

Magic

A short story by Linda Sands

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Many centuries ago, in the time of King Arthur, there lived a boy named Ceredwyn. To other people Ceredwyn seemed like any other boy of his age, and in most respects he was. However, Ceredwyn believed in magic! He didn't know any magic and he didn't know anyone else who knew magic, but he had heard about Merlin the great magician and advisor to King Arthur.

"One day" the boy thought "I'd like to meet Merlin and perhaps he will teach me some magic."

This was his dream, but he kept it to himself lest others thought him to be strange.

So Ceredwyn went dutifully about his responsibilities, collecting wood for the hearth, taking care of the hens and making butter to sell in the village.

When he had finished his work, he played games with the other boys who lived near him.

All the time though, Ceredwyn had a sense that there was more to life than people talked about and the feeling that he was just on the edge of discovering a mystery, kept his dream of believing in magic alive.

One spring morning, the boy went down to the chicken coop where the hens slept and laid their eggs. He could hear the hens squawking and could tell that they were not happy. He soon saw what the trouble was.

The stream had overflowed and flooded the hens' shelter. The oat straw nests were soaking wet and the eggs were sitting in little pools of cold water. The birds were perched on the branches in the coop,

keeping their feet dry, preening their wet feathers and bickering bad-temperedly.

Ceredwyn set to work. He collected the eggs, putting them into his hat. Then he threw out the sodden straw.

He swept the rest of the water out with a leafy branch and left the shelter open so that the sun could dry the earth.

Later in the day, once he'd collected the firewood and churned the butter, he took fresh straw to the hen house and made new nests for the birds on the now dry floor.

Over the next few months, the stream overflowing became a regular occurrence, sometimes three or four times a week. This made extra work for Ceredwyn each time and he began to question why this was happening. It didn't make sense, because there had not been any excessive rain, so why would the stream waters swell and overflow? Although he thought about it often, he couldn't come up with any answers that satisfied him.

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Finally the boy decided to investigate. He packed some food in a leather pouch, rolled it in his over-garment and made a pack from this that fitted comfortably on his back.

Setting out early one morning, he made his way alongside the water's edge, heading upstream to the source of it.

Ceredwyn walked all day. It was tough going in some places where creepers, fallen trees and brambles made it impossible to stay close to the stream. In other places there were sunny clearings with soft clover and scented wild flowers.

Once he saw a doe with her spotted fawn drinking from the stream.

Because he was down wind from them, the doe had no idea he was there and Ceredwyn was able to watch the deer for quite a while before the doe, sensing something she could not see, became nervous and sprang into the safety of the woods with her fawn as close to her as her shadow.

Now, as the sun was beginning to set, the boy looked around for a good place to sleep. He found just the spot! It was a large hollow in the trunk of a huge oak tree. Ceredwyn collected dry bracken and soft leaves to make himself a nest-bed for the night. As it grew dark, he nestled into the warm hollow, finished off the last of his food and then slept peacefully until the morning.

Sunrise saw Ceredwyn up and bathing in the stream. Munching on wild blackberries and walnuts for his breakfast, he wondered how far he would have to walk before he reached the source of the stream. After he'd been walking a good part of the morning, he saw the stream coming forth from the mouth of a cave.

It looked to be only a small opening, but as Ceredwyn climbed up, he saw that there was enough room for him to squeeze through, if he waded in the water and bent right down.

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Once in the cave, his eyes had to adjust to the lack of light. When they had, he began to look around. The source of the stream was a spring coming up from the earth and forming a large deep pool around this natural fountain. "Well, I still can't see what is causing the stream to overflow" he thought.

No sooner had those thoughts passed through his mind, when the cave seemed to light up as if someone had lighted 100 candles. He turned around quickly and much to his horror, a huge scaled beast was

standing before him breathing out flames.

Ceredwyn had never been so frightened in all his life. He felt the blood drain from his face and his legs go weak. The dragon spoke, but the words did not come from its mouth. The boy seemed to be picking up the dragon's thoughts with his own mind.

