

C[⌘]ILLE DORCHA

MABON / ALBAN ELFED: THE FULL MEASURE



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Part 1 - The Turning

THE SEASON OF BEGINNING AGAIN



There was always something about September that felt like a beginning.

As a child, of course, there was an obvious reason for that. September meant going back to school. The long summer holiday was over and another school year waited ahead, carrying with it all the familiar rituals of starting again. A different classroom perhaps, a new teacher, new exercise books waiting for their first marks, and the strange mixture of familiarity and possibility that came from returning to somewhere I knew while knowing that something had changed.

Even now I can remember the particular feeling of those first weeks. The year ahead seemed enormous. Pages were empty. Lessons had not yet been taught. Whatever projects, friendships, discoveries, successes and disappointments might eventually fill the months ahead were still unknown. There was something exciting in that. Everything had begun, but almost nothing had happened yet.

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It is curious that I should remember September in this way, because beyond the classroom the year was telling a very different story.

Summer was ending. The evenings were beginning to draw in, the warmth could no longer be taken for granted and the first signs of autumn were appearing around us. The expansive months of the year were giving way to something quieter. Soon leaves would begin to fall and the hours of darkness would overtake those of daylight. The natural world seemed to be approaching an ending at precisely the moment when my own small world was beginning again.

Perhaps that contradiction is one of the reasons this time of year has remained so important to me.

There was another September ritual that I loved, although as a child I doubt I could have explained why.

Harvest Festival.

At some point we would be asked to bring something into school to contribute to the harvest collection. It might be a tin of food, a packet or some other provision that could be passed on to people who needed it. What any one of us brought was usually unremarkable. A tin placed on a table is, after all, only a tin.

But I remember the transformation that happened when everybody brought theirs.

The individual offerings accumulated until there were provisions heaped together: tins and packets, boxes and jars, all brought from different homes and placed into a common store. What had seemed insignificant in one pair of hands became abundance when gathered with the gifts of others.

I loved seeing it.

At the time I understood the simple explanation. We were collecting food for charity. People who had enough were giving something to people who did not, and that was a good thing to do. Yet looking back, I think there was something else in it that affected me more deeply.

We did not know the people who would receive what we had brought.

There was no exchange. Nobody was going to knock on my door afterwards and thank me for the tin that had come from our cupboard. I would never know who ate it, where they lived or what circumstances had brought them to need it. Once I placed my contribution among all the others, it ceased in any meaningful sense to be mine.

And somehow that made the giving more beautiful rather than less.

The great collection showed what could happen when a community decided that having enough carried with it the possibility of sharing. No single child had created the abundance before us. No family had. Each had simply brought what they could, and together we had made something none of us could have made alone.

There was a lesson in that which I understood long before I had words for it.

Abundance is not only measured by what we possess.

Sometimes its fullest expression is found in what we are able to give.

Many years later, September still carries that feeling of beginning for me. The school calendar undoubtedly left its mark. After so many childhood Septembers, and then so many more spent working within education, perhaps it would be stranger if the month did not still contain some echo of a new year beginning.

Yet I sometimes wonder whether the school year created that feeling at all.

Perhaps it merely gave a familiar shape to something I would have felt anyway.

For this is also the point in the year when I notice a change in my creativity. As summer begins to loosen its hold and the evenings gradually close around us, something within me seems to open. Ideas begin arriving more readily. I want to write. I want to make. I find myself drawn towards those acts of imagination and creation that will occupy me through Samhain and into the deep winter around Yule.

On the surface, this seems entirely backwards.

We are accustomed to placing beginnings in spring. That is when seeds germinate, buds open and the visible world erupts into new life. Autumn belongs to the other end of the story. Fruit ripens. Crops are gathered. Leaves fall. The year's great outward growth draws towards its conclusion.

Yet not every beginning announces itself by breaking into the light. Some things begin in darkness.

