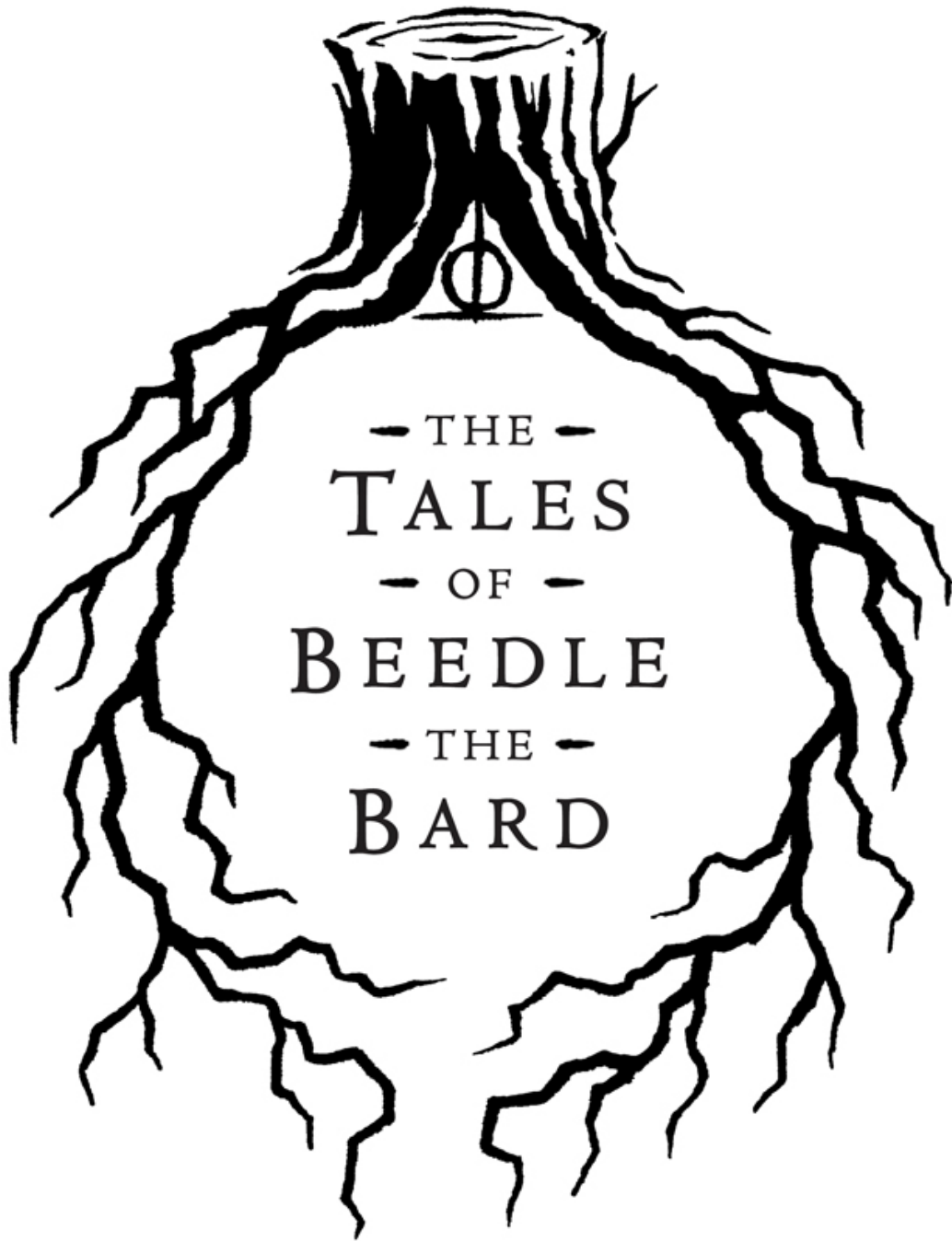


— THE —
TALES
— OF —
BEEDLE
— THE —
BARD

J. K. ROWLING



J. K. ROWLING

Pottermore

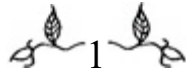
from J.K. Rowling





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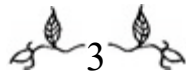
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THE TALE OF THE THREE BROTHERS



Introduction

The Tales of Beedle the Bard is a collection of stories written for young wizards and witches. They have been popular bedtime reading for centuries, with the result that the Hopping Pot and the Fountain of Fair Fortune are as familiar to many of the students at Hogwarts as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are to Muggle (non-magical) children.

Beedle's stories resemble our fairy tales in many respects; for instance, virtue is usually rewarded and wickedness punished. However, there is one very obvious difference. In Muggle fairy tales, magic tends to lie at the root of the hero or heroine's troubles – the wicked witch has poisoned the apple, or put the princess into a hundred years' sleep, or turned the prince into a hideous beast. In *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, on the other hand, we meet heroes and heroines who can perform magic themselves, and yet find it just as hard to solve their problems as we do. Beedle's stories have helped generations of wizarding parents to explain this painful fact of life to their young children: that magic causes as much trouble as it cures.

