

The Nature of Things

The story of Myrddin Emrys

The Merlin Chronicles Volume 1

by

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CHARACTERS

* historical individuals

(*) possibly historical individuals

M individual in the Arthurian legend

Aberthol – Caem Lw’s administrator of agriculture

Arthur – a warrior (*)**M**

Bagdemagus – a warrior, known also as Baggy **M**

Ban – Caem Lw’s administrator of mining **M**

Bleys – scribe and scholar, Merlin’s grandfather **M**

Brathach – advisor to Uther, later Arthur

Caiside – Kaita’s brother

Caradoc – Caem Lw’s general, north **M**

Carrow – a sorcerer, Meinir’s friend

Cathen – a Druid

Columba – Arthur’s childhood nurse

Denzel – stall master in Tintagel

Dinadan – a warrior **M**

Elestren – kitchen worker in Tintagel

Eglantine – Lanti’s full name

Egglame – a warrior **M**

Elga – a sorcerer, sister to Pacifa

Eliwlod – Caem Lw’s general, east **M**

Falina – Bagdemagus’s wife

Father Kevern – a Christian priest

Father Michael – a Christian priest

Floyd the Elder – Caem Lw’s administrator of law

Grym Bywyd Dwr – a water spirit

Gwenhwyfar – Welsh for Guinevere, a.k.a Gwen (*)**M**

Gwythyr – Gwen’s father

Hebenia – Gwen’s mother

Ida – king of Bryneich *

Jowan – advisor to Uther Pendragon

Kaita – a Druid

Languoreth – the name given Morrie by her mother (*)**M**

Lanti – Elestren’s daughter

Meinir – a sorcerer and physician, Merlin’s mother

Merlin – a sorcerer (*)**M**

Mordred – son of King Ida **M**

Morgause – a sorcerer, Morrie’s aunt **M**

Morken - a sorcerer, Merlin’s father (*)**M**

Morrie – a sorcerer **M** a.k.a. Lady Morgaine

Mungo – a Christian warrior *

Myrddin (pronounced Meerthen) Emrys – the Welsh name for Merlin (*)**M**

Pacifa – a sorcerer and scholar

Romney – Caem Lw’s administrator of finances

Rozen – head cook, Tintagel

Sagamore – a warrior, Arthur’s friend **M**

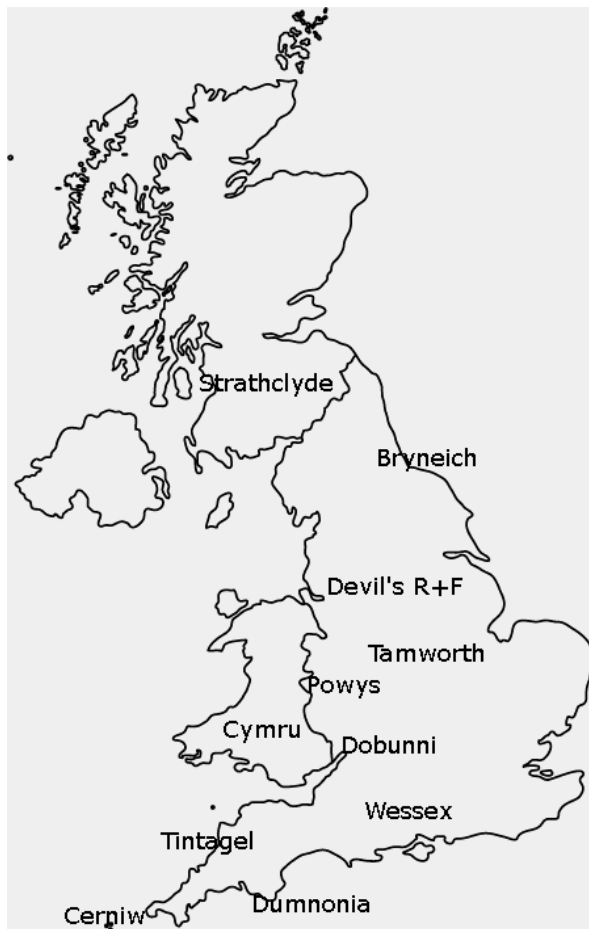
Sorcha – a Druid

Taliesin – a bard and sorcerer, a.k.a. Talli * **M**

Tudlwystl – queen of Powys *

Uther Pendragon – chieftain of Tintagel (*)**M**

Vivien – a sorcerer, Morgause’s daughter **M**



6th century Britain

The boy who talked to water

Meinir listened to her son's voice chattering as he splashed along the side of the brook. She let his words flow through her without trying to understand what he was saying. He seemed to be using a language of his own, as he often did, and the brook, when answering him, used a language that she didn't understand at all. It was the tone of his voice that she listened to.

