

Airy Faerie

Imbolc/Ostara 2007



Publisher's Notes

YAWN! Stretch, hit the snooze button and pull the covers back over my head.

Welcome to the...YAWN...oh sorry about that. Welcome to the Airy...YAWN...Faerie.

There is a good reason why I am not known as a morning person. I like to wait until a little later in the day to get going. Not even the smell of coffee will get me out of bed. I have been known to drink a White Chocolate Mocha Espresso at faerie coffee and then go right home and take an hour nap! I never have liked mornings, and if they are cold and dark, forget it. So while the sun slowly creeps its way towards spring, I slowly creep my butt out of bed and into the shower to get the ball rolling. Even after a hot shower the temptation of a warm comfy bed is sometimes too hard to resist.

Hmm, that sound's good. Maybe just a few more min...ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

As you know, we here at the Airy Faerie discovered that we had hit the snooze button one time too many and missed our Imbolc issue. To our faithful readers we are very sorry for this delay but apparently we needed the rest. To our unfaithful readers...well you probably didn't even notice we were gone, so no apology needed. Seriously, we are very sorry that we missed an issue, and can only blame some of the worst snow storms Denver has seen in years. It is amazing how grey skies and cold weather affect us. But the sun and warmer

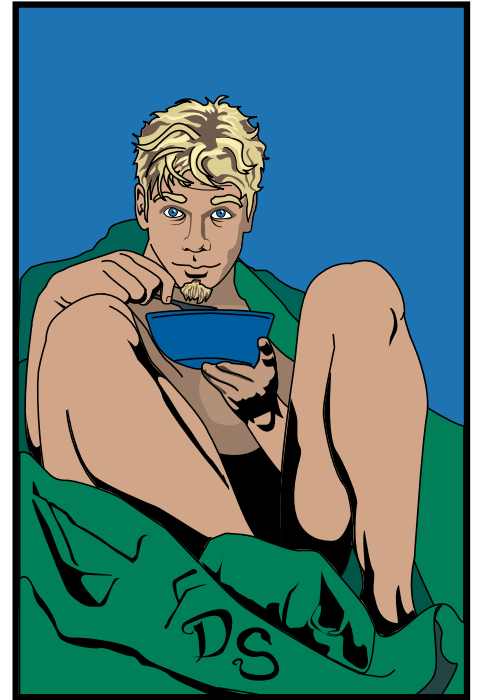
weather is returning! Yeah! And with it, the creative juices have thawed and have started to flow.

If it is only the early bird gets the worm, I will have to settle for handful of Oreos. Now I am ready (bushy eyed and bright tailed and all that good stuff) to face a new day that is full of possibilities and new joys to discover, kind of like spring. If you can wipe the sleep from your eyes you might see the crocus announcing the arrival of a new season.

As with the return of all the joys of spring, all the joys of the Airy Faerie are returning as well. If you are new to the Airy Faerie, WELCOME! We hope you enjoy our little fae 'zine. With this issue there is course the return of the blossoms of male nudity and gay sexual images. Please stop here if you are offended by such things. If naked men and man to man sex puts a little spring in your step then bounce right on in. We hope everyone enjoys this issue of the Airy Faerie, and would love to hear from you.

Like it is in the physical world, all of the joys of the returning things, this issue also comes with a new bundle of joy. One of the newer members of the Denver tribe, Barley, submitted one of his satyrs to be included in this issue. We look forward to seeing more of his art in the future.

As the sun slowly rises in the east, pour yourself a good strong cup of coffee, tea, a mimosa or whatever you have to start your

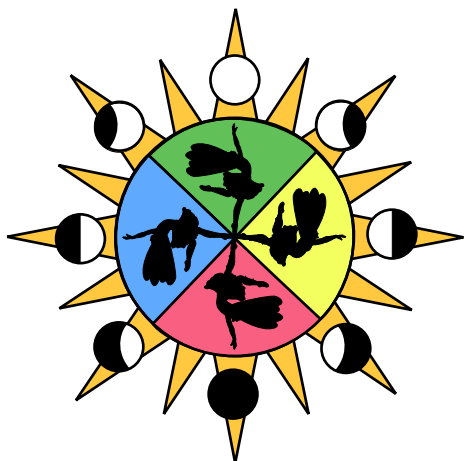


day, kickback and enjoy the Denver Faeries' Airy Faerie.

And since this issue has finally gone to bed, I think I will do the same and take a nap. See you at Beltane.

Naked Hugs and Faerie Blessings,
DragonSwan

Airy Faerie



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The Airy Faerie is a publication of the Denver Radical Faerie Tribe.

For more information you can contact us at:
Denver Radical Faeries
PO Box 631
Denver, CO 80201-0631

or send an email to:
DenverRadicalFaeries@yahoo.com

or visit us at
www.geocities.com/denverfae

Tom's Page

Art and writings from Tom's journal



I touch you for good reason
You are a lover
Not just of me
But of life
We are clumsy in our being together
Our love making is slap stick
People would wonder what we are doing
We don't practice proper rhythm
We know each other's taste,
No need of soundings
Our touch and tongue do the work
And after,
The whispers
Magic has been done in flesh and blood.

I was brought up as Catholic.
I liked the ritual of the mass
Incense, vestments and candles.
Later, I would find out that is was
Kyrie Illusion.

The Gods of Old Age
Of Winter, of death
Earth element full of strength and wisdom
Ready and calm
The relationship with the Sky Father
Of deep peace and sleep,
Rest and forgetting
And transition from one world to another
They are our teachers and guides
They come from the North

Pantrate, a dark ode
Penetrate the evening
Hide in the dark
Spring into the night
A menace encapsulated
In male-ness
Is this a ritual?
Something to join the fragmented?



Faerie 101: Darkness

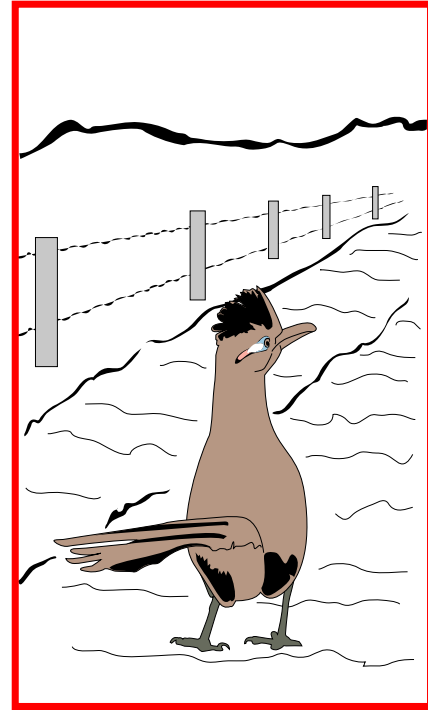
By Phoenix

OK, so this wasn't one of our standard 101 sessions. However, the combination of our Yule and Imbolc rituals shed a lot of light on our feelings about darkness and I thought it was worth sharing with you. It is amazing how we as a society cast "being in the dark" as a bad thing. We have to crank up the wattage to dispel any hint of shadows. Almost every electronic something in our modern urban life has something that lights up. Now, this is not supposed to be a "down with light" kind of moment with you. No, this is about how the role that darkness plays in our lives.

Take a moment to think about your feelings about darkness. Think about the range of things, both positive and negative, that you associate with the dark. Now, since you are reading this, you probably have some form of light source illuminating this text. Find a moment when you can be in a dark room and see how your feeling change as you think about the darkness around you. When you are ready to try this, gather some paper and a writing utensil. If you really want to test your creativity, get some colored paper and glue too.

Once you are ready, turn off your lights and take a hard look at your space and see how much light there still is. Try to get your space as pitch black as possible. If you can't black out your main windows, then you might need to use an inner room such as a bathroom or a large walk-in closet if you are so lucky as to have one (and this will be one of my only times to tell you to go into a closet!). Look around your space. Is there something giving off light? If so, cover it up. Stuff towels along the doorways to block out the light. The darker you get your space, the more you will be amazed at how much light even a little green "power is on" light can give off. Each time you think you found all of the light sources, your eyes will have adjusted and you will be amazed to find yet another light source. If you can't get to a good pitch blackness where you can't see anything, then you may need to resort to a good old-fashioned blindfold.

Once you get your space as dark as possible, sit in the darkness and examine your feelings. How does that compare to how you felt when you were thinking about the same thing while sitting in the light? Take a piece of paper and write some of your feelings down. On one side, write your positive feelings; on the other, the negative. Take some of your colored paper and tear it into shapes and glue them on another piece of paper (for a group activity, each person



would get their own color to add to the central paper). Let your mind and body demonstrate their creativity without the reliance of the visual component of seeing what you are doing and making decisions based on what you see.

When you are ready to return from the darkness, light a candle. How bright did the flame seem after sitting in the darkness? How long do you think you were in the darkness? Find a clock and figure it out. Was it longer or shorter than you imagined? I won't ask if you can read anything you wrote, but what about your artwork? Does it look anything like you were imagining when you created it?

If you want to experiment on the other side of the spectrum, creating a space with zero darkness is probably going to be harder than creating a room with zero light. The closest I can really think of is to go outside on a bright sunny day right after it snowed, or out in the desert at high noon in the summer. Creating a space that is the equivalent of being inside the light bulb would probably not be healthy for your eyes, so I would urge caution if you really want to try.

Since this will be coming out close to Ostara, I will mention that life is a balance between those extremes. It is the balance of night and day, light and dark that is celebrated during the equinoxes. The balance is not always a perfect 50-50. It is more like a seesaw. The two are connected. Each gives shape and form to the other. Each gives hope to someone in the extreme of the other (think of the light at the end of the tunnel or the relief of shade during a hot summer day).

If you really want to appreciate the gift that darkness can give you, journey up to the mountains or out to the county. Get away from the city and all of the lights that constantly assault our eyes. When you step into the night, look at the stars. All the infinite splendor of the million stars is always there, but we surround ourselves with so much light that we can't appreciate them. In the greatest of ironies, it takes a little darkness to be able to see their light.