An idea may exist long before we find the words with which to express it. A story may gather itself quietly from memories and experiences that seemed unrelated when they occurred. Something glimpsed months ago joins something heard years before; a scent unlocks a forgotten place; a half-formed thought suddenly finds another and becomes something larger. We rarely know the precise moment when a creation begins because much of its beginning

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happens beyond our sight.

Perhaps this is why I have never found the growing darkness of autumn something to regret.

At Alban Elfed, the autumn equinox, light and darkness meet in balance. From here the nights become longer than the days and we begin our journey into the dark half of the year. It is tempting to describe that movement using the old opposition of light and darkness: light as warmth, knowledge, safety and life; darkness as their absence.

But that has never felt complete to me.

Darkness has gifts of its own.

It gives us sleep and dreams. It draws us towards hearths, lamps and one another. It changes the familiar world and asks us to experience it differently. Things that escaped our attention in daylight become noticeable when sight no longer dominates everything else. A flame that was almost invisible beneath the midday sun becomes compelling when night gathers around it. Stars that were above us all day finally become visible.

Darkness does not create the stars.

It allows us to see them.

There is something of that in creativity too. The shortening days draw me inward, not in retreat from the world but into another way of encountering it. The outward experiences of the year begin to settle. Memories, ideas and impressions gathered almost without noticing begin to find one another. The world outside becomes quieter and my inner world seems to grow larger.

Perhaps that is part of why I called this place Dark Forest.

A forest in darkness is not empty. Quite the opposite. It is filled with life, paths, trees, clearings and possibilities that continue beyond the reach of our sight. We cannot know everything that waits beyond the next turn. That uncertainty can contain fear, certainly, but it also contains mystery. If every path were illuminated from beginning to end, there would be nothing left to discover.

The darkness leaves room for what might be.

This is the gift I increasingly recognise at Alban Elfed. I do not stand at the equinox mourning the loss of summer light or imagining the months ahead as something to be endured until the sun returns. I welcome the darkness because I know something of what it brings me.

It is a different season of growth.

The fields have produced their harvest and the work of the light

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months has become visible. We can gather it, take stock of it and recognise what has been given. Like those Harvest Festival tables of my childhood, things that arrived separately can now be seen together. Experiences, relationships, successes, mistakes, discoveries, pleasures and disappointments all belong somewhere within the measure of the year we have lived.

Not everything gathered will be kept.

Some things can be shared. Some can be transformed. Some can be released. And somewhere among everything the year has placed into our hands may be something whose purpose we cannot yet see.

That no longer troubles me as it once might have.

The darkening path does not require me to know where it ends.

Only to enter it.



Part 2 - The Grove

BENEATH THE STILL WATER



Before entering the grove, I begin as I always do, with cleansing.

There is a coolness to the evening now that was absent only a few weeks before. The warmth of summer has not disappeared completely, but it no longer lingers once the sun begins to fall. Water runs warm across my skin and, afterwards, clean clothes carry a comfort that feels different at this point in the year. The light beyond the window is already beginning to fade.

I sit quietly and allow my breathing to slow.

The sounds around me gradually become less distinct. Thoughts that seemed important only moments before begin to loosen, giving way to the steady rhythm of breath until the room itself seems to recede.

The grove emerges around me.

Autumn has begun to touch it.

The canopy remains thick with leaves, but the unbroken green of summer has gone. Yellow and bronze appear amongst the branches and the ground beneath them is scattered with the first fallen leaves. The air smells richer now: damp earth, bark and vegetation beginning its slow

return to the soil.

Above the trees, the evening sky is still bright.

Beneath them, shadows have already gathered.

I walk between the two.

Light falls through openings in the canopy, illuminating patches of bracken and moss before giving way again to shade. Neither feels out of place. The grove holds them both without preference, allowing the last warmth of the day and the coolness gathering beneath the trees to exist together.

Ahead, the altar waits.

Glass bottles, pipettes, bowls and tools lie ready upon the stone. Their arrangement is familiar now, each placed carefully for the work that will follow. The lowering sun catches the glass and throws small fragments of amber light across the surface.

