



Oak Leaves



Journal of Ár nDraíocht Féin The Quarterly Summer 2015 ~ Issue No. 69



The Quarterly Journal of Ár nDraíocht Féin

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ADF's Mission and Vision

The Mother Grove recently held their first retreat since 2002 at a hotel in Chicago, with the express purpose of revisiting the Mission and Vision of ADF, something that has not been done in a very long time.

Of course, there were articles on the website about ADF's vision from the 1980's and 90's, but these had never been boiled down into simple statements that could show who we are at a glance. This we finally managed to do at the retreat, and they were posted on our main web page.

There is nothing new here, really. We continue to honor the vision of Isaac Bonewits, our founder, and the Mother Grove believes that the following statements would meet with his approval. May these statements hold up to the test of time!

The Mission of ADF

Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF) is a Pagan church based on ancient Indo-European traditions expressed through public worship, study, and fellowship.

The Vision of ADF

Our vision is that the Gods and Spirits are served in the modern world through:

- Public temple worship with a skilled priesthood
- Accessible religious training for all
- A spiritual relationship with the Earth
- Sustainable Pagan institutions

A flourishing family and community Pagan culture, we value:

- Commonality of ritual practice
- Honoring the Earth Mother
- Scholarship and research
- Reciprocity with the Gods and Spirits
- Respect for others through living our virtues
- Service to the community, land, and the Gods and Spirits.

May the Kindreds bless us all and grant us the strength, perseverance, and fertility to see our vision come true.

So be it!

~ Reverend Kirk Thomas



To Hermes

By: Ceisivr Serith

You devised the lyre,
 then lightly gave it up,
 a peace offering to the god you had wronged.
 A little thing for you,
 a moment's work.
 but the perfect gift for the music god
 who sets each in its place,
 in proper order,
 so that he might restore the order you had violated with
 your thieving raid.
 You created the occasion, and the means for
 overcoming it:
 a wonderful god who can conceive his own
 overcoming
 and then overcome that!
 Clever god, with clever mind and hands,
 I praise your insight and creativity:
 the right thing for the moment is what you bring,
 a surprising talent in a god of thieves.



Peace up to Heaven

By: Judith O'Grady

At the end of the second battle of Mag Tuired one of the Morrigna (most likely either The Mórrigan or Badb) makes a prophecy, for which I use this translation:

“Peace up to heaven.
 Heaven down to earth.
 Earth beneath heaven,
 Strength in each,
 A cup very full,
 Full of honey;
 Mead in abundance.
 Summer in winter. . . .
 Peace up to heaven . . .”

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cmt/cmteng.htm>

 Ancient Irish poetic rules make the last word of one line either the same or allusive to the first word of the next line as well as last line to first line circularity. So it is obvious that a number of lines are missing; I have filled in those lines with appropriate poetics:

Peace up to heaven.
 Heaven down to earth.
 Earth beneath heaven,
 Strength in each,

Each in each piled,

Piled like a cup.

A cup very full,
 Full of honey;

Mead in abundance.
 Abundance flowers,

Flowers like Summer.

Summer's inside winter. . . .

Winter's a blanket,

Blanketing the green.

Green under the wet,

Wet is Summer's peace.

Peace up to heaven . . .”

Untitled 2013 by Unknown ADF member





ADF Germany

Building Our Druidry Internationally

By: Mairi NicDhoiseu, Birgit Reinartz, Nicole Flores

ADF Germany meeting by Mairi NicDhoiseu

When I joined ADF in 2012 there were only three members in the whole of Germany. We do not live close to each other; there are 300 km between us, which is far for a German, especially with our high gas prices. So we tried to build community via the web. Ishtar did a great job with her website www.sternenkreis.de and published a lot of interesting articles and translations. We all started translating the Dedicant Path and other important articles while working on the DP. Year after year more people joined. Since translations could only be done voluntarily, it will take time to provide the DP in German. So I decided to provide a seminar based on the COoR in German, which was split into eight parts reflecting parts of the COoR and also contained a lot of information on druidry, the kindreds, nature awareness, Indo-European culture and divination.

Last year we decided it was time to meet in flesh, to discuss what our future should look like, and what could be done to strengthen the German community of ADF. Unfortunately we couldn't meet in autumn 2013. But then in 2014 there was a great opportunity for all of us to make up for the cancelled meeting: Rev. Nancy McAndrew was in Germany and Janet McCandlas would host an ADF solstice rite.

We all met at Janet's house and we all laughed about all the stuff we crazy pagans bring with us for just a rite. Instruments, ritual robes, books. There was no more room in the living room left.

We started to plan the rite, which was dedicated to Danu as the local sovereignty Goddess with the River Danube not being far away.

After our beautiful rite we enjoyed our potluck dinner with Nürnberger Würstchen, vegetarian sausages, self-made tomato bread, pumpkin seed cheese, salmon pastries, cheese and pepper, rolls and German beer and juice. We talked about building a German community, when to meet again and where. We talked about building protogroves in Hessia and Saxony, becoming DP reviewers so people could submit their DP in German, how to do funding, how to get on with the DP and CTP. Our kind host Janet enjoyed playing music with us, so her piano, a bodhran, a harp and some percussion accompanied our singing of "John Barleycorn", "Are ye sleeping Maggie", "Tree Wassail" and some more.

It was a really beautiful meeting, full of laughter and joy. Nancy as ADF Clergy and having started a protogrove (GOSH) herself could provide us with a lot of important information, which will be helpful in building a German ADF community. We will definitely meet again.



Thanks to Janet and her husband Rob for hosting and thanks to all who came to make this meeting a great and wonderful one.

High Day Recap by Birgit Reinartz

This was my first ADF group ritual ever, and the second group ritual in total, so one can say it was a really new experience. The ritual was held on the first ADF-Germany meeting which one of the members hosted and under the guidance of Rev. Nancy McAndrew, who came over from the US.



Since we were a small group everybody got involved in one part of the ritual or more. And since we are all musicians somehow our ritual contained a lot of song. After deciding what we wanted to do and preparing the ritual space we started out with a small meditation led by Nancy. Then we processed to the ritual space and surrounded the centre singing 'We approach the sacred grove'. We made an offering to the outsiders and Mairi sang the 'Brighid Song' in Gaelic to call for inspiration. To establish the centre, first Nancy kindled the fire in our midst and made an offering to it. Janet took care of the water: Some of us had brought bottles with water from different places, Ellie had unity water from 2013 and Nancy had some from this year's Unity Well at Wellspring. All of them were mixed together in a big cauldron. Then, while Janet and Nancy planted the apple tree at its new home, Birgit sang and played 'Tree Wassail' by Anne Hill as a blessing for the tree with the company of the others. The place was purified by water and incense.

Mairi called Mannanan as our gate keeper, and in his honour we sang 'Mannanan, carry us', Mairi's own variation of 'Rhiannon, carry us', which Ellie underlined with her ocean drum for a beautiful wave sound. Mairi then opened the gates and we were ready to make our offerings to the Kindreds.

Nicole gave grain to the Nature spirits, Mairi alcohol to the ancestors and Ellie frankincense to the Shining Ones. Our special deity of the occasion was Danu, who gave her name to one of the main rivers of the region and as such is the sovereignty of the land. Janet presented her a Danu statue which will have a permanent place in her new Nemeton, and sprinkled her with water. Nancy gave oil to her and afterwards everybody made a small offering of incense sticks.

Early in the ritual we had a little accident, when the horn with our prepared blessing of the waters fell onto the incense sticks and drowned them. Obviously they had needed a refreshing of blessings. Let me just say that they burned nicely, so our offering seemed to have been accepted, drowned or not.

Nancy drew the omen using Mairi's ogham sticks. First she got 'oak', the ultimate druid tree: Yes, our offering was definitely welcome. Then we received 'birch': Nancy's interpretation was that this was a time of new beginnings for us, since we were starting to actively form a German group, not just fiddling around as solitaires. But it also included the message that this meant a lot of work for the coming time.

After receiving the omen Nancy asked the Kindreds to bless the refilled contents of our horn so that their blessings would be passed on to us and fill us, and we passed the horn around. In a second round we brought out individual toasts to our group.

In our core work we asked Danu for her support to keep the land safe from fracking, since there are some people starting to change their minds about this theme in dangerous directions. We asked her for her blessing of Janet's ritual place and formed a circle hand in hand humming our base tones to connect with this power. Janet then finished the ritual with a lot of thank you's to all of those who were involved, we closed the gates and declared the ritual ended.

Like I said beforehand this was my first group ritual according to the COoR and I was really happy with it. Maybe it wasn't as personal as it would have been had this been a solitary rite. Instead there was another undertone: Everybody did something in her own style and it all somehow fit together in harmony. It was great to see how the others approached different aspects and it was all there, from quite dramatic to very simple and easy. I loved singing together with the others because that's something I really miss when I'm working alone. And I was surprised how easily we were able to plan what we wanted to do before; having the steps of the COoR as a basic frame was surely a great help in this. I was happy that we had to speak freely, since I'm no big fan of completely out written rituals. It felt as natural as possible to do what we did, even speaking English, or in Janet's case German.

Afterwards we all had the feeling that our ritual had strengthened our group and inspired us to further plans.

Summer Solstice 2014 Recap by Nicole Flores

When I left Germany I was a Solitary Pagan. To my surprise I found a Druid Protogrove just within a month of being in Upstate New York. This is when I learned of ADF. I became a Member of ADF and the Northern Rivers Protogrove, and started studying for the Dedicator Path. I celebrated every High Day with my new found friends and we gathered for Study Groups and lots of other activities. When the time came to move back to Germany I left Northern New York with one eye happy and one eye sad. I learned so much within that time and made lots of friends within the ADF community.

I flew back to Germany just in time for the very first European meeting for Summer Solstice 2014. It was seven of us, including Rev. Nancy McAndrew, who was visiting Janet McCandlas in Germany at that time. Janet was so kind to be the host of this first European meeting/ritual.

Before the ritual we all talked about our paths in ADF, asked Nancy lots of questions and prepared the ritual guidelines. The ritual itself included the planting of an apple tree and we sent healing energies to the waters of the world against fracking. After the ritual we gathered for a nice bountiful potluck. We ended the gathering with an improvised music



session that we all enjoyed. I am really looking forward to more ADF gatherings in Europe and to see the community flourish.

Author Bios:

Mairi NicDhoiseu - Having been a Pagan since 2000 I joined ADF member in 2012 and loved the scholarly approach from the beginning. Finished my DP in 2013. Currently I am enrolled in the CTP preliminaries and Initiate Path, and am the founder of Clan of the Green Mother Protogrove.

Nicole Flores - I am a member of ADF since May 2013 and a member of the Northern Rivers Protogrove, NY. My hearth cultures are Gaelic and Norse.

Birgit Reinartz - After being an eclectic Pagan for about 20 years I joined ADF in Summer 2013, because Isthara's stories made me curious. Soon it became clear to me that to get a better understanding I would have to do the DP, which I finished in August 2014. In the follow-up I am working on the Bardic and Liturgy Studies, and especially in doing things for and with children. Since there are no other known Pagans around here, I am strictly solitary.

OL Staff Note:

It is quite a treat to have articles outlining ADF groups internationally and the staff here hopes that this submission inspires other ADF International groups, and solitaires to submit their community building stories in the future for our membership to read. All photos in this article are from the 2014 ADF Germany event.





Crafting Magical Workings

By: Jan "Skylark" Avende

Crafting magical workings can be quite a daunting task, especially if it is something that you are new at, or have very little experience with. There are some things you can do to help you grow in confidence and experience with your magical work. If you're doing magical work for one of the advanced study programs, remember: you should be experimenting and trying new things out, and writing down what does and doesn't work so that you can learn from them.

First off, if you're struggling coming up with ideas for what to do for magical workings, or if you have an idea but don't know where to start or how to begin writing it, my best suggestion is to go to the texts of folks who have already done it. By this I mean primary sources. The Greek Magical Papyri, the Artharvaveda, the Galdrabók, and other such texts. These are excellent sources of inspiration. I'd also like to note that while I think it's imperative to get some practice writing your own workings, there is also nothing wrong with doing workings that others have written. It is good practice, and can really help you get your feet wet and gain confidence. Additionally, if someone has written a really good magical working for something you really need, there is no need to reinvent the wheel, and you shouldn't be afraid to use that working and write up your own experience using it.

Second, I'd try to remember that not all magical workings have to be big and huge, and it's far more important that they are meaningful to you. There's nothing wrong with big, huge workings, but if that is all you are doing, you will probably end up getting burnt out rather quickly. For many of the advanced study programs you need to be doing regular magical work. For me, this meant that I aimed for at least one magical working a week.

This may seem excessive, but I think it's important to look at how you view magical workings. For me, magic is often a tool in my toolbox for accomplishing something, and the question I ask myself is "Would I take a mundane action to try to resolve or aid this situation?" If the answer is yes, then I have met the requirement for the magical working to meet my own moral standards. So, after consulting the gods via divination, I will proceed with a magical working. My thought process is that if I truly want something to happen or manifest, and have determined that it is the right course of action and morally sound, then there is no reason why I shouldn't use all of the tools I have to achieve my goals.

Third, having determined that you're going to do a magical working and as you're planning what kind of working to do, remember that for the advanced study program work you're going to have to have at least three magical workings that have "demonstrable, intended results" and that you'll have to explain how the results manifested. So, be sure that at least some of your workings will have results you can explain in that way: meaning not everything should be energy work or something similar or you may find yourself frustrated when you go to answer that question. I had good luck with this by doing some workings where I wanted to change the expected outcome of something, or alter the quantity of something. Though I imagine you could have good luck here with healing work as well if you have a baseline on which to base what the original outcome would have been without magic.

Fourth, I found it helpful to categorize the types of magic that I do, and then rotate what kind I was doing so that I didn't get tired of any one specific type. I categorized based on both intent and method. Categorizing the various types of magic like this also helped me come up with what kinds of workings to do, as well as better brainstorm new kinds of magic to experiment with. It also allowed me to mix and match intents with methods to practice all different kinds and ways. For example, you can do healing work via energy, or charmed candles, or tinctures/tonics that are actually consumed, or talismans that are worn, or spirit arte (working with helper spirits), or toning, or spoken charms, or any manner of things. Each of those is a different working. This means if you know you are good at healing work, then you can stick with healing for awhile but try a whole bunch of different methods. Let's say you then find that you're good at making talismans. You could then use that as a jumping off point to try other intents like protection, blessing, inspiration for creative arts, and manifestation of specific things. Then you just keeping moving on in that fashion, letting the intent inspire the methods, and the methods inspire the intent, and back and forth and back and forth.

I've listed below some specific ideas (note the mix and match with methods and intents that could be done with these). Most of these I've tried, and items with an asterisk* have a full working written up (full disclosure, most, though not all, of these are Hellenic in nature).

Feel free to ask questions about any of them (email: skylark913@gmail.com).

- * Spoken charm to bless the tools you use for your work
- * Using materials sacred to a deity associated with divination to increase your Sight with divination tools.*
- * Toning for healing a physical ailment
- * Blending ingredients to soothe a fussy or teething baby*
- * Spoken charm to create a purification/grounding and centering stone (included below)
- * Creating an amulet/magical object for prosperity*
- * Knotwork to use as needed for wisdom and guidance*
- * Talisman for protection of material goods*
- * Spoken charm to bless mode of transportation (shoes, bike, car)
- * Talisman for the protection of young children and/or mothers*
- * Spirit arte to increase milk production for breast feeding (this was done each week)
- * Spoken charm for canning food for the winter
- * Use blessed waters to create a protective charm for the home* (this is renewed each month)
- * Spirit arte for bardic inspiration
- * Visualization of a 'fetch' to help during trance work
- * Spoken charm with offerings to introduce a person to a deity and encourage a relationship to form*
- * Carve a binding tablet to stop someone from bothering you (magical restraining order)
- * Tea used for grounding and centering in a time of chaos

To wrap up, here is one of the workings I've done. I've found this one particularly potent because I, like many people, find having a worry stone or fidget calming and centering. The creation of this stone includes magical intent alongside that simple tactile form of self-soothing.

Creation of a Purifying Grounding/Centering Stone

Magic: Let the maelstrom strip away those things that are pulling in our unwanted attention. Let the stone stand firm at the center of the swirling storm, and help us to maintain our own center.

- need a stone (or some other focus object), myrrh, and salt.

