

Math Son of Mathonwy

In this branch we are concerned with the family of Dôn, a goddess whose name is equivalent to the Irish Danu, mother of the gods known as the Túatha Dé Danann, and the Gaulish divinity whose name is preserved in the river name Danube (Donau). The tale is set in Gwynedd, in the north of Wales, where Dôn's brother Math is king. Dôn's children, Gwydion and his sister Aranrhod, are two principal characters in the story, but the narrative focuses on the birth, boyhood, marriage, and later career of Aranrhod's son, Llew Llaw Gyffes.

The tale of Math is a complex one, and it resists both a simple plot summary and a concise statement of its meaning. Myth and magic are everywhere apparent in the tale, and the action is even less realistic than in the other three stories. There are several narrative threads in the tale, some of which are broken abruptly, and others that are frayed, leaving gaps in the fabric of the story. The initial episode, which tells of the love of Gilfaethwy for Goewin and the ruse by which he rapes her, bears no apparent relation to the rest of the story. Gilfaethwy disappears from the narrative, as does Goewin, and although Math subsequently marries her, we discover nothing of her later career. Aranrhod enters the story under rather unusual circumstances, but we have no means to account for her great hostility toward her son Llew. There is no further mention of the aquatic first son, Dylan, after he takes to the sea immediately after being born, although he turns up elsewhere in Welsh tradition. Aranrhod, too, disappears from the story after she has inadvertently provided a name for her son. The last third of the story tells of the unfaithfulness of Llew's wife, his destruction by his wife's lover, his revival by Gwydion, and the punishment of the wife and lover.

Gwydion and his uncle, Math, are both powerful magicians, and the tale is filled with their magic. Gwydion demonstrates his powers when he changes himself and his companions into poets, altering their appearance, presumably, and endowing them with magical poetic powers as well; then, he deceives Pryderi by conjuring splendidly equipped horses, hounds, and arms out of toadstools, and trading them for the swine that Pryderi had received from the Otherworld. Later, he

and Math conjure a woman for Lleu out of flowers. This creative magic is associated with Math and Gwydion in the Book of Taliesin poem, "Cad Goddeu," where the persona of the poem asserts that he was created not of a father and mother, but from the elements by Math and Gwydion.

We have to do here, then, with the two supreme magician/creators of early Welsh tradition. Unlike his nephew Gwydion, Math is not a shape-shifter, but he does have the power to shift the shapes of others, even against their wills and the strength of their own magic. Gwydion tries to escape his uncle's anger, but with the aid of the magic rod, Math transforms Gwydion and his brother into various beasts, and condemns them to procreate, alternating sexes over a three-year period. The three offspring of these matings are transformed into fine young boys by the same staff of enchantment, although they are in animal form when they arrive with their parents at Math's court. But here is one of those threads abruptly broken off; no further mention is made of these three in the story. It has been suggested that we have in this episode a reference to a lost tradition about three heroes associated somehow with totem animals, but there is no evidence for the suggestion, and we must be content to drop the three as does the story-teller.

The longest sustained episode in the tale and the most interesting for modern readers, perhaps, is that of the deception of Lleu by his wife Blodeuedd. Here the human element is strongest; Blodeuedd and Gronw fall in love at first sight, and their adulterous affair hatches a plot to slay Lleu, so that the two of them can live together openly. When they succeed and news of the event reaches Gwydion, he is genuinely grieved and cannot rest until he has had some word of his nephew. He searches the land tirelessly, and when he has found Lleu, he takes pains to assemble the best physicians to effect the cure of the wasted lad. The tenderness and love felt by Gwydion for Lleu is in marked contrast to the superficial affections that have motivated Gronw and Blodeuedd. But in spite of the genuinely human emotions that motivate this very well constructed episode, it remains firmly rooted in the magic of Celtic tradition. Lleu's life is governed by certain taboos, and while he has no control over them, he has knowledge of them, so that he need only avoid them to remain safe. Such taboos are frequent in Irish tradition, where they are known as *gessa*. A hero or king knows, for example, that he must never harm birds, or that he must never taste the flesh of a dog, or that he must never refuse a boon requested under certain circumstances, or that he must not proceed in a certain direction around a specified place. Life's road is travelled by steering successfully past these obstacles that threaten destruction. Sometimes the taboos are

simple enough and clearly articulated; at other times they are strange, almost perverse, as in those that circumscribe the life of Conaire Mór in the Irish tale, "The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel." In many instances, the taboos are in conflict and produce dilemmas, so that the hero cannot help but break one to avoid another. It is this tradition of taboos and circumscriptions that underlies the curious events that lead to the disappearance of Lleu, but here there is no dilemma: Lleu willingly places himself in harm's way in order to ease his wife's pretended anxiety. And while the details of the manner in which he can be slain are bizarre, it should be noticed that the place in which his destiny is to be met is neither terrestrial nor profane, and the weapon by which it is to be accomplished is constructed only during sacred time.

