



Lord William of Hapton was in love with Lady Sybil of Bearnshaw Tower near Cliviger, but Lady Sybil was in love with the vast open moorland that surrounded her home. She had heard of the witches at Pendle and wanted to be one so that she could change shape and fly over Eagle's Crag with the curlews. With a daily practice that involved the study of old books, long walks over the hills and quiet contemplation, her powers grew.

Lord William decided he must rescue her from herself. Everyone said Old Mother Helston was a witch, and thinking of the proverb, 'set a thief to catch a thief', he set off to pay her a visit.

She was gathering ragwort in her garden when he arrived, and as they walked back to the cottage he noticed how fast she walked even though she limped on her left leg.

At first, when he told her about Lady Sybil, she said,

"Let her be a witch if that's what she wants",

but when she saw the gold coins clatter on the table she changed her tune. Lord William said,

“Please make her want to be my wife.”

Mother Helston looked at him and said quietly,

“Very well. Go out hunting on All Hallow’s Eve. When you find a white doe, throw a silken cord around her neck and lead her to Hapton Tower. Leave her there and go to bed. Leave the rest to me.”

On All Hallow’s Eve, Lord William set out with his hounds. He’d only been out half an hour when he startled her, a light and fleet milk white doe. He set off after her. As he got closer he noticed a hound that was not his, keeping pace with her. He also noticed that the dog had a slight limp in its hind leg.

This strange hound caught her and held the doe’s leg gently until Lord William could throw a silken cord around her neck, and then it was gone. He led the milk white doe gently back to Hapton, where he took her to a room in the tower with silk curtains and locked her in for the night.

He awoke in the early hours of the morning. The curtains around his bed were shaking, the door flew open and the sudden draught made the candlesticks fall and roll across the floor. Remembering the doe, he ran across the hall to the tower room. When he opened the door he saw, not the doe, but Lady Sybil sitting quietly, combing her hair, smiling sideways at him as if to say,

“Do you still want me now?”

They were married within a few months. She left Bearnshaw Hall to join Lord William at Hapton. Some said she also left her old practices behind, but the moors

still drew her, especially on a full moon, when she would leave the confines of Hapton and fly with the owls among the stars.

The couple were well known for their kindness, and Lady Sybil had an uncanny ability to help the sick and bring good fortune to the unfortunate.

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## **Ideas and Exercises**

- ◆ Imagine and write the first dialogue between Lady Sybil and Lord Hapton after he finds her combing her hair in the bedroom.
- ◆ Tell the story from Lady Sybil's point of view.
- ◆ Write a poem focusing on one of Lady Sybil's night time flights over the moors with the owls and the stars.
- ◆ Write a story about someone who shape-shifts into a bird or an animal. If you want an extra prompt, include their capture while they are a bird or animal and what happens to them.
- ◆ Close your eyes and imagine you're a large bird. Maybe an eagle? Or a raven? Feel your wings hinged between your shoulder blades and folded down your back, your clawed feet on the earth. Very slowly begin to open and stretch your wings. Begin to beat them. Feel the uplift in your chest each as they come down, until the beating is so strong you lift up from the ground and you're flying.

What does it feel like?

Try not to force an answer. Focus on imagining the flying and take down notes on how it feels. Can we begin to feel a little of how a bird feels?

Write a paragraph describing this imaginative experience.

- ◆ Take a folktale that you know or find one that appeals to you and tell it out loud. Try and write it in 500 words or less.

*Tips: - Imagine the story visually in your head before beginning, watch it unfold in your imagination. Notice specific details. Focus on imagery that is specific and/or invokes a sense of action.*

*Examples:*

*“...when she saw the gold coins clatter on the table”*

*“She was gathering ragwort”*

*“...the sudden draft made the candlesticks fall and roll across the floor”*

- *In your writing, check that the words you use are as precise as possible. This will make the writing sharper and more direct and the reader will see your story in their mind’s eye more clearly.*

*Examples:*

*“curlews” instead of birds*

*“ragwort “ instead of flowers*