

# FFLUR DAFYDD

# THE WHITE TRAIL

NEW STORIES FROM THE MABINOGION

was watching. Wanting him to know what a sacrifice it was being pregnant, with its million inconveniences, with this slowly ballooning body. He couldn't quite believe that he'd never see her walk up that garden path again.

'We'll let ourselves out,' whispered the female police officer. 'We'll be in touch.'

Cilydd insisted on seeing where they'd found the body; the police stressed that there was no need for him to go. But the *need* they talked of was something they would never fathom; an abhorrent, insidious force in the dark folds of him, which drove him to want to experience every last shred of her undoing. He wanted to fill his lungs with the last air she had breathed, to feel the ground that had given way beneath her feet.

Arthur rang to ask if he could accompany him; Arthur, who was now full steam ahead with his investigation, the details of which he couldn't disclose. 'I'm starting to put it together,' he said feverishly, excitedly over the phone, 'I feel that I'm

on the verge of great... of a great discovery. Just play along with the police – they never solve anything; they simply go through the motions. But I'm getting closer, Cilydd. I will get you back your boy, I promise you. Don't tell them I'm a private eye, will you?'

He remembered nothing about the journey, only how short it was – it seemed that the grey streets gave way to green pastures in seconds, and all too soon they were approaching the scene, the sun shining too brightly for such a dark day. He was vaguely aware of a conversation going on between Arthur and the policemen. Goleuddydd was not mentioned by name. She was merely 'the victim' – even Arthur, he ascertained, was talking of her in such terms. They talked of the vulgarities of a body he didn't recognise – a slit there, a gash here – that was not Goleuddydd. Goleuddydd was a living, breathing, complete being. At what point would she have become the victim? The second she left the supermarket? Or would it have come later? Perhaps it wasn't until they cut into her flesh that she truly





knew. He recalled how wilful and spirited she had been at times in her pregnancy. Had it even been forced upon her? Or was it some sort of game? 'My dreary husband's in there buying my maternity essentials; take me away from it all will you?' He could hear her saying it – asking to be abducted. Getting into a car with a complete stranger. Sticking her head out of the window as they sped out of the car park, sticking out her tongue to lap up those dirty snowflakes. Arthur and the policeman were still babbling on – *victim, vulnerable, time of death, botched Caesarian*; the new, awful vocabulary of his life.

They drove up a dirt track, rounding the corner into a farmyard. The farmhouse was grey and decaying; pale green moss creeping up the walls like bad facial hair, a monster of a building. There were some disused tractors and farm machinery lying about, metallic skeletons gawping at him. It was a place drained of colour – cold and chalky, at odds with everything Goleuddydd stood for. He tried to imagine what she had felt when she'd taken all this

in. Maybe that's when it hit her; that to be in the supermarket on a Saturday with a husband who loved you wasn't such a bad thing, compared to this. The policemen began walking towards a small, dark heap at the far end of the yard. It wasn't until it was right in front of him that he saw the cluster of stones for what it was – a circular pigsty. No one spoke for what felt like a long time. It was only when Arthur gave him a nudge that he realised what they were all waiting for – for him to go in, on his hands and knees, to shuffle down on his trotters, like a pig. The police officers bowed their heads, before handing him a torch.

He was surprised by how big and cavernous it was inside. Positively luxurious, he imagined, for swine. Not so for a nine-month-pregnant woman.

'Is this it?' he hollered. He sensed the aroma of something else there amid the dust and dirt, something too awful to think about.

'Yes, sir. That's where we found her.'

Inside it was just a dark, stench-ridden hole. He wondered where she'd been lying; remembering the





size of her, her physical awkwardness those last few months. It must have been a tight squeeze. Did she know she'd never be coming out?

'Why here?' he hollered again to the police officer. 'Why leave her here?'

'We don't know sir,' the police officer muttered. 'This is what we're trying to establish.'

'I can smell pigs,' he said.

'Some of the samples of saliva on your wife's body do show that she was... she was... in the company of pigs at the time of death. But we can't find any traces of the animals I'm afraid. And this farm has been abandoned for quite some time.'

'What do you mean "in the company of pigs"?' Arthur asked. Cilydd could hear the frantic nib of his fountain pen, gushing blue veins all over his white pad.

'Pig saliva was found on the body,' one policeman stated. 'But like I said, we're not sure where the pigs came from.'

Arthur inhaled sharply: an inhalation of pure excitement.

'A link,' he said, knowingly.

'A link with what?' said the policeman.

'Never you mind...' Arthur replied.

'Sir, with all due respect, if you have any information you should...'

'Oh no... just an observation... Cilydd, are you OK in there?'

'Yes,' Cilydd said in a low voice he no longer recognised as his own. His eyes were still getting accustomed to the darkness. He was lying on his back now, as he presumed Goleuddydd would have been when it happened. In the earlier, healthy days of her pregnancy, she had told him that she wanted to be upright for the birth. 'How nature intended,' she said. It wasn't much to ask for – the simple pull of gravity.

'Cilydd, can I come in?' Arthur asked.

'Not yet,' he said.

He opened his eyes. The dark was clearing now, and it was surprising how darkness took on a new, transparent sheen once you got used to it. Even the smells were commonplace. *In the company of pigs.* It





seemed so absurd, so very unlike his graceful Goleuddydd. He switched on his torch and let the tiny ball of light roll across the grimy roof. And then, suddenly, there it was, etched on to the stones.

'Don't remarry,' it said. Written in blood. He let out a sharp gasp.

'He's seen it,' he heard someone outside saying. 'Sir, is everything OK?'

*Don't remarry.* It was his final contact with Goleuddydd. He reached his hand towards the ceiling, towards her. His hand was left cold and empty – the dried blood did not leave a mark on his skin.

'The blood...' he started.

'Yes, I'm afraid the blood on the ceiling matches your wife's blood, we've checked this,' said a voice from outside. Cilydd lay back, turned off his torch. He lay there for some time. Two police officers came in and took both his arms trying to squeeze him back out through the entrance. It was only then he realised how long he'd been in there, for it had gone dark outside. There was no light to be seen, bar the fluorescent stripes of the policemen's uniform, and

the occasional glint of Arthur's teeth. Dark inside and out, he thought: this is all that's left of me, a hollow pigsty of a man, who will emerge from one kind of darkness only to fall into another, and then another, and it would be ongoing blackness from now on.

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And so there it was; a dead wife, a missing – presumed dead – baby, and nothing left to him in the world but a scrawled message on a wall, a Palaeolithic punch-in-the-guts which was undoubtedly written by his wife's hand, the looping D, the slanting, unserious Y. It was just like her – to lay claim to her personality even as life dripped out of her; only she could make that last drop of blood count. Cilydd turned it over and over in his mind – was that really her last thought – he mustn't remarry? He thought of all the messages she could have written on that wall. She had never been a jealous woman, but then again, he had never given her any reason to be. There was nothing for him but her, nothing at all; if she was



Life is tough for Cilydd after his heavily pregnant wife vanishes in a supermarket one wintry afternoon. And his private-eye cousin Arthur doesn't appear to be helping much.

The trail leads them to a pigsty, a cliff edge and a bloody warning that Cilydd must never marry again. But eventually the unlikely hero finds himself on a new and dangerous quest – a hunt for the son he never knew, a meeting with a beautiful and mysterious girl, and a glimpse inside the House of the Missing.

'How Culhwch Won Olwen' is an ancient Arthurian myth of unquestioning devotion and heroic proportions. Knights chase a magical boar madly across the British Isles and true love conquers all. In this twenty-first century version, Fflur Dafydd asks - why?

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