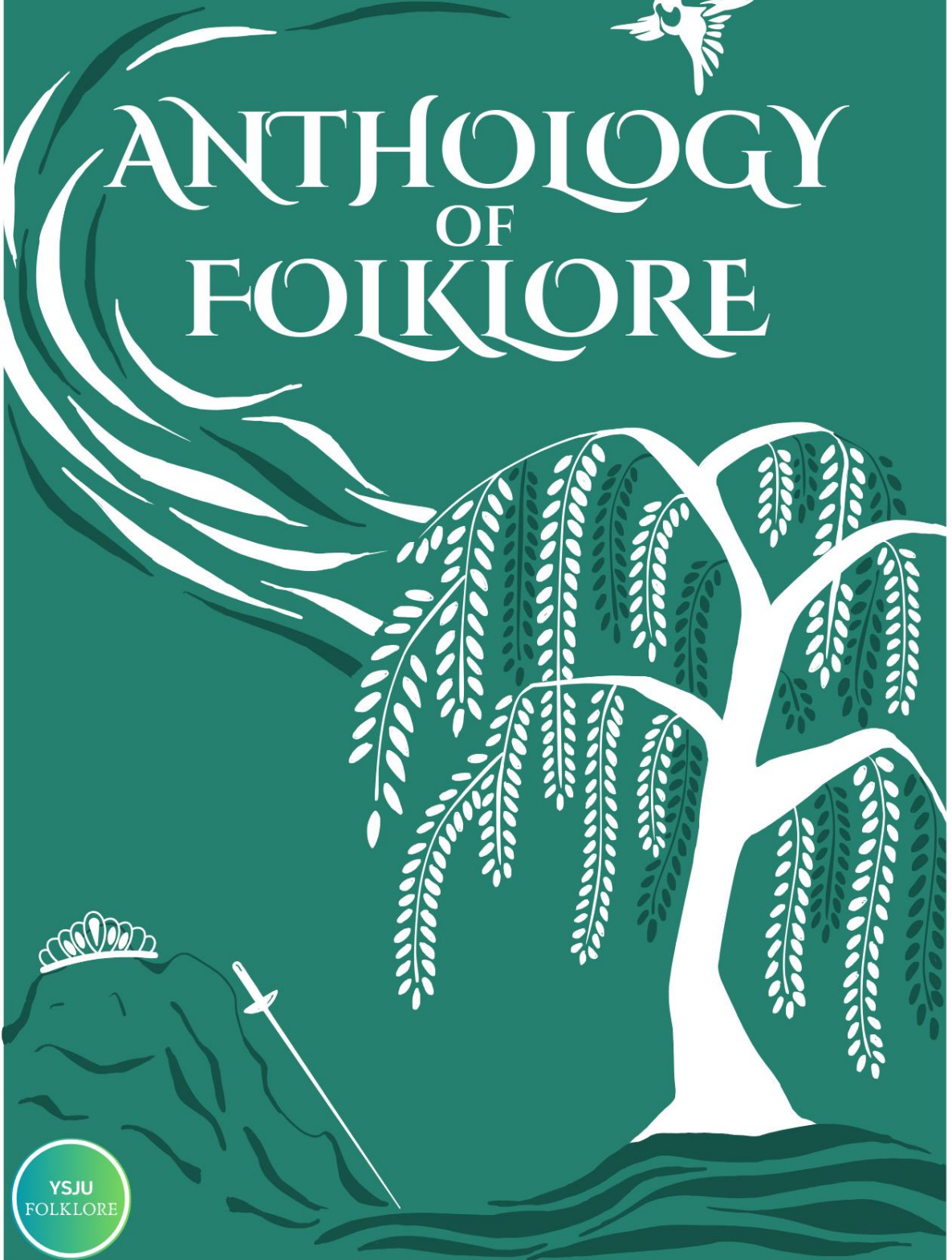


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ANTHOLOGY OF FOLKLORE





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York St John University

**Anthology
Of
Folklore**

**Edited by *Amelia Harrison, Kerry
Holmes and Stela Cambraia***

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Introduction

This anthology is a delightful collection of folktales, meticulously researched and compiled from diverse cultures around the globe. It is a visual and narrative journey through the traditions and beliefs of different continents. Each story, already well-known in its country or region, is presented with a fresh twist to highlight family values while maintaining the core elements of the original tales.

Adding a unique and personal touch, all the tales in this anthology have been submitted by students and staff of York St John University (YSJU). This collaboration brings together a wealth of cultural heritage and personal interpretations, enriching the collection with a distinctive YSJU perspective. The characters in these stories range from humans and animals to gods and inanimate objects, ensuring a rich and varied reading experience. Through this anthology, YSJU not only showcases global diversity but also celebrates the community's creative spirit and dedication to preserving and sharing the world's storytelling traditions.

We hope you enjoy the read!

The Myth of the Guajojó - Bolivia

Luciana Medrano Urioste

Hundreds of years ago, in the depths of the Bolivian Chiquitania rainforest, lived a young woman, as beautiful as the melodies warbled by the passing birds. This girl played a very important role in her society. She was the daughter of the Cacique, the native chief and sorcerer of the tribe. But she knew her pure heart would never be sufficient to achieve a union worthy of her imposing father's approval. She had grown up to believe that her marriage would be carried out under conditions of elaborated convenience, rather than emotional connection.

The girl, stubborn as a mule, firmly believed in the famous tale of true love. She met a young man from her tribe, brave and handsome, but belonging to a lower social class. Their attraction was mutual, and their romance was instant. As expected, the Cacique did not approve of such a union. He forbade all contact between his daughter and the man from the beginning, despite her countless attempts to show him that if he opened his heart, he could find space to accept him. With resounding denial, the Cacique remained firm in his negative position, fearing that the boy's intentions could be dishonest and a threat to their position.

The young woman hated disobeying her father, whose presence was universally intimidating. But the connection she felt with the boy was strong, impulsive, and bold, and he proved to love her sincerely. She continued meeting him in secret, trying to hide her tracks and erasing any type of evidence. However, the Cacique had lived long enough and ruled over enough people to realise that he was being taken for a fool, and the only way he would ever allow being trampled by anyone was over his dead body. He quickly learned of his daughter's disobedience, which could have passed as an innocent rumour. But if the townspeople learned that not even his own children could respect his direct orders, a rebellion, or worse, a usurpation, could quickly become a reality. He had to do something about it.

