

“The Island of Shimmering Water”

You are about to embark on a journey to the place where the waters of the heart arise. Close your eyes and see before you in vision a shoreline of silver sand and small stones, lapped by the sea that seems now green, now blue. Waves rush in upon this shore, advancing and withdrawing with a soft roar as the stones turn over. And there, on the back of the ninth wave, is a ship, long and low in the water, its sides draped with rose samite, a single sail at its mast-head, on which is a symbol of nine overlapping circles, etched in silver on a ground of deepest blue. Gently, the craft touches the shore and you step aboard. At once you are under way, the sail billowing out above you, the waters creaming back from the bow in bright curves...

The sea is calm and you make good progress, flying before the breeze. Ahead, you see the dark blot of an island, coming swiftly nearer, and soon your craft touches the shore. You step down from the ship and find yourself walking on soft golden sand. The way leads inland, through grass-grown dunes which become softly rounded hills, cloaked in green. The island is not large, and soon you find yourself approaching what must be the centre. There, you see an inland lake of pure, crystalline water, at the centre of which lies a low knoll of land, crowned by a grove of silver birches – an island within an island. On it stands the figure of a woman, dressed in a gown of deepest blue, the colour of her ship’s sail. Her golden hair floats unbound to her waist and even at this distance there is a kind of otherworldly sparkle about her. She raises one hand to beckon you to her, and calls out across the water words you cannot quite hear...

The water seems shallow and without hesitation you begin to wade out to the knoll. The water is cold, but extraordinarily exhilarating. You find yourself swimming through it, even though you may never have swum in your life before... In a moment – all too briefly it seems – you feel land beneath your feet and walk to where the Lady awaits you. Surprisingly your clothes are dry. Then, you are face to face with Argante (Holy Mother), the Lady of the Lake, she who, long since or only yesterday, gave to Arthur his great sword Excalibur. Her eyes are the colour of the mist, now seeming silver, now catching the tints of sky or sea. Her manner is gentle and welcoming, yet there is about her a sense of powerful strength which few, in any world, would deny. She welcomes you and bids you walk with her to the birch grove...

The trees are truly beautiful in a way that you have never seen except in dream or otherworldly state. Tall and graceful, their leaves seem to dance perpetually as though stirred by a breeze... At the centre of the grove is a well-head, the stones intricately carved with spiraling patterns. From it spill out three streams of pure water, so clear that they are scarcely discernible with mortal sight. You feel, rather than see them, as they flow out from the fountain through the trees and out of sight. The thought comes, unbidden, to your mind, that these are the waters which give sustenance to the world, perhaps even to all worlds, above, below and beyond...

Gently, the Lady indicates that you should approach the well-head and look within... You do so, and at first see nothing. It is like looking into a lake of pure sunlight, so clear that,

as your eyes grow accustomed, you seem to see, fathoms below you, the bottom of the well, with sands and crystal stones that catch the light and throw it back in a thousand sparkling shards... Then, slowly, your sight clears, and you see that the water itself is made up of myriads of infinitely tiny droplets, moving and changing so swiftly and in such intricate, endlessly varied patterns that your senses cannot grasp more than a fraction of their reality...

Amid the rainbow links of light you see a great fish swimming, which you know to be the Salmon of Knowledge. And somewhere far below- or above, such terms have no meaning now – you see something else ... a sword, sunk deep in the water, glinting as though lights danced along its blade, striking points of fire in the great purple stone of its hilt... Wondering, knowing that you look upon the great Sword of Pendragon, you draw back from the brink of the well, unable to see for a moment anything but the endlessly sparkling chains of droplets which seem to surround you...

At your side the Lady Argante (Holy Mother) lays a hand upon your arm and guides you to a grassy bank beneath one of the graceful birch trees. There, slowly, your sight clears, and when you are able to see clearly again, you realize that you do so with enhanced sight. Where before you saw nought but a circle of graceful trees, now you see nine women dancing an endless dance of joy upon the greensward. And there, beneath another tree, lies a figure whose strong limbs and mighty head are laid in sleep so profound that it seems nothing could wake him...

