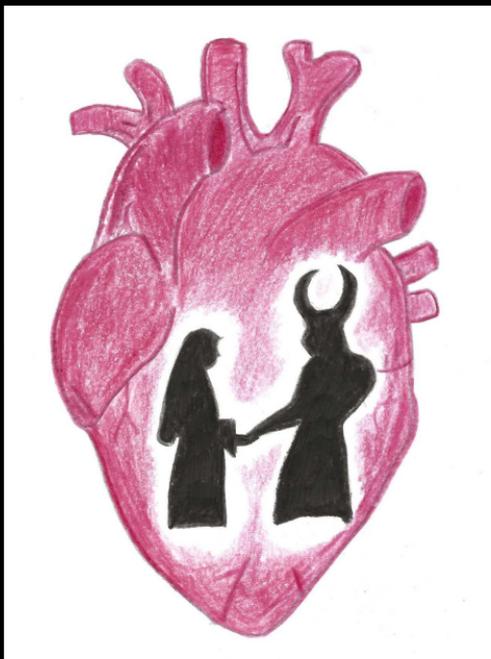


THE HEART OF ANNWN



Sister Patience

**THE HEART
OF ANNWN**

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Cover art 'Bride of Gwyn' by the author.

*For Gwyn ap Nudd
and the Mystics of the Sacred Heart.*

*My breath with Your breath.
My heart with Your heart.
My feet on Your path.
You and I at one.*

‘In the morning let your first act
be to greet My Heart and to offer Me your own.
Whoever breathes a sigh toward Me,
draws Me to himself.’
~ Saint Mechtild

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I
Red and Blue

The Curse of St Collen

“Didst thou ever see men of better equipment than those in red and blue?” asked the king.

“Their equipment is good enough,” said Collen, “for such equipment as it is.”

“What kind of equipment is that?” said the king.

Then said Collen, “The red on the one part signifies burning, and the blue on the other signifies coldness.” And with that Collen drew out his flask, and threw the holy water on their heads, whereupon they vanished from his sight...’

~ The Story of Gwyn ap Nudd and St Collen

Must there always be conflict
within me between
red and blue
as if the fire and ice
of Hell constantly war inside?

Will I always be damned with these hot red cheeks
and these toes dangling cold blue and senseless like icicles?

Is it the fault of my heart my blood does not flow strong and true?

Is it because my heart is not united with Your Sacred Heart
that I walk through Hell and not through Annwn?

Gwyn ap Nudd can't You teach me a spell
to undo the curse of St Collen,
to see Your people in
red and blue
and Your realm anew?

Rosacea

How dare you arrive
like one of the people in red
when I depart from the mead-feast,
give up the mead and the wine white and red?

When I no longer sit at the table smiling and laughing
with a glass in my hand and rosy cheeks
how dare you hex me with a face
redder than any wino's?

Redder than the faces
of the Three Drunkards of the Island of Britain?

Redder than the faces
of the men who drank for a year
before the Battle of Catraeth and returned
on funeral biers even redder with their own blood?

How dare you ruin me with a face more hideous than the battle-dead?

How dare you inflict upon me this catastrophic battlefield
where the sympathetic and parasympathetic
branches of my nervous system
war against each other
bringing about vasodilation,
telangiectasia, dermal matrix degradation?

How dare you plague me with papopustular eruptions?

Have I done something wrong to bring about this punishment?

Is it because I get angry and shout at my father?
Is it because of my embarrassment in the presence of others?
Is it because of my shame I cannot be like them?

Is it because I like to run and overdo it at the gym?

Is it because there is a warrior within me
who cannot get out and drink
and sing and paint the world bright red?

Is it the fault of the red dragon and her fiery breath?

Is it because I refuse to breathe the fires of prophecy?
Is it because I cannot find the words to lay
this burning in my cheeks to rest?

Raynaud's

You're the person in blue
who handed me a spade left out
on the stable yard all night
in the depths of winter

leaving my right hand white
as the coats of the horses of Annwn,
cold as their frozen forelocks,
numb as their toes
forever
escaping the heat
of horseshoes - the furnaces of Gofannon.

I didn't know who you were
or why you had come
all those years of shovelling
(and still I muck out in my dreams,
straightening the bankings,
sweeping back the beds
of the horses of the Queen of Annwn).

I didn't know who you were
or why you had come
when I struggled to stuff wads
of sphagnum moss into frosty holes
on the drained off peat-bogs
with senseless fingers.

I didn't know why
your departure caused such pain -
white flesh turning blue, purple, red, pink again
as I got to work sawing, splitting, lifting, hauling logs.

At last you revealed yourself on the refrigerator isle
when I was searching for a carton of milk
that was not out of date.