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One Day Past Imbolc

By Beast

The ice is melting;
A well of hot tears
Wells up
Scarce plumbed.

To feel something
Better than nothing?
I have yet to decide.

In the hot brine
dreams are dissolved.
What is the seed
To bring solution to crystal?

A kind word?
An old wound
Finally felt and remembered?

Like the colored
Castles
That glow in the brandy snifter
Growing up from plastic magic
Bought in a souvenir stand.



Satyr by Barley

Memories are both
Cheap and precious,
True and falsely colored.
Mnemosyne of Memory
Sends soft remembrance
To take sharp away.

Are we better off without them?
Our ears clear
To receive the song of the world.

To awaken each day
Bright-eyed, like The Fool
Off on a journey that is always new
Bag empty and open
To receive the gifts
Of the day.

But what are we
But what we have
Seen and done?

Is it better to hold
All memory in a precious place
And let it go when
Dust has dimmed all features?

Or let it fly when it is bright and quick?

But now
Better I feel
Hot tears than grey despair the
Runnel of weeping
Washes funeral ash
And clears the eyes.

No way past mourning but through it.

Failure shows us what we have striven for.
Loss - what we have received.

February, 2007

The 4-F Tarot: Water, Water Everywhere...

by Phoenix

This issue's basic level cards that are scatter throughout the issue are the ones representing those energies that have learned to adapt to an environment that constitutes a lack of water. We turned to the desert for our inspiration. For the cards we selected the roadrunner, cactus and scorpion, lizard, and camel. Each of them have some familiar facts that we learn in school such as camel's ability to go two weeks without water and four weeks without food. When looking at a card such as the cactus think about whether you are to focus on the needles or is it the challenge of getting to the sustenance inside? Or is it something you can use for dye or medicinal purposes? Certainly you can let your surface understanding of their abilities and habits guide you when they appear in a spread. However, the more you learn about them, the more alive in your mind they will become when they interact with the other cards.

The cactus and scorpion card introduces an aspect of the cards of the flowers family that hasn't been mentioned yet. The underlying thought behind the deck is about the flow of the energy between cards. It is about movement. Flowers are beautiful but it is not common for them to uproot themselves and move to a new situation. In that respect, they would be more like an endpoint for a journey. They might be what you are searching for in order to make a potion. So, to give the cards some motion, we added many of their

mobile friends. In this case it is the scorpion-small and deadly; easy to overlook when focusing on the more evident danger of the cactus's needles. The choice of what you focus on when interpreting a spread, as always, is yours.

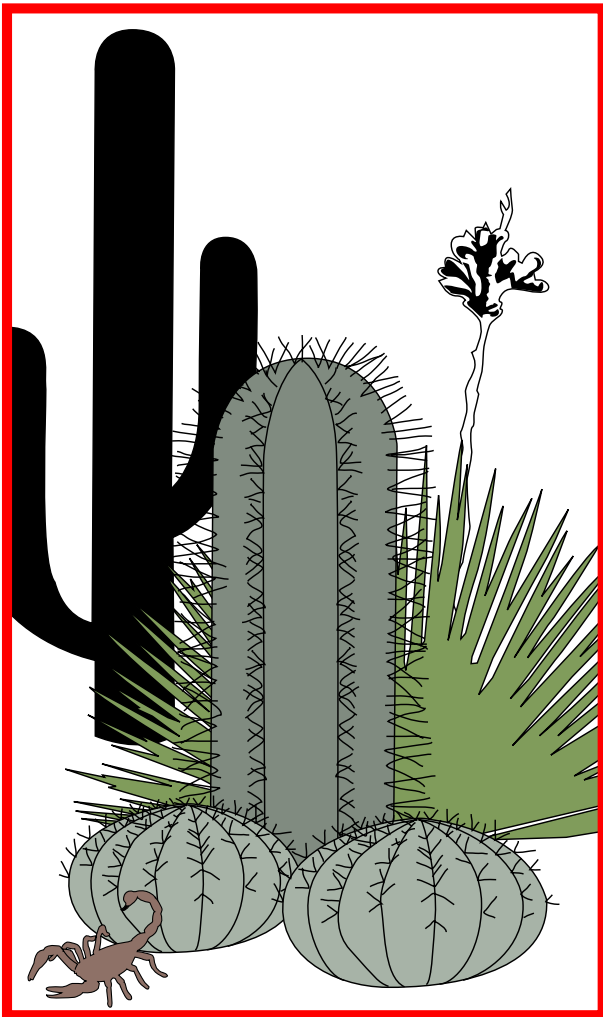
In the past, we have presented several different levels of the energies of the cards. This month we present the first of the "Goddess" cards. To elevate up to the God and Goddess level, the energy of the card needs to radiate across both the elemental and animal aspects of the deck. A Goddess tends to be more passive and receptive than the companion God. The operative word is "tends" as this does not represent the exclusive behavior of the card. Each God and Goddess has been given a base of power that is the combination of one of the elements with one of the 4Fs (Feather, Flower, Fin and Fur for those of you who might be new to us). This was our first "rule" that help us start determining what the card was going to look like.

This issue we have the Goddess of Water. Her throne sits on the intersection of Water and Flower. Her power base is one of the four central spaces of the energy grid and She touches almost everyone's life with the exception of Fin/Air (they have left her embrace), Fur/Fire (cats and water are certainly not cosy friends) and Fur/Earth (moles and groundhogs are certainly not creatures we associate with water).

The second "rule" was that as a goddess of an element, Her power lies in her ability to draw energy towards Her. On the other side, a goddess of a 4F draws her power from her ability to move through the energy. This is what led us to select the lake setting as the image for this card.

Looks cold, doesn't it? The Goddess isn't the figure walking into the water. She is the lake itself and all that surrounds it. She is warm and inviting even though it is in the middle of winter. When we originally conceived this card it was going to be one of two things. It was either going to be a good old fashioned swimming hole, full of energy and people splashing around or it was going to be a lone figure walking into a misty lake on a summer morning. The calmer energy ruled and the more exuberant energy will be found on the God of Water card when he makes his appearance. As we worked on balancing the "court" cards and making sure that each had its own distinctive energy this card settled on the Imbolc energies. Thus began the shift from summer to winter. The snow is melting and the first crocus of the season can be seen. The figure is walking into Goddess's embrace without hesitation. Despite the chill in the air, or maybe because of it, She has warmed the waters to be a healing place.

Who is the man walking into the water? In connecting this card to others in the deck, I see him as the next step in evolution of the man in the card "Caught in the act" (shown in the Litha 2006 issue). That card has a naked man reaching out his door to grab his morning newspaper. He has now left the safety of his home. He is exploring his world and is about to take the plunge into a new life. Once in the water, he will become a diver and encounter the Goddess of Fins in her underwater realm. When he surfaces, he will discover that he is not alone. He will find many friends that share his love of both nudity and the water when he enters the lagoon of the God of Water.





Quest for the Crystal Phoenix

Chapter 19: Tale of the Phoenix

by Orpheus

Apollo awoke to Toby's announcement that it was time to get down to the Bathing House to get cleaned up before reuniting with the queens' party.

"But why can't we sleep in a bit more," whined the prince. "After all, what good is getting clean going to do us when we get back into the dust on the road?"

"True enough on the dust part," replied Toby. "But we are the queens' escort and should try to look the part and not look like the ruffians who kidnapped them."

Reluctantly, Apollo got his things together and headed down to the Bathing House located at the back of the inn. The cold water was a shock to his mind but soon he was wide awake and eager to get on the road. If all went well, they would be in Phlaretown in two days and he wanted to sit in the sauna again with the guards. The thought brought a smile to his face.

"My, what a bright way to start the day," said Timmy, one of the hosts of the inn. "For a moment, I thought we had two suns." He directed everyone to one of the tables where he had laid out a large breakfast for them.

Cetee joined them saying that he had gotten word from Saundra that plans had changed and that they were to meet the queens at the fairgrounds instead of at the guard post. Upon their arrival at the fairgrounds, Susan told them that during dinner the guards kept saying that they couldn't believe the fantastical tale about the archery contest. They all felt that Saundra's son made up the story to hide the fact that he had no real skill on his own. Since his tale involved several of the people in the traveling party, Susan gave into Saundra's request for a demonstration to help her son regain his reputation as an honest person.

While Johnny and Susan helped set up the official challenge targets, Cetee pulled Apollo aside for a quick lesson. "Don't watch my hands during the demonstration. Keep your attention on the arrows in my quiver. When we get on the road I will ask what you saw."

That seemed simple enough to the prince. Susan interrupted them saying that Captain Stacy insisted on a variation to the challenge. Since they did not have trees on which to hang the targets, her guards had strapped them to their armor and would move around.

"That won't do," said Cetee. When the captain said the tale of his ability must have been overrated Cetee set up a quick demonstration. He directed Johnny to set up two targets directly in front of him; one at forty paces and the other at fifty paces. While the faerie did that, Cetee asked the captain to string his bow. When she couldn't, he took over the task explaining that this was his battle bow which was made from the heartwood of an ironwood tree. The

bow he used in the challenge was his practice bow, but while on the road and guarding the royal family, he carried his battle bow. He notched his arrow and in a blur of motion there were ten arrows in the bull's eye of the second target. It took a moment for the guards to realize that they were seeing those arrows through the gaping hole in the first target.

"Now, if that target had been one of your guards..."

"I would be looking for some new recruits," came her stunned response.

"Showoff," said Susan.

"I suppose you can do better?" challenged Cetee.

Susan notched an arrow and aimed higher than Apollo would have thought. She shot the arrow and quickly notched a second and sent it though the hole in the first target. The first arrow came down just as the second was about to hit the second target, knocking both to the ground.

"Very impressive, Susan," said Cetee, "but shall I remind you that the purpose of the exercise is to hit the target, not the other arrow? The trick is to remember to shift your sight line slightly so that the two arrows don't cross paths."

The two launched into a series of trick shots that would wow audiences if the two of them ever joined a traveling faire. With all the fancy shots, Apollo found it hard to not watch the action. He tried to stay focused and confessed his lapses when they got on the road. Not one to drop a lesson, Cetee pressed him for whatever he did see.