Math son of Mathonwy was lord of Gwynedd, and Pryderi son of Pwyll was lord over twenty-one cantrefs in the South, namely, the seven cantrefs of Dyfed, seven of Morgannwg, four of Ceredigion, and three of Ystrad Tywi. In those days, Math son of Mathonwy could only live while his feet were in the lap of a maiden—unless the turmoil of war prevented him. The maiden who was with him was Goewin daughter of Pebin of Dol Bebin in Arfon. And she was the fairest of all the maidens that were known in her time. In those days the permanent court was in Caer Dathl in Arfon; none could go on circuit of the land on his behalf except his nephews, sons of his sister, Gilfaethwy son of Dôn and Gwydion son of Dôn, and the retinue with them.

The maiden was with Math continually. Gilfaethwy son of Dôn set his mind on the maid, and fell in love with her to the extent that he did not know what to do about it. Even his color, his appearance and his general condition worsened for love of her, so that it was not easy to recognize him. What his brother Gwydion did one day was to look at him closely.

"Lad," he said, "what has happened to you?"

"Why," answered the other, "how do I look?"

"You have lost your color and your good looks," he replied. "What has happened to you?"

"Lord brother," he answered, "it won't profit me to confide to anyone what has happened to me."

"Why is that, my friend?" he asked.

"You know," he said, "Math son of Mathonwy's nature: whatever whisper—no matter how small—passes between men, if it falls on the wind he will know it."

"Yes," said Gwydion, "you be quiet now, for I know your thoughts: you love Goewin."

What the other did then, when he realized that his brother knew what was on his mind, was heave the heaviest sigh in the world.

"Keep quiet with your sighs, my friend," he said, "that's not going to cure it. I will arrange a marshalling of the forces of Gwynedd and Powys and Deheubarth, because without that it won't be possible to get the maiden. Be cheerful; I will arrange it for you."

Then they went to Math son of Mathonwy.

"Lord," said Gwydion, "I have heard that some kind of animals that have never been in this island have come to the South."

"What are they called?" he asked.

"Swine (*hobeu*), Lord."

"What sort of animals are they?"

"Small animals, whose meat is better than beef. They are small and they change names; they are called pigs (*moch*) now."

"Whose are they?"

"They belong to Pryderi son of Pwyll—sent to him from Annwfn by Arawn, king of Annwfn." (And they still preserve that name in the word for a side of pork: *hammer-hob*.)

"Well," he said, "how can they be got from him?"

"I will go as one of twelve—disguised as poets—to ask for the swine."

"He can surely refuse you," said the other.

"My plan is not bad, Lord," he said. "I will not come away without the swine."

"Gladly," said the other, "go forth."

He and Gilfaethwy went, and ten men with them, as far as Ceredigion, to the place now called Rhuddlan Teifi; Pryderi had a court there. They came in dressed as bards, and were received joyfully, and Gwydion was seated beside Pryderi that night.

"Well," said Pryderi, "we will be pleased to hear lore from some of those young men there."

"Our custom, Lord," said Gwydion, "is that on the first night we come to a great man, the chief poet recites. I will recite lore gladly."

Then Gwydion was the best reciter of lore in the world. That night he entertained the court with pleasing monologues and lore that was admired by everyone of the court, and Pryderi found it delightful to be entertained by him.

When it was over, he said, "Lord, is it better for anyone to state my business with you than myself?"

"It is not," said the other, "yours is a most accomplished tongue."

"This is my business, Lord: to plead with you for the animals sent to you from Annwfn."

"Well," he said, "that would be the easiest thing in the world were it not for the covenant between me and my country about them, namely, that they should not go from me until twice as many as they have been bred in the land."

"Lord," said the other, "I will be able to free you from those words. This is how: don't give me the swine tonight, but don't refuse me them. Tomorrow I will offer an exchange for them."

That night he and his companions went to their lodge to take counsel.

"Men," he said, "we won't get the pigs by asking for them."

"Well," they said, "by what ruse will they be had?"

"I'll arrange to get them," Gwydion replied.

And then he began to practice his skills, and began to conjure, and he conjured twelve steeds, twelve black white-breasted hunting dogs, twelve collars with leashes on them—anyone who saw them would have thought they were gold, twelve saddles on the horses—where they should have been iron, they were solid gold; the bridles were made in the same way.