He lured the young warrior with his magic to the depths of the forest, where no one could bear witness to the secret; and cold-blooded murder the Cacique had planned. The girl, worried about the disappearance of her lover, began to suspect her father's characteristic thirst for ambition and abilities of revenge. She left for the jungle to look for him, and when

the evidence of her beloved's death became real, there was no word or action that could free her from her grief.

Driven by the pain, she ran to her father, accusing him of murder and not afraid to reveal it to his people. The Cacique saw her shouts as a nuisance tantrum and did not hesitate to use his sorcerer skills and turn his daughter into a lonely bird, so that no one would know of the crime he had committed. He preferred to lose the love of his daughter than the power over his people. However, the woman's cries did not stop despite having been transformed. Through the songs of the bird, called Guajojó, she mourns to this day the loss of her loved one, as well as warbling bad omens, flying across the depths of the Bolivian Chiquitania rainforest.

The Crown - Romania

Alex Cojocaru

There was once upon a time, like never before – for if there had not been, it would not be told – a most beautiful sea of mustard froth.

And within the depths of this froth – weaving between dense clusters like hunted hartebeests – danced needles of flesh and bone, sending tufts of yellow soaring for the skies. Further below, where the stems of the bedstraw shone like emeralds in the care of the sun, and her dress bore the lightest of stains from gliding freely along the path of trampled plants, stood a girl.

So bright a smile had she, that the bouquet of violets clasped in her hand dimmed to grey before the very eyes of the other maidens. For where the corners of her mouth stretched up towards her cheekbones the flesh dipped and dented – and the corners of her eyes, in their half-mooned state, painted thin lines in semblance of a pair of crow's feet.

Her hands, much like those of her companions', finally clasped around the lady's bedstraws like a silk-weaving caterpillar and drew them in to join her bouquet. When the girl fell, they all did, dresses pristine, crafting colourful crowns. Another girl, with eyes like olives in a spider's embrace, braided her crown without looking up at the rambunctious laughter and giddiness of her peers. It did not subside as the sun bid them farewell. Nor as the girl with olive eyes helped another tie the remaining stems to her flower crown.

When the sky darkened, it was time to return to the village. Hand in hand, the girls walked. Far in the distance, smoke rose. Thick like moss, it climbed towards the heavens and the maidens quickened their pace to reach it before it did. Upon their arrival, there was euphoria like no other. Music and festivity and the orange of the bonfire where their beloveds stood red-faced – a product of the heat perhaps, or perhaps not – awaiting a dance.

And so dance, they did. Until the dresses blurred and their feet hurt, and their skin burned from the licking flames. Until the fire became nothing but embers. Until the crowns, lopsided atop the heads of their owners, were removed and thrown onto the village houses. They watched with bated breath and relieved exhales as there they remained.

All but one.

For when the backs of the girls were turned, one crown began to slide. It slid and slid and finally it fell, and like a horrible gift, landed on a welcome mat, there to be found the next day.

Inside, the floorboards began to creak unsteadily from room to room. Thin green tendrils were protruding from every crack, searching, sniffing. Climbing walls and stairs and ceilings, slithering on and around furniture like snakes. Illuminated by the television screen, an old woman's resting body lay unsuspecting upon her worn sofa.

It was there that the tendrils stopped. Observed. Then, almost tenderly, began to wrap around the woman like netting. Embracing her like an old friend might another, leaving her eyes for last, perhaps hoping for some recognition, though it never came.

The woman never opened her eyes again. And so tighter and tighter the tendrils squeezed until they seemed to extract all semblance of a life out of her. Until finally, when she lay limp inside her grass cocoon, she was freed.

The Crown - (Romanian version)

Alex Cojocaru

A fost odată ca niciodată– că de n-ar fi nu s-ar mai povesti – cea mai frumoasă mare de spumă, gălbuie ca muștarul. Și în adâncul acestei spume – mișcându-se ca niște antilope vânate printre ciorchinii denși – dansau ace de carne și oase, trimitând smocuri galbene înălțându-se spre cer.

Mai jos, unde tulpinile sânzienelor străluceau ca smaraldele în grija soarelui, iar rochia ei purta pete ușoare de la alunecatul nestânjenit pe cărarea bătătorită, stătea o fată.

Avea un zâmbet atât de strălucitor, încât buchetul de violete din mâna ei pălea chiar sub ochii celorlalte fecioare. Căci acolo unde colțurile gurii ei se întindeau spre pomeți, carnea obrazilor se strângea – iar colțurile ochilor ei, ca jumătățile de lună, pictau riduri subțiri.

Măinile ei, precum cele ale însoțitoarelor ei, s-au strâns în cele din urmă în jurul sânzienelor ca o omidă care țese mătase strângându-le în buchetul său.

Când fata a căzut, căzut-au toate cu rochiile curate, creând coroane colorate. O altă fată, cu ochii ca două boabe de măsline în îmbrățișarea unui păianjen, și-a împletit coroana fără să se uite în sus la râsul zburciugat și zburdălnicia celorlalte. N-a fost chip să se domolească când soarele a început a apune. Nici atunci când fata cu ochi ca măslinile a ajutat-o pe alta să-și lege coroana de flori.

Când cerul s-a întunecat, venise timpul să se întoarcă în sat mână în mână. În depărtare, se ridicase ceața. Groasă ca lichenii, se înălța spre cer și fecioarele și-au grăbit pasul pentru a ajunge în sat. La sosire, tot satul era cuprins de euforie. Era muzică și sărbătoare și focul portocaliu în jurul căruia ibovnicii lor stăteau cu obraji rumeni– poate din cauza căldurii, sau poate nu – așteptând un dans.

Și-au dansat. Până când rochiile s-au mânjit și picioarele le chinuiau și pielea lor s-a ars din cauza flăcărilor, și până când flăcările au devenit nimic mai mult decât jar. Până când coroanele, înclinate deasupra capetelor, au fost scoase și azvârlite peste case. Le-au privit cu răsuflările tăiate și răsuflând ușurate atunci când au rămas acolo.

Toate mai puțin una.

Când fetele și-au întors spatele, o coroană a început să alunece. A alunecat și a alunecat și în cele din urmă a căzut și, ca un dar nefast, a aterizat pe covorașul de la intrare, să fie găsit a doua zi.

Înăuntru, scândurile au început să scârțâie de la o cameră la alta, vlăstari subțiri și verzi ieșind din fiecare crăpătură, căutând și adulmecând. Se cățarau pe pereți, pe scări și pe tavane, încolăcindu-se în jurul mobilierului precum șerpilor. Iluminat de ecranul televizorului, trupul adormit al bătrânei zăcea neștiutor pe canapeaua veche. Acolo s-au oprit vlăstarii. Priveau.

