The Land of Heart's Desire

by W. B. Yeats

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The Land of Heart's Desire

W.B. Yeats

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THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

PERSONS

MAURTEEN BRUIN. SHAWN BRUIN. FATHER HART. BRIDGET BRUIN. MAIRE BRUIN. A FAERY CHILD.

The scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen in the county of Sligo, and the time is the end of Eighteenth Century. The characters are supposed to speak in Gaelic.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

The kitchen of MAURTEEN BRAIN'S house. An open grate with a turf fire is at the left side of the room, with a table in front of it. There is a door leading to the open air at the back, and another door a little to its left, leading into an inner room. There is a window, a settle, and a large dresser on the right side of the room, and a great bowl of primroses on the sill of the window. MAURTEEN BRUIN, FATHER HART; and BRIDGET BRUIN are sitting at the table. SHAWN BRUIN is setting the table for supper. MAIRE BRUIN sits on the settle reading a yellow manuscript.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

Because I bade her go and feed the calves, She took that old book down out of the thatch And has been doubled over it all day. We would be deafened by her groans

and moans Had she to work as some do, Father Hart, Get up at dawn like me, and mend and scour; Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you, The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN BRUIN.

You are too cross.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

The young side with the young.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

She quarrels with my wife a bit at times, And is too deep just now in the old book; But do not blame her greatly; she will grow As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree When but the moons of marriage dawn and die For half a score of times.

FATHER HART

Their hearts are wild As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

She would not mind the griddle, milk the cow, Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

FATHER HART.

I never saw her read a book before: What may it be?

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

I do not rightly know: It has been in the thatch for fifty years. My father told me my grandfather wrote it, Killed a red heifer and bound it with the hide. But draw your chair this way—supper is spread; And little good he got out of the book, Because it filled his house with roaming bards, And roaming ballad-makers and the like, And wasted all his goods.—Here is the wine; The griddle bread's beside you, Father Hart. Colleen, what have you got there in the book That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I, Or had my father, read or written books There were no stockings full of silver

and gold To come, when I am dead, to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART.

You should not fill your head with foolish dreams. What are you reading?

MAIRE BRUIN.

How a Princess Edene, A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard A voice singing on a May eve like this, And followed, half awake and half asleep, Until she came into the land of faery, Where nobody gets old and godly and grave, Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise, Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue; And she is still there, busied with a dance. Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood, Or where stars walk upon a mountain top.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Persuade the colleen to put by the book: My grandfather would mutter just such things, And he was no judge of a dog or horse, And any idle boy could blarney him. Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART.

Put it away, my colleen. God spreads the heavens above us like great wings, And gives a little round of deeds and days, And then come the wrecked angels and set snares, And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams, Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes, Half shuddering and half joyous, from God's peace; And it was some wrecked angel, blind tears, Who flattered Edene's heart with merry words. My colleen, I have seen some other girls Restless and ill at ease, but years went by And they grew like their neighbours and were glad In minding children, working at the churn, And gossiping of weddings and of wakes; For life moves out of a red flare of dreams Into a common light of common hours, Until old age bring the red flare again.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Yet do not blame her greatly, Father Hart, For she is dull while I am in the fields, And mother's tongue were harder still to bear, But for her fancies: this is May Eve too, When the good people post about the world, And surely one may think of them to-night. Maire, have you the primroses to fling Before the door to make a golden path For them to bring good luck into the house. Remember, they may steal new-married brides Upon May Eve.

MAIRE BRUIN (going over to the window and taking the flowers from the bowl.)

Here are the primroses.

[She goes to the door and strews the primroses outside.

FATHER HART.

You do well, daughter, because God permits Great power to the good people on May Eve.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

They can work all their will with primroses— Change them to golden money, or little flames To burn up those who do them any wrong.

MAIRE BRUIN.

I had no sooner flung them by the door Than the wind cried and hurried them away.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

May God have mercy on us!

MAIRE BRUIN.

The good people Will not be lucky to the house this year, But I am glad that I was courteous to them, For are not they, likewise, children of God?

FATHER HART.

No, child; they are the children of the fiend, And they have power until the end of Time, When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle And hack them into

pieces.

MAIRE BRUIN.

He will smile, Father, perhaps, and open his great door,

FATHER HART.

Did but the lawless angels see that door They would fall, slain by everlasting peace; And when such angels knock upon our doors Who goes with them must drive through the same storm.

[A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens it and then goes to the dresser and fills a porringer with milk and hands it through the door and takes it back empty and closes the door.

MAIRE BRUIN.

