

Myth and Mystery



This land has inspired storytellers for thousands of years. Legendary tales, passed down by word of mouth from our ancient ancestors have added to the sense of magic and mystery that we feel about this place. It's for you to decide where fact ends and fiction begins.



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Arthur and his Knights Awaiting the Call



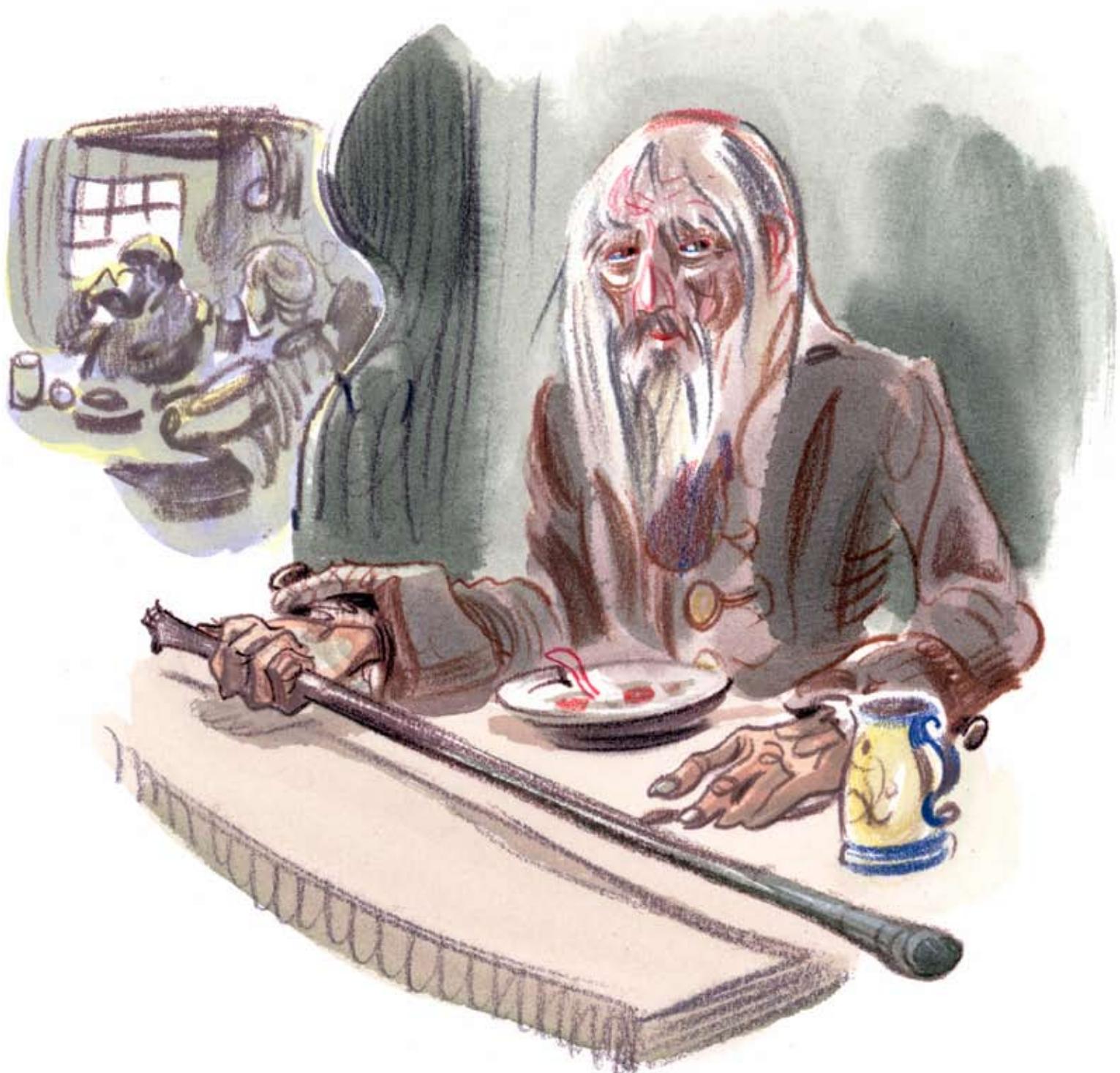
Some say the golden age of chivalry ended with the passing of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. But for others they are only sleeping, concealed in a special place, ready for the call to arms when our country's need is greatest.



