

# A DWARF WIVES' TALE.



by  
BELLADONNA  
TOOK  
(Vera Chapman)

PART II

(Resumé of part I: Three Dwarf maidens, Stanna, Danna and Anna, in the Lonely Mountain long before the coming of Smaug, entreated Gandalf to make them beautiful by magic. He did so: but the Dwarves, especially the other Dwarf-wives, were scandalised, and appalled, and commanded him to reverse the spell. He accordingly reversed the spell on Stanna and Danna. Anna, who had fallen in love with the Elf Tintallion, escaped and ran out of the front door of the Lonely Mountain and got away: she was still much prettier than any Dwarf-maiden had any right to be);

NOW READ ON

One way the road went down to Dale, the other way it went westward towards the woods. She did not take the road to Dale but turned west. For that was the way to the Elven-king's Hall, and the way she had seen Tintallion go.

All that night and the next day she wandered on. She slept cold on the ground, and she had no food, but like all Dwarves she was tough and capable of great endurance; but by the time she caught up with the band of travelling Elves, she was weary and famished. She heard them singing before her, and hastened after them, as they marched gaily through the dark woods just before nightfall; and she called out after them:

"Wait for me, fair people ... oh wait for me !"

They halted, and gathered round her. They were of the Wood-Elves, (those whom Bilbo later met), Elves who had not sojourned in the Blessed Realm like the High Elves, and so were not so wise as the others, nor always so kind.

They stared at her, lifting their lanterns to look at her strange aspect. There were Elf-girls amongst them as well as Elf-warriors, and they all, men and girls together, chattered and laughed.

"What in all the worlds can it be ? A Dwarf-wife ? Oh, never ! Where's your beard, Dwarf-wife ? Left it at home, or shaved it off ? Oh, shame, to be seen abroad barefaced !"

And poor Anna began to cry at their mockery; and so quaintly did her face fold up between dimples and tears, like a baby's, that they teased her the more to make her do it again, and they laughed in their thoughtless delight. But poor Anna, helpless, hungry and tired, stood weeping in misery. Then Tintallion came striding up from the lead to see why they had halted.

"Elves !", he said. "You have forgotten your courtesy. Stop torturing this poor lass. Whatever she is, she is a damosel, and in distress. Be kind to her." And he drew her to him

by her shoulders, and she trembled greatly.

"What is your name ?" he asked.

"My name is Anna."

"Anna ... in my people's language that signifies a gift. Do you bring a gift, wandering maiden ?"

"Alas, no gift ... only myself."

"And what would you wish of us ?"

"My lord Elf ... I wish to go with you."

"Why, so you shall, at least till tomorrow.

It is not safe for you to stray in the forest by night, here on the edge of Mirkwood. We are just about to make camp, and you shall spend the night with us, for you are tired, and I am sure hungry and thirsty." And in gentle, casual courtesy, he kissed her on the brow, as one would kiss a child. And she, poor girl, thought that she would surely die, so violently did her heart beat.

The Elves made camp in a green glade, as was their custom, and Anna sat next to Tintallion in the circle round the fire, and feasted on the Elvish bread and fruits and wine. Then the Elf-girls made up a soft bed of leaves and grasses for her, and she dropped into sleep bewildered with joy.

Early in the morning she woke, when the light was just showing grey. All around her the Elves lay sleeping on the ground under their grey-green mantles; and she took a thought that she would steal a look at Tintallion where he slept. So she rose and went quietly to the spot where she had seen him lie down apart from the rest. He lay at the foot of a beech-tree, and clasped in the Elf's arms was a beautiful Elf-woman. They lay entwined, lovingly, together and at the sight Anna's heart froze. She cried out as a wounded animal cries ... but the sleepers never stirred.

Then she turned her back on the camping-place of the Elves, and fled away back into unknown country.

She wandered many days, till she came to the shores of the Long Lake, where men dwelt. And there she met a man. At first she thought he might be an Elf, for he was about that height; but then she saw he was thickset and burly, hairy and gross, and clad in unpleasant rough country garments. And his voice had no music in it at all, neither had his face any light.