Raynaud's -
you were named
after a French physician in 1862
yet I suspect you had a much older name,
older than Jack Frost, the *gwrach*, the *gwiddonod*.
Without knowing it I cannot banish you nor your chilblains.

Instead I hide inside from your threat in winter,
wrap my fingers and toes three times,
outside can never stand still.

What Ails Me?

'Hail is cold grain
and showers of sleet
and sickness of serpents.'
~ Hagalaz (Norse rune)

I.

I come to You
my mind a wasteland,
the poles, the solstices of my world
out of kilter and something awakening beneath the ice
to ask the somewhat selfish question – “What ails me, my Lord?”

It echoes down through the centuries reminding You of Your father's
wound
and the wound You suffer every year battling against Your rival,
the wound to my navel after my dedication to You,
the pit of snakes in my belly button,
the heroes flung into it,
sucked dry.

II.

“What ails me, my Lord?”

I'm back at high school again
with serpents twining around my chair legs,
staring down into the depths of the ink well I never used.
I'm chewing my pen, ink is dripping from the side of my mouth,
from my finger tips and I'm raising my hand
to ask for more paper, bleeding words,
rising to the challenge of the exam,
exulting in the quiet of the other pupils,
this scratching of pens the one thing I can succeed in.

III.

“What ails me, my Lord?”

I think of the serpents who twist around my arms

and sit deep in my belly and I wish I could tie around my ankles
to hang like You over the Abyss to gain the wisdom that explains
this...

the way by lack of courage or confidence I am always climbing
the first three rungs on my ladder and then falling
back down into my pit of snakes.

IV.

“What ails me, my Lord?”

I’m back at the surgery again
and the nurse is wondering if I’m dead,
tapping my veins, trying to awaken them to life.
I’m explaining the junctions and showing which ones work.
Where blue flows to red and is tested then
incinerated by the fiery serpents.

V.

“What ails me, my Lord?”

My beast looks too much like an ink spodge test,
then I see my father splattered on the settee like a murder victim
from a third rate horror movie doing nothing as always.

I cannot find his wound or his serpents.

Instead I sink into mine and awaken them again,
the wounds made by all the surgeons, all the psychiatrists,
by all the snakes fighting back, by all the horror movies and I hear

Your laughter, Your divine laughter, in my veins like poetry,
not the canned laughter of the television
he sits in front of.

VI.

“By asking the question you have opened the door.

Although all our blood and poetic truths

cannot save the world or heal
our ailments

by this opening
your serpents might return
to health and an answer might come through.”

My Father's House

‘Creiddylad daughter of Lludd Llaw Eraint went off with Gwythyr son of Greidol, but before he could sleep with her Gwyn son of Nudd came to take her by force. Gwythyr son of Greidol gathered a host and Gwyn triumphed... Arthur heard of this and came to the North, and summoned Gwyn son of Nudd to him, and released his noblemen from his prison, and made peace between Gwyn son of Nudd and Gwythyr son of Greidol. This is the agreement that was made: the maiden was to be left in her father's house, untouched by either party, and there was to be battle between Gwyn and Gwythyr every May Day forever from that day until Judgement Day, and the one that triumphed on Judgement Day would take the maiden.’

~ Culhwch and Olwen

I'm a prisoner in my father's house.

I've been here over forty years.
“Get out and get a job!”

But I can't - there's no work
for maidens who cannot grow flowers,
can only grow words about outdated Brythonic Gods.

I tried my best to work with the horses of Rhiannon,
to bring my healing to the land for Creiddylad,
stacked shelves in the supermarket,
cleaned a hundred schools.

Always something breaks.

Like the stitching on a rein,
like the buckle on the girth leaving
me like a rider clinging onto a horse's crupper.
Sinking like the seventh-and-a-half man
unable to grasp the last strands
of a black tail into the sea.

It seems I'm fated to stay in the depths of the ocean

where my father pretends to be king,
but I refuse to bend my knee
to any other than Lludd.

It seems I will be always be stranded
somewhere north of Blackpool,
deeper than Lune Deep
where even Du y Moroedd
dare not travel on his black hooves,
were the waves will pitch and roar forever.

I cannot hear the call of either lover.
I cannot go or be taken by force.

Eating my Father's Heart

'Gwyn triumphed... and he killed Nwython and cut out his heart, and forced Cyledyr to eat his father's heart, and because of that Cyledyr went mad.'

~ Culhwch and Olwen

"Are you sure this will cure me?" I ask.

I'm the only one at the table and the hall is dark.
Before me, on the plate, is a heart,
raw and red and bloody.
The knife and fork
to either side of it look
too gentlemanly for this primitive task.
Cannibalism - whatever would my ancestors say?

"Will I not go mad?" I ask Gwyn worriedly.

