

Rowan
By Ross Cameron

To the North and East of here, in a place near the sea, lived a chieftain known as A'clach - the stone. He was a mighty warrior and skilled in magic, but he was a cruel man and his people feared him. As he grew older the chieftain began to plot to find ways to cheat death. He knew of the fair folk, the queen and her court, who would come among the trees and along the cliff edges near the sea and he planned to capture one of them and hold her to ransom so that the queen would grant his wish to live forever.

He used dark magics to find the true name of one of the court. For this tale we will call her Rowan for true names are powerful and should never be given away lightly.

He used the elements from a tree in the forest to create a special liquid - wood for the earth, leaves for the air, roots for water and blossom for the fire of the summer sun. He captured a dove that had sat in the tree and performed a ceremony to give it Rowan's name. He clipped its wings so it couldn't fly, and he fed to the bird a peppercorn.

He had eight of his guards, hearts as cold as his own, stand at the edge of a glade where the court would pass, holding torches to illuminate the spirit world. He poured the liquid to make a circle on the forest floor and tied the dove to a stake inside. When Rowan arrived she stepped into the circle to help the dove, he called a magic word and bound her soul to the bird. The peppercorn in the dove burned Rowan's throat and she couldn't speak. She was trapped.

"Queen", he called, "I am A'clach and I hold to ransom one of your own. Pay to me the prize of life eternal for her return". The queen called Rowan's true name, but the dove came to her.

She swallowed it whole, spitting the peppercorn into the face of the enraged chieftain.

He drew his sword and stabbed Rowan through the heart. The queen and the court began to sing. The man was entranced and he could not stop listening.

The song told of a small burn that rose high in the mountains where summer rain fell, the chieftain flowed with it while it grew as it gathered water from storms. He tumbled over rocks fell down mighty waterfalls as it became a roaring river. He was thrust out over the cliff edge where he shattered into a hundred pieces and each turned to a pebble.

The queen bent down and picked up one of the pebbles. "Stone you were and stone you are. You have the life eternal that you desired. As a stone you will be washed out to sea, broken down into sand then reformed as stone, doomed to complete this cycle until the ends of the earth itself."

Then she raised back her hand and threw the stone far into the ocean. The torchbearers had held in place, the queen, with a wave of her hand, turned them to standing stones. Where Rowan had fallen a tree of that name grew in her place.

The chieftain's son ran into the forest, "mighty queen please forgive us, please forgive the actions of my father, we are not of that kind."

The queen looked gently at the boy and said, "A'clach and his men alone deserve the punishment for their actions. Rowan, who has fallen, will grow again and come back.

We are of the seasons, we do not die, everything is eternal, everything moves in cycles.

The same is true for you, if only you would see it".

She, and the court, turned and left. There stands to this day a circle of stones and a rowan tree in the middle. The boy grew old, he looked after the clan as a wise and peaceful ruler.

I will not tell you the name of the clan for true names are precious and secret and dangerous for people to know.

Here ends our tale