

## **THE PECULIAR ADVENTURE OF BECAN**

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ON A CERTAIN ISLAND IN THE NORTHERN SEAS there was a small castle. In that castle lived an old wizard named Conant. Conant was an extremely old wizard, no one was quite sure how old he was (and I think he forgot his own age). He wore long green robes, walked with a large wooden staff, and his long white beard flowed near to the floor. He always had a cap on that covered his long white hair, and he wore glasses that rested on the tip of his nose. From time to time he would take in an apprentice or two.

Currently he had two young apprentices. One was a boy named Becan who was eleven years old. His father had trained under Conant when he was a lad and knew that the old wizard would train his son well. Becan was a bright, but impatient, lad. He had curly light brown hair and dark brown eyes. Conant gave the lad red robes to wear when he arrived at the castle one year ago for training. Conant's other apprentice was a young lass named Morna. Morna was a distant relative of Conant's, like her grandmother's second-cousin or some such thing. Morna was nine years old, and had arrived shortly after Becan. She was very smart and even Conant was impressed at how quickly she learned. She was given purple robes which in a odd way complemented her curly red hair.

Naturally, both students were given wands to perform complicated spells. Simple magic can be done without wands, that is how magic tricks are played, but real spells need to be performed with a wand. Becan was always too eager to perform the new spells and Conant had to let him learn the hard way a few times that rushing through can be dangerous.

One day when the three were in the training room Becan asked, while reading through a spell book, "Can you teach me how to apparate? The spell in the book doesn't seem too difficult."

Conant was helping Morna learn a spell to transfigure small objects (currently a spoon into a cup for a safe practice). Conant turned to Becan and smiled as he always did at Becan's questions. "My lad," the wizard began, "you are not reading carefully. The words are simple enough, but you have to see the place you want to go to. If there is any conflict in your mind

then you may end up in a different place entirely. You have to train your mind more."

"I think I can handle that," Becan said, "I can picture the field at my parent's home right now."

"Haha," Conant chuckled, "my dear lad, you need to be patient. The field you are picturing can easily become a different memory or thought altogether. I will teach you how to focus your mind soon. Then we can see if you are ready to apparate."

Becan folded his arms and gave a pout and replied, "Fine."

Conant shook his head. Just then the clock struck the hour, it was five in the evening.

"Oh dear me," Conant said with a larger smile, "I am afraid I will need to be leaving. I am expected at an old friends home for dinner, he is turning one hundred today. But I am afraid you two would be quite bored by us old timers. When you are ready for dinner, Berta will have food ready for you in the kitchen."

The old man began to walk but stopped, "Becan," Conant ordered, "do not practice any new spells while I am gone. I do not want another incident like the horde of five foot mice that rampaged in the basement last month."

Morna gave a little giggle, and Becan folded his arms tighter and sank into his chair.

Conant then left the room, of course he was going to apparate to his friend's party but he did not want Becan to try to copy after he left.

A few minutes went by. Morna continued to turn the spoon into a tea cup and then back into a spoon. Becan

looked around the room. Conant's collection of potions caught his eye. He walked over to the cabinet of potions. Most of the ones that were left in the classroom were transfiguration potions, which were safer than using a spell. They were put into different categories. Rodents, Aquatic, Semi-Aquatic, Birds.

Becan looked at the bird potions. They seemed to be placed in order of size, without really paying attention to which vile he grabbed he took two from the larger end. He put them into his robe pocket and returned to the spell book.

"Morna," he called, "have you ever been to northern Eire?"

"No, I come from the southwest," she replied then she looked at him with an inquisitive look and asked, "why do you ask?"

"Oh, I was going to stop by tonight and wanted to see if you wanted to join," he said trying to look very proper.

"Haha," Morna laughed, which made Becan look more serious, "you know it is too far to fly before it's too late. And you are not suggesting you are going to apparate are you?"

"Well, Conant is going to be away for a while," Becan began, "when ever he visits his old friends they drink too much wine and he does not come back till the next midday. So we should not be bothered."

"Well um...", Morna stuttered.

"Don't be scared now," Becan said walking over with a smile and offering her his hand, "I know what I am doing."

Morna is a smart young lass,

but something about Becan's look makes her follow him when she knows better. Perhaps when they are older they will figure out the cause of this.

"Um...okay," Morna said, blushing and taking his hand.

They walked back over to the spell book.

Becan skimmed over it again and said, "The book says that multiple people can go together as long as they are physically connected. So hold on tight to my hand...not that tight."

Morna squeezed his hand, but lightened her grasp a little.

Becan took out his wand. He said, "léim amach," and drove his wand straight into the air.

All of a sudden they felt like they were moving very quickly, too quickly for Morna's liking. Then all of a sudden they landed on the ground, and Morna landed on Becan's side.

"Oof," Becan groaned as Morna climbed off of him.

"Sorry Becan," she apologized.

"It's okay," he replied, "I am fine and it was our first go at it after all."

They looked around and they were in a field with emerald grass all around. It was mid-March so it was rather cool, but the children did not mind. Becan did the spell correctly, they were in Northern Eire near his home. This was the field that he roamed before he went to Conant's for training.

"It worked!" Becan exclaimed, "I knew I could do it."