Another notable difference between these fables and their Muggle counterparts is that Beedle's witches are much more active in seeking their fortunes than our fairy-tale heroines. Asha, Altheda, Amata and Babbitty Rabbitty are all witches who take their fate into their own hands, rather than taking a prolonged nap or waiting for someone to return a lost shoe. The exception to this rule – the unnamed maiden of 'The Warlock's Hairy Heart' – acts more like our idea of a storybook princess, but there is no 'happily ever after' at the end of her tale.

Beedle the Bard lived in the fifteenth century and much of his life remains shrouded in mystery. We know that he was born in Yorkshire, and the only surviving woodcut shows that he had an exceptionally luxuriant beard. If his stories accurately reflect his opinions, he rather liked Muggles, whom he regarded as ignorant rather than malevolent; he mistrusted Dark

Magic, and he believed that the worst excesses of wizardkind sprang from the all-too-human traits of cruelty, apathy or arrogant misapplication of their own talents. The heroes and heroines who triumph in his stories are not those with the most powerful magic, but rather those who demonstrate the most kindness, common sense and ingenuity.

One modern-day wizard who held very similar views was, of course, Professor Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Order of Merlin (First Class), Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. This similarity of outlook notwithstanding, it was a surprise to discover a set of notes on *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* among the many papers that Dumbledore left in his will to the Hogwarts Archives. Whether this commentary was written for his own satisfaction, or for future publication, we shall never know; however, we have been graciously granted permission by Professor Minerva McGonagall, now Headmistress of Hogwarts, to print Professor Dumbledore's notes here, alongside a brand new translation of the tales by Hermione Granger. We hope that Professor Dumbledore's insights, which include observations on wizarding history, personal reminiscences and enlightening information on key elements of each story, will help a new generation of both wizarding and Muggle readers appreciate *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. It is the belief of all who knew him personally that Professor Dumbledore would have been delighted to lend his support to this project, given that all royalties are to be donated to Lumos, a charity which works to benefit children in desperate need of a voice.

It seems only right to make one small, additional comment on Professor Dumbledore's notes. As far as we can tell, the notes were completed around eighteen months before the tragic events that took place at the top of Hogwarts' Astronomy Tower. Those familiar with the history of the most recent wizarding war (everyone who has read all seven volumes on the life of Harry Potter, for instance) will be aware that Professor Dumbledore reveals a little less than he knows – or suspects – about the final story in this book. The reason for any omission lies, perhaps, in what Dumbledore said about truth, many years ago, to his favourite and most famous pupil:

'It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution.'

Whether we agree with him or not, we can perhaps excuse Professor
Dumbledore for wishing to protect future readers from the temptations to
which he himself had fallen prey, and for which he paid so terrible a price.

J K Rowling

2008

A Note on the Footnotes

Professor Dumbledore appears to have been writing for a wizarding audience, so I have occasionally inserted an explanation of a term or fact that might need clarification for Muggle readers.

JKR





THE WIZARD AND THE HOPPING POT

There was once a kindly old wizard who used his magic generously and wisely for the benefit of his neighbours. Rather than reveal the true source of his power, he pretended that his potions, charms and antidotes sprang ready-made from the little cauldron he called his lucky cooking pot. From miles around people came to him with their troubles, and the wizard was pleased to give his pot a stir and put things right.

This well-beloved wizard lived to a goodly age, then died, leaving all his chattels to his only son. This son was of a very different disposition to his gentle father. Those who could not work magic were, to the son's mind, worthless, and he had often quarrelled with his father's habit of dispensing magical aid to their neighbours.

Upon the father's death, the son found hidden inside the old cooking pot a small package bearing his name. He opened it, hoping for gold, but found instead a soft, thick slipper, much too small to wear, and with no pair. A fragment of parchment within the slipper bore the words 'In the fond hope, my son, that you will never need it.'

The son cursed his father's age-softened mind, then threw the slipper back into the cauldron, resolving to use it henceforth as a rubbish pail.

That very night a peasant woman knocked on the front door.

‘My granddaughter is afflicted by a crop of warts, sir,’ she told him.

‘Your father used to mix a special poultice in that old cooking pot –’

‘Begone!’ cried the son. ‘What care I for your brat’s warts?’

And he slammed the door in the old woman’s face.

At once there came a loud clanging and banging from his kitchen. The wizard lit his wand and opened the door, and there, to his amazement, he saw his father’s old cooking pot: it had sprouted a single foot of brass, and was hopping on the spot, in the middle of the floor, making a fearful noise upon the flagstones. The wizard approached it in wonder, but fell back hurriedly when he saw that the whole of the pot’s surface was covered in warts.

