



## Child of the Phoenix

*Barbara Erskine*

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## **Child of the Phoenix** Barbara Erskine

Born in a burning castle in 1218, Princess Eleyne is brought up to support the Celtic cause against the English. She is taught to worship the old gods and to "scry" into the future and the past. Eleyne's second sight, however, involves her in the destinies of England, Scotland and Wales.

## **Child of the Phoenix Details**

Date : Published November 11th 1996 by HarperCollins (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9780006472643

Author : Barbara Erskine

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Fantasy, Romance, Medieval

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## From Reader Review Child of the Phoenix for online ebook

### Tina says

No time travel in this book, which makes it my favorite of Barbara Erskine's. The plot is far-reaching and well researched within 13th century Wales and Scotland. Paranormal elements are mild and do not overwhelm the storyline. All in all, a very compelling read told from the viewpoint of a thoroughly likeable, but convincing and well-rounded female protagonist.

I have re-read this several times and continue to love this book. It also has inspired in me a thorough interest in this period of Scottish history, Robert the Bruce and the wars for independence in particular. I have done quite some traveling in Scotland by now and will go back again later this year - so thank you, Barbara Erskine, for bringing this into my life!

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### Joanne says

One of Erskine's best that I've read -- when she gets it right, she's GOOD!!!! The strength of this book for me, besides a page-turning, compelling plot, was that she set it entirely in the 13th century, (rather than a time-slip story as some of her other novels are) and nobody can recreate the past like Erskine. She can weave a magical spell and tell a tale of the old gods and ancient beliefs and blend it with bits and pieces of history that makes you feel as if you've been transported to another time and place. A hefty novel, but it moves quickly and is a rich and rewarding read. Highly recommended!

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### Tessa says

[where Eleyne was fighting GhostAlexander away from her and having sex with him... Yes she had sex with a ghost. I didn't have any problem with his spirit being there and watching over her but for me that just went to far. The ending with Alexander and Eleyne running into the crashing tower together was great, a fitting ending to this story but please Mrs Erskine, never again do I want to r

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### Artemiz says

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### Shivani says

if u are seeking adventure, romance and magic or say miracle then its for you.. it will take you back in time, the castles, the wild nights behind the curtains and the controversies surrounding kingdoms...

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### Diane says

I like her books, great detailed historical novels. Most of them jump back and forth from the present to the past but this keeps to the past only and tells the story of Eleyne who is a daughter of one of the princes of Wales in the 13th century. She marries four times to four very different men and falls in love with a king, a man who won't let her go even after he's dead. She's got a mad woman for a nurse and though she has the Sight, she can't stop things from happening and can't see her own future very well. I read this years ago and liked it a lot. On second reading, it's still good but parts of it seem a bit much (the dead lover's continued presence). Still a good read, and she's based on what may be a real person, according to the author's notes but it's not very historically accurate for the most part.

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### **Fatima Zadjali says**

This would perhaps be one of my favorite novels ever, recommended by a friend I wasn't sure I would love it- but it was amazing!

The description the author uses is easy to relate to and as a reader makes it easy to live within the story and imagine what it was like to live in that era.

The authors description of places was beautiful and brief also (the reader doesn't get bored) plus I personally loved the detail the author used with the outfits and the minor details of embroidery and color vs textile - every female loves that.

A lot of drama I must admit but I loved it.

A few of the chapters were a bit disturbing (E's marriage to de Quincy) and Rhonwen was quiet annoying and disturbing but it is what kept the novel moving and very interesting.

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### **Misfit says**

Awesome piece of Fiction! And fiction it is, based upon historical characters and NOT historical fiction. The main character, Elyne, is (according to the author's notes at the end) a composite of two characters, one of them being Ellen, the daughter of Llewellyn the Great and Joanna. I admit to being a bit put off at the first part of the book at the characterizations of some of the Welsh court, particularly Joanna. Having read SKP's Here Be Dragons, and having adored Joanna and Llewleyn and their great love, I admit to grumbling abit at having Joanna being portrayed as such a sanctimonious biddy. Then I realized this was strictly a piece of fiction and I kicked back and thoroughly enjoyed the story. Lots of truly evil villains, two timing false tongued kings, some wonderful heros and a spooky ghost or two. What more can you ask for in a book?

