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## Publisher's Notes

Happy Solstice Greetings Faes, and welcome to the Yule 2008 issue of the Denver Faeries' Airy Faerie. I am sitting at my computer typing and retying this publisher's note, trying to get inspired for a really great seasonally appropriate note. My muse seems to be taking a little nap. I am not going to complain too loudly, it can't be easy to be the artistic muse for an artist who spends more time procrastinating than creating. Every year I promise him that I am going to work harder on my art, and start presenting his inspirations to the world. With the help from family and my lover Phoenix, I started getting my feet wet in the market place. I don't like the idea of using the Airy Faerie to advertise my stuff, but as Phoenix has pointed out several of you have asked where to get my art. Now I can tell you where to go...to get my art that is. I have put

some of my designs on CafePress.com. See page 16 for more information about this new venture. We ordered some of the products for ourselves before telling you about the site and we were pleased with the final results - far better than the iron-on transfers we were doing on our own.

I am not sure what my muse was up to with this issue of the Airy Faerie. After sending Phoenix the artwork I was working on for the issue, he pointed out it was a very 'fucking' issue. My muse seems to have an idea of how he wants to spend these dark days. He may also be making a statement about the holidays, and how screwed up they are. As I said, I am not sure of his reasons; but my muse is in the mood for some hot doggie style, sweaty, man love.

On that note, I will give the "AIRY FAERIE ADULT CONTENT WARNING!" You are viewing a fae zine that has images and stories with adult male nudity and adult gay male sexuality. Please do not view this on a public or work computer. If you are under 18 years old, or if you are offended by such things, please do not go any further. Before you share this with your friends, please make sure they want to view such things.

One of our contributors has returned under his new name, Minister of Chaos. And we have a new friend who has joined our ranks of readers and has jumped in with both feet with a creation written especially for us. Welcome Raven Bear Paws!

If you do share this fae zine with others, PLEASE remember to also share with them, the web site: [radfae.org](http://radfae.org). This is a great web site for all things faerie. They are also kind enough to store back issues of the Airy Faerie. Many thanks and naked hugs to the hard working faes at [Radfae.org](http://Radfae.org)!!!!

Naked Hugs and Faerie Blessings,  
DragonSwan



# Airy Faerie



## Yule 2008

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

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# Mountain Above the Clouds

## By Minister of Chaos

Flying high above.  
There's a blanket of clouds that cover the world below.  
Going nowhere. Making not one single movement.  
Just fluffy white things communing with the sky.

Not too far ahead standing proud, standing high.  
There's a mountain above the clouds.  
Seeming as though it rules as a goddess from above.  
Letting it's beauty glisten for all to see.

Right now the world seems at peace.  
Right now there seems to be nothing but pure beauty.  
This mountain high above the land.  
It shines radiantly in the sun's bright glow.

The clouds, her subjects acknowledge this set show.  
She looks down on them all with great adoration.  
They gaze at her as though they're entranced by her very presence.  
This type of beauty seems almost too much to comprehend.

But yet it does exist.  
Very hard it is to ignore.  
It claws at a person.  
Makes them yearn for so much more.

Just to look at it.  
Just to see this miraculous site.  
A view that's too hard to escape.  
Over the land mass it seems to drape.

The clouds at her attention.  
Almost seeming as though they're awaiting their next command.  
A presence such as this is always in demand.  
Huge amounts of calming waves become greatly apparent.

Messages that don't seem to come from the mouth.  
Seeming not to come from paper they seem coherent.  
This mountain, this huge masterpiece.  
Exists and shines, requesting to be documented.

Never long forgotten will it be.  
Those it has already touched will always feel.  
Feel its ever lasting energy.  
Feeling as it speaks through silent waves.

It's splendor personally is too hard to convey.  
This mountain above the clouds.  
May all that's in the sky praise it.  
Simply beholding its colorful array.

