

The Entwives' Garden

"You never see any, hm, any Ents round there, do you?" he asked. "Well, not Ents, Entwives I should really say."

'Entwives?' said Pippin. 'Are they like you at all?'

'Yes, hm, well no: I do not really know now,' said Treebeard thoughtfully. 'But they would like your country, so I just wondered.'"

—The Two Towers, book 3, chapter 4

"Alright," said Sam, laughing with the rest. 'But what about these tree-men, these giants, as you might call them? They do say that one bigger than a tree was seen up away beyond the North Moors not long back.'"

—The Fellowship of the Ring, book 1, chapter 2

"Oy, Pippin!" called Meriadoc Brandybuck, as he jogged to catch up with the hunched-over figure sneaking toward the Hedge. "Where do you think you're going?"

Peregrine Took turned, his displeasure evident. "Well!" he exclaimed, "It seems I can't go anywhere without you tagging along!"

"That you can't, Pip, that you can't. Not when you're visiting Brandy Hall as my guest, at least. What would the other hobbits say about me if I let you go wandering out the door at this unspeakable hour without so much as a nip of breakfast?" He wagged his finger at Peregrin. "And I'm *certainly* not letting you run off when you've never gotten around to telling me why you're suddenly interested in dropping by, after you went and disappeared for more than a month without saying a word."

Pippin rolled his eyes, and walked over to his friend. "You ought to keep your voice down, Merry. The sun's not yet up, and decent folk are trying to sleep."

"And if decent folk are abed, what's that make you, then?"

"The same thing it makes you, I'll wager. Now let me be, Merry! I'm out for an early morning stroll is all, and I'd just as soon walk alone."

"A stroll my eye. You're looking for the Gate!"

Pippin scowled. "Well, so what if I am?"

"Pippin, it's dangerous in the Old Forest! If you're planning on going, at least let me come with you. Besides, the Gate's locked." He produced a large iron key from his pocket, holding it up with a grin. "It wouldn't do to have folks running off into those woods alone and half-cocked, would it now?"

Pippin's face fell, and he muttered something unintelligible under his breath. Finally, he said, "Well, alright then. I suppose it wouldn't be quite the same going off on a wild goose chase without you."

"Of course it wouldn't, Pip. Now, come with me. You're at the wrong edge of the Hedge, anyway." Merry smiled serenely as Pippin's scowl deepened, and he fished a loaf of bread from the small pack he'd brought with him. "So, a bit of breakfast on the go?"

After they had walked together for several minutes in uncomfortable silence, Merry finally burst. "Confound it, Pippin! Are you going to tell me what we're looking for, or aren't you? A fine adventure this'll be if I spend it all in the dark."

A broad smile crept across Pippin's face as he said, his voice dripping with false innocence, "Why Merry, I thought you'd never ask!"

As Merry glowered, Pippin's face grew a bit more serious. "Ever since we came back from the quest," he began, "I've been thinking about what Treebeard said to us. You know, about the Entwives?" Merry nodded, and Pippin continued. "Well, for a long time my head was full of other things, what with the dreadful shape the Shire was in when we came back. But lately his words had pushed their way back up to the front of my mind, and I started thinking. 'Now Peregrine,' I said to myself, 'you made a promise, and it's high time you saw to it.' And so I went to the North Downs, and to Bindale, and everywhere else I could think to look, chasing after bits of rumor and local legends. And everywhere I went, I found nothing. Nothing! But then I thought, 'Well, what about the Old Forest, then?'"

Here Merry, who had been listening with growing interest, interrupted. "Now Pip, I've been in those woods more than once, and strange or not, the trees aren't at all like old Treebeard was. In fact, they remind me more of the Huorns, only quieter. Less awake, I would say." As he spoke, a chill ran down his spine, the memory of grasping branches and suffocating trunks coming back to him. "Most of them, anyway."

"Yes, Merry, but who *else* lives in the Old Forest? Someone who seems to know all there is to tell about this part of the world, and who just might know something about the Entwives, if any ever came near these parts?"

"Tom Bombadil," whispered Merry. "Of course." Then, turning to his friend with a look of wonder, he

exclaimed, "Peregrin Took, I do believe you've had a good idea!"

"Well, I was about due, I dare say." Pippin shrugged. "In any case, we seem to have reached the Gate, unless that hole in the Hedge is just for show."

