you have bled from God's body and that all paths lead home." "What about the devil?" I argued. "If God is here, then so too is the devil, right? Where is the devil in all this?" The Council was lovingly patient in the face of my petulance. "Searching, searching, always searching, but it is all around you. Everything will be stripped away and you will see," stated one of the Council. "Don't look for it because it cannot be seen with your eyes, only experienced and known." "What is the devil? It is a culturally dependent archetype of a fluid concept of badness," one of them explained. "You will find no devil, only God anywhere in everything," continued another. "Each of us is God," confirmed a third. "We are sparks of the same primordial flame but none of us is the fire in its entirety. The fire is us but we are not it. The fire in its entirety is, in fact, all around you. It is the seen and the unseen. It is sentience itself. God is and there is nothing else." "The universe is balanced but not between what you might imagine as light and dark or good and evil. Ancient beings of chaos are as much an indispensable part of nature as those of order and neither one can be considered good or evil. They exist in harmony, not struggle." "How can there be balance if there is a God and no devil?" I pointed out smugly. "God is not the opposite of what you imagine the devil to be, so there is no imbalance that necessitates a devil in the first place," one

of the Council corrected. "God is balance. Everything is exactly as it should be and God is the responsive totality, which you might imagine as inherent and universal consciousness." My thoughts were reeling. I couldn't focus. This was too much to grasp. All I could think was that a council of six seemed peculiar. Six got a bad rap with the whole mark of the beast and it always seemed inauspicious. "Why a council of six?" I blurted out. "Three is the arch number," began one of the Council, "but everything exists in pairs. Imagine it as separate sides of the same coin. Three paired with three is six, making six the sacred number of balance. There are six elements that render existence possible – water, earth, wind, fire, spirit, and what the living psyche cannot fully grasp, love; six directions of form – east, south, west, north, down, and up; six stages of life – infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and time-between; the six parts of a physical being – body, blood soul, bone soul and that of its helpmate counterpart." "Wait a minute," I interrupted. I have two souls?" I asked, scanning the edges of the room. "Is there another me?" I questioned, not wanting any surprises. "No. You will benefit going forth knowing this, so listen well. The blood soul can be imagined as the spirit you possess as a material being. This spirit is tied to the physical earth and comes from the Wind, in which the world is enveloped. Wind is drawn into bodies grown of the Earth, and mixes in the blood, giving life to matter. The blood soul is finite and dissipates back into the Wind from which it came when blood ceases to flow, while the body once again becomes Earth. The bone soul is borne of God and is timeless. It resides in the deepest recesses of a being. You might imagine it as awareness that can transmigrate material objects. The bone soul can make its home in a tree, a boulder, a lake, a mountain, even a star; anything. Of course, it can also be born into a living material body. This pure

consciousness contains soul knowledge, which is wisdom and perspective attained through time and experience. These are traits of the material world. A living body created from the union of the Wind and Earth can exist without the bone soul for a time, as witnessed when it leaves the body during sleep. If the connection is lost, the body will die shortly thereafter. However, the blood soul and the body tend to be shallow and hedonistic, even quite gluttonous and rapacious at times. The blood soul dissipates and the material body dies, but a bone soul can be neither created nor destroyed except by God; never ceasing to exist but merely changing form. A scattered bone soul may become anchored to the land or a material object temporarily, but always returns to its true nature without exception." "Does the Council intervene in the case of a living body without a bone soul?" I wondered. "That sounds dangerous." "The Council can intervene but under most circumstances does not." "What if the Council can't agree and you need to break a tie?" I inquired. "There is never any need to perform what you would imagine as voting. However, consensus requires seven, the seventh of which is you. Consensus is reached without the application of sentimentality but not lacking compassion or consideration either." "I don't understand. I'm not ready for any of this!" I cried, realizing the mist was beginning to swirl around me with its wispy tendrils climbing my body. "Ah but you are!" said one of the Council, delighted. "It was fated by you, your soul group, and this very council. It was your intention to let go. Your helpmate chose to suffer greatly fulfilling what seemed like an insignificant role to you." "I don't remember," I told them. "You will. Unless you wish to walk away?" one of them asked. The tendrils of mist climbed my body. "No," I replied defiantly. The tendrils wrapped around my face and forcefully entered my mouth and nose, slithering into my very being. The things I had

