



CAMPFIRE STORY

RAVENS FLIGHT

THE RAVENS FLIGHT

Foreword:

In Spirit Walker, Renn mentions that Fin-Kedinn used to tell stories of old, on cold winter's nights beside the campfire. These would have been told for generations over probably many thousands of years, handed down by mouth. Most of them would be concerning the origin of spiritual aspects of the clanspeople's lives, and which explained the world they lived in, The Origin of the First Tree, how the Clans came into existence, the first Spirit Walker, and the stories will probably have had moral messages and advice. This is similar in a way, to the more modern religious texts of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism and the stories they note as Jesus and Mohammed telling. This particular story is mentioned by Renn, Fin-Kedinn probably told it many times, as it would have been linked so closely to their clan – it's about how the Raven got its wings.

The day was late, and the camp growing dark as the sound of clattering bowls and light chatter died away. Nothing could be heard but the howling wind as it tore through the forest. Nearly thirty pairs of eyes turned to him, their faces gleaming warm with anticipation despite the cold of the evening.

He stood from his place on the bench, hood drawn back, his hair and beard blowing about his face in fiery strands. At last he spoke;

"Are you all sitting comfortably?" he asked, his voice was not loud or strained, but measured and mellow – yet not even the might of the wind could suppress it. There was a gentle murmur of agreement, before he continued.

"This story has been told at a campfire by every leader for uncounted summers, I myself heard it for the first time as a very young boy nearly forty summers ago. For you see, the Raven has not always been the proud creature it is today. Not always could it spread its wings and fly off into the heavens. In fact, it was once a most awkward creature, verging on useless. Because, the first Raven did not have any wings!"

A few chuckles sprang from the camp, and the children giggled at the thought. Fin-Kedinn smiled and continued.

"One day, many summers ago when the forest was still new, and man had not found it, the first Raven was ambling uncomfortably across the forest floor. He was a very unusual creature, with long thin legs, a sharp beak, and a beautiful black tail. Yet he was flawed – he had no way of travelling, other than his

lopsided hop, which was very slow and tiresome. How he longed to be up in the air with the other birds, high in the sky swooping and swerving with the wind – how impressive they looked!

"Not like down here!" the raven muttered angrily to himself, "Where I can't catch any insects, or reach the tasty fruit on the blackberry bushes. Instead I must live off wriggly worms and vile snails – why was I not given any wings, why could I not go up there too?" He shook himself angrily, and carried on his way.

That night, a heavy storm blew over the forest, but the raven slept safely in his burrow beneath a large oak and was untroubled.

The next day, our raven was walking along the same path through the forest, when he heard a voice calling out. Searching for the source of the noise, he saw a small rabbit trapped beneath the fallen branch of a large tree, blown off during the night. The creature seemed terrified; scared it would never get out, or become food for one of the forest's hunters. The Raven took pity on the rabbit and went over to help it, but the branch was large and heavy – he could not lift it.

"Get it off! Get it off!" squealed the rabbit, squirming unhelpfully beneath the wood. Yet then, the Raven had an idea, and he hopped off as fast as he could, to find another branch. The rabbit was outraged and even more scared, fearing he had been abandoned, but his expression changed to one of intrigue and apprehension as the raven returned – with a slightly smaller fallen branch between his beak, and several stones at his feet.

"What's that for?" it asked suspiciously.

"You'll see." The raven said soothingly, placing down the branch and dragging it round so that part of it was wedged beneath the larger one.

Next, he began to push down on the other end, which was sticking up into the air. He threw all his weight and strength at it, trying to force it down, and lever the other branch up, but it didn't move. Harder and harder he pushed, he put the stones on for more leverage, and at last the other branch was beginning to lift. Slowly it rose, off of the rabbit – who bolted away instantly, and then rolled off, landing on the ground with a thump.

Almost weeping with joy, the rabbit ran to the slightly abashed raven and thanked him time and time again, stating his wish to pay the bird back. But the raven declined, citing he had no need.

"But surely there's something you want?!" cried the rabbit in shock, "Please, anything, you have saved my life!"

"Well," the raven said thoughtfully, still a little shocked in the sudden change of attitude of the rabbit, "I have a great desire for a pair of wings, but I do not think you can help me with that?"

The rabbit frowned for a short while, and then – practically jumping in delight – I'm sure we could find a way, wings can be made with what the forest has, we can make you some! The raven's face lit up at this news, and he nearly cried out in joy.

