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HARE AT PENNANT

By Ruth Bidgood

According to the author, “the ancient life-symbol of the Hare became debased over the centuries. One of its later manifestations, the Trickster, is in this poem identified with the hare saved by Saint Melangell from the hounds of Prince Brochwel in an ancient Latin manuscript copied in the 17th century.”

I Hare have been the clever one,
up to my tricks, always a winner,
fooling man and beast – but not now,
not you, pretty lady, holy one.
You untwist my deviousness.
I huddle at your feet
in your garments’ folds,

and am simple hare, fool hare, hunted hare.
 I have doubled and doubled,
 am spent, blown, not a trick left
 to baffle pursuers.
 A leap of despair
 has brought me to you.

Cudd fi, Melangell,
 Monacella, hide me!

“Seize him!” I cried to my hounds
 (the best, I had thought, in all
 my pryncedom of Powys).
 But each time I chivvied them on,
 the fools came squealing and squelking back.
 So I rode into tanglewood,
 my huntsmen after me,
 the wretched scruff-hounds skulking off;
 and she was there in the glade,
 still as an image, still
 as her carved Christ on his cross.
 I pictured her alone with me;
 but this was no girl from the huts
 to be gripped and thrown aside
 for a paltry coin, no absent warrior’s
 hungry wife. Cool as moonlight
 this maiden waited on wet grass,
 looking up at me with no fear, no blame,
 and by her small bare feet,
 panting and peeping, crouched the hare.
 I saw how it would be; she’d get her land
 from me, the prayer-girl, to make
 a sanctuary here – and Powys
 would go short of hare-meat
 and the dark strong broth! I
 would make my peace with the cringing dogs,

hunt forests to the north for other prey,
 yet leave a thought behind me here
 for her to shelter.

Cudd fi, Melangell,
 Monacella, hide me!

Once I was Great Hare
 and the Moon’s companion,
 and Easter’s acolyte bearing the light.
 Victim, I ran charred through heath-fire,
 Lay bloodied in last corn.
 I was warped to hold the soul of a witch:
 dwindled to trickster and buffoon.
 Men dodge my real, unchancy name,
 calling me cat-shanks, cabbager,
 dew-fellow, cat-of-the-furze,
 maze-maker, leaper-to-hill.
 False, broken is my boast of winning;
 I crouch in dread of the fangs.
 All I have been, am, she shelters.
 “Not I”, she says, “It is my Lord”. But she
 is what I know, soft-robed saint,
 gentle one, who heard my piping cry,

Cudd fi, cudd fi, Melangell
 Monacella, hide me!

“Hare at Pennant” reprinted courtesy of the author from *The Fluent Moment*, 1996, Seren Publishers, Wales.
 This and more of Ruth Bidgood’s poetry can be read online at *Poetry* p f at: www.poetrypf.co.uk/ruthbidgoodpoems.html