"Be not afraid. The flames from my belly are not directed towards you. If you come in peace then you are welcome here. Tell me, who are you and what brings you journeying to this place?"

With the thought transference, there also came a sense of peace emanating from the beast. Ceredwyn began to lose the feeling of wanting to vomit and became a little more steady on his feet. "My name is Ceredwyn and I came to find the source of the stream" he stammered

"Welcome Ceredwyn, I am Aelfhere. Why have you come in search of the source of the stream?"

"Because it keeps overflowing and flooding parts of my home" replied Ceredwyn. "I want to know the reason for it and stop it if I can."

The dragon bowed its head humbly. "I didn't realise it was affecting anyone else but me" it said "and I can't help it."

"You can't help what?" enquired the boy.

Well, it doesn't happen all the time, but when I'm asleep ("I sleep up there" said Aelfhere, looking towards a ledge above the pool) "I sometimes dream that I'm rolling on my back in the warm sunny meadow as I did when I was young.

It feels so good that I forget myself and then I end up falling into the pool. It's a rude awakening, it makes a big splash and then of course, because I'm not a small creature, there's a lot of water that's displaced.

I thought I was the only one who was affected, but lately I've heard some stories from 'out there' (Aelfhere nodded his head towards the cave opening) about the damage it's causing, and I want to stop it. I think I'd better talk to Merlin.

Ceredwyn was startled. "You know Merlin?" he gasped!

"Yes I know Merlin and thank goodness I do! I could not imagine being able to get by without Merlin's magic. He has helped me out many a time."

Ceredwyn began to feel excited. "Where does he live?"

"I don't know" replied the dragon "He's never told me."

"Then how do you get in touch with him?"

"I think about how it feels to be with him. It is a peaceful feeling and I sense a sort of glow inside. That is when I talk to him. Then he either speaks back to me, or gives me an idea about what to do. At times the feeling of his presence will just fade away and over the next few days the problem will be solved."

"What does Merlin look like?"

"I think he must appear differently to everyone" said Aelfhere "because I have heard many descriptions of him and none of them were how I have seen Merlin - and even stranger than that, no description has ever been the same as another as far as I've heard.

Do not take my word as truth, but find out what Merlin looks like for yourself."

"I'd like to very much" Ceredwyn said enthusiastically. "How do I do it?"

"Let us sit in comfort" said the dragon "and I will show you."

At the back and along the sides of the cave, away from the water, there were dry leaves and grass. The boy collected a pile of these and

made himself a comfortable cushion to sit on.

The dragon seemed quite content to sit on the rocky surface and when both were still, the great beast began to speak with his thoughts. Each time a flame began to flicker from his jaw, he turned his head to the side.

This reassured Ceredwyn somewhat and helped him to trust that he was not going to end up roasting on a bonfire.

With the pleasant sound of the waterfall in the background, the dragon's discourse began.

"The first thing to do is to close your eyes and become quite relaxed. As you listen to your breathing, let any thoughts just pass by like clouds across the sky.

If you find that you have followed your thoughts, come back to listening to your breathing once again.

Be aware of your breath each time you breathe in, and each time you breathe out. Let everything go and relax."

"After a while you will discover the place that is deep in the centre of your being. This place may be warm and dark or full of light and colours. Whatever this place is like to you, be assured that there is always a peaceful feeling here. This is the place where real magic lives. Magic that most call Merlin. This is the place where you will meet the greatest magician of all time.

You can ask what questions you will in the silence of this awesome place and know that your question is heard. The only thing left to do after you've asked your question, is to stay silent and listen for the answer."

Aelfhere was quiet - his thought-speech had stopped.

Ceredwyn settled down and became still. He didn't think this was a particularly awesome place, as Aelfhere had described it, but he did

feel warm and peaceful.

He decided to ask a question as the dragon had suggested.

"What do you look like Merlin?"

He waited in the stillness, but heard no reply.

The waterfall outside was the only sound besides his own breathing.

Suddenly, a falcon seemed to fly out of nowhere and it landed on the ledge inside the cave. It fixed its stare on Ceredwyn.