Apoi, aproape tandru, au început să se încovoie în jurul femeii precum o plasă. Îmbrățișând-o ca pe un vechi prieten, numai ochii lăsându-i descoperiți, sperând în zadar să fie recunoscut. Femeia nu și-a mai deschis ochii niciodată. Astfel, din ce în ce mai strâns cărceii se strângeau până când păreau să scoată toată vlaga din bătrâna femeie, până când, în cele din urmă, zăcând fără suflare în acel scriu de iarbă, a fost eliberată.

Marnie and the Rainbow Tree - Ireland

Sam Pheby-McGarvey

Each morning, Marnie and Owen awoke with sore heads. They'd asked their parents many times "Why?" Their parents had answered, "It's a family disease. Something hereditary and incurable. We get it too." Their parents would drape cold, wet flannels sprinkled with lavender oil on their brows to soothe the pain. The next morning, the pain would return.

Marnie and Owen lived in a small village, surrounded by lush woodland, bubbling streams, and rolling hills: paradise. Their father was the most skilled carpenter for hundreds of miles. He was very popular with the people of the village for the wonderful things he made. Their mother painted portraits of the villagers who loved her equally. She always captured something special in each of them and never charged them very much.

Marnie was the oldest and Owen was the youngest. When Marnie wasn't playing with her brother and their friends, she was learning the flute from Mr Mergatrode, the village musician. They would sit by his small cottage next to a stream and play along together. Their music weaving with the sounds of nature. One day, Mr Mergatrode turned to Marnie and spoke in his soft bass voice, "It's time you had a new flute."

Marnie's family were not rich. Her father was afraid of offending his clients if he charged them too much. Marnie knew this, replying, "I can't afford a new instrument."

Mr Mergatrode shook his head, "No, you misunderstand me; look at this flute." He held his flute to Marnie, who took it. It looked old and battered. He continued, "This flute might not look like much, but for me, it plays the sweetest music. I carved it from a very special tree, and I want you to do the same."

Marnie handed the flute back suddenly, and was very excited, "Which tree?"

"You must find your own tree. One that speaks to you. Listen to the woods; they will guide you."

"No chance!" Marnie's mother said as soon as her daughter had finished speaking. "Your father can bring you the best wood. He can help carve the flute."

"But I have to..." Marnie tried to explain before her mother held up a hand for silence. That night, Marnie swore that tomorrow she'd sneak

into the forest to find a tree. The next day, Marnie lied that she was having another music lesson. Instead, she crept to the woods.

She closed her eyes and heard the rustle of leaves, the wind whistling through the foliage, and the wood snap of bark and branch bending from its caress: nothing unusual. She was beginning to feel stupid when she heard it. A string of sound, a melody undulating through her ears, dissonant and harmonic. Sounds clashed and melded together, beckoning her forwards.

She followed with her eyes closed, expecting to trip or walk into a tree, afraid that if she opened her eyes, the sound would vanish. The sound guided her safely to its source. Intensifying with every step she took.

It stopped. She opened her eyes.

A small tree. Leaves, a multitude of changing colours, fluctuating tones. This was the tree. She sat beneath its small branches, carving. After she'd finished, she held a beautiful flute, light brown with a hint of colour shining through the grains.

Every morning Marnie and Owen awoke with sore heads. Marnie spent most of her days with Mr Mergatrode playing and practising in preparation for the Summer Solstice festival at which she'd been asked to play. She wanted dearly to play her new flute but somehow felt it too special to practise on and decided to save it for the festival.

By the long evening light of the slowly setting sun the village gathered around a makeshift stage to talk, drink, dance and make merry. Her family were there, and all her friends. Marnie looked out over the people from the stage. She focused on Mr Mergatrode's smiling face as she placed her special flute to her lips and blew air into it for the first time.

No note came out. Instead, to her surprise, she heard her mother's voice, distant and crackling. It told a strange tale of fae folk who lived in the woods. Two humans who had fallen for the fae and had lived with them, and given birth to two children who met and fell in love. How they had cut off their antlers, which marked their otherworldly heritage, but each morning, they'd grown back and had to be filed down. They had born two children, and to keep up the ruse, they'd taken to cutting their children's antlers as well. How she had been so wracked with guilt that she'd needed to confess her secret but feared how the others might react. So, she'd gone to a tree that marked the passing into the fae world and had whispered her secret into its multicoloured branches.

After the voice had trailed off, Marnie looked up and saw the looks of horror on her parents faces. The surprise on the faces of the villagers, muttering to each other and looking at her and her family. Her hand went to her head and felt two small bumps.

The village mayor stepped onto the stage, and on seeing his presence, the other villagers became quiet. He raised a hand, "I know this is a shock; I can tell you it is for me, but. This family has lived with us for years, they make a good honest living and are a credit to this village. So, what if they come from another world? They live here now, and I'll have no one make their lives harder for their heritage."

This was met with cheers and clapping, and Marnie could see the looks of relief on her parent's faces.

Now, Marnie and Owen wake with clear heads, but their antlers do often get caught in the bedding.

Churn-Milk Peg - North Yorkshire

Iona Bailey

The leaves crunch and the branches snap as the children skip along, baskets empty and tummies hungry. The late autumn sun filters through the trees, casting a golden glow over the turning-orange leaves. They giggle to themselves, eager to find their bounty. One runs ahead, spotting the distinct leafy shell of a familiar nut.

“Not that one, it’s too green!” Another cries. They pull the child back into the group, and they continue further into the woods, their eyes peeled, scanning the trees and forest floor. They’re a bit early to find any fallen on the ground; few hazelnuts would be ready to drop this early into September, and those that had would have already been spotted by keen-eyed birds. They had been warned to leave it a few more weeks before venturing for their quarry, but like most children, they were too excited to listen to their parents’ words of hard-earned wisdom, and instead, they bent to the whims of their hungry bellies.

One of the oldest lets out a gasp and darts forward, closely followed by the shouts of laughter of the rest of the group. They huddle around an old hazel tree, twisting and pulling at the nuts that have just started to turn brown. They giggle and yell, occasionally shushed with reminders that Old Peg will hear them if they get too loud. They’re too distracted to notice the quiet whispers, too enraptured to notice the smell of smoke from a pipe on the breeze, their raucous energy drowning out the world beyond their hazel tree.

