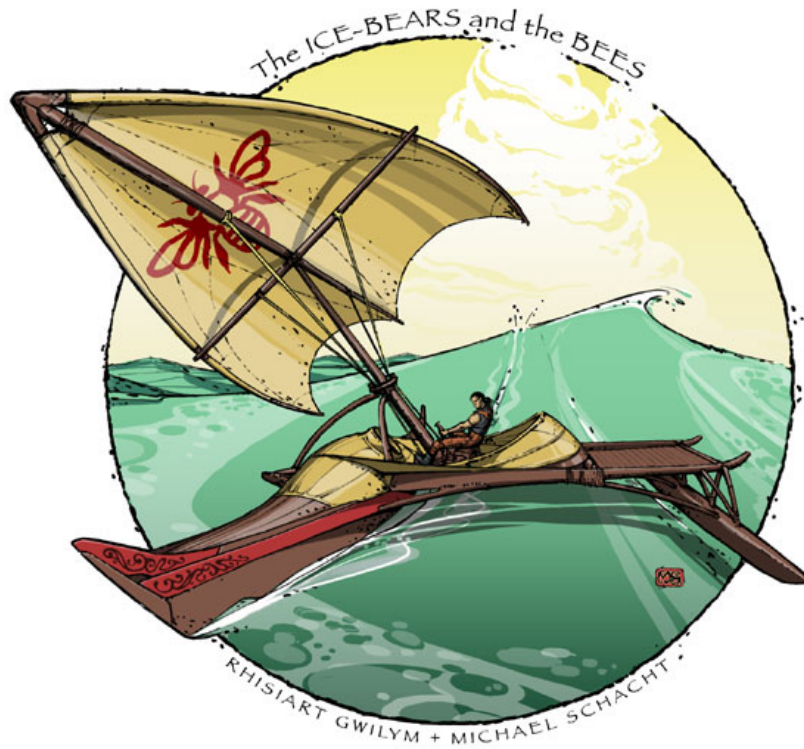




**SPECIAL PRIZE WINNER
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The Ice-Bears and the Bees

**Story by Rhysart Gwilym
Illustration by Michael Schacht**

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It was in the twenty-fifth year of our cenedl's annual round voyage that Iorwerth's astonishing ship Y Gwenynen (the Bee) suddenly made its spectacular appearance. Everyone, all the people, all the dogs, the whole cenedl, were gathered on the mole to see our ship Arth Yr Iâ (the Ice-Bear) slip his moorings, and to send our blessings with ship and crew.

The tide was just at full. There was that usual short while of dawdling of the water, hanging about, not sure for a minute or two of any particular current direction.

Just at that dramatic moment - '...e'en at the turning of the tide...' the Gwenynen came hurtling round the point of Y Gribin Fach. I mean really tearing along, the knife-sharp hull slicing through Dyfi's clear green water at nearly twice the eight knot breeze.

Yes, I know that seems impossible, but - well, Gwenynen can outrun the wind on a beam reach, even in such gentle weather, because of the canted-hydrofoil shape of its hull, taken from the beautifully-evolved hull-form of the old Enewetak long-distance voyaging canoes, the walaps. It's no longer possible for anyone on our coast to dispute that walaps can run faster than their driving wind, having seen Gwenynen doing it so often; and now with all the copies doing it too.

Everyone on the mole, and all aboard Arth Yr Iâ just stood flat-footed and stared. Which was exactly what Iorwerth had intended of course, the young rip! I must say, he'd calculated it very neatly, and got it perfectly right. But then, he's been messing about in - well, anything that he could get to float, really - on, and often enough *in*, the waters of the Dyfi estuary ever since he was about seven. Olwen has been in a state of intermittent terror about him all that time, certain whenever he's late back to Dol Frwynog that her wayward boy must have drowned in some mad escapade. (He sailed an open four-metre boat to Eire single-handed when he was fourteen. The first anyone knew about it was when the Aberdyfi harbour-mistress called us to say that she had a message from the Eirainn coastguard that Iorwerth had just made his landfall after twenty hours at sea. Plenty of food and water, and excellent foul-weather gear, but no radio, and - get this - no compass! Just used the old Norse 'airts' method to hold his course, "to see how well it worked in practice"! Were there ructions? That doesn't even begin to describe it!)