He looked her up and down. "Well", said he, "You're an oddity. What in all Middle-Earth are you?"

"If you please", she said, "I'm a Dwarf-woman."

"A Dwarf-woman?" he laughed loudly. "You're not ... but what you are is a liar. Everyone knows the Dwarves have no women. They grow out of the stones, or increase as the stones do. The Gods alone know how. But Dwarf-woman ... no, no. I'll tell you what you are ... you're just a child of men, but deformed ... no doubt for some sin of your parents, a curse was put on you, and a strange sickness sent, to stunt your growth ... or perhaps it was a witch overlooked you. We've heard of such. But all are unlucky and uncanny, because the Gods hate them." And he turned to go on his way.

But she, being desperate, cried out after him, "Whatever I am, will you give me some food, for I am dying of hunger?"

He stopped and looked her up and down again. "Oh, well, yes." he said. "I'll give you food, and I'll give you work as well. You look strong ... I think you could be a useful servant for me and my wife. Here!" and he threw her a crust of bread from his bag ... she caught it and sank her teeth into it eagerly. "There's bread for you." he said. "And here's a whip for you too, whenever I think you need it. Now march!"

So she became a servant to the man and his wife in their small homestead on the banks of the Long Lake. The wife was as harsh and hard as the man. Anna had bitter servitude, hard toil, scanty food and no payments but beatings. Her sufferings would be tedious to tell. So that she could not run away, the man and his wife told her terrifying tales of the forest that lay behind them ... Mirkwood it was, so black that day was hardly lighter than night there, and full of huge spiders, and goblins, and trolls, and worse things that had no names.

But at last, so desperate she became in her misery, that she cried, "O Powers above, by whatever name they call you ! Anything would be better than this slavery. I would rather die by a goblin, or a troll, or a giant spider ... what worse can befall than death ? And since I shall never see my beautiful Tintalion again, I would as soon die." So she gathered a sack over her shoulders, having no cloak, and stole away at night, and set her feet firmly on the Old Forest Road. She had no idea of where she should go, but she thought she might surely find some better adventure. One thing she could not do ... she could never return to the Mountain of the Dwarves. Partly for fear, partly for pride ... but also because she was sure that the Dwarves, and particularly the Dwarf-wives, would never take her back.

At first she did not find the Old Forest Road so very bad, since at that time that part of it that led from the region of the Long Lake was well-kept ... it was wide, with the trees cleared away more than a bowshot each side, and paved all along. The grim things of the Forest were kept outside the pales, and Anna saw nothing to molest her for the first few days of her journey. She had food with her, for she had taken a good sackful of provisions from her unkind employers ... she did not think it theft to take a little for her needs from people who had paid her nothing for months of hard work. From time to time she rested on the verge of the road, and at night she slept by a little fire, and so she feared nothing. But after a few days journey, the road began to be paved worse, and the palings were broken here and there ... then there were no more palings, and the bushes and trees encroached to right and left,



AT NIGHT SHE SLEPT BY A LITTLE FIRE

and the paving-stones were broken and grown over with moss and briars; and sometimes the road divided, or went round in a loop to avoid a mire, and there was doubt as to which was the true road. She kept hoping, moreover, that somewhere she would reach a town, or a village, or at least an inn. Nobody had told her that she might walk for two hundred miles or more and still find none. And the trees closed in on her, black and terrible. And then she heard footsteps following.

Night was falling, but with those footsteps behind her, she dared not stop, but plodded on. Heavy, deadweight steps they seemed to be, flat-footed and earth-shaking, coming up behind her through the dark. And at last the moon rose, and she saw it behind her. It was a troll.

It was huge, about three times her height; something the shape of a man, but clumsy and pot-bellied, hairless all over but covered in something that might have been scales - it had big ears and a prodding nose, and great toeless feet that plodded after her. In one hand it grasped a roughly shaped club.

