



It's Been A While...

...So let's remember a tale that began with a wise and respected elemental king, Loen, and his simple curiosity for his mortal counterparts. A curiosity which grew to fascination, and then to love for the human woman who bore his son, and which ended in grief and unspeakable rage when that infant was sentenced to die. Do you recall how Loen destroyed himself in the storm of his own making? And how his horrified brother gathered his dust and bore it away to lie for millennia in darkness, instead of allowing its natural return into the ground? An undeniable act of love that echoed down through the ages, but formed the basis of a bed of violence and deceit, upon which all of Cornwall rested in uneasy slumber.

Until...

We remember how, thousands of years later, two mortal children from the village ventured into an abandoned mine, only to discover the jar, and its protector. The boy, Tom, stumbled and broke the jar, releasing and inhaling the essence of the once-loved king, whose spirit was not only driven mad with age and captivity,

but whose fury against the mortals who slew his son had only grown during its captivity.

Once more inside a thinking, reasoning form, Loen understood that he could yet return to his lost world, if only he could find a suitable host in which to anchor his spirit. The reigning queen understood that her own son, Maer, would provide this, but that she must then lose him, and she became desperate to protect him; when she learned that Loen's infant, half-mortal son, Tir, had survived the ritual that should have killed him, she knew she had one final chance. She made her plans, she sowed the seeds of fear among her people, and she sent Maer to find, befriend, and gain the trust of the one creature who could save his life.

Tir had lived many lives, dying young each time by wounds of a similar kind to that which should have ended his life on the sacrificial stone at Lynher Mill. He had been living each life in confusion, increasingly volatile; never understanding his place in his world, and fighting his way through each one. His first love, Lucy, swore she would never let him die, even as he faded, cradled in her arms on the dusty ground.

Tir found himself, in this new life, a talented but angry young man; his wife killed in front of him, and his own – supposedly fatal – wound inexplicably healed. His life subsequently became plagued by horrific dreams, and half his spirit yearned towards a land he'd never visited, sensing that peace might lie within his grasp there. The other half fought against it with all its failing strength...

They brought him back, those confused and misguided elementals, to allow their king to abandon the innocent and bewildered form it had stolen: Tom, now grown, and falling apart under the strain of what was happening to him. They knew that Loen would abandon his plan to inhabit Prince Maer in an instant, and instead take over the strong, half-mortal body of his own son, and Maer had been assured his friend would survive the transition his ancient ruler planned. And so he'd led

Richard onto the moor, fusing the unbreakable bond between land and rightful ruler, in the belief he was saving his people.

But Tir, known in his mortal life as Richard, had fallen in love with Tom's sister Laura, and, at her side, he believed he had finally found his place in the world. When he understood that the rogue king would kill her, once he had control, he knew the only thing he could do was to take his own life before that could happen. Maer, realising he'd been deceived by his own mother, had found him and prevented it, and together they had fought back against Loen's ferocity and determination.

There was fear, and there was death, at that stone circle where Loen had tried to take his place, condemning Richard's formless spirit to roam the moorland forever, but many surpassing acts of courage brought about the ending of it all. Loen was made to understand, finally, that this was the son he had loved and lost, and who deserved to live and reign in his own right. I hope you remember that sense of rightness and relief, when Loen's spirit was instead absorbed into Casta, the father of Prince Maer. Loen's new understanding, and Casta's willingness to accept his ancient spirit, meant that Casta's own consciousness was not beaten by the invasion but instead strengthened by it. This made Tir and Maer the brothers they'd always felt themselves to be, and as darkness crept over the moorland towards the exhausted group of survivors, we discovered that Laura was carrying Tir's child, a son, who would carry Loen's and Tir's legacy onward.

But all was not as settled as it seemed; there soon came stirrings of unrest along the coast, among those elementals who hated the Moorlanders and their servants, the spriggans, and believed them responsible for the death of one of their own: Dafna. Her three grown children: Arric, and younger twins Nerryn and Mylan, were caught in the terrifying crosswinds of vengeance, misunderstandings, and lies, and their loyalties were turned against them. And against those they have loved – in particular Nerryn's betrothed, Prince Maer.