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The beauty of this dramatic appearance of the Gwenynen was that no-one had seen him fully rigged and going through his paces until that moment. Of course everyone knew that Iorwerth was up to something with a boat down at Cwm Eidal cove. When is he not? But I think only Ceri had wormed her way into his schemes enough to understand just what a breath-taking stroke he planned this time. She was aboard Gwenynen too when he tore round the point, but it was apparent within seconds that she was just ballasting for the time being, posing decoratively a little way out on the akas. (Very beautiful girl, Ceri. I don't doubt that Iorwerth placed her there quite deliberately, as another touch in his dramatic appearance) He conducted his outrageously swanky manoeuvres completely solo, sweeping out into the brimming channel, stopping dead, then reversing his run and racing back in to the mole. He stopped spectacularly, 'screached to a halt' as you might say, as if the walap had disc brakes, just as it seemed that he must ram Arth Yr Iâ amidships.

And all of this, mark you, without help from his crew-woman, and without once getting up himself from the command position midships, his helmsman's seat astraddle the bottom of the leeward-leaning mast, like a horseman astride a white-hot Arab. Oh, so cool!

It was obvious within seconds to every seamanly onlooker that to get this good he must have been tuning this ship, and his own fluency of skills with it, for quite some time. Also, what was obvious to me straight away was that he seemed to have cracked a major puzzle for Pacific proa enthusiasts: how to make them conveniently single-handable, yet keep their traditional speed and agility intact.

And dammo! He'd done all this; yet in all the time he'd been working on it no one had cottoned-on to what he was plotting. Even Ceri had dropped no hint to anyone, such was the conspiracy of secrecy in which Iorwerth had wrapped her.

Looking back, I realise how crafty he had been. Obviously it wasn't possible for him to prevent word of his latest sea-craft from trickling out, over the months, as here and there people of the local communities caught glimpses of the walap at the cove, or of Iorwerth messing about in him on the estuary. Word had drifted back to Dol Frwynog,

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of course, in dribs and drabs. But by then he'd had us all long conditioned to the idea that he was always up to some tinkering with boats. No one paid it much attention. The crafty young sod had hidden it all by leaving everything in clear view, but making it all look like plain, small potatoes: There was this rather nondescript, oddly-asymmetric ten-metre canoe-like hull (he hadn't painted it up to full fig, insignia and Celtic abstracts and all, till the last minute). The hull was decked-over; there was a minute cupboard of a cabin midships; but all done at very low key.

This being Iorwerth, it was done with meticulous craftsmanship, and very strong-made. But naturally, that wasn't particularly eye-catching. It only showed to a knowing eye making a close inspection. And even then no one thought anything of it, beyond an approving, smiling head-shake at the young devil's style, his dogged drive, his cheerful energy. Without even trying particularly, Iorwerth is well-liked for his natural qualities.

And of course all the girls are green about his close soul-bond with Ceri, ever since they were tinies. Knowing Iorwerth, I'll bet he and Ceri baptised Gwenynen the minute he was afloat, and the cabin sole was comfortable enough to stretch out on. Lucky lad! I don't mind admitting a twinge of envy at that thought; a slender, big-eyed girl like Ceri; ah well....

Obviously the outrigger structure caused a mild curiosity whilst Gwenynen was building. They're not all that common on our coasts even now. Very conservative-minded, are sea-farers: great believers in the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' principle; stick with what has proved serviceable. To all but the reckless young the sea is so irreducibly frightening that it makes us cautious.

