

Aidan and the Well

Aidan of nowhere had nothing. Not a coin in his pocket or a loaf of bread in his bag. He had but three sets of clothes that were sizes too big (for they were his father's God rest him) and he owned no shoes. Aidan was alone in the world his own beloved father had died years ago from an illness.

Aidan's father was a blacksmith who from the time his son grew enough common sense taught Aidan his craft. When his father died Aidan was heart broken (as it is with such stories) because his father was the only parent he had in the world. Little Aidan had been too young to manage the forge alone and too poor to hire on any help so he was thrown into the lifestyle of the homeless.

Even though he had no house of timbers and mortar he lived in a certain part of the forest to which he called home. He chose this area because it was the easiest to get to (which wasn't too wise but when he chose this place he was still very young). Most of the forest was so dense, so thick that if a child slid his hand in between two trees that it would surely get stuck (it did happen once the whole town had to get every ounce of butter they had to get the child's hand out). Aidan's home lay on the outskirts of the city Greenmond that coincidentally was known for its lumber. Greenmond surrounded the castle of Ironthorn where resided possibly the richest man in the providence (the lord of Ironthorn owned most of the lumber mills).

From his camp Aidan could see the castle of Ironthorn and was forever reminded of how poor he was and how wealthy the lord of Ironthorn must be to have his home in the middle of Greenmond. Aidan thought it a great honor to live in the safety of the gates of the city and aspired to one day have his home there.

Aidan never went into the city the closest that he ever dared to venture was to the crop fields to glean after harvest, to the old well and whenever he could manage it Aidan would go to the mill by the river where the fair Brighid lived.

Brighid was the old miller Foster's daughter and could easily be called by all who saw her as the prettiest girl in Greenmond (the phrase 'in the world' is a very conceited comment because who has seen every young woman in the world?). She was well known for her kind and agreeable nature.

Now Brighid was very fond of Aidan having known him since they were children. Aidan had a mind to marry her but Brighid's father disapproved of the match. To the miller Aidan was nothing more than a vagrant.

One fine May day Aidan was feeling high in spirits and called on the miller Foster to announce his intentions of marrying Brighid. After his declaration of affections the old miller had all five of his sons chase the shoeless Aidan off the Foster's property.

The fine day that had started so merrily turned its tide on Aidan who walked home in defeat. Aidan greedily took in the fresh air he could smell the pine trees around him, the hum of the mills that were all too familiar to any resident of Greenmond now were playing a melancholy tune for Aidan.

Fate and its wheel have a peculiar habit (and sometimes cruel) of changing unsuspecting people's lives drastically. Even though Cupid played a nasty joke on Aidan maybe fate decided to ease up on him because it just so happens on this day Aidan took the path that led past the old well. This could have been because his feet were tired and cut so he wanted to wash them in the well water but most likely Aidan just wasn't paying attention.

When Aidan finally drew near enough to the well to see it on the path ahead he heard the most unusual sound a voice coming from inside the well!

"What's that? Who's there?" The annoyed voice echoed out of the well. The voice sounded like branches against windowpanes, a high scratchy whine.

Aidan made his way to the mouth of the well and peered over the stone side. "Are you hurt? Do you need help getting up?" Called Aidan to the unfortunate soul at the bottom; the person that Aidan saw was a bent old woman with a wild feel about her.

"Are you daft?" The old woman barked agitated (and anyone would be stressed if they were stuck at the belly of a well). "Of course I need help and it would be greatly appreciated, young man. If you could lower the bucket I'll climb up the rope." Suggested the crone in a more affable tone than before. Aidan was skeptical about her climbing up the rope the well had to be a good eight feet deep, and the woman looked in no shape to climb up. Against his better judgment he lowered the bucket to her.

"How did you manage to get at the bottom of the well?" Aidan asked bemused as the old woman climbed hand over hand up the rope.

“Ack!” She spat. “As I was gathering my water I leaned too far over, and the rascally old fox came cantering out of the woods. He pushed me in!” (In truth she fell in but it is human to lay blame on another isn’t it?)

When she was on the grass again Aidan got a better look at her. The old woman had a very large nose, long gray hair down to her knees. Her mane concealed much of her brown dress. The crone glared at Aidan out of one beady eye.

“I don’t like being indebted to any one. So what will be your reward?” Aidan stared at her unsure of what the ancient lady meant. “What do you want as payment for helping me out of the well?” Repeated the hag slowly and clearly as if Aidan was an idiot.

“I’m not sure; I want many things but none of which I’m sure you can give me.” Aidan finally found his tongue and sheepishly gave his reply.

“Ah a man without imagination, come over here. You see this well whenever you drink of the water from the well and state aloud a wish it will be done.” She said mischievously showing her wine gums. “Then you will have to agree with me that this reward greatly exceeds the good deed.” Aidan nodded catching on to the woman’s scheme.