"For each shot that required multiple arrows, I watched you pull the first arrow out of the quiver but I never saw your hand touch the following arrows. It seemed like they jumped out of the quiver on their own."

"I didn't and they did."

"But how? I looked for signs of magic but didn't see anything. Is this something special to cen...to your people?"

"No. The gift came from my father's side of the family. Through our shared relationship with him, you should be able to tap into that same gift. It is that gift I want to awaken in you." Cetee refused to say more. He said that they would have to wait for a more private time to get deeper into the discussion.

Their evening in Betweenstville was busy if uneventful. Rose had been a frequent visitor at the King Cross Inn, but to the residents of the town, her sister queens were exotic foreigners and the trio had to shake hands with everyone that lived within shouting distance of the inn. When Apollo heard the innkeeper's wife call the children in for their evening chores, he imagined that shouting distance probably extended to the nearby villages. For all the formal functions that he had experienced at his grandmother's court, he felt that he would rather fight a giant for a month than do another of these mass "meet and greet the people" evenings. When he mentioned it to his grandmother the next day, she said that evenings



like that remind her of why she likes the formality of court. The announcing of everyone's full title takes time, which in turn gives her a moment to relax her hand between handshakes. Apollo had never thought that there was much to be gained in all that formal protocol, but after hearing that a couple of people got hurt in the rush to be the first in line to shake hands with the queens, he revised that thought. Sometimes a little bit of structure can be a good thing.

To Apollo, that day's ride was one of the slowest he had ever experienced in his young life. His heart lightened when he finally saw the walls of Phlaretown in the distance. His mood was short lived when Toby told him that they were still an hour away from the gates. Captain Pike greeted the company and escorted them to their quarters, which to the prince's surprise was a row of neat little cottages and not the barracks that they had stayed in previously.

Toby noticed the look on his face, "Yes, no sauna time for us tonight. These are officer quarters. I'm guessing that the officers are now bunked in the barracks while we stay in their houses."

"But that doesn't seem right," said the prince.

"But it is how the system works," replied the guard. "Captain Pike wanted to give up his quarters for your father, but it was short notice and King Adam was able to pull rank to get his way. This time, they had advanced notice and things have already been arranged so we can't really argue. Besides, did you really want to get in the sauna with your grandmother watching?" Toby suggested that they take a walk while the queens got settled.

"Your father asked me to watch over you as if you were one of my own sons. So here's my first bit of fatherly advice for you. Don't be so eager young prince to experience all of the adult pleasures in the world so quickly. I saw you on the stairs back in Betweenstville." Apollo gulped at finding out he had been discovered. "Don't worry. I did my share of spying on lovers out in the haystacks in my day. Do you know what happened when I got too curious about finding out what they were doing?"

"You got caught and had to do extra duty cleaning out the stables?"

"Worse. Diaper duty for the baby that came nine months later. I was barely older than you are now when my first son was born. I wanted to be a master carpenter but had to give up my schooling to join the guard to earn money for my family. You have a lot of responsibility ahead of you. Don't rush things by adding fatherly duties before you are ready."

"How will I know I'm ready?"

"When you meet the right person you will know. Don't listen to your dick like I did when I was your age. Listen to your head and your heart. Even then, they don't always agree. When all three tell you that the moment is right, then you are ready."

"But the sauna was fun and the party at the Halfway Inn looked even better."

"Trust me, they are. But when you are looking for your true love those are not the first places to look. And when you are in those places, you aren't out looking for the maiden who will fit your glass slipper and I can guarantee you that you aren't going to find someone with that dainty of a foot in the common room at the



Halfway Inn. There would be those that might try, but it ain't never going to fit."

Apollo chuckled at the thought.

"There are years of feasting at the sexual banquet ahead of you. Don't spoil the dinner by having dessert before you decide on the main course."

With the mention of food, Toby's stomach let out a loud rumble. "That is enough food for thought. Let's go get ready to get food for our bellies."

Apollo's stomach rumbled in agreement.

Dinner was a semi-formal affair which afforded Captain Pike the opportunity to display the finest talents of his guards. Several gifted musicians serenaded throughout the meal and the cooks dusted off their special occasion cookbooks to find the perfect recipes to showcase the local crops and game. Their attendant was the same young man that had served Apollo and his companions on the previous visit. Captain Pike introduced him as Kadie Guard Jason.

"What is a Kadie Guard?" asked Rose. "Is that something unique to the guard here in Adbalm?"

"Your Majesty," offered Jason, "that is 'K' and 'D' which stands for Kitchen Duty. I believe the guards in your country refer to it as the Kitchen Patrol."

He had similar light exchanges with the other queens. His youthful laugh responded to the things they said. However, when it came time to greet the prince and the others that had been with him before, his face blanched and he went into a stoic professional mode.

Apollo whispered to Toby, "What just happened? Did I just

—continued on page 10

Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

miss something or did we offend him?"

A little louder than he probably should and just enough to carry to the captain's ears, he replied, "He is afraid that we will tell his secret."

"Oh?" asked the captain. "What secret is that?"

Jason got a panicked look on his face. His eyes pleaded with Toby to not say what happened that morning.

"It was nothing," said Toby quickly. "He told us that he wanted to ride away with us."

Realizing what Toby was doing, Apollo added, "He wanted to be the one to discover the cause of the lurking danger that my father felt and be the hero of the day."

"That's no big secret. We all felt that way," replied the captain. "However, Jason, that was bold of you to say something to our guests."

"I know, Captain. But the King and his guards gave me a demonstration of why I am not yet ready to take on an assignment of that magnitude. I made a vow that morning to pay attention to all that my teachers here have to tell me, not just the things I want to hear."

"Captain Toby, if your demonstration had that effect on him, could you share it with others?"

"I'm afraid not. It was a demonstration that was filled with the urgency of the situation and I'm not sure that it could be easily replicated with equal effect."

"Speaking of which," said the captain, "what was the situation back at the capitol?"

The group took turns filling in the tale of the king's trial and eventual marriage to Rondar. At the conclusion of dinner, Captain Pike escorted the queens and their attendants on a tour of the guard post. Toby, Johnny, Cetee and the others accepted a challenge by the officers who had given up their quarters for a friendly volleyball competition. They left to go change, leaving Apollo by himself for the first time in weeks. He couldn't figure out anything else to do so he started helping clear the table.

"Your Majesty, you don't need to do that," offered Jason. "That is my job. Shouldn't you go watch your team play?"

"I will when they are ready to start. Don't you want to watch your team?"

"Of course."

"Well, if I help you, won't you get done faster so we both can watch?"

The two got the tables cleared in record time. When Jason reported to the Kitchen Leader to see if there were other tasks for the two of them to do, the older guard took one

look at who had been helping and dismissed them both with an admonishment to not get into any trouble. Since the game hadn't started yet, Jason and Apollo found a quiet staircase that overlooked the volleyball court and sat down.

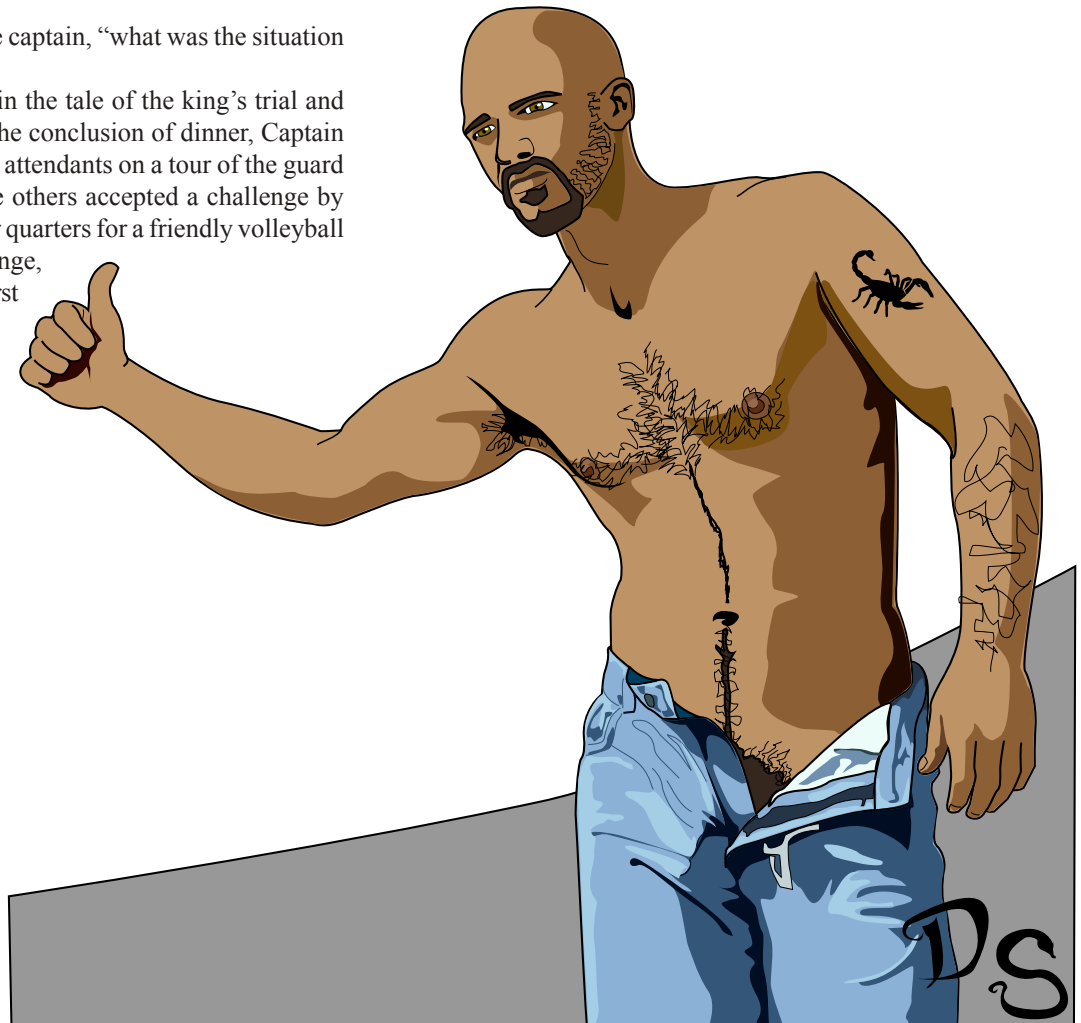
"I want to thank you for not saying what really happened that morning," said Jason.