*Poseidon, Earth Shaker, Wave Bringer:
You whose trident stirs the mighty maelstrom,
whose waters wash us clean in the storm.
I bring you this gift of salt for your realm, and myrrh for
your delight
As I ask your aid in this working tonight.*

offer salt and myrrh

*You teach us of endurance and patience:
The calm in the raging storm.
You teach us of strength and perseverance:
The gates holding the Titans at bay.
You teach us of persistence and change:
The ebb and flow of the tides.*

*each person takes stone, holds it at their center,
and speaks:*

*"Poseidon, may this stone mark my center,
Holding me firm and strong here within myself.*

*Let the whipping winds cyclone about me
Stripping away the miasma I carry.*

*Strip away the obstacles I put up
in front myself.*

*Strip away the extraneous
emotions and thoughts
diminishing my focus.*

*Let me stand firm at the center,
Even though the storm may rage
about me.*

*Though the maelstrom spins, I
stand strong.*

*Like this stone, I stand firm upon the Earth:
Unshaking and unafraid.*

*Like this stone, I stand firm amidst the storm:
the waves breaking around me, the riptide passing me by.*

*Like this stone, I stand firm and strong
Here at my Center."*

*Poseidon, Lord of the Deep,
Connect us to the foundations of the Earth
And help us to find peace and joy
in the blossoming waves of the storm.*

Author Bio:

Jan "Skylark" Avende has been a member of Three Cranes Grove and ADF since 2009. She is an ADF Initiate, and has taken to heart the directive in the Initiate Oath to "lead others to the flame," focusing on helping others as they work through the advanced study programs. She is currently serving as the Regional Druid for the Heartland Region, the Chief of the Bardic Guild, and the Arkhon of the Hellenic Kin.

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The Robin

By Nick Egelhoff

There was something off-putting about the house that Anna sensed as soon as she walked through the front door. It was a nice enough home, quaint and clean and in a neighborhood that looked like it came out of a 1950s sitcom. But there was something about it that gave Anna a feeling not unlike that which accompanied the sound of nails down a chalkboard.

"Come on, kiddo, keep it moving!" Her father said as she heard him tromping up the steps and across the porch behind her.

Anna moved further into the empty house, clutching the cardboard box in her arms like it was a shield. Her gaze swept slowly and cautiously around the room, half-expecting to see a scary stranger or some kind of horror movie monster slipping out of sight through a doorway, but no such thing happened. Anna chewed her lower lip and looked to her father as he set his own box down. He returned her look with both eyebrows raised.

"What are you waiting for, sweetie? Put the box down, go get another one," he said. *"You're twelve, not two, and you're going to help mom and I."*

"Yeah, yeah," Anna replied, setting her own box down and following after her as he exited through the front door, casting a suspicious glance over her shoulder.

They had moved into the house to be closer to her mother's work at the university, leaving behind the house in Dublin that Anna had lived all of her life in for this strange, new place in Clintonville. Her parents had assured her that she'd still be able to visit with and keep in touch with her friends, that the neighborhood was a safe one and that the transitioning between schools wouldn't be that hard. But even then, she'd felt apprehensive moving into this new place even before she'd been vaguely creeped out by the house.

The unpacking was relatively unremarkable, though Anna's feeling of disquiet was amplified when she entered the small bedroom in the house's furnished attic that would be her own room. Again, there was nothing overtly threatening or creepy in the room - no giant spiderwebs or dead mice in the corner or skittering shadows - but there was a small door in the wall that gave her pause. Her father explained that it likely led into a crawlspace, since the attic was an actual room and not just empty space under the roof, there was storage space in between the room's walls and the roof. There was something about the small, rough-hewn door set into the wall, though, that made a shiver run up and down Anna's spine, and the whole first night she slept in the room - curled up in her sheets and comforter on the air mattress - she got only a scant few hours of actual sleep, her gaze continually drawn to the door.

But as the move continued and tiredness caught up with her, Anna eventually found herself able to ignore the anxiety and the disturbing feelings that the room and the house elicited. Two weeks passed and though she still, occasionally, got an odd feeling when she looked at the crawlspace door, it no longer made her skin crawl or instill visions of creepy old women or monstrous creatures in her mind when she looked at it.

She slept soundly and peacefully in her room, snuggled up with her old stuffed elephant, Mr. Trunk, until one night when she woke in the darkness. Anna's heart was thumping and she didn't know why. She couldn't remember the dream she'd been having, but something in her gut told her that her apprehension had nothing to do with it. She lay curled up in her bed for what felt like eons, but was likely only a moment or two, listening with her breath held in her chest.

Breaking glass.

It was somewhat distant, but she distinctly heard what sounded like one of the windows down on the first floor being shattered. Anna hunched her body up, biting her lip almost painfully as her gaze shot to the door of her room, which led to a short stairway down to the second floor. Someone was in the house. Someone had broken in and...and...and what were they going to do? Were they just going to steal stuff? Were they psychopaths that would kill Anna and her parents? She felt her heart hammering more quickly in her chest and her eyes darted around the room, looking for somewhere to hide. Anna's gaze fell swiftly upon the shadow of the crawlspace door before darting back to the room's main door. Dare she?

What's worse, said a little voice in the back of her head, *cobwebs and bugs and pretend monsters or real burglars?*

She considered the thought for what seemed an inordinately long span of time before she cautiously slipped from her bed and tip-toed toward the crawlspace door, stopping for a long few heartbeats as she heard muffled stumblings come from two floors below. With her heart beating so hard she could hear the pounding of it in her ears, Anna barely even noticed the soft light spilling out from the crack along the bottom of the crawlspace door. She gently pushed and pushed against the door, trying to budge it without giving away her presence. Distantly, she considered her mother and father in their room below, but a panicked voice reminded her that *they* were adults, they could take care of themselves. It was better for her to hide and avoid danger.

And with one last shove she opened the crawlspace and tumbled through.

Anna felt dried leaves and twigs underneath her as she rolled, grunting softly as she felt her shoulder smack into the stout, gnarled roots of a tree. She came to a rest, feeling dried leaves

crinkling and crackling beneath her, the musty smell of dirt and slowly decaying vegetable matter reaching her nostrils as she blinked against the blinding light. As her vision resolved, she saw a canopy of leaves high above her and beyond them, the shining sun. Bewildered, Anna pushed herself up into a sitting position, absently brushing dried leaves and small twigs from her blonde hair. Around her, in every direction where she cast her gaze, were trees.

And it was day.

Anna shook her head and looked back the way she'd tumbled, but saw no sign of the crawlspace door through which she'd come. Her chest suddenly felt tight and her heart hammered in her chest. Where was she? How would she get back home? She scrambled backward in a panic, stopping only when she bumped into the base of an old oak tree. Through the fear, through the panic and the desperation, a single sound came to her: the song of a robin.

Her heartbeat slowed and Anna looked up into the branches above her to see a grayish-black bird with a soft red underbelly peering down at her. It chirped and sang, and strangely Anna felt calmed. The bird hopped around on the branch, looking straight at her, and the girl felt the distinct impression that it was *talking* to her. After a moment, it took wing and she watched it fly off through the forest, only to come back a few moments later, chirp at her loudly, and fly off in the same direction. The bird repeated this process two more times before Anna realized that it wanted her to follow.

Up and down hills covered with trees the robin led the girl, until finally it settled in the branches of an apple tree, whose fruit was ripe and swaying gently in the soft breeze. She hadn't realized how hungry she was until she had climbed into the tree and snagged one of the delicious, red orbs from its branches. Anna voraciously consumed half a dozen before she reclined back against the apple tree's main trunk, her belly full. When she was able to be roused again, the robin led her to a stout and ancient ash tree, whose roots on one side were wrapped up and over a boulder. The robin beckoned her into the empty space under the tree and Anna found it dry and comfortable and free of any insects or other animals.

"*Thank you,*" she said softly and shyly to the robin, strangely embarrassed to be speaking to the little bird. The robin chirped happily to her for a moment and then flew away. Confused she stayed around the tree through the rest of the day and huddled in the empty space beneath it through the night, clutching a stout branch of ash wood she'd found in case anything came for her. She slept little that first night, but in the morning the robin returned and accompanied her back to the apple tree.

So it went for three more days: the robin would keep her company for several hours, then flit off until the next morning. In the meantime, Anna made as much of a home under the ash tree that she could, continually telling herself

that she would search for a way home later. Despite the solitude and the confusion of where she was, Anna found the forest to be idyllic place that almost seemed safe.

Until she had the dream.

Anna was aware of darkness.

It was deep and thick and pressed in on her oppressively from every direction, suffocating her. She wanted to run, to escape this pervasive abyss that surrounded her and find someplace where there was light and freedom and room to breathe. Form and space took shape around her in the darkness, unseen but felt in that way that knowledge can spring fully formed into one's awareness while dreaming. Blind, Anna stumbled forward, the feel of dirt beneath her feet, the firmness of rock upholding her, the musty smell of soil strong in her nostrils.

Vision resolved before her: shadows taking on solidity with a strange negative quality that was all blacks and greys and no actual light. She was making her way through a tunnel, the fuzzy shadow of roots hanging from the ceiling and brushing her head as she passed. The sound of a soft moaning, groans of pain and sadness, reached her ears and she hurried forward, knowing that she had to find their source.

She wanted to run, to escape this pervasive abyss that surrounded her and find someplace where there was light and freedom and room to breathe. Form and space took shape around her in the darkness, unseen but felt in that way that knowledge can spring fully formed into one's awareness while dreaming...

The tunnel opened up into a small chamber formed within the rock, the roots she'd felt earlier thicker and more numerous, falling like curtains in some areas. She passed under and through them, parting them as the groans become more and more audible. Anna stopped dead, surrounded by an odd curtain of long roots as

she saw the young man. He sat against one of the chamber's rock walls, his head lolling back against the stone, and thick tree roots from the ceiling binding his wrists, arms, and legs into immobility. She stood there for what seemed an eternity, before the young man - who could only be a few years older than herself - moved his head and looked at her in the darkness.

"*Help...*"

She awoke with an inhale, shivering in the early morning shadows beneath the old ash tree. Anna rubbed her arms and stirred, slipping out from beneath the tree and trying to warm herself by moving around. The robin found her as she sat beneath the apple tree, eating her breakfast as the dawn light slipped through the forest canopy and warmed the land around her.

"*Good morning,*"

The words came softly and in a sing-song manner into her mind, but the shock of hearing a voice other than her own caused Anna to nearly choke on her bite of apple.



Nature Spirit by David Crawford

Her gaze settled upon an object that glinted in the early morning sun from atop a low stone in the center of a dozen standing stones, though several of them had fallen to rest upon the dirt. Anna slowly approached, feeling the hairs on the back of her neck stand up the closer she got. Only a few yards separated her from the stone, when movement to her right caught her eye and stopped her movements and stilled her breath.

Long - almost twelve feet if not longer - and nearly as thick as Anna was, its body marked by alternating bands of tan and dark brown, the snake coiled around the low stone and raised its head to look at her.

"W-who...?" she sputtered, looking around desperately for a long moment until her eyes fell once again on the robin perched among the branches of the apple tree. The bird quietly bobbed its head in what could only be interpreted as an acknowledgement.

"You?!" The girl croaked out the astonished question.

"Yes." The voice came soft and melodious into her thoughts.

"You can speak?"

"All things can speak," the robin replied, "one just needs to listen."

That made Anna pause, her mind turning the words over and over in contemplation. Finally, she said: "Why did you wait so long to speak to me?"

"Have I not been speaking to you this whole time? Language is more than just mere words."

Anna had no reply to that, only partly because the robin continued speaking a moment later. "If you want to return to your home, you must do two things. First, there are some old ruins not far from here - to them you must travel and retrieve what you find there."

Anna's jaw dropped open. "Home? You know how I can go home?!"

The robin twittered audibly and bobbed its head several times. "Yes, yes! You must go to the ruins and after that you must find an old cottage that sits in these woods. But beware the clever when you see it..."

Anna followed the robin through the woods to a place where the trees thinned some as large, rectangular blocks of stone began to emerge from the earth, eventually coming together in a megalithic jumble. She picked her way carefully among the ruins, staring at the stones marked here and there by reliefs and strange, curling etchings that looked to be somewhere between an alien form of writing and the kind of organic lines one expected to see in plants and trees, not the bones of the earth.

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"Who are you that dares violate the sanctity of this place?"

Much like with the robin, the snake's words slid into Anna's mind as the creature slowly swayed back and forth before her, its black eyes staring unblinkingly into hers as its tongue flicked out to taste the air.

Anna took a step backward and the snake's head bobbed forward as she did, causing the girl to halt her movement. "I...I..." she stuttered, beginning to cast a glance over her shoulder, looking for the robin, but stopping herself. "I was told to come here. By a bird. A robin."

The snake's head swayed and it peered at her speculatively. "Perhaps you were. Perhaps you weren't. Perhaps you've trespassed to steal riches." There was a long pause as it eyed her, those ebony orbs assessing her. "What grows in the shadow of roots?"

Anna's mind flashed to the disturbing dream she'd had that morning and she suppressed a shudder as she blurted out: "Dark dreams!"

The snake blinked slowly and seemed to nod in acceptance of her answer. It swayed another moment before speaking again. "From whence does life come?"

Anna blinked, completely unsure of what the creature meant. "From whence does life come? The Earth? Moms and dads? She bit her lip nervously as the snake watched her with its cold, reptilian gaze and her stomach gurgled nervously. Food? "F-from..." she cleared her throat to answer, feeling it tighten as she tried to speak. "From the apple tree...?"

The snake's head bobbed forward minutely and Anna flinched, letting out a small squeak of fear. But it did not strike, it simply nodded in that odd way again. "Where is home?"

The girl felt her heart drop and her lip trembled, memories of her mother and father and all of her friends arising within her mind. She fought back tears and shook her head, closing her eyes and turning her face away from the snake, not wanting to feel its fangs in her cheek when it inevitably struck. "I don't...I don't know the answer to that," she said softly.

There was a soft hiss and the sound of scales slipping across stone. Then...nothing. When Anna opened her eyes again, she caught a glimpse of the snake's tail slipping off into the tall grass between two fallen standing stones. Her heart thudded heavily with relief in her chest. Whatever test the snake had been conducting, she'd passed. She felt faint for a moment and clutched a nearby stone until she felt the strength fully return to her legs.

She turned her eyes toward the low stone in front of her. Anna stepped carefully through the grasses, her eyes flitting about for any other strange predators who might try and stop her, before she stopped a few inches from it. The glinting object was a knife. She didn't know what kind, but "iron" was the first word that jumped to mind. It didn't shine lustroously like some of the kitchen knives she'd seen her dad use, but its blade did reflect the sunlight that fell upon it, while its handle was tightly wrapped in leather. Anna reached out and touched it, drawing a finger down the length of the warm metal before picking it up by the handle. It felt somewhat heavy, but not so much that she had difficulty lifting it. She weighed it in her hand for a long moment, before nodding to herself and turning to leave the ruins.

Now she just had to find the cottage.

Anna had barely left the ruins behind her when she caught sight of the robin again. He called to her in a spirited song and then took off through the forest again. Though no words entered her mind as they had earlier, as she followed and listened to the robin's song, she got a picture in her head of a silver ring, old and tarnished enough that it barely glimmered. And she knew that she needed to find it, wherever it might be.

She followed the robin's zig-zagging path through the woods until the sun reached its zenith. She stopped to pause for a moment against an elderly oak tree catching her breath from the constant pace of the journey, when she realized that the robin had stopped singing. Confused, Anna spent several minutes combing the area, looking for the little bird, but ultimately she found nothing. A worried frown upon her face and a furrow in her brow, Anna glanced in the direction that the robin had been leading her, debating with herself between continuing along the path or turning back toward her makeshift "home" under the ash tree. After several long minutes of deep thought, the blonde girl nodded to herself, dusted off her pajama bottoms - which by now were quite dirty and beginning to fray around the hem - and continued in the direction the bird had been flying.

The sun had moved a few more hand spans toward the western horizon by the time she found the cottage. Even from a way's off, through the trees, she could make out that it wasn't the homeliest of places. Swaddled in a darkness that seemed deeper than that cast by the forest's canopy, it was cobbled together out of old wooden planks of uneven sizes and varying quality - some of the lumber, she could see as she warily approached, was rotting in places and thick cobwebs had been woven under the eaves. Anna watched the place for a long time from behind the protection of an elder tree, the wind moaning softly and hauntingly through the branches above her head. When the western sky began to grow darker and still Anna had seen no movement from the house, she took a deep, steadying breath and started forward.

She could feel her heart hammering in her chest as she stepped as quietly as she could through the ankle deep leaves and detritus that lined the forest floor, expecting the door of the ancient cottage to burst open at any moment, unleashing some fresh Hell upon her.

But nothing happened.

