**The Lady of the Lake Fan Fach**

High up in a hollow of the Black Mountains of South Wales is a lonely sheet of water called Llyn y Fan Fach. Here, many years ago, there lived a lonely shepherd boy with his widowed mother. Following the death of his brothers in the war, the young boy soon started to take on more responsibility on the family farm, Blaensawdde.

The boy began to happily learn the ways of farming and soon became skilled, understanding more about growing crops and looking after animals than any other farmer around.

‘Mother’, the boy said one day, ‘is it not time for me to find a wife?’

‘Who will you marry?’ asked his mother.

‘That’, said the boy, ‘I do not know yet.’

Not long after, the young man was sending his cattle up to the mountain to graze. The sun was beating down; the sky was as blue as sapphires and the water was lapping at the lakeside. The air was so sweet, that the young man fell asleep. Just then he thought he heard a voice calling to him in his dreams:

‘In drowsing and in dreams  
Naught’s what it seems;  
All’s an illusion  
That grows from delusion.  
If your true love you’d see,  
Then see her in me;  
So quick, lad, awake,  
And look on the lake.’

Quickly he sat up and rubbed his eyes. There on a rock was a woman more beautiful than any he had ever seen, singing her song. She was so beautiful, queens of the world could not equal her in her beauty.

She was combing her hair, which was as shiny as gold. Her neck was as white as the foam on a wave; her lips were as red as the reddest foxglove and her eyes as blue the summer sky. Suddenly his heart began to pound, and he could not believe the sight before his eyes. “I must be dreaming,” the shepherd remarked, “because I wish so to find someone to love.”

The young man was afraid he would frighten the lady away, so he held out some cheese and bread that his mother had baked for him. The beautiful maiden glided across the lake and took his offer of food. The food however was not to her taste and she declared:

‘Too hard is your bread:  
Not with that I’ll fed.’

At this she plunged back under the surface of the water and the young man feared she had gone forever.

When he returned home, he told his mother what had happened with the hard-baked bread.

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‘True son,’ his mother replied, ‘I did bake the bread harder than usual. The young lady must have feared she would break her tooth. Do not worry, all that is wrong can be mended before morn,’ and without delay she set about baking another loaf of bread.

The next morning the young man set off to the lake once more, hoping to see his true love again. Minute followed minute and hour followed hour and still the beautiful lady did not come. Eventually, just as he was giving up hope, she appeared. She was as beautiful as ever, as she sat upon a rock combing her golden hair.

The young man called to the lady and again offered her the bread and goat’s cheese he had brought for his lunch. This time however the lady cried:

‘Too soft is your bread:  
Not by that I’ll be led.’

No sooner had the words left her lips, than she again plunged beneath the surface of the water.

When the young man returned home once more, looking sad and weary, he told his mother what had happened.

‘True son,’ she said, ‘I did bake the bread softer than I usually do, but do not fear, this time it will be perfect.’

Again the next morning, the young man drove his cattle up to the lake as usual. All day he waited, though there was no sign of his beautiful lady. Then just as he was about to return home, she appeared through the mist.

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‘Maiden,’ he cried. ‘Unless you love me, it is no better for me to live than to die’.

‘A pity,’ she said, ‘for someone as young as you to die,’ and as the young man held out his bread for her, she ate a small piece.

To his delight, the lady thought the bread had been baked perfectly this time, and she said:

‘True baked is your bread:  
And with that I’ll be wed.’

‘But remember,’ she added, as he jumped for joy on the bank, ‘if during our marriage you strike me three causeless blows, you shall lose me straightaway and forever.’

She had barely finished speaking when she plunged below the surface of the water, returning with her father and ‘Maiden,’ he cried. ‘Unless you love me, it is no better for me to live than to die’.

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twin sister. The two girls were identical in their beauty and the young man struggled to tell them apart.

‘I hear you wish to marry one of my daughters,’ said the bearded gentleman.

‘Yes,’ replied the young man, ‘if she does not marry me I fear I shall die.’

‘A pity,’ answered the older man. ‘To marry my daughter, just tell me which of my daughters it is that you love. Is she on the right or on the left?’

The young man fell silent, he had no idea. He started to speak, but then fell as dumb as a doorknob.

‘Well,’ said the girls’ father, ‘either you grow dumb or I grow deaf.’

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‘Well,’ said the girls’ father, ‘either you grow dumb or I grow deaf.’

At this point, desperate to help her beloved, one of the sisters moved her foot ever so slightly forward to show that it was her. No-one else saw the movement, but it told the man which sister he loved.

‘This,’ said the young man, ‘is the woman I love.’

‘You are correct,’ said the girls’ father. ‘You may marry my daughter, but just remember, if you strike my daughter three times, you will lose her forever.’

As a present for their wedding the gentleman agreed to give the couple as many sheep, cattle and goats as his daughter could count in one breath. At this, she tightened her eyes and took the mightiest breath she could, counting faster than a fly-wing’s beat. Just as she had finished counting, the animals came splashing out of the lake, baaing and mooing as they did so. The family said their farewells and the couple returned to Blaensawdde to start their lives together.

Soon the couple were married and together produced three fine sons. They lived at Esgair Llaethdy about three miles from the lake and were as happy as any couple could be. Then one day during the spring, the couple attended the christening of one of their neighbours’ children. The husband was ready to go, though his wife was taking a lot of time.

‘Lady wife,’ he called, ‘why are you not ready yet?’ and he tapped her gently on the arm.

‘You forget your manners husband,’ she said. ‘Do you not recall our agreement not to strike me a blow? Pay more attention next time,’ and from that day on they agreed to be much more careful.

It was in the summer when the husband and wife were invited to a wedding. All of the guests were full of joy and happy for the newly-married couple; the bride looked as pretty as a picture and the groom as handsome as a film star. As the happy couple were being greeted by their guests, the lady burst into tears.

‘Wife, wife,’ the man urged, tapping her on the arm, ‘why are you weeping at this happy time?’

‘I weep,’ said his wife, ‘because their troubles are just beginning and so are ours as that is the second blow you have given me. Be very careful not to strike a third.’

Much time went on and the couple were as happy as ever. One sad day in autumn, the couple attended a funeral of one of their friends. Everyone there was full of grief and hurt, but at the most serious part of the service, the man was astonished to hear his wife burst out laughing.

‘Please wife,’ the husband urged tapping his wife on the arm, ‘is this really the place for laughter?’

‘I laugh,’ she told her husband, ‘because the dead man’s troubles are over and so is our marriage, for that is the third causeless blow. Farewell husband, forever,’ and she left the funeral and returned to Esgair Llaethdy.

When she got back to the farm, she called all of the animals to her and the sheep, cattle and goats all followed her up the mountain. Under the silver moonlight, the lady, accompanied by her animals, splashed into the lake, leaving no trace behind them.