

SION AP SIENCYN

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IT was on a Thursday, and the day of the full moon; and the whitethorn was in bloom, and the birds were singing on the mountain-side; and it was towards evening by that time, and the sunlight lying mellow-golden on the long green fields.

Sion ap Siencyn stood by the farmyard gate; and thinking he was—was there something in that sunlight now, and was there a tune in the air with the birds, or something, that he could make a l'l song of them whatever? Then the pigs set up a squealing and a pother, meaning to say dinner-time it was with them; and out from the old yellow-washed farm-house came Gwenno his wife with the pail in her hand to fill their trough.

'Sioni,' said she, 'for shame upon you loafing there, and me toiling all day, and slaving all night, to keep a loaf on the board and the dirt from the floor here!'

'Yes, sure,' said he; 'what is on you now?'

'What is on me?' said she; 'and the pigs themselves crying out that but for me they shouldn't have bite nor sup nor support for their lawful ambitions!'

They were certainly crying out something; and Sion ap Siencyn was all for a bit of peace, with that l'l song in the air and all; and he wasn't going to argue, with his wife *and* the pigs against him.

'What is it, indeed now?' said he.

'You do know very well what it is. Bronwen Cow is after her meandering up the mountain, and in the Field of the

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Pool of Stars she will be; and she knowing well that I will be waiting to milk her. Such spiteful ways you do teach the creatures, woe is me!

'Well, well; not much for me to go and fetch her, after all,' said Sion; and with that, off with him.

In the farm kitchen old Catrin, Sion's mother, was in her chair by the hearth. 'Where is Sion *bach*?' said she, when Gwen came in.

'Fetching Bronwen from the Field of the Pool of Stars he is,' said Gwen.

'Uneasy is my heart for that news you are telling me; and this the Eve of May, and the faery night of all the nights in the year.'

Sion went up through the long Field of the Stream; and the beauty of the world was delighting him; and the song in the air was coming nearer to him, but he was not catching it yet. And he went up through the green Field of the Hollow; and the way the light lay on the rushes, he had never seen the equal of it before. And he went through the gate in the hedge, and into the Field of the Pool of Stars; and there, in his deed, was Bronwen Cow out before him. He called her; but perverse she was, and walking on, and he must go after her; and the more he called, the more she went, and the more he must follow; and she put seven hedges between herself and the farm before he could even come near her;—and all the while the song was coming nearer to him; and it the loveliest song in the world or Wales, he was thinking.

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And just as he came up with her, lo, there was the root and source and fountain of the song out before him and plain for his vision: it was a bird on the blossoming hawthorn tree; it no bigger than the druid wren, but its feathers aglimmer whitely like sunlight on the mountain snow; and with every flirt of its wings shaking out a ripple of song to steal and travel over the world till you could know the mountains were laughing in their deep hearts for pleasure of it; and in his deed to God he must stop a minute and listen to that.

Stop he did, and listen; and every sorrow he had ever known, he made nothing of it: converted it was, in his memory, into joy; with the richness and the pleasantness of that singing.

But there, wonder was on the world that day, certainly it was. As he listened, he was aware of a song on his south that was better than the other one; and turning, saw a bird among the rushes there, crested and crowned, and as blue as the heavens, and shining like a jewel, and making song to bring the stars leaning out of the sky to listen. Never could he turn to go back while that song might be there for his hearing. And wondering he saw what the power of the song was: for the earth and the sky were changed about him, and the mountains that he saw were better than any he had seen before; and the population roaming on them and in the valley were beautiful—lovelier than human, flame-bodied, and with delicate plumes of flame over their heads. And lovely lights were

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rising out of the mountains; and it was a greater joy to him to be alive than any joy he had known formerly; and he had little thought for Bronwen Cow, or for Gwenno his wife, or for the farm. And then came a third bird, coloured like the rainbow; with a better song than either of the others had; and in the sweetness of her discoursing it seemed to him that he heard all the wisdom of the deep world. And it seemed to him that the ancient and flame-robed Kings of Wonder were about him; and that the vast mountains were their palaces; and he on a footing with them, as it were; and an inhabitant of the Ancient World, with wisdom and stature to him, and the dignity of the cloud-hidden peaks; and if there was anyone called Sion ap Siencyn, he was not remembering that one; instead, he was remembering the ages of the world and antiquity, and delighting in the beauty beyond time. . . .

Then the three of the birds flew away, and the stars were shining: an hour or more he must have been listening, though not five minutes it seemed. In the dimness he could see Bronwen Cow descending towards the farm before him; and happy he was as he turned to follow her, knowing that now the world of song was open to him, and that never again would he be at a loss for the words of beauty to sing. 'It was as if I had listened to the Birds of Rhianon,' said he. They were three faery birds that were in Wales at one time; you could be hearing them for a hundred years, and think it was an hour or less you had listened. . . .

There was firelight and candlelight in the farm kitchen,

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and the door was open; and when he had but looked in through the door, he stopped, there on the threshold; for what he saw and heard was not what he expected. A very old man was on the settle by the fire; and opposite him a young man that might be his grandson; and there were three children on the hearth between them; and moving about the kitchen a woman that had the voice and the look of Gwen with her, only there was something strange with her too.

‘Indeed’ she was saying ‘for shame that you don’t go out after Bronwen Cow; and she in her meandering out upon the mountain!’

‘Let you him be,’ said the old man. ‘Were you never hearing what befell the great-grandfather of my grandfather?’

‘Ah, tell us the story!’ cried the children all at once.

‘Three hundred years ago it was,’ said the old man, ‘and the Eve of May it was; and a cow from this farm strayed out upon the mountain; and the great-grandfather of my grandfather——’

‘What was his name?’ cried the children.

‘Sion ap Siencyn was his name,’ said the old man.

‘There’s somebody at the door,’ said the woman.

‘Come you in, and welcome to you!’ said she.

No one came, and no one was there when they looked. ‘It was the wind sighing,’ said the young man. Then the grandfather went forward and told them the story of Sion ap Siencyn. ‘They say it was the Birds of Rhianon sang to him,’ said he.