done in all of my many lifetimes flashed across my widened eyes. I saw myself as a rich man and I saw myself as a beggar. The beggar was lying in the shadows of society, shivering with hunger. The rich man strutted past the beggar, who reached out a filthy, trembling hand from which the rich man recoiled. He kicked the beggar away and spit on her. The beggar jumped to her feet and jabbed a flash of blade into the rich man's stomach, snatched his billfold and ran away. So senseless. So oblivious to each other. The lives spiraled around me interweaving in a complex web. Oh, the things I had done; the things done to me; the things I did to myself; but also, the many sacrifices that were made for me and the many sacrifices I had made; the glorious heights of joy and satisfaction; the crushing depths of despair and hatred. Everything flew through my vision in a terrible flash. I felt every moment of love and suffering I had ever caused over the millennia pulsing in me. The Council was there experiencing it with me in its entirety and knowing all my thoughts surrounding each moment in time. I was naked. I could hide nothing. But there was nothing more to conceal. Tears would have been gushing freely from my eyes and flowing down my face. I held my head high, turning my face upward and released a primal scream of agony. I could not contain everything within me. It felt like I was going to burst at the seams. I was blind and lost, swallowed up in the moment forever. My eyelids became a warm blanket sliding over me. There was judgement here alright, but it came from within and not from some external authority figure. Forgiveness came from the same place. Then I understood. Everything made sense. I didn't know everything there was to know about existence. Everything just made sense in a way it never had before. Soul knowledge. I felt utterly tranquil. All was right. When I came to, I was lying on the glass floor of the Hall of Acquirement before

the Council. "Arise," they said in unison. I stood and then I gasped. I looked like one of the Fair Folk! "Let us honor the sacred elements," said one. "Indeed," said another as he raised his hand. Mist lifted off the ground and began to swirl and close around all of us like a giant flower bud. The petals then peeled away and the flower opened, the mist settling back to the ground. We were left standing in a dense, dark grove of oak trees and mossy boulders. It was daytime, but it was cool and dimly lit in the grove. "Tylluan Lwyd, will you please set an altar?" One said as more of a statement than a question. "I will," I said in acceptance. I strode to the tree nearest me. It was old, twisted and gnarled. "Allow me wood from you now and when I am a tree you may have wood from me," I said, expressing gratitude and reciprocation with nature. I took branches from the oak tree, which I then fashioned into a simple mat on top of a stone. It wasn't very good because I didn't know how to make an altar, but it would suffice. It was imbued with my sincere intention at least. The Council approached and one of them set upon my altar a large flat sea shell. Another placed a handful of earth into the recess of the shell. One by one, three more members of the Council stepped forward, each bearing a different artifact they stuck into the earth inside the seashell; a feather, a stick of incense, and a small polished stone. The last of the Council stepped forward and enclosed her palm around the stick of incense. Thick fragrant smoke began to seep between her fingers and upward, out of her hand, as the incense smoldered. "Water, Earth, Wind, Fire, Spirit, Love. The ancient harmonies are given thee," she recited. "Be one with the power of the elements." She rubbed ash from the incense into her fingertips and turned to me. She dabbed three dots onto my forehead, then placed three fingertips in a row across my eyebrows and the bridge of my nose. Slowly, she dragged her fingertips downward,

closing my eyes and leaving three dark streaks down my face. "Wela i ti, Tylluan Lwyd," she whispered mysteriously. "Wela i ti." When I opened my eyes, I was alone in the grove. I surveyed the area more thoroughly than I had previously. The dense, moss-covered forest stretched on endlessly. I didn't know what to do next. Presumably, I was to return to Gwyn but I didn't know how to or where to go. Just then a small, darkly colored bird swooped down into the treetops and landed on a branch high overhead. It began to sing the most beautiful birdsong. I was transfixed on the bird, listening to its voice. It seemed to be looking at me as it sang. The little bird began to hop down some of the branches, and got closer to my position, but a noise in the woods attracted my attention and I looked away. I peered around, feeling quite wary. The forest was quiet; suspiciously quiet. I realized the bird had stopped singing several moments ago. My eyes instinctively darted upward to where I had last seen the bird and I jumped in surprise. On the branch was one of the Fair Folk. There sat a young girl smiling politely. "Hello!" she chirped and leapt lightly down to the ground. I stepped back, although I felt disarmed by her demeanor. "Um, hi," I spoke in reply. "Who are you?" "Oh, you poor thing," giggled the girl. "I'm Aderyn Tywyll," she said with a quaint roll of the r, "death omen of Gwyn ap Nudd. Like you." I was puzzled. "Wait," I stammered. Aderyn Tywyll giggled again and spoke before I had a chance to continue. "Did you think you were the only one?" she asked rather cheerfully. "Well, I didn't, you know, I mean, it may have crossed my mind," I said stumbling over my words. "Come! Follow me! Gwyn is nearby. You don't want the Cwn Annwn to snatch you up," she said as she spun around and flew back up into the branches. In one swift motion Aderyn Tywyll had transformed into the darkly colored bird. But it was too late for me. I had already heard a twig snap somewhere nearby