He came to Pryderi with the horses and the dogs.

"Good-day, Lord," he said.

"God prosper you," he replied, "and welcome."

"Here is your freedom from the words you spoke last night concerning the swine—that you could not give them nor sell them. You can exchange them for something better. I will give you these twelve horses, outfitted as they are, with their saddles and their bridles, the twelve hunting dogs with their collars and leashes, just

as you see them, and the twelve golden shields you see over there." (He had made those out of mushrooms.)

"Well," he said, "we will take counsel."

What they decided was to give the pigs to Gwydion and take the horses, dogs, and shields from him.

They took their leave and set out with the pigs.

"My friends," said Gwydion, "we must move quickly. The enchantment lasts but from one day to the next."

That night they travelled as far as the upper part of Ceredigion, to the place which for that reason is now called Mochdref (swine-town). The next day they took the road, and came across Elenid. That night they were between Ceri and Arwystli—in the town which is also called Mochdref because of that. Thence they went forth, they went as far as a commote in Powys, which is called Mochnant (swine-brook), and they stayed there that night. From there they travelled as far as the cantref of Rhos, and they stayed there that night, in a town still called Mochdref.

"Men," said Gwydion, "we will march these animals into the might of Gwynedd, for they are marshalling behind us."

They reached the highest township of Arllechwedd, and made a pen for the pigs there; for that reason it was called Creuwryon. After making the pen for the pigs, they sought Math son of Mathonwy in Caer Dathl.

When they arrived there, the country was being marshalled.

"What news here?" asked Gwydion.

"Pryderi is marshalling twenty-one cantrefs to come after you," they replied. "It is amazing how slowly you have come."

"Where are the animals you went after?" asked Math.

"They have made a pen for them in the other cantref below," said Gwydion.

Then, lo, they could hear the trumpets and the mustering of the land, and they dressed and went forth until they were in Penardd in Arfon. That night, Gwydion son of Dôn and his brother Gilfaethwy returned to Caer Dathl. The handmaidens were forced out rudely, and Gilfaethwy was put in Math son of Mathonwy's bed with Goewin daughter of Pebin to sleep together; the girl was seduced dishonorably, and slept with against her will that night.

With the dawn next morning, they went toward the place

where Math son of Mathonwy and his host were. When they arrived, the others were going into counsel over where they would await Pryderi and the men of the South. They joined the discussion. What they decided was to wait in the fastness of Gwynedd in Arfon. Between Maenawr Bennardd and Maenawr Coed Alun they waited.

Pryderi attacked them there, and that is where the encounter took place. A great massacre was effected on each side, but the men of the South had to retreat. They retreated as far as the place still called Nant Coll, and they were pursued there. An incalculable slaughter took place there, and they retreated as far as the place called Dol Benmaen. There they rallied and sought a truce, and Pryderi gave hostages for the peace. Gwrgi Gwastra was one of the twenty-four nobles' sons he gave in hostage.

After that they went in peace as far as Traeth Mawr. Because the foot soldiers could not be prevented from shooting at each other as soon as they had come to Melen Ryd, Pryderi sent messengers to request that the two hosts be restrained and that it be left between him and Gwydion, since he had caused it. The message came to Math son of Mathonwy.

"Well," said Math, "I swear to God, if it please Gwydion son of Dôn, I will allow it gladly. I will not compel anyone to fight beyond what lies in our power to do."

"God knows," said the messenger, "Pryderi says that it is only fair for the man who so wronged him to put his body against his, Pryderi's, and let the two hosts stay out of it."

"I confess to God, I will not ask the men of Gwynedd to fight for me; I myself will fight with Pryderi. I will put my body against his, gladly."

That was conveyed to Pryderi.

"Well," said Pryderi, "nor will I ask anyone to assert my right but myself alone."

The two of them went aside, began to arm themselves, and then fought. By dint of strength and force, magic and enchantment, Gwydion won and Pryderi was slain. He was buried in Maen Tyfyawg, above Melen Ryd, and his grave is there.

The men of the South set out with woeful lamentations toward their own land, and no wonder: they had lost their lord, many of their best men, their horses, and most of their weapons. The men

of Gwynedd returned home happy and full of high spirits.

"Lord," said Gwydion to Math, "wouldn't it be proper for us to release their lord to the men of the South, the one they pledged to us in truce? We should not imprison him."

"Let him be freed, then," said Math.

And that fellow and the hostages that accompanied him were sent back to the men of the South.