Soon, the tree is bare, their baskets filling up, and they trot along to the next tree one of the children has spotted. This tree is younger, the fruit it bears meagre in comparison and there’s not enough to go around. The youngest of the group spots another tree a little further away and gives up his fight to get a place on the young tree; leaving the older children, he scampers towards his prize. Soon, he is out of earshot of the other children. He hasn’t been foraging for hazelnuts on his own before, but he always watches the older children; he knows which nuts not to pick. Doesn’t he? He’s fairly sure, he tells himself; no, he’s certain that he can tell which nuts have turned brown enough to pick.

He examines the leaves, stretching to pull back the green casing protecting the riches that it’s hiding. It’s a little green, but that’s alright, isn’t it? There’s definitely some brown on there, or is that just the colour of where it attaches to the stem? He sets his basket down and teeters on

his tiptoes, craning his neck for a better look. It's just out of reach. He extends his arm at full stretch. He tips over, his hand closing on the hazelnut as he falls. The nut comes away with him as he lands on his behind, and he rubs his elbow where it had hit the trunk on his way down. He opens his hand and reveals a perfectly green, unripe hazelnut, not a smidge of ripe brown anywhere to be found.

The ground shakes and footsteps thunder. He turns and sees the oldest, ugliest woman he has ever seen running towards him, shaking her arms, scattering ash from the pipe she held in her gnarled hands and yelling at him in a croaky, smoke-wearied voice. "Smoke! Smoke a wooden pipe!" She cries. "Getting nuts before they're ripe!" Her tattered rags are stained with grass and gifts from the birds, and they catch on the twigs and branches that hang low from the trees.

"Run," The cry goes up from the other children. "It's Churn-Milk Peg! She'll take you!" Baskets fell and nuts scattered as the children ran, yelling at one another to leave their quarry and she would leave them be. The young child tries to follow, scrambling on hands and knees away from the old hag barrelling towards him. But he is too late.

Arms go around him, hot ash spilling over his skin and the acrid stench of pipe smoke scorching his nose. Hoarse cackling fills his ears, and he finds himself suspended in the air by the painful vice-like grip of the arms surrounding him. He's dragged away, the cackling and smell of smoke following in their path.

The other children run back to their village, shouting at the top of their lungs that Churn-Milk Peg has taken another. Mothers and fathers embrace their sons and their daughters. Cries of relief ring out as parents reunite with their children. One long solitary wail rises above all the shouts of relief. A mother falls to her knees, barely supported by the arms of her husband. Slowly, the happy calls die down until all that is left is grief. A child's name is screamed over and over again as whispered warnings fill the air, parents reminding children of why they had said to wait just a few more weeks. Promises echoed in response, a lesson learnt by all those too eager to fill their bellies.

Never pick an unripe nut, for fear Churn-Milk Peg will take you.



The Black Dog - United Kingdom

Megan Freeman

This illustration is titled "The Black Dog" and was created using watercolour paints, micron pens, white ink, and then edited within Photoshop. It is my artistic interpretation of the folkloric figure of the Black Dog, which has allegedly been sighted across the U.K., especially in the Northwest and Southeast.

My first time discovering this folkloric figure was when I heard tales of Padfoot while researching British folklore for an artistic project, as I am always gaining inspiration from folklore, mythos, and legends from around the world for my practice.

Padfoot is one of the many names of Black Dogs mentioned in British history. It is said to be a phantom black hound that roams the landscape of the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Black Dogs are seen as omens of death or misfortune to those who see them, and they have many different interpretations across the U.K., but most tales describe a larger-than-average-sized dog, closer to the size of a bear, with an all-black coat and large, glowing, often red eyes.

I personally chose to depict this creature as I now reside in the very area where Padfoot is said to have been sighted in texts from the 1880s and 1890s.



Maria Sinukuan, The “Enchanted” Lady – Philippines

Nadine Garcia

Maria Sinukuan is the Diwata (mountain goddess) of Mount Arayat in the Philippines. She is often referred to as the 'enchanted lady'.

Mount Arayat is bountiful in fresh fruit and produce, which Maria tends to bring to a small village near the base of the mountain. The village is often grateful for her contributions and in return, consider Maria's home a sacred place.

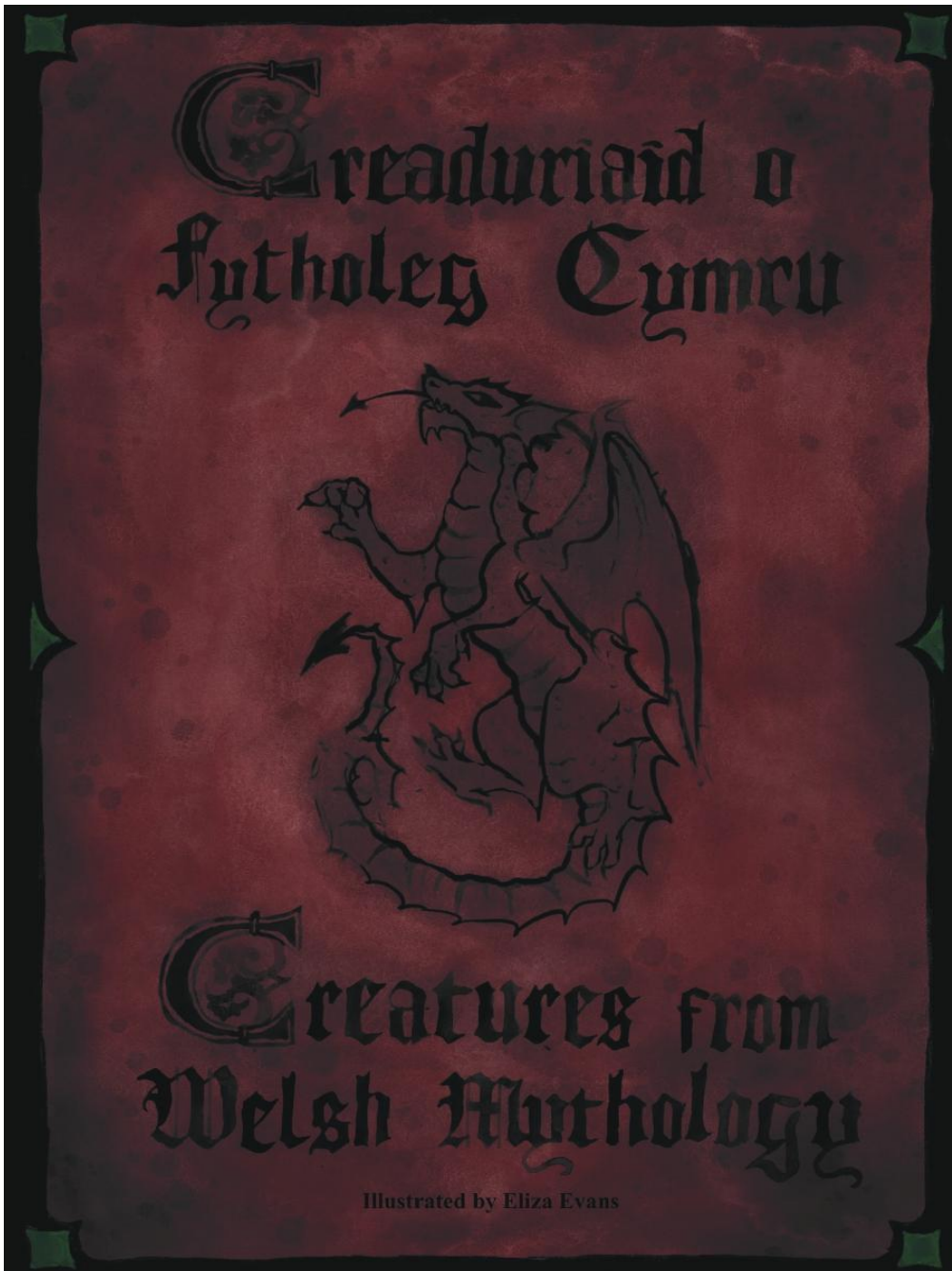
One day, a group of three men decide to climb the mountain to steal more fruit for themselves. Maria sees them initially and tells them: "feel free to take whatever you need as long as you ask for my permission". The men become greedy and fill their bags to the brim with stolen fruit.

