

The Owl and The Pussycat: The Piggy-wig's Story

(Inspired by Edward Lear's wonderful nonsense poem.)

In the beginning was the Bong-tree. Emblem and spiritual guide of our land for a thousand generations before me and, so the prophecies foretell, a thousand more to come. I stand and gaze upon it and wish, now that the time of decision is coming, that it would give me a sign. What will be The Question, what answer will I be required to give?

The two strangers are consulting with each other now and, I believe, will soon be asking me The Question. For a year and a day they have sailed – and for a year and a day I have felt it coming. They have already expressed a wish to be married now that they have landed upon our shores, and I wonder if The Question will stem from this fact.

I can do nothing until they ask it. O mighty Bong-tree, guide, I beseech thee.

I turn and look upon the shack that I call home. Simple and wooden it stands – but decayed, the slats ripped and holed, the thatching on the roof straggled and peeling. Were I to look upon the rest of the island I would see the same everywhere. Age-weariness and decay. One thousand generations of it.

And I? I am the thousand-and-first keeper of The Ring. The middle-most Piggy-wig of two thousand and one generations destined to lead our island through its transitory life on this insubstantial planet and into the realm that follows. The Ring, the symbol of our authority, has been placed through the noses of each leader in turn. In itself, it has no power. But the authority it confers is everything.

But of what worth is this tradition with our island so degenerated now?

The Builders from the land-over-the-water come and they say, “We can put this right. We can rebuild – we can replant and revitalise. For mere pennies we can do this. We can bring your island back to life. For mere pennies.”

And – “For mere pennies,” echoes the turkey who lives on the hill. “For mere pennies,” echoes the rabbit who lives in the warren. “For mere pennies,” echoes the lizard who lives on the shore.

Yes. For mere pennies. But pennies have not been seen in this land for many generations. From where are we to obtain the pennies The Builders require?

The Owl and The Pussycat have finished their consultation, and they come to stand before me. The Owl bows low, and clears his throat in prelude, and I know that The Question is about to be asked.

“Dear Pig,” he begins formally, and I bow in acknowledgement of the title. The language of etiquette is to be used, as is just.

“Are you willing,” he continues, “to sell for one shilling your Ring?”

I gape at the enormity of The Question. My Ring? The Ring that symbolises so much?

I am about to refuse outright, but as I open my mouth to speak I find that I cannot utter as much as a syllable. And a train of thought begins – the pennies that would mean so much to my fellow creatures. To me, even. The work that could be undertaken.

Yet – the thousand generations to come. How would they define their authority? With no ring to be a symbol of their position, how would they guide? How could they be acknowledged as leader?

But what use is a leader of nothing? Of death and decay?

Perhaps it is time for the power to be spread. For all creatures to take their share in the making of decisions – the defining of our land. Perhaps one alone can no longer carry the burden.

In an instant I know what to do, and I praise the mighty Bong-tree for giving me that knowledge. I raise myself up from my contemplation and give my answer.

“I will.”