

Varied chances befell me after the death sentence of Silkworm. He was grown from eggs I stole and hatched. A silk merchant named Arthur kept hundreds of the worms on his property. He didn't miss a couple from his nightly count. The couple I took grew into Silkworm.

I needed a material of value. My husband perished after he joined the Crusades, died in his sleep and frozen in a furrow, for he consumed too much of the wine that was given by the mighty holy army. They are traveling north, into Wales, with the hope of recruiting the men there. They wish to reclaim Jerusalem. At their thing in Seedbury, I was in a band of musicians. We played reeds and horns inside a giant pie and a horse was said to dance. That was the night my husband died.

Silkworm worked for me. He was a weird group of worms. He liked to change the color of his silver skin. I liked him.

I spied how Arthur made his silk. Some of Silkworm had to be destroyed with steam and his parts must be cleaned of the death inside and mess. His steamed parts could boil into silk. The rest of Silkworm proceeded with his rapid growth. He was a wonderful producer.

Arthur knew someone else made and sold silk. His exchanges declined. He grieved the clergy. The clergymen obliged Arthur's grievance and inspected the dwellings of our village. They found Silkworm hidden in my plants.

First they excommunicated Silkworm. They charged him with blasphemy. It was God's will that he work for a man and not myself. A clergyman defended Silkworm at the

ecclesiastical court. He said Silkworm grew according to his divine nature. He said Silkworm was a beautiful creature of God, and the holy man grew misty, babbling and sad. He suffered an unknown freak on behalf of Silkworm. The other clergymen said God forbade Silkworm from growing in my plants, yet he grew as an aberration to divine will, and he forfeit his blessed nature and must be killed.

The court called for a corsned to save Silkworm from his foul nature. They instructed him to eat portions of consecrated bread. He would not oblige. They drowned him in holy water and prayed their weird songs.

Young Nest was not a help at this time. I think she intended to aide me. I think she desired a companion to share her silence with. She was without home. She lived with a group of harvesters and made music on the reeds with me. We danced side by side in the giant pie.

She flew a stone at a clergyman's head after he killed Silkworm. Her escape too hastened for the stricken man and his fellows to keep sight of her. I knew it was she. I knew the hat she hid her hair inside. She met me at my home. I granted her request to sleep in my dead husband's bed. She took well to baking bread.

I decided to go away, afraid of the vengeance Arthur and the other men might pursue, their faces twisted with woodness beginning the day my husband died. They grew in woodness after the revelation of Silkworm. If I remained in Seedbury, I feared they would have me close to the woods, among the other well-kept souls.

Nest agreed to go away with me. We would search for the nearest village that would have us. We packed enough bread, berries, and cheese to last us two weeks. We set

out in wheat-blade month. Miserable rain came. Fine drops hung in the gloom. Slimy yellow leaves fell from the trees. Cobwebs bejeweled. They were scaly and raying with raindrops and they looked like the starfish that seaside merchants wear in their hair.

My cold breath could have been the spiderwebs clinging to my cheeks. My teeth hit each other. Nest screamed at the crows. It pleased her to watch them scatter. Her energy upset me, it was too heedless of the inclement rain, the cold I hated. The rain might have been filled with the harsh wind, for the gusts seemed to seep into my skin.

Nest laughed and cawed in imitation of birdcall, merry with her jokes and disrupting the birdcalm. I admonished her for her frolics.

My bandelette soaked into the silk tunic I wore underneath it. We rested beneath some large branches to dry ourselves and eat. I could see the leaves on the ground melting into mud.

Nest was sturdy, she cried for a small sleep. I implored her to stay fast and I slipped on a green stone. She helped me up and smiled at my thankful blessing.

At our next rest, she scared a crow that tried to steal her cheese. The crow hopped like a rabbit. Bothered by an itch in my ankle, I saw an ant crawl through an old scab. The scab was a healthy ruby and crusted white. I peeled the scab and devoured it, for they are said to be a revitalizing sustenance, able at staffing off blight and illness.