Her father Bleys, walking beside her on the rough path through the wood, said, 'He doesn't sound as sad as he did this morning.'

'No. Whatever Grym Bywyd Dwr is saying to him, I think he's feeling better.'

'How are you feeling?'

'Hungry. Tired, footsore, angry. Relieved that the three of us are alive.'

'And grieving,' he said quietly.

She suppressed a sigh. 'And grieving.'

She looked at her son as he threw himself into the water, laughing, and emerged, his hair and clothes streaming. She shivered in sympathy but he didn't care about the cold. He never did. He didn't care about his clothes either and he was barefoot so she wasn't worried about him ruining his shoes. They were tied to her belt.

Still laughing he scrambled ashore and shouted something over his shoulder as he ran towards her and his grandfather. By the time he reached them his clothing and hair were dry. 'Grym Bywyd Dwr says it's not far now,' he said, grabbing his grandfather's hand and swinging it as he fell into step with them.

'Well, that's certainly good to hear,' Meinir smiled. 'Will we be there by dinner time?'

'Probably not,' Myrddin said. 'I think we should eat something now.'

Meinir laughed. 'I'm sure you do.'

Bleys said, 'You're a clever lad. I think you're right. Do you think your mother has something in her pack for us?'

Meinir looked down at her son's hopeful face, his blue eyes sparkling with the mischief that was almost always there, though not so much in the last month. She ruffled his thick black hair and said, 'Oh, maybe there's a crumb or two left.'

'I'll fetch water!' he shouted and ran back to the brook.

'Myrddin!' she called after him. He stopped and turned. She held up the scoop she had attached to her belt by his shoes and he came running back. She suspected he had been about to fetch the water in the form of a big bubble the way he had done back home and it worried her. He had to learn. He had to learn now. He took the scoop from her hand and dashed off to the brook again.

Bleys sat on a fallen log with a deep sigh of satisfaction and stretched his legs. 'Don't worry too much, Meinir,' he said. 'He's learning.'

'We can't make mistakes,' she said grimly.

'No, we can't. But we hadn't made any mistakes before and the chieftain still found Morken. It's because we made no mistakes that you and Myrddin weren't discovered. And survived.'

She sat next to him and started opening her pack. 'You're right.' She looked at the boy walking carefully back towards them with the full scoop. She was in fact proud of him for doing it without using any magic. She knew he wanted to. 'Thank you,' she said, receiving the scoop from him. She drank then passed it to her father.

She took out the last of the bread, goat cheese and dried wild apples from last year. It would be good to come to the village. Their weeks of travelling had depleted all of their supplies and most of their strength. Even Myrddin, with all of his childish energy, was thin and tired more often than she liked to see.

She held her face up to the afternoon sun. It was warm and pleasant after the harsh winds and cold spring rain of yesterday.

'So how much farther is it?' Bleys asked his grandson.

'I don't know exactly,' the boy said. 'Do you want me to ask her?'

'No, that's all right. We'll just get started in a moment.' He took Myrddin's hand, pulled him in between his knees and rested his chin on the boy's head. Myrddin leaned back against his grandfather comfortably.

Meinir's heart warmed at the sight. It had been a terrible time recently but there was much to be happy about.

But then Myrddin started moving his hand and small swirls of dust rose from the path, twisting into the shapes of birds. Pride in her son's skills was immediately crushed by fear and she reached her hand out to cover his. He looked at her, startled, and then turned away, ashamed.

'I'm sorry, Meinir,' he whispered.

'I know you are,' she said quietly as her father's arms tightened round him comfortingly. 'But you know how important it is to remember.'

'I thought it was all right when it's just us,' Myrddin said, almost inaudibly.

'That was true before. But now we can never ever be sure that it's just us. There might be someone coming along the road that we haven't seen yet. Or someone walking in the wood. And when we get to the chieftain's fortress there will always be people around. Always. Even if you think you're absolutely alone, someone might see you. And you know what will happen if someone sees you use your magic.'

He nodded and she saw tears start to roll down his cheeks. 'But I don't understand why. I don't do anything bad with it.'

'I know. But the chieftain has decided that magic is evil and anyone who uses it will be killed.'

'But when can I use it then?' he whispered.

She sighed, exchanged a look with Bleys. 'Never.'

Myrddin's eyes widened and he glared at her. She could almost read his mind, though in truth she did not have that power. 'Never?!' He didn't say, 'I don't believe you,' and he didn't say, 'You're mad,' but he might as well have.

'Never,' she said firmly. 'Absolutely never.'

'But when are you going to use yours?' he demanded, sensing some deep injustice.