I approach, but do not yet touch them.

Something moves at the edge of my vision.

Beyond the altar lies the pool.

I have stood beside it before, but this evening its surface seems unusually dark. Trees crowd around its banks and their reflections stretch across the water until it is difficult to tell where the forest ends and its reflection begins.

The sky remains visible upon the surface.

Nothing beneath it can be seen.

Then the reflection breaks.

A salmon rises silently from the darkness and rests just beneath the surface. For a moment its silver body catches the remaining light.

Then it turns downwards.

Within seconds it is gone.

I leave the altar and walk towards the water.

At the edge of the pool I wait, watching for another flash of silver beneath the surface.

None comes.

The water offers only my own reflection and the dark shapes of the trees behind me.

Still, I know to follow.

I step into the pool.

The water rises cold around me. Another step takes me deeper and then the ground falls away completely. I allow myself to sink until the surface closes overhead and the sounds of the grove become distant.

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There is no struggle for breath.
Below me, silver flashes.
The salmon is waiting.
It turns once more and descends.
I follow.

Light remains above us for a while, wavering upon the surface and reaching down through the water in long, pale shafts. With every movement deeper it becomes weaker, until the world around me is reduced to shades of blue and black, broken only by the occasional silver turn of the salmon ahead.

We descend farther than the pool should allow.

I feel no need to question it. The water is cold against my skin but there is no struggle for breath, no pressure urging me back towards the surface. I simply follow the salmon as it moves steadily downwards, its body sometimes disappearing completely before another turn catches some impossible remnant of light and reveals it again.

Soon I can no longer see the surface above me.
There is only the dark water and the salmon.



I continue deeper until even my sense of direction begins to loosen. Down has meant following the silver shape ahead, and I have followed it for so long that I no longer know where the surface from which I came might lie.

Then something changes.

At first I cannot identify what it is. The movement of my body feels the same and the salmon remains ahead of me, yet the water gradually begins to lighten.

I am rising.

I do not remember turning.

Perhaps the salmon turned and I turned with it. Perhaps the water itself has curved around some impossible depth. There is no moment at which descent became ascent, only the growing certainty that somewhere above me there is once again a surface.

A muted green light begins to penetrate the water. The salmon becomes clearer and I see it swimming upwards ahead of me. It reaches the surface first, breaks through and disappears.

A moment later, I follow.

I emerge into stillness.

This is not the pool I entered.

The water around me is darker and wider, enclosed on every side by trees so ancient that their branches meet high above it. Moss hangs heavily from trunks and exposed roots disappear into the black water along the bank. There is no evening sky visible here, only a soft green-grey light filtering through layers of leaves. It feels neither like day nor night.

For a few moments I remain in the water, listening.

Music drifts between the trees.

A harp.

The tune is quiet and intricate, played upon a small harp held by a young man sitting at the edge of the pool. I do not recognise the melody, yet something about its movement feels strangely familiar. Each phrase seems to travel towards a conclusion, settling for a moment upon a note that feels complete, only for that note to become the beginning of something new. The music is never hurried. It turns back upon itself, changes and continues, carrying traces of what came before into whatever follows.

I move towards the bank and climb from the water.

The young man does not stop playing as I approach. His attention

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remains upon the strings, fingers moving with the ease of someone for whom the instrument requires no conscious effort. There is youth in his face, but not inexperience. He seems entirely at home beside this hidden water, playing his music in a place that the daylight world above could never reveal.

I know him.

Mabon ap Modron.

I sit upon the bank a short distance away and listen.

The melody continues for a while longer, rising and falling gently through the trees. At times it seems almost joyful; at others there is something more reflective within it, though neither feeling ever completely replaces the other. Eventually a phrase comes to rest and this time Mabon allows the final note to fade without beginning another.

The silence that follows feels complete rather than empty.

He places the harp beside him and looks towards me.