You know who the sleeper is without being told – Arthur, the Great King, sleeping on the Island named Avalon until he is woken by a great and terrible need. So profound is his sleep that he seems almost to be at one with the earth, and as you look indeed it seems that all you can see is a low green mound, which has something of the shape of a sleeping figure...

For the first time, the Lady speaks aloud, though you hear her words in your mind and understand them there, even though she speaks in a tongue long since forgotten in your world. ‘You have swum in the Lake of Life. And have looked into the Well of Wisdom. And you have seen the Sleeper and the Sword of which I am guardian. Have you any words to say to me, any questions to ask that I may answer?’

Her words invoke an ancient longing within you – not unmixed with fear. Here, you stand at the centre of knowledge and understanding, where all the wisdom of the Otherworld and of the Nine Sisters finds its source. Whatever question you ask will be answered with absolute truth, nor may you turn away from the answer, should it be different from what you expect to hear. There is no onus upon you to ask anything, but if you do so you must abide by what you are told...

When you have finished your speech with the Lady it is time to depart. Make your farewells and begin to return to normal consciousness. From this place there is no need to go back by the way you came. Though the way is difficult to find, the door between the worlds is opened instantly at the Lady’s word. You find yourself returned to the

place from which you began this journey, but you may well be changed by what you have seen and heard. Take time to write down anything you wish to remember, and to reestablish contact with the physical world around you, for this has been a deep journey to the centre of the otherworldly realm of Faery, and you have walked where few mortals have walked before, and seen what few have heard.

Remember these things.

Excerpted from: *Ladies of the Lake*, by Caitlen and John Matthews, London: The Aquarian Press, ©1992, pp. 104 – 107.

The Path of the White Hart

Before you is an ancient woodland, one of the primal forests of the foretime. Leading towards it is a pathway which enters the tangled trees, but you are not encouraged by this. Here is no tame wood, with neatly forested trees at serried intervals, but a thick forest in which you will have no map. Discouraged, fearful of becoming lost, you begin to turn away when an extraordinary sight greets your eyes. It is a white hart.

Astounded by its brilliance, flashing towards the trees, you are upon the path before your mind has even assented. The hart enters the trees and you follow, moving fast to keep it in sight, for it is your only guide in this uncharted wildness. The path twists and turns, and is frequently overgrown. You cannot leap over such obstructions like the fleet-footed deer ahead of you, so you go slower. Brambles catch your sleeve, causing you annoyance. No sooner has one obstacle been overcome than there seem to be more and more.

The white hart is distant now and the path less clear. You strain to see how far ahead it has gone, and can only just glimpse the golden scud of its tail bounding away in the distance. Without the hart, the path is difficult to find, and you strive to find the way ahead. You have clearly wandered from your way and you berate yourself for being so foolish as to have entered the forest in the first place. The trees which seemed just obstacles to your pursuit now seem to draw in around you. You cannot hear the bird song that ought to flood these branches above you. Lost in a lonely wood, you stumble onwards, looking for any sign of life.

You see a hopeful clearing and strike towards it. Something shines from the branches and you make for it. In the clearing you find a perfect crystal mirror hanging. You walk around it to view this strange object. Who has set it here? For what purpose? It is a beautiful thing catching the sun's rays, but there is no-one to appreciate it here. Would anyone miss it? As you go to detach it from its hanging, the crystal mirror seems to come to life, uttering sound from deep within it.

Disquieted, you drop your hands quickly. The reverberations are quite clear – the mirror has just spoken to you. It swings and turns to face you so that you have a good view of its face. This is even more disquieting, because it does not return your reflection. Look closely and you will see the face of one you once knew well and professed to love. Reflected in the crystal mirror is the face of a past friend or lover whose love you refused or betrayed. Their image comes before you now and, despite the painful memories which are invoked, you are enabled to speak and answer the reflection in a way which heals all hurts.