Then Math went to *Caer Dathl*. *Gilfaethwy* son of *Dôn* and the host that had been with him went on circuit of Gwynedd as was their custom, and did not go to the court. Math approached his chamber, and had a place arranged for him to recline, the way he loved to put his feet in the maiden's lap.

"Lord," said *Goewin*, "seek a maid who may sit beneath your feet now; I am a woman."

"What does this mean?"

"An attack was made upon me, Lord, and that openly, nor was I silent—there wasn't anyone in the court who didn't know it. It was your two nephews who came, Lord, sons of your sister: *Gwydion* son of *Dôn* and *Gilfaethwy* son of *Dôn*. They raped me and shamed you, for I was slept with in your chamber and in your bed."

"Well," he said, "first, I will do right by you—as far as I am able; as for me, I shall act according to my right. I will make you my wife and will put possession of my realm into your hand."

They did not come to the vicinity of the court then, but lived about the country until a prohibition was enacted against food and drink for them. At first they did not come near Math; then they did.

"Lord," they said, "good-day to you."

"Well," he said, "have you come to make reparation to me?"

"Lord, we are at your will."

"Were it my will, I would not have lost what I did of men and arms. You cannot compensate me for my shame, to say nothing of *Pryderi's* death. But since you have submitted yourselves to my will, I will begin your punishment."

Then he took his staff of enchantment and struck *Gilfaethwy* so that he became a good-sized hind. He seized the other quickly, and though he wanted to escape, he could not; he struck him with the same staff so that he became a stag.

"Since you two are inseparable, I will make you travel to-

gether and mate in the same manner as the wild beasts in whose shape you are; and when they have offspring, so shall you. A year from today return here to me."

At the end of a year from that very day, he could hear a commotion beneath the chamber wall, and the dogs of the court barking at it.

"See what is outside," he said.

"Lord," said one, "I have looked; there is a stag and hind, and a fawn with them."

Thereupon he rose and went out. When he did, he saw the three beasts; the three he saw were a stag and hind, and a sturdy fawn. What he did then was raise his staff.

"The one of you that has been a hind during the past year, let him be a wild boar this year. He who has been a stag, let him be a wild sow."

And at that, he struck them with the staff.

"The little one, however, I will take; I will have him raised and baptized."

The name given him was *Hyddwn*.

"Go; one of you shall be a wild boar, the other a sow, and such nature as wild pigs may have let that be yours too. A year from today be here alongside the wall and your offspring with you."

At the end of the year, they could hear the dogs barking beside the chamber wall, and the court gathering around them. Thereupon, he rose and went out. When he came outside, he saw three beasts. The kind he saw were a wild boar, wild sow, and a god-sized piglet along with them. He was strong for his age.

"Well," he said, "I will take this one and have him baptized."

And he struck him with the staff, and he turned into a big, fine, handsome boy. The name he gave him was *Hychdwn*.

"As for you, the one that has been a wild boar for the past year, let him be a wolf bitch this year, and the one that has been a sow, let him be a wolf."

And he struck them with the staff, and they became wolf and bitch.

"Let your nature be the same as that of the animals in whose shape you are. And be here a year from today beside this chamber wall."

At the end of a year from that day, he heard a turmoil and

barking beside the chamber wall. He rose to go outside, and when he came there, he saw a wolf, a bitch, and a sturdy cub with them.

"I'll take this one," he said, "and have him baptized; his name is determined: Bleiddwn. Three sons you have, and these are they:

Three sons of wicked Gilfaethwy,
Three true champions.
Bleiddwn, Hyddwn and Hychdwn Hir.

Saying that, he struck the two of them so that they returned to their own shape.

"Men," he said, "if you have done me wrong, I have punished you enough, and you have had great shame; each of you bearing the other's child. Have these men bathed and their heads washed, and have them properly dressed."

And that was done. After they had been properly arrayed, they went to him.

"Men," he said, "you got peace, and you shall have friendship. Now give me advice on the sort of maiden I should seek."

"Lord," said Gwydion son of Dôn, "it is easy to advise you: your niece Aranrhod daughter of Dôn, your sister's daughter."

She was summoned to him, and came in.

"Maiden," he said, "are you a maiden?"

"I do not know other than that I am."

Then he took his magician's rod and held it down low.

"Step across this," he said, "and if you are a maiden, I will know it."

She stepped over the rod then, and as she did she dropped a big, fine, yellow-haired boy. What the boy did was to utter a loud cry. After the boy's cry, she made for the door, dropping as she went some little thing from her. Before anyone could have a second glance at it, Gwydion took it, wrapped a brocaded silk coverlet around it and hid it. Where he hid it was in a small chest at the foot of his bed.