‘Disgusting object!’ he cried, and he tried firstly to Vanish the pot, then to clean it by magic, and finally to force it out of the house. None of his spells worked, however, and he was unable to prevent the pot hopping after him out of the kitchen, and then following him up to bed, clanging and banging loudly on every wooden stair.

The wizard could not sleep all night for the banging of the warty old pot by his bedside, and next morning the pot insisted upon hopping after him to the breakfast table. *Clang, clang, clang*, went the brass-footed pot, and the wizard had not even started his porridge when there came another knock on the door.

An old man stood on the doorstep.

‘’Tis my old donkey, sir,’ he explained. ‘Lost, she is, or stolen, and without her I cannot take my wares to market, and my family will go hungry tonight.’

‘And I am hungry now!’ roared the wizard, and he slammed the door upon the old man.

Clang, clang, clang, went the cooking pot’s single brass foot upon the floor, but now its clamour was mixed with the brays of a donkey and human groans of hunger, echoing from the depths of the pot.

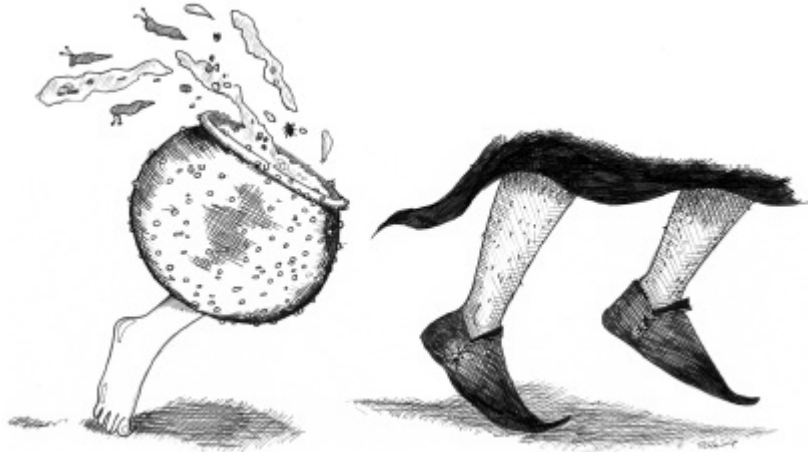
‘Be still. Be silent!’ shrieked the wizard, but not all his magical powers could quieten the warty pot, which hopped at his heels all day, braying and groaning and clanging, no matter where he went or what he did.

That evening there came a third knock upon the door, and there on the threshold stood a young woman sobbing as though her heart would break.

‘My baby is grievously ill,’ she said. ‘Won’t you please help us? Your father bade me come if troubled –’

But the wizard slammed the door on her. And now the tormenting pot filled to the brim with salt water, and slopped tears all over the floor as it hopped, and brayed, and groaned, and sprouted more warts.

Though no more villagers came to seek help at the wizard’s cottage for the rest of the week, the pot kept him informed of their many ills. Within a few days, it was not only braying and groaning and slopping and hopping and sprouting warts, it was also choking and retching, crying like a baby, whining like a dog, and spewing out bad cheese and sour milk and a plague of hungry slugs.



The wizard could not sleep or eat with the pot beside him, but the pot refused to leave, and he could not silence it or force it to be still.

At last the wizard could bear it no more.

‘Bring me all your problems, all your troubles and your woes!’ he screamed, fleeing into the night, with the pot hopping behind him along the road into the village. ‘Come! Let me cure you, mend you and comfort you! I have my father’s cooking pot, and I shall make you well!’

And with the foul pot still bounding along behind him, he ran up the street, casting spells in every direction.

Inside one house the little girl’s warts vanished as she slept; the lost donkey was Summoned from a distant briar patch and set down softly in its stable; the sick baby was doused in dittany and woke, well and rosy. At every house of sickness and sorrow, the wizard did his best, and gradually

the cooking pot beside him stopped groaning and retching, and became quiet, shiny and clean.

‘Well, Pot?’ asked the trembling wizard, as the sun began to rise.

The pot burped out the single slipper he had thrown into it, and permitted him to fit it on to the brass foot. Together, they set off back to the wizard’s house, the pot’s footstep muffled at last. But from that day forward, the wizard helped the villagers like his father before him, lest the pot cast off its slipper, and begin to hop once more.



Albus Dumbledore on 'The Wizard and the Hopping Pot'



A kind old wizard decides to teach his hardhearted son a lesson by giving him a taste of the local Muggles' misery. The young wizard's conscience awakes, and he agrees to use his magic for the benefit of his non-magical neighbours. A simple and heart-warming fable, one might think – in which case, one would reveal oneself to be an innocent nincompoop. A pro-Muggle story showing a Muggle-loving father as superior in magic to a Muggle-hating son? It is nothing short of amazing that any copies of the original version of this tale survived the flames to which they were so often consigned.

