

26 | The Black Cauldron

by Lloyd Alexander

In this passage from the book about the faraway and long-ago land of Prydain a stranger who claims to be a prince causes a commotion when he rides into the little farm of Dallben the enchanter.

Autumn had come too swiftly. In the northernmost realms of Prydain many trees were already leafless, and among the branches clung the ragged shapes of empty nests. To the south, across the river Great Avren, the hills shielded Caer Dallben from the winds, but even here the little farm was drawing in on itself.

For Taran, the summer was ending before it had begun. That morning Dallben had given him the task of washing the oracular pig. Had the old enchanter ordered him to capture a full-grown gwythaint, Taran would gladly have set out after one of the vicious winged creatures. As it was, he filled the bucket at the well and trudged reluctantly to Hen Wen's enclosure. The white pig, usually eager for a bath, now squealed nervously and rolled on her back in the mud. Busy struggling to raise Hen Wen to her feet, Taran did not notice the horseman until he had reined up at the pen.

"You, there! Pig-boy!" The rider looking down at him was a youth only a few years older than Taran. His hair was tawny, his eyes black and deep-set in a pale, arrogant face. Though of excellent quality, his garments had seen much wear, and his cloak was purposely draped to hide his threadbare attire. The cloak itself, Taran saw, had been neatly and painstakingly mended. He sat astride a roan mare, a lean and nervous steed speckled red and yellow, with a long, narrow head, whose expression was as ill-tempered as her master's.

"You, pig-boy," he repeated, "is this Caer Dallben?"

The horseman's tone and bearing nettled Taran, but he curbed his temper and bowed courteously. "It is," he replied. "But I am not a pig-boy," he added. "I am Taran, Assistant Pig-Keeper."

"A pig is a pig," said the stranger, "and a pig-boy is a pig-boy. Run and tell your master I am here," he ordered. "Tell him that Prince Ellidyr, Son of Pen-Llarcau. . ."

Hen Wen seized this opportunity to roll in another puddle. "Stop that, Hen!" Taran cried, hurrying after her.

"Leave off with that sow," Ellidyr commanded. "Did you not hear me? Do as I say, and be quick about it."

"Tell Dallben yourself!" Taran called over his shoulder, trying to keep Hen Wen from the mud. "Or wait until I've done with my work!"

"Mind your impudence," Ellidyr answered, "or you shall have a good beating for it."

Taran flushed. Leaving Hen Wen to do as she pleased, he strode quickly to the railing and climbed over. "If I do," he answered hotly, throwing back his head and looking at Ellidyr full in the face, "it will not be at *your* hands."

Ellidyr gave a scornful laugh. Before Taran could spring aside, the roan plunged forward. Ellidyr, leaning from the saddle, seized Taran by the front of the jacket. Taran flailed his arms and legs vainly. Strong as he

was, he could not break free. He was pummeled and shaken until his teeth rattled.

Ellidyr then urged the roan into a gallop, hauled Taran across the turf to the cottage, and there, while chickens scattered in every direction, tossed him roughly to the ground.

The commotion brought Dallben and Coll outdoors. The Princess Eilonwy hurried from the scullery, her apron flying and a cookpot still in her hand. With a cry of alarm she ran to Taran's side.

Ellidyr, without troubling to dismount, called to the white-bearded enchanter. "Are you Dallben? I have brought your pig-boy to be thrashed for insolence."

"Tut!" said Dallben, unperturbed by Ellidyr's furious expression. "Whether he is insolent is one thing, and whether he should be thrashed is another. In either case, I need no suggestions from you."

"I am a Prince of Pen-Llarcau!" cried Ellidyr.

"Yes, yes, yes," Dallben interrupted with a wave of his brittle hand. "I am quite aware of all that and too busy to be concerned with it. Go, water your horse and your temper at the same time. You shall be called when you are wanted."

Ellidyr was about to reply, but the enchanter's stern glance made him hold his tongue. He turned the roan and urged her toward the stable.

Princess Eilonwy and the stout, baldheaded Coll, meantime, had been helping Taran pick himself up.

"You should know better, my boy, than to quarrel with strangers," said Coll good-naturedly.

"That's true enough," Eilonwy added. "Especially if they're on horseback and you're on foot." ■

✓ Enter your reading time below. Then look up your reading speed on the Words-per-Minute table on page 130.

Reading Time _____

Reading Speed _____


Enter your reading speed on the Reading Speed graph on page 131.