It's different with the double canoes, though. They've become naturalised in our waters. Indeed, our vessel Arth Yr Iâ is an eighty foot Wharram trading pahi: a truly beautiful ship, and the apple of the cenedl's eyes.

But the thing that the whole coastal community had failed to notice in Iorwerth's quiet busyness were his innovations in rigging the Gwenynen: an original combination of an adjustable inverted-y mast, a pair of shores to support it, and flying serenely above

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all this - pretty-nearly permanently set, like a traditional Chinese trader's lug-sail - a close-tethered Rogallo kite-sail, under perfect all-axis control with just four sheets and an endless furl/unfurl loop-line. (That last also serving, as I was to discover for myself later when crewing for skipper Iorwerth, as a beautifully effective reefing method, by flying the rogallo horizontally at the masthead, weathercocked into the wind, then easing off on the tight set of the furl/unfurl loop, until the sail got twin bellies between its spars, which completely spoiled all its vortex lift. Neat, sweet, works a treat! And no bloody flogging, even in a half-gale. Just sits there at ease, flying from the masthead, drag cut to a minimum, with a useful, moderate, near-vertical lift steadying the vessel, and a mild horizontal drive whenever you want it, just by canting the kite over slightly, and then giving it a slight angle of attack. Brilliant!)

What we were about to discover as Iorwerth literally water-skidded Gwenynen to a halt right before Arth Yr Iâ was that he had a friendly - but really pretty breath-taking - challenge; for skipper Niamh on the pahi; but really for all of us in the cenedl.

I'd better take a moment to explain: 'cenedl' means several things in Cymraeg. It's modern meaning is 'nation' of course. But it's acquired a second meaning in our time. Centuries back it had had an earlier meaning, something like tribe, clan, kindred, extended family. In a sense, that meaning has reappeared. During and after the worldshake, the survivors everywhere started - of necessity - to coalesce into that new version of the old extended family: the intentional community. These seem very often now to be what the Scottish clan was in old times: a spine of actual blood-kindred, but with an equal number, or sometimes even a greater number, of other members related by marriage to the family, or often unrelated couples and their children, or even just single, accepted-in members. And of course every cenedl had to take a few at least of the orphans. We couldn't just abandon them. We even have four American boat-people in our cenedl, though they are now as old as me; long-married here, and with Cymreig grandchildren of their own.

Our cenedl settled at the abandoned hill-farm of Dol Frwynog ('Rushy Meadow') forty years back. We were drawn mainly from the local towns. People found it necessary to start going back out to live directly on the land, as everything, all over the world,

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adjusted desperately to the precipitous end of the Oil Age.

As most of the Cymreig people do now, we live close to the coast, and fishing and sea-faring are part of our livelihood. Our first vessel, the six-oared curragh Brenhines Y Môr (Queen of the Sea), we built in one of the big barns at Dol Frwynog, and then hauled down to our nearest cove on rollers. (We hadn't yet made the mole at that time)

Arth Yr Iâ was a much bigger project. By then we knew that there would be work for such a vessel, fishing and coastal trading, so the investment of time and effort seemed worth it. In fact it was the curragh which towed most of the timbers down the Dyfi from windfelled pines in the Dulas valley forests, with relay teams of our people waiting to relieve the previous team of rowers at regular intervals down the riverbank. We set up a building yard at the same abandoned slipway at the mouth of Cwm Eidal where years later Iorwerth was to quietly build his 'unnoticed' walap.

I remember the building of our pahi as one of the best times of my life at Dol Frwynog.