Apparently some of the reviewers were put off by the size of the book. It went very quickly for me, but then I'm the type that doesn't like to read any book under 500 pages if I can help it. As a side note, Erskin's books are not readily available in the US, except by special order and thus paying freight. I was in Vancouver, BC recently and found two of her books on the shelf at a major bookstore in downtown Vancouver on Robson street. If you're in Canada it's worth checking out.

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### **Katie says**

Initially, 'Child of the Phoenix' was a fairly solid example of the historical fiction genre. It's a bit cliched (can we say beautiful and willful heroine?) and nothing spectacular, but the story races along quite well and I found it an engaging and quick read despite its size. Characterisation is patchy and inconsistent: Eleyne is

described throughout as an independent, opinionated, fiery woman and yet she submits without question when her first husband beats her to punish her for her actions, then has willing sex with him and snuggles up to him for comfort, which is utterly unbelievable. I would have expected, shock, anger and hurt, not the strange meekness which Erskine suddenly gives her. I could live with that though, as most of the enjoyment of historical novels for me is in the plot rather than the characters.

Halfway through, however, the book runs into major problems. The story goes round and round in circles as similar events happened repeatedly with seemingly no attempt to differentiate between them. Then the paranormal romance strikes! Now, I have nothing against a bit of magic in books, particularly the occasional use of the Sight or references to the old gods which seems to be ubiquitous in any historical novel with an even vaguely celtic setting, but this combination of strange visions and a ghostly love triangle was far too much for my tastes.

Erskine explains in her afterward that very little is known about her central character. In fact, she may even be two entirely different people that Erskine has erroneously combined, historical records are that vague and incomplete. To me, the paranormal subplot which quickly takes over is a lazy way of attempting to inject excitement into the times when very little was happening in Eleyne's life without having to develop the story and characters in a more difficult way without such instant appeal. The paranormal occurrences are noticeably absent at times when important and interesting historical events are occurring, and so they really do just seem like a way to fill in the gaps without trying.

Ultimately, I would have preferred this book if Erskine had avoided the problem of long periods when nothing happened by making the book much shorter. There are plenty of examples of time being skipped over, just indicated by a dated heading, and so, at over 1,000 pages, I feel that she could have trimmed a lot of fat from this book and made it a much tighter read, without the need for a silly ghostly lover.

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### **AndreaH says**

I read "Lady of Hay" years ago and liked it, and recently finished "Kingdom of Shadows." Little did I know this was the middle book of a very loose trilogy. I certainly wish I had read it before "Kingdom" just for historical continuity. "Kingdom" takes up in history where this book ends.

It's the tale of strong woman who survives 5 husbands, nine children, and a lot of intrigue, believing she will give birth to a king.

She's Welsh, four hubbies were Scots, one an Englishman.

This is purely historical fiction, and, like most of Erskine's books which jump between past and future, it has a good dose of the paranormal.

Frankly I could have done without the prophecies, and all the ghostly woo-woo. While parts of this book moved quickly, some of it dragged.

I don't often put a book down for a day (almost never) but I did it quick easily here.

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### **Chroniclesoftania says**

The story of a Welsh princess Eleyne of Mar who was born in a burning hall and rescued from the flames. Like a phoenix she is touched by destiny from the ancient Gods and druids of her home country to be the

mother of a line of kings. She goes through four husbands, produces around 9 children and lives to an old age. Her character is akin to Eleanor of Aquitaine in that she is tough, but more spiritual and has premonitions of the future and past. Her lineage produces the Scottish Stuart dynasty (e.g. Mary Queen of Scots). William Wallace (aka Braveheart) appears in the background and Robert the Bruce make a cameo appearance.

This book dovetails nicely as a sequel to 'Lady of Hay' which was about Eleyne of Mar's grandmother, Matilda de Braose who built Hay castle in Wales and was imprisoned in later life by King John at Corfe Castle and starved to death. This book is a prequel to 'Kingdom of Shadows' about Isobel Countess of Buchan who is the mistress of Robert the Bruce and crowns him. Isobel is the great granddaughter of Eleyne of Mar.