I think of all my father's neuroses -
checking every window,
pulling on the door,
of his refusal to listen,
to see what is right in front of him.

I think of the times he has patronised me,
of my grandmother patronising him.

"Must I swallow this inheritance?"

"Bite by bite or down in one."

Not only is it tastier than I thought
but it provides an excuse for my madness.

II
The Mighty Beating
of His Heart

The Other Tawe

‘The white horse calls this talk to an end
his bridle leads us away
hurrying to battles in Tawe and Nedd.

Not the Tawe here in this land
but the one far away in a distant land
where the tide ebbs fiercely on the shore.’

~ The Conversation Between Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwyddno Garanhir

I.

Strange night, strange night,
woken from my sleep by the voice of an other.

Strange night, strange night,
woken from my sleep by a voice of my own.

“Come and see the battle by the other Tawe.
Come and see the battle where the river flows.
Come and see the battle by the other Tawe
where the still and flowing one ceaseless goes.”

II.

On the otherside of the Water Country,
on the otherside of its watery roads
where waterboatmen love
slow flowing rivers,

breaking the stillness where
ragworms writhe and lugworms gup
a thousand hoof-falls, a thousand foot-falls,
squelching, squelming, squeaming deep into the mud.

And oh how beautiful and sleek the horses.
Oh how beautiful and sleek their coats.
And oh how beautiful and sleek the horses.
Oh how beautiful and slick with blood.

A thousand hoof-falls churning,
a thousand warriors in circles turning,
fetlocks dragging in muddy waters,
sudden suck of horseshoes lost.

And oh the battle-clash of swordsmen.
A thousand swordsmen trained by Arthur
and yet they float like waterboatmen
kicking not to the river's source

and a shield with the Virgin Mary
painted on it sinks deep into the mud.

III.

And all the battleflags lie fallen,
fallen broken like the broken legs
of a thousand deadly warriors,
fallen broken like the legs of cranes.

And all the fabrics ripping tearing
with screams like mothers despairing
and their flapping, flapping, flapping
on the wind is like the wings of cranes,

a thousand crane-women are flapping in
heralding a warrior on a white stallion,
bridle donned with silken materials
flapping like flags from his long reins.

And oh the sounds of their wings!
Like a thousand sail boats overturning
on the tidal waves of the river's estuary
lifted airborne on Annwn's winds.

And oh can you hear the beating
of His heart and the throbbing in His veins?
The river-water once so slow and flowing
turns its tides in His holy name.

IV.

Upriver a beaver finishes her dam.

The flash of her teeth is like a window
bedazzled by the light of a white-hot sun.

And through the window nothing can be seen
because the brightness of the warrior is so bright
it would bring a host of angels to their knees.

The sky is splitting - filled with the wings of cranes
and their feathers are falling into waters
running still and slow again.

He Sings the Soul Names

Mither voices through the mizzle,
through the mist, mist-numb mutters.
He fails to muster them at first with His voice.
Hoofbeats louder, huge round hoofbeats of His Horse.

“COME!”

Mistlings mither through the mizzle,
seep, sink, sit, slither in the godless grey
drizzle of forgetting until the voice of a God loud
as the cracking of glass beneath the hooves of His horse calls.

“COME! COME!”

Awake the mistlings remembering,
their misting reassembling into a mither of forms.
They look like something viewed through cracked glass.
They teeter, totter, diused limbs pale, severed, crunch of footfalls.

“COME! COME! COME!”

Oh the baying of the hounds rounding,
bounding, barks, bristling hackles, woofs reign!
He rounds them up, gentle guidance, touch of red nose,
hand on arm, “Don’t dither,” “remember, remember, remember.”

“COME! COME! COME TO MY FORT!”

Oh these feet know the path, the way
when the mind does not, misty heel, misty toe.
One foot before another soul-forms remembering forest,
foray up river, up hill, up mountain, to the in-the-air turning fort.

“COME! COME! COME TO MY HALL!”

Misted ones mix and dance no longer
mizzle-like but blue and red as blood and water,

the only drizzle sweat upon their brows before they sit
and partake in the feast of holy leaf-meat and ever-flowing mead.

“COME! COME! COME TO MY CAULDRON!”

This drink is not one of forgetting -
they know themselves now and the pain
as He sings their soul-names voice resounding
like the sound of shattered glass is outweighed by beauty.

“COME! COME! COME TO BE REBORN!”

The waters in the cauldron are blue
as the infinite seas of the Deep and filled
with blood and there are stars shining and each
beholds a star and reaches out and becomes like glass.

She Rested Against His Bosom

‘Then rapt out of herself, she saw on high the King of Glory, and at His right Hand His Imperial Mother, while she herself at His left Hand, rested against His bosom, and listened with attentive ear to the ceaseless and mighty beatings of His own sweet Heart.’