With a muted clang, the gates closed again behind the hobbits. Both turned and looked at the trees, which stood unmoving in the unnaturally still air. There was no sound of bird or wind, and even their own breathing seemed piercing and intrusive.

"Well, Pip," whispered Merry as quietly as he could (though to his ears his voice was still uncomfortably loud), "Perhaps you'd best tell me how you plan on us finding Old Tom before we head in. For my part, I'd just as soon not be stuck hoping he rescues us again. He may have come and saved us once before, but I think it was more by chance than by design."

Pippin looked toward the trees, and shuddered at the memory of Old Man Willow. "Actually, I was rather hoping he'd just... show up. You know, maybe he'd be happy to see us again," he finished lamely.

"Well, he's not here yet. Have you got another idea?"

They both stood in silence for a moment, pondering. Then Pippin suddenly snapped his fingers. "I've got it!" he cried.

Merry jumped, and whispered hotly, "Keep your voice down, will you? Now what is that you've got?"

"The song Tom taught us, Merry, the song!" Pippin explained in an excited whisper. "We'll just sing the song he taught us on the day we left his home, and he'll come to us!"

Merry frowned. "I don't know, Pip. I seem to remember that song being for if we were in danger. Besides, I don't remember all the words anymore. It's been a while, after all."

"Well, I think it started with 'Hey Tom Bombadillo, ho Tom...' no, 'Ho Bombadil... Ho Tom... hmm...'" Pippin trailed off in thought.

Then, as they stood there pondering, a voice came drifting toward them from the depths of the forest. Both hobbits pricked up their ears, hoping it was Tom's, but instead they heard a voice they did not recognize. There were no words, only a low hum which drifted from note to note like a trickle of rain water splashing down a hill. The voice could almost have been another hobbit's, but the singer hummed his tune with a richness and strength that neither Merry nor Pippin had ever heard within the Shire.

The voice seemed to meander along, coming ever closer to where the two stood. Both waited, entranced, until at length it emerged, along with its owner, out of the trees before them.

"Farmer Maggot!" exclaimed Merry, as the coverall-clad hobbit stepped into sight. "If you aren't a most unexpected and blessed sight!" Pippin said nothing, and so great was his surprise that he scarce remembered to breathe, and would have gone quite blue in the face had not Maggot broken the tension then by opening his own mouth.

"Well now, what have we here? Peregrine Took and Meriadoc Brandybuck, by the looks of it. And where might you two be off to? It's not often I see another hobbit on this side of the Hedge."

Pippin heaved a quick breath in while Merry explained their errand. "...And he's the last person we could think to ask if we're to keep our promise. But now that we're in, we've no idea how to find Tom. Have you by any chance seen him while you were in... there?" He gestured vaguely toward the trees.

Maggot let out a hearty laugh, and whatever vestiges of the wood's oppressive silence remained were swept away. "Seen him? I'm just coming back from a visit with him! Here now, if you like, I'll take you back to his house. He may have left by now, but Goldberry at least should still be about."

The three walked through the woods, with Farmer Maggot in the lead. He had begun his song again, and it seemed to Merry and Pippin that the trees parted ways for him as he stepped, for the path he led them down was so straight and clear that even a blind man could have walked it safely. At first the two remained quiet, but soon they began speaking softly once more.

"Merry, do you suppose Old Tom will remember us?"

"I'll wager he will, Pip. He seems to know quite a lot about quite a lot, if you understand me. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if he already knew what we were here for."

"Well, that would make the asking easier. You know, the only other time we've seen Tom and Goldberry was in the autumn. Do you suppose they wear clothing to match the seasons?"

"You mean, do I think they dress for the weather?"

"Well, yes, but I was also thinking that perhaps they change their colors. You know, maybe they wear less yellow and more green in summer?"

The conversation ran on like this for some time, both hobbits feeling quite at ease with Farmer Maggot to guide them. In fact, it seemed like no time at all (though the sun had already past its peak) before they heard a light, airy voice come lilting past their ears:

*Summertime is still in prime, the sun is brightly shining,
Best the time for telling tales, best the time for rhyming!*

*Merry be the coming of a favored friend or guest,
And only made the merrier, because the time is best!*

And with that, the hobbits suddenly found themselves standing once more before the house of Tom Bombadil.

