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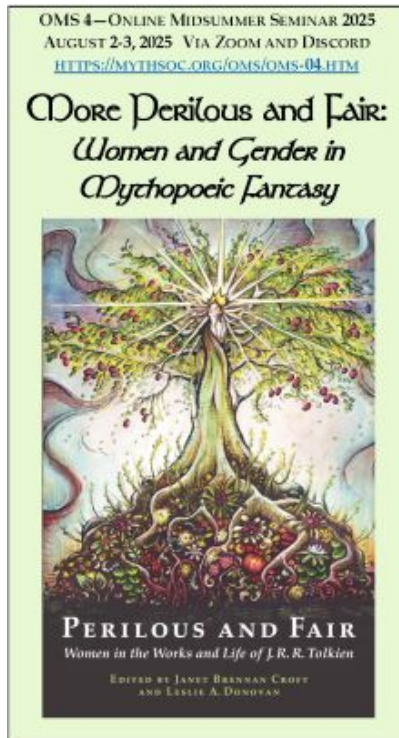
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Now I Know that I Did Not Know

by James Ross Kelly

AH, HE WAS ALWAYS LAUGHING, and it infuriated me. It seemed he didn't care about anything other than hunting and fishing and his damn goats. I could never get him to help with the wheat more than an hour. I hated the damn goats.

Oh, he'd take plenty when harvest came, and leave me some dried goat meat, or venison three months later—oh he'd always give something, but he wouldn't work much. Bragged about it too, said he'd figured it took him about seventeen hours a week of scuffing up his feet to get what they needed to eat, and sometimes that was just fishing!

I admit I took it easy in the winter, but if I didn't work ten to sixteen hours a day, we wouldn't eat every day of the year, and well, just look at what I'd done I'd built irrigation canals, a barn, our home, the wheat fields and the vineyards, and wells that made such a difference. I have slaves, my sons dress in cotton, and we employ people at looms for trading cloth for things we do not grow, and we have schedules, and we always know where the children are. And I made dams and diverted water from the streams to dry land and the crops that we grew! There seemed to be no end to how productive we could be!

Abel was never where he was supposed to be. Oh, you'd hear the bells on his goats, but you might not see him for three days after you first heard them. I'd hear from my friends that they'd talked to him long before he'd come see me, and once when I went to visit, he'd told me where he'd be and when I got there, he'd left his goats in a valley and went off hunting for three days.

"You knew I'd come back," he said the next time I saw him and complained, "You could have stayed, and my wife would have fed you cheese, and berry pies and you could have fished by the pool."

I was always frustrated with him, if not angry. When we were told by our father to make offerings, I took what I'd made with my own two hands: sheaves of wheat, clay pots, vegetables from the garden, nuts, and fruits from the orchards.

Abel killed his three best kid goats. When the offering was over, he became a cloud of white and yellow light that day and had favor with Him. I had worked for twenty years to get wheat like that; the vegetables and fruit were from a garden and groves I tended for twenty-five years; the fruit and nuts had no more wild bitter taste but were sweet and good. I was empty and felt what I had done with arduous work to please Him was nothing in His eyes. Abel gave nothing he himself had made and always He was wild and fierce. Abel ran to that and what he has spawned is wild and fierce, and I somehow wanted to make war on that. Thinking order and homes and buildings and clean clothes more important than—well, I thought it more important than passionate love.

I was jealous, wrinkled-up jealous with envy I was, I admit it full well. You see I made lamps and could work with my hands and was with my wife when it was dark; and he made fires and holed up in smoky holes in the mountains and lived in skin tents on the plains. Yet, He loved him and showered him with blessings every day and the herds were plentiful, and he'd begun using his goats just for milk, because he hunted most every day but one, and he had honey and meat and the goats had mostly become his pets. How many times did I see him in the forest when we were boys, when we were supposed to be gathering mushrooms, and instead he'd be looking up with his arms raised and worshipping?

Our Father had told me that was the source of his favor; nevertheless, after the offering I could not take it anymore, really. I am sorry, I did not know. There was a reality that he perceived that was more real than what I knew, and though it's no excuse, that is why in the end I asked what I asked about my brother. Yes, it was an envious lie. My bitterness betrayed me.

Now I know that I did not know. He wanted only me, rather than the good things I might make, or do. I've lost everything, most of my family has died from plague—now my skin is white as sand and my sorrow never ceases. I must go northeast and build a city where there is no one.

I have begun to wander. He will see me again someday, and I hope that I can do what is right despite the never-ending memory that, when I saw my brother in the field next to the pool looking to heaven and laughing with joy—I crushed his skull with a rock.



A Wight from the Night's Watch and a Wilding Wight,
By Franz Klug