

***From the notes of Scholar Greene on the legends of Cottington Woods:
Niall Hayward***

One of the more interesting tales I came across in my travels through the Cottington Woods was the story of Niall Hayward. I think one would compare him to a modern day Riding Hood, who rose as a hero among his people, protecting them from the dangers of the Woods, from the roving bands of Robber Barons, and more importantly, from what the tale describes as the "monstrous threat of Auberly."

According to the legend, Niall ventured into the most unsettled places of the Woods, seeking to draw enemies away from his people, and somehow found his way to the Heart of the Woods, to that Tree of Jewels mentioned in other tales, the Tree that is the home of the great Fairy that is the Guardian of the Woods and the Voice of the Spirit of the Forest - the one that some tales name Arafel.

It doesn't say how he accomplished this feat, as the Tree is said to be hidden deep with the Fairy Mists, the heart of a Fairy Forest with its roots here in our mortal world. But find it he did.

And there, within the Tree, in the presence of the fury of one of the last, Great Fairies, Niall Hayward spoke Her True Name Thrice, and in so doing, commanded the aid of the last Bright One, to fight against the Princess of Auberly, who had bargained with the Queen of Fairies herself for Life Eternal and the Endless Devotion of all those who fell beneath her command.

It is said, that because he used her name such, this was not a Bargain, in the way most things of Fairies were. So it seems strange that after the battle was won, Niall Hayward felt it necessary to pledge his service, and the service of each firstborn of his line thereafter, to the Guardian of the Woods. The old man who told me this tale said it was because he understood there was a debt, even if there was no bargain, and isn't that the way of heroes - to do the good deed, even when they could get away with not?