~ Revelations of Saint Mechtild

When all the dead were gone to the cauldron
and the dance of blue and red
reached its end

I rested against
the bosom of my King
and listened to His heartbeat,
deeper than the deepest drums of Annwn
and mightier than all the warriors of Arthur’s court.

And as I rested there He opened the door to His heart.

Like Mechtild, in that sacred place, I found a treasure-house.

I entered to behold a vineyard with a river of living water
flowing from east to west and twelve fruit trees
who were maidens in green vestments -
Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience...

I bathed in the river of love,
swam with the fish with golden scales,
cleansed myself of anger, impatience, fear, doubt.

My King, on a high throne crafted from shining crystal,
handed to me a wedding garment woven from
the vibrant colours of the Tylwyth Teg.

The white the magic of the mist.
The red the passion of Annwn’s roses.
The green the verdant power of the green hills.
The blue the calm of the ever-rolling ocean.

The gold the majesty of His crown.

“All you desire you will find in my heart.”

A Place of Astonishment

‘The heart embodies the paradoxical nature of Shiva
and is therefore a place of astonishment,
sheer wonder and ineffable mystery.’
~ The Triadic Heart of Shiva¹

Your heart is a place of paradox.
Inside You tease me with Your riddles.

“How many corners has my fortress when it spins?
In the absence of the sun where divides the day and night?
How many blackbirds does it take to sing the forever twilight?

How many blades of grass are upon my green hills?
How many leaves are upon my evergreen trees?
Where in Annwn are the tastiest fruits?
From which animal comes the tenderest meat?

Are the flames of Annwn one fire and the waves one sea?
Why one hot? Why one cold? What the cause of burn and chill?
Where is the source of the rivers and what the course of the wind?
Where did I bury the bones of the mist and who dug them up again?

How many dead come to my cauldron? Are they living or dead?
Is my land the land of the dead or the land of the living?
Are you alive or dead? And what about me?

And what of the breath - where did it come from?
Why does it leave and where is the Land of Last Breaths?

And what of my heart - when did it begin to beat?
What happens when my heart skips a beat
and when my heartbeat ceases?”

“I cannot bear to think of that!”

¹ I first heard this cited by Andreas Weber in his Heart Wisdom course for Advaya.

“Stop. Listen.” Silence.

In a moment of astonishment
He and I are at one with the Deep.

The God of Wild Things

Caratkara - 'astonishment,' 'miracle,' 'surprise'

Caratkarasana - 'the ecstatic unfolding of the enraptured heart'

~ Translations from Sanksrit of the name of the Wild Thing yoga pose

I am a wild thing
when I take *catakarasana*,
back-bending with my weight on my palm,
the sole of one foot and my pinky toe,
one arm arching overhead.

In this pose I am reaching out to You.
In this pose my third eye is wide open.
In this pose my heart is open too.

As it unfolds in rapture I see You
as the God of Wild Things

dancing in ecstasy

with stag-headed men,
with horse-headed women,
with those who take the form of bulls.

I see You dancing with the Three Bull Protectors,
the Three Bull Chieftains, the Three Bulls Spectres,
the Three Powerful Shepherds, the Three Power Swineherds,
the Three Wild Spectres, with Cyledyr Wyllt and Myrddin Wyllt.

I see You dancing with the Wild Things and dancing with me.

You take me by the hand into the place between poses
and fold me into the rapture of Your heart.

He Proposes on May Eve

‘There was to be battle between Gwyn and Gwythyr every May Day forever from that day until Judgement Day.’

~ Culhwch and Olwen

‘The second plague was a scream that was heard every May eve above every hearth in the Island of Britain. It pierced people’s hearts and terrified them so much that men lost their colour and strength, and women miscarried, and young men and maidens lost their senses, and all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters were left barren.’

~ Lludd and Llefelys

‘The Scream over Annwn... a mysterious gesture of ritual frenzy.’

~ Will Parker

‘The second plague... is a dragon, and a dragon of a foreign people is fighting it and trying to overcome it and because of that... your dragon gives a horrible scream. And this is how you can find out about it. When you get home, have the island measured, its length and breadth, and where you find the exact centre, have that place dug up. And then into that hole put a vast of the best mead that can be made, and a sheet of brocaded silk over the top of the vat, and then you yourself keep watch. And then you will see the dragons fighting in the shape of monstrous animals. But eventually they will rise into the air in the shape of dragons; and finally, when they are exhausted after the fierce and frightful fighting, they will onto the sheet in the shape of two little pigs, and make the sheet sink down with them, and drag it to the bottom of the vat, and they will drink all the mead, and after that they will sleep. Then immediately wrap the sheet around them, and in the strongest place you can find in your kingdom, bury them in a stone chest and hide it in the ground, and as long as they are in that secure place, no plague shall come to the Island of Britain.’