Nearby, an old apple tree grows at the edge of the pool, its branches reaching out over the dark water. Some of its fruit has already fallen amongst the leaves, while others remain upon the tree, their skins carrying the deepening colours of autumn.

Mabon rises and walks towards it.

He studies the fruit for a moment before reaching into the branches and choosing a single apple. He turns it once in his hand, then comes towards me and places it into my open palm.

Its weight surprises me.

The fruit is cool and firm, its skin mottled red and gold. Months of rain and sunlight, root and leaf, blossom and bee have gathered into something I can now hold in one hand.

Mabon looks at the apple, then at me.

With his thumb he presses into its flesh.

The fruit parts easily beneath his hands.

Inside, protected within the ripened flesh, are the seeds.

For a moment he holds the opened apple between us. What appeared complete contains something else entirely: small, dark seeds held quietly at its centre, each carrying a future that cannot be seen by looking at it.

He closes my hands around the apple.

Only then does he speak.

“Now you hold the harvest of what has been, and the possibility of what will be.”

The words settle into the stillness beside the pool and Mabon offers no explanation.

I look again at the opened fruit in my hands. The harvest and what might come after it are not separate things after all. One has been carried silently within the other.

Behind me the pool remains dark. Somewhere beneath its surface lies the impossible journey by which I came here, although nothing upon the still water reveals it. Around us the trees continue beyond what little light reaches this hidden place, and beside the water Mabon's harp waits for the music that has not yet been played.

I carry the seed a little way from the water, beyond the reach of the old apple tree's branches, until I find an open place amongst the trees where the earth is dark and rich and there is space above for something new to grow.

I kneel and make a small hollow with my fingers. I place the seed inside and draw the soil gently back over it until nothing remains to show where it lies.

I do not know whether I will ever see what grows from it, nor what shape it might eventually take. I do not need to.

For now, the seed belongs in darkness. Beneath the earth, beyond sight, its possibility remains entirely its own. I leave it there, trusting it to become whatever it will become when its time comes.

When I return to the pool, Mabon has taken up his harp once more. A new melody begins beneath his fingers, and I remain for a moment to listen before movement upon the dark water catches my eye.

The salmon has returned.

It breaks the surface only briefly before slipping beneath it again, leaving widening circles that disturb the reflections of the trees. I look back towards Mabon. His attention remains upon the harp, the music continuing without interruption.

There is nothing more I need to be shown.

I step into the pool and allow the water to rise around me. When it becomes deep enough, I take one final breath and slip beneath the surface.

Silver flashes below.

Once again I follow the salmon downwards. The green-grey light above slowly disappears until there is nothing around me but dark water and the occasional flash of the salmon ahead. I make no attempt this time to understand whether I am descending or rising. Direction

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has ceased to matter.

Eventually the water begins to brighten.

Far ahead, amber light trembles upon a surface.

The salmon reaches it and disappears.

I follow.

My head breaks through the water and the familiar Sacred Grove returns around me. Evening has deepened while I have been gone, and the last light lies softly between the trees. For a while I remain where I am, looking back at the pool.

Its surface gives nothing away.

Yet I no longer mistake what I cannot see for emptiness.

I leave the water and return to the altar, where the glass bottles, bowls, pipettes and tools remain exactly as I left them. Small fragments of the remaining evening light still catch upon the glass, though the shadows between them have deepened.

The work has not yet begun, but I know now what I am asking of it.

The accord must carry something of the fullness of the apple and something of the unseen promise held quietly within it. It must belong to the moment when the year's harvest is gathered even as another kind of beginning stirs beneath the surface; to the balance between what has become known and everything that remains possible.

I place my hands upon the stone.

The blessing has been given.

The making may begin.

Part 3 - The Practice

WHAT WE GIVE TO THE DARKNESS



Alban Elfed arrives at a point of balance.

For a brief moment, day and night stand almost equal before the Wheel turns onwards and darkness begins to occupy the greater part of each day. It is easy to approach this moment by thinking about what is being lost. Summer is ending. Evenings are drawing in. Leaves are beginning to fall and the long months of darkness lie ahead.