Anna reached the door, taking the old, wooden latch softly in hand, afraid to handle it too forcefully lest she make too much noise, lifted it, and pulled the door open. Nothing jumped out, nothing rushed at her, nothing so much stirred aside from a few of the old, dried leaves on the forest floor. As the door slowly, softly creaking open, a long hallway cloaked in shadow lay before her, its floor bare dirt and walls made of some kind of crumbling plaster. Anna blinked, looking at the dark, empty hallway for a beat, before craning her head to the side, looking around the corner of the small cottage. She looked back into the hallway.

The hallway was longer than the cottage.

Anna swallowed nervously at that realization. Sure, this whole place was teeming with weirdness: talking animals, strange ruins, and she didn't even know how she'd arrived here. But this was strangeness on a whole other level, a level that made her stomach a roiling pit of dread the likes of which she was certain she'd never experienced before. She didn't want to go in there, every sense and intuition screamed at her to turn and run.

But the robin had told her to go in there that her way home depended on her going in.

Taking another deep, steadying breath and clenching her teeth so as to hold back the tide of frightened tears that threatened to well up and overflow down her cheeks, Anna stepped into the cottage's hallway, the old door creaking softly shut behind her.

Despite the gloom and the absence of any glowing light-bulbs or even candles, there was enough half-light in the hallway for Anna to make out shapes in the darkness so that she wasn't stumbling around blindly. She let her fingers trail across the left-hand wall to steady herself and keep herself oriented as she slowly made her way down, vague memories of having been in a similar situation countless times in the past, trying make her way from her bedroom to the bathroom in the stillness of the small hours of the night.

She made it to the end of the hall, where it turned to the left, and looked down the continuation. It ran another twenty feet or so before it dead-ended, it seemed, and there were a half-dozen doorways that branched off from the hallway on either side. Biting her lip, Anna slowly approached them, and peeked through each one, her right hand idly squeezing the handle of the dagger that she held. The doorways all opened onto a similar space: another long hall that went off for forty feet or so, before turning out of sight. Anna's gaze glanced across the dozen portals in turn, before she closed her eyes, took a deep breath and randomly stepped toward one, letting her instinct guide her.

Anna let that method guide her through the increasingly labyrinthine cottage, leading her through hallway after hallway, but those weren't the only rooms. She wandered, warily, through an antique kitchen that reminded her of an illustration she'd once seen in a history book describing life for Colonial settlers in the 1700s. Elsewhere, she averted her eyes from something that looked like a butcher's shop, though some of the meat hanging from the rafters looked like it had walked on two legs instead of four when once they'd been whole and living. Still in another room, she came across what looked like a coffin atop a table draped in black linen; in the corners of the rooms stood veiled mannequins whose eyeless faces made a shiver run down Anna's spine.

And after what seemed like hours of wandering, she found the young man.

The room had earthen walls that were held at bay by wooden framing and the occasional board that kept the dirt from spilling onto the floor. In one corner a large, glass-covered oil-lamp hung from one of the rafters, casting an eerie light upon the bare, spartan room. In the opposite corner, across the room from the door through which Anna entered, sat a young man, leaning back into the crease of the walls as his arms were chained to each of the walls. He was extremely emaciated, his ribs and hip bones showing prominently given that he only wore a pair of worn, dirty pieces of cloth sewn together into the barest semblance of "pants". His eyes were dark and shadowed in the dim light of the lamp, his face drawn and bony. He weakly lifted his head to look in Anna's direction as she stepped into the room, rasping out a soft and gravelly: "Hellppppp..."

The blonde girl gasped, shocked and frightened equally by the young man's state as she was by his sheer *presence* in the room. She stopped dead in her tracks, not risking one more movement into the room and bringing the knife up to bear in front of her.

"*W-who are you...?*" she asked uncertainly.

The young man's head lolled weakly to follow her, his eyes gazing up from under his dark brow. "*Help...help me...please...*"

Anna shied back, feeling as if every inch of her body had erupted in gooseflesh under the young man's gaze. The young blonde girl shook her head quickly, unable to find the voice to verbally decline the man's pleas, and taking an instinctive step backward.

"*Release me, please, child...!*" he rasped out.

And in that instant, the man's sheer pitifulness outweighed Anna's fear and unease. Nervously, the girl licked her lips and took a few more steps toward him. "*O-okay,*" she stuttered. She approached to within two feet of the man, her right hand clenching the handle of the dagger as if she were clinging to a lifesaver, and reached out toward the wall, leaning to feel at the chains that kept him bound.

He had a birthmark. Anna tilted her head slightly, confused and intrigued. Just above his right hip was a small, dark mark that stood out starkly against the backdrop of the young man's pale skin. Blinking, she leaned back away from the wall and peered at the mark on his skin. So entranced by the thing, she was unaware of the low, rumbling growl that had begun to emanate from the young man's throat.

If she looked at it in just the right way it looked almost like a cleaver...

The young man snarled and lunged at her, his teeth snapping together less than an inch from her midsection before Anna leapt backward. He yanked hard at the chains, shaking loose dirt from the walls, and slowly pushed himself to his feet. "*She's here, Mistress! She's here!*" The young man screeched, his face becoming even more gaunt and animalistic as he lunged at Anna, making the chains that bound him creak and squeal with the strain upon them.

"*I will tear your throat out for her!*" The young man growled, yanking on the chains. The bolts that held them affixed to the wall began to slide out in spurts as Anna stood in frozen horror, trying to stay out of the range of the monstrous young man. With a shriek of bending metal a link on one of the chains snapped open and the man swiped at the girl, missing her arm by millimeters. The movement shook Anna

from her horrified trance and, with a cry of terror and anger, she rushed the man and brought the dagger down upon him.

The man's animalistic growls died away as he stumbled a step backward and slumped against the wall, the handle of the dagger jutting out of his breast, its blade sunk up to the hilt into his heart.

His eyes locked with Anna's for a moment, and though there was still the monstrous rage there, she watched it slowly dwindle - like the flames of a dying fire - until they were glassy and lifeless before the man's body slumped to the floor. Anna watched his still form for a long moment, unable to comprehend what she'd done.

She'd killed him.

She felt her legs tremble weakly as the realization washed over her. She'd never killed anything larger than a spider before and now...now she was staring down at the corpse of a man. Anna slowly backed away from him, babbling softly to herself words of disbelief at what had happened, what *she* had *done*. Her heel touched the threshold of the room when she heard a screech of rage that sounded muffled by distance, which was followed by a soft shaking of the walls inside the room and out in the hallway. Anna's back went ramrod straight as she heard it, the sound dispelling the feelings of shock and shame and fear that had clouded her mind.

Motivated by fear, she crossed back over to the man and grabbed the handle of the dagger. He had said something about a "Mistress" and Anna hoped dearly that whatever had made that howl of anger was *not* the person to whom

The blonde girl gasped, shocked and frightened equally by the young man's state as she was by his sheer presence in the room.

he'd called out. She tugged on the handle but the blade barely budged within the dead man's chest, causing Anna's stomach to roil in protest. She yanked and tugged, feeling more desperation as every second ticked by in her head, wanting to be gone from the house of madness and danger. She placed a bare foot on the dirt wall to give her some leverage and pulled hard on the handle with both hands, rolling the man's corpse briefly and revealing a blood-red knit cap mashed into the dirt beneath him.

Suddenly she was tumbling backward. Anna landed on her back with an explosive "Umph!" hearing the dagger hit the dirt not far from her head. She scrambled to her feet and snatched up the fallen blade, pausing to brush the dirt from her quickly and cast one last glance back at the man that she'd killed.

Something glinted in the lamp-light as it shone upon the knife wound in the man's breast. Curious, Anna crossed the bare room to look at it. It...was silver. Without thinking, she reached out and slipped her fingers into the wound, retrieving the object. It was a ring, a silver ring. Just like the one she'd seen in her mind's eye as she'd followed the robin. Anna blinked several times, beyond confusion at this point, and simply surprised that she'd found the damn thing in a dead man's chest.

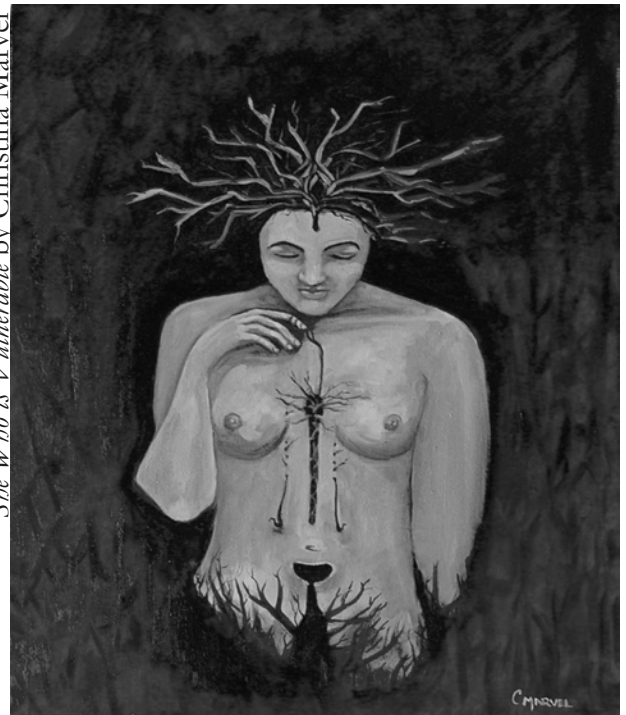
Shaking her head, she wiped the blood off on her pajama pants and slipped the ring on.

Immediately, the room changed. The walls were no longer dirt, but wooden planks. The lamp still burned in the one corner, but the corpse that its light shone on was decidedly *not* human. It was built like a man, but its skin had a rubbery texture in the light and its face was more canine than anything else that Anna could make out. The girl bit back a scream of horror and stepped away from the dead...*thing*. Emerging in the hall, she saw that it was only a few yards long now. Doors still sat in the walls on both sides, but most of them were little more than ornamentation, consisting only of lintels facing into wooden walls.

Anna cautiously made her way down the hall, not questioning the new perceptions she was experiencing, focused only on getting to the door at the end of the hall that her gut screamed at her was the door back out to the forest.

She was maybe six feet from the door when she passed one of the few doors in the hallway that actually lead to somewhere else. The blonde girl heard the creaking of floorboards within and froze like a deer in headlights. Slowly, she turned her head to look into the room and saw that it was the antique kitchen that she had stumbled across earlier. Within now, though, was something...*shaped* like a woman. She was elderly and clothed in a long dress of the color of dried, autumn leaves, her gray hair pulled back into a bun. At the same time, in a blurring of vision that caused Anna's eyes to hurt, she saw the woman simultaneously as some kind of carrion bird; a gnarled and hideous-looking ancient tree; a squat, flabby thing that was all fangs and claws; and a strange absence of physical presence that seemed like a twisting of the space where she stood.

She Who is Vulnerable by Christina Marvel



"You," she said, her voice full of sweetness and venom that sent a chill through Anna. "Come here, dearie. Let Nana take care of you."

Anna felt her heart beating a mile a minute in her chest as she stared at the woman-shaped thing in the antique kitchen. The thing's eyes watched with a predator's intensity, waiting to see which would win out within the girl's mind and heart: fight or flight. A moment later, the blonde girl blinked and the decision was made as she turned and hurled herself toward the door at the end of the hall.

A cry that was something between the screech of an eagle and the roar of a lion followed her as Anna fled from the doorway that opened into the kitchen. She heard the loud crash of something hitting the wooden floor, followed by what sounded like footsteps - but too many for any biped - headed after her. Anna didn't look behind her to find out what it was, instead she sprinted the two yards to the door and slammed her shoulder into it. The door exploded outward and waning sunlight greeted her eyes as wooden boards changed to leaf-strewn earth underneath her bare feet.

She dashed through the forest, the trees blurring in her peripheral vision as she sped past them, her breath coming in short, sharp bursts as she ran as fast as she could away from the cottage and the unholy terror that dwelt within. She heard the door to the cottage slam open and shatter against something, likely a tree, followed by another of those skin-crawling avian-feline roars. Anna didn't dare cast a glance over her shoulder to look at the creature, but instead darted off to the left and began weaving her way in a zigzag pattern through the trees, hoping to give the thing a harder time of catching her.

The blonde girl skidded to a stop on the bare earth under the branches of a towering oak, her eyes wide with fear. A dozen

yards off, lurking among the trunks of a small group of maples, was the woman-thing from the cottage. It still looked mostly grandmotherly, but Anna could see some of the malleability of its form at the edges, as if the shadows danced around it in some kind of disturbing halo that implied the other, monstrous forms she'd perceived. Anna backed away as she saw the creature watching her, its eyes black and full of malicious hunger, before spinning on the ball of her foot and taking off at a sprint back the way she'd came.

Anna only got about a dozen feet before she abruptly stopped once more. The creature was there, lurking in the trees about half a dozen yards away, watching her. The blonde girl cast a glance over her shoulder and saw there was nothing in the direction from which she'd fled. Turning back, she screamed in terror as the woman-thing with a hand that was somehow both bone and tentacle in its mind-numbing, shape-shifting way and snagged her by the front of her pajama shirt. Anna screamed hysterically as the woman-thing lifted her up, the blonde girl beating at the arm with one fist and both feet, while the creature regarded her speculatively.

"Come here, dearie," it croaked in a monotone. *"Let Nana take care of you."*

Tears streaming down her face, Anna kicked at the creature's chest and face in a desperate effort to make it loosen its grip. Instead, the woman-thing pulled her closer, its mouth stretching open and revealing row upon row upon row of needle-like fangs and serrated teeth. The blonde girl let out one last, desperate scream and swung her knife hand at the creature, barely even able to look at where she might be aiming.

It was a surprise when she felt herself falling to the forest floor as the woman-thing let loose a reverberating cry of pain, rage, and fear. The breath momentarily knocked from her by the impact, Anna's eyes shot open as she saw the creature stumbling back from her, hands clawing at its face in desperation. From the woman-thing's left eye, the handle of the dagger jutted outward, its blade sunk deep into the socket. With a mixture of elation, revulsion, and confusion,

Anna watched, frozen on the forest floor, as the creature stumbled among the trees, its desperate movements becoming slower and more sluggish.

And then...it simply crumbled into dust.

She watched in horrified silence as the woman-thing collapsed in on itself, its skin turning brittle and sloughing off in particulate waves, like sand falling in an hourglass, or exploding in bursts of small clouds of dust. Finally, nothing remained - not bones, not fabric, nothing - except for a thick mound of dust and the dagger that lay on top.

It took several long moments for Anna to gain the will to even move, and she pushed herself backwards until she felt her back against the trunk of a tree. Feeling some small measure of safety, she sighed deeply and closed her eyes, letting her breathing and her heartbeat slow. She lay like that for a good long while, until she felt twigs pressing on her shoulders.

Wrenching her eyes open, Anna saw two thick branches of the tree had bent down, their outermost and smallest branchings and little twigs moving like fingers to brush her shoulders gently. The blonde girl screamed loudly and bolted away from the tree, instinctively darting for the dagger and snatching it up before she turned to face the tree. Though it had no discernible face, the tree moved its branches in ways that reminded Anna of someone holding their hands out in a calming gesture and she heard a word whisper into her mind like the soft movement of wind through branches.

"Peace."

Anna blinked uncertainly. *"You...you don't mean me any harm?"* she asked warily.

The tree made a movement that could either be a nod or evidence of a stiff wind blowing against it. Since there was no detectable wind, the blonde girl assumed it was the former. *"Indeed, friend. I am the robin who has helped you so."*

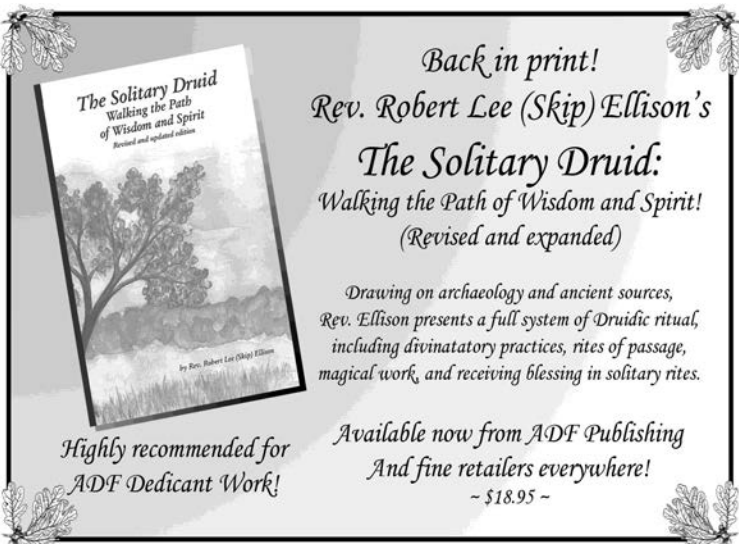
Anna scrunched her face in confusion. *"You're a tree, not a bird."*

"And the creature you just slew looked like an old woman, though it was not," the tree's whispering voice replied in her head. *"In truth, I am neither tree nor bird, but man. I was captured by the thing in the cottage and enchanted like this as punishment, allowed only a few hours every day to wander in the form of the robin."*

The blonde girl blinked several times as she processed this. *"Oh. Oh! But...the old lady...thing...whatever, it's dead now. So...why are you still like that?"*

"Because the enchantment does not always die with the enchanter. I need that silver ring you wear in order to free myself."