Beedle was somewhat out of step with his times in preaching a message of brotherly love for Muggles. The persecution of witches and wizards was gathering pace all over Europe in the early fifteenth century. Many in the magical community felt, and with good reason, that offering to cast a spell on the Muggle-next-door's sickly pig was tantamount to volunteering to fetch the firewood for one's own funeral pyre.¹ 'Let the Muggles manage without us!' was the cry, as the wizards drew further and further apart from their non-magical brethren, culminating with the institution of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy in 1689, when wizardkind voluntarily went underground.

Children being children, however, the grotesque Hopping Pot had taken hold of their imaginations. The solution was to jettison the pro-Muggle

moral but keep the warty cauldron, so by the middle of the sixteenth century a different version of the tale was in wide circulation among wizarding families. In the revised story, the Hopping Pot protects an innocent wizard from his torch-bearing, pitchfork-toting neighbours by chasing them away from the wizard's cottage, catching them and swallowing them whole. At the end of the story, by which time the Pot has consumed most of his neighbours, the wizard gains a promise from the few remaining villagers that he will be left in peace to practise magic. In return, he instructs the Pot to render up its victims, who are duly burped out of its depths, slightly mangled. To this day, some wizarding children are only told the revised version of the story by their (generally anti-Muggle) parents, and the original, if and when they ever read it, comes as a great surprise.

As I have already hinted, however, its pro-Muggle sentiment was not the only reason that 'The Wizard and the Hopping Pot' attracted anger. As the witch-hunts grew ever fiercer, wizarding families began to live double lives, using charms of concealment to protect themselves and their families. By the seventeenth century, any witch or wizard who chose to fraternise with Muggles became suspect, even an outcast in his or her own community. Among the many insults hurled at pro-Muggle witches and wizards (such as fruity epithets as 'Mudwallower', 'Dunglicker' and 'Scumsucker' date from this period), was the charge of having weak or inferior magic.

Influential wizards of the day, such as Brutus Malfoy, editor of *Warlock at War*, an anti-Muggle periodical, perpetuated the stereotype that a Muggle-lover was about as magical as a Squib.² In 1675, Brutus wrote:

This we may state with certainty: any wizard who shows fondness for the society of Muggles is of low intelligence, with magic so feeble and pitiful that he can only feel himself superior if surrounded by Muggle pigmen.

Nothing is a surer sign of weak magic than a weakness for non-magical company.

This prejudice eventually died out in the face of overwhelming evidence that some of the world's most brilliant wizards³ were, to use the common phrase, 'Muggle-lovers'.

The final objection to 'The Wizard and the Hopping Pot' remains alive in certain quarters today. It was summed up best, perhaps, by Beatrix Bloxam (1794–1910), author of the infamous *Toadstool Tales*. Mrs Bloxam believed

that *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* were damaging to children because of what she called ‘their unhealthy preoccupation with the most horrid subjects, such as death, disease, bloodshed, wicked magic, unwholesome characters and bodily effusions and eruptions of the most disgusting kind’. Mrs Bloxam took a variety of old stories, including several of Beedle’s, and rewrote them according to her ideals, which she expressed as ‘filling the pure minds of our little angels with healthy, happy thoughts, keeping their sweet slumber free of wicked dreams and protecting the precious flower of their innocence’.

The final paragraph of Mrs Bloxam’s pure and precious reworking of ‘The Wizard and the Hopping Pot’ reads:

Then the little golden pot danced with delight – hoppitty hoppitty hop! – on its tiny rosy toes! Wee Willykins had cured all the dollies of their poorly tum-tums, and the little pot was so happy that it filled up with sweeties for Wee Willykins and the dollies!

‘But don’t forget to brush your teethy-pegs!’ cried the pot.

And Wee Willykins kissed and hugged the hoppitty pot and promised always to help the dollies and never to be an old grumpy-wumpkins again.

Mrs Bloxam’s tale has met the same response from generations of wizarding children: uncontrollable retching, followed by an immediate demand to have the book taken from them and mashed into pulp.



¹ It is true, of course, that genuine witches and wizards were reasonably adept at escaping the stake, block and noose (see my comments about Lisette de Lapin in the commentary on ‘Babbitty Rabbitty and her Cackling Stump’). However, a number of deaths did occur: Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington (a wizard at the royal court in his lifetime, and in his death-time, ghost of Gryffindor Tower) was stripped of his wand before being locked in a dungeon, and was unable to magic himself out of his execution; and wizarding families were particularly prone to losing younger members, whose inability to control their own magic made them noticeable, and vulnerable, to Muggle witch-hunters.

2 {A Squib is a person born to magical parents, but who has no magical powers. Such an occurrence is rare. Muggle-born witches and wizards are much more common. JKR}

3 Such as myself.