among the trees. I looked around wildly, expecting to see the jaws of death flash into my face anywhere I looked. Instead, I spied a pale stag with large white antlers, the tips of which were blackened. The stag was flanked by several of the snarling Cwn Annwn. It stepped forward, and in a swirl of mist transformed into Gwyn. "Dormarth," said Gwyn's deep voice. Dormarth, who was standing right next to Gwyn, sat upon hearing the master's voice. The rest of the Cwn Annwn relaxed and lay down lazily on the ground. I felt strangely like a betrayed lover when I laid eyes upon Gwyn. I smiled sheepishly. "I didn't know there were others," I almost mumbled. Gwyn laughed, his eyes twinkling. "The world is teeming with omens, Tylluan Lwyd, and watched by the Fates," he stated matter-of-factly. "Pay close mind and beware of who you offend. Not all omens are mine." "What do you mean?" I asked. "Aren't you the king?" "I am King of Annwn, the Otherworld. I am not master of the universe. There are local deities, demigods, and spirits of the land over whom I hold no sway. I must take my leave but follow Aderyn Tywyll to my consort and ask about Flower Face." Gwyn turned and walked into the forest. As he walked, mist swirled around him and he continued walking as the white stag. Dormarth dutifully rose and followed Gwyn and the rest of the Cwn Annwn followed suit. After the group had receded into the woods, I looked around for Aderyn Tywyll. She had flown down from the canopy now that the Cwn Annwn were gone, and landed on the branch over my head. She changed form and was once again the young girl of the Fair Folk smiling on the branch. "You'll have to have intention," she said. "Intention is very important. It's not just a vague want of something. It's like wanting to move your hand to scratch an itch and actually moving your hand to scratch it. It's like the difference between thinking something versus the intentional act of saying it. Does

that make sense?" "Yeah, actually!" I exclaimed. "That makes sense but what am I supposed to do?" "Follow me!" she cried while she simultaneously jumped, transformed, and streaked upward. I stood staring up feeling dumbfounded, while the darkly colored bird disappeared beyond the treetops. I tried to imitate her and I jumped but nothing happened. I stretched my arms upward and jumped again then a third time. Nothing happened. I climbed up onto the branch on which Aderyn Tywyll had been perched and jumped off. I hit the ground hard and rolled. Sighing, I got to my feet. I closed my eyes while taking a long, deep breath then exhaled purposefully through my pursed lips and started sprinting. Faster and faster, I ran. The trees were whizzing past me in a blur. I began to lean back and could hear small branches snapping within the blur when suddenly I broke through the treetops and soared upward into the sky. I felt such exhilaration as the wind whipped across my face, ruffling downy feathers that were now there. I took a look at myself and saw that I had transformed into a large gray owl. I admired my wingspan and the stout feathers splayed at the tips of my wings. By the time I came to my senses I had flown quite high. Stretching my broad wings, I listed into the breeze, looking for Aderyn Tywyll. It was amazing how much detail I could see. I continued listing into a long slow spiral and scanned the treetops and the skyline. On the horizon I noticed the forest abruptly ended, giving way to a vast and barren plain. It seemed strange but before I could investigate, I caught sight of a darkly colored bird flying in celebratory loops. I straightened my wings and aimed toward Aderyn Tywyll. She pulled out of the last loop and sidled up next to me. While chirping at me loudly she pulled away into a dive and gained an impressive amount of speed. I couldn't talk or anything and the wind would have made a conversation difficult if I could. All I could do

was follow along behind because I didn't know where we were going. We passed over the vast barren plain, out of which eventually rose a rather large hill that was topped with a roofless stone tower. We landed atop the stone tower and I peered down into its depths. Inside the stone tower slept a winged red dragon. Aderyn Tywyll changed form and began to descend a spiral staircase leading down into the recesses of the tower. I was still perched on the wall and didn't move. Noticing my hesitation, Aderyn Tywyll addressed my reservations. In her cheerful voice she called out "It's alright! It won't eat us if it sees that we're Fair Folk." I swallowed hard, stepping down off the wall and into my more familiar form. Our footsteps rang out inside the quiet tower, echoing through the stillness as we descended the stairs. The dragon opened its yellow eyes, then slowly raised its head and searched the staircase for the intruders. We continued down the stairs. When we reached the bottom of the tower we were in the presence of the red dragon. It was smaller than I expected a dragon to be, but fierce looking and battle scarred. There was nowhere to go inside the tower. The stairway emptied before the dragon. "Welcome, tribe of the Fair Folk," rumbled the dragon's deep, gravelly voice. "Draig Goch!" began Aderyn Tywyll, continuing to roll her r. "We request an audience with Gwynnevar Margen, the Phantom Queen of Annwn and consort of Gwyn ap Nudd." "What is the password, please, or I will eat you," the dragon warned. My eyes got wide and I turned to Aderyn Tywyll. "I thought you said it wouldn't eat us!" I said in a bit of a panic. "Well, it won't eat us right away. The Fair Folk are welcome in here but the queen does not like to be disturbed," she replied. "Draig Goch! The password is Tylwyth Teg!" Aderyn Tywyll cried out, her small voice echoing around the chamber and up the tower. "Very well," the dragon responded gruffly and stood to expose an arched doorway