In the quarter century since we built him, Arth Yr Iâ has *created* our circling year-voyage: Each year at Samhain, the ship leaves the Dyfi with a lot-chosen crew for the Winter leg of the voyage, under the command of one of our five skippers, heading for the Atlantic coast of North Africa, and the oceanic islands to the west: the Islas Canarias, and the Cabo Verdes. All down the European and African coasts outside the Straits of Gibraltar, for eighteen hundred miles, and at many fortunate locations on the islands, there are places where we keep our outhives. By agreement with the local people, we place our big rugby-football shaped hives in safe places on their lands. Often the hives will hang in trees, but there are places too where our local partners can supervise them closely enough to guarantee their safety on the ground.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. The ship doesn't reach Africa till the new year. That's where we're heading, but all down the coasts of Kernow, Breizh, France, Occitanie, Euskadi, Galicia and Portugal we have hundreds more of our outhives and local partners to visit.

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We moor or cast anchor at literally scores of havens down the Atlantic coasts. At every place we must go ashore, meet and greet with our partners, eat and celebrate - and in the case of the younger shipmates, dally with the local girls and boys, of course.

I know something about the hives, because I designed the originals, when our pahi first began to feel out our trading area. I've been busy with their evolution ever since. Imagine a squat rugby-ball about the size of a biggish rucksack, sliced in two equal halves horizontally, with the queen-excluder plate sandwiched between them. We make them from a sort of wet-climate adobe, if you get my drift, that I concocted over months of stinky experimentation: Scavenged odds and ends of wood, chewed in our portable mills to fine wood-wool, then bound into a rough dough with traditional waterproof gelatin-glue, boiled up from hide, hoof, horn, bone, fish-cleanings, whatever we can find; a gloriously-foul witches brew.

We make them both at home, and on board the pahi, to replace worn out and damaged hives, and to extend our coastal-ribbon hive-field up and down the Atlantic.

Over the summer the top chambers of the hives, where the queens can't go to lay brood, are filled by the worker-bees with honeycomb crammed with raw nectar, honey, pollen and bee-bread: food for gods! And surely a great boon to us humans, eaten raw and unprocessed, just as it is, wax and all.

Because we now have so many hives spread up and down the Atlantic coast, we take only a few pounds of comb from each hive and leave the rest, with reverent thanks and ritual bee-cake gifts, to our small serenely-toiling sisters. We divide our take into three: some for ourselves, some for our partners, some to trade. But we must visit every hive once a year, and this takes several months of work over the Winter half of the year. Oceanic transhumance! Whilst we edge down the Atlantic coast, those shipmates not honey-gathering (and fornicating) are busy on the two other main jobs of the voyage: Inshore fishing from the pahi's coracles, drying their catch in our onboard smoke oven. Or making new hive-parts with the moulds we carry.

A pungent and energetic life, but deeply satisfying for those with a taste for it. And for

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those of us left at home in Cymru for that year, there's our old-fashioned, land-based, lowland-and-mountain-meadow transhumance with our flock.

Well, it was into this well-lubricated works that Iorwerth dropped his spanner, that morning when he produced the fully-operational Gwenynen, apparently out of the air.

"Aboard Arth Yr Iâ, there! Skipper Niamh!"

Niamh, less gobsmacked than everyone else was watching this show with a little, quietly-delighted smile. "Ahoy there skipper Iorwerth!" she hailed back, enjoying the game hugely.

"Skipper, I think we have to call you Commodore from today," Iorwerth called.

"Why's that, Iorwerth?"

"You have an escort. With a challenge." said Iorwerth.

"Oh?" The smile carefully-controlled, but broadening slightly despite all she could do. Niamh is twenty years older than Iorwerth, and a mother-lioness. But like a lot of the women, younger and older, within and around our cenedl, she's probably more than half in love with him, notwithstanding her good man Geraint. I don't doubt - indeed I know - that lots of the local women, and enough of the men too, have lubricious fantasies about our beautiful and feisty boy Iorwerth.

"So, skipper! Look to see a ship herding you as you go south. With the bee insignia on its sail."

