

The Birth of Taliesin

There was once a witch, an ugly old witch. In fact the ugliest, oldest witch you have ever seen. And this witch had a servant boy called Gwydion who, as you might expect, she treated very badly.

In her cauldron the witch was brewing a potion, very special potion, a potion which would bestow the gift of magic and the gift of prophecy. However even the most important of her potions the witch did not stir herself. She had Gwydion to do that, to stay up day and night and stir and stir and stir. To stir until she told him he could stop. She told him to never on any account drink the potion. If he drank it, she told him, he would die.

So Gwydion stirred and the potion bubbled, and he stirred and it bubbled, until it bubbled so fiercely that a drop splashed onto his thumb. Without thinking he licked the burning liquid off. And in the moment that his tongue touched the drop of potion he realised that he could suddenly see past and present and future.

The witch knew instantly that he had disobeyed her and she cried that she would kill him. As he heard her run screeching up the path Gwydion turned to flee and found himself somehow transformed into a hare, hopping on powerful legs away from the witch. Quick as a flash she in turn became a sleek greyhound and gradually, bound by bound, she gained on him. Coming to the river Gwydion the hare leapt into the water, turning as he sank below the surface into a fish and gliding smoothly away. Quick as a flash she became an otter and dived in after him, moving the water with powerful paws and gradually stroke by stroke she gained on him. With all his strength Gwydion the fish flung himself out of the water and as he leapt into the air he became a lark and rose into the clouds away from the witch. She pulled herself out of the water and as she touched the bank she became a hawk, soaring into the sky higher and higher until she hung above the hovering lark and prepared to dive. Gwydion the lark plummeted to the ground, and landing outside a grain store raced inside and turned himself into a grain of corn. One tiny grain amongst the hundreds, the thousands, that covered the ground.

The witch landed outside the shed and turned into a chicken. Steadily she pecked her way through the grains of corn until finally she ate the one that was Gwydion. That was that, she thought.

But it was not. Nine months later the witch gave birth to a boy, a particularly beautiful boy. Knowing who he must be, she put the baby into a sack and flung him into the river. He was found by the king's fisherman who pulled him out of the water and brought him to the king. He named him Taliesin. And Taliesin grew to become a bard with the gift of poetry and of music the like of which had never been seen before and has never been seen since.