

Pwyll Lord of Dyved

A Branch of The Mabinogion

Pwyll Befriends Arawn

The following is taken in part from "The Mabinogion" translated by Jeffrey Gantz.

Part One of the First Branch of the Mabinogi

Pwyll Lord of Dyved ruled over the seven cantreys of the land. One day his thoughts turned to hunting while in his chief court at Arberth. Glynn Cuch was the part of his realm that he wanted to hunt so he set out that evening and spent the night at Penn Llwyn on Bwya. In order to turn his hounds loose in the forest; he blew his horn and began to muster the hunt, but while riding after the hounds, he became separated from his companions. While listening to the baying of his pack, he perceived the cry of another, a different cry which was advancing towards him. He spied the other pack in a clearing in the forest with a stag running before it, and watched as his pack reached the edge of the field. This other pack overtook the stag and brought it down. Pwyll at once remarked the pack's colour, without bothering to look at the stag, for no hound he had ever seen was the colour of these; a dazzling shining white with red ears, and as the whiteness of the dogs shone so did the redness of their ears. He approached and drove off the strange hounds and baited his own upon the stag.

As Pwyll was about this he saw a rider approaching on a great dapple-grey horse. He was wearing a hunting horn round his neck and a hunting dress of greyish-brown material. The horseman rode up to him and said, "Chieftain, I know who you are, but I will not greet you." "Well," replied Pwyll, "perhaps your rank prevents your doing so." "God knows, it is not the degree of my rank which prevents me." "What else, chieftain?" asked Pwyll. The stranger replied, "Between me and god, your own rudeness and discourtesy." "Chieftain, what discourtesy have you seen in me?" "In no man have I seen greater discourtesy than driving away the pack which has killed a stag and baiting one's own pack upon it. That was your discourtesy, and though I will take no vengeance, between me and God, I will dishonour you to the value of a hundred stags." "Chieftain, if I have done wrong, I will earn your friendship." "How?" asked the other. "As befits your rank, only I do not know who you are." "I am a crowned king in my own land." "What land do you come from?" "Annwvyn, I am Arawn King of Annwvyn." "Lord, how can I earn your friendship?" "This is how. There is a man - Havgan King of Annwvyn - whose realm borders on mine, and he is constantly waging war against me. By ridding me of his oppression, which you can do easily, you will earn my friendship." "I will do that gladly. Only tell me how I can." said Pwyll.

"That I will," said Arawn. "We will make a strong bond of friendship. I will send you into Annwvyn in my place, and give you the loveliest woman you have ever seen to sleep with every night; moreover I will endow you with my shape and appearance so that no chamberlain, no officer, no follower of mine will know that you are not I. All this for a year and a day, and then we will meet again here." "Fair enough. But even if I stay in your land for a year, how am I to find the man of whom you speak?" "A year from tonight he and I are to meet at the ford. You will be there in my place; strike him once blow, which he will not survive, and if he asks you to finish him off hold your hand, no matter how much he begs you. For however often I struck him, the next day he would be fighting as well as before." "Very well," said Pwyll, "but what will I do with my own kingdom?" "I will see that neither man nor woman knows that I am not you, for I will go in your place." "Then I will be glad to go." "Your journey will be free of trouble; nothing will impede your progress to my kingdom, for I myself will guide you."

Arawn led Pwyll to where they could view the court and other dwellings. "My court and kingdom are now yours. Make straight for the court. No one there will fail to recognize you, and as you observe the people's behavior you will learn our customs." Pwyll rode towards the court and once inside he noticed the finest assembly of buildings anyone had seen. He

entered the great hall to change. Youths and servants strode towards him and pulled off his boots. Many greeted him as they went by. He was clothed in a gold brocade garment and the hall was made ready. Upon entering he could see the finest troops and companies he had ever seen and with them was the queen, dressed in shining gold brocade, the most beautiful woman anyone had ever seen. She took her place to one side of Pwyll and the earl was on the other. Pwyll talked to his queen and she was little affected and most gracious in disposition and conversation. They passed the time drinking and eating and singing and carousing. Of all the courts he had seen, this one was the best supplied with golden plate and royal jewels.