A little queer old woman cloaked in green Who came to beg a porringer of milk.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

The good people go asking milk and fire Upon May Eve—Woe on the house that gives For they have power upon it for a year. I knew you would bring evil on the house

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Who was she?

MAIRE BRUIN.

Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill; She must be one of them.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

I am afraid.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

The priest will keep all harm out of the house.

FATHER HART.

The Cross will keep all harm out of the house While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Come, sit beside me, colleen, And cut away your dreams of discontent, For I would have you light up my last days Like a bright torch of pine, and when I die I will make you the wealthiest hereabout; For hid away where nobody can find I have a stocking full of silver and gold.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

You are the fool of every pretty face, And I must pinch and pare that my son's wife May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Do not be cross; she is a right good girl! The butter's by your elbow, Father Hart. My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change Done well for me and for old Bridget there? We have a hundred acres of good land, And sit beside each other at the fire, The wise priest of our parish to our right, And you and our dear son to left of us. To sit beside the board and drink good wine And watch the turf smoke coiling from the fire And feel content and wisdom in your heart, This is the best of life; when we are young We long to tread a way none trod before, But find the excellent old way through love And through the care of children to the hour For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.

[A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens it and then takes a sod of turf out of the hearth in the tongs and passes it through the door and closes the door and remains standing by it.

MAIRE BRUIN.

A little queer old man in a green coat, Who asked a burning sod to light his pipe.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

You have now given milk and fire and brought For all you know, evil upon the house. Before you married you were idle and fine, And went about with ribbons on your head; And now you are a good-for-nothing wife.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Be quiet, mother!

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

You are much too cross!

MAIRE BRUIN.

What do I care if I have given this house, Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue, Into the power of faeries!

BRIDGET BRUIN.

You know, well How calling the good people by that name Or talking of them over much at all May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house! Let me have all the freedom I have lost— Work when I will and idle when I will! Faeries, came take me out of this dull world, For I would ride with you upon the wind, Run on the top of the dishevelled tide, And dance upon the mountains like a flame!

FATHER HART.

You cannot know the meaning of your words!

MAIRE BRUIN.

Father, I am right weary of four tongues: A tongue that is too crafty and too wise, A tongue that is too godly and too grave, A tongue that is more bitter than the tide, And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love, Of drowsy love and my captivity.

[SHAWN BRUIN comes over to her and leads her to the settle.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Do not blame me: I often lie awake Thinking that all things trouble your bright head— How beautiful it is—such broad pale brows Under a cloudy blossoming of hair! Sit down beside me here—these are too old, And have forgotten they were ever young.

MAIRE BRUIN.

O, you are the great door-post of this house, And I the red nasturtium climbing up.

[She takes SHAWN'S hand but looks shyly at the priest and lets it go.

FATHER HART.

Good daughter, take his hand—by love alone God binds us to Himself and to the hearth And shuts us from the waste beyond His peace, From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Would that the world were mine to give it you With every quiet hearth and barren waste, The maddening freedom of its woods and tides, And the bewildering lights upon its hills.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Then I would take and break it in my hands To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Then I would mould a world of fire and dew With no one bitter, grave, or over wise, And nothing marred or old to do you wrong. And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky With candles burning to your lonely face.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Once a fly dancing in a beam o' the sun, Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn, Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew, But now the indissoluble sacrament Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold With my warm heart for ever; and sun and moor, Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll; But your white spirit still walk by my spirit. For not a power in earth and heaven and hell Can break this bond binding heart unto heart.

[A VOICE sings in the distance.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Did you hear something call? O, guard me close, Because I have said wicked things to-night.

A VOICE (close to the door).

The wind blows out of the gates of the day, The wind blows over the lonely of heart And the lonely of heart is withered away, While the faeries dance in a place apart, Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring, Tossing their milk-white arms in the air; For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur, and sing Of a land where even the old are fair, And even the wise are merry of tongue; But I heard a reed of Coolaney say, 'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung, The lonely of heart must wither away!'

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

I am right happy, and would make all else Be happy too. I hear a child outside, And will go bring her in out of the cold.

[He opens the door. A CHILD dressed in a green jacket with a red cap comes into the house.

THE CHILD.

I tire of winds and waters and pale lights!

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

You are most welcome. It is cold out there, Who'd think to face such cold on a May Eve.

THE CHILD.

And when I tire of this warm little house, There is one here who must away, away, To where the woods, the stars, and the white streams Are holding a continual festival.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

O listen to her dreamy and strange talk, Come to the fire.

THE CHILD.

