

In *Nimue: Freeding Merlin*, the protagonist Nina/Nimue faces a mortal challenge and so instead of dying she splits herself into a spirit and a demon. She survives, but her demon-self wanders causing destruction.

Nimue realizes that the only way to reestablish wholeness within herself is to find and embrace her demonic Shadow Self. Recovering her wholeness takes the three-fold effort of an invisible white wizard, Merlin, a water spirit, Nectan, and the dark Lord of the Underworld, Gwyn Ap Nudd, skilled at rescuing lost souls. Here is an excerpt from the book:

“I felt the ground shudder and quake as a portal opened between Annwn and Abred – the Underworld and the realm of humankind. The ground above us split open, dirt and rocks fell around us. Even an oak fell, crashing past us as we rode out guided by the light of the full moon and the wisdom of the ancient ones who call the dead back to their collective soul residence of Annwn. This is how I rode back to surface Earth^[RQ1], disguised as a wild rider of the hunt. We galloped beside the hounds, and it was then I realized that we could also shape-shift into screech owls and bats. There seemed to be hundreds of us now as we ran on the luminous path of the full moon.

I noticed that the bald hill of Ynys Witrin was above us, the ancient Tor stretching upwards like a beacon of light. We passed between the white and red springs. Some hounds paused for a moment to lap the healing water, and then on we ran.

Gwyn Ap Nudd held up his hand, and immediately the entire company stopped and fell silent, even the dogs. They waited for his command as he sniffed the air like a stag. His antlers seemed to act as antennae as he listened for the sounds of the lost souls. Perhaps he heard wailing, or then again, maybe he felt the emptiness of the lost ones. He motioned for me to come and ride beside him.

“The world is collapsing because of you. Use your powers.”

“What will happen if we do not find my shadow self?” I asked, involuntarily trembling from both fear and excitement.

“All three worlds will collapse upon themselves, and the soul of Albion will be destroyed,” he said. “We must divide up now. We cannot fail.”

The company understood his words, which must have been inaudible, but they understood the greater meaning. They spread out in concentric rings spreading across the land.

“Do you have a sense of her?” he asked.

I closed my eyes. Even though I was in a state of shock, I willed myself to see the danger I had created with my momentary misuse of magic. Once again, I wondered if Myrddin Emrys was watching us, and if so, I hoped he could help.

Suddenly a shadow flickered in my mind. I had a vision of Tintagel, Myrddin’s face etched into the stones above the entrance to his sea cave. Then the vision shifted, and I saw an ancient woodland with trees covered in ivy. There was a tall waterfall perhaps sixty feet in height with a hole behind it, clearly Nectan’s Kieve. And then I knew our destination would be the Glen of Trethevy where the Trevillet River flowed over three waterfalls. It was where the hermit Nectan resided – Saint Nectan, the eldest son of King Brychan of Ireland. I had heard a tale that Nectan had been beheaded by thieves, and he had placed his head back on, frightening the ruffians. But he had become a saint for his actions. I wondered what the difference was between our actions, or if my situation was judged harshly merely because I was a woman.

Gwyn Ap Nudd shook me from my reverie. "Nectan is no saint but an ancient water god," he noted. "A guardian of sacred wells. He can strike the uninitiated blind."

"Perhaps he has found her," I said, sharing my vision with him.

"We ride to Trethevy!" shouted Gwyn.

Our horses lifted off the ground, flying with bats^[RQ2] through the night. The stars sparkling above gave me some sense of hope that may or may not have been deserved. We landed near the top overlooking *Cuwa Nathan*, Nectan's plunge pool. Looking down, I thought I saw a shadow moving amongst the stones.

"We will net her here," said Gwyn Ap Nudd.

Dark figures spied us and scurried into the waterfall and through the hole in the sheer rock-face. I figured they must be the water deities Gwyn had told me about during our journey. I saw my double enter the watery realm of the pool below the waterfall, where perhaps she thought she would be safe^[RQ3].

