

MIRACULOUS CREATURES

There are marten cats and badgers and foxes in the Enchanted Woods, but there are of a certainty mightier creatures, and the lake hides what neither net nor fine can take. These creatures are of the race of the white stag that flits in and out of the tales of Arthur, and of the evil pig that slew Diarmuid where Ben Bulbin mixes with the sea wind. They are the wizard creatures of hope and fear, they are of them that fly and of them that follow among the thickets that are about the Gates of Death. A man I know remembers that his father was one night in the wood Of Inchy, "where the lads of Gort used to be stealing rods. He was sitting by the wall, and the dog beside him, and he heard something come running from Owbawn Weir, and he could see nothing, but the sound of its feet on the ground was like the sound of the feet of a deer. And when it passed him, the dog got between him and the wall and scratched at it there as if it was afraid, but still he could see nothing but only hear the sound of hoofs. So when it was passed he turned and came away home. Another time," the man says, "my father told me he was in a boat out on the lake with two or three men from Gort, and one of them had an eel-spear, and he thrust it into the water, and it hit something, and the man fainted and they had to carry him out of the boat to land, and when he came to himself he said that what he struck was like a calf, but whatever it was, it was not fish!" A friend of mine is convinced that these terrible creatures, so common in lakes, were set there in old times by subtle enchanters to watch over the gates of wisdom. He thinks that if we sent our spirits down into the water we would make them of one substance with strange moods Of ecstasy and power, and go out it may be to the conquest of the world. We would, however, he believes, have first to outface and perhaps overthrow strange images full of a more powerful life than if they were really alive. It may be that we shall look at them without fear when we have endured the last adventure, that is death.

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