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As Above it is Below

Everything is Dual; Everything Has Poles; Everything Has its Pair of Opposites

With careful and deliberate steps, the small boy meandered down to the coastline of his small island village. The journey to the shore was difficult, but something the child had known his whole life. Stopping to bend and adjust his falling socks, the chill sea breeze flicked about his dark locks and bit at his flushed cheeks.

“Damnit Wyn,” came a voice from before the boy. “We haven’t got all day.”

Wyn’s gaze rested on the bleak horizon; the point where the gray ocean met the gray sky in a blur of water and cloud. His elder brother stood before him, an eyebrow cocked and his hands on his hips. He groaned, turning to face the blonde boy on his right.

“He’s fine, Elis,” The other boy commented, silver eyes flitting over Elis’ face. The taller boy frowned, looking down at blonde before returning his attention to his little brother.

“Oi! Wyn! *Brysiweh*,” the dark haired boy called in his native tongue. Wyn pressed his lips together and continued trailing behind his brother.

Wyn sat himself cross-legged on the sand while the two older boys dumped their simple fishing equipment onto the untrodden terrain of their covert bay. The native Terns flew with a confident wing over the ocean, and ashen clouds moved in a thick pall above the island.

Wyn didn’t care for Elis and Wren’s fish talk, so he sat there quietly with closed eyes, imagining the scene before him.

The small bay hosted one old dock where Elis kept his little row boat. Ocean vegetation wept from its aging planks and the gentle swell of waves knocked the boat against the dock.

The boys' island home was often mundane and blanketed in gloom, but there was a very particular sort of whimsy which veiled the landscape. It flitted about the fishing depot, stirred in the green patchwork of sheep fields, and festered in the familiar wood.

Wyn liked it there.

The elder boys stood close, fumbling with fishing line and other things foreign to Wyn. He loved the boys, but sometimes he wanted someone else—someone to play games and dance with him instead of talk fish.

“Wren,” Elis addressed the blonde.

The boy looked up but hissed in pain as he carelessly pricked his finger with the silver fishhook at the end of his line. Instinctively, he brought the digit up to his lips and continued his work with one free hand.

“ ‘s like King Edward ‘n whatever her name was,” Wren murmured.

Elis scoffed, “if you’re going to compare yourself to any King, might as well be Richard. The first one, that is.”

The fair boy shot Elis a coy smile.

“Oi! Wyn!”

Wyn’s face twitched, but he didn’t acknowledge his brother. Elis huffed and pressed his lips together as he worked a line of rope between his hands, skin hardened by years of farmwork.

“Wyn,” Wren called, looking at the child through his fringe of light hair, his bottom lip caught between his teeth. “We’re goin’ fishing, okay? Dunno for how long.”

Wyn frowned, his large dark eyes flicking to the elder boys.

“I don’t like fishin’.”

“We know,” Elis prodded the sitting Wyn with his foot. “Go explore or something.”

Elis turned to Wren, pushing his shirt cuffs up his forearms, his lips tugging into a malevolent smile.

“But be careful of Bendith y Mamau, Wyn.”

Elis felt Wren tense from next to him. “Don’t bring ‘em up, Elis.”

The taller boy rolled his eyes. “You’re no child. You oughtn’t worry about such things. They won’t get *you*. That is, if they’re even real.”

“Still—” Wren trailed off, leaning into Elis.

Wyn sat across from them, shaking sand out of his school shoes. He wasn’t listening.

“Wyn.”

“Hm?”

“Mum’s told you ‘bout the Tylwyth Teg, remember? Them ugly things ‘bout knee high. You know they take children, right? Snatch ‘em right out ‘o this world.”

“Come on, Elis.” Wren groused, bringing a hand to touch the iron cross which hung round his neck on a silver chain.

Elis jabbed the boy in the ribs. “Go exploring if you don’t wanna come fish. But be careful ‘round the lake. Or else they’ll get ya. And you’d miss us—me ‘n Wren, that is—if you were taken away.”

Wren scowled and toyed with the back of his necklace. Elis eyed him curiously, reaching to cradle the boy's rigid forearm. "You're too superstitious, y'know."