“So you my boy will not feel at all offended if I give you an obligation? I will give you my wishing water if you agree that when the time comes that you will do what something for me without question.” The crone proposed then began wringing out her hair.

Now Aidan was a sensible lad who would have refused this contract straight away but in his mind an eerie picture of himself with Brigid in front of a little cottage. A little cottage all their own inside the walls of Gremond.

“I accept your offer, but I’ll not do anything illegal.” Aidan stuck out his hand to shake on the deal. The woman took his hand and cackled insanely.

“You will if I tell you to.” The hag croaked then in a puff of black smoke disappeared.

Aidan was dazzled for a moment or two but as he didn’t want to stand by an old well all day he drew up the bucket up. The water sloshed around as he untied the rope

that attached the bucket to the crank. While Aidan trudged home he tried to think of what he would wish for first.

It was not until Aidan was quite thirsty and his feet quite sore that he thought of what his wish should be. Stretched out beneath a tree Aidan took a sip of the well water and rubbed his blistered feet attempting to abate the pain.

“I wish for a pair of shoes.” Aidan ordered and with a pop and sparkle there laid beside him two wonderful black shoes just the right size for him. Aidan slid the shoes on then he realized how silly it was for him to have walked to his camp when he could be sitting in his own home at this very moment. “With this I could have a job, have a house. I could support Brighid!” Thought Aidan barely able to contain his excitement.

Aidan took another sip of the enchanted water and wished for a forge, because that was Aidan’s trade. Aidan was transported to his forge it was amazing complete with all the tools needed to perform the job. The shop had a second floor; this had a bed, chest of drawers and a bedside table. Aidan was pleased with the location of his shop because his neighbors told him that there was a need for a smithy on this side of town.

Before Aidan could go and propose to Bridgid, he would see how business would do. For about a month Aidan enjoyed working but he couldn’t make tax after all the hard work he had done. It took Aidan a while before he comprehended that with the wishing water he could get the money needed to make tax. (You can see that poor Aidan was not the hardest tree in the forest.)

That was the turning point after then Aidan became lazy as the workload got more demanding he could still never meet tax. So he would wish the work done once and a while then on a regular basis. Soon after Aidan did no work at all. The love of money poisoned him he spent his hours wishing for fine clothes, jewels and coins.

Poor Brighid was sent for by Aidan every morning and every morning she would wait for Aidan to propose but one never came. One dismal afternoon Brighid stalked up to Aidan’s house and marched in she had been preparing her self all day to revile the withdrawal of her affections.

“Aidan I am happy to find your situation comfortable but your cruelty has forced my feelings from you. Your heart ignores all touch save for the cold of metal.” Brighid seethed releasing the poison that was once her love for Aidan.

The young blacksmith was hurt but not astonished. He resolved to craft a broche by hand Aidan went to town and bought the materials needed, silver and a small red gem.

Aidan worked for days on end to finish Brighid's broche. When it was finally constructed the broche was in the likeness of a rose and in the center of the petals was the red gem. There was only one fault with the broche the pin was too long. Even though the gift fell short of perfection Brighid would love it because Aidan poured his love for her into it. In making the broche he was purged (almost completely) of the sin of greed.

(I say 'almost completely' because every one has the ability to be greedy some are able to repress and control greed better than others.)

Aidan waltzed to the mill alive and giddy with the peace offering in hand. At first Brighid would not see him she almost had her brothers show Aidan out. Then Aidan remembered his last encounter with her surly brothers and thrust the ordainment into Brighid's hand.

Brighid felt the warmth still lingering from the hearth she knew that Aidan had forged it himself.

Before the long anticipated proposal could travel from Aidan's lips to Brighid's ears the old crone appeared.

"My boy the time has come for debts to be paid." Screeched the witch as she grabbed Brighid by the arm who let out a confused shriek before Brighid disappeared. The broche fell to the ground with a defeated pang. "You can't have everything you want. You can give up the water or your beloved Brighid!"

Aidan opened his mouth but said nothing. Saving Brighid would mean financial instability he would have to work more than he was used to. Yet it was for Brighid that he agreed to obtain the water in the first place.

The conjurer took Aidan's silence to mean that he'd rather keep the wishing water. With a chorus of insane cackles and a puff of black smoke the crone was gone. (I wonder if the laughing is apart of the incantation she uses to disappear or if the smoke tickles a lot.)

Instantly Aidan realized his mistake and broke out of the mill, up the path that led to the enchanted well. He was gripping the broche so tight it was cutting into his skin Aidan was at such a quick pace he ran into the stone wall of the well.

Aidan drew up the bucket hurriedly the water sloshed over the rim. Cupping the cool water in his hot palms Aidan brought the water to his lips and took a drink.

“Bring me back Brighid!” He commanded louder than he meant to, the birds in the surrounding trees took flight in fright.

