

Eithrig and Seumas

Near Edinburgh Castle, 638 A.D.

Eithrig and Seumas carried their newborn daughter and had sneaked out of Edinburgh as the Anglo-Saxon army from Northumbria besieged the castle. The land was in a constant state of war, with armies pillaging. Picts, Britons, and fellow Gaels were warring with one another as the land that would become Scotland was ravaged and divided.

They had successfully worked their way into the forest when they were accosted by three soldiers, one on a large battle horse and the other two on foot.

“Eh, boy! Where are ya headed? The castle is the other way.”

Seumas pushed Eithrig behind him as the soldier urged his large horse closer to them. “We are heading home, Sir. It is a two-day walk that way,” he said, pointing in the direction away from Edinburgh Castle.

“So what do you have there, woman? Show me before I cut both of you.”

Seumas implored, “We are only a poor family fleeing the battles raging all around us. Please let us pass in peace, kind sir.”

“Show me what you have, woman.”

Seumas implored, “We are only a poor family fleeing from the battles going on all around us. Please let us pass in peace, kind sir.”

“Show me what you have, woman.”

Eithrig, a tall, red-haired woman, unwrapped her two-day-old baby daughter and held her up, showing the soldier there was nothing to fear. “’Tis only my child, Sir.”

The soldier turned to the other two soldiers and said, “Kill him,” pointing to Seumas, “and that ugly little Scoti child. Leave the woman to service us.”

The two soldiers wore stupid-looking smiles as they drew their swords and walked toward Seumas and Eithrig. They pulled their swords back to strike Seumas and were about to behead him when Eithrig stepped in front of them without a word. She glanced quickly at Seumas, and he grabbed her hand as she stepped into a gray slice of space that had suddenly appeared between them and the two soldiers.

The two soldiers froze for just a second as they tried to understand what was happening. But the soldier on horseback had seen a witch before and knew this was one standing before him.

He stabbed down hard at Eithrig as she and Seumas stepped into the gray and were gone, leaving the three soldiers staring at each other.

The soldier on horseback knew he had struck her before she fled. He could see a smear of red blood on the tip of his sword. He looked down at the other two and said, "You have to be careful around those Scoti fooks. Many of them, like those two, are in league with the devil."

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Eithrig and Seumas stepped out of the slice of gray and into a deeper, darker part of the forest.

Eithrig cried out when she saw blood on the swaddling blanket her newborn daughter was wrapped in. She pulled the blanket and saw blood covering her daughter, who lay very still and was no longer breathing.

She fell to her knees as the pain of losing a child tore through her. It was a pain so deep and so strong that it would last until the day Eithrig died.

Seumas pulled her into his arms. "Is there nothing you can do?"

Eithrig only shook her head as she caressed her daughter's dead body.

Seumas said, "Let's find a Rowan tree. We will talk to it."

Eithrig knew Rowan trees held no love for witches, but she had to try. She inhaled deeply and pointed toward a grove of trees in the dark forest.

A lone large tree, with clusters of red berries hanging from its leaves, stood in the grove, surrounded by numerous large, fierce-looking pine trees.

Seumus approached the tree and said, "We come to you in a time of pain. We are simple children of the earth and offer ourselves in return for the life of our daughter."

The tree seemed to sway slightly, as if a breeze were blowing through it, though there was no wind about.

Eithrig carried her daughter's body to the tree and laid it among the large roots that lay above the ground at its base.

She spoke to the tree in her mind, "I know you detest me and my kind. I apologize for any pain I or my kind has ever inflicted on you and yours. I have always found my source in the earth and among its growth, of which you are the greatest. I need help. I implore you. I am here on my knees, begging you. I am a witch of the earth. I give you my soul and being if you will

take her, hold her, and give her the life I know you can. If you want to. Please, I am speaking to you as one mother to another. Please help her. She is too precious for this world to lose.”

The Rowan tree had given no indication that it had heard or cared until Eithrig said, “One mother to another.”

The tree’s limbs shivered as red berries began to fall from its branches until the small body of the dead child was completely covered.

Eithrig watched for a moment before moving some of the berries off her daughter, only to find her daughter was no longer there.

She and Seumas stood up, held onto each other, and quietly said their daughter’s name. “We will always love you, Miriam. Live and love always. For as long as you possibly can. Forever is not long enough. And one day, look and find us.”

As they looked into each other’s eyes, the earth at the base of the Rowan tree swallowed them up.