



C

elenar was a renowned warrior and master huntsman and together with his two brothers, and some half-dozen kinsmen plus their families, made up the band of the Red-feathered arrow-makers. Their name originated from the fact that the band only used bird feathers dyed red to flight their arrows.

Above all else Celenar esteemed his wife Merithina of the golden hair, and clear blue eyes, and his two sons Celedir and Thentasir. He would often ride with them over the land teaching them all he knew in the ways of beasts and men. They grew strong under his guidance, and their father was well pleased.

"Our sons", he said once to Merithina, "will become great in the ways of the sword and the hunt, yet they are good of heart and no man of good will shall fear them, for they shall protect the weak, and guard them like the shepherd guards his sheep."

His wife did answer, "My dearest, surely thou speakest of thyself for no other is nobler than thou. For their gifts our sons owe it to thee for thou hast sired them."

This answer had warmed Celenar's heart and he bowed himself low before Merithina. "Thou art the most fairest lady in the land and nothing could be worthy of thee save the fairest things one might find."

With these words Celenar resolved to give his wife a treasure as an everlasting token of his love for her.

For many a day he sat and pondered, yet of nothing could he think that would be fitting. He mentioned this to his brother Narodern who answered, "Your love is indeed all she desires, brother. Is it not enough that you hunt for her, feed her and have helped to sire two healthy sons?"

Celenar smiled at his brother and then sighed. "For such a woman, it may be enough indeed, yet my love for her is so great that nothing I may bring pays full justice to it. Still I take comfort at your words, and shall think no more on it unless such a gift is indeed revealed to me."

Celenar and his brothers, Narodern, and Ecladern, were riding in the hills. The sun had long been westering and both men and beasts were tired; the horses' hides were spattered with sweat and grime and the men's cloaks were mud stained, for it had been raining heavily that morning. Their limbs ached and were stiff for they had dried in the afternoon sun.

They had ridden into a dell carved between the gently sloping hills. The scent of flowers hung thick in the air, and the sweet song of birds echoed from the tree-tops. Oak and Elm, Ash and Hawthorn clustered thickly in the hollow and only occasionally would the sunlight break through a gap in the canopy. Here sprouted thick clumps of thistle and other shrubs bearing pretty woodland flowers. At the far end of the dell two oak trees stood and their boughs had met and intertwined thus forming an archway.

The whole place seemed to be enchanted as the riders stilled their horses and gazed around them as if transfixed by the heady scent and the birdsong.

As they absorbed the scene they noticed a rustling in the undergrowth near the natural archway. They stared at the oak trees, Celenar particularly found his eyes drawn to the space between them.

It happened suddenly. Under the archway appeared a milk white stag, pure white from the highest antler to its hindfeet and tail, except for its pink eyes.

The stag stood impassively between the oak trees, its head held high with the majestic arrogance all powerful animals have. Keenly the hunters eyed the firm sinews under its silky hide, the compact muscles of an animal in its prime, yet they could not fix an arrow to their bows. The pink eyes regarded them momentarily then the beast flicked its head, turned, and with a gentle movement of its powerful legs was gone.

The sun had lowered and now its rays shone through the archway illuminating the whole dell. Everywhere shone golden and, blinded by the sunlight, the hunters dreamt they rode in fairie amidst the ever blooming flora, and heard the Elvish songs all around them.

Presently they drifted out of their enchantment and turned their mounts for home. They undertook the homeward journey silently for each was ensnared by his dreams.

And so the gift was revealed to Celenar and he knew he must hunt the stag, and fashion the pelt into a robe for Merithina, so she would be ever-white and never fading, for surely naught could dim the whiteness of that fur.

Thus Celenar of the Red-feathered arrow-makers resolved to hunt the milk-white stag of Dondorielno (the name of the dell meaning oaken-archway), till one or the other died.

Early the next morning just when the new daylight was beginning to sweep away the night darkness, when the ground was still soaked with the clear dew, and the birds had just woken, Celenar left his wife where she slept, and stealthily took his sword, hunting spear, and bow and arrows, mounted his horse and rose swiftly away.

Though he galloped his mount hard, it was well into the morning when he came to Dondorielno. The ground had dried quickly after yesterday morning's rain for the sun now shone strongly. Though he scoured every inch of the dell near the oaken archway, he found no trace of the stag. He had no choice but to follow the vague direction of the stag's disappearance through the trees and beyond. Remounting, he spurred the horse on through the archway.

Immediately the wooded surroundings of the dell fell away and all the shapes around him seemed blurred and deformed. The horse reared and snorted. It took all Celenar's efforts to steady his mount.

About him a heavy mist swirled guarding any secrets the land might hold. In all directions it sat, moving towards him so that the cold damp kissed his cheeks, chilling the flesh to the bone.

Grimly he forced his mount round and raced back the way he had come, yet there was only mist, and the sodden grass before him. He dug his heels into the horse's flanks and galloped onwards into the gloom, as he became aware of his original quest, to find the white stag.