"Well," said Math son of Mathonwy, "I will have this one baptized," he said, looking at the sturdy yellow-haired boy. "The name I will give him is Dylan."

The boy was baptized, and as soon as he was, he made for the sea. No sooner had he come to the sea than he took the sea's nature,

and swam as well as the best fish in the sea; because of that he was called Dylan Eil Ton. No wave ever broke under him; the blow that caused his death was delivered by Gofannon his uncle, and that was one of the three unfortunate blows.

One day, as Gwydion awoke in his bed, he heard a cry from the chest at his feet. Though it was not loud, it was loud enough for him to hear it. What he did was to rise quickly and open the chest. As he opened it, he saw a little boy, flailing his arms free of the folds of the coverlet and tossing it aside. He cradled the boy between his arms and took him to the town, where he knew there was a woman in milk and he had her nurse the boy. And that year he was nursed. When he was a year old, they thought his stoutness was remarkable were he two years old. In the second year he was a large boy, and able to set out for the court on his own. After he came to the court, Gwydion himself took charge of him. The boy came to know him well, and loved him more than anyone. The boy was raised in the court, then, until he was four years old—and it would be remarkable for a boy of eight years to be as sturdy as he.

One day, he set out for a walk behind Gwydion. What he did was to go to *Caer Aranrhod*, and the boy with him. When he came to the court, *Aranrhod* rose up to welcome him, and greeted him.

"God prosper you," he said.

"What boy is that behind you?" she asked.

"This boy is your son," he replied.

"Och, Man! What has come over you to disgrace me, and maintain my shame by keeping him as long as this?"

"If you have no shame greater than my fostering a boy as fine as this, then your shame is a small thing indeed."

"What is your boy's name?" she asked.

"God knows," he replied, "he has no name yet."

"Well," she said, "I put a curse on him, that he shall not have a name until he gets it from me."

"I confess to God," he said, "you are a wicked woman; the boy shall have a name, though it displease you. And you, though you may grieve that you are not a maiden, because of what you are you will never be called maiden now."

Thereupon, he went away angrily, made his way to *Caer Dathl*, and stayed that night. The next morning he arose, and

taking the boy with him, journeyed along the sea-shore between there and Abermenai. And where he found dulse and laminaria, he conjured a ship. From the seaweed and the dulse he conjured cordovan leather—a good deal of it, and dappled it until no one had ever seen fairer leather. Then he rigged a sail on the ship, and he and the boy came in the ship to the entrance of the port of Caer Aranrhod. They began to fashion shoes and stitch them, and they were seen from the fort. When he knew they were being observed from the fort, he took away their own appearance and put another upon them so they could not be recognized.

"What kind of men are in the ship?" asked Aranrhod.

"Shoemakers," they replied.

"Go see what kind of leather they have and what kind of work they do."

They went, and when they arrived he was mottling the cordovan with gold. The messengers returned and told her that.

"Well," she said, "take the measurements of my feet, and ask the shoemaker to make a pair of shoes for me."

He fashioned the shoes, and not in her size, but larger. They brought her the shoes, but they didn't fit.

"These are too big," she said. "He will have the price of these, but let him also make some smaller ones."

What he did was to make the others much smaller than her feet, and send them to her.

"Tell him that none of these shoes fit," she said.

That was told to him.

"Well," he said, "I shall make no shoes for her until I see her foot."

That was told to her.

"Well," she said, "I will go to him."

She came to the ship, and when she did he was designing and the boy stitching.

"Well, Lady," he said, "good-day to you."

"God prosper you," she replied. "I am amazed that you are not able to proportion shoes according to measure."

"I couldn't," he said, "but I can now."

At that moment there was a wren perched on the deck of the ship. What the boy did was to make a cast at it and hit it in the leg between the tendon and the bone. She smiled.

"God knows," she said, "it's with a skilful hand (*llaw gyffes*) that the fair-haired one (*lleu*) has hit him!"

"Well," said the other, "God's curse to you, he has got a name, and a good enough name it is: he is Llew Llaw Gyffes henceforth."

Then the work vanished into dulse and seaweed, and he occupied himself with it no more. On account of that he was called one of the three golden shoemakers.

"God knows," she said, "you won't be any better for being evil toward me."

"I haven't been evil to you, even so!" he said, and with that he transformed his boy into his own shape, and took his own form.

"Well," she said, "I put a curse on this boy that he shall never take arms until I arm him."

"I swear to God," he said, "that comes from your wickedness, but he shall take arms."