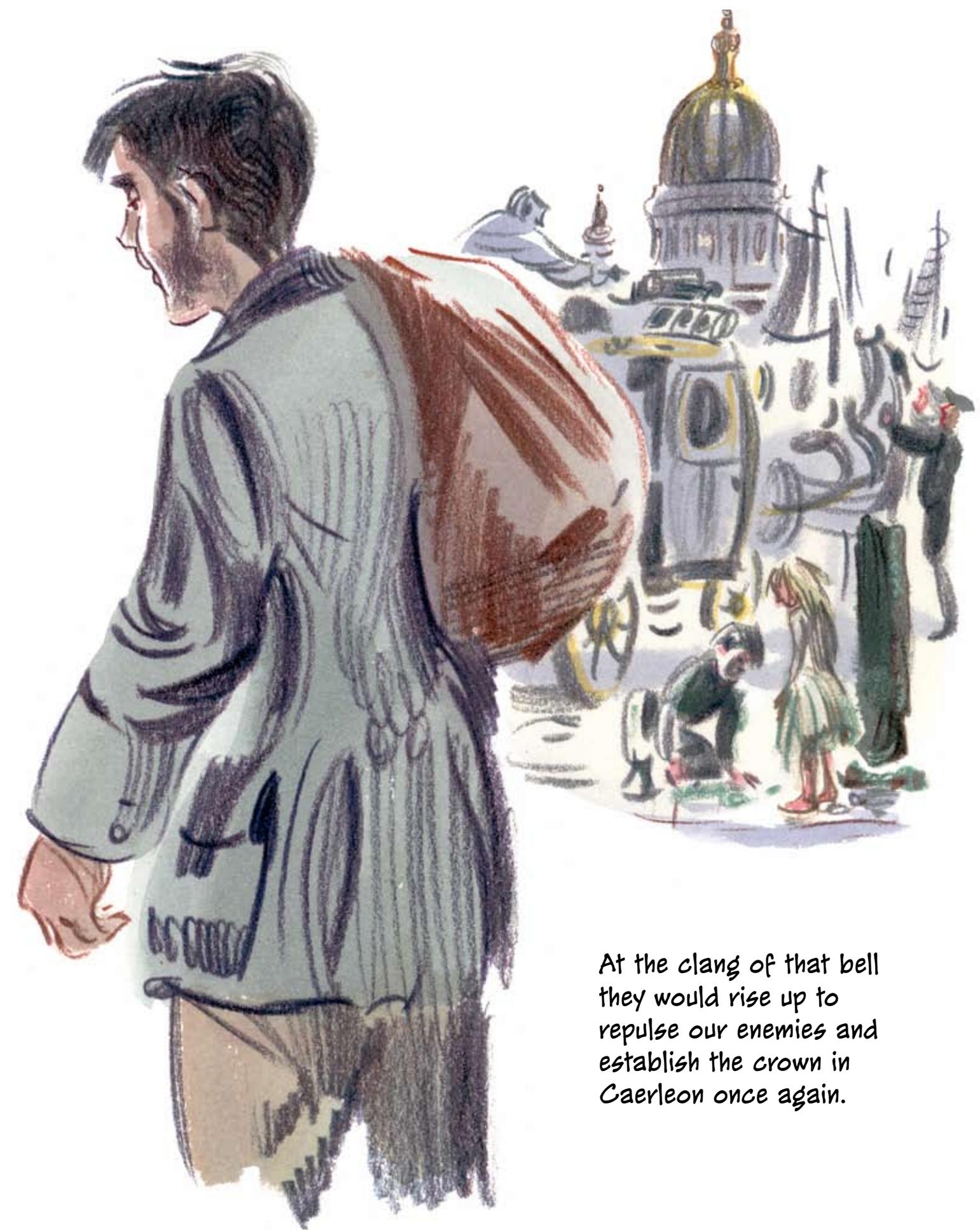


Legend has it that the special hiding place is
Craig y Ddinas (Dinas Rock) at Pontneddfechan.

A Welshman in London was once challenged by a wise man to lead him to the place from whence had come his hazel walking stick. They returned to Wales and mighty Craig y Ddinas. The wise man found a particular rock, which together they lifted, uncovering the entrance to a great cavern.



In the musty dark was a host of sleeping warriors, King Arthur with his Knights, awaiting the call that would be sounded by a bell inside the cave's entrance.



At the clang of that bell
they would rise up to
repulse our enemies and
establish the crown in
Caerleon once again.