If Bombadil's home was familiar to both Merry and Pippin, it was at once far different than either of them remembered. And if it were possible, every change seemed to be for the better. When they had come before in the autumn, the house had been a thing of reds and yellows and oranges, and its beauty was beyond question. But now, with Midyear's Day but a week away, his home seemed to burst with color. Flowers of every shape and hue surrounded it, and the walls reflected each shade cast upon them in yet greater measure.

But most stunning of all was the Lady Goldberry, who waited before the open door. Fair was she in the memories of the two, yet she stood before them now in splendor redoubled, a creature of summer revealed at the height of her majesty. Yellow tresses framed her ageless face, pale and lovely beyond mortal measure. She wore a dress of white, and set against the vibrancy of color which abounded her on every side she seemed as a swan among darting songbirds, noblest and most beautiful to behold. A belt of gold about her slender waist glinted in the sunlight, and a silver necklet shimmered as she moved. And yet, the greatest and most radiant light came from her eyes, and it seemed that they did not merely reflect the sun, but shown of their own accord, and would have been no less brilliant were she standing in total darkness.

Farmer Maggot bowed gracefully, and Merry and Pippin followed suit after a few moments, awkwardly lowering their bodies without once dropping their eyes from the Lady.

"Back so soon, my honored friend? But we had hardly parted! And with you two young hobbits who have been here once before? Glad shall such a meeting be, once Tom is returned."

Her voice seemed to dance upon the air, so ethereal that the hobbits did not so much hear it as *feel* it, penetrating into their awareness without a sound. Farmer Maggot answered, his words falling heavy and solid upon the ears, "A glad meeting it would be indeed, Milady, but I must be off again. My farm needs tending, and the missus will worry if I'm not back by tonight. It'll already be a near thing, after stopping to help these two."

She nodded. "Farewell again then, until your next returning." Then, turning her eyes to Merry and Pippin, she said, "Tom knew you would be here, but he had another errand. He shall be returning soon. Come! Enter and be welcome."

Turning, Merry and Pippin thanked Farmer Maggot profusely, and bade him farewell. Maggot tipped his hat. "When you finish here, you both are welcome to visit my home. I would like to hear how this search of yours concludes." With that, he turned about and set off to the west, humming his song once more.

They watched him go, then turned back to Goldberry, who was waiting patiently in the doorway. Entering Tom's house, they found it as bright within as it was outside, and every room seemed filled to bursting with living energy. Goldberry showed them a pair of chairs to rest in, though she stayed standing.

"Tom will soon return, dear friends, but I must now be going. The Withywindle is my home, and every day I go there until the summer passes, and the frost begins to bite."

"You're leaving?" cried Pippin in dismay. "But we've only just arrived! Do stay; we may have come to speak to Tom, but it wouldn't be right not to see you save for a hullo now that we're here."

Goldberry laughed, and it was the sound of wind rustling its way between two trees. "A fate that would be sad indeed, but fear not such a thing! I'll return before sunset, and Tom and I together shall entertain our guests. But now I must be off to bathe." And with a curtsy and a kindly smile, she floated weightlessly out the door, as though carried upon a breeze.

It was not long at all, in fact only a matter of minutes, before the hobbits heard a well-remembered voice coming toward the house:

*Hey, come derry-dol, merry-dol, my darling!
Tom must be a-flying home, fast as the flitting starling!
Guests are waiting in the house, with no one there to host,
Fear not, my little friends, for Bombadil is close!*

The rhyme then fell into what sounded like nonsense to the two, and it was not long before the Master himself burst through the door, both of the hobbits jumping up to greet him.

"Welcome back, my merry guests!" cried Tom, exuding such vitality that Merry and Pippin felt overwhelmed standing before him. He, at least, had not changed a bit; from his bright blue coat to his ruby-red cheeks, and down to his dandelion boots, Tom was precisely as he had been when they last visited. "And pardon that I'm late. Old Tom had a task to do, that called for him at once." Then, moving seamlessly back into song, Tom told them,

*Summer is the time when the fair lady goes to water,
For though she is with Bombadil, she's still the river's daughter.
Every day till autumn she must go back to her home,
And there she finds renewal in the splashing and the foam.
Fairest of the fair, and yet her loveliness is greater
Than the comeliest of elf-maidens, when steps she from the water.*

*Old Man Willow, still he sits beside the Withywindle,
And he does not stand for beauty or for laughter in the dingle.
He envies and despises liveliness within those waters,*

And he has got no love for the lovely river-daughter.