"I will tell you a secret. On the road, the others said they were embarrassed about how they overreacted. If they said something about what you did, they would have had to say what they did."

"But you lied for me," he said. "And you don't really even know me."

"I'm a prince. I can't lie. It's in the rules somewhere," said Apollo. "Besides, you may not have said it, but you thought it didn't you?"

Jason confessed that he had and if it hadn't been so early and he so sleepy, he probably would have asked to go. "No matter what was going on in my mind that morning," he said, "I meant what I said at dinner. Seeing those swords pointing at me was scary but it made me think that I had been only thinking about myself that morning. Your father's guards were ready to fight for him. I should have too, but I could only think about the inconvenience of having to get up extra early. After that, I vowed to pay attention to all the little things so that I wouldn't do something that stupid again. Like



it or not, guard duty is my last chance to improve myself. I've escaped being killed twice and I don't think I would be lucky a third time."

Apollo got the young guard to explain what he meant. Jason said that when he was little his parents never approved of anything he did. Over time, his father took to physical discipline sugar coated in the guise of 'teaching Jason to act like a man.' In retrospect, he had to agree that some of the things that he did were bad, but he just wanted them to pay attention to him. He had to constantly hide the bruises so he knew he had to leave. When he was about Apollo's age he had already run away several times. The first couple of times his parents did the proper thing and alerted the guards of his disappearance. After the third time, his father said that if Jason walked out of the door on his own two feet, he couldn't expect someone to go looking for him and he could walk back on all fours for all his father cared. The next day, Jason left for school and kept on walking. It was mid-winter and he hadn't planned for the snow that fell that night. He found shelter in a doorway. The snow piled up and his feet went numb. He thought about going back home but then he thought his father would help him warm up by throwing him into the fire. The thought of freezing to death seemed better than what waited for him back home. About midnight, an old, thin man stopped in front of him and encouraged Jason to follow him to proper shelter in exchange for some service that Jason could do for him in the morning. Over the next several months, Jason carried packages between Faginelli and many of the wealthy houses in town. He never knew what was in the packages and was told that he was better off not knowing.

One night, he was stopped by a guard after he had made a delivery. He was nervous about being late back to Faginelli's house because he had a bundle of cash from the payment of the delivery and Faginelli was furious with his boys if they were late on the return trip. The guard recognized Jason and insisted on walking Jason back to his home to give his parents a lecture about sending their child out after curfew. It was hard to say which one was more surprised to learn that Jason's parents had moved. The guard refused to let Jason leave and took him to his home and became his guardian. A month later, Jason was on his way to school when Faginelli found him and lured him into an alley. Jason didn't have Faginelli's cash with him so the older man began to beat him. The guard had been following Jason waiting for something like this and charged in. Faginelli drew his sword at the sound of the approaching guard and stabbed Jason. Jason woke up weeks later in the hospital. He learned that his guardian had killed Faginelli but had died of infection from his own wounds. Jason enlisted in the guard to help other kids learn from his mistakes. "And then look at me. At my first real encounter with greatness, I forget all protocol and make a total fool of myself in front of the King."

"I wouldn't say you made a total fool of yourself," offered Apollo. "Even with the weapons pointed at you, you didn't drop the food."

Jason laughed. "True enough I guess."

"Thank you for sharing your story. I have never met someone who has had that kind of misfortune. I didn't know that there were real people like your father and Faginelli in the realm. I always



thought they were just characters in a book. That must have hurt to find that your parents had left you behind."

"Not really. Or I should say, it was nothing I hadn't already been resolved to. They had made it clear that they didn't want me. I had learned to not want them. So, in the end, I guess we got what we both wanted."

The sound of the volleyball game broke the moment so the two of them wandered down to the volleyball court. They worked their way to the front of the crowd in time to watch Johnny fly up into the air to stop an errant ball from soaring out of bounds.

"Hey! That's cheating," shouted one of the post guards. "You can't fly in a volleyball game."

"It's not!" retorted the faerie. "I looked at the rules while we were changing and they didn't say anything about flying. The rules didn't say you couldn't so by extension it must be permitted."

"He got you there, Tony," said one of his teammates. "You jealous?"

"You shouldn't be," added another teammate. "I know you can get your legs higher in the air than that."

"Hey! Whose side are you on?" asked Tony.

"Yours of course. But I keep thinking about the fact that the faerie promised a blow job to the losing team. I know what kind of blow job you give and I've heard that the faerie is the hurricane of blow jobs."

"Wait a minute," said Tony. "He said it was a blow job for the winners."

"I'm an equal opportunity faerie. Serving 19-14!"

The guards tried to quickly react to the incoming ball but Johnny's aim was perfect. The ball went directly into the unguarded corner. With the next serve, Johnny added his special spin that caused the ball to fly out of bounds as soon as Tony hit it. With that win, Jason and Apollo learned that each team had won a game.

"Since the teams are even," suggested Johnny, "I'm tired of holding back. I want to play a game of faerieball."

"What's that?" was an almost unison response.

-continued on page 12

Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

"All of you get on that side of the net. I stay on this side by myself. I get the same three hits that you all get, which of course means I have to be able to touch the ball twice in a row."

"There ain't no way you could match us," said Tony.

Johnny zipped down to flight size. He zoomed across the net, expanded to half human size, pulled Tony's shorts down and then zipped back to the other side all between Tony's "no way" and "match us."

"What to bet?" asked Johnny as Tony realized that his shorts were around his knees.

With that, the game was on. The first couple of points went quickly to Johnny as the combined eleven players realized that more is not necessarily a good thing. They dropped their ranks down to eight on the court at any given time and caught up to Johnny. Everyone gasped in amazement as Johnny zipped around, popping to large size to hit the ball, shrink and zip to where he had set himself up for the next shot. Ultimately, the guards and Cetee didn't have a chance.

Apollo and Jason rushed out to the court and joined in the big congratulatory hug. "That was fantastic. I didn't know you could do that," said an excited prince.

"That? That was nothing," said Johnny, whose breathless speech gave lie to his nonchalant attitude. "If you think that was something, you should go to the Balls in the Air Festival where it is faerie against faerie. The current champion is named Thunder because he is so fast that a thunder boom can be heard when he moves. Still, after a workout like that I'm parched. I'm going to need some man juice to replenish my strength." Addressing anyone in listening range, "Who wants to be first in line to help save a faerie?"

Jason raised his hand. Johnny looked at him and said thank you but that he is allergic to virgin sperm. Everyone laughed as Jason blushed when he said "It's not from last of trying."

Patrick and Stane got a gleam in their eyes. "I think we can help on that." They put their arms around Jason and led him to the locker room.

"Johnny," said Queen Holly walking out to the court.

"Grandmother, I didn't know you were watching. I thought you were with the ladies."

"You know that the discussion of fashion tips of the elite bores me."

"As if a natural beauty such as yourself would need to know anything about something like that."

"Flatterer. Besides, I haven't missed watching you play faerieball since you started playing over a hundred years ago and I'm not going to start now. From what I just heard, are you telling that old tale that you need a teaspoon of man juice to regain your strength? If I have told you once, I've told you a hundred times, it is a tablespoon that you need. No wonder you always look so malnourished. After a demonstration like that, I order you to get at least a cup before you go to bed. And if you can get two cups, that would be better since your Spin-Flip-Split play was far under your standards. I can only guess it is because you have not been taking care of yourself."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Johnny brightened at what his grandmother had just ordered him to do.



Tony and his teammates escorted Johnny off the court. Apollo heard them boasting about how many times each of them could cum in order to help Johnny fill his dietary needs.

Cetee offered his arm to the queen to escort her back to her quarters. "That should keep him busy for a couple of hours."

"I'm hoping it will be longer than that. If you please, I would like a word alone with my nephew."

"Certainly."

Queen Holly gave the prince a similar talk as had Toby earlier in the evening. She concluded by saying, "You and Johnny are dangerously close to crossing the line of proper Faerie Godparent relations. If you go any further, I will have to assign you a different Efgee."

"But..."

"No 'buts' about it. I know it won't work to try to put the snakes back in the pants now that they're loose, but I am ending any new lessons of Johnny's Sex Magic classes. When you are truly ready, you will find a human teacher who will show you the magic of sex as it should be experienced the first time."

Holly kissed him on the forehead. "And next time you go sneaking down a staircase to spy on adults having sex, remember to turn invisible."

"You know about that?"

"Who doesn't?" With that, she kissed him again and sent him off to bed.

After breakfast, the company departed. When they reached the edge of town, Queen Holly took her leave of her sisters and headed east toward her home while the rest continued north. The remaining

evenings of the journey were filled with the meet and greet parties as had been the case in Betweenstville. Apollo was surprised since his grandmother and he had often passed through these same towns with hardly saying a word to anyone. He realized that his grandmother was different. She had always been shut away in a carriage and then rushed inside to her quarters, all the while complaining about the lack of luxury. Now, she seemed to be enjoying things and people came flocking to be around her. He liked this new version of his grandmother. This matched Apollo's vision of what his mother must have been like when she married his father.

Nearly two weeks after leaving Alphatown, they finally saw the castle spires of Resquad. The company was greeted at the city gates with a royal fanfare. Children presented bouquets of flowers to the queens and their ladies. The palace guards led them on a 'triumphant return' parade through the streets of town. When they arrived at the castle, they were informed that King William requested their presence in the Small Reception Hall. He had a guest that was eager to meet with Lord Cthdêhâssêsbüt. Rose sent word to her husband that they would join him as soon as they washed the dirt of the road from their faces.