~ Lludd and Llefelys

‘The two dragons, one of which was white, the other red, came forth, and approaching one another began a terrible fight, and cast forth fire with their breath.’

~ The History of the Kings of Britain

It's the night before His battle.
It's the night of the dragon's scream.
It's the night of the Scream over Annwn.

Across the world wars and wild fires are raging.
Lands are barren and warriors are falling to their knees.
Refugees are fleeing and washing up on Britain's seas,
women carrying their babies living and dead.

We're heading as ever towards the world's end.

My Beloved is in His armour looking unlike a knight.

He gets down on one knee and holds out a ring
on which two dragons are intertwined.

"Will you marry me in life?"

When I say, "Yes,"
He holds out a second ring
on which dragons fight with fiery breath.

"And will you," he asks, "marry me in death?"

III
The Wedding

The Land of the Fair²

Are you going to the Land of the Fair
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Remember me to one who lived there
For she once was a true love of mine

Tell her to build us a coffin of wood
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
From no tree that ever has stood
And she will be a true love of mine

Are you going to the Land of the Fair
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Remember me to one who lived there
For she once was a true love of mine

Tell her to dig the deepest of graves
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Without a pick axe or a spade
And she will be a true love of mine

Are you going to the Land of the Fair
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Remember me to one who lived there
For she once was a true love of mine

Tell her to seal our burial tomb
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Without hammer or nails return to the womb
And she will be a true love of mine

² This is a rewrite of the well known Yorkshire folk ballad 'Scarborough Fair'.

The Earth's Embrace

I'll never forget the sound of the rattle of grave dirt over my head as the burial was completed. Not "farewells," but "journey wells." The feeling of sinking down into the earth's embrace.

Into a cave. Shouldn't be alone here. Not good to be alone. Work to do.

Prayers to the earth, earth my mother, who I've been separated from for so long. Calls to my spirits - winged white mare, white red-eared hounds, seven crows, to the ancestors. Orddu and her line and... who's this? Cotton-white hair. My grandmother on my mother's side and great grandmother too.

"I've been waiting for this night all my life to die to my old self, heal my wounds, make new for my wedding."

Thoughts of my husband-to-be, Gwyn ap Nudd, bull-horned, beautiful, terrible...

Shaking my rattle, *shakha shakha*, entering the trance, surrendering into the arms of my grandmothers. They take me back into my early childhood to where I'm splashing on the beach with my mum and show me I was happy then, clearing the distorting waters of false perception.

Shakha, shakha, "journey on." Not so happy now back at primary school. Smell of piss because there was always somebody who wet themselves and carpets - the one in the library to where I always fled. We're in the playground where I dared not run as a horse anymore being called a pig. "Oink," "oink," they're pushing me about, because I'm the fat kid, the fat kid who just couldn't stop eating.

There was a pig within me, a pig who got out of control, ancestors say I must befriend the pig. "It wasn't your fault." I touch the pig's snout, roll with the pig, snuffle with the pig, we're digging up the land of my past and rearranging those hills and folds and there's a vast boar

beside me large and snorting and I'm running across the land - stones, graves, mines - with the Great Boar of Dartmoor.

Pigs in the skies, circling like dragons, flying down, down, down to the well in my navel filled with mead. Nodens³ is here, with His silver hand, with His healing hand, coaxing them to sleep.

Shakha, shakha, "journey on." Through the stables, riding school, event yard, to the ghost of a horse. Poor Badger, dead of a brain tumour (unlike my brother who survived his aged two and thirty-one). I didn't know what to do. He went mad then died but still roamed the yard shaking his head.

Ancestors know how to lay a restless ghost to rest. Quiet words. A horse blanket. They shake their rattles over him, shake their rattles round my head, and something soft and tumorous clears.

There's a dead horse in my grave with me, a dead horse from the grave next door, now he's Gwyn's white horse. I'm plaiting his mane for the wedding whilst the ancestors reweave the threads of the past.

Shakha, shakha, "journey on." Exams and festivals. Pills and papers. A witch in a bubble. A crashed out train. Glastonbury Tor in the distance, the tower like the headwear of an immense God looking on.

Madness. The brink of the Abyss. Three *ellyllon*, pointed faces, taking me up to the upperworld. With delicate silver instruments operating on my brain and suturing my forehead shut.

I no longer see the shadow dancers, the dark and bright people, but know they are still there.