Everyone just stood there, still gobsmacked. Niamh carried it off best, though. She's always had an affectionate soft spot for Iorwerth's intelligent waywardness. (There was that time at the international Eisteddfod at Landelo in Breizh, when Iorwerth was seventeen and crewing on the southern voyage that year. Niamh and he were away from the Arth over the same night. Gone in different directions, on honey business. But

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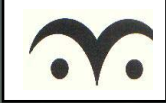
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But I always wondered about that. Neither Ceri nor Geraint were in the ship's company that year.....)

"What was this about a challenge, Iorwerth?" she called.

"This is my best ever baby, skipper. Walaps are king! The ultimate ocean-crossing, storm-riding, flying shit-kicker! I say he can sail anywhere in the world that our pahi can go, and do it twice as fast."

"You don't expect me to risk the pahi in a race, do you Iorwerth? We're not all as moonstruck as you, my lovey!"

"No skip, not a race. But I bet that I can make every leg of our passage south in *half* the pahi's logged time, port to port. Covering twice the ground, like a sheepdog round the flock."

This surreal conversation continued for a few minutes longer, as the ebb began to set in, Iorwerth standing the Gwenynen effortlessly off and on to hold his position, with a studied cheekiness. Niamh could scarcely contain her amusement, and quite a few of us had head-shaking, chuckling grins by then. At one point, skipper Ianto, who was staying behind at Dol Frwynog that year, said:

"But Iorwerth, what about sea-trails? What about surviving a gale or two, to know that he can?"

"Done that!" said Iorwerth, "All this year. I single-handed him to the Fastnet last month. Hell of an old blow on the return leg. Remember that storm!"

Amongst the astonished sounds from the people, there was this little anguished cry from Olwen. "Iorwerth, you were at Coleg Y De, doing your exams!"

"No mam" said Iorwerth, "I was doubling the Fastnet, on my own. Non-stop. Only

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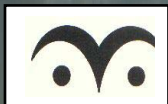
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spoke the lighthouse keepers all the voyage. But they can confirm it."

Olwen made a sound between a groan, a laugh, a gasp, a lip-bite: "Oh *Iorwerth!*" she whispered. She has no other child.

"Anyway skipper," Iorwerth called as he set Gwenynen away from the mole, "I shall make you miss the tide if I craic on any more, so I'll set out now. Best to all. Love you mam! And here's asking Power that we all meet safe back here at Beltein. Oh, yeah: Ceri's crewing for me. And we've got all aboard that we need. See you at Bideford shipmates!"

And he was gone out of speaking before anything more could be said, flying the walap's ama spectacularly, all the way out of sight round Y Gribin.

The whole voyage that year was filled with such strokes by Iorwerth:

At Tra Clogher in the west of Eire he ran Gwenynen up onto the sand, through the breakers of a fresh Spring westerly, to stand on the legendary beach which is said to be the place (well, *one* of the alleged places!) of Cuchulainn's fight with the sea. Then he got Gwenynen off again (on a rising tide, admittedly) under his own power, like one of those orcas hunting seal-pups on the beaches of Patagonia, with the prize between his teeth, so to say.

In the Lofoten archipelago off northern Norway he put Ceri aboard Arth, then - just in that tidal window when it's briefly possible - he tore Gwenynen across the Maelström, and lived to tell the tale.

Then finally, when we'd visited our last trade partners in northern Norway, and in the renewed reindeer-herding communities of Samiland, at the time of the midsummer midnight sun, he raced ahead of us as usual, as we did again what skipper Ianto - the Great Bear himself - first induced us to do twenty-five years ago: we struck northwards on our brief annual pilgrimage to Svalbard, to pay our respects to the Ice Bears.

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Norway has abandoned Svalbard. All Russians and almost all Norwegians left the islands during the time of the worldshake. A small community of Norwegians still clings on at Longyearbyen, and with them we make our northernmost trade, honey for dried fish.

But it was to Hornsund that Iorwerth went flying ahead of the pahi; to see whether the hermit shaman was still alive: Odd-Gunnar the Bearfriend.