"Only you can follow her," Gwyn told me.

He handed me a fine silver net that glimmered. It must have been made by the Elfin people, because it was very light to carry, yet was filled with enchantment of a very ancient sort.

“The silver net will respond to your command. But do not let her see it,” warned Gwyn.

I dismounted from the bay mare and walked with stealth down the primitive steps that led to the base of the waterfall. One, then two stones fell into the pool below. I continued to descend, carefully and as silently as my feet would carry me.

“Nimue?” I called out from beside the pool.

I stared at the water^[RQ4], wondering if she would look back up at me. Her face did come up to the surface of the pool, and she gazed at me with pale skin and blank eyes. As she rose out of the water, I realized she had a dagger and meant to use it. The blade glinted in the moonlight as she stepped up on the bank of the pool^[RQ5]. I was a ghost though, so no matter how hard she swung at me the blade passed through me^[RQ6].

I had no idea what to say to this other self, the shadow that was now divided from me. In her brokenness she was a demon, so it was my job to

heal her and end the fragmentation, the dark magic. Her eyes were so empty that just looking at her gave me a terrible sense of despair.

“Come back to me,” I said to her at last. “We belong together.”

She snarled, showing me her teeth. I growled back at her. We circled each other on the bank like she-wolves.

“You were created so I could live,” I told her. “But we are better together, you and I. You are my body; I am your power. We are one magic.”

She hesitated, before leaping deftly through the waterfall and into the tunnel that led inside the Earth. I walked into Nectan’s pool of water, climbed up the slippery stones beneath the waterfall, and floated back into the dark cave where she crouched.

“You are not complete,” I said.

I held my hand out to her. She looked at me like a wild animal, distrust in her eyes.

“I know you are frightened,” I told her. “But you can trust me.”

She hesitated just long enough for me to throw the net over her. As the silver strands came down over my double, she shrieked like an injured fox.

Though I had netted her, I did not know how to bring her back to myself. I thought that perhaps I should try a dissolution spell, but I was afraid that I would erase myself in the process. We gazed at each other transfixed.

Gwyn Ap Nudd appeared at the entrance of the cave, then sat on the edge of it like an owl watching us curiously. His wild eyes locked on my soulless double. He crawled toward us and she growled at him. He made a purring sound, which seemed to calm her. Gwyn did not take his eyes off her as he inched in closer, now chirping. One of the bats entered the cave and flew around her, which made my double struggle inside the net.

Eventually he touched her shoulder. She squirmed, but he was gentle, petting her and speaking to her as if she were a young mare. Then she began to make chirping sounds and he held his hand out to her. She placed her head against his chest and then he motioned for me to come forward. There we were staring at each other, face-to-face. Though mirror images of each other, one of us was a white spirit and the other, black magic.

“It is wholeness that we seek,” said Gwyn. “Touch her.”

Still shaking, I offered my hands to her. She allowed me to place one ghostly hand on her, and then the next, until finally I held her in an embrace.

“We must unite again,” I told her.

“*Siochaint!*” chanted Gwyn, using the ancient word for peace. He then continued chanting in the tongue that only those of the wild hunt know.

Then he surprised me by throwing yet another net over us. I did not struggle because I trusted Gwyn Ap Nudd, the dark alchemist. Dark Nimue noticed that I was not frightened, and so she remained calm in my embrace. I sent life-force from my body into her cold figure. She blinked, and then as we moved even closer to one another, the silver net tightened. We were in a close embrace now, yet still Gwyn pulled. It felt as though our bodies would crush each other, and I almost yelled for Gwyn to stop. Then suddenly she flowed inside of me; or was it that my spirit-self flowed back into my body that had been her_[RQ7]? I took a deep breath, feeling the familiar aches and pains of a physical form.

“Is she gone?” I asked Gwyn Ap Nudd.

“The darkness is always part of us, as is the light,” explained Gwyn...