They came toward Dinas Dinlleu, then, and Llew Llaw Gyffes was raised until he was capable of every kind of horsemanship, and until he was perfected in form, growth and size. Then Gwydion realized that he was getting restless over the lack of steeds and arms, and he summoned him.

"My boy," he said, "you and I shall go on an errand tomorrow; be more cheerful than you are."

"I will," said the lad.

Early in the morning the following day, they arose and took the route that led by the sea up toward Bryn Arien. At the very top of Cefn Cludno they mounted horses and came toward Caer Aranrhod. Then they changed their shapes and went to the gate in the guise of two young fellows, except that Gwydion's countenance was more studied than that of the lad.

"Porter," he said, "go inside and say that bards from Morgannwg are here."

The porter went.

"God's welcome to them; let them in," she said.

They were received with very great joy. The hall was readied, and they went to eat. After they ate, she and Gwydion entertained themselves with tales and lore. Gwydion was a good reciter of lore.

When it was time to leave off the entertainment, a chamber was prepared for them and they went to sleep. Long before morn-

ing Gwydion rose, and summoned his might and magic. By the time day was dawning the sounds of turmoil, trumpets and cries were filling the land. When the day came, they heard knocking on the door of the room, and then Aranrhod, asking that they open up. The lad rose and opened the door, and in she came, a maid with her.

"Men," she said, "our position is bad."

"Yes," he said, "we have heard trumpets and shouts; what do you suppose it is?"

"God knows," she said, "we can't see the color of the sea for the multitude of ships, and they're coming to land as fast as they can. What shall we do?"

"Lady," said Gwydion, "there is no counsel for us but to shut ourselves inside the fort and defend it as best we can."

"Well," she replied, "may God reward you! Defend it—you will find plenty of weapons here."

Then she went after the weapons. She returned accompanied by two maidens, and they had arms for two men.

"Lady," he said, "you dress this young man, and the maidens will assist me to dress. I hear the roar of men coming."

"I will do that gladly," and she outfitted him completely, and did it cheerfully.

"Have you finished outfitting that young man?" he asked.

"I have," she replied.

"Then I have finished, too," he said. "We will divest ourselves of our arms now, for we have no need of them."

"Och!" she exclaimed, "Why? A fleet surrounds the place!"

"Woman, there isn't any fleet here."

"Och!" she exclaimed, "Then what was that hosting?"

"It was assembled," he replied, "to break your curse on your son, and to get arms for him. And he did get arms, no thanks to you."

"I swear to God," she said, "you are a wicked man. Many a boy could have lost his life over the uprising you caused in this cantref today. But I will put a curse on him," she said, "that he will never get a wife from any race that's on this earth now."

"Well," he said, "you have always been a wicked woman, and no one should maintain you. But he shall have a wife, just as he got a name and arms."

They came to Math son of Mathonwy, complaining most

persistently about Aranrhod, and related how he had caused him to be armed.

"Well," said Math, "we two shall seek by means of our magic and our enchantment, to charm a wife for him out of flowers."

At that time he had a man's physique and was the most handsome fellow anyone ever saw. So they took the flowers of oak, broom, and meadow sweet, and from these they created the fairest and most beautiful maiden anyone ever saw. And they baptized her in the way they did then, and named her Blodeuedd. At the feast they slept together.

"It is not easy," said Gwydion, "for a man without territory of his own to support himself."

"Well," said Math, "I will give him the one best cantref a young man can have."

"Which is that, Lord?" he asked.

"Cantref Dinoding," he replied. That place is now called Eifynydd and Ardudwy.

The place where he kept his court in that cantref is called Mur Castell, in the upper part of Ardudwy. And he dwelt there and ruled that land; everyone was pleased with him and his governance. One day he travelled to Caer Dathl, to visit Math son of Mathonwy. On the day that he went to Caer Dathl, she was going for a walk in the court. She heard a hunting horn, and after the sound of the horn, there was a weary stag going past, with dogs and hunters chasing it. Behind the dogs and the hunters came a crowd of men on foot.

"Lad," she said, "go down and find out what that crowd is."

The boy went, and asked who they were.

"It's Gronw Pebyr, the man who is Lord of Penllyn," they told him.

He relayed that to her, while Gronw kept after the stag. They overtook the stag and slew it at the river Cynfael. He was busy skinning the stag and baiting his hounds until night overtook him. And as the day declined and night drew near, he came past the gate of the court.

"God knows," she said, "unless we invite him in, he will satirize us for letting him go off to another land at this hour."

"God knows, Lady," they replied, "the most proper thing is to invite him."