I'll sit upon your knee, For I have run from where the winds are born, And long-to rest my feet a little while.

[She sits upon his knee.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

How pretty you are!

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Your hair is wet with dew!

BRIDGET BRUIN.

I'll chafe your poor chilled feet.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

You must have come A long long way, for I have never seen Your pretty face, and must be tired and hungry; Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD.

They are both nasty. Old mother, have you nothing nice for me?

BRIDGET BRUIN.

I have some honey!

[She goes into the next room.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

You are a dear child; The mother was quite cross before you came.

[BRIDGET returns with the honey, and goes to the dresser and fills a porringer with milk.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

She is the child of gentle people; look At her white hands and at her pretty dress. I've brought you some new milk, but wait awhile And I will put it by the fire to warm, For things well fitted for poor folk like us Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD.

Old mother, my old mother, the green dawn Brightens above while you blow up the fire; And evening finds you spreading the white cloth. The young may lie in bed and dream and hope, But you work on because your heart is old.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

The young are idle.

THE CHILD.

Old father, you are wise, And all the years have gathered in your heart To whisper of the wonders that are gone. The young must sigh through many a dream and hope, But you are wise because your heart is old.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

O, who would think to find so young a child Loving old age and wisdom.

[BRIDGET gives her more bread and honey.

THE CHILD.

No more, mother.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

What a small bite; The milk is ready now; What a small sip!

THE CHILD.

Put on my shoes, old mother, For I would like to dance now I have dined. The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake, And I would like to dance until the reeds And the loud wind, the white wave on the shore, And all the stars have danced themselves to sleep.

[BRIDGET having put on her shoes, she gets off the old man's knees and is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes.

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART.

You cannot know how naughty your words are! That is Our Blessed Lord!

THE CHILD.

Hide it away!

BRIDGET BRUIN.

I have begun to be afraid again!

THE CHILD.

Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

That would be wickedness!

BRIDGET BRUIN.

That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD

The tortured thing! Hide it away.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART.

That is the image of the Son of God.

[The CHILD puts her arm round his neck lovingly and kisses him.

THE CHILD.

Hide it away! Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

No! no!

FATHER HART.

Because you are so young and little a child I will go take it down.

THE CHILD.

Hide it away, And cover it out of sight and out of mind.

FATHER HART (takes it down and carries it towards the inner room).

Since you have come into this barony I will instruct you in our blessed faith: Being a clever child you will soon learn.

(To the others.)

We must be tender with all budding things, Our Maker let no thought of Calvary Trouble the morning stars in their first song.

[Puts the crucifix in the inner room.

THE CHILD.

O, what a nice, smooth floor to dance upon! The wind is blowing on the waving reeds, The wind is blowing on the heart of man.

[She dances, swaying about like the reeds.

MAIRE (to SHAWN BRUIN).

Just now when she came near I thought I heard Other small steps beating upon the floor, And a faint music blowing in the wind— Invisible pipes giving her feet the time.

SHAWN BRUIN.

I heard no step but hers.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Look to the bolt! Because the unholy powers are abroad.

MAURTEEN BRUIN (to the CHILD).

Come over here, and if you promise me Not to talk wickedly of holy things I'll give you something.

THE CHILD.

Bring it me, old father!

[MAURTEEN BRUIN goes into the next room.

FATHER HART.

I will have queen cakes when you come to me!

[MAURTEEN BRUIN returns and lays a piece of money on the table. The CHILD makes a gesture of refusal.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

It will buy lots of toys; see how it glitters!

THE CHILD.

Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

I love you!

THE CHILD.

Ah! but you love this fireside!

FATHER HART.

I love you.

THE CHILD.

But you love Him above.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD (to MAIRE).

And do you likewise love me?

MAIRE BRUIN.

I don't know.

THE CHILD.

You love that great tall fellow over there: Yet I could make you ride upon the winds, Run on the top of the dishevelled tide, And dance upon the mountains like a flame!

MAIRE BRUIN.

Queen of the Angels and kind Saints defend us! Some dreadful fate has fallen: before she came The wind cried out and took the primroses. And I gave milk and fire, and when she came She made you hide the blessed crucifix; She wears, too, the green jacket and red cap Of the unholy creatures of the Raths.

FATHER HART.

You fear because of her wild, pretty prates; She knows no better. (To the CHILD) Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD.

My own dear people live a long, long time, So I am young; but measure by your

years And I am older than the eagle cock Who blinks and blinks on Ballydawley Hill, And he's the oldest thing under the moon. At times I merely care to dance and dance— At times grow wiser than the eagle cock.