2-18-2008  
12:44 PM PST  
Poem 6

Yule 2008



# The Mother's Winter Song

## By Raven Bear Paws

Walk with me,  
walk with me beneath the snow covered trees,  
and watch as your Father slumbers.  
Dream of his love for you  
as the bitter breeze blows.

Take my hand.  
Take my hand and welcome back his light,  
for his light shines for you.  
Like a beacon in the darkest night  
his light will forever shine with your eyes.

Lay with me,  
Lay with me and let my heart be your Hearth,  
forever may it warm you,  
For you are my child,  
My child of the woods.

Sing with me.  
Sing with me and feel your spirit grow.  
Sing the song of love, honor and compassion,  
for that is all I ask of you,  
Sing of your heart and my love for you will grow.  
Sing with me The Mother's Winter Song.

December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008  
In Honor of the Mother and that Father

Page 3

# Yule: The Annual Battle

By Phoenix

Here we come to the final Sabbat in my turn at the Wheel. While the first article was at Imbolc, the idea of doing this series actually started last year at Yule after an on-line discussion about the origins of the season. This had largely prompted by the movie *Zeitgeist*, which devotes a segment of time to digging into the stories of the Christ child and proving that the Church stole most of their ideas from another religion. In fact, they were taken from several religions. As a result, we get two armed camps. The one side has the staunch believers who claim that theirs is the only way. The other is on the attack trying to prove the origins of the stories are something other than what the first side claims. And I might as well add the third armed camp waiting in the wings to prove the second camp is wrong as they wait with information about the origins of the origin to the story. It has become more about the battle of ownership of the idea than the spirit to be honored, which then means I might as well add the fourth camp – the secular vs. sacred camps, and those trying to prove that the secular traditions all have sacred

origins (oh, and of course the folks back the other camps have to try to claim the prize of proving that Santa was a shaman...no a bishop...shaman...bishop...well, I'm here to tell you that he was a ancient toymaker aided by Xena, the Warrior Princess as documented in *A Solstice Carol*, Season 2, Episode 9.)

Personally, I get amazed at how worked up people can get over the topic. I learned that many holiday traditions have non-Christian origins back in the days when I was an Episcopagan. Our priest talked about how the religion did not grow up in isolation and freely borrowed the stories of those early priests' youth and those that they encountered. They adapted the stories to fit the message they wanted to teach. This certainly was not a radical idea since most of the cultures with pantheons had been doing the same thing for centuries, Celts and Greco-Roman included.