As his eyes flicked from left to right, he noticed dark grey shapes floating in the fog, wavering above the ground, swooping around him, regions of darkness where all light was drawn and none reflected save for a greyness which filled their eyes and drew one's gaze.

Now the shapes multiplied and thronged about him as if drawn like iron to a magnet. His heartbeat raced and something knotted deep inside his stomach. Now beads of sweat ran down his face, forcing him to shiver as his way became barricaded by grey shapes. His eyes saw nothing but the cavern-like greyness.

He tucked his head down towards his chest and covered his face with his arms, and placed his hands over his ears, for he heard the cries.

Groans of wailing torment penetrated his head, grief struck calls from the nether holes of the earth cold with piercing cries of woe, striking terror into the flesh, Celenar's flesh, that now felt their fury.

Almost doubled trying to seek relief, his body whipped by fear, twisted and turned in a effort to seek shelter. Then he could stand it no longer, and tore his hands away from his head and unsheathed his sword.

Crying for mercy he swung many wide arcs about him, blows that would have been the bane of anything, man or beast. Yet there was only mist that the blade sliced through, for there were no grey shaped to be seen, only the mist that shrouded this silent land.

He laughed as he realised that he had almost been destroyed by his own fear. He laughed until the ground seemed to shake with the noise and the air danced. Sheathing his sword he rode off to seek the stag.

As he rode he heard voices, bearing in mind his previous experience these were just ignored as another figment of the imagination. Yet they persisted, enticing him to listen. Celenar was drawn by the beauty of the voices, soft and sweet, sharp and clear, they ran over him like the waters of a cold spring, washing away his fears and cleansing his clammy skin.

Not fearing them he listened, "Good master huntsman, why comest thou hither? Why dost thou hunt the white stag? Come follow us and we shall guide thee home."



The hunter shouted, "I hunt him because I must, my good ladies, and that is all I shall say." He rode on and nothing was seen. Yet he knew the maidens of the mist watched him, harmless, yet strangely powerful.

The mist cleared before him and there stood the stag. With a shout Celenar drove his horse forward, the stag leapt away and the pursuit was on.

The stag was fast yet not fast enough. About him the mist abounded save for a narrow path straight before him. It seemed like hours he chased the animal until his horse was well lathered. Spear at the ready he closed waiting for the moment to kill.

Suddenly the stag's legs gave way and the beast floundered below Celenar, at his mercy. The pure white coat was sodden and its flanks heaved as the lungs laboured for air. Bloody foam had gathered at the snout, and distressed it cast a gaze at its pursuer, one that pleaded mercy yet displayed a proudness that warmed Celenar. The pink eyes held his gaze for a moment never wavering, and in that moment Celenar lowered his spear and turned away, for he could not kill such an animal. Then the mist swirled around and closed in, the stag drifted away, and something stirred in the undergrowth. Startled, his horse reared and Celenar was flung from the saddle, hit his head upon landing, and lay in blackness.

Upon waking he found his horse licking his bruised head. Raising himself he found a bundle of cloth beside him. Curious, he unfolded it and gasped in wonder. It was a robe so soft and silky it would be fit not for the highest Queen in all the world. A deep blue, it was lined with fur, white, deep and warm. Throughout the blue ran little gold threads like small streams flowing over rocks. They seemed to catch what little light there was and threw it out again so that the robe seemed warm and gentle to behold.

"There good Celenar, Stag-sparer. Give that to Merithina. Fare ye well."

"Thank you", cried Celenar. "Who are you ? Please show yourselves." Only silence greeted his words and the mist gently melted away, unfolding itself from the land.

He recognised a lone tree on a ridge before him. Over the hill the camp lay. Clutching the robe tightly he mounted his horse and rode home.

There his brother told him it was time for the mid-day meal. And after eating was told his tale, and Merithina recieved the robe, and wept for joy and from that moment Celenar was satisfied.

And now this tale is old yet still the robe is with us. For it was handed down from mother to daughter until the days of the High Kings, when it was given to the High King's wife, and now it is hidden in the land of Nuld for the High Kings are no more, though men say they will come again.

---

### ON THE ROAD TO MORDOR

Solution to the puzzle by Jessica Kemball-Cook

(as appeared in Mallorn 10)

DWARF wore brown, ate Cake, rode the Chestnut horse, and smoked Westmansweed.

ELF wore green, ate Lembas, rode the dappled horse, and smoked Longbottom Leaf.

WIZARD wore white, ate apples, rode the grey horse, and smoked Old Toby.

HOBBIT wore blue, ate bread, rode the black pony, and smoked Southern Star.

MAN wore red, ate cram, rode the bay horse, and smoked Southlinch.

Therefore, the answer to the question is a) the Man was eating cram, and b) the Dwarf was riding the chestnut mare.