I followed the smell of smoke. It led us to a village with a Welsh name, from where we quickly left. We trailed behind some merchants. Nest did not desire to follow the merchants: rather, she said we should stay in the Welsh village for the night. I knew we needed to find a stable occupancy, and I did not trust a place where I didn't know the

language. We journeyed to a castle where the merchants were welcome. It was a huge amount of stone and clean of moss. The grey sky darkened into blue, the sudden night of autumn.

Nest wished to stay the night in the castle. I did not. Likely, men with weapons patrolled their land. I said I wished to intrude on a nice little cruck. Sweet purple smoke slipped to nothingness from out its furnace vent. At first sight I mistook it for a hay mound.

I knocked on their door. The dwelling snawked of delicious straw. We received welcome from a handsome man and his beautiful wife.

Rhys and Bridget blushed, red as wine. I saw them as friendly people. Their bouffant pantaloons were far more delicate than our humid and dripping linen and differed in state from the coarse exterior of their cruck. Their dwelling was bigger on the inside than it was on the outside, for a large and curtained painting that was beside their table and chairs. The painting tricked my sight into believing there was a vast arched hallway, lit by torches in gargoyle knosps, a painted extension I believed was a weighty space unless I stood close to its flatness. Fire warmed me into kindly feeling. I smelled embers and warm bread.

From inside the shelter, it was nice to hear the rain and gales go loud. Bridget gave us bread to eat and warm rosewater to drink. Green wisps softened the chairs. Peacock feathers adorned the backs of the chairs. Rhys set more wisps on the floor and said we could stay the night.

The cups were too smooth for Nest's liking. She grieved. I gratified our hosts, with a mean likeness for Nest.

Rhys desired to know where we traveled from. He asked in a friendly manner. He was delighted to hear we were musicians. I asked for information on the castle. He said he supplied parchment for the castle. Bridget said the lord of the castle had specific tastes for his parchment.

With a laugh they sought to heal my shudders. Bridget led me to an underground room, connected by steps made out of soft roots. Nest complained to stay by my side. I bid her stay at the table with Rhys. Bridget filled a tub with steaming water that had been resting to a boil in a cauldron over the fire, the preparations of a bath she had intended for herself and husband. She courteously granted me her bath. I did not examine the room that held this bath. I suspected it was very hollow. I thought I could hear a wind in its bleak unknown deepness. The room was held by a wooden frame that must have been made under a lord's orders. A furnace lit the room. I could have slept with peace in the refreshing water.

Out of the tub I returned to a wicked Nest. The young one refused to drink more rosewater. I said a warm bath might ease her spirits and I led her to it, where she grieved to leave this place for the castle. I refused to hear this grievance. I pledged we could depart in the morning and I vowed the bath would restore her sense and ease her rashness.

I left Nest for the table. With Rhys and Bridget I drank a second cup of rosewater. Rhys shared a number of witty sayings about the Crusades. I was cheerful.

Bridget said she would cook a meat broth with peas and cauliflower. It would be my first taste of cauliflower. I promised to harvest carrots with her in the morning, able to use my own billhook, a tool I traveled with for protection and use. I showed it to Bridget. She showed me her shovels, long-handled hooks, and blades. I helped portion the purple cauliflower with one of her blades. It was much sharper than my billhook. I did not cut the plant well. Rhys and Bridget laughed at my try. Little pieces fell off the plant's top, like it was dry sod coming apart in the heat. I feared I made a mess.

Bridget feared for Nest. She feared the child slept in the bath or lurked through their chamber. She and her husband regarded each other. I did not know what to think of it.

I said I would find the little one. Bridget beseeched me to rest, eat, and drink. Food was kept in the chamber, where the dark and cold protect it from rot. Bridget said she must fetch a heap for our broth and in this process she could check on Nest.

Bridget left. Rhys heard me tell of the tragic demise of Silkworm. He spoke more of his witty sayings for the clergy. I thought him and Silkworm could have been companions. I asked about the castle, in hopes of seeking placement in this land.

