

The Legend of Branwen

Many years ago, an enormous man called Bendigeidfran was king of The Isle of Britain. Bendigeidfran was a giant. One day, from Harlech, Bendigeidfran saw thirteen small ships sailing across the sea. It was Matholwch, the king of Ireland, who was crossing the sea to ask for Bendigeidfran's permission to marry his beautiful sister, Branwen. Her hair was long and black as the night and her lips were like red roses. All of the Irish men came into the magnificent court at Harlech and a great feast was enjoyed. Fortunately, Branwen agreed to marry Matholwch but unfortunately, there was one person who was very unhappy about this. He was Efnisien, who was Branwen and Bendigeidfran's nasty half-brother.

While everyone else was enjoying the wedding festivities, Efnisien, who was very angry, cut off the ears, tails and jaws of Matholwch's beautiful, white horses. Matholwch and his men were furious. Bendigeidfran hoped Matholwch would forgive Efnisien and gave him some new horses, gold jewellery and a magic cauldron; the magic cauldron was very special as it could give new life to a person who had died.

The following morning, Matholwch, his men and Branwen sailed back to Ireland. They lived happily there for one year and had a son called Gwern.

One day, the people of Ireland decided that Branwen should be punished as revenge for what Efnisien had done had done to Matholwch's horses. Her punishment was to send her the kitchen to work. The baker would shout at her, the butcher struck her and all the other servants would make fun of her. Her life was wretched. Her only friend was a tiny starling who came onto the windowsill, daily. Firstly, Branwen taught the starling to talk to her. Then, she told her sad tale to the little bird and finally, she wrote a letter and tied it to the bird's leg telling it to fly with the message to a huge giant in Wales.

The bird soared across the sea and arrived at Britain. When it saw Bendigeidfran, the giant, the tiny starling landed on his colossal shoulder. After reading the letter and hearing about Branwen's punishment, Bendigeidfran was furious. He decided to prepare his men and his ships to go and rescue the beautiful Branwen.



He strode across the sea; his head like a mountain, his hair like the land and his huge eyes like lakes. The ships were like a moving forest. People in Ireland couldn't understand what was happening. When he arrived in Ireland, Bendigeidfran saw that a bridge had been destroyed to stop the soldiers. The giant lay down to create a large bridge to cross a river. "He who would be a leader, let him be a bridge," shouted the giant. The Welsh soldiers walked over his body.

There was fierce fighting between the soldiers of Bendigeidfran and Matholwch. However, Matholwch had the magic cauldron – every time an Irish soldier was killed, they were thrown into the cauldron and came back to life. Efnisien tried to break the cauldron but he and Bendigeidfran were both killed. Consequently, the Welsh lost the battle and Branwen sailed back to Wales. Branwen finally died of a broken heart on the banks of the River Alaw, in Anglesey.