Odd has lived alone amongst the Ice Bears in his souterrain bothy on the shores of Hornsund for forty years. In that time he reckons that he has saved more than two hundred bears in difficulties: lost cubs, starving yearlings, injured adults; and set them back into independent freedom again, when they were ready.

He confounds all the conventional wisdom about the unexpungeable dangerousness of Ice Bears. He numbers at least a hundred as personal, named friends, and goes on hunting expeditions with individuals amongst them, sharing catches with his brother or sister: most of the meat for the bear, skin and the rest of the meat for Odd. Particularly, he seeks out mothers in difficulty whilst rearing cubs, to help with their hunting. Though he has never spoken of it to any of us, we think that he has a particularly vivid clairvoyant gift, which lets him find the hidden seals even when the bears can't. He has never carried weapons amongst them, and insists that he has never had the smallest injury, even by accident. Ianto, and other members of our cenedl who have spent extended stays with him, assert that he has indeed champions amongst the bears, as he says, who insist forcefully to passing visitor bears - and in fact to anyone else - that Odd is their friend, and not to be molested. This understanding has spread far and wide amongst the Ice Bears of the polar ocean. But Odd himself set this agreement going when, as a young visionary - a bear-shaman even then - he came without any kind of weapon to make his bothy and live amongst the bears.

Ianto reckons to have learned the art of living at mutually-respectful peace with bears during his several sojourns with Odd. Ianto has been working steadfastly for years towards the reintroduction of bears into Britain. In fact, we have a three-legged Chinese Moon-bear, given into Ianto's safe-keeping by the Jill Robinson Foundation, living at

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liberty as a pensioner at Dol Frwynog; and our local communities have got used to that (after a good deal of initial hysteria).

Amazingly, Tritroed has never offered the smallest threat to our sheep and goats; also - and this has been seen too often to doubt it any more - she assists our shepherd dogs to keep off the local wolves and wild dogs from our flock.

Drinking in these stories since he was a tot, Iorwerth had formed the intent years ago to do what he now did. But it seemed that only Ceri knew what he intended, so private had he been about it. And she had always kept the oath of silence, sworn on her adoration of him.

Looking back, I realise that I wasn't surprised all that much. And if I look back further, to a time when I was babysitting Iorwerth and his cousins - including Ceri as an entrancing six-year-old picsi -whilst the adults were bringing down the flock one Autumn, then I realise why I wasn't surprised.

Iorwerth had perched on the arm of the oak long-seat where we'd all been conjuring a bedtime story. He told us with rapt inwardness about a dream he'd had of flying with bears. We had been looking-and-telling at Raymond Briggs' timeless picture-book classic 'The Snowman'. It was, said Iorwerth, very like that, only with bears instead of snow-people. There was a visit to Lappland (Samiland, where the children knew that the Arth was already trading), a meeting with many bears, white, brown and black, and the most soul-transfixing flight - he smiled seraphically as he described it - with the biggest of them all, a giant Ice Bear. Iorwerth had laced fingers with his eight-inch claws as they flew, but then later had swung onto his back and *sunk* into his fur, as the flight drove on northwards into the deepening cold and dark, 'the mighty Northern night', and the aurora. Iorwerth was very clear that he had actually melted into the bear, and felt his arms and legs inside the bear's, and his head just beneath the bear's big, steadily-pacing heart, as if he was wrapped in a thick protective cladding of live bear. I remember Ceri wide-eyed and open-mouthed as they all listened to him; Iorwerth describing his dream of shape-shifting, without even knowing the word.

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"And were you really the bear yourself, Iorwerth?" she asked.

That's why Iorwerth went directly to Odd-Gunnar when we reached Svalbard. He had a bargain to strike with the hermit.

When our main party arrived at Hornsund in the Arth, after touching at Longyearbyen, we of the Dol Frwynogwyr made again our Midsummer Rite for the Ice Bears. We gave sealed comb in jars to Odd, sustenance from the warm south for his winter comforting. Then under his guidance, we went inland a little to one of the power-places, and spread pieces of comb widely around the rock-tower.