Yet darkness brings gifts that light cannot.

This celebration offers an opportunity to welcome those gifts rather than treating the dark half of the year as something to endure until spring returns. Darkness gives us rest and dreams. It draws us inward and changes the way we experience familiar things. It creates space for reflection, imagination and mystery. Above all, it reminds us that something does not cease to exist simply because we cannot see it.

Before preparing your space for Alban Elfed, consider beginning with an act of giving.

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It need not be ceremonial. Indeed, something useful may be more appropriate. Add food to a collection for a food bank. Give to a charity whose work matters to you. Offer your time to someone who needs it, pass something useful to another person, share something you have made, or find some other way of allowing a little of what has come into your hands to continue its journey through the hands of someone else.

There is no need for the person who receives your gift to know where it came from.

The harvest is not diminished by sharing.

Often, this is how abundance becomes visible.

When evening approaches, prepare the place in which you intend to practise. Clear away unnecessary distractions and bring together anything you wish to have beside you. You may choose to place seasonal fruit upon your altar or table, particularly an apple, whose ripened flesh already carries within it the seeds of another beginning. A bowl of nuts, autumn leaves or something gathered respectfully from the land may also be appropriate. Keep the arrangement simple. This is not a display of abundance, but an acknowledgement of what has been gathered.

As the light outside begins to soften, gently warm the accord.

Allow its fragrance to move gradually through the room. There is no need to hurry towards meditation. Sit for a while with the changing evening if you can. Notice the difference between the last natural light beyond the window and the gathering darkness within the room. Resist the urge to illuminate every corner.

Let darkness have a place.

The equinox does not ask us to choose between light and dark. For this brief moment it holds them together, reminding us that both belong to the turning year. Soon the balance will shift and darkness will become greater, but this is not a failure of the light. It is simply the Wheel continuing its movement.

Before closing your eyes, allow yourself to think about the year that has brought you here.

Do not measure it only by achievements. A harvest is larger than that. Remember experiences as well as accomplishments, things learned as well as things made, relationships strengthened and those that changed, unexpected joys, disappointments, mistakes, discoveries and questions that remain unanswered. Some things may already have revealed their value. Others may still seem unfinished.

You do not need to decide what everything means.

Simply recognise that you have gathered it.

Then allow your thoughts to turn towards what has not yet taken form.

Perhaps there is something you feel beginning within you: an idea, a hope, a change, a creative impulse or simply a sense that something new is waiting. You may know exactly what it is, or you may have no words for it at all.

Do not ask it to become clearer.

Not yet.

As the fragrance settles around you, close your eyes and allow your breathing to slow.

The grove begins to emerge.

Autumn has touched the woodland since your last visit. Green remains amongst the branches, but yellow, bronze and russet now interrupt the canopy. Fallen leaves lie across the path and move softly beneath your feet as you walk. The air is cooler, carrying the rich scent of earth, bark and leaves beginning their slow return to the soil.

Evening is approaching.

Light still reaches between the trees, but shadow occupies the spaces between its long golden shafts. You pass easily through both as the path carries you deeper into the grove, neither seeking the light nor avoiding the darkness.

Eventually the trees open around you.

The Sacred Grove waits.

For a while, simply remain there.

Notice the last light resting upon the trees. Notice too the darkness gathering beneath their branches. Neither needs to surrender its place to the other. Here, at the balance of the year, both are welcome.

Then you become aware of water.

A deep pool lies amongst the trees.

Its surface is perfectly still, reflecting the canopy above so clearly that another forest seems to descend beneath it. The remaining evening light lies upon the water, but nothing of what exists beneath the surface can be seen.

Walk towards it.

As you approach, something breaks the reflection.

A salmon rises from the darkness.

Its silver body catches the last light for a moment before disappearing once more beneath the surface. Rings move slowly outwards from the place where it vanished, widening until the pool becomes still again.