"But with good reason," Wren huffed.

He moved to kneel on the coarse brown sand, clasping the iron cross round Wyn's neck. Wyn decided that he liked how it looked against his green school sweater. "When I was younger I nearly stumbled right into that bloody fairy circle. I've told you."

"Heard they like blondes."

Wren drew his brows together and leaned down to whisper a few sentences in Wyn's ear. The child stood after a while, promising Wren that he would stay away from the lake and keep the necklace on. Wyn turned to pick his way up the narrow trail and he paused, looking over his shoulder to wave a quick good-bye.

Wren caught his lip between his alabaster teeth as he stared at his feet. Elis frowned, grasping the boy's chin between his calloused fingers, forcing eye contact.

"Kid'll be fine. He's been exploring countless times. All the children have. Tylwyth Teg is jus' a story. He probably wasn't even listening."

"S'pose," Wren murmured, turning to face the blackening ocean.

Wyn tore his way through the village. He trotted past the rows of quaint whitewashed cottages and alongside the stretches of green pasture. Wyn smiled to Father Hughes as he made his way past the church and up the rocky path which led to the clearing he'd scouted with Elis and Wren countless times.

The boy's dark locks fell across his forehead as his gait slowed. He recalled the number of cottages which adorned the island's rich landscape. The number of cows and sheep his family owned. The number of ships dotting the harbor.

Muscle memory carried Wyn the rest of the way up to the clearing. He skipped along the child-carved trail, and plopped onto the soft, cool ground, his back against the log that had been there for as long as he could remember. Moss dappled the log's flanks, fungi decorated the rotting wood, and speckled mushrooms dotted the ground, a stark contrast against the background of decay.

Wyn could see the glimmer of the lake through the dense wood, and as he promised Wren, the boy stayed away.

He missed the brotherly presence of Elis and Wren. It was rare that he was adventuring without them. Oftentimes, said adventures would end with him crying to Elis about a thorn in his leg or a scratch on his face, but that was all part of the thrill.

Wyn sighed, picking at the wild grasses around him. As much as the boy enjoyed the solace of his little Welsh Island, it was lonely sometimes. Or, Wyn liked to think it was lonely. The island swelled and hummed and *throbbed* with life.

Wyn shuddered, using his shoulder to swipe at his cheek as he felt a warm breeze tickle his face.

"Hullo."

Wyn jumped, contorting himself to face the sudden noise. His fingers dug into the cool earth and his jaw slackened.

"Hullo, I said."

Wyn rubbed his eyes hard.

Ribbons of pale sunlight cascaded down from the parting overhead clouds and illuminated a figure Wyn had never before seen.

Wyn felt his chest heave with uncertainty.

The presence before him was an older boy, perhaps around the age of his brother. His skin was pale, as was his hair, and his coruscant eyes didn't match one another (one was a bit browner than the other, which was blue). Wyn looked him up and down quizzically. Nobody from his small village would dress so ostentatiously. Outfitted in a shimmering green ensemble, the boy stood with his weight on his left foot, sock garters situated at his mid-calf.

The boy strode over to him, kneeling so that his torso hung over the log, next to the trembling Wyn. He was as pretty as Antinous with his thin pink lips stretched into a smile.

“What's that?” He gestured to the iron crucifix. “What's that you have 'round your neck?”

Wyn swallowed hard. Studying the boy's face a bit closer, he noticed a small brown mark under his feline-like right eye.

“Wren gave it to me.”

The boy frowned. “Why's that? He wanted to keep me away?”

Wyn reached up to spin the cross between his thumb and forefinger, muttering a weak “dunno.”

The boy reached out to swipe a thumb over Wyn's bottom lip. He flinched and squeezed his eyes shut, neither welcoming nor rejecting the touch.

The boy's hand moved down to give Wyn's necklace an experimental tug, holding his breath as he did so. The boy gave a second, harder pull, and the thin silver chain snapped. He tossed the iron cross aside.

Wyn's eyes flew open and he felt his face begin to burn, eyes stinging and tears threatening to roll down his cheeks. *What would Wren think?*

"Don't worry 'bout that. It was nothing but an object. Iron, it felt like." He screwed up his face. "I don't much fancy iron."