The arctic foxes who had been scurrying after us since the shore pounced on little pieces and ran with them. But - as if they heard what was in Odd's mind - the Ice Bears arrived very soon; singly, or mothers with cubs. One gigantic bear had in fact been waiting at the rock. But he made no objection when the other bears began with deep, concentrated appreciation, to eat the gifts from heaven.

Our people stood in rapt silence with Odd, as more than forty bears came to visit and to accept our gifts, some actually taken, with exquisite restraint, from people's hands. Eventually, they stood licking the last spilled drops from the rocks with delicate care. Afterwards, we sat in the weak warmth of the midday sun outside Odd's bothy, sharing a meal before we left again, direct for Iceland, then Faroë, Zetland, Orkney, Scotland, Man, and home.

It was now that Iorwerth casually played his culminating stroke.

Niamh cued it, unwittingly. She said: "Well my lovey, I think we have to admit that Gwenynen has been a useful addition to us this year. And you've certainly won your challenge. I could get used to him being on hand to do all the racing about to gopher for us when we're travelling. So will you be going again with Ianto this Samhain?"

For a moment, Iorwerth looked at her with a little rueful smile.

"Can't do that, skip," he said. "We have to stay here. I have to learn to think in Bear."

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After the first hubbub, people looked at Odd. But he just sat smiling gnomically, saying nothing.

Niamh considered for a moment. Then she said: "We? Ceri's staying too? You know she's three months pregnant, Iorwerth?" Ceri threw her a look, and seemed about to speak. But the truth was already out. "You want her to have her first birth here - at midwinter....?"

There was a good deal of forthright commentary on this idea. But eventually everyone was silenced by the old she-bear who, like Tritroed, was Odd's pensioner now that she was too crank to hunt.

She appeared suddenly from the hillslope behind the bothy and walked into our picnic, whilst everyone but Odd stiffened a little in apprehension: "Oh God! Bears and food....." they thought.

The white grandmother padded directly to Ceri, who sat stock still, holding her breath, whilst the bear breathed-in her essence.

She made a soft crooning sound in her throat, turned her inscrutable small eyes to Odd, then without touching the food, turned and padded off again towards the beach.

"Inge will take care of Ceri," Odd said softly, with a serene smile. "She will be well."

Short of dragging Ceri to the pahi by force, there was no budging her. And no-one quite dared to consider that, with Odd's massive kindred near abouts.

We did leave them. All did go well with Ceri, and with Rhiannon. When she was three days old, at Odd's suggestion and Inge's gentle but overwhelming insistence, Ceri gave Rhiannon, bagged in her bear-fur papoose mitten, to Inge to nurse, and the old bear lay wrapped for hours, crooning softly, around the tiny scrap. Thereafter for a while, Rhiannon was suckled on both human and bear milk. Inge had produced a lactation

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specially. And - even without any of the artifices of civilisation to hand - Rhiannon was never ever soiled or wet. With seemingly telepathic timing, Inge kept her meticulously licked clean at all times.

And Iorwerth did indeed bring his womenfolk safely back to the mole at Cwm Eidal, tearing up the flood tide in the Dyfi just at midday, with long white tell-tales woven from bear fur flying from the ends of his sail-spars.

He and Ianto get into long, plotting discussions now about the 'Bring Back the Bears' campaign. And a rapt, slightly-smiling, unreachable look comes into their eyes.

I think that there will be bears living free in Britain again soon. In my lifetime. After all, the wolves are back already. No-one knows for sure how that happened, but there's a widespread feeling that if we're to have bears too, then it should be done by public arrangement, rather than by secret unilateral action by the EarthFirsters.

But if it's not agreed soon, I think I know at least one member of the Bear clan who will be bringing back orphan Brown bear-cubs from Iberia before too long, to foster and release in Britain.

I must try to live to see that.....

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