“No.” Said the water flatly in a monotone voice Aidan was surprised the water had never talked back to him before.

“What do you mean ‘no’?” Aidan demanded his harsh words echoing back at him.

“The witch who fell in me will not allow it.” Answered the well without emotion Aidan was losing hope.

“Can you take me to her, to where Brighid and the witch are?” Asked Aidan eagerly a plan forming in his mind he would go and tell the witch to give Brighid back that he changed his mind.

“Yes.” Said the water in the same toneless voice Aidan took another sip.

Aidan knew that the witch might not give up Brighid without a fight for a deal is a deal. So he swallowed the gulp of water and wished for a sword and dagger. Then he deemed himself ready and took a draft of water.

“I wish to be inside the enchantress’s stronghold.” Aidan demanded prepared to fight with whatever the witch through at him.

Confused but not harmed Brighid sat shaking with fear as the old woman soothed her, which was difficult because the crone’s voice was so hoarse.

“Now don’t worry pretty one. I won’t harm you; no I plan to marry you to my son, Milkweed. Would you like to meet him? Milkweed?!” Called the old woman over her shoulder the door at the end of the room cracked open then it shut it’s self.

“Yes?” Croaked someone near the floor Brighid tried to see who it was and careened her neck. Her eyes fell on an over sized frog it was a nauseating greenish swamp brown with bumps and warts all over it.

“Come and meet your bride.” Rapped the alleged future mother in law excitedly as she put an arm around Brighid’s shoulders.

The cat-sized frog hopped into Brighid's lap to get a better look at her. She started to scream of the hopeless and then fainted.

Aidan was quite lost and Brighid's scream helped him to locate the miller's daughter. He flung open the doors to see Brighid crumpled in a heap on the floor and the witch with a frog looming over her body. The witch turned to the door and gasped at the sight of Aidan.

"What are you doing here go home!" She ordered impatiently waving Aidan away as if to shoo a fly.

"You never let me answer I never told you I would keep the water." Aidan cried out to the crone the huge frog bounded (hopped really fast) at Aidan as the frog flew through the air he yelped.

"You'll not have my bride back!"

Aidan put his sword straight through the belly of the frog, black-blood gushed from the wound and the frog (who was very miserable to begin with being a giant frog and all) 'croaked'.

The witch loved her son very much he was a very evil frog and she was extremely proud of his learning the family business lunged at Aidan. Aidan's sword which he put out in front of him to block the witch turned to dust. The witch was steadily coming closer to Aidan who couldn't think of what he could use to protect himself. The witch was upon him in a second she would kill Aidan who could see her conjuring a broken blade from air. Instinctively Aidan put his arms up to cover his face unaware of the weapon in his hand. Whereas the sword and dagger could not be used against the witch who created them with the enchanted water there was one item in his possession that could kill the hag.

The old woman was now right next to Aidan so close he could feel flicks of angry spit on his face. Then the witch stopped yelling and glanced down at Aidan's hand in which was his rose broche crafted with not the water but his own hands. The imperfection became his savior the long pin had pierced the hag's heart.

"What have you done?" Raved the defeated sorceress cried as she died immediately she left no cadaver of blood but the same puff of black smoke.

Aidan was so surprised he killed the witch that he let out an ‘Egad!’ and jumped back away from where the witch once stood. After a few moments of shock Aidan came to the knowledge that there might be other creatures in the moldy castle. These people might not be too keen to see Aidan standing triumphantly over the carcass of their frog prince and waving away the remains of the lady of the castle. So he decided to wake up Brighid and escape from the dank clammy castle.

Brighid had other ideas (I should say no ideas) because she was still indisposed and wouldn’t wake. Aidan picked her up in the fireman’s hold which is not romantic at all and it is a very good thing that Brighid was really passed out.

When they finally reached the outdoors Aidan got a proper look at the witch’s house. Dreary was the word to describe it trees grew ten feet away from the gate all other vegetation stopped around the same radius. Such as you would find on mountains the zone where it is too high for living things to survive. The castle was crumbling and seemed like if you sneezed on it the whole structure would fall over. The most ominous feature was the black stones that the castle was constructed with, gave no doubt in a passerby’s mind that no fairy princess lived here.

There was a river close by and Aidan who was covered in grimy frog guts thought it best to wash in the river before he revived his fair lady. Who woke unharmed and overjoyed to see Aidan (though she did slap him once). Aidan didn’t think of how they were going to get home until Brighid asked and Aidan didn’t know. He had wished himself to the witch how would they get home? Now the river happened to be the source to an under ground well. Aidan’s well to be exact and Aidan didn’t know this of course he took a drink and told Brighid.

“I wish we were home”. He sighed then with a pop they were at Aidan’s forge! I would like to say ‘they lived happily ever after’ all fairy tales end that way but that would be a boring life wouldn’t it?