You do not need to follow it.

This journey is yours.

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Instead, walk around the edge of the pool and notice the land surrounding it. Some places are crowded with roots and fallen leaves. Elsewhere there are small openings between the trees where light can still reach the earth.

Take your time.

Eventually you find a place that feels right.

Kneel and place your hand against the soil.

The earth is cool beneath your palm.

Think now of whatever began to stir within you before you entered the grove. Perhaps you know what it is. Perhaps it remains no more than a feeling. There is no need to give it a name simply because you have come here.

Imagine that possibility resting within your hand.

Do not imagine its completion.

Do not decide what it must become.

Do not ask how quickly it will grow or what it will eventually give you.

For now, it is enough that it exists.

With your fingers, make a small hollow in the earth.

Place what you carry inside.

Then cover it.

The soil closes over it until nothing remains to show where it lies.

For a moment you may feel the temptation to uncover it again. To check. To make certain that it is still there. To know whether anything has already begun.

Leave it.

Some beginnings need darkness.

Sit beside the place for a while and allow yourself to accept that you cannot know what happens next. What you have placed into the earth may become exactly what you imagine. It may change as it grows. It may lead somewhere you could not possibly have anticipated.

Your task tonight is not to decide its future.

Only to give it somewhere to begin.

When you are ready, return to the edge of the pool.

The light has faded further now. The trees reflected upon the surface have become dark shapes against a deepening sky, and the woodland beyond them reaches into places you cannot see.

Nothing there is empty.

Roots continue their work beneath the earth. Creatures move unseen amongst the trees. Seeds lie hidden beneath fallen leaves. Beyond the reach of your sight, the forest continues.

The salmon surfaces once more.

This time it does not ask to be followed.

It simply appears, catches the remaining light and returns to the darkness beneath the water.

Let it go.

You do not need to see where it goes in order to know that it remains.

Turn back towards the path.

As you walk through the grove, allow yourself to notice how different the woodland becomes as evening settles. Shapes soften. Distances become harder to judge. Sounds seem clearer. The familiar world has not disappeared; you are simply experiencing less of it through sight.

Perhaps this is one of the gifts of darkness.

It does not always reveal by showing.

Sometimes it reveals by asking us to trust what remains unseen.

Gradually allow the grove to recede.

Become aware once more of the fragrance around you. Feel the chair beneath you and the ground beneath your feet. Listen to the ordinary sounds of the place in which you are sitting.

Do not immediately return to whatever awaits your attention.

Remain for a little while in the darkness you have allowed into the room.

The thing you planted within the grove does not require your attention tonight. You do not need to make plans for it, write a list of actions or decide how it will become real. There will be time for doing.

For now, allow possibility to remain possibility.

Before Alban Elfed has passed, give something of your own harvest away without expectation of return. Then give something else to the darkness: an idea, a hope, a question or a beginning whose final shape you cannot yet know.

Trust that unseen does not mean absent.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

Part 4 - The Accord

THE ACCORD IN THE SEASON OF THE FULL MEASURE



Aonta an Tomhais Iomláin was created as an expression of Alban Elfed's full measure.

By the autumn equinox, the first promise of harvest has become something more substantial. The fields that stood heavy at Lughnasadh have given up much of what they carried. Fruit hangs ripe upon branches. Berries darken in the hedgerows and the work of the light months can be gathered, shared and stored. For a brief moment, light and darkness stand together in balance before the wheel turns onwards and the nights begin to claim the greater part of each day.

This accord was created to inhabit that moment.

It carries the richness of something brought to fullness, but it does not treat fullness as an ending. Like the apple opened beside Mabon's pool, what appears complete already contains the possibility of what might follow. Harvest and beginning exist together, one held quietly within the other.

The accord therefore settles close to the earth.