The boy felt a tingle go up his spine. This was the type of falcon that was called a merlin - the falcon that Merlin the Magician was named after. It was said that the magician would shape-shift, or change into a falcon so that he could travel swiftly.

Ceredwyn could not stop himself from crying out, though he did whisper his cry. "Look! Behind you! It's Merlin!"

The falcon spread its wings and with a swoosh flew swiftly out of the cave through the waterfall opening.

At the same time the dragon slowly opened his eyes.

Aelfhere turned and looked to where Ceredwyn was pointing.

"What did you see boy?" The dragon's thoughts came flowing to Ceredwyn.

"I saw Merlin! He was a falcon! Oh I wish you had seen him too, but you weren't quick enough."

"I saw Merlin too, but not as a falcon." Replied Aelfhere peacefully.

"Merlin appears to me as a light inside myself and that's where I direct my questions. I am delighted that he has already given me an answer.

Each evening before I fall asleep, I am to get in touch with Merlin and ask him to wake me if I am about to fall into the water. He also told me that I should go and roll around in the meadow outside on occasions,

to satisfy that urge and then I won't need to dream about doing it."

Ceredwyn felt very happy and couldn't stop smiling. Not only had he solved the mystery of the overflowing stream and met a real live dragon, he had also learned how to contact Merlin, had asked him a question *and* had received an answer. This had turned out to be one amazing day!

"I always knew there was magic in life!" he thought "and now I've learned a wonderful secret."

The dragon heard Ceredwyn's thoughts and replied with his own. "It is only because you believed in magic that you have learned of this secret. Now that you know, keep it close to your heart and use it whenever necessary. Merlin will always show you the answers to your questions. It is up to you to be still enough to hear them.

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Although the cave was lit by the light emanating from the dragon, the boy could tell that it must be getting dark outside. It had been the most interesting, wonderful day of his life and he was tired.

Aelfhere suggested that Ceredwyn make a bed for the night out of leaves and sleep well until morning.

The beast then climbed onto the ledge where he slept and soon both of them were sleeping soundly.

The next morning when Ceredwyn woke, he felt somewhat disorientated. He looked around the cave and suddenly all the events from the day before flooded back into his mind. The feeling of excitement returned.

"It's real!" he thought, looking at the dragon who was sitting quietly watching Ceredwyn.

"Did it work?" asked the boy "Did you ask for Merlin's help before you went to sleep?"

"Oh yes, it worked!" Aelfhere looked pleased "and today I shall go and roll in the meadow as though I were young again."

Ceredwyn washed in the pool and collected his belongings together. He knew he would travel home soon, or his family would be searching for him. Although he would have enjoyed staying with Aelfhere longer, he did not want his family to fret.

"May I come and see you again?" he asked the dragon.

"Surely" replied Aelfhere, "Merlin will let you know when it is time for you to return to me"

They said their 'goodbyes' and Ceredwyn set off for home.

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Later that day when he stopped to rest in a sunny clearing, he sat quietly, listening to his breathing as the dragon had taught him. After a while he felt the peaceful feeling he had felt in the cave and Ceredwyn asked a question.

"Will you always come when I need you Merlin?"

The only sounds besides his own breathing were the crickets, an occasional bird call and the water bubbling over the stones in the stream.

The boy felt content. He had experienced magic and even if it did not work again, he would keep those memories close to his heart forever.

He stood up to continue his journey and as he took a step forward, a falcon, who had been sitting silently on a high branch above the boy, flew down to the ground. It landed just in front of Ceredwyn and stood staring at him.

The falcon looked unafraid and very powerful. Words seemed to flow from the bird to Ceredwyn's mind.

"I not only come when you need my help, but I am always close by. Remember this and your life will be full of magic."

The moment seemed to last forever. The boy and the falcon looking into each other's eyes.

Suddenly, as if to break the spell, the falcon took off into the air and disappeared over the tree tops. Ceredwyn didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He felt so much. He felt completely full.

Magic is real!