

REGINA, REGINA PIGMEORUM, VENI

One night a middle-aged man, who had lived all his life far from the noise of cab-wheels, a young girl, a relation of his, who was reported to be enough of a seer to catch a glimpse of unaccountable lights moving over the fields among the cattle, and myself, were walking along a far western sandy shore. We talked of the Forgetful People as the faery people are sometimes called, and came in the midst of our talk to a notable haunt of theirs, a shallow cave amidst black rocks, with its reflection under it in the wet sea sand. I asked the young girl if she could see anything, for I had quite a number of things to ask the Forgetful People. She stood still for a few minutes, and I saw that she was passing into a kind of waking trance, in which the cold sea breeze no longer troubled her, nor the dull boom of the sea distracted her attention. I then called aloud the names of the great faeries, and in a moment or two she said that she could hear music far inside the rocks, and then a sound of confused talking, and of people stamping their feet as if to applaud some unseen performer. Up to this my other friend had been walking to and fro some yards off, but now he passed close to us, and as he did so said suddenly that we were going to be interrupted, for he heard the laughter of children somewhere beyond the rocks. We were, however, quite alone. The spirits of the place had begun to cast their influence over him also. In a moment he was corroborated by the girl, who said that bursts of laughter had begun to mingle with the music, the confused talking, and the noise of feet. She next saw a bright light streaming out of the cave, which seemed to have grown much deeper, and a quantity of little people,¹ in various coloured dresses, red predominating, dancing to a tune which she did not recognize.

I then bade her call out to the queen of the little people to come and talk with us. There was, however, no answer to her command. I therefore repeated the words aloud myself, and in a moment a very beautiful tall woman came out of the cave. I too had by this time fallen into a kind of trance, in which what we call the unreal had begun to take upon itself a masterful reality, and was able to see the faint gleam of golden ornaments, the shadowy blossom of dim hair. I then bade the girl tell this tall queen to marshal her followers according to their natural divisions, that we might see them. I found as before that I had to repeat the command myself. The creatures then came out of the cave, and drew themselves up, if I remember rightly, in four bands. One of these bands carried quicken boughs in their hands, and another had necklaces made apparently of serpents' scales, but their dress I cannot remember, for I was quite absorbed in that gleaming woman. I asked her to tell the seer whether these caves were the greatest faery haunts in the neighbourhood. Her lips moved, but the answer was inaudible. I bade the seer lay her hand upon the breast of the queen, and after that she heard every word quite distinctly. No, this was not the greatest faery haunt, for there was a greater one a little further ahead. I then asked her whether it was true that she and her people carried away mortals, and if so, whether they put another soul in the place of the one they had taken? "We change the bodies," was her answer. "Are any of you ever born into mortal life?" "Yes." "Do I know any who were among your people before birth?" "You do." "Who are they?" "It would not be lawful for you to know." I then asked whether she and her people were not "dramatizations of our moods"? "She does not understand," said my friend, "but says that her people are much like human beings, and do most of the things human beings do." I asked her other questions, as to her nature, and her purpose in the universe, but only seemed to puzzle her. At last she appeared to lose patience, for she wrote this message for me upon the sands—the sands of vision, not the grating sands under our feet—"Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us." Seeing that I had offended her, I thanked her for what she had shown and told, and let her depart again into her cave. In a little while the young girl awoke out of her trance, and felt again the cold wind of the world, and began to shiver.

I tell these things as accurately as I can, and with no theories to blur the history. Theories are poor things at the best, and the bulk of mine have perished long ago. I love better than any theory the sound of the Gate of Ivory, turning upon its hinges, and hold that he alone who has passed the rose-strewn threshold can catch the far glimmer of the Gate of Horn. It were perhaps well for us all if we would but raise the cry Lilly the astrologer raised in Windsor Forest, "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni," and remember with him, that God visiteth His children in dreams. Tall, glimmering queen, come near, and let me see again the shadowy blossom of thy dim hair.

1. The people and faeries in Ireland are sometimes as big as we are, sometimes bigger, and sometimes, as I have been told, about three feet high. The Old Mayo woman I so often quote, thinks that it is something in our eyes that makes them seem big or little.
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