through which nothing could be seen but inky darkness. We crossed the area of the chamber left exposed by the dragon's movement, passing through the doorway and into the hillside. "So how come that dragon can talk but in the form of our omens we cannot?" I asked. "There are many of what the living call mythical creatures that populate Annwn," Aderyn Tywyll explained. "As omens, we become physical beings visible in the physical world but limited by the physiology of those forms. Mythical creatures don't often interact with the material world, though they can sometimes be seen by the living; usually the ones they call mentally ill." Deep inside the hill was a labyrinth that effectively turned the hill into a small city. I followed Aderyn Tywyll along many winding corridors through the city which was filled with mythical beings of all sort, until we arrived at a set of wide stairs with pillars that led to an ornately carved wooden door. She pushed the door open easily despite its hefty stature and we entered a long throne room. There were two golden thrones at the far end of the room. Seated in one of them was a beautiful, pale woman; the one called the Phantom Queen. She was dressed in blue silk. "Aderyn Tywyll," the queen acknowledged. "And Tylluan Lwyd," she said gently with what seemed like a genuine smile. "Hello, Gwynnevar!" squealed Aderyn Tywyll. "Gwyn has sent us to hear the story of Flower Face." Gwynnevar's face fell. "Ah, so sad that story is. I once had an acquaintance by the name of Blodeuwedd," she began. "We called her Flower Face because she had been a bouquet of flowers. A local deity called Duwdod Unig transformed her one day into a woman because he was lonely and wanted to marry Blodeuwedd. She obliged, but soon fell in love with a hunter of Annwn. The two lovers conspired together and concocted a stratagem to kill her husband. They very nearly did so too, but the wounded deity turned into an eagle and flew away. The dying

eagle was seen sitting atop a tree by one of the living, and was reluctantly coaxed down to be nursed back to health over time. When Duwdod Unig returned, he killed the hunter and captured Blodeuwedd. His heart was broken and he cursed Blodeuwedd with the form of a white barn owl so her heart-shaped face would forever serve as a reminder of her treachery. She can often be found sitting in a Hawthorn tree.” “But the council told me our souls couldn’t be killed!” I cried in alarm. “True enough,” Gwynnevar said, “but the energy a soul is made of can be scattered. In this case, the hunter’s soul energy was absorbed by the land and he grew into a corpse flower, spreading the scent of death into the material world. It will take some time but one day the corpse flower will decay and release the soul energy back into the universe.” “So that’s why Gwyn said to beware who you offend,” I mused. “Oh yes,” said Gwynnevar. “Annwn is both beautiful and terrifying.” I shuddered even as I basked in the radiance of Gwynnevar’s grace. I knew this was someone I did not want to cross. “Why is this part of the land so barren?” I asked. “This might come as a surprise to you,” spoke Gwynnevar, “but Gwyn was not always King of Annwn. Long ago, a deity called Arawn had lay claim to the throne of Annwn. He had a large following though his popularity began to wane over the centuries through neglect. Gwyn was a chieftain then and held the allegiance of the Fair Folk. He did not challenge Arawn, but Arawn was no fool and came for him anyway. Arawn enchanted the trees to fight as his warriors. The countryside became barren as the alder, the aspen, the oak, the bluebell, and the holly were called forth into battle. Arawn’s army was vanquished by Draig Goch in a ferocious firestorm. Gwyn then slew Arawn in single combat.” “You mean he scattered Arawn’s energy across the land?” I pointed out. “No.” Gwynnevar countered sternly. “Once he was mortally wounded, the mare deity Epona