"He blocked the river's path down into the dingle, so Old Tom had to go to him, and set him straight again. I sang his roots into his trunk, and his black heart almost choked. The river's now on path once more, and he's again been bested. But come! You've traveled far today, and now it's time for rest; I'll show you to a bath, and save my tales and songs for later."

The hobbits' journey had not really been all that far, nor for that matter terribly arduous, although to some of the less traveled Shire-folk it might have seemed so. But Merry and Pippin were not about to turn up their noses at a bath, especially not with the prospect of Tom's tales to follow it. Tom showed them to a pair of washtubs filled with cool water, and both of them gratefully immersed themselves as Bombadil danced off to the kitchen, singing songs full of *derry-dols* and *ring-a-ding dillos*.

Pippen sighed as he relaxed in the water, sinking ever deeper into the tub. "You know Merry, I think—no, I *know* I like being back here. I'd forgotten just how pleasant Tom's house can be. In fact, it rather reminds me of Rivendell in that way."

Merry did not answer right away. When he did, he said, "No Pip, I don't think it's like Rivendell at all. Rivendell's a place where you go to forget what gave you pain, and to leave your troubles behind. Here, it's more like you come to remember what gave you pleasure."

Without opening his eyes, Pippen nodded. "Yes, I can see what you mean. Rivendell's a place for emptying yourself; this is a place to fill yourself up."

By the time Merry and Pippin had finished bathing, the sun was already sinking low on the horizon. When they came back into the main room, they found the table laden with white bread and butter, honeycomb and cream, and all other manner of delicious things. As they stood, suddenly acutely aware that neither of them had eaten since before sunrise, Tom capered in from the kitchen, and Goldberry floated gracefully along behind him. Her beauty, as the hobbits beheld her fresh come from her home in the river, was something so surpassingly wonderful that neither of them were able to describe it to their satisfaction afterwards. Pippin would try, saying, "She had the beauty of an elf-queen, but she was not at all aloof or unreachable. It was like she was standing right there in front of you. But of course, she *was* standing right there in front of me." Merry would simply say, "She was beautiful beyond words, and I'll not insult the memory by trying to make some stick."

In the twinkling of an eye, though, the moment was past, and the hobbits soon found themselves sitting at the table, raucously laughing as Tom told tale after tale of his outlandish adventures, and greedily devouring more than enough to compensate for any meals they may have missed. Tom's cupboards seemed to never empty, though Merry and Pippin both struggled to outdo one another in their eating.

Before too long (by hobbitish meal-standards, at least), all had retired to four large, comfortable chairs,

the hobbits heaving contented sighs as they patted their bulging bellies. Indeed, so satisfied were the two that they might have forgotten why they came altogether, had Tom not reminded them.

"So what was it that brought you here, to visit the Old Forest? I've heard of one young Took who's lately taken to far wandering, and everywhere he goes, they say he's asking after giants. Is that why you have come to Tom, to hear a tale of ogres? For Tom has seen his share of them, and they make for good stories."

Well, yes and no," began Pippin, still feeling marvelously at ease. "You see, I've been going about asking for stories of giants, to be sure, but what I'm really looking for are Entwives." A shadow seemed to fall across the room, but Pippin did not notice. "I met a very old Ent named Treebeard back on the quest, and I promised him I'd look for them in the Shire, as he said it seemed a place they would like, and, well, you seem to be the sort who would know if any Entwives live in this part of the world." Pippin paused expectantly, but when Bombadil did not speak, he continued, "So, do you by any chance know of any Entwives hereabouts? I'm sure Treebeard would love to hear anything you know about them."

The Lady Goldberry gave a polite smile, and said, "Such a tale is long, and not the best for telling when the sun has already set. Let's have some other story tonight, before we're off to bed."

She seemed about to suggest a tale, but Tom stopped her, saying, "No, my dearest Goldberry, the story wants for telling. Few now know its every verse, perhaps you and I only. Friends, I'll sing a lay for you, though Old Tom did not write it. *The Entwives' Garden* it was called, and long it has now been since I last did tell the tale in full, but still I can rememb'r it." He sat silent for a moment, an uncharacteristically pensive look upon his face, and then began a slow, solemn chant, unlike anything the hobbits had ever heard him sing:

*A tithe of Entwives crossed the Anduin
In years long past,
From Dargolad they fled.
For war engulfed the Entwives' home,
Some few escaped,
The most left burnt and dead.
They fled beyond the Evil's reach,
And sought the Ents,
But knew they not
What way the land of Tree-herds lay;
And so they sought
Every which way
The path which into Fangorn led.*

