

THE PHEONIX AND THE FLAME

Lachlan and Rhiannon first met on the night of the summer solstice when life was full of promise and filled more with dreams than memories.

Rhiannon was beautiful, with eyes big and bright; all for the moon. Lachlan was full of energy and driven by the fire of the sun.

They spent many joy-filled years together

... But all earthly loves are subject to the cycles of life and of death. And so; our story begins now - after Lachlan's passing, as Rhiannon sits alone, her heart broken and never mended.

Lachlan's story is quite remarkable. He was born a tiny baby, less than half the weight of an average child, and with a weakness in his joints.

Then, one spring, a group of travellers arrived in the area, with Freeman Tod Flynn, the renowned healer, among their number.

The old healer was drawn to Lachlan's strong and pure spirit so he decided to perform a re-birthing ceremony in which he would endeavour to heal Lachlan's brittle and often broken bones.

As the sun came up on midsummer's morning, Freeman Tod Flynn began an incantation asking Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, for protection and grace.

Lachlan prepared himself. He breathed deep, strong and true, and on a subtle cue from the healer he drank a teaspoon of ash sap.

Then, Freeman Tod Flynn passed him through the cleft in the young ash tree. The two sides of the cleft were tied closely together and, as the tree healed, so would young Lachlan, whose fate was now bound up with that of the tree.

Lachlan developed strength and flexibility, adaptability, and a capacity to take heavy knocks, all characteristics the ash tree itself was renowned for.

He & Rhiannon loved to walk at Cuithechan nan Uinseann, listening to songbirds, and entranced by springtime flowers. Ash timber they used for tool handles, and shinty sticks; and ash bark, leaves and seeds they used for medicines, inspiration, and to prophesise the future.

That horrible, horrible, day when Lachlan was taken from her still haunted Rhiannon.

A terrible storm was brewing, and as Lachlan set out to sea, Rhiannon started to weep. The protective totem that she had carved for his boat out of ash had cracked, - smashed on the rocks.

She screamed with all her might for Lachlan to stop, but it was all in vain. He could no longer hear her above the noise of the crashing waves. He was gone.

In all the years since, Rhiannon had been distraught with grief.

Then, on winter solstice, the extended family came to visit Rhiannon. Young Lachie, the youngest of Lachlan and Rhiannon's grandchildren, and a child that Lachlan had never met, so wanted to cheer up Grandma Rhiannon, that he picked up a little log from the woodland floor, and ran gleefully towards the house with his present, and a big beaming smile shouting, "Grandma!"

Rhiannon was speechless and didn't know what to do. The yule log was the first piece of ash to enter the house since Lachlan's passing. The ash tree had been so intimately entwined with Lachlan's life that it was too painful for Rhiannon to see the tree, or to connect in any way with the tree.

There was a long silence, before finally Rhiannon's body began gently to tremble and shake. She sniffled a little, let out a sigh, and began to sob. She held out her hand to young Lachie and, with devotion in his eyes, her youngest grandson offered up his yule log.

Rhiannon took the piece of ash wood, stroked it, held it to her cheek and, as she placed it in the fire her daughter had set and lit, a single tear splashed upon its bark.

Immediately, flames began to lap up around the little log and before long, it was burning strongly. As the wood burnt, Rhiannon felt a release of pressure and a huge surge of energy.

It was as if *she* was being reborn . . .

That night Rhiannon had one of her prophetic dreams. In it, Lachlan's spirit encouraged her to walk at Cuithechan nan Uinseann, and to visit the tree that he was passed through as a youngster, and whose fate was intimately entwined with his.

When she woke, she knew she had his blessing to end her mourning. And so, after a few moments gathering thoughts, energy, and courage, she ventured out to seek out Lachlan's ash tree, and to pay her respects to One-eyed Auld Frain.

Phoenix tree, one-eyed Auld Frain, oldest and wisest of the ash trees at Cuithechan nan Uinseann, was profoundly full of life. There were worlds within worlds within worlds within . . . And right at this moment, Rhiannon saw wonder in all of them.

Her soul bathed in this wonder, before stirring to the sound of pink-chested Bullfinches cracking ash keys. It warmed her heart to see them, as they were Lachlan's favourite birds, and it gave her the final bit of courage to walk the short distance to see what was left of Lachlan's ash tree.

To her amazement, she didn't see the single-trunked tree that she remembered! Rumours that the tree had snapped near its base were true. The old trunk lay near its snapped stump, decaying slowly, releasing its goodness back into the earth that had fed it. In its place stood seven young, fresh stems, that had grown from behind where the trunk had snapped, and they were already home to the aforementioned Bullfinches.

She knew now that life could, and should, continue beyond Lachlan, and that she should be part of it. She knew also that in many ways Lachlan would continue to be with her. She invested all her energy into the generations coming after her and always, of course, she held a special place in her heart for young Lachie who had rekindled in her the joy of life.