put Arawn on her back and galloped across the sky, scattering his essence among the stars. When the last star of this universe burns out, Arawn's soul will have been freed." Something had been gnawing at me in the back of my mind. "What's the difference between Flower Face and Arawn? She was a bouquet of flowers who became a woman while he is imprisoned until the end of time. Was Flower Face imprisoned in the bouquet?" "Blodeuwedd was a wild spirit. She was the indweller of a remote meadow, coyly teasing travelers from a distance with her natural beauty. She loved to be pursued but would also play a hide and seek, never to be encountered face to face. One day, a young maiden came to the meadow. She was collecting flowers to braid a head wreath to be worn at her joining, and called upon Blodeuwedd to bless the union with a most favorable sign. The young maiden made her way along the base of a hill of purple heather, where she was overjoyed to find Blodeuwedd as a plume of lucky white heather. The maiden collected a bouquet of the flowers and returned home. But before she made it back, she was accosted by Duwdod Unig, who was lonely and wanted to marry the maiden. When she explained that she was to be betrothed that very day, Duwdod Unig swore to kill the maiden's beloved if she rebuffed him. The young maiden pleaded for the life of her beloved, which caused Duwdod Unig to fly into a rage. He was intent on having the maiden one way or another and was going to kidnap her. The maiden begged for her safety and offered Blodeuwedd in her stead. Duwdod Unig was delighted and accepted the offer. He twisted and braided and the bouquet into a poppet that he enchanted and turned into a woman, Flower Face. Arawn on the other hand, instead of transforming himself or taking refuge in an object, had his energy diffused and seeded across the sky. Arawn had no intention and no control over the placement of his energy

unlike Blodeuwedd, who had taken physical form of her own accord and that physical form was then manipulated by an enchantment. Arawn's consciousness is also not located in a singular place the way Blodeuwedd's had been. He is in more of a twilight dream state as he processes thousands of experiences across the universe in each moment. He will wake more and more as his essence becomes freed." I was left in a thoughtful silence. "Well," the Queen continued, "all this talk of violence has gotten me in the mood to hunt." "You hunt as well?" I asked. "Did you expect the Phantom Queen was not a huntress?" She flashed her teeth in a sweet smile. It was frightening, but I tried not to react. "Will you accompany me?" she asked. "I don't know how to hunt," I confessed. Aderyn Tywyll chimed in excitedly. "I'll show him what to do! Just follow your instincts, Tylluan Lwyd!" she continued. "You'll be drawn to a wandering soul like a magnet. It's subtle so you can't let your mind wander. You'll have to really focus until you get the hang of it. Eventually you'll notice it all the time and you always be able to track a wandering soul. You can also sift through the signature of the energies you feel. When you think of someone, you get a profoundly faint feeling that is specific to them and no other energy pattern in the universe. It's their fingerprint. It's their energy you can feel radiating out from them like ripples on the surface of a pond. Once you feel it you can follow it to the source. You can find anyone. You lead the hunt and serve as an omen to anyone paying attention. And that's it, come on!" With that, Aderyn Tywyll spun on her heel and flew away, ever caught up in the excitement. Out the door and back through the city she went. I turned to bid farewell to the Queen. "Afterward, Tylluan Lwyd, you are welcome to return here and spend a while intertwining with us," she said with a coy half smile. I never felt more fear over giving the incorrect response. I gulped hard

and ventured "I will take it into consideration, Queen." She laughed and I softened, though I wasn't quite sure of the laugh. Then I made haste to follow Aderyn Tywyll until we came out of the top of the roofless stone tower on the hill. I followed along over the rooftops of the town below to a more densely populated urban area. The darkly colored bird landed at the top of a tall, old conifer. I circled and perched on the rooftop of a redbrick building across the street. She started singing her beautiful birdsong. The activity below seemed to shudder. I surveyed the area and noticed the living going about their business, while the mythical creatures stopped what they were doing for a moment, then began to quickly leave the area. Even the shadows seemed to tremble in fear. No, the shadows were actually starting to disperse as well. I watched as they receded into the surrounding shaded areas. I didn't know what was happening, but my curiosity was piqued. But nothing happened; not at first. The living continued walking, driving, shopping. I continued to listen to the darkly colored bird singing. The living could obviously see and hear her but paid her no mind. Suddenly, and seemingly out of nowhere, the Cwn Annwn stormed the scene, drawn to the birdsong. One of the hounds leapt at a living man and tore his bone soul loose. The hound shook it violently before dropping it into a limp heap on the ground. The soul stood and stumbled in a daze, but began to blur and was absorbed back into the man's body as he continued walking. Other hounds rampaged through the area, routing some unlucky mythical creatures from their hiding places. A small elf scurried across the street, hotly pursued by one of the hounds. It scooped the elf up into its jaws and swallowed him whole. Not even the shadows were safe. Two of the Cwn Annwn had one cornered. The shadowy figure backed away from the hounds but they pounced. A violent tug-of-war ensued over the