Messengers went up to him, then, to invite him. He accepted

the invitation gladly, and came to the court; she came forth to welcome him and greet him.

He removed his gear and they went to sit down. What Blodeuedd did was to look at him, and as she gazed, her entire being was filled with love of him. And he noticed her, too, and the same feeling was awakened in him as awakened in her. He could not conceal being in love with her, and he told her; she rejoiced exceedingly, and that night they talked of the love and affection they felt for one another. Nor did they put off past that night embracing each other; they slept together the same night.

The next day he meant to depart.

"God knows," she said, "you won't leave me tonight?"

That night they stayed together again. The same night they conspired together about what ruse they could devise to remain together.

"There is but one advice for you," he said, "find out from him how his death may be encompassed, as if you were concerned about him."

The next day he meant to depart.

"God knows, I don't advise you to leave me today."

"Well, since you don't advise it, I won't go," he said. "I do say, though, that there is a danger that the chieftain whose court this is may come home."

"Yes," she said, "tomorrow I will let you go."

The next day he sought to go and she did not prevent him.

"Well," he said, "remember what I told you, and talk diligently with him; do it as if out of the tenacity of your love for him, and pursue with him how his death might come about."

That night he came home, and they spent the time conversing and in song and revelry; that night they went to bed together. He spoke to her, and spoke a second time, but he got no response.

"What has happened to you?" he said. "Are you well?"

"I am thinking," she replied, "something you would never guess: in fact, I am worrying about your death—in case you should go before me."

"Well," he said, "God reward your concern. But unless God strikes me dead, it will not be easy to kill me."

"For God's sake—and for mine—will you explain to me how you could be killed? For my memory is better for being wary than yours."

"I will gladly," he answered. "It is not easy to kill me with a cast. One would have to spend a year making the spear that was thrown at me, working on it only when people were at prayers on Sunday."

"Are you safe from that?"

"No doubt I am," he said. "I cannot be killed in a house, nor outside; neither on a horse nor on foot."

"Well," she said, "how can you be killed?"

"I will tell you," he replied. "You make a bath for me on a river bank, and construct a roof-frame above the tub; after that, roof it so as to make it a good shelter. Then bring along a billy-goat and station him beside the tub; I put my one foot on the billy's back and the other on the edge of the tub. Whoever should hit me in that position will kill me."

"Well," she said, "thank God for that! That can be avoided easily."

No sooner did she get that information than she sent it to Gronw Pebyr. Gronw labored over the spear, and a year from that very day it was ready. On the same day he let her know that.

"Lord," she said, "I'm wondering how that which you told me before could be. Will you show me how you would stand on the edge of the tub and the billy's back if I make the bath?"

"Yes," he said.

She sent word to Gronw, and asked him to be in the shadow of the hill that is now called Bryn Cyfergyr (Hill of the Battle); on the shore of the Cynfael it was. She had all the goats she could find in the cantref gathered together and brought to the far side of the river, facing Bryn Cyfergyr.

Next day, she said, "Lord, I have had the frame arranged, as well as the bath, and they're all ready."

"Well," he said, "let's go look at them, gladly."

They came to look at the bath.

"Will you get into the bath, Lord?" she asked.

"I will, gladly," he replied.

He got into the bath and washed.

"Lord," she said, "here are the animals you said were called billy-goats."

"Well," he said, "have one of them caught and brought here."

It was done. He rose then from the bath, put on his trousers, and placed one foot on the edge of the tub and the other on the

billy's back. Gronw rose up from the hill called Bryn Cyfergyr, knelt on one knee, and cast the poison spear at him. It struck him in the side, so that the shaft stuck out of him but the head remained inside. He uttered a horrible scream then, and took flight in the shape of an eagle until they lost sight of him. As quickly as he disappeared, they went to the court, and that night they slept together. The next day Gronw arose and took possession of Ardudwy. After taking possession of the land, he ruled it until both Ardudwy and Penllyn were in his power.

The news went to Math son of Mathonwy. Math became anxious and depressed, and Gwydion even more so.

"Lord," said Gwydion, "I will never rest until I have news of my nephew."

"Yes," said Math, "and may God strengthen you."

He set forth then, and began to walk; he traversed Gwynedd and all of Powys, and after wandering everywhere, he came to Arfon, to a peasant's house in Maenawr Bennardd. He went inside and stayed there that night. The head of the household and his family came in, and lastly the swineherd.

The man said to the swineherd, "Lad, has the sow come in tonight?"

"Yes," he replied, "she has just come to the pigs."

"Where does that sow go?" asked Gwydion.