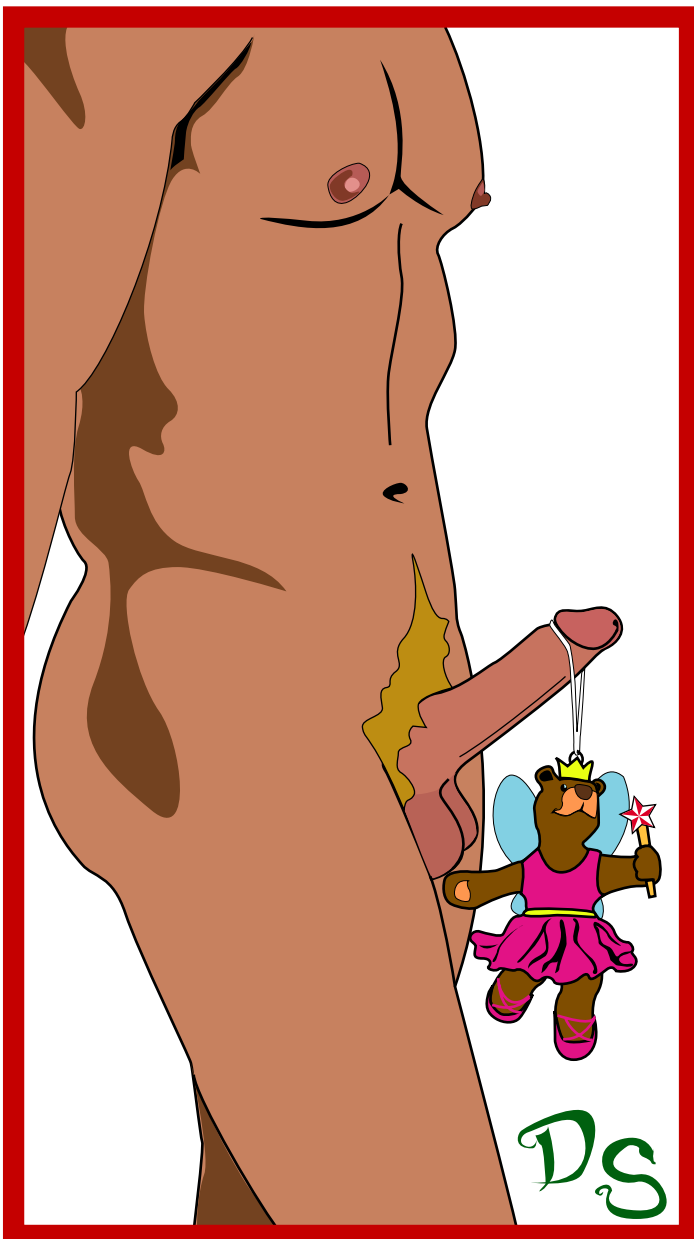
As I worked through the Sabbats, I was eager to find out the truth about this Sabbat. Unfortunately, the more I learned about the other Sabbats, I quickly realized that this was an impossible task. Between the compression of time, the dark years of pagan oppression and all the scholarly finger pointing, the waters have been so muddled that becomes hard to peel the layers back to find out who the original Sun God was whose birth we anticipate during the season. Scholars even struggle to find the origin of the name for the Sabbat. Is it Germanic? Old English? Nordic? If the very name in different cultures has become associated with the Sabbat, so too have the traditions become merged. Somewhere, under all of that are the universal energies that are common to all traditions. The Celts, with their vast territory, recognized this when they could have regional names for deities and still understand that they were the same gods and goddesses they knew back home even when they had a different name.

Common to all traditions is that fact that the season centers on the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. In one branch of traditions there is focus on the hope that comes from knowing that the days will start becoming longer. That hope then manifests in the form of the birth of a new Sun God. And of course, through the year, the Goddess figure has been represented as pregnant, so at some point in time, she does have to give birth. So give even more hope to the future, that birth happens in the middle of Winter when everything is dormant for the season.

Another branch of traditions has decided to focus on the interplay of light and dark, night and day. This has come to be honored in the annual battles of the Oak and Holly Kings. I will admit a huge amount of disappointment in not finding any solid links between the kings and the Celtic traditions other than the one I mentioned last issue. But regardless of origin, I have to wonder if there really is something about that annual battle. I mean, just look at the struggles that I mentioned at the beginning. And how many pitched family battles have been fought over whose parents get the visit this year? For a season that is supposed to be filled with peace and goodwill, we certainly have a strange way of showing it.

But for me, this year, I think I am going to focus on that longest night thing. The Great Mother is resting, restoring her energy for the seasons ahead. She doesn't operate on a 24x7, 365 days a year cycle and gives herself a season to rest. This has been a fun series to write, but now it is time rest and see what the future brings.

Airy Faerie





# Make You Think: Turning the Wheel

By Phoenix

As I have been learning things about the Sabbats, I will admit a bit of hesitation about the start of the seasons occurring on the Cross-Quarters. I have been well trained by the calendar makers that the seasons start on the solstices and equinoxes. It is right there in black and white (or what ever color your calendar is) so it must be true. Of course, the more you understand the struggles in establishing the dates on the calendar, the easier it is to understand the imperfections that have come from trying to force time to follow our desires rather than the other way around. In researching something for one of the tarot cards I had one of those “Eureka” moments that had been staring me in the face as it relates to this.