Wyn sniffled.

The boy's countenance softened, his fawn-colored eyebrows raising as he studied the distressed child.

"Say," he started, "do you like to dance—to sing?"

Wyn looked at the boy through the shield of his long eyelashes. He thought for a moment and gave a nod. Wyn knew plenty of folk songs and dances—he'd known these things his whole life—but he couldn't seem to remember much of any of it in the moment.

"We could sing and dance all you'd like. Eat sweets. I could teach you new games. How'd you like that?"

Wyn nodded, more sure this time, the knot of fear in his gut melting into excitement.

"I like you," the boy grinned. "We're going to have a wizard time."

"Wizard?"

"Wizard."

Wyn felt the breeze grow uncharacteristically warm. He felt the island breathe underneath him. The Terns sang and the mushrooms round him glowed with life. Elis' warning was merely a hazy memory in his subconscious.

Wyn closed his eyes as the breeze picked up, peppering his face with warm kisses. The child's stomach gave a strange heave and he opened his eyes.

The boy was situated suddenly on the other side of Wyn.

“ ‘M name’s Newlyn.”

“Hullo.”

“And I know you’re Wyn of Cairnholm, Wales.”

The mention of his name and home caused Wyn to think of Elis. A small gasp tumbling from his parted lips, he stood and told Newlyn he ought to find Elis and Wren to tell them he was okay and that he’s perfectly capable of solo exploration like the man in *The Mammoth Book for Boys*.

Newlyn stood, an ethereal light illuminating his delicate features and elaborate clothing. He rested his weight on his right foot.

In a delirium of joy, Wyn raced down the trails. He grew frustrated, though, as his practiced movements didn’t seem to match up with the trail. It looked a bit different, but Wyn couldn’t determine why.

Reaching the bustle of village life, he turned to wave to Father Hughes, but found himself waving at the sheep pasture across from the church. To wave the other direction was foreign.

Wyn frowned, but continued down to the coast, nearly bumping into a passing woman. She didn’t seem to notice, so Wyn said nothing and continued on.

His feet lost traction on the sandy descent to the bay, but with his eyes trained on the boat knocking against the dock, he stumbled down to the water.

“Elis,” Wyn called, but his elder brother remained where he was. Him and Wren were sprawled out on the coarse sand, Elis’ hair, dark with seawater, clung messily to his forehead.

“Elis,” he called again, more urgently this time. By then he was nearly standing over the boys, eyebrows furrowed. He opened his mouth to speak once more, but Wren spoke first.

“I hope Wyn’s doin’ alright.”

Elis sighed. “He’s fine. Probably having a smashing time.”

A green broth of surreal disgust brewed in Wyn’s core.

“He probably misses us. Or me, at least.”

“That, or he hasn’t even thought of us.”

The boys shared a smile and looked out into the infinite horizon. The black water crashed against the bluffs outside of the bay in a steady roar.

Wyn felt a lump grow and burn in his throat as the boys chattered. If they didn’t want to talk with him, he would go to Newlyn. Kicking sand down the collar of Elis’ shirt, he trekked up the steep trail. The grasses nipped at the hem of his shorts, and it occurred to him, in that moment, that the path was not where it should’ve been. Where it always had been. The trail—the village—should’ve been on the easternmost side of the island—the side facing the motherland—but it seemed to be the very opposite.

Wyn rubbed his eyes hard enough so that they had gone fuzzy.

Before him appeared a blur of green. Newlyn stood there, poised and confident and smiling as he called for the boy.

“Dunno where I am,” Wyn murmured.

“What was that?” Newlyn asked, bending so that his face was level with Wyn’s. The child looked into the older boy’s eyes. The brownish one and the bluish one made less sense than they had before, or maybe it was the mark that perched atop the ivory flesh now under his left eye.

“Said dunno where I am.”

“Wyn,” the new friend laughed, “Wyn, you’re *home*.”

The little boy stuck out his bottom lip, avoiding Newlyn's eyes. He looked to the coast. The gray horizon, the black, bulging, roaring water; the same scenery he'd known his whole life. But none of it felt like home.

Opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled.

THE END