Let that face come before you now and, without recrimination or guilt, speak and make answer to the questions asked by the mirror: 'What did I give you? What did you give me?' Consider the nature of the exchange that you experienced at that time, and make your peace with the image reflected. You notice that beside you in the clearing is a little stream which runs throughout the forest. Cleanse the crystal mirror – which you now

have no desire to take with you – with some of the water; uttering words of blessing and farewell to the image that lies within.

Shaken by the encounter, you turn to your path and begin to see it clearly. After walking a little further, you are confirmed of your way by a tip of shed antler upon the path, which you pick up. With great determination, you hurry onwards, confident of finding the magical beast. Then you hear the crying of a little girl. She runs out of the dense undergrowth and begs you to find her plaything which is lost. You would rather go onwards and do not welcome the squalling of a child, but you turn aside to help her.

She leads you into what seems the thickest of the undergrowth, full of nettles, thorns and thistles. ‘Why was she playing in this place anyway?’ you think. Scrabbling around under the bushes in the densest scrub with the antler as a pick, you find a golden ball, which has rolled in here. The girl claps her hands with glee when you return it to her. She tosses it up and bids you catch it. You have no time for a game, but you oblige her. As the golden ball enters your hands, it splits in two and out flies not one, but a flight of birds. They rise singing into the forest until it is filled with bird song. Of the girl, there is no sign.

You travel further along the path, walking more slowly now to listen to the new-found song of the woods. The trees seem more friendly and you look about you with appreciation. The path is easier to follow and your haste less urgent. Almost unawares, you arrive in a clearing where the meandering stream curves. Here is the white hart, drinking unperturbed. Now that it is still, you can observe it better. Its hide is brilliantly white, its antlers and hooves touched with gold. It raises its head and regards you with lambent intelligent eyes. It is no shock when it addresses you.

‘Many have sought me. Hunters for my hide, kings for my golden horn. But only lovers find me. I am the guardian of these woods and none can come further in without answering to me. What is your sole, unchanging desire? What lies at the heart of your life? Answer me that and I will let you ride upon my back.’

The deep and beautiful voice urges you to answer in your own words. You look into your own heart and find the words...

A tear rolls down the cheek of the white hart as you speak. ‘Come now, mount upon my back and I will take you to your sole desire.’

With awe and trembling, you stand upon a stone and mount, letting the white hart bear you across the stream into the depths of the forest. You hold tightly to the antlers and close your eyes, so fast is your flight.

You find yourself in the inmost depths of the forest, in a clearing which is shrouded by mist. The white hart sets you down and nudges you to enter. Fearful of the unknown, you pass the magical boundary of this place and find yourself within an apple orchard. Within it sits a woman in a red dress. Her lack of ornament seems to enhance her strange

beauty, for she is white of skin and black of hair. There is a silver bed beside her, which is empty. The place is so peaceful and restful that you wish you could lie down, but that is not why you have come. You notice that a horn hangs from a nearby tree.

The woman speaks. 'Desire is a bridge to another country. Many have striven to enforce their desire in this place, but all have faded away. What is your wish? To lie upon this bed and dream the fulfillment of your sole desire? Or to blow the horn yonder? If you would be free of selfish desire, if you would know how love is served, then take the horn and blow it. But, before you do, know that nothing in your life will remain as it was afterwards. If you are fearful of change, weigh well these words before setting the horn to your lips. It would be better for you to lie upon the bed and dream than to blow the horn unworthily.'

You weigh the decision. To blow the horn you must relinquish your own desire. To achieve it you must lie upon the bed. Is this a trick? You think back to the white hart and know that it is not, for how could a beast of such purity and wisdom lead you astray?

You think upon your avowed desire and test it...Lie upon the bed, if that is what you have chosen, and watch the images that form in the dream. Take the horn, if that is what you have chosen, and blow with all your might, paying close attention to what is happening,,Take time to experience this now...