Comprehension

Put an **X** in the box next to the correct answer for each question or statement. Do not look back at the selection.

- Who was Hen Wen?
 - a. an old enchanter
 - b. a vicious winged creature
 - c. a white pig
- When the horseman rode up, Taran was busy
 - a. trying to bathe the pig.
 - b. feeding the pig.
 - c. cleaning the pigsty.
- Ellidyr was
 - a. a Prince of Caer Dallben.
 - b. a Prince of Pen-Llarcau.
 - c. the husband of Princess Eilonwy.
- What did Ellidyr call Taran?
 - a. the Assistant Pig-Keeper
 - b. a sow
 - c. pig-boy
- Compared to Taran, Ellidyr was
 - a. younger.
 - b. older.
 - c. the same age.


6. What was Dallben's reaction when Ellidyr told him Taran should be thrashed for insolence?
- a. He was angry.
 - b. He was unperturbed.
 - c. He agreed with Ellidyr.
7. Who ran to Taran's side to assist him?
- a. Princess Eilonwy
 - b. Dallben
 - c. Coll
8. Why didn't Ellidyr talk back to Dallben?
- a. Dallben left right away.
 - b. Ellidyr didn't have anything to say.
 - c. Dallben's stern glance prevented him.
4. Taran's response to Ellidyr's words, "Mind your impudence, or you shall have a good beating for it," shows that Taran
- a. is very proud.
 - b. is very frightened.
 - c. has a sense of humor.
5. Taran became angry because
- a. the pig bit him.
 - b. he fell into the mud.
 - c. Ellidyr was rude to him.
6. Which of the following is a statement of opinion rather than fact?
- a. "You should know better, my boy, than to quarrel with strangers."
 - b. "But I am not a pig-boy. I am Taran, Assistant Pig-Keeper."
 - c. The Princess Eilonwy hurried from the scullery, her apron flying and a cookpot still in her hand.

 _____ Number of correct answers
Enter this number on the Comprehension graph on page 132.

Critical Thinking

Put an **X** in the box next to the best answer for each question or statement. You may look back at the selection if you'd like.

1. The purpose of the first paragraph is to
- a. inform you that Caer Dallben is a little farm in Prydain.
 - b. establish the setting, the time and place, of the story.
 - c. inform you that the story takes place in autumn.
2. Who is the narrator of this story?
- a. an outside observer.
 - b. Taran
 - c. Dallben
3. The word that best describes Ellidyr is
- a. carefree.
 - b. arrogant.
 - c. calm.
7. In what way are Taran and Ellidyr alike?
- a. Both are hard workers.
 - b. Both are from a royal family.
 - c. Both are hot-headed.
8. How did Taran feel about the task given to him by Dallben?
- a. eager to begin
 - b. reluctant to begin
 - c. too angry to begin

 _____ Number of correct answers
Enter this number on the Critical Thinking graph on page 133.

Vocabulary

Each numbered sentence contains an underlined word from the selection. Following are three definitions. Put an **X** in the box next to the best meaning of the word as it is used in the sentence.

- The hills shielded Caer Dallben from the winds.
 - a. exposed
 - b. eroded
 - c. protected
- As it was, he filled the bucket at the well and trudged reluctantly to Hen Wen's enclosure.
 - a. happily
 - b. unwillingly
 - c. easily
- Though of excellent quality, his garments had seen much wear, and his cloak was purposely draped to hide his threadbare attire.
 - a. suitcase
 - b. saddle
 - c. clothing
- The horseman's tone and bearing nettled Taran, but he curbed his temper.
 - a. loosened
 - b. relaxed
 - c. controlled
- "Mind your impudence," Ellidyr answered, "or you shall have a good beating for it."
 - a. rudeness
 - b. courtesy
 - c. appearance
- He was pummeled and shaken until his teeth rattled.
 - a. beaten
 - b. caressed
 - c. brushed
- Ellidyr, without troubling to dismount, called to the white-bearded enchanter.
 - a. stopping
 - b. asking
 - c. bothering
- Ellidyr was about to reply, but the enchanter's stern glance made him hold his tongue.
 - a. farmer's
 - b. magician's
 - c. horseman's



_____ Number of correct answers

Enter this number on the Vocabulary graph on page 134.

Personal Response

I know how Taran felt because

What would you have said to Ellidyr if you had been Dallben?