Cedarwood forms its foundation, substantial and reassuring, while vetiver draws that woodiness downwards into darker, rootier ground. Together they carry something of the forest at this point in the year, when the canopy still holds much of its leaf but attention is beginning to turn towards what lies beneath. These are not the sun-warmed timbers of Lugh's workshop. They are living woods rooted in dark soil, carrying within themselves both the memory of summer and the preparations for what comes next.

Warmth gathers amongst them.

Beeswax brings a soft, golden richness, joined by the gentle sweetness of benzoin and tonka. None is intended to make the fragrance sugary or indulgent. Instead they suggest the particular abundance of early autumn: fruit brought in from the tree, provisions gathered together, stores beginning to fill and the quiet satisfaction of having enough to share. There is warmth here, but it is no longer the open warmth of summer. It is the warmth we begin to make for ourselves as evenings cool and the world draws inward.

Geranium and the smallest touch of rose move through that warmth, carrying the last memory of growth and bloom without allowing the accord to become nostalgic for the season that is passing. Myrrh reaches in another direction. Resinous, contemplative and quietly mysterious, it draws the fragrance towards the darker months ahead. Then, almost at the edge of perception, Roman chamomile introduces a sharper, slightly bitter note. It recalls the bite beneath the sweetness of an autumn apple: the faint bitterness of skin and seed that keeps ripe fruit from becoming simple sweetness. That small contrast matters. The harvest held within this accord is ripe and abundant, but it retains the complexity of something grown rather than confectioned.

Nothing within the accord asks the darkness to retreat.

This became increasingly important as the fragrance developed. Alban Elfed is often described through balance, and understandably so. At the equinox, day and night appear for a moment to stand as equals. Yet balance does not require us to hold that moment still. The wheel continues to turn. Darkness increases, not because light has failed, but because darkness too has its season and its gifts.

Aonta an Tomhais Iomláin therefore does not attempt to preserve summer.

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It turns willingly towards autumn.

The woods deepen. Resins settle around them. Warmth becomes closer and more intimate. What remains floral is woven into earth, wax and root rather than lifted towards the sun. The fragrance does not close itself down as it develops; instead, it seems to invite attention further inward.

For me, this is where the accord reaches beyond the harvest itself.

September has always carried the feeling of a beginning. Perhaps that comes from the rhythm of school years that began as summer ended, or perhaps those years merely taught me to recognise something already present within the season. Whatever its origin, this is the point at which my own creative year seems to awaken. As the evenings draw in, I find myself increasingly drawn towards writing, making and the quieter work of imagination that will accompany me through Samhain and towards Yule.

Darkness makes room for that work.

It narrows what can be seen while leaving what might exist wonderfully open. Like the surface of Mabon's pool, it conceals without becoming empty. Like the seed placed into the earth, it asks us to accept that growth does not always need to be visible in order to be real.

This understanding lies close to the heart of Dark Forest itself. A forest in darkness is not devoid of life simply because we cannot see beyond the next few steps. Paths continue. Roots spread beneath the soil. Creatures move beyond our sight. Somewhere ahead there may be a clearing we have never visited. The unknown can contain uncertainty, but it also contains mystery, imagination and possibility.

The full measure of Alban Elfed must therefore include both what has become visible and what remains unseen.

It is the harvest gathered after months of growth. The provisions placed together and shared. The experiences accumulated through another turn of the wheel. But it is also the idea not yet made, the path not yet followed and the seed entrusted to darkness without demanding to know the precise shape of the tree it might one day become.

It is this meeting that Aonta an Tomhais Iomláin seeks to hold.

Wood and root. Wax and resin. The last traces of flower. Warmth gathered against the approaching night. A fragrance with substance enough to speak of what has ripened, yet with something quieter

The Accord in the Season of the Full Measure

beneath it that refuses to reveal everything at once.

At Alban Elfed, we need not choose between ending and beginning any more than we need choose between light and darkness.

For a moment, we are allowed to hold the whole measure.

The harvest of what has been.

And the possibility of what will be.

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Published by Dark Forest Books
London, United Kingdom

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Cover design by Terence Freeland
Illustrations by Terence Freeland

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