"When the pen is opened each day, she goes out. She isn't observed closely and we don't know where she goes, any more than if she went into the earth."

"For my sake," said Gwydion, "will you not open the pen until I am on the other side of the pen with you?"

"All right, gladly," he replied.

They went to sleep that night.

When the swineherd saw the light of day, he awakened Gwydion, who rose, dressed, and came with him to the pen. The swineherd opened it. As soon as he did, here she came, bounding out. She set a brisk pace, and Gwydion pursued her. She went upstream, travelling in the brook now called Nantlleu; there she paused and fed.

Then Gwydion came under the tree, and looked to see what the sow was feeding on; he saw her eating rotten flesh and maggots. What he did then was to look at the top of the tree. When

he did, he saw an eagle there. When the eagle would stir, the lice and rotten flesh would slake off him, and the sow would eat that. Then it occurred to him that the eagle was Lleu, and he sang the *englyn*:

There's an oak that grows between two lakes,
Gloomy is the air and the glen;
If I speak no lie,
This comes from Lleu's flowers.

At that point the eagle let himself slip down until he was in the middle of the tree. What Gwydion did was to sing another *englyn*:

There's an oak that grows on a high plain;
Rain wets it not, nor does it melt;
It nourished a score of torments.
In its top is Lleu Llaw Gyffes.

Then he slipped down farther until he was on the lowest branch of the tree. He sang this *englyn* to him then:

There's an oak that grows along a slope;
Stately prince in his temple.
If I speak no lie,
Lleu will come to my lap.

And at that he landed on Gwydion's knee. Gwydion struck him with his magician's rod, so that he was changed into his own shape. But never had anyone seen a more wretched appearance in a man than his; he was mere skin and bone. He took him to Caer Dathl, then, and all the good doctors that could be found in Gwynedd were brought to him. Before the year was out, he was completely healed.

"Lord," he said to Math son of Mathonwy, "the time has come for me to exact justice upon the man who caused me such affliction."

"God knows, he will not be able to maintain himself, owing you redress."

"Well," said the other, "the sooner I get justice the better."

They mustered Gwynedd then, and marched on Ardudwy.

Gwydion marched in front and assaulted Mur Castell. What Blodeuedd did when she heard them coming was to take her maidens and head for the mountain and the court that was there, across the Cynfael river. Because they were afraid, they could only proceed by looking backwards, so they were unaware until they fell into the lake; all drowned except she alone.

Gwydion overtook her then, and said to her, "I won't kill you, I'll do worse: I'll let you go in the form of a bird. And because of the shame you brought upon Llew Llaw Gyffes, you shall not dare show your face ever in the light of day for fear of the other birds. There shall be enmity between you and all the rest of the birds. It shall be natural for them to persecute you and dishonor you wherever they find you. You shall not lose your name, however, you shall always be called Blodeuwedd." What *blodeuwedd* is, is "owl" in the language of the present day. And from that cause the owl is hated by birds; the owl is still called "flower-face" (*blodeu-wedd*).

As for Gronw Pebyr, he went to Penllyn and sent a message from there asking Llew Llaw Gyffes if he wanted land or territory, gold or silver in retribution.

"No, I confess to God," he said. "Here is the least I will accept from him: let him go to the place I was when I was hit by the spear and me be where he was, and let me cast a spear at him. That is the least I will accept."

That was told to Gronw Pebyr.

"Well," he said, "I must do that. My loyal nobles, my retinue and my foster-brothers, is there one of you who would take the blow for me?"

"Certainly not," they said.

Because of their refusal to suffer taking a blow on behalf of their lord, they have been called from that day to this, one of the three unloyal retinues.

"Well," he said, "I will take it."

Then those two came to the shore of Cynfael river. Gronw Pebyr stood where Llew Llaw Gyffes had when he was struck, and Llew stood in the other's place.

Then Gronw Pebyr said to Llew, "Lord, since I did what I did to you through the maliciousness of a woman, I beg of you for God's sake let me put the stone I see there on the bank between me and the blow."

"God knows," said Llew, "I won't refuse you that."

"Well," said the other, "God reward you."

Then Gronw picked up the stone and put it between him and the blow. Llew cast the spear at him, and it pierced through the stone and through him so that it broke his back. And Gronw Pebyr died, and the stone is there still on the bank of the Cynfael in Arduwy, with the hole through it. Because of that it is called Gronw's Stone.

Llew Llaw Gyffes took possession of his land again and ruled successfully. According to the lore, he was lord over Gwynedd after that.

Thus ends this branch of the Mabinogi.