In a half hour's time, the group assembled in Rose's quarters and proceeded to join King William and his guest. The Small Reception Hall was a large wood paneled room with large windows that allowed the king to entertain a guest with less than full formality that would be required in the marble covered Throne Room. King William and his guest were sitting in the chairs by the windows that looked out upon the Garden of the Queens. The two men rose at their entrance. "Ah, my wife! Welcome home. You have been missed."

"It is good to be home. Thank you for the welcome we received at the gates. You have not done that since my first visit to my family's home after we were married."

"I believe that you ordered me to never throw an unexpected parade at you. You never wanted to be seen at less than perfection."

"And I still don't." Rose held a finger to her husband's lips to stop him from responding. "I forgive you as the moment reminded me of the first time I arrived. I had never been out of Rysbal and I came here to meet the man my parents contracted to be my husband. I was nervous and the greeting made me feel like I was special."

"And you still are special, my dear."

"Excuse me for interrupting your reunion," said Apollo, "but your guest looks like he wants to say something."

"I have never been so insulted in my life!" The man appeared to be only in his late twenties so Apollo wondered how many times that really meant. The gold threads in his red robes flickered in the afternoon sun as he gestured wildly. "I, Father Fenton Phillip, Fifth Father of the Temple of the Phoenix, have been kept waiting for days for someone I was told who would be here upon my arrival. Now, I am ignored while you have a family reunion and I have yet to be introduced to Lord Horses Butt."

"Excuse me, young priest," said Cetee trying to puff himself up in a similar manner, "but my name is Lord Cthdêhâssêsbüt. You would do well to note the proper pronunciation before attempting it again. I can not in good conscience apologize for your wait. My

communication with the First Father of your order was very specific in stating that we would be traveling during the summer and to have his emissary arrive after the first of next month to ensure that we would be here to receive him. The fact that we are having this conversation two weeks prior to that should be an indication of our intent of honoring our obligations."

"Please forgive us," said Rose. Her words were calm but Apollo noticed that her white dress had suddenly developed little flashes of red that indicated her true feelings. "We have been on the road for the past two weeks and only just arrived. I have not had a chance to have a private moment with my husband and we were directed to meet here in this informal chamber with no indication that this would be a State occasion. If I had known that I would be meeting the Fifth Father of Temple of the Phoenix, I would insisted that we meet with the full court in attendance so that we could accord you the full honors that your rank should receive. Now, being too late to remove the stink of a bad first impression, shall we move on to supper where we can chat about the hardships of being on the road?" She held out her arm to the priest who accepted it in an automatic response. She led him out of the room toward the dining hall.

"Who was that woman?" asked William. "What have you done with my wife?"

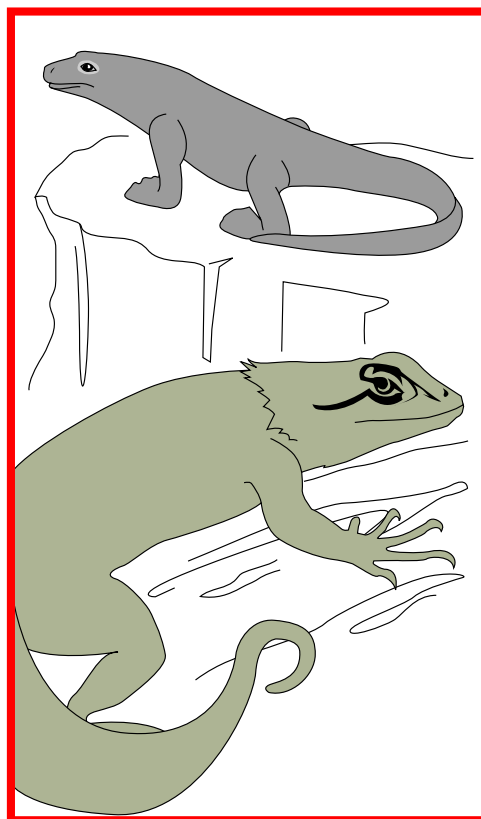
The others laughed at his confusion but assured him that this indeed was the same woman who left for a vacation with her sisters.

During dinner Apollo asked Father Fenton what a phoenix was.

With great indignation, "You brought me all the way here from the Temple and you don't even know what a phoenix is?"

"Forgive my student's ignorance," offered Cetee. "I only know enough on the subject to recount the legend that the phoenix dies in

-continued on page 14



Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

flames and from the ashes a new phoenix is born. As the phoenix is proving to be an omen in his life, I felt it best for him to hear the truth from a knowledgeable source and not cloud his mind with the legend. I know many things about the early tales of our country but I have heard naught else of the phoenix.”

“The part of the legend where the phoenix dies and is reborn is only partially true. The phoenix returns to the fires of its birth at Mount Phoenix after it has been in battle with its mortal enemies, the great dragons. When it lands on the molten lava, its feathers return to the flames of their creation and the phoenix sinks into the lava. After three days, the phoenix bursts forth, renewed and healed. Some of the lava dripping off its tender new skin sticks and forms the new fiery feathers.”

“And what does your order do, Father?” asked Rose.

“We feed it and nurse it back to health when it is injured.”

“I thought you just said that it sunk into the lava when it was injured,” said Apollo.

“Um...that is only for the serious near fatal injuries with the great dragons. It’s the lesser injuries that we tend.”

“Where did the phoenix come from?” asked Apollo.

“For that, we would have to go back to the beginning of time,” said Father Fenton. He said that when Zeus and Hera were married, they called on their friend Gaia to make a suitable place to raise their children. Gaia hadn’t given them anything for their wedding so this was the perfect gift for her to make. She collected ether from the cosmos and created a new world. When she finished, she showed it to the newlyweds but told them that the world was still too hot. They would have to wait for it to cool before settling.

Zeus, being eager to start his dynasty, siphoned off some of the heat and created a huge ball of light that he hung in the sky. Gaia discovered this and pointed out that his sun was going to burn everything under its light if it shone all the time. He harnessed the sun to his chariot and started driving it across the sky so that its light never stayed bright enough on any one spot long enough to cause damage. When his son, Apollo, was born he turned the duties over to him.

Hera was also eager to get started with her family, so she too siphoned off some of the heat and created a ball of light that she hung in the sky. Once Zeus had his sun to the other side of the world, this moon gave off a soft glow. When the world eventually became populated, they got used to the moon’s pale nighttime light. Unfortunately, Hera hadn’t siphoned off as much energy as her husband and the moon began to fade to nothing. Zeus offered to let her take some of the sun’s energy to recharge her moon. Over a two week period, she started to fill it back up to its full strength, only to watch it begin to fade again. When Dion was born she entrusted him to keep the moon charged.

When the world was cool enough to walk around on, Gaia surveyed the new land. The rapid cooling created by the siphoning off of the heat had caused great buckles to form in the land. In other places, the land caved in and made deep holes. Her tears flowed as she looked about at the ruin that had been made of her beautiful world. Soon the holes filled up and became the oceans of the world. When Zeus and Hera arrived, they loved both the land and the waters. Gaia laughed at her foolish insecurity. Walking around, her

bare feet found the one final hot spot left on the world. The pain caused a tear to fall, which landed on that spot. It sprang to life and leapt up in the air. That is the first recorded moment of the phoenix.

“I have heard many tales of the origins of our world,” said Cetee, “but I have never heard that one. How old a tale is that?”

“It dates back to the very beginning of your country, nearly five hundred years ago. Soon after the world was cool, Zeus and Hera made clay figures for their world and Gaia breathed them into life. These were the first citizens of Rysbal, Riangler, and Adbalm.”

“And what of the world before then?” asked Susan.

“There was nothing. Only the heat of the cooling planet.”

“Fascinating, since my mother was over nine hundred years old.”

“Impossible. Only the gods existed before then.”

“Father Fenton,” asked Cetee, “what of the citizens of Wobnair who existed before the three counties were formed?”

“I can see your minds are filled with illusion and fantasy. There is no room for the light of truth that I have to offer.” He rose from his chair and started to head out of the dining hall.

“Wait. I want to know what a Phoenix of Water is,” said Apollo.

“And if the Phoenix of Earth has hatched.”

Father Fenton spun around quickly. “I thought you said you knew nothing of the phoenix. How do you know about those? Only a priest of our order knows about those.”

“I believe I told you that the phoenix was an important omen in this boy’s life,” said Cetee, beaming at his student’s ability to ask just the right question to force a teacher to reveal something that they hadn’t planned to teach. “We learned of their existence from my father, and he from his father-in-law. But we truly know little else.”

“I am not allowed to say more on those. Only a Fourth Father or higher is allowed to speak of them outside of our order.”

“Can you make arrangements to have your First Father send a Father of sufficient rank to us when your return to your order?” asked Cetee.

“I must. Once they learn of this, they will need to learn all you know in order to assess the damage control of the premature disclosure of this knowledge.”

“Can they tell me about a Crystal Phoenix as well?” asked Apollo.

All color drained from the priest’s face. “Only the First Father has knowledge of the greatest secrets of our order. He has said that none of us are old enough to understand what he has to tell us. Even Second Father Phinius, who turned one hundred before I left said that he has never heard the inner secrets.

“How old is First Father?” asked Cetee.

“No one knows for certain. He has always been there. First Father has said that he will only tell the secrets to the one who bears the mark of the phoenix on his arm.”

“Like this?” Apollo used his magic to turn his sleeve invisible.

“You? You’re the one?” Father Fenton suddenly dropped to his knees and bowed at the prince’s feet. “I never thought this day would come in my lifetime.”

“What do you mean?”

“It is only the realization of one of the oldest verses that a priest

must memorize. *'Watch for the human who bears the mark, the phoenix will be there to prove he is king. With Phoenix of Fire and Water, with Earth and with Air he will light the spark that will end the long Winter and turn it to Spring. When the Four are together, a fifth needs be born. The Crystal Phoenix will rise at the sound of a horn.'*

Father Fenton got up. "Please excuse me. I must ready myself to be gone at first light. First Father will need to know of this immediately."

"Can we expect a visit from the First Father in the near future?" asked William.