Start with a simple circle which is divided on the quarters and cross-quarters so you have a basic eight-slice pie as is illustrated by the upper figure on this page. With those eight slices, you can color them two different ways to make four quarters. You can use the vertical and horizontal lines as a reference point as shown by the lower left figure. Or you can use the diagonal lines as shown by the lower right figure.

Now, take that simple design and think of it in terms of the basic compass points – North, East, South, and West. The diagonal lines become Northeast, Southeast, Southwest and Northwest. Which of the two colored circles best illustrates the quarters represented by the directions? I would say that North is probably everything from Northwest to Northeast, wouldn't you? If you go between Northeast and East, that becomes East-Northeast, so it is more East than North. So as you walk around a circle, it would be fair to say that when you cross the line representing Northwest, you have entered the region ruled by “North.”

Think about that same design as it might relate to the four elements – Air, Fire, Water and Earth. Again, I would argue in favor of the diagonal orientation of the quarters of the elements. Going to that “northwest” line for an example - that would be Water+Earth, also known as mud. On one side we have muddy water and on the other side we have either wet dirt or moist soil depending on the mix. Either way, that dividing line is that perfect mix we need for the mudmen. You go too much to the Water side it will just wash off. Too much on the Earth side and it is too cakey to stick right and you just get dirty (which is still fun to clean up, just not the same experience as true mud baths). So again, crossing that dividing line shifts your elemental orientation one direction or the other.

Now, let's look at the seasons with this same wheel. The calendar would have us use the vertical/horizontal alignment. This runs counter to the flow we have established with the directions and

elements, so let's look at this further. The calendar tells us that Winter starts when we have the most darkness. Summer starts when we have the most light. Spring and Autumn get the two balanced night/day points. For certain, each of those four moments in time represents a transition point in the solar cycle.

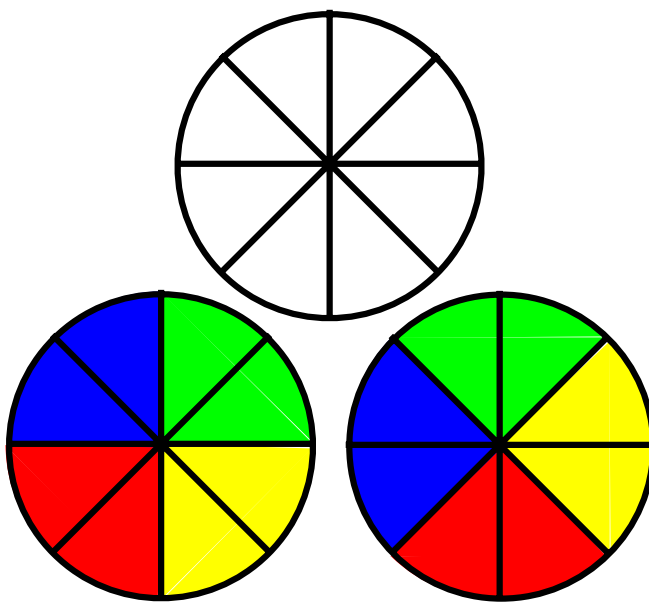
What happens on those cross-quarter points? Well, if we go simplistic and say Spring/Fall represent  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and Summer and Winter are the all or nothing of 1 and 0, then the other four points represent the combinations of  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$ . So at what point does a season begin? When the ratio of light tips in its favor – at those  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  points! When we move off of the equinox at Mabon, the night grows longer and by Samhain that we really feel the shift to the new season. Winter doesn't begin when the light starts

returning at Yule – that really is the point when Winter begins to lose its icy grip and the first ray of springtime hope can be felt. By Imbolc, that ray has grown and we feel the shift to the growing days and springtime energies begin.