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### **Katherine says**

Took me some time to read as I felt it was very involved but it's an excellent story

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### **Triinu says**

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### **Angel Bunny says**

Alright, so you should know that I have currently stopped at page 282. Why you ask? I just realized that I am basically reading a soap opera!

Now, don't get me wrong! But seriously, this.. Just... Yeah. I can't go on much longer! Now, I have read longer and bigger books but the thing is that this story is just making me laugh at its ridiculousness!

I seriously feel like If Someone turned this into a TV series then it would be very popular! This just has so many turns and betrayals that I just want to strangle some of these characters! I suppose that I should credit the writer for bringing these emotions. But like some of the reviewers before me, the main character just acts completely out of character sometimes! Okay, so the Main Character gets beaten and instead of being angry, sullen, or depressed, she just willingly has sex with him and snuggles up with him like he didn't hit her with his belt a few nights ago! Jeez!

If your wondering where I stopped and why it was when Eleyne's husband dies and we find out Eleyne's indirectly poisoned him! I barely got passed the part where people Isabel laughed at her Ex friends beating! It's absurdly ridiculous! Now, maybe I am just letting outside activities get the best of me, but I just can't go on right now!

To be honest, I just need to get these thoughts down, haha.

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### **Ashlie says**

My mum owns both Lady of Hay and Kingdom of Shadows and last year she showed them to me properly and said they were books she had really loved when she was younger (and of course still loves them) and she thought I would like them, which I did. Since then I've been looking in libraries in suburbs surrounding me

and I've found most of the books Barbara Erskine has written. Child of the Phoenix was the first I read out of two I borrowed and I'm glad I did because I got to revisit characters from both the aforementioned books, who had really resonated with me, even though sometimes they annoyed me. Here was Eleyne, another female heroine whose (fictional) attitude was at odds with the time as she didn't see why she should be at the beck and call of any man. I think this makes it a lot easier for the reader to identify with this character because we can almost imagine her as a modern woman of today. However, terrible things happened to Eleyne which are not acceptable today, this is one of the stark contrasts in this book as compared to our own lives, and it seemed the general opinion of harsh punishment in that time was that it was accepted without question by most. It serves as an example of how far we have come since the time the book was set, but how not a lot has changed because there will always be someone trying to control someone else. Another reader's review also made the point that if Eleyne had not chosen her battles, she would never have had a moment of peace, which makes me sad even though she's partly a fictional character, but I know it's how it would have been for most women throughout history, so at least their stories are being told.

Also, loved the book and was sad when I finished it!

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### **Alison says**

This is a purely historical novel from Erskine, and despite the long and complicated life the heroine goes through it's definitely the best I've read so far.

There is real history here and you can see the results of the actions of this book in the present day just by following the family tree in the book. Be warned that the heroine goes through numerous marriages and love affairs and terrible things happen to her and her children.

But there is a legacy here and that is fascinating. As is the Welsh background and important events and people covered.

My only gripe was Alexander. The obsessive 'love' went on far too long as did the interference of the maidservant character.

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### **Lucy says**

There were aspects of this book that I loved, but equally, there were parts that I found grating, frustrated and in some parts tired.

Growing up, I remember my mother always loved Barbara Erskine, and she had always told me to try her novels. Lady of Hay, her most famous was the most obvious choice, but I've never been a big fan of time travel/or split time novels, so I thought I would try Child of the Phoenix, a straight historical fiction, especially as I had recently finished Sharon Kay Penman's 'Here Be Dragons' which also features Llewellyn the Great and Joan, so I thought a novel about their daughter would be fascinating. I appreciated the historical note at the end of this novel, where Erskine explains that the character of Eleyne was a composite of different historical figures, so some inaccuracies/stretches of the imagination with the timeline I can forgive.