"Certainly not. First Father never leaves the Temple. Anyone who seeks something from him must come to him." With that Father Fenton left the room.

"Well, that was certainly a rude exit line," said Rose.

"Rude or not, I'm proud of you, dear," said William. "Your dress has hardly changed colors this evening. The patterns are much more subdued than when you left. That young priest's attitude has been enough to try my patience these past few days. The vacation must have been good for you."

"I will say, sister," said Susan, "you did seem to have more control before we returned. Are you sure you can handle being back?"

"Certainly. That pompous priest is nothing that I haven't learned to handle with the nobles. But I do wonder about what is causing this seemingly lack of control. I was fine when I went to my chambers. I felt a bit dizzy when I sat down to brush my hair. I stubbed my toe and that's when I first noticed a color change."

The sisters looked at each other and as one said, "The box!"

"Yes! It is on my vanity," Rose signalled to a page and asked them to request Baroness Hilda join her at her chambers. She rose and kissed her husband on the cheek. "Please forgive my departure. I have some unfinished business that my mother left behind. I shan't sleep tonight until the matter is disposed of."

While the others filled King William in on the details of the happenings of the past couple of weeks, Apollo excused himself to take a walk in the Garden of the Queens.

"Do you want some company?" asked Johnny.

"No, thank you. I just want a couple of minutes alone in the garden to tell mother about father and Rondar."

As soon as he stepped out of the door that led into the garden, the aroma of the evening blossoms captured his senses. He took a deep breath and let his mind imagine that his mother was holding him in her arms; her perfume rich with rose and lavender. He sat on the bench by where they placed her ashes and was surprised to see that her iris was blooming this late in the season.

"They do that, you know, when someone they love is thinking loving thoughts at them."

"BeBeep! I didn't see you there."

"Comes in advantage more times then not," said the toad. "Sorry for startling you that way, but I have something to say to you and it's not often that you are out here alone. It's not that I don't trust the others, but if someone finds out I've talked to you, I will be a dead toad. So the fewer that know, the better for me."

"What is it?"

"You are in danger. The evil that once lived in this castle has

returned."

"You mean Black Bart?"

"Worse. Belladonna. She has vowed to destroy the House of Charming."

"We already know that. We know that she is an old peddler woman who probably sold my mother a papel sedoipen fruit."

"That is the least of her gifts. She is a mistress of illusion and all magic of darkness. She may have been cursed to be the ancient crone forever, but she can use her magic to make herself look like anyone she wants. But whatever the illusion, she will still have to walk like the crone she is. You are a bright student. Find someone who can teach you the magic of illusion so that you can pierce the disguise and unmask her before she has a chance to kill you."

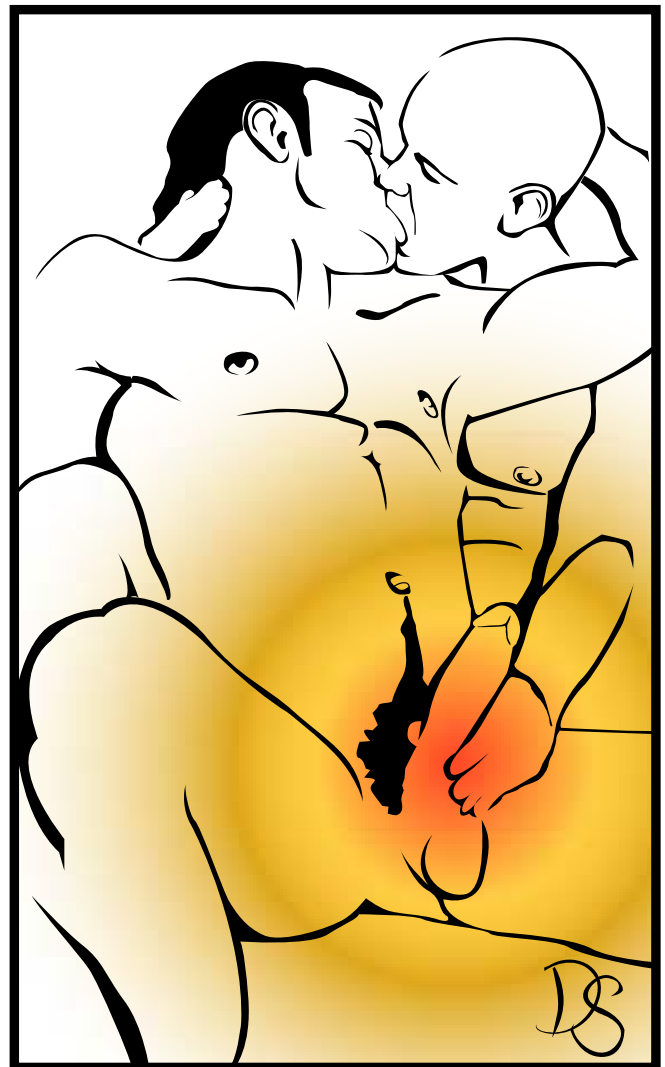
"But what do we do until I can learn?"

"If you suspect someone, bring them here. I can tell you in a heartbeat if it's her."

"You can see through illusion? Can you teach me?"

"No and no," said the toad. "But I do know when my wife is near me, no matter how she disguises herself."

With that BeBeep jumped into the fountain. When Apollo looked into the water, the toad was gone.



The Gabby Diaries: The Remodel - Part 1

By Gabby

Samhain last year was hard for me. As I sat in circle it felt like Grams and Uncle Phil were sitting beside me. The feeling lingered in the days that followed. That weekend I was in a very contemplative mood so I stayed home and didn't go to The Cave with everyone else. Once I had the house to myself, I sat on the floor in front of Grams's old overstuffed chair and put my head on the arm as if resting against her leg. I imagined her hands ruffling my hair saying, "You silly boy! Why are you mourning me when I've been gone eleven years now? You have your friends. Go celebrate life!" I got up and wandered the house for a while. I went up to the room where Phil had built his model railroad. I left the overhead lights off, letting the beams of the steam locomotive light up the miniature landscape. The pleasure faded as I started thinking of all of the lonesome whistle train songs Phil loved to sing so I continued my wandering of the house. The gloom inside my heart darkened as I looked into the room where Phil's hospital bed had been stored. Everywhere I wandered in the house I found signs of the former residents of the house. The things I had kept just as they had been when Grams and Phil were alive. I was the custodian of their home and somehow, in keeping their things there would always be a connection to them. But for some reason, that evening, the connection was feeling like a noose.

As I continued to wander the halls of the house I found the little signs of Peter and the others. But that's what they were - little signs. I looked around and realized that this was Grams' house. It wasn't really my house and it certainly wasn't reflective of the four people who called this home. The more I looked, the more I saw of the things that really made the house seem old like the orange shag carpet in the rec room and the pink tiles in one bathroom and avocado green in another. In the dim light, I used to be able to imagine what the rooms were like when mom's family filled every room with childish energy. But tonight, I just saw the faded ghosts that begged to be given a proper burial so that they could finally rest in peace. I went up to our meditation room, turned on the fountain, lit a candle and sat in its flickering light trying to understand what it all meant.

I heard the sound of a car door outside and then the front door. It must have been later than I thought. I waited in the candlelight and soon Peter asked if they could join me. They had gotten to the bar, found that it was packed and decided that the universe said they were supposed to be home with me. I invited them in and told them that I had come to a realization that I had been hanging on to something that didn't exist anymore and that it was time to move on and bring the house into the modern world. I will give my partners credit for not saying "It's about time," but I could see it in their eyes.

We spent time during the next week making a list of all the things that needed updating starting with the house itself. Don't get me wrong, Grams built a wonderful house. But in the course of the additions to the house, systems like the heat, plumbing and electricity were all patch jobs. If you got the temperature just right in the family room, the lower bedrooms would become an icebox while the master bedroom turned into a sauna. If you were in the upper bathroom taking a shower and someone flushed a toilet in the

lower one you were suddenly without water. And the electric wiring wasn't designed for all of the modern devices. It was not uncommon for us to overload a circuit. Then there are many repair jobs like where the brothers got into a brawl and some holes mystically appeared in the walls. Grams didn't buy the mystic story, nor did he buy the supplies needed to repair the damage. Jeff and Bruce did the repair themselves but you could see the imperfect patches.

We invited Aunt Becky to dinner one evening to discuss our ideas. Of all of Grams's children, Becky was the only one who took a serious interest in his construction company. She learned to work most of the equipment and eventually married one of the foremen. When Grams retired, she took over the company. Over the years she had built up a reputation as being one of the best at remodeling older homes and I knew that she would be the only one I would want touching her family's old home. She walked around the house and made notes about other structural things that should be inspected. When she finished she told us that for the scope of what we wanted to do the best plan would be to totally gut the house down to the studs, pull out all of the old and then start fresh as if the house had just been built. We agreed and she said she should get back to us with some estimates.

With that process started we turned to what we wanted to do with the interiors. We discussed the key things we wanted and didn't want. I started with the fact that people always said the house felt comfortable so while I wanted things updated I didn't want rooms that were so upscale that people didn't feel like they could touch anything. Peter went for "easy to clean." He doesn't hate housework but said that takes time away from having fun. Aeric contributed that he wanted color. He hates walking into a house that



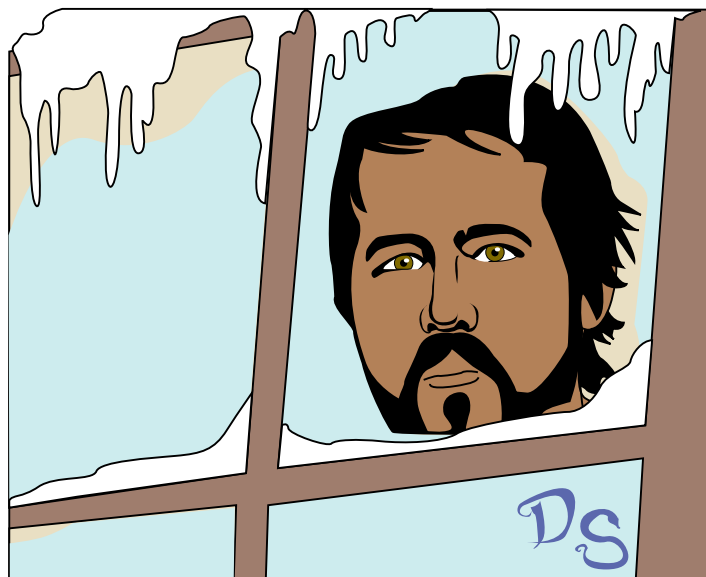
is all lifeless beige or stark white. I agreed with a condition that we didn't overdo the color to the point where people walk into a room saying "My, this is a lovely green room." Jim's only real comment was that he didn't want us to sacrifice quality because of price. He agreed that the house shouldn't look like one of those overpriced designer rooms on *Copy Cat This for Less*. He had those rooms for a while and it never felt comfortable. But, he added, that doesn't mean we have to settle for the types of stuff we see on *Design Your Entire House for \$1,000*. He told us that he had a good friend in the design business and invited him to join us for dinner a couple of days later.

