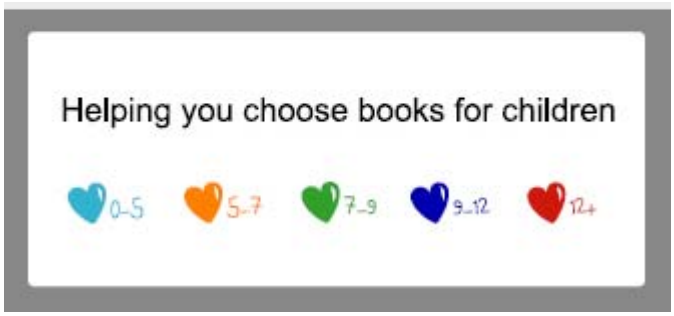
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PWYLL AND PRYDERI

I

The Marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon



Once upon a time, in the days gone by, Pwyll prince of Dyfed was lord over south-west Wales. In feature, form, and favour he was all that a man should be, but he had no wife, for he knew of no lady in all the land who would be at the same time beautiful and as well-born as himself. This was a great sorrow to his noblemen and foster-brothers, who were troubled lest after Pwyll's day they should not enjoy the rule of a man so pleasant as he. Often they took counsel together, but it was all to no avail till one day an old white-headed man entered the court where Pwyll was holding a feast at Arberth. The peculiarity of the old man was this: that the hairs of his head and his beard were wires of silver, and yet they were softer to the wind's touch than the softest silk; and behind him there walked two deer-hounds which were whiter than Eryri's snow, save that their ears were red as foxgloves. The old man greeted Pwyll, and the prince gave him a welcome.

'Lord,' said the old man, 'I marvel to see you here at Arberth, and yet you have not gone to the top of the gréen mound which stands behind your court.'

'Why,' asked Pwyll, 'what is the quality of the mound, that I should profit by climbing it?'

'The quality of the mound is this,' answered the old man, 'that when the son of a true king sits upon its summit, either he shall receive a blow and a wound or he shall see the marvel he desires most in all the world.'

'I am not afraid of a blow or a wound,' said Pwyll. 'As for the marvel, I should be glad to see that.'

So he and the old man, with the two hounds at their heels, and followed by the noblemen of the court, left the court and walked to the green mound, and because the day was hot and the mound steep they were glad to sit and rest when once they had reached the summit. The moment Pwyll sat down, they saw a lady on a big white horse, with a garment of shining gold-brocaded silk upon her, come riding along the highway that led past the mound. 'Is there any one here that knows this lady?' asked Pwyll. Not one of them, they said. 'Then let one of you go to discover her name and condition.' A young nobleman arose and went to the road to meet her, but by the time he reached the bottom of the mound she had gone some distance past. He hurried after her, but though her horse appeared to move at a slow walking-pace he saw her getting farther and farther from him. Quickly he took a horse from the court, the most mettlesome he could find, and drove in his spurs, but the faster he rode the farther behind he fell, and the lady all this time appearing to proceed at a walking-pace. Only too quickly his horse began to flag, and when he noticed this he reined in and returned to the mound and informed Pwyll of his discomfiture.

'Be easy, lad,' said Pwyll, 'there is some magic meaning here, and only the old man can inform us of it.' But when he turned to speak with him, there was no old man to be seen,

and no dogs either, the very ground and sky quite empty of them, and the leashes and the collars gone too. 'There is only one thing to be done,' said Pwyll at that. 'For tonight we will return to the court, but tomorrow at the same time we will come to sit on the mound and trust to see this marvel again.'

So they did, and at the appointed time went to the mound to sit down. 'Lad,' said Pwyll to the young man who had gone after the rider the day before, 'bring with you the swiftest horse you know to be in our meadows.' He did so and stood waiting with the horse as the company sat down. That same moment they saw the lady coming along the road at the same ambling pace. 'Be ready, lad,' Pwyll warned him, and when he was fully ready he said: 'Now ride and find out who she is.' But even as the lad mounted his horse she had passed him by, and by the time he was settled in his saddle there was a clear space between them. He now put his horse into an amble, and when this did not help him he gave his horse the reins. All the time she was proceeding at the same unhurried pace as before. Next he gave his horse the spurs and drove it till it was white with lather, but if anything she now seemed even farther ahead. His horse began to flag, so he reined in and returned to the mound and told Pwyll how he had failed the second time.

'I see now,' said Pwyll, 'that it is idle for any one to pursue her save myself. And yet I know she has an errand to this plain, if only she could be brought to declare it. However, for the present we will return to the court.'