*A score of years the Entwives searched in vain
Until, at last,
They did despair and rue.*

*"The Ents are lost!" They wept and wailed.
"And we unhomed,
What now are we to do?"
A council held the Entwives then,
And long they spoke
In Entish tongue.
No mortal song could tell their pain,
For without hope
And without home
They anguished, until spoke Greenhue.*

*"The Ents are gone, so speak we not of them.
Great is the loss,
But we are yet alive!
Behold the land beneath our roots:
Is it not good?
For here, can we not thrive?
The land is filled with rolling hills
And grassy downs
And running streams.
Though forests lie on every side
This land is pure
And clean its air,
This place is beautiful and alive!*

*If we did chose to cultivate this land
And govern it
With wisdom and with love,
A stunning garden could we grow
And there could live;
The glistening stars above
Would stop their circling, standing still
Amazed to see
The sight below,
So great our garden's beauty'd be!
The west'ring sun
Would rise back up
For one more chance to gaze on us!"*

*Then Earthfoot raised her voice, and to them said,
"Hark unto me,
O sisters in distress!
I do not think the Ents are gone,*

*But still I hold
That Greenhue's plan is best!
This land, in truth, is ripe for growth;
With little work
It soon could shine!
And would a lovely garden known
Throughout the world
And told in song
Not bring the Ents to us at last?"*

*The Entwives of a single mind agreed,
And settled in,
A new life for to build.
The land soon burst with flowers rare,
And amber grass
In fields newly tilled.
Their husbands ne'er returned to them,
But time went by,
And as it did
The Entwives did forget the Ents,
And loved the land
With all their hearts,
And felt no yearning unfulfilled.*

*Their garden burst with berry-bushes tall,
With herbs and roots,
With orchard-rows,
And every crop besides.
Sweet-smelling apple trees there were
With blossoms white
To line the riversides.
Their garden was the fairest yet,
Eclipsing that
Which once they'd made.
"So fair is it that care is lost
And joy is found
With every step,"
The Entwives said with pride.*

*But though the land was fairest in the world,
And was beloved
By all who came and saw,
The Evil One who does not sleep*

*Heard word of it,
And sought to bring its fall.
And so it came to pass one year
While Entwives went
About their ways,
The Dark One's armies marched to war,
And rank on rank
Bent to destroy
The land, and those who walked it tall.*

*The Entwives were caught blind and unawares,
And quickly fell
Before the Dark One's might.
They were no match for Evil's steel,
And one by one
Were slain in desperate fight.
If only they had been forewarned,
And gathered aid
Against the flood!
But such was not the fate which came,
And every one
Was burnt and ruined
On that disastrous night.*

*O Brakenroot! O Dewstep and Leafeye!
Struck down in flame
To smolder through the night.
O Sappendrop and Willowbud!
Dismembered by
Cruel axes in the fight.
O Greenhue, overwhelmed at last,
With ten score orcs
Slain by her hand.
O Earthroot, last of all, alone,
Upon the hill,
One final stand,
Then fell in hated fire bright.*

*All that was left within the mortal world
Of their being:
The garden they had made.
The Dark One would have then destroyed
This final trace,*

*And their long work betrayed.
No sign would there be to be found
Of that which once
Had been so fair.
But fortune smiled upon the land:
The Elven Lords
To battle came,
And Evil fled in disarray.*

*It pleased then Eru, mighty Lord on high,
To find new folk
The garden for to mend.
And came the race of tunnel-folk
Out of the east,
And settled in that land.
And grace was seated in that folk
Who dwelled thus in
The Entwives' home.
And so the Entwives' beauty lives
Still, to this day,
Within the Shire
The land the hobbits yet do tend.*

*The Entwives walk no more the earth;
They are long past.
But still their land does thrive and grow;
Their garden lives.
The entwives died,
No more they roam.
The Entwives live
Their voices known
In every hobbit's stride.*

For a long while after he finished, there was silence in the house of Tom Bombadil. No words were needed. Merry sat still as stone, giving no sign of his thoughts. Tears ran down Pippin's cheeks, but neither would he break the stillness which had descended.

Eventually, Goldberry stood. "Let me take you to your beds for the night," she said. "Tomorrow, Tom will show you back to the Gate."

"What happened to them is not recorded... But I think in fact that the Entwives had disappeared for good..."

—The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, #144