As they wander down the mountain, their bags become heavier and heavier, forcing them to stop. As they open their bags, tons of rocks begin to flow out of them. Maria emerges, and scolds the men for their ungratefulness, and promptly turns them into swine.

After this incident, more people from the village attempt to steal from Maria and her mountain. Fed up with the village's behaviour, she disappears from Mount Arayat, and the mountain becomes desolate and barren.

**Illustrated Welsh Mythology and Folklore –
Wales**

Eliza Evans





Eliza Evans

is an artist and illustrator from North Wales who is studying at York St John University. She uses brush and ink to create her illustrations and then edits them digitally, however she also enjoys using print techniques such as screenprinting and linoprinting. Eliza is inspired by wildlife and nature as well as mythology and folklore, using her upbringing surrounded by the Welsh countryside to influence her illustrations.

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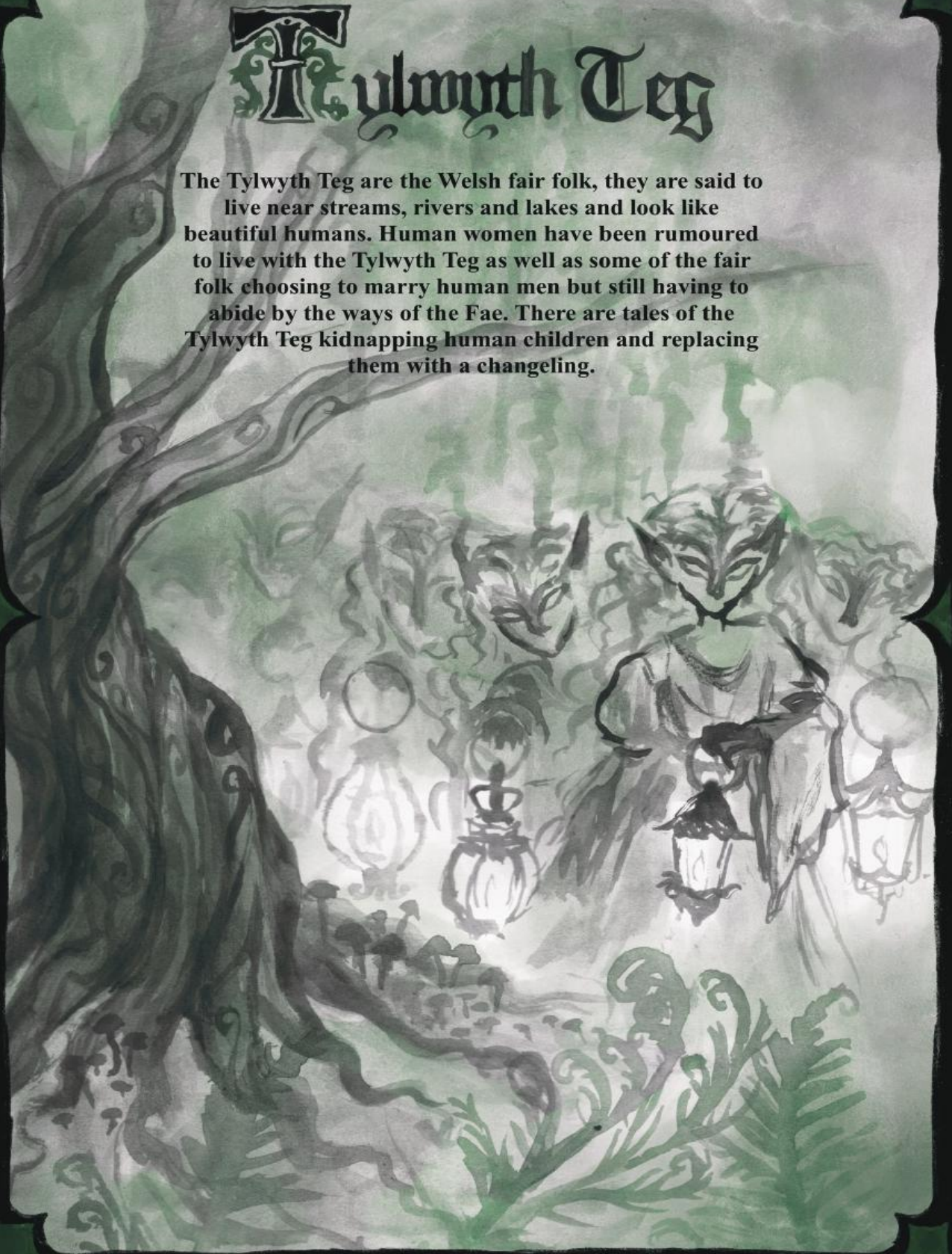