They did this, and spent the night in song and carousal, and on the morrow they beguiled the day until it was time to go to the mound.

'Groom,' said Pwyll, 'saddle my best horse and bring him to the roadside, and fetch too my best stirrups and my spurs.' He did so, and the company ascended the mound and sat down. That same moment they could see the lady coming along the same road, on the same horse and in the same guise, and at the same ambling pace as they had seen her yesterday. 'Groom,' said Pwyll, 'I see the rider. Give me my horse.' He mounted his horse, but even as his foot entered the stirrup the lady passed him by. He turned after her, and gave his horse the reins, feeling sure that at the second bound or the third he would catch up with her; but though he was soon driving his horse to its utmost speed, and she in no haste at all, he could not close a hoof-breadth of the space that lay between them.

'Ah, maiden,' cried Pwyll then, 'for the sake of him you love best, stay for me a while.'

At his words the maiden stayed and waited. 'Gladly,' she replied. 'And you would have been kinder to your horse had you asked this long since.'

'Lady,' said Pwyll, 'I am a king in this country, but it is not for that reason I ask you these questions. Where have you come from, and where are you going?'

'I travel to please myself,' said the maiden. 'And I am pleased to see you, lord.'

She drew back that part of her head-dress which covered her face, and it seemed to Pwyll that the countenance of every maiden he had ever seen was unlovely compared with hers. 'My welcome to you in Dyfed,' he said, 'Will you tell me who you are?'

'I am Rhiannon, daughter of Hefeydd the Old, and they want to give me to a husband against my will. But I will not

have him unless you yourself reject me, for you are he I love most of men. And it was to hear your answer to this that I came riding here.'

'Between me and heaven,' said Pwyll joyfully, 'I have a quick and ready answer, for had I the choice of all the ladies and maidens in the world, you are the maiden I would choose.'

'Then make a tryst with me,' said Rhiannon, 'a year from tonight, at the court of my father Hefeydd. I will have a feast prepared against your coming, and at that feast you shall ask for me at my father's hand. And now I must go my way.'

They parted, she to her father's court, and he to meet his war-band on the mound. But when the year wore on to the appointed time he set off a-wooing with his men, and they were a hundred armed noblemen together. They came to Hefeydd's court and asked for Rhiannon, and Pwyll's suit had a joyous answer. There had been great preparations made against his coming, and all the resources of the court were dispensed at his direction. The hall was now made ready, and they went to table, Pwyll in the seat of honour, Hefeydd the Old on one side of him, and Rhiannon on the other, and the rest of the company thereafter according to their rank.

The carousal had begun, and their mirth was at its highest when Pwyll saw enter a tall, auburn-haired youth of royal mien, wearing a cloak of gold-brocaded silk and shoes of red leather. He came boldly into the hall and greeted Pwyll in a full, clear voice.

'My welcome to you, friend,' replied Pwyll. 'Sit where your rank will have it, and drink with us and be merry.'

'There is a time for all things, lord. Know that I am a suitor come here to ask a boon of you.'

'Friend,' said Pwyll, 'you are the first to ask a boon at my hand this day. Ask what you will, for the day's sake, and it shall be yours.'

But Rhiannon had caught at his arm. 'Alas, lord,' she cried in dismay, 'this is a sorry answer of yours!' And the noblemen and ladies of the court cried out with her, lamenting Pwyll's rash answer.

'Why, lady,' asked Pwyll, 'what have I done?'

'Lord,' said the auburn-haired youth, 'what you have done is to pledge your word in the hearing of the whole court. Shall I name my request?'

'Name it,' said the troubled Pwyll.

'Tonight you think to marry the lady whom I love best. It is to ask for her, and the feast and the preparations that are here, that I have come.'

Pwyll sat dumb, without word or whisper from his lips. 'You may well sit dumb,' said Rhiannon, 'and it would have been kinder to us both had you sat dumb long since.'

'I did not know who he was,' pleaded Pwyll. 'Indeed, I still do not know.'

'Who else but the man to whom they wanted to give me against my will? For this is Gwawl son of Clud, a chieftain strong in hosts and dominions, and since you have spoken the way you have, bestow me on him without more delay, lest he carry away your honour with your broken word.'

'Alas,' said Pwyll, 'what kind of counsel is this? I can never bring myself to do so hateful a deed.'

