

## Vanishing Act

By Bill Wolfe

Miriam huddled in the corner of the dimly-lit Alehouse, terrified to make a sound. Alewife Cadwgan, had run screaming from the room the moment the fighting started. Two men lay bloodied on the floor, and the woman who called herself Marwolaeth, Death, was fighting Gorsedd, the village blacksmith, for her life.

Blows to the throat and head, which had felled Brean and his brother Arawn, bounced harmlessly from Gorsedd's massive and fire-toughened body. Miriam had never seen anyone fight like this She-Demon. She ducked-away from a ham-handed blow from a fist near as big as her head, spun around and kicked his knee, but he didn't fall.

Gorsedd's massive iron tankard, that he'd forged himself, lay on the floor before her, dark fresh ale trickling to the rough wooden floor. Miriam felt her fingers grasping the thick handle before her mind was even aware her hand had moved. The Blacksmith's back was to her.

It was as heavy as a newborn lamb, but Miriam had been lifting lambs all spring. The impact numbed her hands, and seemed to have no effect, at first. Gorsedd just stopped, put his hand to his head and turned toward Miriam. His puzzled look was replaced by a blank stare, as his eyes rolled-back, and his knees buckled. The floor of the Alehouse trembled with the impact of his huge body.

"Thank you, Miriam." The strange woman bent to pick-up her sword, knocked from her hand by Brean before she had a chance to completely draw it from its scabbard. "I don't know what happened. They moved so fast."

"I know what happened," Miriam answered, keeping an eye on the three men still standing, cowering behind the long table. "You came in here demanding to see the scrolls they used for their devilish games. You gave naught a thought that these are men who are unaccustomed to taking anything from a young woman such as yourself; excepting perhaps, her maidenhood. You expected them to treat you like an equal because in your eyes, you are."

"But not in theirs?"

"Course not, silly girl. The very thought borders on sacrilege."

"Speaking of sacrilege," Marwolaeth stepped forward, sword held low and ready. She wouldn't be taken by surprise, again. "You called for me, and how was I received?"

"We called for 'ye not, witch!" It was the taller, and best-dressed of the three men who spoke.

In perfect imitation of what Miriam had told her, she quoted:

“Behold! We call upon the messenger of doom to slash with grim delight this victim you hath chosen.”

The men stood in stunned silence.

“Perhaps I am the messenger of doom. Perhaps I am here to reward you as you demanded, but I must see the scrolls from which you read. I must judge your worthiness for the reward you’ve earned.”

The two men glanced from the solitary woman standing before them, and the tall man who had spoken.

“You, what is your name?” She casually pointed her sword at the man, as if it were a soup ladle.

Though his lip trembled, his voice was clear. “I am Prydwen. The scrolls are mine, found by my father at Carywne Castle, two score years ago.”

“An old Roman fortress, I presume. Place them on the table and then back away.” Her sword didn’t look so much like a soup ladle, now.

Inside the leather tube, were three old parchments. Miriam couldn’t read, but she’d seen the Latin letters in The Bible. These scrawlings didn’t look anything like them.

“Damned Plotlemy,” she whispered so low that Miriam wasn’t sure she even heard it. “He must have made copies when he was in charge of the Library, and given some of them to the Romans.”

“Lady?”

“Best thing Julius Caesar ever did was to burn down the Library of Alexandria. We haven’t seen a bona fide copy of the Necronomicon, since then. This is a Roman copy of a Greek translation of just a few pages. It was probably made during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor, one of the kings of Egypt, a few centuries before Caesar.”

“You, Prydwen. Are these the only copies? You’ve made no others?”

“I . . . I couldn’t, Ma’am. I tried, but the letters. . . the letters aren’t what they seem.”

“These are not normal words. Did your father ever manage to read them?”

“No, Lady. He did not. But his brother, my Uncle, did.”

“There are more of these pages?”

“Aye, three more. My Uncle Heddwyn, gone now to Brú na Bóinne, in Ireland. He has the other three of the six.”

“Time now for your rewards, gentlemen.” With that, she turned toward Miriam, removed the brooch from her cloak, and whispered: “Cover your eyes. Don’t look until I tell you it’s safe.”

Even with her hands clasped over her eyes, Miriam could see a bright flash of light, followed by the sounds of three bodies hitting the floor.

“Not yet,” she heard. “There’s these three to be dealt with.”  
There were two more flashes, in quick succession, and then a third.  
“It’s okay now. You can look.”

Miriam saw all six men on the floor, the last three without a mark on them.

“Are they. . .are they dead?”

“No child. These men are merely fools, playing with something dangerous. They will awaken with no memory of tonight, and without the scrolls, they are simply fools, once again.”

“Miriam. I must go to Ireland. I’ll need a guide.”

“It’s clear you don’t understand this land or its ways, my Lady.”

“My name, Miriam. What is the name of the babe you brought to the Stone?”

“The babe was Eswen. It means Strong One.”

“Eswen. I like that. And Miriam, when we’ve dealt with the Uncle, and recovered the scrolls. There are more Stones in Ireland. And some of those, still work. If you’ve a mind, I can show you more of God’s Creation than you can ever imagine.”

“In your own words, Eswen. . .Lead On!”

The End