Shakha, shakha, "journey on." I must go now to where my healing commenced. To where I met Gwyn. The fairy funeral procession. My corpse in the coffin. Journeying to Annwn to awake my soul. My vows to Him beneath Glastonbury Tor at the White Spring - a

³ Nodens is the Romano-British name of Nudd / Lludd.

cauldron filled with stars. The nine maidens swaying, His dancing people returning, the sutures slipping as He reveals His world.

Ancestors shaking their rattles over my third eye tugging out the last suture so I can see again.

“I’m ready now,” I tell them, “I can see clearly and I’m ready for my wedding to Gwyn.”

He sends not one white horse but six white horses with plaited manes and ribbons in their tails. They take me on a chariot around the corners of snow-capped mountains where the horses graze on nothing and the hounds of Annwn bark their chorus with geese and swans honking ahead.

Over frost-gilded trees, to the heart of the forest, to the yew grove that circles the Abyss then down on the spiralling winds to the Castle of Cold Stone where Winter’s King is asleep on His death bed.

Everybody is gathered in Gwyn’s Hall - the fair folk in blue and red with their pipes and fiddles, Orddu and her kin, my mum and my mother’s line, the monastic devotees of Annwn, my best friend.

Just one problem - my Fairy King, my groom, is in his tomb. Stone dead. What’s a bride to do?

Let that remain unsaid. Know only that I awoke my beloved from His coffin as He woke me long ago. Two became one then flew again as two from my grave, up, over my comrades singing in their graves the songs that echo from the Devon hills and call the knockers from the mines, the dead from their graves to dance with the Piper and His fauns and the Dancing Green Woman in the ferny glades.

Choo! Choo! The green train chuffs its congratulations down the track whole.

What a celebration! We fly above, the night and the stars united in us, united with all.

I return with the bird song - not the nightingale, not the lark, but thrush, blackbird, robin.

I am reborn from my grave with the help of a fair woman and greet the dawn as a Bride of Gwyn.

Sweeter than Wine

‘Harmonious is my song in Caer Siddi...
and around its turrets are the wellsprings of the sea;
and (as for) the fruitful fountain which is above it -
its drink is sweeter than white wine.’

~ The Chair of Taliesin

The drink of our honeymoon
is not the *ambrosia* brought by doves
to a mountaintop in golden cups.

It is not the *amrita* churned
from the ocean by a thousand demons
with the tail of a serpent knotted to a mountain
leaving a dark poison known as *kalakuta*
swallowed by Shiva - *Nilikantha* -
held like mouthwash in His blue throat.

It is not the *awen* brewed in a cauldron
that broke and spilled across Gwyddno’s land
poisoning his horses before You as a spectral black dog
lapped it up with Your blue-black tongue.

It is not the red wine drunk at the Last Supper.

It is not the white wine pressed from grapes from Annuvian vines.

From the crown of Your head pours a fountain
and its drink is sweeter than wine.

I Offer You my Heart

‘In the morning, when first thou risest, salute the flowering and loving Heart of thy sweet Lover... and endeavour to plunge thine own heart therein with the whole strength of thy heart.’

~ Revelations of Saint Mechtild

In the morning, when I first rise,
I offer You my heart as a flowering rose⁴,
redder than the Rose of Lancashire
and blood spilt by the Tudors
so when You trawl the battlefields
its fragrance takes Your mind from the stench
and You are no longer amongst crows and carrion
but with me in a secret chamber where a hundred roses bloom.

I offer You my heart so You can use it as a cup.
Its overspilling waters are bluer than Annwn’s seas,
bluer than the waters that spilled from the cup
of the fountain cup-bearer when Seithenin
broke the floodgates drowning
the land of Gwyddno.
With it You quench Your thirst
in the moments between gathering the souls,
gulping it down then watering Your thirsty horse.

I offer You my heart not as a pomegranate
but a fruit known only to You and I
with exceeding sweet savour.
This is no trick to keep You in my world.
I know by treachery You will not keep me in Yours.
I offer You every single seed without deceitful conditions.
I offer You the sweetness within without expectations
to satiate Your hunger on the never-ending roads
of the dead never looking back to Thisworld.

Thus I plunge into Your Heart by my love.

⁴ Each first line is borrowed from the Revelations of St Mechtild.

The House of my Heart

In the House of my Heart
the red and blue people dance,
in the chambers they are transformed.

In my right atrium a blue woman arrives
with a herd of blue cattle with blue lips, blue tongues,
they are mooing, sad and sorrowful, she speaks their names:
'Blue Anxious One, Blue Doldrums, Blue Depression, Hornless Blue.'
Other cowherds, horseherds come, boys and girls with hounds
who are yappy or listless and mysterious people
in the best of equipment red and blue
lead them into the next chamber.