With this new thought, I stopped thinking of the upcoming Yule as the start of Winter. It and the other Quarter Sabbats (Ostara, Litha and Mabon) are the celebrations of the fullness of their season. This is probably one of the reasons these are the “lesser” Sabbats – they simply honor the energy of the season. The other Sabbats (Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain) become the “major” Sabbats because they represent the transitions between the sea-

sons – so in our celebrations we have two events to mark – the end of the previous season and the beginning of the next.

Here in the icy grip of the snows of a soon to be White Yule, I am finding a little comfort in knowing that Winter isn't about to begin - it is nearly half over!



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# The 4-F Tarot: Harvesting the Deck

by Phoenix

The cycle of creating something like the tarot deck is not unlike the cycle of the Sabbats. You start with an idea, watch it grow, harvest things and then the fields go through a rest cycle and the process starts again. That is sort of where we are at right now, a rest cycle. It's not that we aren't doing things but that is one reason why you don't see as many new cards in recent issues. The other reason is simply we did all of the easy cards already. Now, we are working on cards that we need to spend a bit more time with so that we capture the right attitude and images that will help evoke the right messages when the deck is being used in a reading.

Let's go back to that rest cycle for a moment. In this case, part of that rest is to allow us time to see the cards sitting side by side. It is looking at them as a whole and not just a group of individual cards. As DragonSwan stretches his wings as an artist, he tries different things with the images. By taking the time to see the how the full set is coming together, we have to opportunity to start revisiting the cards that we have already shown you and start to even out the images so they look like a part of a set instead of 108 individual cards.

During our trip this summer, one of the things that we talked about was defining a color palette. We had realized that we kept using similar colors over and over again. So it was time to put a little more energy into thinking about the colors used on the cards. The "Air" cards would drawn from certain colors that would be different from the "Fire" cards. The "Feathers" would be different than the "Fins." The intersection of the elemental and animalistic energies would then help define the dominate color scheme.

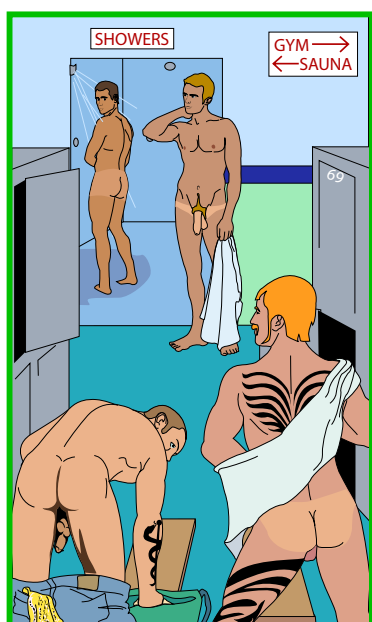
We also decided that we liked the stronger colors that DragonSwan started using in the summer issues. We were deliberately trying to keep the stronger colors in reserve to give the energy boost to the more dominate cards yet to come. The muted colors were doing a disservice to the energy of the cards.

So between the blending of styles and rethinking the color palettes, we picked the Lovers of Air, the Lockerroom of Love at First Sight, to experiment. As you can see, I have the original version of the card on the page and the revised card on the opposite page. As the colors deepened and brought the card into focus, so too did the images of each of the characters on the card. The personality of each started to shine and thus began the process of adding more to the card than just a simple change to the background colors.

Now, for the two new cards that we are presenting this issue. The first is the Magic of Earth (page 3). This is one that I had struggled with during the original concept I had of this group of cards. With the change in perspective that came with our trip last summer we realized that part of that struggle was that we were looking at the card the wrong way. At one of the scenic overlooks along the way we saw these beautiful trees growing in the most unlikely places. Every time I see plants growing in rocks I am reminded of the power of the Great Mother. She will find a way to nurture life in the strangest places. We have to trust Her to open the place for that seed to fall where it can take root. We have to trust Her to bring the nurishment that is needed to sustain life. As a card in a reading, this could be about that trust and believe that anything is possible. It can be the simple wonderment at seeing an accomplishment that others said couldn't be done. And it could even be just a reminder to take some time and enjoy the view.