When it came time to sleep Pwyll and his queen went to bed. He turned his face to the edge and had his back to her, nor did he speak another word before morning. The following day the tenderness and affection returned in their conversation, however not one night during the following year was different from the first.

Pwyll spent that year hunting, singing, and carousing. His days were filled with fellowship and in pleasant talk with his companions. On the night of the meeting he was accompanied by the nobles. When they reached the ford Pwyll said, "Nobles, listen well. This encounter lies between the two kings, in single combat, for each one claims the land and the domain of the other; therefore let everyone else stand back." The two kings drew near and met in the middle of the ford. The man who was in Arawn's place struck Havgan's shield so that it split into two halves. His armour shattered and he was thrown an arm and a spear's length over his horse's hindquarters to the ground where he lay mortally wounded. "Chieftain, what right did you have to kill me?" asked Havgan, who apparently knew that his opponent was not actually Arawn. "I made no claim against you, nor do I know of any reason why you should kill me. But since you have begun so, finish me off now." "Chieftain, I may yet regret doing to you what I have done. He may wish to may strike you again, but I will not." "Loyal followers," said Havgan, "carry me away, for my end is now certain, and I can no longer maintain you." "Sirs," said the man who was in Arawn's place, "talk among yourselves and decide who ought to be my men." They answered, "Lord, all men ought to be, for there is over Annwryn no king but yourself." Thus he received the homage of the men and began to rule the land, and by noon the following day both realms were in his power.

Arawn was awaiting Pwyll when he arrived at the meeting place and each was glad to see the other. "God reward your friendship," said Arawn. "Well," said Pwyll, "when you arrive in your own land, you will see what I have done for you." "For what you have done, God reward you." Arawn restored Pwyll's shape and appearance and took back his own so that each man was himself once more.

Arawn was happy to see his troops when he returned to his court in Annwryn, though his arrival was of no great novelty because they knew nothing of his absence. He spent the day in pleasure and merrymaking and sat and talked with his wife and nobles. When it came time to sleep, Arawn and his wife went to bed rather than carousing. His wife came to him and at once he began talking to her and held her, caressing her lovingly. "My God, how different he is tonight from what he has been." He spoke to her once time, a second, then a third but she gave him no answer. "Why do you not answer me?" Arawn asked. "I tell you that for a year I have not spoken at all in this place." "How can that be? We have always talked in bed." "Shame on me," she said, "if since a year from yesternight this bed has seen conversation or pleasure between us, or even your turning your face to me, let alone anymore more." Arawn set to thinking and said, "Lord God what a faithful comrade I took for a friend! Lady, do not blame me, for I have neither lain down nor slept with you this past year." He then told her what had happened, and she said, "I confess to God, you made a strong pact for your friend to have fought off the temptations of the flesh and kept faith with you." "Lady, that was my thought when I was silent." "No wonder," she said.

Meanwhile, Pwyll Lord of Dyved arrived in his realm and questioned his nobles as to how his country was ruled the past year compared to previous ones. They answered, "Lord, never have you been so perceptive, nor so kind. Never have you distributed your goods more freely. Never was your discernment so marked." "Between me and God, you ought rather to thank the man who was with you." And he told them what had happened. "Well, lord, thank God you made such a friend. As for the rule we have known this past year, surely you will not take it from us?" "Between me and God," said Pwyll, "I will not."

From that time on the friendship between Pwyll and Arawn grew. Each sent the other horses, hounds, and other treasures he thought his friend might like. Moreover, because of Pwyll's sojourn in Annwryn, and because he reigned so prosperously and united the two realms, the name Pwyll Lord of Dyved fell into disuse, and he was called Pwyll Head of Annwryn ever after.

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