My first impression as David walked through the door was less than favorable. What I saw was an older gentleman in his late 50's and impeccably dressed in a tailored suit. I could imagine him being the kind of designer who insisted that you only use Louis XIV furniture if you could prove that Louis XIV himself sat in it. After the basic "Cubby meet David" introductions, he asked to be allowed to wander around the house to get a sense of the scope of the project before sitting down to talk about specifics. We sat in the living room and heard him opening doors upstairs and eventually heading to the basements and on to the senior retreat.

I watched the clock and it was a good half hour before he joined us and we sat down for dinner. His first question threw me off. I expected something like what style we wanted, but instead he asked if I could pick any designer from television which one would be my first choice. I said that there were several that I liked and that I had always thought that it would be fun to see a show like *Designs Three Ways (but you only get to pick one)* but it would be the various shows competing instead of local designers. Peter said that he thought it would be fun to do a reality show type elimination where the designers voted on which one of their shows best suited the needs of the homeowner. Jim offered that it should be a benefit for charities and that if the designers voted the same way as the homeowner they got money for their charity. I should have realized something was up but fell into this hook, line and sinker and before too long we had a remodel fantasy that involved just about every show on MyHouse TV that we could think of.

If his first question surprised me, the question at the conclusion of dinner stopped me in my tracks. "When would you like to start filming?" That's when I learned that I had been set up. Jim had neglected to include in his introductions that his friend was the head of MyHouse TV. Jim had planned to surprise me with a Yule gift of a remodeled kitchen care of the cast of *I Inherited This House, Now What?* When my partners sat down to plot the surprise with David they mentioned that we were going to gut the house and start from scratch. David mentioned that his network was looking for a way to do a big sweeps week special that combined a couple of their top shows in a single project and they were off and running in the grand plot.

The day before Yule, David returned to the house. With him was Cindy, the host of *Welcome to My Home*, the show that features creative things that average people have done with their home décor. I had mentioned that I loved how she seemed to put the homeowners at ease. David agreed and felt that she would be the perfect host for



this since she didn't have a design team that would be competing. They brought a small crew to start recording our thoughts about the design. Cindy lived up to her reputation and is as gracious in person as she appears on television. She is shorter than I thought but after meeting us, she reached into her bag and decided which shoes she needed and suddenly she was eye to eye with us. This footage was for the design teams so they would all see the same thing. The following morning, one of the camera men, Gregg, came back to start a couple of days of taking the "before" photos that would be used throughout the series.

With all the focus on Cindy the night before, I hadn't really had a chance to pay attention to Gregg. We all agreed that he was a cute young otter, probably in his mid-20's. Aeric was the only one of us that had a chance to talk to him and said that he had a great sense of humor. Gregg showed up in a faded pair of jeans and a flannel shirt that was open enough to reveal the deep pelt of fur on his upper chest. He accepted a cup of coffee but didn't say much else before diving into his work. My partners all took off to their daily routine leaving me alone with Gregg. About 10:00, Jim called from his downtown office he uses for his various foundations to say that the storm was starting to move in. I looked out our window and it wasn't snowing yet. The forecast had predicted a couple of inches. A little while later, Aeric called and said they had updated things to say we were going to get a blizzard and he was heading home. By the time he got to the house the snow had started to pile up. Between the two of us, we convinced Gregg that he should check out of his motel and settle into our guest quarters. The winning argument was that the motel had no food service and if he was going to be stuck inside, he might as well be at the house where there was ample food and he could keep working. Aeric drove him over to the motel to pick up his stuff. While they were gone, I talked to both Jim and Peter. Jim was frustrated with the slow traffic so he bailed out and stopped at Jack and Gil's and was going to wait out the storm there. Peter decided that he was going to stay at the clinic to make sure the animals had care.

It took Aeric and Gregg nearly two hours to go the motel and back. It seemed like an eternity to me since the motel was only a couple of miles away. Aeric called to say that they stopped for some extra groceries but were getting close so I went outside to clear

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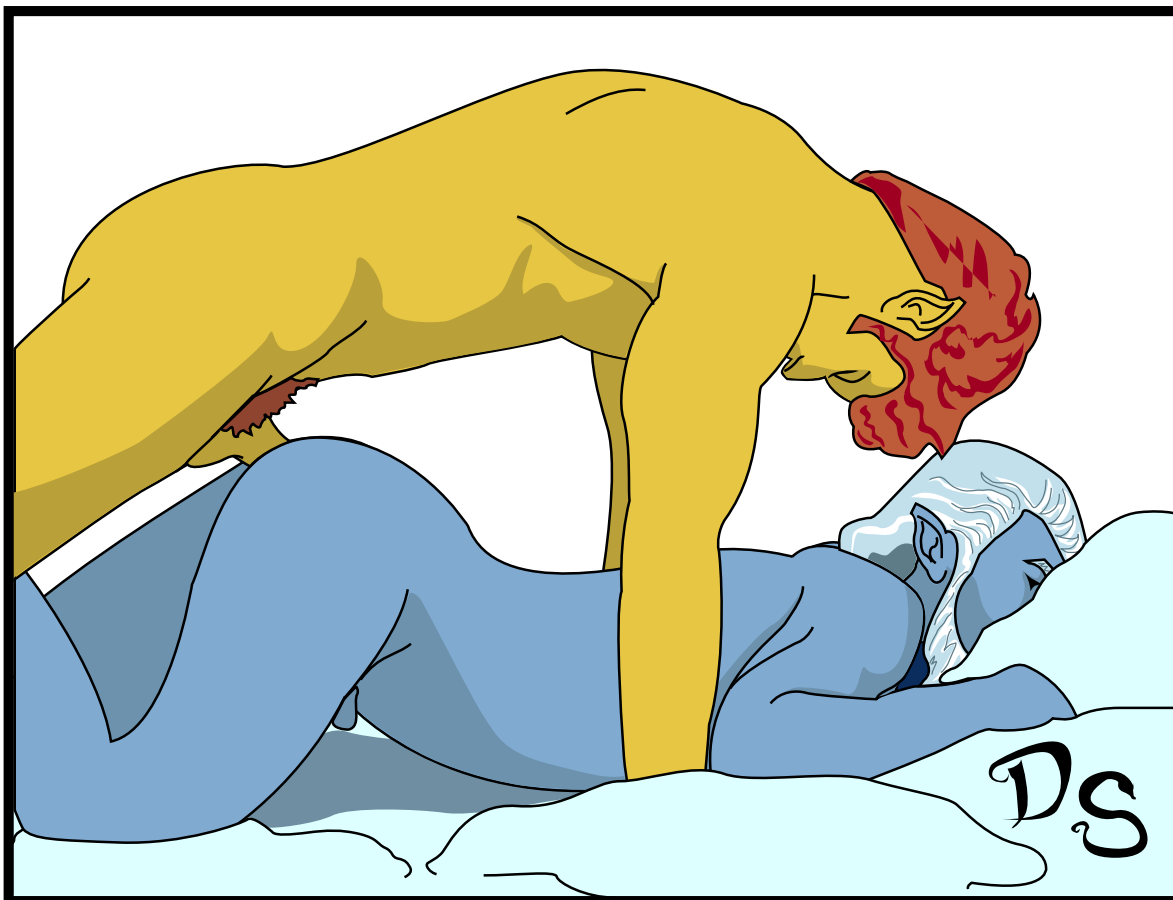
The Gabby Diaries—continued

away the worst of the drift on the driveway so Aerio could pull into Peter's space in the garage. Even with his pick-up, Aerio got stuck in the middle of the street so we spent a while shoveling the tops off the drifts so he could plow a path into the driveway. By the time we got inside we were chilled to the bone and were so covered in snow we looked like walking snowmen. When I got my coat off I went into automatic pilot and started to strip off the wet clothes. Gregg's eyes got big and I realized my faux pas and apologized. I said that we normally are a very casual household and nudity was not uncommon. He said not to worry since he had several boyfriends that were nudists even if he wasn't himself. Then he realized his own faux pas that he had just implied that he was gay and tried to cover it by trying to changing it to be just "friends." We assured him that he was in a gay household so he didn't need to cover up his sexuality. I finished stripping off my wet clothes and helped Gregg carry his stuff down to the senior retreat. Before I left, Gregg thanked me for being myself and getting nude. He said that several of his last boyfriends had called him a prude for not stripping and maybe his coming here was just the thing he needed to work on overcoming his shyness. As he talked he stripped down to his underwear. He had a moment of hesitation as he removed that final layer revealing his hard on. In the confessional moment before me I followed my instincts and didn't call attention to it. Instead I asked what had changed his mind. He opened one of his suitcases and pulled out the recent issue of *Bare Bears*. He opened it to the pictures from last summer's gathering at BareButt Mountain. He

said that he kept looking at this and said that he wished he could be that free and have that kind of fun. Since he was here in the house with some of those guys, he felt that he should take that as a sign and that maybe his wish would be granted. I gave him a quick naked hug saying "Welcome to the naked family." I left him to get settled.