FATHER HART.

What are you?

THE CHILD.

I am of the faery people. I sent my messengers for milk and fire, And then I heard one call to me and came.

[They all except MAIRE BRUIN gather about the priest for protection. MAIRE BRUIN stays on the settle as if in a trance of terror. The CHILD takes primroses from the great bowl and begins to strew them between herself and the priest and about MAIRE BRUIN. During the following dialogue SHAWN BRUIN goes more than once to the brink of the primroses, but shrinks back to the others timidly.

FATHER HART.

I will confront this mighty spirit alone.

[They cling to him and hold him back.

THE CHILD (while she strews the primroses.)

No one whose heart is heavy with human tears Can cross these little cressets of the wood.

FATHER HART.

Be not afraid, the Father is with us, And all the nine angelic hierarchies, The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents, The adoring Magi in their coats of mail, And He who died and rose on the third day, And Mary with her seven times wounded heart.

[The CHILD ceases strewing the primroses, and kneels upon the settle beside MAIRE and puts her arms about her neck.

Cry daughter to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD.

You shall go with me, newly-married bride, And gaze upon a merrier multitude: White-armed Nuala and Ardroe the Wise, Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him Who is the ruler of the western host, Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire, Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood, But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song. I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

FATHER HART.

Daughter, I call you unto home and love!

THE CHILD.

Stay, and come with me, newly-married bride, For, if you hear him, you grow like the rest: Bear children, cook, be mindful of the churn, And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs, And sit at last there, old and bitter of tongue, Watching the white stars war upon your hopes.

FATHER HART.

Daughter, I point you out the way to heaven!

THE CHILD.

But I can lead you, newly-married bride, Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise, Where nobody gets old and godly and grave, Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue, And where kind tongues bring no captivity, For we are only true to the far lights We follow singing, over valley and hill.

FATHER HART.

By the dear name of the one crucified, I bid you, Maire Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD.

I keep you in the name of your own heart!

[She leaves the settle, and stooping takes up a mass of primroses and kisses them.

We have great power to-night, dear golden folk For he took down and hid the crucifix. And my invisible brethren fill the house; I hear their footsteps going up and down. O, they shall soon rule all the hearts of men And own all lands; last night they merrily danced About his chapel belfrey! (To MAIRE.) Come away, I hear my brethren bidding us away!

FATHER HART.

I will go fetch the crucifix again.

[They hang about him in terror and prevent him from moving.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

The enchanted flowers will kill us if you go.

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

They turn the flowers to little twisted flames.

SHAWN BRUIN.

The little twisted flames burn up the heart.

THE CHILD.

I hear them call us, newly-married bride.

MAIRE BRUIN.

I will go with you.

FATHER HART.

She is lost, alas,

THE CHILD (standing by the door).

Then, follow but the heavy body of clay, And clinging mortal hope must fall from you; For we who ride the winds, run on the waves, And dance upon the mountains, are more light Than dewdrops on the banners of the dawn.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Then take my soul.

[SHAWN BRUIN goes over to her.

SHAWN BRUIN.

Beloved, do not leave me! What will my life be if you go with her? Remember when I met you by the well And took your hand in mine and spoke of love.

MAIRE BRUIN.

Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD.

Come, newly-married bride!

MAIRE BRUIN.

I always loved her world—and yet—and yet I think that I would stay if I could stay.

[Sinks into his arms.

THE CHILD (from the door).

White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird!

MAIRE BRUIN.

She calls my soul!

THE CHILD.

Come with me, little bird!

MAIRE BRUIN.

I can hear songs and dancing!

SHAWN BRUIN.

Stay with me!

MAIRE BRUIN.

Dear, I would stay—and yet and yet—

THE CHILD.

White bird! Come, little bird with crest of gold!

MAIRE BRUIN (very softly).

And yet—

THE CHILD.

Come, little bird with silver feet!

SHAWN BRUIN.

Dead, dead!

FATHER HART.

Thus do the evil spirits snatch their prey Almost out of the very hand of God; And day by day their power is more and more, And men and women leave old paths, for pride Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

A VOICE sings outside—

The wind blows out of the gates of the day, The wind blows over the lonely of heart, And the lonely of heart is withered away, While the faeries dance in a place apart, Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring, Tossing their milk-white arms in the air; For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing Of a land where even the old are fair, And even the wise are merry of tongue; But I heard a reed of Coolaney say, 'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung, The lonely of heart must wither away.'

[The song is taken up by many voices, who sing loudly, as if in triumph. Some of the voices seem to come from within the house.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE ***

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