shadow before it ripped in half and each hound gulped down its share. A pale doe strolled through the carnage while the rest of the hounds sniffed around and searched the area. The hounds began to bay and converged on the redbrick building I sat upon. There was a wandering soul inside, I could feel it. A winged frog and what looked like a cross between a man and a porcupine dragged an old woman in a nightgown out of the building and dropped her in the street before retreating back into their hiding places. The doe clicked her tongue and the hounds, who had already begun to advance, stopped in their tracks. They kept their gaze fixed intently on the old woman. The doe had now become Gwynnevar. She knelt before the old woman who was lying helplessly in the street and stroked her hair. "Your time has passed young one," said the Queen. "Sit upon my back and I will take you home." The old woman recoiled from the queen's touch and scooted backward, trembling in fear. Gwynnevar frowned for a moment and then clicked her tongue twice. The hound nearest the old woman dashed forward and swallowed her up. Gwynnevar, who was once again the pale doe, calmly wandered away, her hooves clacking loudly on the pavement. She meandered up the street and disappeared around a corner, followed by some of the Cwn Annwn. Others disappeared down alleyways and side streets, no doubt in pursuit of their next quarry. The darkly colored bird flew down to the rooftop on which I sat. When I turned around, she was Aderyn Tywyll again. "See? Easy-peasy, huh?" she asked, her eyes big and bright with elation. "Yeah, actually. Easy-peasy," I said. But I was troubled. "What do you know about those shadows that were moving around down there? Were those demons?" She giggled in amusement. "Demons? No, those are beings whose souls bear such a heavy burden that they collapsed like a black hole. You could consider them an astral black hole because of the energy they

draw from the surrounding environment. Their pull is so intense that a void is created, drawing so much energy even the physical temperature drops. They are living shadows, subsisting on fear like parasites at the fringes of existence. Some call them shadow watchers because all they can do is observe, but the fear their presence instills reverberates strong waves of energy that satiates their starvation. They are not inherently bad the way they are perceived. They're a natural formation of this universe as much as anything else." I could understand that much, but I began to feel quite cross. I didn't believe in or agree with eternal damnation. "Can they ever redeem themselves?" I wanted to know. But my assumption proved to be mistaken. "Oh, there's need for redemption! Over time, a living shadow will draw less and less energy until the damaged soul is fully restored." "But these shadows fear the Cwn Annwn?" "No soul can stand up to the Cwn Annwn. A pack of the Cwn Annwn is lethal and when they are loosed there is no stopping them. Except by maybe Draig Goch." "That poor old woman though," I said thoughtfully. Aderyn Tywyll shook her head. "That was just her most familiar form, Tylluan Lwyd. She was not an old woman." "So does that mean," I began as I looked my own form over. "Does that mean this isn't really me? What does a soul actually look like?" "Hmm," she pondered. "Well, if you were to look with eyes, you'd see something that resembled a flicker of light or a fleeting shadow. But when you and I perceive a soul's form it depends on what that soul is familiar with, how it perceives itself, and what it projects intentionally." "What about Gwynnevar?" I asked. "I noticed that none of the living seemed to react to a doe on a busy street." "Gwyn and Gwynnevar and some others shapeshift within the spirit world, but they don't transform into a physical being the way we do. A death omen serves as an escort for the hunters and the Cwn Annwn,

as well as a harbinger for the living and the unseen alike." "What will Gwynnevar do with that soul?" I inquired, feeling slightly concerned. "It's bound for Annwn to see the council and from there each soul has a different path charted." The taste of the hunt had whetted my appetite. "I think I'm ready to try it out myself," I told Aderyn Tywyll. Her excitement was contagious, as was apparently Gwynnevar's lust for violence. "Have fun, Tylluan Lwyd. Just remember to call out when you find one." She winked at me and away I flew, practicing feeling the pull of a wandering soul. The populated area was too loud; too active. Wandering souls were apparently omnipresent among the living and it was difficult to parse out a feeling of a single wandering one. I decided to head to the countryside to try my luck in a more sparsely populated region. As I was cruising high above the rooftops, I felt something familiar. It was quite a powerful feeling. So much so that I couldn't ignore it. Then I spied her face; my helpmate counterpart. She was still alive, though much older. I could feel the pain I put her through by ending my life. It was tucked away, deep down in her bone soul and it ached terribly. I watched her for a long time going in and out of shops, stopping to talk, walking to her car. I knew she was alright. I could feel that too piled on top of the hurt. She drove out of sight while I contemplated but I followed the feeling of her. She drove to a small townhome and went inside, and that was the last I saw of her. I flew down to her patio where there were a couple of chairs and a table with an ash tray, and I left for her upon the table a single gray feather. I decided it best to continue on my way and let her live out her remaining life, gaining her soul knowledge, until one day I would escort her to Annwn and our energies could intertwine once more. It was difficult to tear myself away from the feeling of her, but I knew it was only temporary so I continued on my journey. The city