When she saw the troll, it seemed it saw her plainly for the first time, after having followed her scent most of the night. It gave a yell, showing all the teeth in its horrible mouth and rushed upon her, thrashing out with its club. She dodged the blow easily the first time, but then it struck again and again and again ... randomly, as one strikes at a bluebottle fly in a room, but keeping on, and laying about it wildly ... sooner or later it would get her. She dodged and doubled, but was too tired to dodge very well, and she was afraid to run into the dark-black woods off the road ... more afraid than of the terror she knew ... but indeed she hardly thought at all, but ran before the troll, zigzag along the road, getting exhausted with terror and helpless flight, till inevitably, she tripped and fell, right in the path of the monster, and lay dazed, waiting for the crashing blow that would end it all.

Instead a strong arm seized her and dragged her off the path, almost throwing her into a thick clump of bracken, and a young fellow was standing over her and making signs for her to keep

quiet. a young fellow was all that she could call him, for she hardly knew what he was. Not Dwarf, not an Elf, not a man ... about her own height, or less if anything, but more slenderly built. But she had no chance to observe him. The troll had seen the direction in which they had fled, and was bearing down on them, but the young fellow slipped from the side of her and suddenly was at the other side of the troll, giving a piercing whistle and jumping out at it with an impudent grimace. The troll changed direction and charged at the youngster ... but suddenly he popped up again ten yards away, once more mocking the troll. So it went on, the young fellow leading the troll here and there, hither and yon. Sometimes he could be up a tree, and tweak the troll's nose, and then land just out of reach of its thrashing cudgel; sometimes he would be behind it, and tickle it with a long twig. The troll was enraged and murderous, thrashing around and yelling. But always the boy drew it from the place where he had left Anna. She watched from her covert, where she crouched like a partridge, and trembled for him as he played his dangerous game in the half-dark.

In the half-dark ... for it was growing lighter. The troll seemed to be moving more slowly, as if growing tired ... then behold ! The light grew, and right along the line of the road, from the east, the first ray of the sun shot red and quivering upon the pursuing monster, and the troll stiffened, with its hand whirling the club over its head ... froze rigid. A chalky white colour spread all over it ... its stupid face stayed arrested in a horrible grin, and the light went out of its little piggy eyes. There it stood. The young fellow went over to it and gave it a push, and it fell over with a thud.

"Stone", he said, and dusted his hands.

Then he came back to where Anna was lying, and lifted her up tenderly.

"There now my pretty", he said, "nothing more to be afraid of. Come now, stop trembling, and look at me. Why, ... what



in Middle-Earth are you ?"

"A ... Dwarf-maiden", she said faintly, still trembling and gasping.

"A Dwarf-maiden ? Never ! You're too pretty to be a Dwarf-maiden ... you're too pretty to be out on her own on this dangerous road ... you're ... you're too pretty full-stop !"

He had her comfortably clasped in his arms, and he led her to a seat on a mossy bank. Her face, which had been deathly pale, was now as red as a rose.

"But what are you ?" she said.

"Me ? Why, I'm a Hobbit ... or I suppose I was a Hobbit till I grew too big."

"How's that ?" She looked him up and down as best she could, being so close to him, and she certainly liked what she saw.

"Well ... my name's Hildefons Took, and I left my people and went travelling, a thing they don't really like us to do. I spent a year among the Ents, drinking their Ent-draught, and it made me grow and grow and grow ... and when I came home I couldn't get inside their Hobbit-holes. Not anyway I couldn't ... they didn't turn me out ... they wouldn't do that, and anyhow I wasn't in ... but they gave me to understand I must make my own arrangements ... And you ? Did they turn you out ?"

"No ... I ran away, but I daren't go back."

He looked at her a long time, considering, and she considered back at him. Then he said,

"Do you know ... I think we were made for each other."

And, so it would appear, they were ... for they settled down forthwith in a little homestead on the western borders of Mirkwood, under the kindly protection of Beorn in his big house.

Of course they started with an outsize Hobbit-hole, but it soon became a farm; and they were very happy indeed, and had a large family, and it seems that some of their descendants were numbered among the woodmen who came to the help of the Beornings in the War of the Ring.

But Stanna and Danna hid their yellow curls under coifs, and became good craftswomen, and in due time were given in marriage to worthy and quite unremarkable Dwarves. But neither of them had any children.