'Never,' she said.

Again his eyes filled with tears and his mouth pinched stubbornly. 'But - '

'Myrddin,' she said sharply, 'your father was killed because he used his magic!'

His lips quivered but he stood up straight, defiant. 'He was killed because the chieftain is stupid!'

A choking sound between a sob and a laugh escaped her and Bleys exclaimed, 'Myrddin!'

'Oh father, he's right,' Meinir gasped.

'He's right but he's risking our lives!' Bleys said angrily.

Myrddin twisted in his grandfather's arms and glowered at him rebelliously. 'But he is!'

'And you will never say it again!' his grandfather ordered, his normally good-natured features stiff with anger and fear. 'Myrddin! Talking like that puts your mother in danger!'

'But she can use her magic to protect herself!'

'And she would not, because that would put you and me in danger!'

Myrddin was only seven years old but he wasn't stupid. He whirled round to look at her again, his eyes wide in shock. She nodded. He threw himself into her arms. 'I promise!' he sobbed.

She lifted his chin and forced him to look at her. 'Do you promise? Really promise?' He nodded. 'Good.' She kissed his forehead and hugged him.

Bleys patted his back and said, 'Don't feel too bad, Myrddin. Life without magic is good too. Look at me. I don't have any magic at all but I'm happy.'

Myrddin turned and looked at him. 'No, but you can read and write. Would you be happy if you were forbidden to do it?'

Bleys's bushy grey eyebrows shot up and he laughed ruefully. 'You're right again, boy.'

Meinir smiled too and hid the pain that her son's astuteness brought her. Myrddin scowled. 'It wasn't funny.'

'No, it wasn't,' Bleys conceded. 'I'm sorry. You just surprised me.' He rose to his feet, turned his back to them and crouched down. 'Ride?'

Myrddin scrambled onto his grandfather's back and clutched his arms round his neck. Meinir put her pack on her back and rose too.

They set off again. Myrddin fell asleep, his cheek resting against his grandfather's back.

They walked in silence for a moment. The forest thickened and Meinir felt uneasy. Normally forests held no fear for her, though they did for most people. There were many dangers. Bandits. Wolves. Bears. Some said spirits and malicious Ankou and Bendith and other fairies lurked in the woods. If she could use her magic she had little to fear. But so close to the chieftain's court she wouldn't dare. Bleys was still a strong man though getting old, and she was strong, but any attack would be difficult, especially with a small

child who would have to be kept under sharp surveillance to stop him from using his magic by will or lack of self-control.

Sensing her disquiet, but misinterpreting it, her father said, 'Are we doing the right thing, heading straight for the man who had Morken murdered?'

She thought for a moment. Morken. Her lover. Her son's father. A powerful magician who had helped the chieftain. The chieftain who had never forgiven him for that though it had been under his orders. The chieftain who had hunted him for ten years, and found him, and killed him. Or, his soldiers had.

Finally, she said as though they had not discussed this many times already. 'Yes, I think so. It's best to keep our eye on the enemy. He doesn't know about us. If we had stayed he might have learnt of our existence and hunted us down and killed us, as he did Morken. This way, we know where he is. If our plans work right, we'll get to know him. And knowing one's enemy is the best way to stay a step or two ahead of him.'

'If Myrddin can learn not to reveal us,' Bleys murmured, almost to himself.

She swallowed her own fear of that problem and spoke firmly, 'He's smart. He knows. He'll learn. He already has.' She hoped fervently that she was right.

Myrddin raised his head from his grandfather's back and looked around blurrily. He met her eyes and smiled sleepily at her, yawned, and said, 'Are we there yet?'

'Not yet, my bird,' she said, patting his back.

He lay his cheek against her father's back again and started whispering to himself. Except that it wasn't to himself. She saw his hair being ruffled by a gentle breeze and knew he was talking to the air. Which was answering. Suddenly he straightened up and turned to her. 'Am I allowed to talk to Grym Bywyd Dwr and Grym Bywyd Aer?' he demanded.

She stifled a sigh. She didn't think anyone without magic could hear the murmured voices of the water and air spirits Myrddin spoke with but she didn't want to encourage him. Well, she longed to encourage him, of course, to use and expand his powers as much as he was able but that was not possible. 'If you do,' she said carefully, 'people will think you're a bit mad because they will think you're talking to yourself. That's all right while you're a child but soon you'll be too old for people to think it's sweet. They'll think you're strange.'

'Mmmmm,' he said contemplatively. 'I don't mind that so much but probably it's best that people don't really notice me at all, isn't it?'

She felt a twinge of pride and regret that he didn't sound so much seven as seventy years old. 'Very true,' she said, grabbing his foot and giving it an affectionate squeeze.