It is time to attend once more. The woman rises and takes your hand. 'Friend and loved one, may the desire of your heart be fulfilled in every place. I am she whom you rejected in the crystal mirror; I am she whose toy you retrieved in the forest, I am she who led you here in the shape of the hart. Know that I am Enid (Holy Mother), the Lady of the Enclosed Garden. Keep such a place as this within your heart for the healing of the world, and let those into it as need delivering from their own hatefulness.'

She anoints your brow with a pungent bitter-smelling oil. 'By the balm of love's pain, may all desires be purified.'

She garlands your neck with apple-blossoms. 'By the grace of love's gladness, may all be brought joy.'

She salutes you and lets you go. You pass through the magical mist and into the forest where the white hart takes you up once again, and delivers you to the forest's edge. The hart speaks once more.

'Go gladly and be at peace. May the love of the Lady Enid (Holy Mother) live forever in your heart.'

In your own words, bid farewell to love's messenger and return to your time and place.

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The Well in the Forest

All around you the forest is thick, stretching league upon league. But on every side paths lead away through the tangled undergrowth. Which one will you follow? As you wonder you hear a far-off singing that comes from somewhere amid the trees, and this you decide to follow. A track leads in the direction you want and you strike off from the safety of the clearing into the uncertain half-light of the forest...

After a while you are no longer certain of your direction, and the singing has faded until you can no longer hear it. Then, in the undergrowth to your left you hear a crashing noise and abruptly a large roe deer leaps out upon the path before you. It seems as startled as you, but after a moment it is away, running before you as though you were a pack of hounds...

Something prompts you to follow, though you know that you cannot catch the deer. In a few moments you emerge into another clearing, in the centre of which is an ancient crumbling well-head. There is no sign of the deer but standing by the side of the well is a veiled woman. One half of her cloak is black and the other white, and the veil which covers her head and face together is made of black stuff shot through with silver. As you approach she addresses you.

‘I am Ragnell (Holy Mother). I guard the Well of Truth which shows even the most secret things of those who look within. All are welcome who approach my well, but only those with great courage choose to look within it, and of them few ever seek to drink thereof.’

As you stand by the side of Ragnell (Holy Mother) you are disturbingly aware of her eyes regarding you from behind the veil, yet you can see nothing more of her face, which may be fairly aspected or otherwise. You look towards the well, trying to decide whether to look into it or not... Give yourself time for this and if you do not wish to, give thanks and say farewell to Ragnell (Holy Mother) and return to the place from which you have come. If you decide to brave the test of the well then proceed...

Look down into the well. At first it seems filled with nothing but cloudy water; then the cloudiness becomes crystal clarity and you are able to see to the very bottom. In the water are bubbles and within the bubbles are scenes that appear now close, now distant... What you see there depends very much upon what you seek. The particular property of the well is that it can cause transformations to occur, thus if you believe your spirit to be mostly white you may see its darker side; if you believe it to be dark, then it is light that you will perceive – the ugly may become beautiful, or the beautiful seem ugly. That is the way of the well as it is the way of its guardian.

When you have looked your fill, consider whether you will drink from the waters. They too can cause transformations, changing the way you perceive yourself forever. Think very carefully before you decide one way or the other... If you decide not to drink, then proceed with the visualization; if you decide to attempt the test, then do so now...

When you have drunk, or if you have decided not to, look once again at Ragnell (Holy Mother). You see that she is unveiled. How will she seem to you? Hideous or radiantly beautiful? It is up to you how you perceive her, for here as in all things it is how we *chose* to see that governs the *way* we see. And whatever you see, the true appearance of Ragnell (Holy Mother) remains unchanged... Look well and carefully test what you see before you decide on its reality, even in this place...

Now it is almost time to depart, but before you do so you may ask the guardian one question. Perhaps it will be the one to which she long since gave Arthur the answer: 'What is it that every woman most desires?' Perhaps it will be another? Ask, and Ragnell (Holy Mother) will answer with complete truthfulness...

When the answer has been given it is time to depart. Take leave of Ragnell (Holy Mother) and slowly allow the image of the well in the forest to fade from your inner sight. In your own time re-establish contact with this world, letting the other depart from your consciousness.

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