I did not know the likeness on his face. His words were soft and quiet, difficult to hear. He spoke of the lord of the castle. Exact requirements for his parchment, he said, with strange whispers of vague demands. I did believe the man was troubled.

He asked me to imagine a parchment in my possession, how would I give it words. It was not a question I could answer.

Bridget came back in a run. She was troubled. She said Nest had vanished.

Bridget said she searched for the young one through the chamber's burrow. The burrow led to a back door. She showed Rhys and I the dark path Nest must have took, for she was not in the bath. We searched for her outside the back door. We could not see her outside, for it was dark. I supposed she traveled to the castle. A foolish child, alone in the viscous cold, seeking a castle she does not know. Rhys said it was a strange place. I feared she would be troubled there.

My trouble for her ended when a stone fell on the shoulder of Rhys and another stone fell on the shoulder of Bridget. I thought it was Nest. There was someone else with her. At least three pairs of feet ran toward the castle, their wet steps loud in the dark.

I cursed Nest for this assault. I tended to Rhys and Bridget, who were not as injured as the clergyman from before. They were frightened. Blushes vanished from their cheeks. Bridget said there are many from around the castle who assault them with stones. She bid me not be frightened. She said their shelter would be secure for my stay in the night. I prayed for her and her husband's safety. She took comfort and humor from my prayers.

Once more, I cursed Nest.

Bridget led the path back through the burrow inside. She showed me the chamber of their parchment materials, where she had been searching for Nest before. They had large stone cisterns filled with lime and Bridget had feared the young one might drink the poison potion. Inside the cisterns, skins floated, the substance gloomy with hair. Another skin was hung up on a wooden rack. There was a mound of vegetables and a larger

mound of meat innards. The innards were crowded with vermin. I heard the vermin. It was too dark to see them.

Bridget took some meat for her broth. She moaned for Nest's way, alone and troubled. I moaned with her. I said I could help prepare the broth. She said she preferred to work alone. Once more, I was given a portion of warm rosewater.

Rhys asked me to imagine a parchment in my possession, how would I give it words. It was a question I could not answer. I grieved for having no words for the parchment and my grievance comforted him.

We were frightened by a strange clamor of stones falling on the door. I asked Rhys if he would see to it. He would not see to it. Bridget severed the cauliflower into smaller pieces.

Rhys said if he had words for a parchment, they would be words about parchment, rejoicing at his witty saying, to my comfort. I said my words might begin with going away. I might wish my words to tell of my husband's fate and how I met Silkworm. How I came near an unknown castle. My words led me to his table.

More stones fell on the door. Bridget examined the clamor, a blade in hand. From the open door she shouted about my presence as her chance comer. She told falsehoods about my origins and way. She said I was a nobleman staying the night before a visit to the castle.

She told me the falsehoods would keep the wicked men far from their shelter for the night. They would be afraid to discomfit a nobleman. I feared for her position. She said they were well covered.



I asked about the wicked men. She said her and her husband had vile enemies in the castle and on some nights there was no rest, for their enemies would not stop flying stones. I wondered if Nest was with them, with less faith than before. I missed her.

On the table was a yellow scroll. I thought it was weird wood, soft and thin as skin. Rhys said it was a new parchment, made at a mill from the pulp of trees. He said he could fill it with my words if I wished. I said he was too friendly. He said I had the feeling of home. Bridget said it was true for her as well, we had the sweet feeling of home. She said that the wooden parchment was not as lasting as the parchment they made from goat skin. She urged me to use it.

I did not long to fill the parchment with words. Rhys said he would destroy it if I did not desire it. I did not heed him. I thought about Nest. The wicked men outside may have been violent and I feared they might beset her.

I desired to look for her. The fire that before warmed me gave me fever. I imagined the wicked men waiting outside the crutch. I imagined they were made of stone. They could fly stones at me and if I flew a stone back it would not damage them.