Morna was looking around the field and smiled at Becan. Becan pointed at a tree nearby and ran off

to it. Morna followed. Becan was an excellent climber, but Morna was afraid of heights. So she stayed on the first branch. Becan climbed as high as he could and looked around.

"See anything interesting?" Morna asked.

"Not really," Becan said, "but the cool air feels good up here."

He climbed back down and the pair walked around the field for about an hour. They saw all sorts of animals, rabbits, badgers, and an occasional deer. After a while Becan's stomach began to growl.

"I am getting hungry," Becan said. Morna nodded in agreement.

"We should probably get back," she said.

She took his hand and he closed his eyes to think. He thought of the castle and the ice nearby, as he was began to say the spell, he thought about snow, and said, "léim amach."

They felt the rush around them and before they knew it they landed. But they were not at the castle. Instead they were in a field of snow and ice. Becan had focused too much on the ice as he cast the spell and his mind wondered off from the castle. The result was that Becan apparated to an icy isle off the coast of Alba.

"Where are we?" Morna asked worriedly.

"I...I don't know," Becan replied then he reached into his pocket, "here I took two bird potions. Hold onto this one. I will turn into a bird and fly up and see if anything is nearby."

"Why not try the spell again?" Morna asked.

"I...I don't know what went

wrong,” Becan answered, “I might make it even worse. Here just hold this.”

He handed her one vial and opened the other and drank it. The transformation is quick but it looks very strange and Morna looked away. When she looked back she was horrified, Becan had turned into an ostrich. Becan put his head down in the snow.

“Don’t drink that one,” Becan’s voice came through the snow, “I took it from the same place.”

Morna shook her head and put it into her pocket.

“Well,” she said, “first I will make a magic fire, then we will need to build an igloo or something to get out of the wind.”

Becan got his head out of the snow and nodded in agreement.

“Tine,” Morna said moving her wand in a downward strike.

Meanwhile, Becan was attempting to put snow together to build the bricks of an igloo. As you can imagine it was not going very well. For it is not in the nature of an ostrich to build an igloo. After a few failed attempts and slipping a number of times, Becan gave up and sat down next to Morna’s magical flame.

Morna had an easier time, because she could still use her wand. She was constructing the igloo with spells to bind objects together and levitating them into place. After she made a rather large igloo she said, “you can go in now, Becan.”

Becan slowly made his way into the igloo. Morna patted him on the wing and followed him in. The igloo was warm enough and blocked the

wind.

“Do you think Conant will find us?” Morna asked.

“I am sure he will,” Becan said, “but I hope he doesn’t drink too much tonight.”

They sat quietly for the rest of the night. Morna knew that Becan was very sorry for his silly plan and did not want to make him feel any worse than he already did.

Luckily for the children Conant did not drink too much to prevent him from coming back early in the morning. When he arrived he appeared in the dining room. He found Berta in a chair with her head in her arms. He could tell that she had been crying and knew what had happened. He shook his head and then tapped her shoulder.

Berta woke with a start, and when she saw Conant she began to sob.

“I don’t know where the children went,” she cried between great gasps, “they just disappeared.”

“It is okay Berta,” Conant said with his arm around her, “It is my fault, I should have taken Becan’s wand when I left. I will get them back. Just make a large lunch because they will be hungry when I get them back.”

Berta stopped crying as hard but was still sniffing as she went into the kitchen.

Conant drove his staff into the floor in frustration. Then he apparated to his study and took out a magic ball. Conant was one of five wizards or witches that could use a magic ball to find someone that he wanted. When he located the children in the snowy northlands, he rose and apparated to the igloo.

"Morna, Becan," Conant called out.

A few moments later a very hungry and cold Morna came out of the igloo. She smiled and ran to the wizard. She embraced him and said she was sorry.

"It's okay child," Conant replied patting her on the back.

Then an ostrich came out and Conant laughed at the sight. Becan had his head very low to the ground and humbly walked up to the wizard.

"I should have listened to you sir," Becan began, "I am really sorry."

"I hope you learned a lesson," Conant said, "or perhaps two. You should really check the labels on my potions. I have flightless birds all the way to the right. Tell me how did the igloo building go for you?"

"I was not able to do anything," Becan replied.

"Stands to reason," Conant said laughing, "we cannot expect an ostrich to do something outside of its nature any more than I can expect you to do something outside of yours. Too bad listening seems to be outside of your nature." Conant patted Becan's back and laughed. "Okay," he continued, "I think it is about time we went home."

Conant lifted Morna onto Becan's back and then held onto Becan's long ostrich neck. Conant then performed the spell (he can cast magic without saying words) and they went straight into the dining room of the castle where Berta was finishing placing lunch on the table.

When she saw them, she ran over and grabbed Morna off of Becan's

back and spun her around. Then she realized that an ostrich was in the dining room.

"Is that Becan?" Berta asked. Conant nodded and everyone but Becan began to laugh.

"Do not worry the potion should run out soon," Conant said.

Conant and Morna took their places at the table. Becan was given food on his plate but had to peck at it. After a few minutes the potion wore off and Becan returned to his normal form.

"Too bad," Conant said with a wily smile, "I was beginning to like you better as an ostrich."

Morna laughed. Becan gave a little grin as he sat down and was able to eat normally, or at least normally for Becan.

So the lesson in the story is to always read the label on the potion. Oh, and to be patient and take the time to learn to do things correctly is a good moral too. ✱