"Oh," Anna said eloquently, before she began working the ring off of her finger. As she pulled it loose, the tree extended one of its stouter branches toward her. The blonde girl reached out and slid the silver ring onto one of its thicker twigs, and as she let the band settle the tree disappeared. In its place stood a young man.



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He couldn't have been older than twenty years and stood a good head or two taller than Anna. He was dirty and his clothing disheveled, but a bright and handsome smile broke out across his face immediately.

"Finally!" the young man crowed victoriously, laughing heartily and picking Anna up in a bear-hug for several moments before setting the girl down again. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"You're welcome," Anna replied, uncertain of what else to say.

After a moment, the young man seemed to regain his bearings and nodded to her before bowing briefly at the waist. "Where are my manners? My name is Jean Durant, son of Vicomte Michel Durant, whose liege is the Marquis of Columbus."

Anna crooked an eyebrow. "Marquis? What's a...marquis?"

The young man blinked at her, absently running his fingers through his thick, disheveled brown hair. "You don't..." he paused, before widening his eyes. "Oh dear! You must be a Mundane commoner. I..." The young man, Jean, shrugged. "Well, I guess since you are here in an Otherland there is no use hiding anything from you." He cast his glance around the forest, before nodding to himself. "Yes. South. It'll be this way."

Anna watched him turn and head in the direction he'd indicated, continuing for several yards before he paused and looked over his shoulder at her. "Well, come on now, my noble savior! I mean to return you to your home."

Jean led her through the forest, explaining things as they walked.

"I had been part of a delegation sent by my father, on behalf of the Marquis, to treat with the government of one of the Otherlands that borders this place--"

"Otherlands?" Anna asked, cocking her head.

Jean smiled and gestured to the forest around them. "Places like this that exist alongside the Mundus - the world that you know. Tens of thousands of them, some no larger than a closet, others as big as a continent."

Anna cast her gaze around them at the trees on all sides, trying to imagine this strange place extending outward in all directions - a whole other world from the Earth that she had known all of her life. Somewhat nervously, she rolled the handle of the dagger back and forth in her hands.

"The old woman...thing...whatever she...it was," the blonde girl said. "What was it?"

Jean became sober, staring off into the distance for a long, silent moment. "An Other."

"What is--"

"You commoners of the Mundus often tell stories of fairies to your children, like yourself--"

"I'm not a child!" Anna protested. "I'm twelve."

Jean patted her on the shoulder. "Of course. One who has accomplished what you have can hardly be termed a 'child'. As I was saying, you commoners tell fairy stories, but they are much distilled and warped, with little true understanding of the beings that populate them. It is said among the wise that when Mankind was young, the first master magicians rivalled the Ancient Powers - primal spirits of untold age and potency - and so as to keep the peace and prevent the world from being rent asunder, the Five Directions sectioned the Mundus off into North, South, East, and West, and the First Magicians agreed to scatter themselves among them. The Fifth Direction broke away to create the Otherland, and with it went the Others, spirits of such skill and intelligence that they rivalled Mankind. When Mankind learned of the Otherland, they coveted it and sought to explore its territories, but the Others rebuffed them and a war broke out."

"What happened?" Anna asked.

"The Otherland was shattered into the thousands and thousands of realms that now exist alongside the Mundus. Many of the Others still inhabit these varied lands, going about their alien lives, bestowing boons and curses upon those who cross their paths or wander into their realms."

There was a long moment of silence between the two before Anna asked: "Do they always die like that?"

In the sky, a pale moon rose and was soon joined by a panoply of stars that Anna didn't recognize once the sun disappeared fully beneath the horizon.

Jean shook his head. "No," he replied and nodded toward the dagger. "But that is made of iron. The old stories say that when Men and the Others fought, the magicians seduced the Ancient spirit that was Iron, promising to honor it greatly by making tools and weapons out of it, if only it would help them against the Others. Iron agreed and since then it has been the great bane of the Others."

Anna silently considered the blade in her hands, but said nothing more.

Eventually, they moved out of the forest into some grassland that was golden-red in the waning light of evening. In the sky, a pale moon rose and was soon joined by a panoply of stars that Anna didn't recognize once the sun disappeared fully beneath the horizon. Though both were tired, Jean assured Anna that they were not far from a small settlement, and sure enough, before the moon had even reached its zenith, they could see the silhouettes of buildings not far off from them. In the starlight and moonlight, Anna could see that buildings of the small town reminded her of a strange mixture of modern elements combined with the style of architecture she'd once seen in a book on the old French Palace of Versailles.

They walked to the center of the village which was marked by two things: a large, square park of green grass, trees that swayed in the soft breeze, and manicured shrubberies; as well as a lacquered door-frame that stood by itself in the center of the park, surrounded by stone walkways.

"Here we are," Jean said, gently touching the limen, letting his fingers slip over the stained wood. "Through here, you can return to the Mundus."

Anna blinked and looked from the empty doorway to the young man. "How?"

"This is a portico - a doorway between the Mundus and the Otherlands. Once open, it should lead you home."

"How do you open it?" Anna asked, touching the frame and looking it curiously.

"Like this," Jean replied, closing his eyes in concentration for a brief moment before whispering out a word she didn't understand.

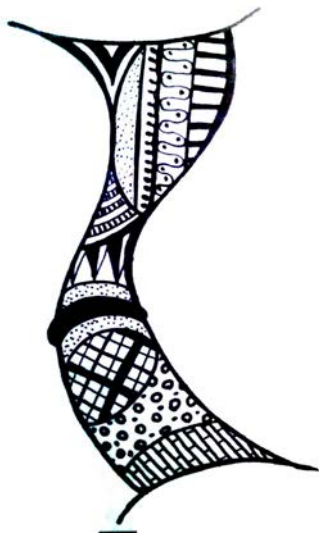
Sunlight hit her face and where just a moment prior she had only seen the other side of the night-darkened town square, she now saw roses and walkways and wooden trellises. *"That's...that's one of the parks near my house..."*

Jean nodded. *"The Park of Roses, yes. Will you be able to find your way home from there?"*

Anna nodded, then looked up at the young man. *"Thank you."*

He gently touched her cheek. *"No, thank you, Anna. Without your bravery and trust, I would still be imprisoned back in the forest. This will not be the last time I show my appreciation for that. Go now, though."*

Anna smiled, hugged Jean, and stepped through the door into the sunshine.



Author Bio:

Nicholas Egelhoff is a long-time member of ADF, former member of Three Cranes Grove and current member of Sassafras Grove. He is an Initiate and is currently serving as the Chieftain of the Kin of Fire and Ice (Germanic Kin) of ADF International. He is married to our Bard Laureate and spends much of his free time surrounded by a family of cats.



By Fire's Light

by Diane "Emerald" Bronowicz

By fire's light we gather in
While drummers beat and

dancers spin

We sing the songs that we all know

And tell the tales of long ago

Holding debates no one will win

We feel the heat upon our skin

As food shared warms us from within

Throughout the night the drink will flow

By fire's light

Many relationships begin

Strangers to friends and friends to kin

The seeds of love at first we sow

Our fellowship as one we grow

A harmony born from the din

By fire's light



A Daily Prayer

by Dara NíDhana

At the center of Earth, Sky, and Sea,

I call to the Kindreds.

By the light of this flame,

draw close to me

as I pray your names.*

Ancient and Holy Ones,

I give you my love, my attention.

In the silence, I wait for your voice.

Speak to me.

*If you wish, say the names of your Deities in this place.



Odis Tag der Neugeburt – Odin's Day of Rebirth - Main Sacrifice

By: Rev. Francesca Hedrick

Just as the Earth in its seasonal flow is being reborn into a growth period, so we are honoring the rebirth of Odin and the knowledge that he gained. The tales tell us of how Odin sacrificed himself and was rewarded with knowledge of the runes. While he did not die, he was transformed and reborn in wisdom. In honoring Odin by making offerings to him and in ghosti-, we hope that Odin in turn shares his knowledge with us.

Nine different offerings of beers, wine, and meads are gathered.

[traditional drinks from the tales]

A symbolic spear is placed in the ground

[represents the one Odin carried]

Odin, son of Borr and Bestla

Son, husband, and father

All Father, your children of Earth welcome you

We offer you this drink *drink is poured on the spear*

Odin, the wanderer

You travel the worlds with Sleipnir and

Gungnir

All Father, your children of Earth welcome you

We offer you this drink *drink is poured on the spear*

Odin, the warrior

Your leadership inspires us

All Father, your children of Earth welcome you

We offer you this drink *drink is poured on the spear*

Odin,

You offered yourself as sacrifice

In turn, you achieved knowledge

You accepted the suffering

In turn, you gained wisdom

You endured the pain

In turn, you became inspired

All Father, your children of Earth recognize your sacrifice

We offer you this drink *three drinks are poured on the spear*

Odin

Magician, warrior, poet

You sacrificed yourself on Yggdrasil

You were rewarded for your offering

All Father, your children of Earth make this sacrifice for you

We ask that you reward us *three drinks are poured on the spear*

Note: As an alternative to May Day / Beltain / Walpurgisnacht, I decided to write a celebration to honor Odin. This portion is the main offering to him. Hail to Odin!

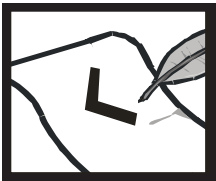


Author Bio:

Rev. Francesca Hedrick is a priest of ADF and an active member since 1999. She has been dynamic within the organization and contributor to many of ADF's sub-groups.



Litha Altar Pic by Jennifer Seaton



Why the Tree?

By: David Crawford

While working through the Clergy Training Program one of the requirements made me stop to think “*why?*” The specific requirement was in Liturgy 1 in the CTP-Preliminary course. It asks the student to “Discuss the significance of Fire and Water in ADF liturgy.” Why isn’t the Tree listed in this requirement? Does it not play the same significance as Fire and Water? The short answer is “No and Yes”. But...*why?*

In the Dedicant manual, the most basic Druidic ritual tools are listed. “Druid ritual, at its simplest, requires only a fire, a bowl of water, the Druid’s body, and the proper offerings to the spirits” (Ár nDraíocht Féin 53) All other things are, well, just beautiful dressings to please the senses of the Druid. But even the bowl of water is not a requirement within ADF ritual. But...*why?* First, if we look at the Core Order of Ritual, the only element that is listed as a “must” is Fire (3838). The reasoning behind this is that “Druidry is a fire religion” (Dangler). Fire is a central element in all cultures of humanity. It is the single most important elemental “tool” within the Druidic cosmology. It spans the three realms and into the three worlds. Rev. Dangler says it best “Kindled on the earth, the fire’s flames leap into the atmosphere, and the pillar of smoke created supports

the celestial realm” (Dangler). The heat radiates outward, upward, and down towards the Underworld. It is a transformative force which carries out offerings to the Kindred. More importantly Fire is a metaphor for the work which the Druid priest performs. It calls the Kindred to the sacred place. It transmutes the offerings into pure energy, which makes these offerings tangible to them, and does all this naturally as part of its very nature.

Water is no less prevalent within the world’s symbolism. Water has always been seen as a force for change. It has the ability break down walls and to reshape the land. Water was also seen as a purifier to the land as well as the soul. It is also seen as the life blood of the Earth. The waters fill the well, which is the foundation of the Tree. But Water was also seen as a gateway, just as Fire was, into the other realms of existence. Many times Water was seen as the entryway into the Underworld, into the realm of the dead. Through the link of Water with the Underworld it also gains the property of being a symbol of rebirth, or reincarnation, which in turn becomes a symbol of the Well. (Corrigan)

Within ADF these two common symbols can be seen as a part of the Three Hallows. Fire is the gateway and symbol of the gods and the Upperworld. It is the receptacle for offerings to many of the great Shining Ones. Water is seen in the form of the Well in ADF rituals. The Well is connected with the Underworld and the Ancestors. Just as in ancient times, the Fire and Well are significant in our ADF rituals as gateways to reach the Kindred. As both are seen as existing separate from our own, “*How do we reach them?*” We do not actually physically climb a tree as part of our rituals, though one surely could much like ancient Pagans climbed mountains to reach temples for the gods that resided in the Upperworld. Or we could descend into a cave to perform rituals and offerings for those of the Underworld.

Then, *why* the Tree? Not all Indo-European nations used the Tree as their central *axis mundi*. Some, such as the Hellenics, used things such as mountains, caves, and even the omphalos stone (also known as the navel stone of the world). What function does the Tree serve in ADF Ritual? Though views varied



Maypole on Lummi Island, WA by Scarlett Messenger

from culture to culture among the ancient Indo-Europeans on what the importance of the Tree was, there was very little variation on the fact that the Tree was held as sacred. From the Celtic Druids to the Priesthoods of the Greeks, Trees were symbols of gifts from the gods and revered as the very symbol of nature (Burkert 39). Today the Tree holds a great many purposes within ADF. It is our symbol for the Nature Spirits. Though in many cases there is no need for a gateway to reach Nature Spirits, the Tree is still seen as the gateway to connect with them. Also the sacred Tree symbolizes the path between the Three Realms. Its roots reach deep into the Underworld while its branches reach towards the heavens giving us a path to the Upper World. The trunk grows stoutly here in the Middle World, the realm of mortals, Nature Spirits, and the earth deities. (Corrigan)

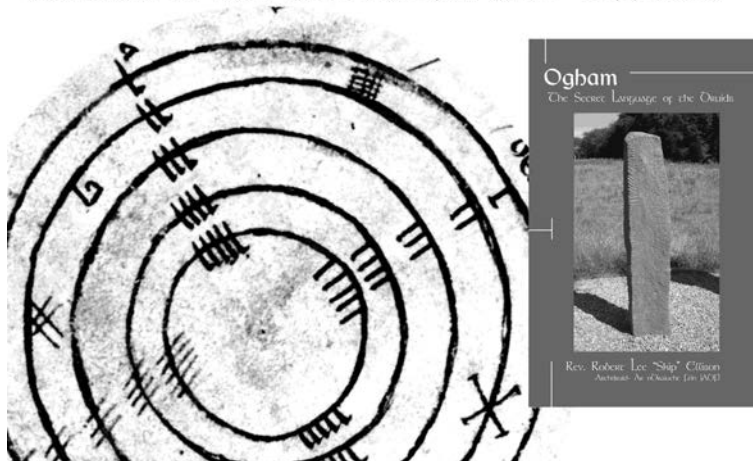
So we have a why, but *why* is it *not* required? In the Vedic culture there is not much in the way of the *axis mundi*...or is there? Perhaps it is their lack of a physical *axis mundi* that gives us the answer. I believe that this has to do with the Druid him or herself. As discussed, the Dedicant Manual states that the "... Druid's body..." is required. And *that* is the answer to *why not*. The Tree serves as the pathway that extends to the Upperworld and the Underworld. It is our portal to travel to and from these realms. But when we look deeper at the meaning of the Tree you see that *we are* the Tree. It is through ourselves that we open this portal into the Otherworlds. The external use of a Tree is not much more different than any other tool. It is there as a focal point. In the end we open the portals of travel within ourselves. Even our Two Power meditation walks us through visualizing *ourselves* as the Tree. Through this guided imagery we open the pathways within ourselves to tap the powers of the heavens and the powers of the waters deep within the world.

So the next time you are planning or writing ritual, take a moment to think about your relevant use of the Tree. Is it serving more than just a focal point for you to access the Tree *within*?

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Author Bio:

David Cranford is a Neo-Pagan Druid that follows the path of Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship (ADF). David is a published writer that works to help educate people on the Druid path, Paganism in general, and magical practices. He has been a member of ADF since 2006, completed the Dedicant Study Program in December of 2007, and is currently working towards ordination as an ADF Clergy to help him further his skills as a writer, teacher, spiritual leader, and servant to the Kindred and the People. As an accomplished artist he is currently building a new portfolio that is centered on his spiritual journey which is available as prints through: druidcub.deviantart.com. He currently lives in northwest Arkansas with his partner where they are working towards establishing a sustainable permaculture community of likeminded people. For more information on David and his projects see his website www.druidcub.deviantart.com.