It happened like this.

Arric, meddlesome, dangerous, and ambitious, killed his own gentle but despised father, and accused Maer of the act, prompting the Coast Lord, Cantoc, to order the death of a Moorlander in retaliation. Arric was happy to take up the challenge, but the Moorlander he chose to kill was their king, the beloved and revered Casta. War was the only possible outcome, and Arric knew he had the most powerful weapon in his hands: the combined elemental strength of his twin siblings.

A Moorlander spy, working for the Coastals, had also taken it upon himself to steal away Tir's and Laura's infant son, Ben, to use as both protection and hostage, should the Moorlanders attack the coast, and Tir himself had been badly injured trying to prevent the kidnap.

The storms had quickly grown out of Arric's control, and he had fled the coast, leaving Nerryn and Mylan locked together as they forced the storms eastwards over the moor, towards Lynher Mill. Laura, had in the meantime and through a family bereavement, made the shocking discovery that it was her own father who had actually killed Dafna. A mortal friend of the adventurous and recklessly trusting Coastal, he had been driven to anger by her teasing, and choked the life from her, leaving her clothing to be found on the moor by her people.

Laura realised that the only way she could stop the horrific destruction that was tearing through the land was to confess to the Coast Lord, beg him to end the war, and offer herself up as a sacrifice instead. Cantoc, who had been grieving Dafna as one who had secretly loved her with all his heart, accepted the gesture, and finally ordered the cessation of the elemental attack.

But the infant, Ben, remained lost to his parents, hidden away in the now-crumbling cliffs, his usefulness as a hostage spent, and his captors fled. Understanding the grief of his parents, and recognising the sacrifice Laura had

been prepared to make for her son, Cantoc freed her from her obligation. He ensured, too, that she and Tir were safe from the vengeance of Nerryn and Mylan, who had emerged from their fugue-state still seeking revenge on the killer of their mother. The elementals could only watch on in fear and hope, as Tir and Laura struggled to bring their wandering infant son to the safety of solid ground.

Dafna's family, the Welsh Coastals, had answered their Cornish counterparts' call to arms, and travelled down in pursuit of their own vengeance for their daughter; Dafna's father had fallen to a lightning bolt, created by Tir as he'd fought unsuccessfully to save Maer from one of the Welsh hell hounds. Maer had been wounded during the battle, but saved by mortal traveller calling himself Hewyl, who had known Laura and her brother when they'd all been children together. Hewyl, known to them as Michael, had been behind the dare that had sent Tom and Laura down into the mine where it had all begun.

We learned, too, that Laura herself had known Tir in many of his previous lives, and that she too had been coming back time and again, to find and save him; Lucy's promise to her dying husband was finally kept, as Laura brought Tir to his true home among the elementals of Lynher Mill. He eventually accepted that his future was to rule over all the elementals, and as Laura prepared to leave him and Ben – called Dreis on the moor – and return to her mortal world, distressing both herself and Tir deeply, the former queen reluctantly explained that, while Laura might not have the same gifts as the elementals, her history meant she had her own connection to the land, entirely separate from her closeness to their king. It meant she would be permitted to stay, and live out her life with her family.

Following the destruction of their home during the battle of Lynher Mill, the Moorlanders have begun to rebuild their lives, in the tunnels of another abandoned mine; somewhere Laura had found on the hill above the village near the burned-

out mill. Tir has sworn that no being should be without a home while the Lightning and the Blade hold Lynher Mill, and has welcomed everyone who suffered during the conflict. The Foresters, Coastals, and Moorlanders now live in accord, with the Moorlanders restored as accepted rulers over all.

And now that we have recalled a very small part of the story that has gone before, let's step back into that complicated, emotional, and turbulent world. Keep a watchful eye on the skies, and on the leaves rustling in the trees... If you should see something from the corner of your eye, something swift, that disappears when you peer more closely, be courteous and respectful in case it should bear, on one now-hidden shoulder, the royal emblem of the Lightning and the Blade.

I welcome your company on this journey.

Terri.