

The Songbird's Surprise

Local poet and musician, Luis McCarthy, was the great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson of the legendary Luis McCarthy, the man who in a moment of divine inspiration, re-kindled the ancient powers of the coiled dragon, when, many moons ago, he planted a young rowan at the heart of the stone circle. This dragon's lair lay deep in the bowels of the earth, directly below the recumbent stone circle on the lower slopes of Beinn Chaorunn.

And Luis had a dilemma . . .

He knew how important the ancient rowan, 'Croabh nan Druid' was to the local community. It protected the dragon, that protected the stone circle, that protected the rowan, that protected the dragon, that protected the stone circle, that . . . And so it went on.

The ancient rowan 'Croabh nan Druad' protected the people of Ardlui and Loch a'chaorun, as well; and brought them much joy and creativity, but . . .

His beloved Brigid, the woman that he intended to marry, had been kidnapped by the dark hearted Fowler Dow, a man so depraved that he tortured song-birds. And he had threatened to kill her if Luis did not chop down the ancient rowan, and pull it out the ground by the roots!

He knew he could not chop down the ancient rowan 'Croabh nan Druad', but of course he could not allow Fowler Dow to kill his beloved Brigid.

What was he to do?

That night while he slept, protected by a small cross made with rowan twigs of equal length and bound together with red thread, he dreamt of mountain hares bounding through the skies carrying rowan leaves delicately in their mouths; and he saw them cover the archway in his garden with so many leaves, that the archway resembled two entwined, living rowan trees.

Then his Brigid came to him in a vision, and in that vision, she took his hand, and as they walked through the archway, she picked a small handful of berries that tasted of honey from the magical rowan tree and fed the berries to him.

Then she told him, '*to show the fowler what he wanted to see*', and that was exactly what Luis would do!

Only what the fowler would see was not what would be . . .

. . . And so, the following evening, the wicked Fowler Dow could be seen rubbing his hands with glee, and squealing with delight, as he *seemingly* witnessed, Luis McCarthy, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson of the legendary Luis McCarthy, and the seventh son of a seventh son, take his ash-handled axe, and wield it at the base of the Wizard Tree, 'Croabh nan Druad'.

The evil Fowler Dow leapt about like a madman, his eyes popping out his head, shouting, "You fools! You fools! Do you realise what you have done! With that blasted old Rowan no more, the dragon's power will wane, and I will become the power at the centre of the Standing Stones of Beinn Chaorunn. You can have your stupid woman back if you like, for I care not whether she lives or dies, for now my power will know no bounds".

And certainly, this was how it *seemed*.

But remember, that things are not always quite what they *seem*.

Luis, along with his friends and family, had been busy. They had covered the standing stones, and the ancient rowan in material that had been dyed black using the bark and fruit of the rowan, to conceal them from the fowlers eyes. Then they had put sculptures of the standing stones, and the ancient rowan tree in their place.

So, when Luis *appeared* to chop down 'Croabh nan Druad', he did in fact chop down a sculpture of the ancient tree.

The following day, when the dark-hearted Fowler Dow returned to the *real* stone circle at Beinn Chaorunn, intent on ushering in a new era at Ardlui and Loch a' Chaorunan, in which *he* would be the power at the centre of stones, he began to shake with rage and shiver with disbelief . . .

The Wizard Tree, 'Croabh nan Druad' was still there!

He screamed, for he could not believe it, and he beat the ground in frustration. The sounds of the birds singing, some of whom were so dependent on the rowan, that they timed their migrations from Scandanavia to feast on the bountiful rowan berries, they seemed to mock him, and he cursed under his breath, "I'll never get the better of that damned rowan tree!"

Then the dragon left his lair deep beneath the Standing Stones. He stretched out his long, powerful neck, and unfurled massive, translucent blue and green wings. His nostrils flared, and flames leapt from them and spat from his ample-sized mouth, as he flew around and around the fowler's head. He didn't attack, or even try to frighten him, but he did fly close to him, open his mouth in a big broad smile and wink at the disconsolate and beaten Fowler Dow.

The people of Ardlui and Loch a'chaorun had had a fright, but they had learnt a very important lesson. Never again would they take each other, or the power of the old rowan, Croabh nan Druad, for granted.

Luis and Brigid finally did get married and what a celebration it was, with everyone, well *nearly* everyone, present to mark the occasion.

After the ceremony, all the guests were given a rowan sapling and asked to plant it in a place that was meaningful to them. Many planted the tree near to their homes to ward away evil spirits, but many of those, who already had rowan growing by their houses, planted theirs near the stone circle at Beinn Chaorunn.

If you were to go there today, you'd find a wonderful, small rowan forest, and at its heart, the ancient Wizard Tree, Croabh nan Druad.