Taliesin and Aneirin -

Christian Bards or Pagan (Part 2)

By: G.R. Grove

In the first part of this essay, we examined the possible backgrounds of Taliesin and Aneirin, together with the probable distribution of Christianity in sixth century Britain. In this installment, we turn our attention to other religious influences and to the courts at which our bards performed.

The Pagan Neighbors

It is not known to what extent Paganism survived in the formerly Roman areas of Britain after the early fifth century CE Roman withdrawal, though archaeological excavations suggests that it did at least for a while in some areas of the southwest. The cult of Mercury at Uley possibly survived into early fifth century CE before the site was converted to Christian use; the temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath continued in use well into the fifth century if not beyond into early sixth; the Nodens complex at Lydney remained in use into the fifth century; the Romano Celtic temple and post Roman shrine at Maiden Castle continued in use well into the fifth century; the Shrine of Apollo at Nettleton saw continuing pagan use after 360 CE (the latest coin date), well into the fifth century and possibly later; and the Pagans Hill temple site was modified in the late fourth century or beyond, and religious observance there was attested in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period (late sixth century) (Woodward 112-115). Even after the temple sites fell out of use, some pagan observances probably continued unofficially in the countryside.

In other parts of Britain outside the Romanized areas, it is harder to date the replacement of pagan customs with Christian ones. Polytheists tend to be polytheistic, and evidence from the Roman period documents local cults, not a pan-Britannic religion. If pagan practices which we know existed before the arrival of Christianity left little or no earlier traces outside the Romanized zones, how can we hope to detect or document their later survival? Votive deposits in lakes, rivers, and marshes are widely attested in the Celtic cultures, and some in Britain from the first and second century CE include Roman material, but aquatic votive deposits known from southern Scotland are not dated later than the first or second century CE (Harding 196); those from Llyn Cerrig Bach on Anglesey end about the same time or perhaps a little earlier (Macdonald 162). Even when a distinctive mode of burial is archaeologically visible, we need not assume it is the

only rite being practiced (Harding 80). As mentioned above, long-cist cemeteries broadly assigned to the middle or later first millennium CE are widely distributed in southeast Scotland north and south of the Firth of Forth, but cannot be considered diagnostic of either Christianity or paganism. Historical sources indicate that some degree of paganism survived through the sixth century in both Britain and Ireland despite Saints Columba, Patrick, and Ninian. Irish sources refer to the continuing presence of druids in the sixth and seventh centuries and later, and Adomnan's *Vita Columba*, written about a century after the saint's late sixth century visit to the northern Pictish kingdoms, also mentions them. The Anglo-Saxon settlers along the east coast of Britain, who were well established there by the fifth century at least if not earlier, were unequivocally pagan, and pagan they largely remained until the middle of the seventh century, during which time they pushed the British back into the western and northern parts of the island.

In the second half of the sixth century, then, the time of Taliesin and Aneirin, Highland Scotland north of the Antonine Wall was divided, in this case between the Irish settlers along the west coast and the shadowy Pictish kingdoms of the east. The southern Picts may have been at least partly Christianized (Alcock 64-65;



Solstice Offerings by Rev. Nancy McAndrew

Hutton 291), but the northern Picts were probably still pagan, as evidenced by St. Columba's unsuccessful missionary visits to them at this time (assuming that was what he did and where he did it – Fraser (100-115) argues that his visits were actually to the southern Picts, and were directed more toward monastic reform than conversion of the populace). The British kingdoms were largely if not entirely Christian, at least superficially; the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to their east were pagan; and the Irish, both in Ireland and presumably in western Scotland, were still undergoing conversion, as the presence among them of druids indicates. Saxons fought Saxons, Irish and British fought Irish and British, and mixed coalitions fought each other. Neither ethnic origins nor religion seems to have been as important as political and material gains. This is also the impression one gets from the poetry, as we will discover below. But first, let us pay a brief visit to the courts where our poets sang.

The Courts

Of the four princely or kingly courts at which Taliesin and Aneirin performed, we know very little – only the names of their lords and of the peoples they ruled. In no case can we be sure of their exact locations, much less map and excavate their sites or measure their foundations. Indeed, we cannot be sure whether these kings and princes had only one courtly hall, or several, for the medieval Welsh and Anglo-Saxon kings often went on a circuit around their territories for part of the year, receiving customary renders of food and drink and provisions for themselves and their retainers in the process. However lacking in some amenities their courts may have been, we should not assume that they were primitive in all material ways: the list of treasures the bards boast of having received points toward us to this conclusion, and the splendid contents of the great burial mounds of Sutton Hoo, raised less than half a century later (Carver *Sutton Hoo* 172), reinforce it.

Powys. Of the three courts at which Taliesin may have sung, the southernmost is that of Powys, the court of Cynan Garwyn, situated in an area which probably included part of modern-day Shropshire. At one point, Shrewsbury was believed to have been the site of Cynan's court at Pengwern, but this idea is now out of favor. Several other locations in the area have been suggested, but so far as I know none have been excavated. What is likely, however, is that Pengwern was reasonably close to Wroxeter, the site of the

Roman city of Viroconium, which was still occupied in the sixth century CE, and indeed underwent a substantial rebuilding program at that time. If this was Cynan's court, or anything like it, Taliesin would have lived very well there, at least as well as any of his Roman predecessors. Excavations have found no particular signs of Christianity at Viroconium, and White (107) has speculated that it may have only slowly acquired a Christian community. There are signs that pagan temples in the town may have been abandoned and despoiled in the fourth century CE, and other signs of what might have been an early Christian church in the city center (so far unexcavated) (White 107; Barker 368-370). It is worth noting that Taliesin's surviving song to this prince contains no Christian elements.

Elmet. The kingdom of Elmet where Gwallawg ruled was conquered by the Deirians under King Edwin sometime around 620 CE, but survived as a district name in the *Tribal Hidage* (Charles-Edwards 10; Koch *Atlas* §23), so we have a fair idea of its possible boundaries. It lay south and east of Rheged and west of

Neither ethnic origins nor religion seems to have been as important as political and material gains. This is also the impression one gets from the poetry...

neighboring pagan Anglo-Saxon Deira. Seven place names of the form "X in Elmet" bear witness to some part of its one-time extent (Koch *Atlas* §23). No name for Gwallawg's chief court, however, has survived. I have ventured in another context to speculate that the Roman town of Aquae Arnemetiae (modern Buxton) in the Pennines, although situated southwest of the boundary shown in the *Tribal Hidage*, might also have lain in Gwallawg's lands, and perhaps have been one of his courts, but I have no evidence for this other than geographical plausibility. It seems likely that Gwallawg was at least notionally a Christian, as the two songs to him contain minor Christian references, and two place names in the western part of the district (*Egles*, *Eccles*) indicate the presence of an early church.

Rheged. The exact boundaries of Urien's kingdom are perhaps the most shadowy of the four. That it probably included the area around Carlisle at the west end of Hadrian's wall is generally agreed (Charles-Edwards 6), but excavations in and around Carlisle have so far found no high status sixth century remains (Harding 206), and districts whose names may be identified with areas mentioned in Taliesin's poetry lie to both the north and south of the town. Known post-Roman settlements are generally lacking in Cumbria and southwestern Scotland (Harding 205) with the exception of Whithorn in Galloway, a later monastic site which may have been occupied by a Christian

community as early as the fourth century CE (Smyth 27). Taliesin's poetry to Urien, and more strongly his eulogy for Urien's son Owein, contain Christian references, and Urien's son Rhun is said by the *Historia Brittonum* (c. 820 CE) to have baptized Edwin of Northumbria, possibly c. 590 CE when Edwin was in exile (Bartrum 565; Smyth 22).

Gododdin: We come now to Gododdin and the court of Din Eidyn (modern Edinburgh) where Aneirin sang. This kingdom derived from the tribal group known to the Romans as the Votadini, whose territory originally stretched from the Firth of Forth south along the east coast toward Hadrian's Wall. By the late sixth century, however, much of the southern extent of their territory had been lost to the encroaching Anglo-Saxons of Bernicia (Smyth 20), who together with their southern neighbors the Deirians would overrun it around 638 CE, when the *Annals of Ulster* recorded the siege and presumed fall of *Etin* (Smyth 31). Evidence for Christianity in Gododdin during this period includes the late fifth or early sixth century CE Catstane mentioned above and the purported activity of St. Kentigern in Manau Goddodin (the area around the western end of the Firth). Aneirin's poetry also includes a number of Christian references which will be discussed below.

So much, then, for the courts and the kingdoms. In the final section of this paper, we will consider the poetry itself, and look for a possible answer to the question posed in the title.

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Dark Cherry Stout

By: Arthur Shipkowski

I've got a secret: for all that I am hardcore on the wine production, my beer is still extracts plus specialty grains. Still, this extract + specialty attempt won a Wellspring brewing competition, though it was too fresh to win Trillium that year -- the cherry flavor had not "melded" yet, a month after bottling.

Specialty Grains:

0.5 lb each Simpson's Black malt, Dark Crystal, and Roasted Barley.
3 lbs dark dry malt extract
3.25 lbs dark malt syrup
1oz hop pellets (I failed at writing down what variety these were, probably "a friend didn't want 'em" hops. Choose wisely, I think I'd avoid citrus-like hops for this.)
4 oz cherry syrup
Safale S-33 yeast

Due to the size of my brewkettle, I did this as a partial -- 2 gallons of water in a pot. Steep specialty grains for 20 minutes at ~150F, set aside (a friend's chickens loved eating good parts out of the remainder). Bring water to a boil, add the 3lbs of dark dry malt extract, return to a boil, add the hop pellets and boil for 45 minutes. Add the dark malt syrup and return the wort to a boil for 15 more minutes.

In the meantime, fill the primary fermenter up with 2.5 gallons of cold water. Keep for two weeks in a primary fermenter and two weeks in a secondary. After chilling the wort, add it to the primary and top off if needed to reach 5 gallons. Mine came out with an O.G. of 1.057 and a F.G. of 1.021, but depending on how well you crush the specialty grains and get all the dark malt syrup in this might vary. I carbonated with corn sugar, which worked well for this one.



Poems

By: Matthew Rutledge

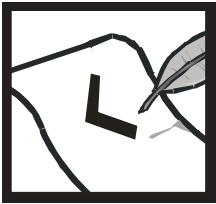
An ABCB rhyme scheme written for Summer Solstice

1. At night we dream
2. At night there's dread
3. Here's the story
4. Baldur Dead
5. At morn we hear
6. a mournful sigh
7. not time to say
8. a dear goodbye
9. If all the things
10. who sit low and high
11. swear no harm to her son
12. celebrate they will in the nigh
13. When all is thrown
14. twig hit below the head
15. he stood no more
16. Baldur dead
17. one old crone
18. would shed no tear
19. we mourn your loss
20. until next half year



Freeform

If fifty men wait fifty nights
and thirty men wait thirty more
Just to see the northern lights
If twenty men and 30 more
Cast a boat from this here shore
when none of them did bring an oar
Will the lights show them forgotten lore
If a hundred men and fifteen more
lift the boat up high upon the shore
Will all you see and hear the tale
mourn the lost meal
of the forgotten wale.



The Eye of the Storm: How I Met Loki

By: Shirl Szynski

I met Loki during a hurricane. He was *not* the deity I was praying to.

Having spent most of my life deep enough inland and far enough north in the US, preparing for anything worse than a tropical storm was not part of my summer routine.

To make things weirder, this hurricane hit in the autumn, in New Jersey, while everything I owned that did not fit into a gigantically windowed hotel room stuck high up on the eighth floor sat twenty-five miles away, packed into a moving truck we'd parked behind a solid-looking building—somewhere away from big trees and out of the flood zone surrounding the apartment that we were about to move into.

It was not a good introduction to the Jersey Shore, where I spent two years and experienced three serious natural disasters.

While the wind raged outside our room, bending the trees far below like saplings, churning the river and sending leafy sprays hissing across the windows, we pulled the curtains tightly, shut off the TV, ignoring whatever horrors it was going to yell at us, and hunkered down with our Siamese cat. My then-husband fell asleep. So did Comet, who curled up in the maximum safety of the bathroom's quiet darkness.

I did not.

After an hour or so of turning over, curling up and shivering, I quietly slipped out from beside my slumbering love and sat on the opposite bed to pray. The other double bed was barely big enough for two people, let alone one who can't sleep. Our first hotel had lost power before we could check in, and the boarding place called to tell us that no one would be staying there, or evacuating the pets to safer lodgings: leave your terrified cat with food and water at your own risk. In the scramble of a hurricane, niceties like king-sized beds in a place that allowed pets were out.

Praying is not a habit I've been in since leaving Christianity, where it was a nightly requirement. My family's church told us to pray daily, unloading the day's burdens. I had spent a long time without deities I called upon before gingerly beginning to learn about the Norse and Slavic Gods. On rare occasions, I called on some of them for help. If I'd known better, I would have called on Thor, the champion of Gods and

humans. But I didn't know better: I was barely a Heathen, let alone religious yet.

The deity who had approached me, who I'd started to get to know, was Freyr. One of the items sitting in that hotel room, along with my illustration portfolio, some beloved framed paintings and my laptop, was an icon of him I'd begun to paint. I'd gotten used to his presence in my life as I sketched and planned and worked on this image, and it comforted me to keep it there, rather than stashed in the truck's cab.

Maybe it was the feeling of vulnerability in the midst of that storm, but a strange thought hit me as I sat down in the darkness on that second double bed. Sitting in my husband's sleep shorts and a flimsy tank top, the last clean clothes we had, I didn't feel covered enough to pray. It wasn't a desire for dignity. It wasn't even modesty. Desperation lodges somewhere far beyond that. I felt... naked, despite my clothes.

I grabbed a long, filmy night-robe that draped my limbs without being too hot.

I still didn't feel covered enough.

Finally, I fished out the large hand-dyed cloth I usually aid out on my altar and used for tarot readings and wrapped it over my head and shoulders, sheltering in its deeper darkness, further insulated from the howling and lashing of the rain. I felt more relaxed, protected, as I called for aid in banishing the raging anxiety born of sound and too-vivid an imagination so I could just sink into sleep.

Heat flickered across my back, my shoulders, up my neck. This was not a natural flush of warmth from my own body, but the sudden feeling of flames that licked my skin and yet did not burn. A curiously prickly heat, like nothing I have ever experienced before or since. This was undeniably *there*, a physical feeling where no physical, visible phenomena existed. I was draped in a fire that would not consume me.

In my mind, I saw two things superimposed, overlapping like an image out of focus. One of them looked like Freyr: radiant, young, hale, the golden God of kingship, peace and vitality who I was painting. But he was like an echo hovering over a tall, lithe, serious man who bent down to slide in through the large window, brushing aside the drapes. Beside him, some massive creature thrust its black and shaggy arm into

the hotel room, groping for something at the foot of the bed, but not entering.

"I smell fear...."

"Hush, child," the God said. The creature's voice rasped, but there was something questioning, tentatively, monstrously childlike to it. I gasped and pulled the veil tighter around me. I felt it... snuffling... sensing. Looking for me.

"Can I eat her fear?"

"No."

"But I'm hungry...!"

"You can't have her."

It was like a patient mother talking to an exhausted four year-old about to have a tantrum. He patted and stroked the furry arm, but otherwise ignored its whimpering.

Strangely enough, while the monster's hunger alarmed me, it did not seem, well, *malevolent*. It's hard to classify something that sounds like a little kid asking mommy if it's okay to eat your terror as evil. It's even harder to do when this is who showed up when you prayed for help.

That's not to say I wasn't confused as all hell.

I was.

And there was the hurricane. Still battering the hotel, and most of the east coast.

Later, I learned, we were directly in the eye of it as it passed over. Or maybe that was the second hurricane. Regardless, we were in midst of the most furious storm that had hit New Jersey in over thirty years.

To my surprise, the monster retreated obediently, lurking outside the window, unruffled by the natural forces slamming it. Leaving just me and the God who is also a Giant. The man who is a mother. Unclassifiable, undeniable.

You're Loki I said in my mind to the tall man who I could sense in the heat of the flames, but not see.

He did not respond.

He only looked at me, quietly waiting.

Where is Freyr? I prayed to him—

"Yes."

His patience, his calm in the midst of all I was going through was at once soothing and deeply unnerving. Loki, trickster... God of lying and thievery... and... and dishonor, I thought. All my academic readings of myth prior to this were cast through a lens of Christianized scholarship, through the horrible dualistic twisting of pop culture that needs a clever, brooding villain. Loki kills Baldr. Poor innocent, gorgeous, loving Baldr, dead by squishy little mistletoe. Loki advances plot. Loki is cruel and spiteful and dark and all that Freyr is not. Loki is...

Right here in the room with me.

The one who answered my prayer.