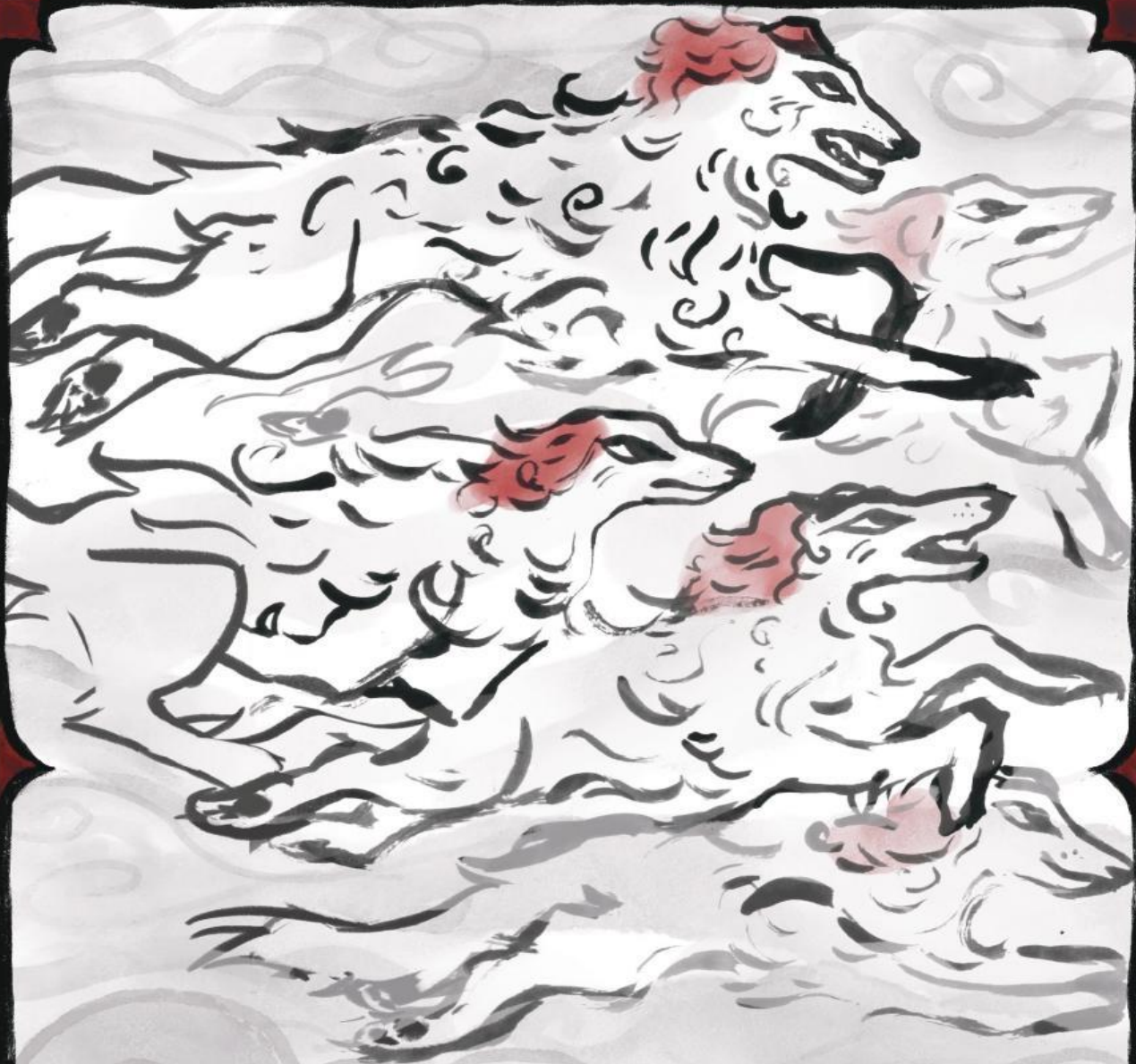
Draig Coch

Y Draig Coch, the Red Dragon, is one of the most iconic mythological creatures of Wales, as it is seen on the Welsh Flag. It is first mentioned in the Mabinogion, a manuscript of compiled mythology from Wales from the thirteenth century, as well as the twelfth century Historia Regum Britanniae, where a frustrated King's fortress keeps falling atop Dinas Emrys. He later discovers two sleeping dragons, one red and one white – possibly representing Wales and England, that wake and begin to battle, resulting in the Red Dragon's victory.

Tylwyth Teg

The Tylwyth Teg are the Welsh fair folk, they are said to live near streams, rivers and lakes and look like beautiful humans. Human women have been rumoured to live with the Tylwyth Teg as well as some of the fair folk choosing to marry human men but still having to abide by the ways of the Fae. There are tales of the Tylwyth Teg kidnapping human children and replacing them with a changeling.





Cŵn Annwn

Cŵn Annwn, the Hounds of Annwn, are a pack of red-eared hunting dogs belonging to Arawn Lord of Annwn, the Welsh Otherworld. They are said to be linked to the wild hunt and can be heard within the howling winds of the night. Their howls are associated with migrating geese, whose call sounds are reminiscent of Cŵn Annwn. Their growls are said to be louder the further away they are.



Adar Rhiannon

Adar Rhiannon, the Birds of Rhiannon, are a trio of birds – often thought to be blackbirds – belonging to Rhiannon, a Goddess of the Otherworld and the wife of Pwyll, King of Dyfed. The singing of these birds can awaken the dead and lull the living to sleep, however, they are not evil and are said to help people forget terrible memories and bring comfort and joy. The quieter their song is, the nearer they are.



Mari Lwyd

Mari Lwyd is a mysterious character in Welsh folklore – a skeletal horse, with a mane of ribbons, ivy and holly with baubles for eyes and a long cloak. During the Midwinter, she performs with a mischievous group and indulge in a ritual called pwnco: visiting houses and engaging in rude rhymes until the group gains entry – in which case, the houseowner gains good luck for the year while Mari Lwyd raids their pantry.





Llamhigyn Y Dwr

Llamhigyn Y Dwr, also known as the Water Leaper, is a malevolent frog-like creature with the features of a bat, such as bat wings, that lives in lakes, swamps and ponds. It causes trouble by snapping the lines of fishing rods belonging to fisherman and can even eat livestock and attack humans.