Amidst the sleepers were two giant heaps of silver and gold. The wise man advised that his companion might take as much as he could carry, but he must avoid sounding the bell and waking the Knights.





This he did and the two left Craig y Ddinas as they found it, the entrance closed and the warriors in peace.

But the man became greedy. Alone he went back for more.



This time he was careless and the bell sounded. The Knights awoke to the false alarm. It's not clear what happened to the man.

Enough to say that the warriors returned to their slumber, no one has ever found that entrance again and those gallant Knights are still ready to do or die on our behalf.

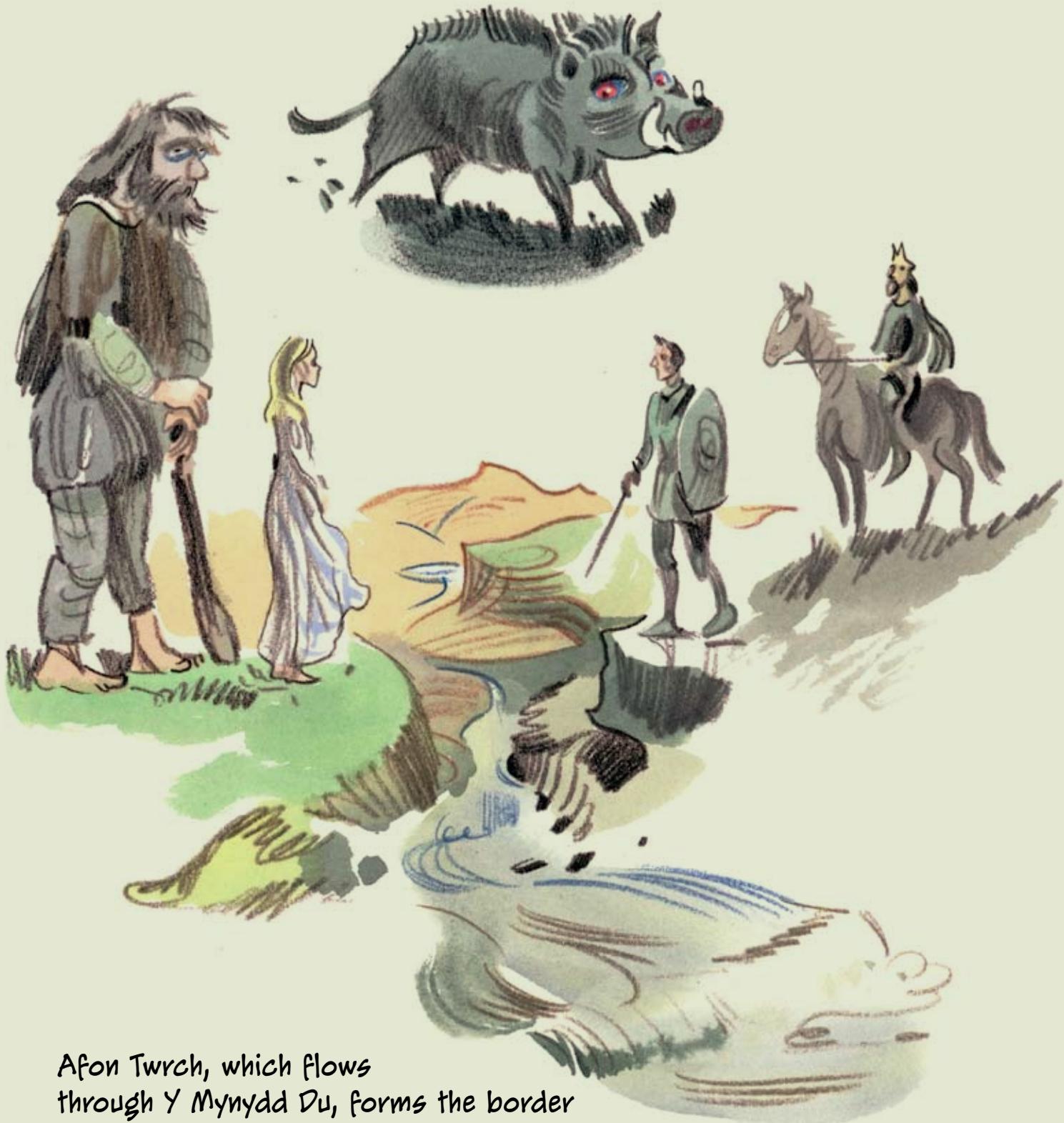


Was that wise man Merlin? Is Craig y Dinas the rock where Excalibur was first drawn by Arthur from the stone? Can you can find the cave?