I was pleading with him for the familiar, for someone gentle (I thought), who would listen. For the God of sunlight and hope, of summer's growth and all that is *not* a screaming tempest, a flood of wind and fury, devouring lives and shore and buildings.

"Why did you call me?"

I'm scared. What else was there to say? I'd never been in a hurricane before. I could feel the walls shaking, hear the occasional tree or piece of metal snap and scrape against the building. *I'm terribly scared.*

"This building is sound. You're safe."

I know that.

Loki stood next to me. The warmth of the fire washed over the chills that shook me. How can you be both hot and cold, I wondered, when you're not sick?

I don't know why I'm so scared. I think it's the news. We shut it off because all it was doing was drumming up fear. Nothing useful. But I can't sleep now. I tried. I've never been in a hurricane before. I don't know if I'll have a place to move into tomorrow. I don't know if the moving truck survived.

It seemed... silly... calling on a God simply because you were frightened, beyond reason. Rationally, I knew I would be okay. Rationality was not banging at the walls, was not the climate of the last two days of insane traffic jams and barren store shelves with food flung upon the floor and trampled, in talking heads and scrolling emergency announcements on every channel warning us of impending doom. He was there and I was ashamed that he had answered me. That he wasn't judging me for cowering. And I didn't even know him.

If I'd had another God to choose to help me, instead of Freyr, Loki would have been the last one on the list.

I don't remember what happened next. I remember that we talked, for some reason, about the other Norse Gods, and something that I said made his face twist—in pain or anger, maybe both—that his voice went harsh, but not at me. There was something I didn't understand about the difference between him and Odin. About which of them was braver. Maybe it was my thoughts Loki picked up on, waiting beneath the surface.

I didn't quite trust him, but I was too shocked not to accept his presence, shocked by the physical sense of him being there. I never did see his face clearly. It was just impressions: towering height, calmness, his voice remarkably pleasant. His demeanor, compassionate. Mostly.

I was floored that someone actually came. In all the years I've encountered spirits, I'd never done something that *brought* one.

What had I sought? I thought maybe there would be some flush of calm. That reminding myself of the God of stamina and peace who I'd been building a relationship with would anchor me in my distress. Snuggling against my husband had not: I couldn't breathe with the weight of his arm on my ribs, and I didn't want to wake him. The day had been exhausting for both of us.

I don't remember most of my conversation with Loki. And I don't know that it matters. What I *do* remember is this: while we were talking out my fears, Loki pursed his lips and looked at me closely. He told me to lie down. It felt like he reached inside of me, deep into my viscera, gripped and twisted something. It felt strange but didn't hurt. Like he'd spun a switch, the panic in me dialed down to a whisper.

"You can sleep now," he said. "Don't be afraid. The storm won't harm you."

Did he stroke my arm, or cheek or say goodbye? It doesn't seem like he just left.

Fatigue fell upon me like a pouncing cat. I was barely even aware that my body moved. All I could do was push aside my ersatz veil, tug a thin blanket over me, curl up again and shut my eyes. I vaguely knew that Loki stopped and looked at my sleeping husband, then walked back out the way he'd come.

I slept immediately, deep and soundly, throughout the rest of the night. When I woke up it was late in the morning and sunlight struggled in under the closed

curtains. I'd slept through my husband making coffee and assembling a cold breakfast of leftovers, awakened only when he finally turned the television back on to see what had happened, and the yawning cat came out to greet us.

My belongings—and our new apartment—survived just fine.

So did most of New York city.

The state of Vermont, inland and severely flooded, was not so lucky.

I never learned who the monstrous child accompanying Loki was, to whom he spoke so gently. Maybe it was Fear. Maybe it was someone born within the storm itself.

Despite his usual characterization, I have since found Loki to be one of the most compassionate of the Norse Gods. Perhaps because he has suffered so much himself. In Scandinavia and Iceland, unlike the US, he is primarily viewed as a wily, mischievous God, rather than a cruel one.

*While I did not know it at the time, the practice of covering up to pray or seek a spiritual presence, what the Icelanders call "going under the cloak" or **utisetá**, is a time-honored practice mentioned in both Icelandic and Celtic sagas and carried on by modern Druids and Heathens to this day. It's an effective way to deeply focus during meditation, and historically has specific techniques and safety practices. Just be careful to get enough air long-term, and sit in a safe place.*

*Norse scholar Stephan Grundy has also written an excellent and deeply researched article on Loki, which is quite different from the prevailing American stereotype. It's posted by permission and downloadable at http://nikarevleshy.blogspot.com/2014/02/lokis-role-in-northern-religions_6.html. Or you can find it serialized in *Idunna* magazine, issues 93-96.*

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Author Bio:

*A spaekona and volva, Shirl Szynski has been a practicing polytheist for over a decade and joined the ADF in May 2014, as a member of Sandia Mountain Proto-Grove. She blogs about Norse and Slavic hearth culture and journeywork for *Witches and Pagans* magazine (*Pagan Paths: One-Eyed Cat*). She also paints icons, consults the Gods as an oracle, and writes essays about seidhr practice, mythology and ethics at staffandcup.com.*



The Most Difficult Race Ever Run

By: Wayne Keysor

This narrative poem is based on original prose material found mainly in the Book of Leinster and recounts the adventures of Finn, bard, warrior, prophet, and hero. The Finn cycle is one of the two great heroic cycles of Medieval Irish literature. Although recorded in the Christian period, the Finn cycle clearly looks back to a pagan past in which the Otherworld was very present and could be accessed by humankind in unexpected and often dangerous ways. Finn, himself, was a liminal figure that often moved back and forth between this world and the Otherworld and was not left unmarked by the passage. I composed this poem in stress alliterative verse, which is the oldest form of English poetry. Perhaps not coincidentally, highly alliterative, variable length verse is also the oldest kind of Irish verse, and some scholars theorize that this type of poetry marked the earliest Indo-European poetics. The poem opens with an invocation to a goddess of poetry, in my case Brigid, which I consider the traditional Indo-European poetic opening.

Beloved of bards, Brigid your wisdom,
O prophetic power that into the poet roars.
Like a hot, howling wind that hurls and whirls,
it fans into flame the fierce sparks of rhyme;
a blazing brand of blessed verse.
It is a tumbling torrent and a towering flood
that like a mellifluous madness upon the maker falls;
a raging river that soon overflows reason's soft banks.

Royal Hibiscus — Memorial to a Father by Skye Windsinger



O what airs you inspire with this outpouring of imbas;
soaring are the strains of your sweet, salmon song,
conjuring up darkling dreams and daring feats
and moonlit marvels whose ageless music shimmers
in the high-beamed halls of the heroes of old,
resounding with famous feasts and fabled deeds
and great heaps of gold that gleam and glitter
in the red, flickering flames of far-gone ages.

Such wondrous words that onto waiting ears fall,
echoing the proud epics of ages long past
when bold and bloody kings blackened in hot war
blades of biting iron or beaten bronze
and holy, thrice-blessed harpers hallowed dulcet notes
with fine-boned fingers that fell like plunging hawks
upon silvered strings until they spun the night
into gauzy, glistening webs of golden enchantment.

And out of these long-ago lays and legends old,
crawl terrible creatures, cruel and wise.
Older than the eldest, they owned the sunless hours.
In the vast, dreaming dark, they dwelled alone,
haunting the lonely hollows, hidden from the eyes of
men. And strong-armed hurlers and clever hunters
harried them into the dark;
heroes who long ago laid down their lashing spears
and their insatiable urge for everlasting glory
among broken bones in barrows cold; now richly
remembered only in the rhymes of singers.

So bright goddess the giver, of the gifts of poets
furnish your favor now; fire in the head,
rhymers' reward, rendering ordinary verse into gold.
Let my three cunning cauldrons craft wondrous tales
and my words carry wisdom from the Well of Segis,
so that our deepest dreams, dwelling in the
primordial dark, might rise resplendent once more
and reclaim for us, holy and haunting, the hymns of
our ancestors.

In the season of the sun, when the flowers sing,
far-seeing Finn and his free-living band
to the meeting of the Munstermen made haste.
For there, heavenly horses were to hold court;
heaving haunches of horseflesh glistening
were to race resplendent against the rising of the sun.
When fish-wise Finn, full of craft, with his cunning
company came finally to Munster, warm was the

welcome of that wealthy king.

The finest foods were freely offered; savory soups accompanied by the sweetest meats, all expertly enhanced by aromatic spices fetched from far away Italy and further China.

And songs were sung, sweet music to ease weary hearts, languorous lullabies and light-hearted satires, and regal rings of royal silver were granted; gifts given by the gracious king's own hand. It was a hosting most holy, hospitality rightly given.

And when the races were run, and the runners scored, haloed in hero-light was a high king of coursers.

This god-like galloper to the king's grandfather belonged, so that righteous ruler with his royal ancestor sought to bargain for the rights to this radiant runner; but as gracious and as great-hearted as the good king was, the other was thrice the thane in thoroughness of generosity. So gladly he gifted him the gallant steed.

This king, keen of vision, considered carefully how such a precious prize might properly be disposed. Being a wise war chief, well-versed in the arts of hospitality, he awarded his wandering guest the winning mount. The lord's largess Finn repaid with lavish gifts of his own; splendid furs from distant Freisa, finest strands of Baltic amber, and a cunningly wrought cup, carved from gleaming ivory.

When this gift-giving was done and goodwill obtained, up to that masterful mount the mighty Finn stepped. However, being born of a line of kings, the beast snorted proudly, and rudely rebuffed him, rearing back in disdain. That is until fish-wise Finn, finest of Ireland's poets, whispered soft words that worked a subtle charm, casting a gentle calm over the recalcitrant lord. Then Finn coolly climbed upon his kingly back, and galloped gladly from the great fortress of Munster, taking two of his men, talented fighters both, the eagle-eyed Cailte, and Oisín of the deer.

All day they dashed, desiring only to outrace the wind and outdo the others in excellence of horsemanship. And when darkness finally dimmed the daylight sky, Finn found himself bested, fairly outridden in the contest. But in their reckless rush, the riders had cast themselves adrift, and were now foundered upon far shores, friendless and alone. So swiftly they searched among the last scarlet rays of day for a friendly fire that would be favorable to guests.



Cailte caught sight of a dwelling, concealed in a hollow. None knew this hostel, nestled as it was in such a lonely place, but difficult need drove them on with its dagger-sharp design. So upon its ancient and unknown door they knocked. Warped and weathered, the door whined loudly on its hinges, pulled open by a forbidding figure, a full-bodied churl. He welcomed them wordlessly, as if well-known was their coming. Immediately they were ushered into the eerie hostel, and its dark door was dragged shut behind them.

Grand and gloomy, greater inside than out that hall seemed, but its definite dimensions were difficult to affirm for shifting shadows shielded much from human eyes. Their host heaped elder wood branches on a huge fire until a cloud of clotted, black smoke crept over the chamber making them gag and gasp, and grasp at their throats. In this harsh and gathering haze, they saw a three-headed hag and a man with a missing head, who moved nonetheless and had a single, staring eye in his sturdy chest. Such strange sights instilled within them a silent dread, but the holy bonds of hospitality held them in their place.

Then a disturbing dirge was delivered by their hosts; a music of pure malevolence, madness laced with spite, which offended awfully the ears of the tormented guests. Even worse, nine horrid heads, wholly lacking in human bodies, like some rotted, raucous, ghastly fruit, rolled into the chamber and with a barbarous and baleful chorus, blasted the companions. And across the ancient hall, there appeared more ghastly sights; terribly bloated trunks, totally separated from their heads, dancing a deranged reel in a deathly chorus line. Offense upon offense, the outrages piled, but the courageous companions kept their tempers until their haughty, fined-boned horses were hauled in and with swift, savage blows, slaughtered

in front of them. Quickly the butchers quartered the queer meat, and speared it on spits of rowen wood that spanned the fire. A dark rage descended on Cailte, and he desired only blood, but Finn restrained his wrath, reminding him that far better their mounts be massacred than be murdered themselves.

Then the churl chose a chunk of horse meat, tearing it free with terrifying force; his talon-like fingers gripping the gruesome meal, a great mass of flesh that was still red and raw, and reeking of blood. He offered to Finn, without ceremony, this foul food. Finn, however, decorously declined, declaring a geis. At this, their hideous hosts into a hot rage fell, and set about to slaughter their suffering guests.

But wits and weapons their weary guests had kept, and so a desperate duel began in that dusky hall, not only with swift swords and spears of stabbing iron, but with hafts and handles, and hands bare and bloody. Finn and his men fought with a ferocity born of terror; tables were toppled and tossed like children's toys, and chairs were chopped into cheap kindling.

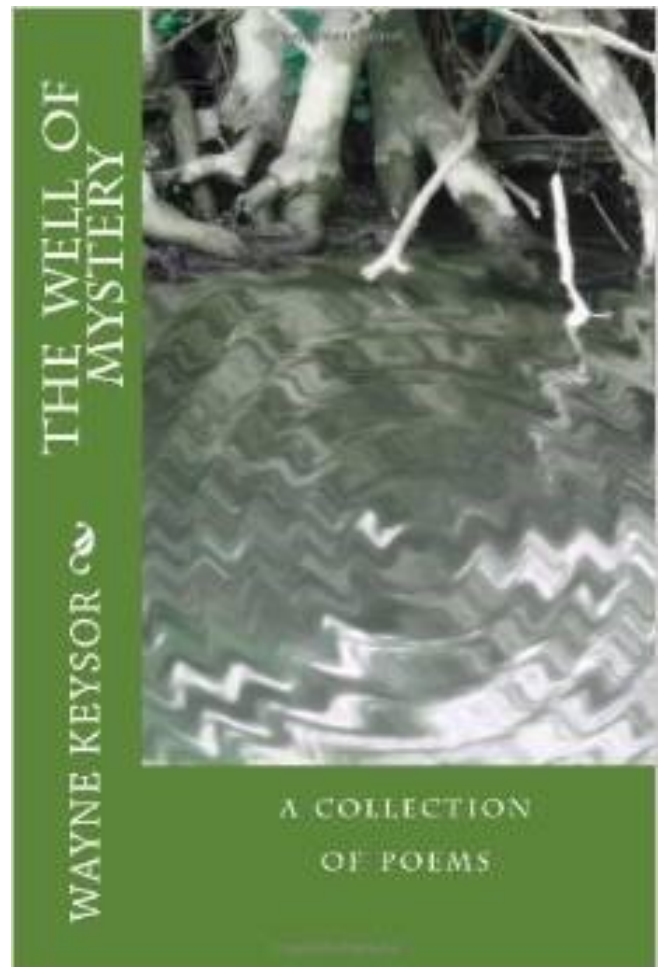
In the course of the combat, some careless foot kicked over the fire. And so the flames failed, until finally they guttered and died, and a darkness, deep and utter, descended over the hall. Still the struggle continued; sweat mixing freely with blood, they battered at each other blindly, their brutal blows only hairsbreadths away from inflicting awful damage, hacking heads from shoulders or hands from arms.

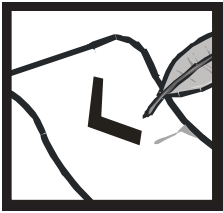
With rage and red fear its goad, this rampage continued until the sun stirred, stretching its golden brow over the horizon. By then, the dangerous duel had turned desperate for the guests. Beleaguered and bloodied, they were backed into a corner; their chests heavy and heaving, their heads spinning, arms like leaden weights, leeched of strength. Now so perilously pressed by their still powerful foes, they only wielded their weapons by will alone. But as the first, bright beams of morning imbued the hall, the combatants were cast into an all-consuming sleep.

When Finn and his fellows awoke, fresh from rest, of their dark and deadly hosts, they discovered no sign. Their horses were whole and the hostel had disappeared. Finn's men were in wonderment at what had happened, Seeking the salmon's wisdom, Finn sucked on his thumb, and voices and visions he received, verifying the cause. The fair sister of those furious Sidhe, the Fenian had killed, and so stern vengeance they had sought on the stalwart band.

Rejoicing, the three returned to the royal fortress, and told their strange tale to the towering lords, who sat spellbound among the sighing stones of that hoary hall, home of their father's father's fathers. And all were amazed, announcing their own relief at finding so fortunate a sanctuary, full of generosity, with a glad gathering of those who guarded zealously the long-established laws of liberal hospitality. And so Oisín earned an answer most dear to that curious question, recalled years later, what was the most difficult race ever run.