Adar Lluch Gwin

Adar Lluch Gwin are giant bird-like creatures said to be extremely similar to Griffins. Adar Lluch Gwin are rumoured to understand every physical language in the world. They are known to be loyal to a fault, with one story telling that one of King Arthur's Knights, Drudwas Ap Tryffin, was given an Adar Lluch Gwin by his fairy wife for his battle alongside his king. The creature obeyed his every word, however unfortunately Drudwas Ap Tryffin commanded it to kill the first man on the battlefield. King Arthur's army was late, and the creature ended up killing its beloved owner due to his command.

Morgen

Morgen are Siren-like creatures who lure men to their death by fooling them with their tricks and beauty. There are tales of Welsh women being turned into Morgen who leave their homes to live with them under the water. Some Morgen are rumoured to have control over the water and have flooded farms and entire towns.



The King Who Lost a Finger - Asia

Anonymous contributor

A long time ago, in the ancient city of Bharat, lived the great King Raja, who had everything that wealth could buy. He was as proud as a peacock and as flamboyant, too.

To crown it all, King Raja would listen and take counsel only from his one true friend, Jha Devi.

He believed that his childhood friend Jha was the only one who had greater knowledge than he and also would not covet the King's throne. Another thing that the King cherished a lot was his dog. They both loved him and could even die for him.

The King would always say that God is not a perfect creator, "If everything God created were perfect, then why did God not bless me with the high level of knowledge He has bestowed on Jha Devi?" King Raja would lament.

And to this, Jha will always say, "God makes no mistake. Everything God does is perfect".

King Raja's main hobby was going on hunting expeditions with his bosom friend and confidante, Jha, alongside his dog. On these expeditions, he would always go without other servants from the palace. He would always brag, "I am the King and a brave one, too; I can take care of myself and my kingdom".

On one such expedition, the King, Jha, and the dog went far away to hunt the one-horned Rhino. Citing the beast, which is known as the King of the forest, the two hunters and the King's dog crouched down, lying belly flat in the savannah.

Upon seeing the Rhino, Jha was admired at its regal strides, and he pleaded with the King not to kill it. "My King, please do not kill this animal; it looks too royal to be slaughtered", he begged.

But the King, disregarding his plea, took aim and was very sure that his arrow would hit and kill the Rhino. He drew the bow to the fullest, holding the arrow so strongly and patiently waiting for the Rhino to turn towards them.

Suddenly, just as the King was about to release the bow, the dog yelped and dived a big snake that was about to bite the King from behind. This made the King lose concentration just as he released the arrow, and one of his fingers was hit by the arrow, reducing its speed.

King Raja missed his shot for the first time in his life.

The one-horned Rhino, noticing their presence, turned and bolted away to safety.

The King was so angry with himself.

He was so angry with his dog.

He was very angry about everything that had just happened.

In all this, Jha was silent, allowing the King to vent his anger for some time before telling him that God had destined it to be like that and that everything that God does is perfect, as God makes no mistakes.

This infuriated the King even more.

Jha pointed to the snake lying lifeless on the grass. "That venomous snake would have bitten you, my King, if not for the dog's brave intervention. He allowed distractions so that the dog could save your life, so you should know that God makes no mistake; everything he does is perfect." Jha went on to explain to the King, who was visibly angry for losing this opportunity to kill the one-horned Rhino.

In all this commotion, they never noticed that there was blood all over the King's garment.

The dog kept barking and staring at the King as if deliberately trying to infuriate him even more.

Jha followed the dog's gaze and pointed out to the King that the blood was from his body. Upon checking, the King noticed that the arrow had pierced through his right thumb and cut it in two.

"Owww!" The King cried out more in anger than in pain.

"I have not only missed my shot, but I have also lost a finger", he cried.

"What type of King loses a finger in a hunting expedition?" he queries, but to no one in particular.

Jha, taking the King's hands, added some soothing balms on it and bandaged it. All through this, he would say, "Everything happens for a reason; it is not a mistake as God knows why he allowed it. Everything God does is perfect".

The words began to irritate the King as they set back home. He never uttered any other word to his friend and not even a glance at his dog.

As soon as they got to the palace, the King ordered that the dog should be caged, and his bosom friend put in prison.

No one dared to question him as the soldier in the palace did as the King ordered. But before Jha Devi was taken to the prison, he sought to speak with the King one last time. For old time's sake, the King approved of his request, believing that Jha Devi would be coming to plead for mercy.

"What have you to say, Jha? Speak and be removed from my presence because I am in haste and preparing to go back to hunt that one-horned Rhino", the King declared.

"My King, I am not here to plead for your mercy because I know I have been loyal to you all my life, but if God has touched your heart to imprison me, then I have only to tell you that it is still not a mistake as everything God approves of is perfect," Jha spoke out boldly.

At this, the King's anger knew no bounds, "Take him out of my presence, and let me see how imprisonment is perfect for him". He barked out, ordering the guards who had brought Jha to him.

Some weeks later, the King, still filled with vengeance towards the one-horned Rhino for making him lose his finger, set out on another hunting expedition with just a servant who would bear his arms as he journeyed to locate and kill the Rhino.

King Raja journeyed far out to the Himalayas, but still, all the trails that the beast had left behind went cold.

Days turned to nights, and nights became days. The King's anger and vengeance pushed his determination never to return home without the head of the beast.

One night, as they lay in their tent, the King heard voices. Before he could set up his quiver to shoot some arrows in order to protect himself and his servant, he was overpowered by the warriors from a cannibal tribe, tied and bundled to the little settlement where their King was waiting.

The cannibal tribe warriors were sent by their King to go and bring humans for sacrifice to their God in order for their community to have a bumper harvest season.

"Hmmm! This looks like royal blood. Our God will surely be happy to receive royal blood for sacrifice", the leader of the cannibal tribe spoke loudly while sniffing at King Raja and the servant and laughing haughtily, sending chills down their spine.

"I am King Raja; let me live, and I will pay you in gold bars", he stammered.

"Shut up, you idiot", the leader of the cannibal tribe retorts. "You are going to be sacrificed to our God. Tie them up and set up the fire." He orders his men.

The village was agog with celebration. Drums and cymbals started playing, and everyone began dancing around the fire. Suddenly, the priestess came in with a gourd in her hands and looking at the two

prisoners as if she was sizing them up, she declared, "Throw the servant to the dogs as the Gods do not accept servants as sacrifice".

The servant was immediately bundled in readiness to be thrown to the beasts while his captor ignored his cries.

The priestess moved on to King Raja; after moving round him, she let out a cry, "He is not fit to be eaten by the dogs; he is not a complete human, and the gods have rejected him. He has lost a finger, release him or his death will bring a plague on our land". She cried out. "Release both of them; they will increase the curse of the Gods on our people". She continues.