If you do, be very, very careful
not to sound that bell!

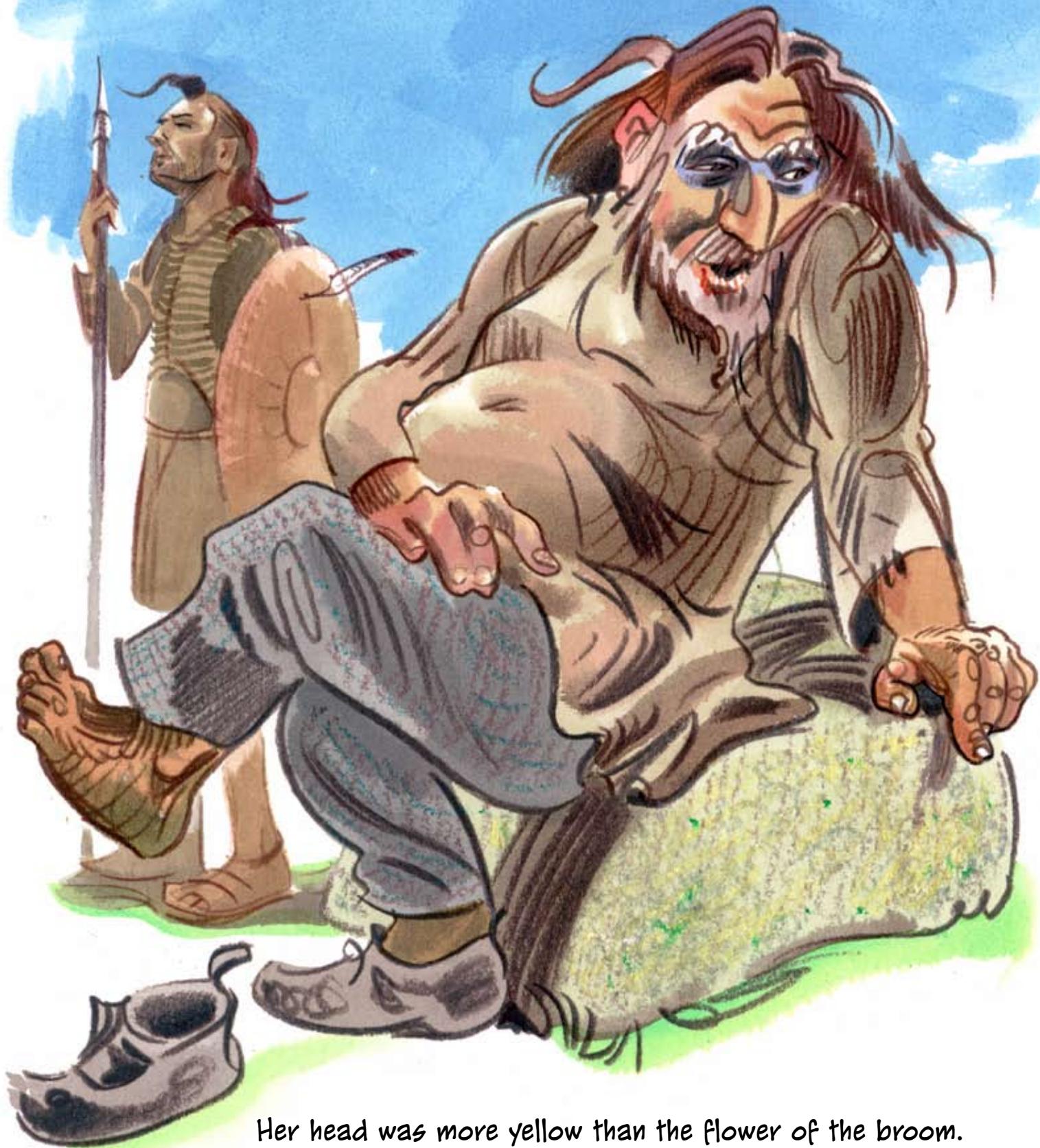
The Story of the Twrch Trwyth



Afon Twrch, which flows
through Y Mynydd Du, forms the border
between Carmarthenshire and Powys.

This is the scene for the tale of Culhwch, Olwen, King Arthur and the Twrch Trwyth (a wild boar). It's one of Welsh literature's earliest tales and part of the Mabinogion.