buildings slowly gave way to villages, then finally fields and wide pastures spotted with dwellings. Night was falling but I was feeling a little more clearheaded now. I circled a farmstead below and quickly descended, landing atop a tall silo. I knew there was a wandering soul somewhere nearby but I didn't know precisely where. Perhaps I didn't need to know. The hounds would surely find it. I called out. "Huuu!" It was loud and sounded more like a groan or a croak than a hoot. A few birds that had been nested in some nearby trees scattered before the dead silence fell again. I called out a few more times and continued waiting. I spotted aberrant movement far in the distance. The Cwn Annwn tore across the farmland, destroying crops in their wake. A hobgoblin appeared from within the dwelling nearby, shouting and racing across the yard toward me. It lifted its hand over its head, wielding a club. The little hobgoblin flung the club with all its might in my direction with startling good aim. I jumped off the silo and out of the way just as the club clattered against where I had been perched. After fluttering momentarily, I regained my balance and flew up beyond the little hobgoblins reach. I saw that a horde of hobgoblins had sprung up from the fields, seemingly out of nowhere. Unbeknownst to me, they had been tending to the crops by night. They beat at the Cwn Annwn with clubs and tools, attempting to chase them from the fields. The hounds retaliated, coalescing into a pack and ripping the little creatures to shreds. But the hobgoblins had them outnumbered, piling onto the hounds like ants. The hounds shook them off and continued their offensive against the hobgoblins. All of the commotion seemed to have attracted the attention of the soul I had been seeking, for I saw a man in the open barn thrashing about in midair, trying to get to the ground. He was over his body which appeared to have been crushed by some fallen bales. The man somehow shook himself

loose in his panic and bolted across the yard. He saw the melee occurring in the fields and ran in the opposite direction, and away from the farmstead. I pursued the soul into the surrounding darkness. I called out to the Cwn Annwn in vain. The soul was going to escape. But there stood Gwyn with Dormarth sitting at his side. The soul tried to halt but fell and tumbled to Gwyn's feet. Gwyn made the slightest motion with his finger and Dormarth happily obliged, lunging forward and swallowing the soul. In the meantime, I had done a little flip in the air and landed on my feet next to Gwyn. "That was exciting," I stated. "This is not good, Tylluan Lwyd," said Gwyn. "You must be careful when hunting in farmlands at night. Aderyn Tywyll should not have left you alone yet. No matter. You will have to go through the Wise Man's Pass to a place called Cwm Pwca and find there the Old One to make amends." I swallowed hard. I could already pick out the signature of the Old One. It was archaic and venerable. "Please send my regards," Gwyn said dismissively. With a quick flourish I took to the dark skies, blindly steering myself toward the pull of the Old One. With nothing but the light of the stars, I crossed the peatlands and the bogs and continued on until I reached a rocky outcropping. I could feel the Old One close by but I could see there was nothing in any direction other than the outcropping, save for some trees and bog. I landed below the outcropping to have a look around. There were cracks and crevices and nooks and niches, but no signs of an entrance. It didn't make sense because I could feel the Old One right there. "Hello?" I called out. "Is anyone here?" "Yes," I heard whispered in reply. I looked around but saw no one. "I'm looking for the Wise Man's Pass. I seek an audience with the Old One," said I. The outcropping shuddered and shook then heaved over to reveal a cavern, where stood a giantess. "I am Canthrig, gatekeeper of the Wise Man's Pass. There are but