The people were disappointed, and the hunters were vexed because it meant that they had to continue hunting for another sacrifice or the harvest would not be good, but they hastily released the King and his servant to go and even gave them new horses to hasten their departure from the community.

The duo haggardly struggled, astride their horses, to get home to their people.

Upon getting home and after some days when he had recuperated from the travails, he sent the guards to release his friend Jha and his dog and bring them to his presence.

"Jha, my good friend, I am beginning to have a rethink after what happened to me during my last journey. So I wish to ask you. If God was perfect, why did he not prevent me from putting you in prison?". The King asked. "Why did he allow my finger to be cut off?" he continued querying.

"My King, God does not make mistakes; perhaps if I had joined you in your expedition, I would have been sacrificed because I am not a servant. I am a free born. And if your finger had not been cut off, perhaps you would not have been spared too", he declared.

"God has destined that everything will happen like this for a reason, and everything that God does is perfect, and He makes no mistakes", Jha concluded.

The Presence Of Pishacha - India

Manisha Dhesi

The Mahabharata narrates the tale of Pishacha, a creation of Brahma, serving as a warning about the consequences of moral degradation. They are flesh-eating demons that prey on the weak. You must chant Narasimha Kavacha to keep them away.

I visit the crematorium, I miss my sister
I read the Gita, to seek Shiva
and softly cry mantras.

There is a darkness in the trees
that cannot be seen,
a presence that dances to the death of lost souls.

Narasimha Kavacha

I bathe in the Ganges to cleanse my mind
the water shows no reflection of mine,
eyes burning red with a haunting glare.

Narasimha Kavacha

In the silence, I hear whispers breathe,
a cold unsettling breeze
changing forms to lure me in,
I speak,
is that my sister or pishacha.

Narasimha Kavacha

The Wild Swans - Denmark

Mie Claridge

My story begins, as most others, with my stepmother, a cunning and evil woman wanting power over my father's kingdom. That is what the stories say, but truth is not always straightforward. She was always a kind woman, but her quiet nature and preference to spend time in the gardens over the warm and luxurious halls of the castle created rumours about dark powers.

It was in her beloved gardens that my brothers gathered to form a blood pact. I watched as their shadows formed a dark circle around her. She was kneeling in a bed of pure white flowers, hands working carefully as not to break the fragile stems of the flowers. My brothers each held a dagger behind their backs, having sworn to reclaim their rightful power together, sharing the blame for their actions. A social insurance policy of sorts - My father needed an heir, after all. I ran towards them, screaming for her to watch out or to protect herself in some way. But my voice drowned in the wind and was heard as no more than a faint whisper, a desperate plea. It felt like I ran forever, time pushing back against my body, forcing me to witness what was happening. I saw every little detail, from the crushed flowers underneath their boots to the hesitant sorrow on my youngest brother's face. He had always been kind and gentle and looked out for me when I was afraid. I knew he did not want to do this, but in this world of power and fear there is little consideration left for choice.

My oldest brother pushed him forwards, urging him to draw the first drop of blood. It had to be this way they had to make him complicit before the horror of a body in pain released him from the illusion that this was justified. He swung his dagger fast, knowing that he would otherwise falter. She turned upon hearing his movements and looked up at him, her trusting expression replaced by fear. He had become something to be afraid of, and no part of his life would ever be the same. Her unexpected movement saved her life as the sharp edge of the dagger carved a line across her cheek, and drops of blood ran down her face. My oldest brother stepped towards her; dagger raised above his head. Her piercing scream cut through air, and several of my brothers stumbled backwards. In that moment, when her blood stained the pure white flowers around her, a green mist of spores was released

from their middle. It flowed upwards, infiltrating the bodies of my brothers, blinding their eyes.

One by one, they fell to their knees, screaming and crying out for help. Their bodies contorted into strange shapes. They changed into eleven white swans unrecognisable apart from their golden crowns and torn clothing, which remained draped across their necks. Gusts of air created by their strong wings lashed my face as they fled. Left behind was a debris of trampled flowers, shiny pools of blood, and eleven ornate daggers. My stepmother sat slumped in the middle, clutching her abdomen where the dagger had pierced deeply into her skin. She would live, but my oldest brother had succeeded in making sure that no son of hers would ever live to claim his throne.

She sent me to live in a cave in the woods fearing that they would come looking for me. She told me that only I could transform my brothers back into their human shape, and she was afraid that they would harm me to force me to undertake the painful labour that was needed to save them. To release them from the spell, I would have to knit eleven shirts out of nettles and would not be allowed to utter a sound through the pain in all the time it took to complete this task.

In the woods, I grew to admire the wild forces of nature, and I found myself happier than I had ever been in the suffocating comfort of the castle. As predicted, my brothers eventually found me. It was my youngest brother who appeared first, in his human form. He told me that when the sun came down, they were all transformed back into their human shapes. They were forced to fly during the day but be careful to find safety before sundown, or they would fall to their death. He told me that his transformation had shown him the truth of his actions and that he had witnessed great suffering while flying over the lands in the kingdom. I could tell by his face that he had aged in a way that only comes with experience. The goodness I saw in my youngest brother and his wish for me to save all my brothers despite their flaws convinced me to help them lift the curse.

My hands burned with every movement as I picked and prepared the nettles, and I lived in silent agony for months. On the day when I finished the tenth shirt, I heard the sound of dogs barking in the distance. A group of royal hunters appeared, and after the shock of finding a young girl living alone in the woods, they decided to rescue me and bring me to their king. I fought silently, but my attempts were drowned in an excitement that their actions were noble - heroic even. In the castle I was treated with suspicion and locked in a bare room

with only a bed my bundle of nettle shirts. I spent my days working tirelessly on the final shirt, hoping my brothers would find and rescue me one day. Instead, my silence and curious task afforded me the same fate as my stepmother. The king was convinced I was a witch, and I was brought, along with my precious nettle shirts, to be tried by fire.

As all hope seemed lost, eleven majestic white swans surrounded the carriage and placed themselves between me and the soldiers, escorting me to my death. I threw the nettle shirts over them, and they transformed back into the familiar shapes of my brothers. All except my oldest brother whose shirt was still missing a sleeve as I had been forced to relinquish my work before it was complete. He had returned to his human form, but his silhouette was distorted. Where his left arm should have been, a large white wing remained as a permanent reminder of his actions.

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