Author Bio: *Wayne Keysor is a member of CedarLight Grove. He has completed his Dedicant's Path as well as the Generalist Study Program. He is also active in the Bardic Guild, having earned the rank of ADF Journeyman Bard. He is a circled member of the ADF Order of Bardic Alchemy. His hearth culture is Irish, but retains a deep interest in classical Greece and Rome. Wayne is also an accomplished poet. Further works of his may be enjoyed in back issues of this publication or in his publication, The Well of Mystery, available at amazon.com.*





After the Picnic -

Disposing of Outdoor Offerings

By: D. Rowan Grove

Many folk in ADF make offerings to their Deities, Land Spirits, and Ancestors, and this is good and appropriate, part of our **ghosti* relationship with the Kindreds. Offerings of poetry or song, a measure of whiskey or bit of bread given to the Fire, leave no trace, but what should be done with the more physical remains? In a previous essay, I addressed the question of household offerings, but away from one's own territory, matters become a little more complicated. Many folk bring solid offerings to outdoor rituals, and many like to leave offerings in places which they perceive as sacred.

The quantity and nature of offerings made at festivals, public parks, or traditional sacred sites need consideration. Festivals, although they involve a higher concentration of offerings than many grove rites, are in some ways less likely to have problems. There is usually a good fire at such occasions, and some sites have either an actual offering shaft, or arrangements will have been made by the organizers to dispose appropriately of offerings.

Rites held in parks or other public places are not always able to have a large fire in which offerings can be burned, and groups meeting in these sites may leave an assortment of food offerings in their wake. A few berries or a sprinkling of grain will do no damage; these

will be eaten by the land creatures, large or small. But if the rite was attended by many folk, and larger amounts of offered grain or other foods were accumulated, this might have to be reconsidered. Some food offerings are less benign; chocolate, for example, is not wholesome for many animals or birds. Even something which would be little or no problem in a small quantity, can cause inadvertent harm in a larger amount. For example, someone may wish to offer to the Land Kindreds of a lake or river by feeding an entire loaf of purchased bread to the ducks or other water birds. But bread is actually rather bad for ducks; while they will happily devour it, it does not provide the nourishment that they need. Water birds fed large quantities of bread have become malnourished, and even starved, because, bloated on bread, they have not searched out the natural foods they need; hardly an appropriate way to honor the Spirits of the place. Liquid offerings, too, have properties which must be considered. Many liquids offered at rituals are highly alcoholic, and while this may be pleasing to the Kindreds, if poured on the ground, either during the rite or afterwards, they can be harmful to the grasses, the small creatures in the soil, and in concentration over the years, the very trees one wishes to honor.

The accumulation of non-biodegradable offerings also needs to be considered. Candles and incense burn

and are gone, and wax stubs may be kept and added to the next sacred fire. But many folk make offerings which are much less ephemeral. I have seen strings of glass, metal or plastic beads; plaster statues, daggers, costume jewelry, bags of polished pebbles or shells, and many other more or less permanent objects brought as offerings. In dealing with these afterwards, consideration must be given to their impact on the immediate environment; clearly, many of these items should not simply be scattered in the area. Members of the group may take some things to dispose of in their own outdoor shrines, but if they are to be buried or otherwise put

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into the Land overall, it should be done in a place and manner that will not cause damage.

If consideration need be given to avoiding cluttering up public parks, so much more care should be taken when leaving items at old sacred sites. From conversations with those living near some of these places in Ireland and Britain, local folk often regard many of the “offerings” left there as little more than trash, polluting the site. A family in Ireland, living close by the access of a sacred cave, recounted to us a tale of a “spirituality group” which visited the cave; the members, wishing to avoid the sticky mud with which the floor is coated, had brought in twenty-three large flattened cardboard boxes to protect themselves – and when they departed, they left the boxes behind, in the cave. While this was not intended as an offering, the group’s “spiritual” visit had the effect of defiling the very place they supposedly came to revere. One little metal cup from a tea-light left at a stone circle is not much; but what of a hundred, or a thousand? The very heat of the candles can damage the old stones and their coating of slow-growing lichens. A wisp of silk or linen tied on a wishing tree is one thing; a plastic bag quite another.

Visits by Pagan pilgrims should not result in candle-stubs and piles of commercially mined crystals littering the Kindreds’ living rooms. So perhaps it comes down to a question: are the offerings we make to the Kindreds for our benefit, or for Theirs? Ideally, both should benefit. Are there offerings which can be made appropriately? Of course: song, prayer, poetry, the visitor’s time, whether spent in talking to the local spirits, or cleaning up the site. I have found that pure water is received with appreciation, particularly in arid areas. There are other options as well. Just as a thoughtful person would not bring a large inappropriate “gift” to clutter up the living space of a beloved elderly relative, visitors should consider both the wishes of the Kin and their environment, and choose their gifts mindfully.

Author Bio:

D. Rowen Grove set up her first Pagan altar at the age of ten, which was quite a while ago. She joined ADF in 2010, completed her DP in 2012, and the first circle of the Seers’ Guild study program in 2013. Rowen currently serves as Bard for the Silver Branch Golden Horn grove in Denver, CO, and as Chief of the Scholars’ Guild. She is a member of the Gaelic and the Fire and Ice Kins, a Flame-keeper within the Brighids Hearth SIG, and continues to work on the IP, GSP, Bardic, and some other study programs.



The Morrigan and the Crow

by Phoenix Rose

Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree
Morrigan, Morrigan, listen to me
If wisdom you seek from the sisters three,
Morrigan, Morrigan, follow me

Take control of your life with sovereignty
Balance light and dark and then you will see
Respect Sacred Earth and live in harmony
Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree

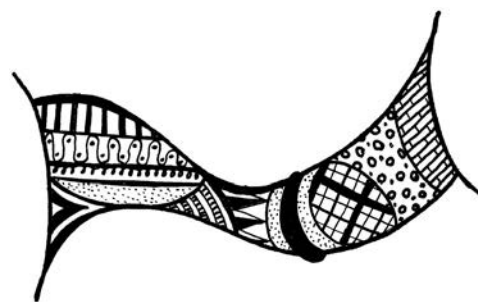
Macha, Badb, and Anu make the sisters three
To the Cave of Cruachan follow me
Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree
Morrigan, Morrigan, follow me

Birth, death, and rebirth are all under me
Change is the one true constancy
Gaze into my cauldron and learn my mysteries
Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree

Guidance and protection you have from me
But know that growth is never easy
And work you must if you follow me
Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree

Morrigan, Morrigan, said the crow on the tree
Morrigan, Morrigan, listen to me
If wisdom you seek from the sisters three,
Morrigan, Morrigan, follow me

Hail the Morrigan!





Little Acorns

Ritual Template for Preschoolers

By: Ishtar vom Sternenkreis

For more than a year I have been experimenting doing rituals for preschoolers and I would like to share some bits and pieces from my experience with you.

We work with preschoolers as it just happens to be the age most represented in our ritual group. They often participate in adult rituals, but we felt it was important to make as well rituals that are more targeted at their age.

I started out using the ritual template written by Kathleen Pezza from Charter Oak Grove that can be found on the grove homepage, but soon experienced that especially calling all of the three Kindred goes over the top of the preschoolers.

You should consider that most preschoolers can only concentrate 15 to a maximum of 20 Minutes on one thing. The younger the kids, the less time they will be able to concentrate. The more kids you have, the more difficult it will be to keep them concentrated on one thing.

Be prepared for many interruptions and questions, integrate them and especially validate them (e.g. "But we cannot close the rite because the Earth Mother hasn't eaten her apple yet" – "This is a very good observation you made. You know the Earth Mother eats through the animals and they will take care of the apple and eat it for her"). If possible have the food in a box, because it can be hard for the wee ones to see

some food on a table and not eating it (even when they have eaten just before the rite). Generally, try to find as many little jobs for the kids to do as possible.

One of the things I started using is a board (the last page of a portable Flip chart) where the ritual order is pinned on by using laminated pictures on hook and loop tape. The kids are used to them from Kindergarten. I use it just before we start to let the kids know what we are going to do now and to remind them of the rules (attention with the fire, try to be quiet). I reduced the rules to as few as possible, which means that I try to have things on the altar the kids are allowed to touch and cannot break. The ritual order board is as well a nice tool to keep the kids focused on the rite by asking what comes next and inviting them to have a look at the board.

Try using a few songs they already know, like the welcome and goodbye song that are used in kindergarten, daycare, sports etc.

Here is the template I use:

1. Musical signal to start and statement of purpose "we are inviting [guest name] and want to have a little feast together, let's start!"
2. Honoring the Earth Mother "We start off by greeting the Earth Mother with a song as we all come from her and she takes care of us by giving us food and drinks." (Song: "Mother I feel you under my feet"). The kids get rattles to play along with the song (what they vigorously do).
3. Cleaning the ritual space. "As we would clean the house when guest come we clean the ritual space." The kids help with soap bubbles, which are loved by them and the concept of soap and cleaning is already well known. Very small kids might need help. Be careful with the design, so that no fights over specific images break out.
4. Establishing the Sacred Tree. While I do set up a bowl with little water (chances are it will spill) and at least an (electric) candle or fire beside the Tree image, I don't directly talk about these concepts with the kids, only telling them that we now build the sacred tree as a sort of magical telephone to better talk to our guest (this was a very valuable idea from Kathleen Pezza, as kids know the concept of telephone already



The Order of the ritual (not complete on this picture).

<i>German Text</i>	<i>English Text</i>	<i>Movement</i>
Der große, der hohe, der schöne Weltenbaum	<i>The Big, the great, the beautiful World tree</i>	<i>Stand still arms stretched out to the side</i>
Der hat ganz tiefe Wurzeln, die bringen Wasser rauf.	<i>Its roots are reaching deep, bring up water from the Sea</i>	<i>Bow down, make a movement as if collecting something from the ground and bring cupped hand to your belly</i>
Und seine langen Äste, die reichen bis zum Himmel	<i>And branches reaching high until the touch the sky</i>	<i>Stretch arms to the sky, moving</i>
und fangen dort die Sterne, damit sie uns hier wärmen. (2x)	<i>And catch the shining stars, so that we can hold them dear. (2x)</i>	<i>Pretend to catch stars, bringing them to your heart and "cuddling" them.</i>

as preschoolers). We use a song connected with movement. Again we do make a connection to the Sea and Sky, I just don't make a big fuss about it. The song goes to the melody of "Ein großer, ein runder, ein roter Luftballon" a well-known children song in Germany. Basically in the movement you bring together the Water from below and the Star power from above in the middle.

5. We open the Door as we would when someone comes to our house. This is easy understandable for the kids.

There are two techniques that I've found work really well and I interchange them according to setting. a) All stand very close together and I call "the doors are –" and all cry "open" while they hold hands and make the circle as big as possible. This should help with the feeling of opening as is as well great fun for the kids. B) is using rattles and drums and calling "open, open, open...", in this case the rhythm goes faster until reaching a peak where they have to stop abruptly and then the ritual leader mimics opening a big door. In this variation the kids love to rattle and my son already took a rattle at home, rattling it and crying "open".

6. Inviting the Being(s) of the occasion. We invite the Being(s) of the occasion, often connected with a story. It's always good to have pictures at hand to illustrate the short (!) story.

7. Sharing a meal as we would share a snack or a cake when a guest comes is nice for the kids and they usually like it a lot. This usually is as well our offering.

8. Listening to what the guest thinks of our feast through the Omen is easiest done while the kids still eat (it will be a bit more quiet ;-)). Remember to reword it into a language the kids will understand.

9. Blessing. We call together for the blessing, by holding the bag in the middle and chanting AWENS, which works well in a Celtic rite, but you could as well only "hum" to make it neutral. This usually creates a special atmosphere for the kids. The blessing is often a small present the kids receive from a special bag. These are things like a straw Brighid puppet, a paper star where we write the blessing down, a painted stone, a

molded statue of the earth mother (brought by the parents), etc.

10. Thanking and saying Goodbye. We usually bow shortly to say thank you and the kids wave "Tschüü" (Goodbye).

11. Closing the door we parallel the opening a) Priests calls "Door" – kids say "close" and we walk towards each other until we are very close. B) Drum and rattle a rhythm that goes faster until we have to stop and then making a motion.

12. We thank the Earth Mother and Close the rite be singing a Goodbye song the kids know already from kindergarten.

Encourage the parents to talk to the kids about the ritual so that you can see what they retained and exchange ideas with the parents. My son 4.5 years gave a pretty good roundup of the Spring equinox rite: "We extinguished a fire, we lit a new one, I walked around the fire with a candle and another candle is still burning in our house". He recapitulates a ritual like this: We invite a guest, give him something to eat and we receive a gift in return. For a four year old that's enough understanding of the basic concept of ritual and offering for me. (His favorite is the cleaning with the bubbles, the opening of the door with the rattles, eating and the present ;-)).

The pictures for the Story how Lugh fights against Balor from the Lughnasadh 2013 rite.





Finding Flidais,

Irish Goddess of Cattle and Deer

By: Morgan Daimler

Flidais is an obscure and intriguing Irish deity who is gaining popularity today. References to her in mythology are few and lack detail, yet there seems to be something deep and compelling about her that draws people to her. Her name may mean "wet one" possibly from the old Irish word *flichidecht*, pronounced *flee-(c)hee-deh(c)ht* with the "ch" sound like in *loch*; it means wet or moist. In modern Irish her name is spelled *Fliodhais*. Flidais would be pronounced roughly *Flee-thash* in old Irish while *Fliodhais* would be closer to *Flyu-ash* or *Flih-eesh*, although the pronunciation would vary slightly by dialect. She is especially associated in mythology with milk and milking and her epithet is *foltchaoin* "soft haired".

In the *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, the Book of Invasions which tells the story of the settling of Ireland, her children are listed as Arden, Be Chuille, Dinand, and Be Teite; the *Metrical Dindshenchas* list her as the mother of Fand and she is also said to be the mother of Nia Segamain. Her daughters Arden and Be Teite are sorceresses or witches of the Tuatha De Danann, the Irish Gods, while Dinand and Be Chuille are farmers. Her son, Nia Segamain, is associated with magical cattle as is Flidais herself. In the *Driving of the Cattle of Flidais* she appears as a mortal character, the lover of Fergus mac Rog and wife of Ailill Finn, while another source says her husband was Adammair. Some people debate whether she was always a Goddess or was a later literary character, but it is possible that, rather than a purely literary character, she represents a Goddess who was later euhemerized into a human figure as the new religion took hold.

Flidais is said to be the owner of magical cattle in the *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, and she was also said to have a herd of deer that gave milk like cows, and her herd was said to include both deer and cows. Patricia Monaghan in her book *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Myth and Folklore* suggests that Flidais's name is related to "doe", although this seems unlikely, and sees parallels between Flidais and continental goddesses like Arto, Artemis, and Diana. She is associated with both domestic cattle and deer, and all animals are said to be her cattle, reinforcing her connection to both milking and to the animal world. In the story of *The Driving of the Herd of Flidais* we are told that she possesses a hornless cow named Maol that gives enough milk at one time to feed 300 men and in the *Tain Bo Cuiligne* Flidais's herd supplied milk to feed the army of Connacht.

Although Flidais in mythology is most often associated with milk and feeding others she does also have a few other associations. The *Banshenchas* says of Flidais, "Though slender she destroyed young men. She decreed hard close fighting". In the *Driving of the Herd of Flidais* we learn that Fergus needed 7 women to satisfy him sexually, unless he had Flidais with him; she alone was able to satisfy him by herself. She also had aspects as a healer; in the same story we are told that Flidais tended and healed the men wounded in battle. There is also a modern Irish healing folk charm against poison which appears in Lady Wilde's book *Irish Charms, Mystic Cures & Superstitions* that calls on "Fleithas", a name similar to the modern Irish for Flidais (*Fliodhais*). It seems likely that this charm is related to the older pagan Goddess. In the *Banshenchas* Flidais is said to have destructive aspects as well, described as a destroyer of young men and someone who proclaims or causes difficult battles. Like all of the Tuatha De Danann Flidais later became associated with Fairy and is sometimes seen as a Fairy queen, or at least the mother of one through Fand.

In mythology Flidais is associated with wild and domestic animals equally but many Modern Celtic pagans often associate her with the woodlands and with wild animals especially. It is not unusual to see Celtic Neopagans borrowing imagery from other deities for Flidais, so that she is depicted with horns like Cernunnos or driving a chariot pulled by deer like Artemis. Her colors might be white, brown, and green and she would appear as a beautiful woman, often out in the forest. A more traditional view would not include these things, but might emphasize qualities seen in the Irish myths where she appears, including her beautiful hair and a description of her in the *Banshenchas* as slender. Deer and cattle are her special animals in mythology and could be used to represent her; she might also be seen accompanied by these animals.

Offerings of milk would seem to be particularly appropriate for her, not only cow's milk but any kind. In my own experience she is an ideal Goddess for nursing mothers to pray to. Flidais is a deity of abundance who provides for everyone who looks to her for support, who is also a Goddess of healing but can bring destruction. She has many children in mythology and is strongly connected to milk and milking, giving her a very maternal feel, but she is also a sensual, sexual Goddess who is able to satisfy even a lover like Fergus, who normally needs 7 women. She is

a Goddess of the balance between extremes; domestic and wild, healing and harming, maternal and sexual.