"Go get me, two small branches which are light and dry," said the bunny – now suddenly very bossy, "4 fern leaves, some willow branch, and an acorn.

Our raven complied without a word, and hurried off to get them, returning a short while later with everything they needed. He then watched the rabbit use the willow branches to strap the thicker oak twigs together, and then round the acorn, into some sort of frame. Every time he tried to ask the rabbit what he was doing, he was answered with a snappy 'shush!' and some impatient looks.

Next the rabbit strapped the fern leaves onto the oak, and trim them with his claws, so that they became shaped like wings. Now raven could see what he was doing.

Rabbit proceeded to add some more finishing touches to his creation, before calling raven over excitedly.

"Here!" he said, "Try this!" lifting the contraption and forcing raven down into it, closing the straps around the bird's head.

"What do I do now?" asked raven, his beak muffled by one of the willow branches. But the rabbit didn't answer, but inclined for him to follow, and ran off into the forest.

The frame was heavy and cumbersome, and raven was slow enough moving as it was, but miraculously he managed to keep up, and they both emerged from the trees at the top of a ridge.

"Look!" the rabbit cried happily, "You can run off this ridge and your wings will make you fly!"

Raven was apprehensive;

"Are you sure this will work?" he asked nervously, "It's a long way down!"

"Of course I'm sure!" the rabbit replied indignantly, "Come on, enough talk! Let's go!"

Raven shrugged, it was too late to go back now, and ran as fast as he could towards the edge of the ridge, flinging himself into the air as he reached the end.

Everything seemed to go slowly, he wasn't sure what was happening. He was sort of falling, but very slowly, and he was still moving forward. 'Perhaps this was flying?' he thought to himself, 'No! You don't fall to the ground when you're flying! This was sort of in-between!'

But before he could contemplate further, he hit the ground with a crunch and a roll. He groaned and got to his feet, rubbing his head, he had managed to glide many paces forward and down from the ridge – but he had not flown.

Suddenly he heard rabbit's voice calling, and he turned round to see his friend running down to him.

"That was amazing!" he shouted, "You nearly flew!"

"No I didn't!" replied the raven sadly, rubbing his tail.

"Well maybe you didn't quite fly," the rabbit said truthfully, "But it was so close, I'll make some adjustments to the frame, and we'll try again tomorrow!"

"I don't know about that," raven said uncomfortable, "I don't think I'll survive another fall like that!"

But his complaints were shouted down, and the next day, they met above the ridge again. This time, rabbit had added some new bits to the contraption.

"Look!" he said excitedly, pointing to two new branches which reached down to the feet of whoever was in it.

"What do they do?" asked raven, mystified.

"You push them like this!" said rabbit, doing just so, and then the wings began to flap. "Everything that flies does this, that's why you didn't quite fly yesterday, this'll work I'm sure of it!"

This time the raven was also very excited, he was sure it would work this time, the new flapping branches looked great!

It took him a short while to get into the frame, and soon he was eagerly running along the ridge and jumping into the air.

Again, everything seemed slow, and he pushed his legs up and down frantically on the branches, it sort of worked and he seemed to fly straight for a few heartbeats, but then his legs tired and he began to glide down – landing crestfallen on the ground again.

Rabbit had time to run over to him before he'd landed, and was again bawling enthusiastically at him,

"You nearly did it! You just flapped too fast at the beginning, you have to do it slower, like the sparrows. Flap and glide – then you won't get so tired!"

And so, after a short break, and climb back up to the top, they tried again. This time, raven flapped slower, and indeed he got less tired – but his flaps were not as powerful as the sparrow's and he began to glide down again, just slower.

"Gah!" he groaned, climbing out the frame in front of a for-once wordless rabbit, "This is useless, it won't work."

The rabbit sat there and looked at him for a short while, and then said; "Meet me here tomorrow, one last time, and I will sort this out once and for all."

That night, the raven slept badly, unsure of whether to meet the rabbit again or not. But by dawn he had decided, and he made his way to the ridge one final time.

Yet the rabbit was nowhere to be seen?

Raven waited and waited – but still no rabbit! Then, near midday, something else appeared on the ridge. It was like no other creature he'd ever seen, it was tall and walked on hind legs. Antlers rose from its head, and around its waist was some sort of hide.