In my right ventricle the cattle are fed and bedded down
on straw that looks and feels like water,
the horses are put out to pasture
and the hounds are given a sausage or two.
It's alright to feel old here, it's alright to fall asleep.
It's alright to have long grey hair and knots in your beard
even if you're a woman because the one who awaits you accepts
the coming of all souls no matter how weary in imperfection
drawn in daze, in trance, to their transformation
by the people equipped in blue and red

to where my lungs transform every sorrow
in the tiny chambers of the alveoli -
in every one there is a king
who has a cauldron
who resides over a feast
where people in red and blue dance
and this place is also the Heart of my Heart.

In my left ventricle they are reborn as tender calves,
as wobbly-legged foals, as newborn pups snuggled together.
They are fed and nurtured by the people in red and blue and fed
on milk with a touch of mead and quickly they grow.

From my left atrium they come stampeding forth -
all the cattle with their cow bells ringing with names like
Red Joy and Red Passion and Red Horned and Red Creative One.
All the horses shaking their red manes swishing their red tails.
All the hounds outrunning their young whippers-in.
The people in blue and red cheer them on.

They are the arrows from the bow
of the Hunter in the Heart of my Heart,
the sound of the blood in my veins rushing
from death to birth to death and back to birth again.

Not Taken from my Mother House⁵

They were taken from their Mother House
time and time again –
surnames erased,
Collison, Allen, Curtis...

But what were these names
attached at the end as they married off
and entered the houses of their husband's fathers?
My surname has never fitted easily with me
and neither has my mother's received
from a husband *ab hominem*.

Perhaps that's why I have
shrugged them off with my nunnery.

Whatever would my ancestors think
if they knew I had married a God
who did not take me away to the Otherworld
but came instead to dwell here in my Mother House –
here, on my altar, in this sanctuary, in my heart, in my blood?

Here in my Mother House where I would keep the skulls
of my mothers and their holy relics if I had them
but instead we keep my great grandmother's
chest of drawers, cribbage board,
gnarly old desk, cutlery...

I am building shrines to my mothers
and hoping they will understand the changes –
why I married a God who will let our names and spirits flow
into the Otherworld and back again more fluently than any river.

I stand here, now, in my Mother House, timeless, eternal,
knowing I will not last forever or be erased.

⁵ A poem written in response to the Mother House module on Sylvia Lindsteadt's
'When Women Were the Land' course for Advaya.

IV
He Shows Me
How to Love

His Smile

At first I thought He would never smile.

He who was cast into the Void
on the hour of His birth.

He whose destiny is to work
without cease gathering the souls
of the dead into the blackest of cauldrons.

He whose horse is forever leading Him by the bridle
into the darkest places between the worlds
to bring back the lost
and those shattered by trauma
and piece them back together like a broken mirror.

When He smiled it broke a thousand mirrors.
When He smiled it broke a thousand hearts.
When He smiled it pieced them together.

When He smiled it united us forever
in the darkness of the Void with
the lost and broken souls.

His smile brought a smile to dark matter.

When He smiled I smiled too.

When He smiled joy and happiness
followed erasing the furrows
of the oxen of sorrow.

He Helps Me Give Metta

Metta, from *Maitri*, ‘Loving Kindness’
~ Translation from Sanskrit⁶

He helps me give Metta (although I resist)
to myself when I’m a newborn, a two-year old
in the middle of my most terrible tantrum,
a snotty school child ringed by bullies,
a troubled teenager escaping into smoke,
a young adult repeatedly failing to leave home.
To myself as His *awenydd* and as His nun
and to my imagined self when my days are done.

He helps me give Metta to the people I like.
To my mum, to my best friend, to my fellow
monastic devotees of Annwn and all the monks
and nuns who have walked the Path of the Heart.
To those with whom I have shared a circle.
To those who have walked in the dark.

He helps me give Metta to people who are neutral.
To the neighbours either side and those who walk their dogs.
To the people who work in the supermarkets and shops.
To those I see in the gym or running or swimming.
To those to whom I give a nod but rarely talk.

He helps me give Metta to the people I dislike.
To the people of my past with whom I have fallen out.
To those who drop litter in the valley and ride loud motorbikes.
To the millionaires and the thugs destroying the world.
To Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump.

Finally He tells me I must give Metta to my dad.

“What?” I cough, splutter, failing to find the words.

⁶ Although Metta is best known as a Buddhist practice references to it are found in the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and in the Upanishads.

“Reach,” he says, “into the depths of your heart.”

I find the Metta in the deepest part of me.

“May you be full of loving kindness,
may you be calm, may you be happy,
may you be peaceful and at ease.”⁷

⁷ Words used in the ‘Befriending the Mind’ course at the Mandala Yoga Ashram.

Master of Tonglen

Tonglen - from *ton* 'giving or sending' and *len* 'receiving or taking.'
~ Translation from Tibetan

You are a master of *tonglen*.