On my way upstairs I stopped in the kitchen to get a pot of chili started. I let Hamlet out to go to the bathroom. He took one look at the snow and looked at me as if I was crazy. I finally got him to go out the door but I had the distinct impression that he felt that if he had to go outside, then I should be joining him. When he came in he made sure to shake off the snow in my direction. I went upstairs and took a quick shower. When I headed back downstairs I grabbed Peter's heavy bathroom for Gregg to wear. We may be a family of nudists but I hate being cold and figured that our guest might want some form of warmth while lounging around. Aerio had a roaring fire going and was stretched out with his head on Hamlet's back. Lady Macbeth was curled up on his stomach. Gregg joined us but something seemed wrong. I figured that the storm was starting to get to our guest from Florida but decided to wait until he said something. He accepted the robe and sat down so he could stare at the fire.

After dinner, Aerio went upstairs to play on the computer. Once again, I was left alone with Gregg. As we sat in front of the fire I could tell he was struggling with something. After several times where it looked like he was going to say something I decided the best course of action was to say that it looked like he needed a hug.



He accepted. What started as a basic hug turned into Niagara Falls as whatever he was holding inside came out as a flood of tears. Once the tears stopped, we took off our wet robes and I held him flesh to flesh. He said that when he got to the motel the night before he had tried to call his lover, Adam, but got no answer. He had been distracted all day because he still hadn't had any contact. He had tried his work number but they told him that his lover took a vacation day. When he checked his email when he got back to the house there was a "Dear John" letter waiting for him. Adam had gotten tired of Gregg always be on the road and decided he needed an in-town lover that would always be around. I asked how that made him feel. He said on the one hand he had come to expect it since if the lover didn't dump him because he was a prude, they dumped him because he wasn't around. What hurt him the most was that when he left for this assignment Adam was all lovey dovey saying how he would miss him and how he looked forward to his return on Christmas Eve and then he had to break things off via an email.

We talked for hours. I pointed out that I didn't think Adam really loved Gregg. I said I thought that he was in love with the idea of being in love. If being a camera man for shows that are produced on the road was important to Gregg and Adam truly loved him, then Adam would have accepted that as part of the relationship. He said he would think about it and we settled into a peaceful silence. As we snuggled I noticed that Gregg was getting hard. I asked what he was thinking. He said that he had been thinking about the sex with Adam, or more truthfully the lack of sex in recent months. He should have realized that Adam was getting satisfaction somewhere else. His hand was wandering on my chest and occasionally brushed the head of my cock, which was starting to stretch further up my belly so he brushed it more often. He gave me a kiss and grabbed my cock. Just as suddenly he backed away apologizing that he was forgetting that I had a lover who might walk in on us. I explained the relationships going on in the house and if he didn't feel comfortable with the possibility of someone joining us then we could go down to his room to be alone. He decided that if a new Gregg was to blossom in this experience he was going to have to go with the moment. His passion was short lived as the excitement of doing something "naughty" caused him to cum quickly. We cuddled and watched the last of the flames in the fireplace dwindle down to embers. He thanked me for the evening and said that he now realized that the break up with Adam may have been just the kick in the butt he needed to jump start his life. He went downstairs to send his reply to Adam's note.

I went upstairs and to no surprise found Aeric curled up in Peter's and my bed. He asked how Gregg was doing. He had been about to join us but said the conversation had been pretty intense so he decided to not interrupt us. I said that Gregg had some things to work through but that he was on the road to recovery. He gave me the good night kisses from Peter and Jim. I gave him everything the two of them would have expected in return and then I gave him everything he wanted from me.

We spent the better part of the next day shoveling. We got the worst of the drifts in the street whittled down so Aeric could get his truck moving. By mid-afternoon, he headed out to pick up Peter and Jim and bring them home. While he was gone, Gregg and I continued shoveling and cut a clear path to the hot tub. After a day of shoveling I knew that a simple hot shower was not going to be enough. The sun had been out most of the day, so with its help and the energy of shoveling, I had long

ago taken off my coat and sweater and had just a t-shirt on. I think I shocked Gregg when I suggested that we strip and make snow faeries. He wasn't too sure about that idea. When the rest of the family arrived home, I pouted and told them that Gregg didn't want to make snow faeries, so we did what any group ofimps would do – we threw him in the snow and then proceeded to jump in the snow ourselves. I think my favorite moment was when the five of us stood in a ring and then fell backwards and made a faerie star. Gregg said his friends would never believe he was doing this. Jim ran inside, got his camera and took some pictures. We piled into the hot tub for a well deserved soak.

I saw Hamlet and Lady Macbeth sitting at the patio door staring at us while we were playing in the snow. The look on their faces said that they though we were crazy. We probably were but it was fun.

The following weeks were busy. We had to put all the holiday decorations away so the house would look "normal" for the first show. Then came the various designers from several of the "clear out the junk" shows. The plan is for them to come in first to help get things sorted and thinned out. They each picked a room to design but would work with the winning design team to make sure colors flowed and all that could stuff.

Over President's Day weekend, Cindy and Gregg came back out to film the official opening of the series where she sat down with us to discuss our dreams for the remodel. We wandered through the house talking about each room. When we got down to the Senior Retreat I had a huge shock. Waiting inside was my mom and dad, Aunt Becky and all of the rest of my aunts and uncles. There were even a couple of the former boarders from when Grams had empty nest syndrome and used the empty rooms to run a boarding house for kids going to the nearby college. Cindy interviewed them all as they shared their memories of what the house had been like in its heyday.

Watching and listening to all my family talk, the scale of what we were doing sunk in. Up until then, it seemed like a fantasy. But this was these people's home for many years and I was about to make it disappear. Mom came over to me and said that her parents would be proud of me. They always said that for a house to be a home, it had to live and breathe with the owners. If it didn't change once in a while, it probably was as dead as the personalities of the people inside. She asked if there was anything she could do to help get things ready. I said yes and yelled to have everyone follow me upstairs. We went to the infamous junk room that collects everything. I went in and started bringing out boxes that Grams had carefully labeled; one for each of her children. Inside each were report cards, school art that had once been displayed on the refrigerator, and all those lost treasures from their childhood. Cindy concluded her taping with "Well, that takes care of six boxes. Now what are we going to do with the rest?"

Stay tuned for next issue when Cindy says, "I didn't realize he was so big!"

Body Scrubs

By Beast

One of the associations of Imbolc is of water, of the rivers and streams starting to move under the ice—emblematic of the loosening of Winter's grip on the world.

Bridget, who is the Deity most associated with this time, is the Goddess of Inspiration, Healing, Creativity, and Smithcraft. Her sacred healing wells dot the countryside in the British Isles, and are still visited by the faithful seeking healing for themselves or their loved ones.

I also think of this as a time of purification and the time for taking sacred and healing baths. One way to augment the healing qualities of bathing is to add salt or sugar scrubs. These scrubs help cleanse the body of impurities and remove dry and dead skin. I have included a couple of recipes for scrubs. I would always add vitamin E to any oils used, as this is an antioxidant that will help to slow the oxidation of the oils that leads to rancidity. You can just take a cap or two of natural vitamin E, pierce it with a needle or pin, and squeeze it into your recipe. If you use Jojoba oil instead of the other oils recommended, you will not need to worry about this, as Jojoba oil (which is actually a wax and not an oil) does not go rancid.

Body Scrub Recipe

Ingredients:

1/2 cup oil. Sweet almond, grapeseed or rice bran oil are all good choices.

1 cup sea salt. Baleine is a good choice. You can also substitute sugar, which is gentler.

5 drops essential oils. The oil you choose for your body scrub depends on the result you want. Lavender is relaxing, lemongrass is refreshing and rosemary is stimulating.

1. Combine the oil and salt in a bowl and mix well. Add essential oil and combine well.
2. To use, apply to dry skin using circular strokes to exfoliate the skin. Sit on the side of the tub to keep the scrub from making a mess. Don't use a salt scrub if you have any cuts in your skin.
3. Shower off or follow with a warm bath.

<http://spas.about.com/od/homesp1/a/bodyscrub.htm>

Brown Sugar Body Scrub

Ingredients:

2/3 cup brown sugar, packed

1/3 - 1/2 cup almond oil

1/2 tsp of vitamin E

10 drops of fragrance or essential oil, optional

Instructions:

Mix almond oil, vitamin E and fragrance or essential oil together in a glass bowl. Add the brown sugar and mix in well. Divvy up into jars and have a great time using it!

In the Shadows

By Okapi

I am intrigued when people walk into a familiar dark room and instantly turn on the lights. It is as if the toilet suddenly got up in the middle of the night and they are going to fall in if they don't. For myself, I keep that light off as long as I can when I wake up in the middle of the night and need to go to the bathroom. The last thing I want is to have that bright light wake me up more than I already am.

People seem to have an interesting fascination with darkness. We see something move in the shadows and we are afraid. We want to know what it is and yet at the same time we really don't want to know because it might be something ready to kill us. Every horror movie ever made counts on this. And the public willingly gives into that fear and screams at just the right moments.

How else have shadows played an important part of our lives? Would Wendy have met Peter Pan if he hadn't lost his shadow? How would the monster survive without shadows to hide in when the child looks under the bed with a flashlight? Would we ever know if spring was near if a ground hog never woke up to see if they had a shadow? And of course, who would know what evil lurked in the hearts of men if the Shadow was not there to tell us?

The dark places and dark times have their purpose in life. It is hard to see the good in that darkness when you are in the middle of it, but when you finally step into the light you realize it was part of the journey that got you to that new place. It would be hard to feel the solemnness of Sahmain in the spring when the world is fresh with new life. Ultimately, that is why the Christian beliefs celebrate their death and resurrection cycle in the spring. As much as they know that "he died for them," they want the real focus to be the celebration that he was reborn into a new life.

The darkness is where we have been, not where we are going. Now, it is Ostara, the time when night and day are equal. Now is the time to step out of the dark corner we curled up in during winter and stretch in the sunshine. Like the plant life around us, now is the time to soak up the solar energy to keep up going through the darkness of the next winter that seems so far away.

