

The Three Red Witches and the Cranberry Bog

IN A BOG FAR to the north there lived three Red Witches. They weren't the type of Witch you are probably imagining right now: mean-tempered and full of evil spells. For you see, witches were once just regular women who lived on the outskirts of their village foraging for healing herbs to protect and care for their community. These three witches wore long red gowns, red shawls, and had long red hair that they tied around their heads in braids fastened with little green vines. They had a friend who was always at their side: a crane, a beautiful gray bird with long legs who also loved the wetland. He accompanied the witches wherever they went.

No one knew exactly where they lived but the villagers knew that the Red Witches were not afraid of the damp misty bogs, of wet moss, and fly-eating pitcher plants. They knew that the women would visit the village whenever someone was going to give birth, or was sick, or needed a bit of magic.

Wherever they went they left behind a small red cloth with a small four-petaled flower painted on it. It was a sign that they had been there and had left their blessing.

The women loved the bog land and took care of it. On full moons they could be heard singing and wading barefoot through bog rosemary and sundew with frogs hopping about their skirts. The people of the village loved the witches and would open their windows to hear their songs floating in on the breeze.

Song:

*Mist and moss
In the wetland bogs
Full of magic
And little green frogs*

*Deep deep down
Red jewels wait
Dance under the moon
And stay up late!*

There was one person in the village however, who did not like the witches. He thought they had too much power and he wanted some of that power for himself. He would walk down the street with a scowl on his face whenever they entered the village bringing their armfuls of herbs. Why do the herbs give them power he wondered? How can I know more about herbs and get some of their power, he thought?

His name was Roman. He was quite a grumpy man with a long stringy beard and brown clothing. One day, when the three women had entered the village to bring **medicine** to a sick

man, Roman lay a trap for them. He strung a clear piece of fish twine across the street to trip them and make them fall and lose their herbs, but the crane saw this and bit the twine with his long beak until it fell to the ground letting the women pass safely through.

The next time they came to the village to bring foraged **food** for some hungry children Roman set the geese on them to tear the herbs from their arms, but the crane saw them coming and flapped his great wings to chase them off. The three Red Witches finished their business in the village and returned home to bogs.

Again the women visited the village, this time bringing a **gift** of a bouquet of beautiful bog flowers to a family mourning the death of their grandmother. Roman was ready again to try and steal the herbs. This time he lowered a hook to grab the flowers and reel them in and this time crane was watching children playing ball in the streets and did not see Roman steal the herbs. The Red Witches could not catch Roman as he ran away with the flowers they had brought to the village.

Roman hid behind a shed outside of town to look at the herbs and try to figure out how he could get their power for himself.

He talked to them commanding them to give him power, to give him medicine and food and gifts. But the herbs only wilted in his hand. He cursed the Red Witches.

After this the Red Witches did not come as often to the village and the people wondered where they were.

Finally, a group of village women got together and said, "we must go and find them and tell them we miss them and their food and medicines."

The woman met at sunset and walked up to the bogs calling for the Red Witches. They walked around the bog calling and calling but no one answered. The Red Witches had disappeared. The women grew angry at Roman for chasing away the women and started to think of ways to chase Roman himself away from their village. As their voices grew louder and louder with anger at what Roman had done, one of them, a quiet young woman drew away from the crowd and bent down in the bog. She had noticed something red and shining at her feet.

As she looked closer, she saw many red shining jewels at her feet, and she called out to her friends to come and see.

"Look what I have found!" There were hundreds of beautiful red berries at their feet in among the green vines in the bog. And then the crowd of women remembered the Red Witches song and realized that the Red Witches were not really gone. They had left a beautiful red berry as a gift that would provide the villagers medicine, food and beauty every autumn. The quiet young woman took a knife out of her pocket and cut one of the red berries in half. The other women gasped in surprise! There was the four-petaled flower that the Red Witches always left on the

cloth at every house they entered in the village. The Red Witches were still with them, but had left their teachings to all of the women in the village to carry on. They decided to name the berry “cranberry” after the Red Witch’s bird friend. And even now if you look at the cranberries flower that blooms in the summer, the flower looks like the bill of a crane. Over time the name changed to cranberry as we know it today. And that is a story of how cranberries came into the world.

THE END

By Landere Naisbitt, BHHT Outreach Coordinator