I see You surrounded by the dead
all filled with suffering and conflicts
that in life they failed to resolve.

I see all their auras out of balance -
dancing, flashing, indigo, yellow, green,
blue, red, orange, violet, like lights
in the most disreputable of nightclubs.

Curse me - I'd wish them from my sight
as the colours blend into toxic smoke.

But to them You open Your heartspace.
You open Your Heart and by a million cords
take the sorrows from their hearts into Yours
where they burn within its brightness.

To them You offer love and kindness.

As the smoke is dissolved in Your heart
they become clear as crystal clear as glass.

I see this sacred art helps to ease Your sadness.

My Stone Chest

‘Gwyn son of Nudd... God has put the spirit of the demons of Annwn in him, lest the world be destroyed.’

~ Culhwch and Olwen

Let us speak no longer of plagues.

Let us speak only of love.

Very carefully You open
my stone chest and in my heart
You find the red and white dragons
intertwined and between them
You find Yourself a child.

Not boy-child or wolf-child
but the tiny slither of a black wyrm.

As I take You in my arms I express my astonishment.

I hold You, like a Madonna, in Renaissance art.
(If only Mary had embraced the serpent).
Our halos are black as dark matter.

The Saints of the Void sing louder
than the Perpetual Choirs of the Island of Britain
and all the so-called ‘demons’ of Annwn are released.

Dragon of my Heart

I.

Dragon of my Heart black and beautiful
with Your wings filled with ghosts

You take me up high into the sky,
show me how far I am from

the cannon fire, the sparks,
the fuses, the ram of gunpowder,
the sound of cannon balls hitting walls.

From the sieges of the past and of the future.

You grant to me Your perspective.
You tell me I must be calm.

II.

Dragon of my Heart black and beautiful
with Your wings filled with skulls

You take me up high into the sky,
show me how far I am from

the machine-gun fire echoing
from my past lives stacatto across
the battlefields where barbed wire is strung.

From the executions of firing squads from the guns.

You grant to me Your perspective.
You tell me I must find peace.

III.

Dragon of my Heart black and beautiful
with Your wings filled with the hung

You take me up high into the sky,

show me how far I am from

the forests of the suicides,
where they hang from the trees
driven to their deaths by who knows what.

From the bullies on the streets and on the screens.

You grant to me Your perspective.
You tell me I must be kind.

IV.

Dragon of my Heart black and beautiful
with Your wings terrifying to angels

You take me up high into the sky,
show me how far I am from

the Gallic Wars, the Crusades,
the Wars of the Roses, the Napoleonic Wars,
from Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

From Vietnam, Gaza, the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

You grant to me Your perspective.
You tell me I must love.

V.

Dragon of my Heart black and beautiful
with Your wings filled with light

You take me up high into the sky,
show me the heights of my privilege.

You tell me one day like You I will
bear the dead in my wings.

Allow us to Come Home

‘Some stupid people also go stupidly to the door holding fire and iron in the hands when someone has inflicted illness, and call to the King of the Benevolent Ones and his Queen, who are evil spirits, saying: “Gwyn ap Nudd who are far in the forests for the love of your mate allow us to come home.”’

~ Speculum Christiani

Tracks of tanks in the snow.
Avalanches falling from buildings.
Is this the thrum of drones or tinnitus?
An ever-present fear the next missile
will hit the nuclear reactor.

I’m neither here nor there.

I’m in a woodland in Wales
with the peasant folk calling out:
“Gwyn ap Nudd who are far in the forests
for the love of your mate allow us to return home.”

I’m wandering through the trees and the people
are getting more sinister – fire and iron in their hands
as they call on the King and Queen of the Benevolent Ones.

I’m walking with the soldiers brought here from Ukraine
for just six weeks to train for frontline combat
with fire and iron in their hands praying
for strength to defend their home.

With my family I’m playing battleships
as the Russian warships depart from Syria.

I’m hearing Donald Trump promising he will end
the war between Ukraine and Russia by drilling a huge fucking hole.

Yet, still, I'm getting called up for war and I'm floating into the air
reciting poetry before my mentor grabs my arm and drags me
to her grandmother's house safe in the Otherworld.

I say I'm not safe to work on the production lines
at Samlesbury or Warton – to hold fire and iron
in my hands, grenades, missiles...

instead I will take the hands
of the soldiers as they return home.

I will walk with them through the wildwood
as I walked with Myrddin and the wildmen of Celyddon.

Together we will call upon Gwyn ap Nudd and Creiddylad.
We will banish the belief that They are evil spirits.
We will bring an end to this illness.

One day we will all come home.

*On a hilltop
far from Glastonbury Tor
I pour an offering of spring water
and the red and blue people
and their King return
to dance.*

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