"Hello Raven." It said, and the bird froze, the being's voice carried such power and love, it warmed him inside.

"I understand you wish for wings so that you can fly among the other birds." He said, and raven managed a nod. The creature looked at him a little more, then leant towards a nearby ash, and touched its trunk gently. The tree gave a shake, and out of it dropped two thin branches of identical shape and length.

They fell neatly into the being's outstretched hand, and he smiled soothingly at the petrified raven. The creature began to move towards him – the raven rooted to the spot by fear and another force entirely.

Suddenly the strange animal's hand opened, and the branches flew out, they shot over and nestled themselves on the raven's two flanks. For a heartbeat they just hovered there – and then suddenly, they began to shake violently.

Their shape began to distort as the wood rippled, they turned darker and darker. Leaves turned to jet black feathers, and more sprouted from the bare wood, and they began to join to the raven, becoming part of him as he stood there not knowing whether to run or cheer.

Then, as soon as it had started, the shaking stopped, and the raven turned to look at what had been two dropped branches. They were now wings, as black as his body. Yet they were not like the wings of the sparrow, nor the finch, they were larger – more powerful, grander and more impressive.

All fear now gone, he gave them both twitches, and tried to unfold them – but got it all in a bit of a muddle and fell flat on his face!

A booming laugh echoed through the forest, and as raven looked up from the ground, he knew then who the strange being was in front of him.

"You'll get used to them!" chuckled the Spirit, admiring the raven, "I must say, they are very fine aren't they!"

The raven wasn't sure what to say. He tried to stammer his thanks, but couldn't quite manage it, but there was no need.

"You have earned them." said the spirit with a smile, and, without another word, turned, waved, and then was gone – back to the forest, or maybe his mountain... who knows?

The raven lay there allowing it all to wash over him, and then he finally understood. For you see, the rabbit he had rescued from the branch had not been a rabbit after all, it had been the World Spirit all along, watching, without anybody knowing – as he has done for a long time.

After a while, the raven got to his feet. He tested each wing several times, until he thought he sort of had some control over them. Then he ran, as fast as he could at the end of the ridge, thrusting himself off again. But this time, he did not fall, he did not glide and he did not tire – he flew. It was not perfect flying, he flapped rather awkwardly, and he was not at all comfortable in the air – in fact it would take him several moons to master his new skill. But it was still a flight, the first flight, the flight, flight of the raven.

And that, is how the Raven caught the air."

Fin-Kedinn took a deep breath, and looked down at his clan. Twenty-Eight faces - young and old, all smiling contently to themselves, the cold and rain forgotten.

That was, until a small girl, of maybe four or five summers shouted out;

"But what happened to the Raven?"

A series of chuckles came from the crowd, even Fin-Kedinn's face betrayed a slight hint of amusement.

"He lived honourable for the rest of his days, high up in the sky with the others birds." he said, "And when the Spirit made the second raven, they became mates, and their children watch over us every day."

The girl looked mystified, a confused smile on her face. Fin-Kedinn was about to say something, when a young hunter - a boy of thirteen summers raised his hand - the Raven Leader nodded, and the boy spoke:

"Why did the World Spirit not give the raven his gift right away?" he asked, "He had already proved himself kind by lifting the large branch."

A small smile played at Fin-Kedinn's lips, he too had asked the very same question many winters ago, and the leader had not answered, but another had - a girl he knew. He frowned,

"Can anyone answer that?" he asked, looking at the children sitting at the front of the throng. But they all shook their heads - except for one. A small red-headed girl, who put her hand up.

"Uncle," she said thoughtfully, "I think I know?"

Fin-Kedinn smiled,

"Go on Renn, tell us." he said.

"Is it because the raven had to work for his wings," she said, "He had to prove he really wanted them, and was happy to keep trying again to fly."

"Very good Renn," said Fin-Kedinn, gesturing to the rest of the clan, "The World Spirit was showing us all that we must try hard to get what we want, not matter how deserving we are of our desires. Dedication, courage and perseverance are three of the most valuable qualities a man can have, and you will be rewarded

for exhibiting them. So we should all learn from the Raven, who tried hard, and got what he earned."

The camp was silent, even the wind had died down now, and all that could be heard was the distant crashing of the falls in the distance. All was calm.

By Mountain Goat

This is an interpretation/fan work of Michelle's Pavers Chronicles of Ancient Darkness, and in no way official material.