The lady Rhiannon leaned nearer to Pwyll and her voice sank to a whisper. 'Do as I say, and all will yet be well. Take this small bag and keep it safe: that is the first thing. Promise

him what is yours to promise, but you cannot give him the feast and the preparations that are here, for they are not yours, but mine: that is the second. And after that be dumb again, and leave the rest of the talk to me.'

'Lord,' said Gwawl impatiently, 'it is time I had my answer. Will you speak now?'

'What is mine,' said Pwyll, 'you shall have—and that is the lady Rhiannon. But the feast and the preparations are not mine, and I may not bestow them on you.'

'Friend Gwawl,' added Rhiannon, 'they are already bestowed upon the men of Dyfed and the war-band of my father's court. But return again, a year from tonight, and a feast shall be prepared for you in your turn, and at that feast you shall make me your wife, if you so desire.'

Gwawl set off instantly for his domain, to prepare his whole kingdom for this marriage. But Pwyll had much talk with Rhiannon before he left for his main court in Dyfed.

A year passed, and at its ending Gwawl set out and a great retinue with him, and came to the feast which had been prepared for him at the court of Hefeydd the Old. Pwyll set out too, and the men of Dyfed, a hundred all told, and they came together to an orchard near the court, where his men took shelter. Pwyll clad himself in coarse, shabby garments, and wore big rag boots on his feet, so that when he entered the hall as the carousal began he must shuffle over the floor like any beggar. He came forward to the seat of honour and gave Gwawl greeting, and called down God's blessing on all the company.

'My welcome to you, friend,' said Gwawl. 'Sit where you may, and drink and be merry.'

'There is a time for all things, lord. Know that I am a suitor come here to ask a boon of you.'

'I welcome your request, friend,' Gwawl was pleased to answer. 'And if it is a fair request, saving only my men and the lady Rhiannon, you shall have it gladly.'

'Judge whether it is fair, lord. I would not ask it save to ward off hunger and want. The boon is that this small bag should be filled with food for me.'

'Men,' said Gwawl to his attendants,' fill this bag, and fill it with all that is best of meat and drink.'

The attendants went bustling to and fro with wine and meat and bread, but despite all that went into the bag it seemed no fuller than before.

'Why, friend,' asked Gwawl, raising his eyebrows, 'will your bag ever be full?'

'Lord,' said the beggar (for such they thought him in the court), 'it is the peculiarity of this bag that it will never be full until a true prince who sits with his bride shall arise and tread down the provisions in the bag with both his feet, at the same time proclaiming so that all men may hear: "Enough is now in this bag, so shut it!"'

'Brave sir,' said Rhiannon, where she sat next to Gwawl at table, 'there is no one can do this except you. Arise now quickly.'

At her bidding Gwawl arose from the table and put his two feet inside the bag. 'Enough is now in this bag,' he said loudly, 'so shut it!'

The words were still between his tongue and his teeth when Pwyll pulled up the bag so that Gwawl was head over neck inside it. The words were still between his teeth and his

lips when Pwyll closed the bag and knotted its thongs, and blew a blast on his horn. The blast was still in the mouth of the horn when down came his war-band, descending upon the court and seizing Gwawl's host and throwing each of them into his own captivity. As the first man entered, Pwyll threw off his old rag boots, and as the last entered he stood before them in his own princely array. And each man as he came inside struck the bag a sharp blow, and, 'What is here?' he asked. And the man who preceded him made answer: 'A badger!' 'Why,' asked old Hefeydd, 'what game are you playing now?' 'The game of Badger in the Bag,' they told him. And that was the first time that any one played Badger in the Bag in the Island of Britain.

'Lord,' cried the man from the bag, 'if you will hear me—this is not the death for me, to be killed in a bag.'

'He is right,' said the joyful Pwyll, 'nor would it be proper to do him more hurt on this my wedding day.'

So they let Gwawl out of the bag, and took oaths of him that he would never seek vengeance for what had happened, nor lay claim in all his life to anything of Pwyll's or Rhiannon's. Then, these oaths taken, they released all his men, and they were given baths and ointments and healing balms, and that same day they set off for their own domain. And the dust had not yellowed their horses' hooves when Pwyll married Rhiannon, and the hall was arrayed afresh for their wedding-feast.

On the morrow they arose in the young of the day and travelled towards Dyfed, and when they reached Arberth there was a great feast prepared in readiness for them. As soon as their coming was known, the full muster of the land was

gathered to give them greeting, and not a nobleman or nobleman's wife left Rhiannon without receiving a sparkling brooch or ring or precious jewel as the first gift from her bounty. And so it came about that they ruled the land in friendship and prosperity that year and in peace and tranquillity the next.