I said I should find Nest. I said Nest and I had a feeling like home and I could not rest if she were in peril. Bridget said there was no logic in searching for her if I was hungry. Rhys had a mean likeness. I was afraid to stand.

Bridget served me soup. She said the meat was goat. I did not know the likeness on her face.

Rhys was loud with wild joy. Bridget was still. I did not know what they were thinking. There were small pieces of meat in the soup. The meat did not taste like goat. It was difficult to chew. The cauliflower was thick with the slime of the meat and it was not like the slime of goat meat. Orange and thick slime.

Rhys spoke of goats. He praised their skins and gave thanks for their meat. He said they could use every portion of the goat. They could make the eyes into jelly for their bread, they could make the hairs into cloaks, skins for parchment, flesh for food. The Lord made the goat for humans, He made the world for humans, and He made humans for humans. Rhys spoke like this was witty.

Bridget had a mean likeness for her husband and I thought she might be a scold. She spoke with gentleness. She praised the goats for giving their skins and flesh and she asked if I gave thanks for the Lord's creation. I did not answer, for I heard a man bewailing outside.

I knew they heard the despair. Bridget and Rhys did not respond to it. The bewailing did not always sound like a man. It sounded like a woman and it sounded like a child. I thought the despair could be from Nest. I went to the door and I did not heed Bridget and Rhys, who wished me to stay inside.

Outside, I could not see through the night. I could not hear the direction of the moan. It floated in every part of the dark. I called for Nest. My call did not end the wail.

I returned to Bridget and Rhys and they warned me the soup would go cold. I could not eat. The weak moans made me sick with a sad feeling. Bridget had a mean likeness for me and said a good guest would eat. I did not heed her and I asked why their enemies bewailed.

Rhys did not end his witty manner. He said their enemies did not like what the lord of the castle required for his parchment, they were sad for the goats. The wail ended. My sadness did not end. I imagined worrying the breath out of Rhys. I did not like his watching cheer.

I think Bridget saw my mean likeness. She said we could search for Nest if I wished. She said we would find her in the dark. Rhys spoke like we were not there, he said their enemies feared the speed of him and his wife, for they were gentle with the lord of the castle.

I spoke to Bridget like he was not there. I said she could not vow we would find Nest in the night. She did vow that I could know the way of Nest in the night. I heeded Rhys, for he spoke loud. He said a goat looked like a human in little parts and the lord knew how to tell a human skin from a goat skin. Bridget said I could find Nest in the night or I could eat the soup she cooked.

My mouth did not allow the soup. The meat tasted like the vermin that before had it. I could not chew it. I was sick with it and I swallowed. Large parts of meat stuck to my throat. Bridget said I must eat.

A large slab of brown meat was what I ate at the end. The ladle went through it like it would go through jelly and dark red came out of it. I asked if I could have bread to

go with it. There was no more bread and I did not want to eat my own. I could not look at it as I put it inside my mouth and chewed. I knew I could not find Nest and I would never again know her for anything.

Once more, Rhys asked me if I was in possession of parchment, with what words would I fill it. Once more, I said I would fill it with my words about being away. Once more, he said he would fill it with words about parchment.

My empty bowl gave Bridget joy. She spoke of my promise to uproot carrots and once more I vowed to help. That was a bad morning, for I did not sleep well that night, ill and sad. My back pained from the labor and I was not paid.

I did not desire the wooden parchment. Rhys desired to give it to me. It gave him joy. I did not burn it like I thought I should. I held the scroll for years and I did not believe I would use it. I did not believe I would meet a holy man to write my words on it.

I returned to the village where the people spoke in Wales and I found the people who spoke in English. I found a shelter and a mill on the Wye. I like my labors there and I like this village, it is a Wales name I do not know. It is near the Wye.

I do not know the name of the castle. There are many castles near the Wye.

It happens I think I see Nest in a crowd of people. I know it is not true.

And I fear I am what I feared I would be, alone in the woods.