Ysbaddaden was a monstrous giant. His eyebrows fell so heavily that they had to be raised by pitchforks so that he could see. But he had a beautiful daughter.



Her head was more yellow than the flower of the broom.
Her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave. Four white
trefoils sprung up wherever she trod.

Hence she was called Olwen, meaning
"she of the white track".

Whoever beheld Olwen was filled with overpowering love.
But Ysbaddaden knew that he was destined to die when
his daughter married.

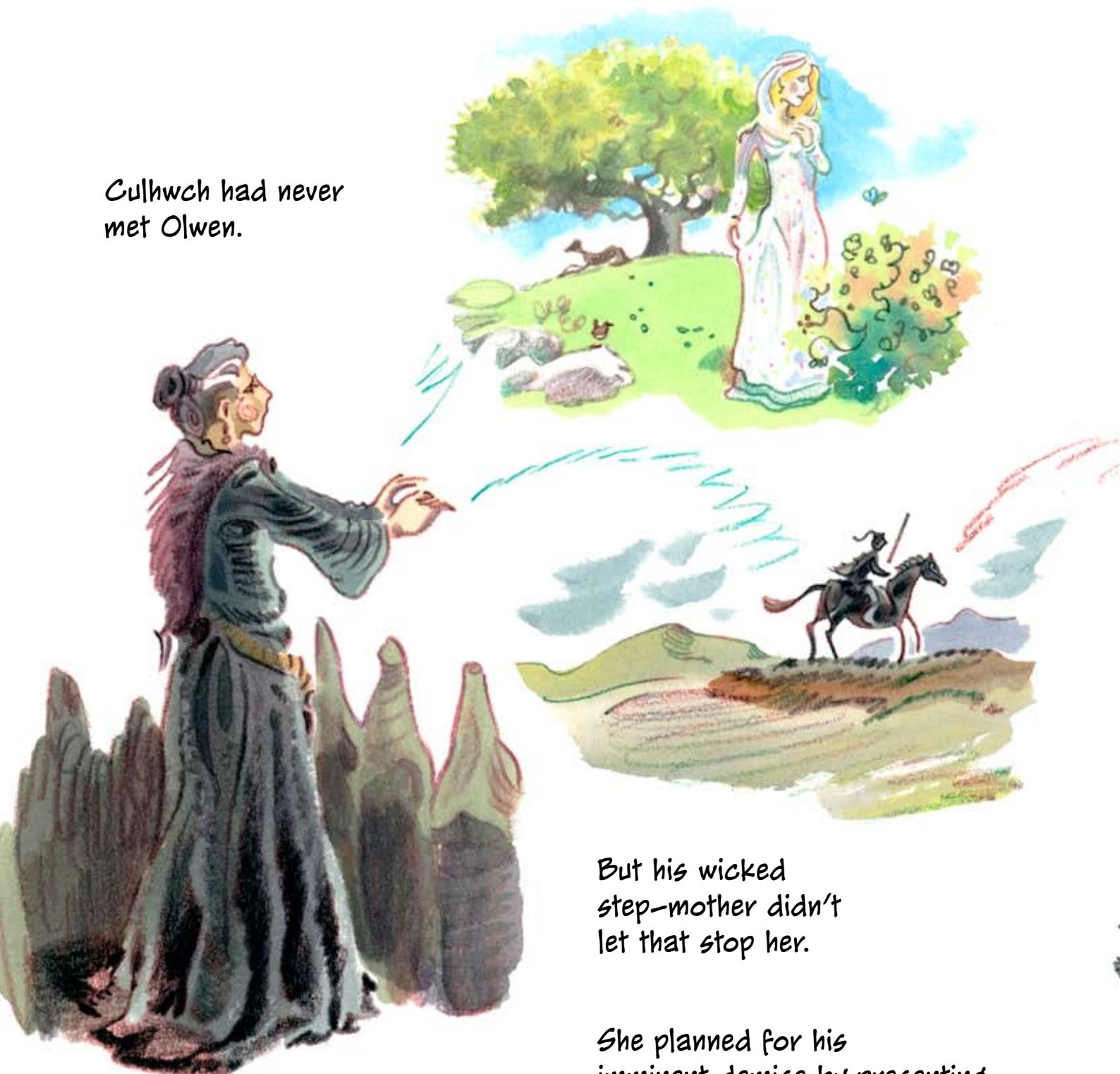


So he kept her close by him in his
castle. No visiting suitor ever left his
fortress alive.