three words that will grant you passage. Speak all else at your peril." My instincts urged me to speak but I was afraid. I had no way of knowing if the gentle nudge I felt was trustworthy or just my imagination. My only choice was to trust myself. "May I..." I began but my voice faltered. "May I pass?" The giantess laughed loudly and smiled. She looked me over curiously for a moment, then sighed in disappointment. "You may," she said and stepped aside. I climbed down into the cavern, slipping on bits of gravel; sliding on bits of moss. I reached the bottom rather roughly and stumbled into a dimly lit chamber. There was an iridescence that filled the air. I made my way along a winding path of stalagmites, ducking under stalactites on the way. Deeper and deeper into the earth I travelled until the cramped quarters opened into a massive cavity within the rock. The walls of the cavity were covered in twisting roots, while the ground was spread with ferns and trees. A lake of dark, still water spanned the cavern to my right. To the left, small dwellings had been carved into rock. There was a freshness to the air and a light fog. The thin fog was glowing white in the iridescence and obscured my vision, though I could hear whispers in a language I did not recognize. I continued forward and a hulking shape began to emerge the farther into the cavity I went. It appeared to be a man seated cross-legged on the ground, beneath some trees. But it was not a man it was a large satyr with hooves and brown fur. Atop his head were twisting, spiraled horns. He was being tended to by the hobgoblins, who brought plates of fruit and bread and flagons of wine. If there was something evil in the universe, this definitely had to be it. "Welcome to Cwm Pwca, Tylluan Lwyd," he said in a low voice. "You have violated the sworn pact between the tribe of the Fair Folk and the Bwca. Do you know who I am?" "You're called the Old One," I replied humbly. "I have many titles. The way you were called father, son,

brother, husband, all referring to one person. To the living I am known as the Lord of Plenty." He took a drink of wine from a chalice. "My Bwca tend to the fields and the livestock at night. The hounds tend to their harvests by day. You have disturbed the balances. Make no mistake, the land will heal and the lost Bwca will be restored, but you are now in my debt, Tylluan Lwyd." "How may I relieve you of this offense, Lord?" I inquired earnestly. "A herd of white cows roams the hills," the Old One began. "The white cows' milk never runs dry, no matter how many pails are taken. White, of course, is a sign of the Otherworld to the living. But a destitute farmer once ignored this warning and took one of the cows back to his farm to hoard the milk for himself. At first, the poor farmer just needed the milk to survive the harsh winter. But the milk the cow produced was the richest and creamiest the farmer had ever tasted, and it made the finest butter and cheese in the land. The poor farmer soon grew rich from selling his milk, butter, and cheese. But he exploited the white cow more and more as word of his trade grew and all of the surrounding villages wanted his merchandise. Angered by the farmer's greed, I asked for the cow to be returned and set a green-clad Elphin Dame to tend the herd as it roamed. But the farmer had developed a taste for wealth and desperately needed the white cow to maintain his standard of living. He assaulted the dame and stole one of the cows, locking it in chains and guarding it in an absurd effort to maintain ownership over it. So, I went for the white cow once again. This time, I took the cow and withdrew the Bwca from the farmer's land, leaving all his crops and livestock to die." "Why, sir, did you set a dame and not a more dangerous guardian?" I asked timidly. The Old One grunted in reply. Then he said "I charge you, Tylluan Lwyd, with being that guardian. You shall escort the dame and the herd, calling the Cwn

Annwn whenever someone draws near." This repayment was beginning to sound like forced servitude. "How long shall I serve in this capacity, Lord?" I asked. "For now, and for as long as you like hence," riddled the Old One. I wasn't sure what that meant but I felt some relief. I said goodbye to the Old One and set off to find the green-clad dame and her herd of white cows. When I found her, I was disappointed to learn that she was rather aloof, though not altogether unpleasant to be around. I entered into the land and became an indweller of the hills in order to fulfill my charge. I found myself aware of every blade of grass across the span of land and of every foot set therein. When someone came into the hills, I would fly around and watch them from afar. If they came too near the dame or the herd, I alerted the Cwn Annwn. The dame's lovely singsong voice kept the hounds pacified. She mollified the beasts further by giving them the delicious milk. The whims of the Cwn Annwn who attended became dictated by the dame's emotional state. Not surprisingly, she loathed greed and became ill-tempered if anyone took more than their fair share from the cows. She would let the Cwn Annwn rip the bone soul from a person's body and tear it to shreds, fertilizing the land with their soul. But as long as she was pleased, the hounds remained subdued. Eventually some of the hounds decided to stay put rather than wandering off after an encounter. I felt comfortable leaving my post with the green-clad dame and the herd of white cows, as she now had a permanent entourage to escort her through the hills. Many years had passed since I last saw my helpmate. She was still alive, but I could feel that she was remarkably aged now and close to death. I went to her and I waited. She was lying on her back in bed with our now elderly son and daughter and grandchildren nearby. I watched her take her last earthly breath and fall still. She peacefully drifted upward and

out of her body, floating in midair as I had. Opening her eyes, she smiled at me. I took her hand wordlessly and helped her to the floor. Our energies began to intertwine the moment they touched. Hand in hand, we walked into Annwn together.

The Tale of Tylluan Lwyd

C. Vincent Jonas

cvincentjonas.books@gmail.com