This is a prayer I use when making offerings, but it could easily be adapted to use as an invocation in ritual:

Flidais of the soft hair
Lover, wife, and mother
whose magical herds
of hinds and kine
are rich in endless milk
who walks always
half in the wild woods
and half by the hearth
who nurtures armies
and heals the wounded
Accept this offering (alt. be with me now)

Although an enigmatic Goddess, Flidais is a powerful force who can help us bring balance into our lives. She walks the line between the tamed human world and the wild forest, between nurturing others and embracing personal power. Honoring her we can connect to many things that we need in our own lives, and find harmony between the extremes of life.

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Morgan Daimler has been a member of ADF since 2001 and was a guest speaker at Wellspring 2014. A wandering priestess of Odin and Dedicant of Macha, she teaches classes on Irish and Norse magical practices, fairies, and related subjects around the northeast United States. Morgan's writing has appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies and she is the author of nine books including "Where the Hawthorn Grows: an American Druid's Reflections" and the forthcoming "Pagan Portals: The Morrigan".



Invocation to Saturn Saturnalia 2013

By: Maria Stoy

Hail Saturn,
First of the mighty ones
Uncreated, untamed power
Old and terrible

Hail Saturn
Fertile Sky Father
Husband and lover
Sire of the Gods

Hail Saturn
The gathering storm
Chalice of potential
Master of chaos

Hail Saturn
Lord of Life
Who waters the seeds
And quickens the cattle

Hail Saturn
Lord of Death
Who cuts the grain
And culls the herd

Hail Saturn
The sands of time
Defeated and victorious
The beginning and the end

Divine sovereign,
Prince of eternity,
Be here unbound!

Come to us from across the sea.
Come to us from the vaults of heavens.
Come to us from the island of plenty.

Come to us on waves of memory.
Come to us on winds of winter.
Come to us on through shuddering earth.

Saturn,
Lord of generosity,
Lord of time,
Lord of reflection:
Accept our offerings,
Accept our hospitality,
And be welcome among us.

Hail Saturn!



Ian's Little Room -

A Personal Column on Magic Arts

By: Ian Corrigan

A Prayer for Ferguson and After

I call for nine blessings on the nations of America.

On the transplanted, on the remnant, on the deep-rooted,
on men and women and every child let there be nine blessings.

First a Blessing of the Well. Let the land and the nation give to each the fullness of sustenance. Let us remember that we are all one tribe, and that the Well must serve us all.

Second a blessing of the Fire. Let us all come together at one hearth in our hearts. Though we dwell apart, let there be a fire of welcome in our hearts for one another.

Third a blessing of the Tree. We are many families, many clans, many colors and tongues. Yet our roots drink from the same Well, our faces are warmed by the same Sun. Let us stand together in that joy and peace.
For it is only by living as one people that we can have peace.

But let there be Justice, and True Dealing, and Wise Reform.

Let force be leashed for the common good.
Let arrogance be quelled. Let prejudice be schooled. Let the bully's heart be softened.
Let poverty and desperation be relieved.
Let ignorance be scorned. Let diligence be praised.
Let generosity overcome judgment.
Let old ways be cast aside.

Let the Clubs of Old Boys be thrown open, the Codes of past centuries be discarded, let locked arms be opened. Let the people's strength stand against that which harms the people.
For it is only by living as one people that we can have peace.

But let there be Kinship, and Forbearance, and a New Heart



Let us forgive the errors of the Dead.
Many were fools, racists, exploiters of their fellows.
Many killed for their gain, and allowed killing.
The wealth of our tribe is built on this slaying.
It is fit to speak truth in love.
Let us forgive the errors of the Dead;
Those who raged in violence;
Those who mistook vengeance for justice;
Those who taught hatred to their children.
Let rage and spite be the rot that feeds the tree of wisdom.

For we all live on One Earth, drinking from One Well, standing at One Fire.
So let it be kinship, my kin!
Let it be Euro and African, Asian and Islander,
pale and red and ebony and every kind of beauty.
Let it be forbearance, that we remember and set aside, that we open our lives to one another.
Let it be a New Heart, and an end to old fear.
I call for nine blessings on the nations of America.
For it is only by living as one people that we can have peace.

So let it be peace.



News and Announcements

Program & Path Completions

Member 6156

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Member 8197

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Sterling Eclipse

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Member 6356

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Aaron Brookes

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Member 5603

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Feb 2015

Member 8092

Completed: Dedicant program
Date completed: Mar 2015

Member 5468

Completed: Circle 1 Magicians Study program
Date Completed: Feb 2015



Protogrove & Grove Approvals

Prairie Shadow Grove, ADF

Chartered
Date Chartered: February 20, 2015

Red Cedar Proto Grove, ADF

Aloha, OR
Date founded: February 20, 2015

Nine Waves Proto Grove, ADF

Houston, TX
Date Founded: March 17, 2015

~Congratulations to all~

Upcoming Events

Trillium

April 16-19, 2015
Cross Junction, VA

Wellspring Gathering

May 21-25, 2015
Sherman, NY

Starwood Festival

July 7-13, 2015
Pomeroy, OH

Sirius Rising Festival

July 13-19, 2015
Sherman, NY

Summerland Gathering

August 13-16, 2015
Yellow Springs, OH

Festival of the Midnight Flame

Sept 10-13, 2015
Bellaire, MI

<https://www.adf.org/events>

For more festival info



Word Search Puzzle

Roman Gods

By: Chris:)

T E L L U S C D N Z D H I Z B V M X Q A
Z Z T F V K F N R L C E R E S E H V O T
V I N E R E B I L M A X K O R L V O W V
A R S M W F H Z B M Q D W A F S K B T B
G T G Q J I A R O F I A L J W Q I M T I
A X U X M N X P U M Y R U C R E M O V B
E M S Z U P M O O M R E H Q N L X D J A
V V V L U A N F R L H L G N B I C H U G
F E Y Z P M K F V U L C A N Q M S N P U
M Y O E N Y X A M E R O L D D P A I I P
X L I Q S X X R I X T Q K F E R T P T X
X N P O S M Z E N W P E P B G L U I E I
Z J L Z F D Y O E U Z J J A K M R H R C

Word Clues

JANUS
JUPITER
SATURN
GENIUS
MERCURY
APOLLO
MARS

VULCAN
NEPTUNE
SOL
ORCUS
LIBER
TELLUS
CERES

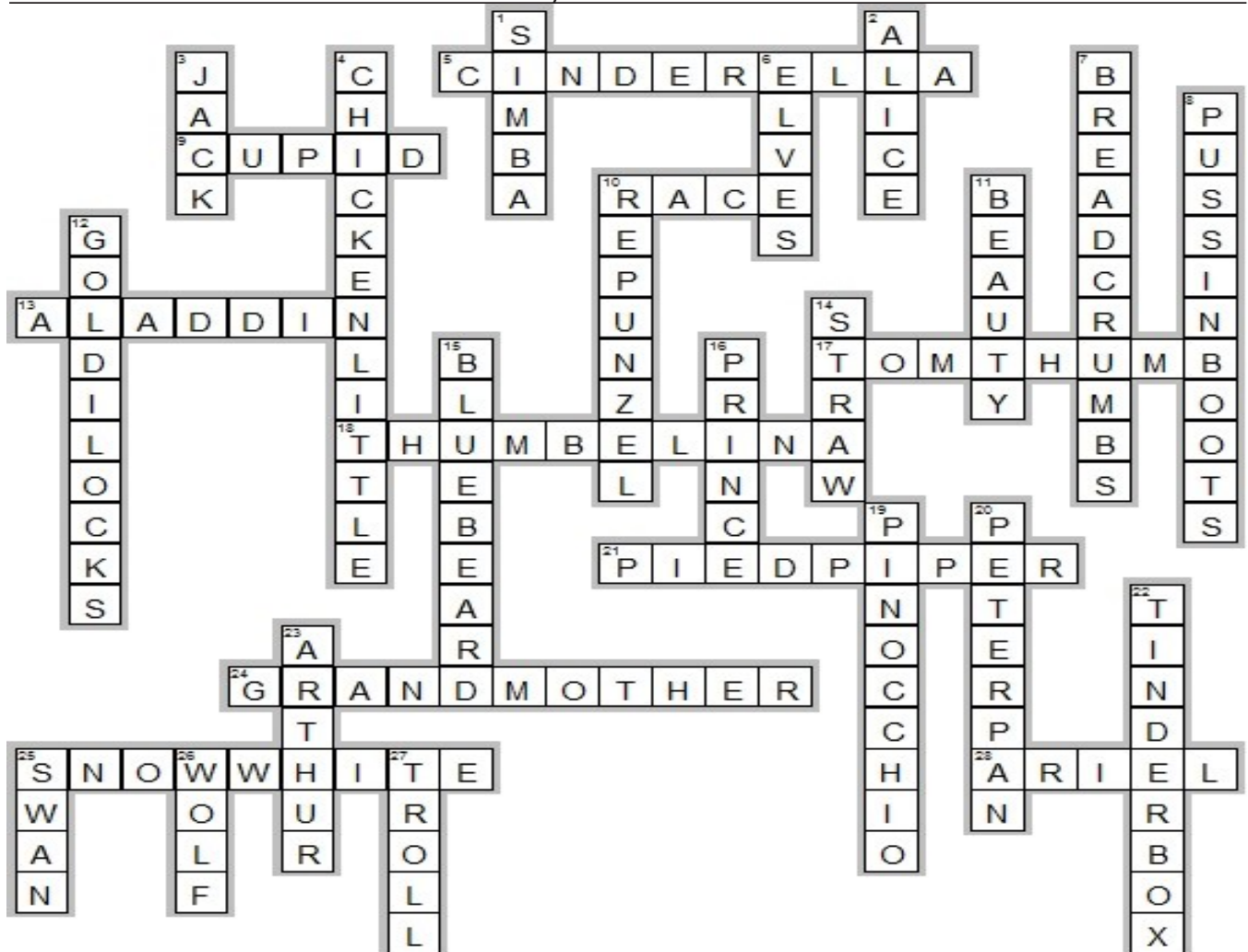
JUNO
LUNA
DIANA
MINERVA
VENUS
VESTA

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Last Issue Puzzle Key





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Submission Guidelines



Oak Leaves welcomes submissions of artwork, articles, poetry, letters to the editor, and anything else that might be of interest to our Druid readers. Submissions, and especially artwork, relating to the turning of the wheel of the year and the celebration of the High Days are particularly encouraged. Submissions from non-members will be accepted, however, if space is constrained, preference will be given to submissions from ADF members. Certain pieces may receive preference, depending on available space.

References and Notations:

Since excellent scholarship is one of ADF's goals, please document sources of ideas and materials that you used for your writings. Detailed endnote references are preferred rather than simply providing a bibliography. Please follow the standards for references in the MLA Handbook or Style Manual. We will not accept submissions with footnotes, as they require considerable editing to convert to endnotes.

Medium of Submission:

Electronic submissions are preferred, sent as email attachments to the Oak Leaves submissions address:

oak-leaves@adf.org

Please send one submission per attachment specifying the format, author's name, your email, and membership status. Be sure the title of the piece and your name are at the top of the page, and you have checked it over for spelling and grammatical errors. Also: please include a brief ADF-related bio for all articles and essays.

Written submissions should be sent in one of the following formats: MS Word (doc/docx), Rich Text Format (rtf), or Text Format (txt).

While electronic submissions are preferred (and may be given priority for printing), readable hard-copy submissions may be sent to:

OL Editor,
P.O. Box 17874
Tucson, AZ 85731-7874

Submitted materials will not be returned to the sender.

Art Submission Guidelines:

We now accept photos as well as drawings and computer generated pictures. Some of the color pictures will need to be modified to grayscale but we will do that as necessary. We would like to have pictures submitted at 300 dpi, and in a useable format such as .jpg, .png, tiff, etc. Please send them to the Art Director at adf-ol-art@adf.org. Contact the Art Director to inquire whether hard copies of your art may be submitted, depending on scanner availability.

Deadlines for submissions are:

Spring: December 1st,
Summer: March 1st,
Autumn: June 1st,
Winter: September 1st





Ar nDraiocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship

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One form per person please.



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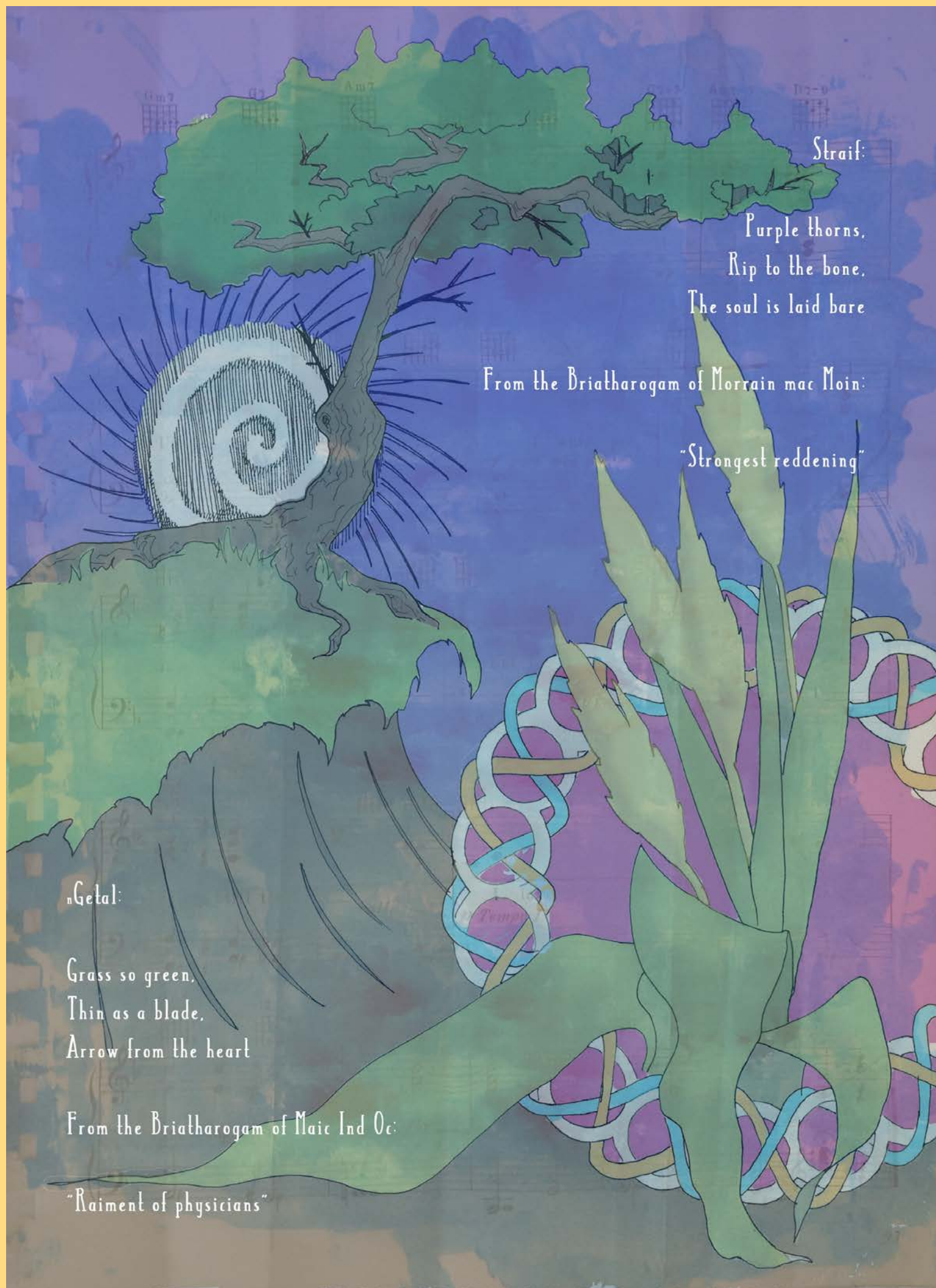
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To whom it may concern: (enter child's name here) _____ has my permission to become a member of ADF, and I am fully aware of the Neopagan nature of this organization.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Parent/Guardian Printed Name _____

Notary Seal:



Straif:

Purple thorns,
Rip to the bone,
The soul is laid bare

From the Briatharogam of Murrain mac Moin:

"Strongest reddening"

Getal:

Grass so green,
Thin as a blade,
Arrow from the heart

From the Briatharogam of Maic Ind Oc:

"Raiment of physicians"

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