To be desperately in love with Olwen was definitely a health risk!

Culhwch had never
met Olwen.



But his wicked
step-mother didn't
let that stop her.

She planned for his
imminent demise by presenting
Olwen to Culhwch in a vision.

He was immediately hooked.
He had to try and win her hand, whatever the risks.

Now Culhwch was no fool.
He sought help from none
other than King Arthur
and his Knights.



Together they sought
out the giant.



The giant, as you can imagine, did not welcome this new suitor.

Instead, he tried to kill him, and when he failed, gave Culhwch forty "impossible" tasks in order to win his daughter.



The last of these was to obtain the comb and scissors from the head of Twrch Trwyth, the deadly wild boar. These would be used by Ysbaddaden to dress his hair for Olwen's wedding.



Undeterred, our heroes set sail for Ireland where they found the Twrch Trwyth with its seven young boars. They unleashed the dogs. One fifth of Ireland was devastated in the chase. They drove the boars across the Irish Sea to Porth Clais in Pembrokeshire.

From there they hunted them across South Wales.
Many lives were lost as each of the young boars was
killed until Twrch Trwyth ran alone.





Finally they reached
Y Mynydd Du, where
Arthur picked up a large
stone and hurled it at the
boar, killing it near
Craig-y-Fran Gorge.

The boar's body
rolled down the
valley and into
the river.



The scissors and comb were brought to the giant, now duty-bound to attend the wedding of Culhwch and Olwen.



It was then that Ysbaddaden met his maker as foretold, leaving our couple to a life of happiness together.



To this day the great rock, known as Carreg Fryn Fras, lies above the Afon Twrch, river of the boar. Some say that the ghost of the fearsome beast still roams the hillside. So watch out if you go there!





The Lady of the Lake & The Physicians of Myddfai

You can feel the drama of Llyn y Fan Fach, the lake nestling below Y Mynydd Du (The Black Mountain), just by being there. There could be no more fitting scene for this well-known tale of a singular lady and her contribution to herbal medicine.

A young man from Blaensawdde in Llanddeusant was minding his mother's cattle, grazing near Llyn y Fan Fach. To his amazement a beautiful young woman emerged from the waters.





Spell-bound he immediately decided to marry her.
Three times he tried to win her favour with gifts of bread,
eventually finding a recipe that she liked.

On his next visit to the lake, the Lord of Llyn y Fan Fach appeared, together with his two identical daughters. If our cowherd could pick which of the twins was his Lady he would win her, together with as many livestock as she could call in one breath.



He eventually identified her by the tie of her sandals.

A fine selection of animals answered her call and the pair were betrothed. But her father gave a warning – that should our man strike his Lady three times without good reason he would lose everything.



Making home at Esgair Llaethdy (the ridge of the dairy), close by the village of Myddfai, the couple had three fine sons.



Surely nothing could upset their blissful life together.



Some years later, while attending a wedding, the Lady began to weep and shout that the bride's troubles were just beginning.



Embarrassed her husband gently tapped her shoulder.
She told him that the first blow had been struck.
Shocked by this, he would be more careful in future.

All prospered until one day at a funeral the Lady laughed out loud that there was no more trouble for the deceased. Another mild tap on the shoulder yielded the response that a second blow had now been received.



The news filled him with remorse and trepidation.



The third "blow" was another mere tap, when encouraging his wife to make her way to market. Sadly that was that. She called together the farm's animals, led them to Llyn y Fan Fach and all returned beneath the waters whence they had come.

Our man, distraught at this tragic turn of events, never saw his Lady again. But she did one day appear before their sons at a place now called Llidiart y Meddygon (Physicians' Gate).





Offering a bag of herbal remedies, she told Rhiwallon, the eldest, that it was his mission to relieve mankind from misery and pain.

She also instructed them in the use of local medicinal herbs from Pant y Meddygon (Physicians' Hollow).

There is evidence that Rhiwallon and his successors, known as the Physicians of Myddfai, lived in the 13th Century and gained widespread renown for their medical expertise.





They are recalled in local names, such as Llwyn Ifan Feddyg, The Farm of Ifan the Physician. Special herbs, not found anywhere else hereabouts, still grow in the cliffs behind magical Llyn y Fan Fach.



Be sure to look out for the Lady
when you visit the lake!

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