'Oh, look!' he suddenly shouted. 'The sea!' They emerged from the forest and Myrddin wriggled down from his grandfather's back and ran ahead, calling out, no doubt to Grym Bywyd Dwr, who replied by sending a wisp of fog around him.

Meinir and Bleys caught him up and stood for a moment on the crest of the path, shading their eyes against the glaring sun low above the horizon straight ahead. They stared at the sparkling blue expanse, the rugged coast running north and south. Myrddin chattered cheerfully with the water and the mist swayed around him.

After a moment Meinir rested her hand on his shoulder and said softly, 'We should move on, Myrddin.'

The boy looked up at her quickly then back at the sea. 'Bye bye,' he whispered, and tears filled Meinir's eyes. She was taking her little boy away from a friend, and her hatred of the chieftain flared.

Her father put his arm across her shoulders, she took Myrddin's hand, and they walked on.

The woods were behind them. They had entered the fields. Workers in the fields of barley and oat watched them as they walked by; some of them lifted an arm in greeting to which Bleys lifted his in return. They passed more people on the path, which had widened to a road. They were greeted politely, though not warmly. The looks they got bordered on the suspicious but there was no hostility. An old man, a young woman and a small boy posed little threat, Meinir assumed. As indeed, they did not.

The sound of pounding hooves approached them from behind and they turned to see half a dozen mounted soldiers galloping towards them.

A frightened cry escaped from Myrddin and he pressed against Meinir's leg. She pulled him close and Bleys steered them quickly to the side of the road, blocking them both with his body.

Another small group of two men, three women and a young girl were approaching from the other direction. They quickly knelt low in reverence; Bleys and Meinir followed suit, Meinir pulling Myrddin roughly to his knees. He was trembling in fear and she wrapped her cloak round him and pressed his face to her shoulder. The last soldiers he had seen had killed his father before his eyes.

She was afraid he would use his magic in some way without even realising it but a moment later the soldiers had thundered past, ignoring the two groups completely.

One of the men crossed the road and said in a neutral tone, 'You are not from here.'

'We seek work at the court,' Bleys said calmly.

'Hm. Well, you might get it. But watch out for their sort.' He jerked his head toward the disappearing soldiers. 'They don't like strangers and they don't usually bother to ask questions.'

'Thank you for the warning,' Bleys nodded.

'They're needing someone in the court kitchen,' one of the woman called across the road. 'Tell them Elestren's sister sent you.'

Meinir raised her hand in thanks and nodded.

The other man joined them and looked down at Myrddin. 'The boy doesn't like soldiers,' he said curtly. When no one answered he crouched down taking Myrddin by the shoulders and turning him round. Myrddin stiffened but did not protest and looked back steadily into the man's face. 'Are you strong, boy?' Myrddin nodded. 'Are you a good worker?' Again Myrddin nodded. 'The chieftain's stables need a boy to muck out.'

'I can do that,' Myrddin whispered.

The man rose and he and his companion crossed the road again. One of them called over his shoulder, 'Good luck to you.'

'Thank you,' Bleys and Meinir chorused.

They started walking again.

'Now all we need to know is if the chieftain needs a scribe,' Bleys said.

'It was so rumoured when we left,' Meinir replied.

The sun was approaching the sea, sending a gold path down the water, as they neared the cliff overlooking the craggy peninsula on which the fortress stood. There was a chill in the air but the breeze from the sea was fresh, blowing away the stink of the village so that they only caught whiffs. The settlement around the fortress spilled out across the plateau of the peninsula and lined the cliff above the bay. It was a rough village but it looked prosperous and bustling. The fortress itself was squat and heavy, but there were banners flying from the stockade, brightly coloured in the setting sun. Meinir could see three boats crowding the harbour below and swarms of sailors and other workers loading and unloading. The paths around the fortress were active with people and animals coming and going.

Meinir wondered what their future would be. Her anxiety vied with her hope, her grief over their loss with the relief that the three of them were alive and healthy.

'Are you ready?' her father asked quietly. Myrddin stood between them, clutching their hands.

'Yes,' she said, and they headed down the path and onto the bridge leading to Tintagel.

https://www.amazon.com/Nature-Things-Myrddin-Merlin-Chronicles/dp/9163906554/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1502798803&sr=8-1&keywords=rhuddem+gwelin

Also available: *Protecting Cheesyfee – the Merlin Chronicles Volume 4*

https://www.amazon.com/Protecting-Cheesyfee-Merlin-Chronicles-4/dp/9163788551/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1502798803&sr=8-3&keywords=rhuddem+gwelin

To be published soon: *The Wrathful Traveller – the Merlin Chronicles Volume 2*