For the most part, the writing was well done, descriptive, but not too much so. Each character has understandable virtues and flaws and were not just binary villains and heroes, and yet, in some places, I

found some characters unnecessarily frustrating- particularly Rhonwen, and Eleyne when it comes to her blindness to Rhonwens faults. I can understand giving a character depth by having flawed reasoning, but at points I think it was just too repetitive- the characters weren't learning from their mistakes to the point where their blindness was borderline unbelievable.

The treatment of events, was well done, and the relationships between most characters was believable, but like with a large number of historical fiction, there was a large focus on witchcraft. Now this is not necessarily a problem, and given the Celtic elements of this novel, I can understand the inclusion, but you could barely go five pages before there was a reference to ghosts, magic, special poisons, conjuring visions, etc. Sometimes it was interesting, sometimes, it would have been better if the history had been allowed to speak for itself.

I gave it three stars because it is mostly well written and quite enjoyable, but sometimes the reliance on magical elements (in what is a historical and not a fantasy novel) and the frustrating actions of the characters just took away from it too much. I'd still recommend it though as it's a fun novel to get involved with, but if magic isn't your thing- maybe give it a miss!

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### **Yvonne says**

This is one of my absolute favorite books! It's a sweeping saga that takes you from Wales, to England to Scotland. Set in the 13th century with Christianity and Druidism as backdrops to the political dealings between all three countries centered around Eleyne, a girl/woman of noble birth and whose destiny is linked to three crowns. Birth, life, death, fire, prophecy and psychic abilities are all connected in a story that is a page turner you are unable to put down. I've read and reread this book numerous times throughout the years. Absolutely love it!

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### **Rosemary Morris says**

Barbara Erskine's ancestress, The Child of the Phoenix, is Eleyne of Mar, daughter of Prince Lewellyn and King John's illegitimate daughter, Joanna.

In this epic novel of requited and unrequited love, happy and unhappy marriage, the author uses a blend of fact, fiction and fantasy to create Eleyne, the Welsh princess gifted with second sight. The love of her life is Alexander II of Scotland whose love for her transcends the grave.

I believe in reincarnation but I found the concept of sexual encounters between flesh and blood Eleyne and Alexander's ghost unbelievable. Nevertheless, overall, it did not spoil my enjoyment of the tale of Eleyne's trials and tribulations, murder and her relationships with each of her four husbands and her lover, the king, during his lifetime.

The first lines of the novel gripped me and compelled me to read on. "The full moon sailed high and cold above the streaming clouds, aloof from the rising tide and the white whipped waves. At the door of the hall a woman stared out across the water towards the glittering snows which mantled the peaks of Yr Wyddfa. Near her a man stood waiting in the shadows, silent, still, his hands clasped on his staff. Einion Gweledydd was tall, white-haired austere in his patience. Soon the child would be born: the child whose destiny he had foretold: the child whose hands would hold three crowns: the child he would claim for the ancient gods of

Albion.”

Fascinated I raced through the book and, when I reached the last pages read until midnight (much too late) to find out how the tale would end.

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## **Annie says**

Finishing Child of the Phoenix meant that I have now read all of Barbara Erskine's novels (even if I was too chicken to finish Hiding from the Light). If you track her literary style during her career as a published author, there are definant similarities between all her novels. She writes about head-strong women and their interactions with the paranormal. Many of these books are ghost stories of sorts.

However, Child of the Phoenix is different in that it is the only one of Barbara Erskine's novels that is only set in one time period. It's a historical saga with that distinct Erskine flavour that makes it so special.

This book tracks Eleyne through the course of her life and as a modern woman, it served as a reminder of the adversity my own decendants have faced to achieve female equality. The things that Eleyne endures in her marriages are just horrific and she does fight back sometimes but the reality is that if she fought against every wrong committed against her, her life would've known no moments of peace. Whilst she is a forward-thinking, spirited woman for her time, she does pick her battles wisely. Which means that some of the characters get away with doing things to her that they would be jailed for today. Eleyne knew happiness but she by no means had a happy life.

This book really is such an epic. So if you're going to read it, devote a good two weeks to immersing yourself in the pages. I would certainly recommend it to anyone who likes Sharon Kay Pennman.