And then, there are our daredevils, the Kings of Air (page 18). This is another card that transformed during our trip. Based on the balancing of energies within the deck, the King of Air is supposed to be a blend of Feather and Fin energy. Our original concept was that of a sailboat captain, maybe a pirate to steal our hearts, or just a mature man ready to sail into the sunset. As the cards built up around it, this was feeling too passive. And then, we were driving along the Crystal River and saw two young men jumping off a rock into the river below. That reminded us of one of the concepts that had been considered, and tossed, for the God of Water - the cliff diving daredevils. That youthful energy of flying through the air seemed well suited for our young kings ready to try out their wings. When putting this into a spread, which are you? The daredevils making that leap? Or the observer shaking their head saying "They are idiots." Or are you the friend standing there wishing they could join them? What's stopping you? Is it the fear of the unknown and feeling like you might be another lemming following the crowd to certain death on the rocks below? But then, you will never know the elation of having made the leap and survived. The choice is yours.

I hope you like the changes that you are seeing that are coming into the deck now that we have given ourselves a little rest. I know I am. With each card that gets added to the deck, I watch our "baby" come alive. And in the process of creating and resting and revisiting, as you can see, each card is coming to life as well.



SHOWERS

GYM →  
← SAUNA



# Quest for the Crystal Phoenix

## Chapter 31: The Magical Scavenger Hunt

### by Orpheus

Apollo watched with sadness as the portals to the castles closed behind the Royal Cousins. Ever since the weddings he had felt cut off from his friends in this time. All of them were busy with their new families and trying to live up to their duties as monarchs. Somehow that never left much time for him or the task of sending him home. After moping at the various castles, Apollo decided that he needed to clear his mind and went camping at the place that was destined to become the Valley of the Kings. It was in the familiar surroundings of nature that he decided that needed to take matters into his own hands if he wanted to go home. If the cousins weren't really putting energy into solving the problem, then he needed to find a teacher who wasn't going to be distracted by Royal Duties. It was a struggle to figure it out but then he thought of the Memory Crystal that surrounded Princess Laurel Lilac. She was the one who triggered the crystal that brought the cousins to his time so he guessed that she might be able to figure the way to get him home.

Apollo approached King StoneHeart, leader of the dwarves of Crystal Mountain, for permission to stay in the caves. With permission granted, Apollo began to find ways to tap the memories locked in the princess's crystal. At first, he was lost in the randomness of the memories. Each memory was a tantalizing fragment that never had enough substance to yield information. One day, out of sheer frustration, he called to the cousins for help. Their understanding of sister and cousin proved to be a useful way to help bring focus to those memories. Thus began a pattern of the prince bringing the cousins to the cave each month. When a session yielded something that Apollo needed to cast the spell, he would search for it. Once he found it, he would gather everyone again for the next session.

"That was a heavy sigh, My Lord."

The sound of the dwarf's voice brought the prince out of his thoughts. "Sorry, I was wishing I could finish all these insane little quests and go back home."

"You don't like it here?" asked the dwarf.

"It's not that, Renaldo," said the prince. "But my family and friends have probably given up hope of seeing me again. I miss them and I don't belong here."

"But didn't the queens promise that the spell would return you to the moment you left your time?"

"That's the theory," said Apollo. "But the question will be whether I remember anything or will this just be a dream?"

"Then you will have to find a way to remind yourself of the lessons learned."

"An excellent idea! I'll have to find a way to preserve all of the notes I've been taking."

"The caves hold many secrets, certainly they can hide one or two more."

"I may take you up on that if I don't think of something else." Apollo patted Renaldo on the back. "I don't know what I would do without you. You have been a wonderful companion these past few months."

"It is I who should be thanking you," said the dwarf, blushing at the compliment. "You have given me the opportunity to leave the safety of the caves. It is not common for my people to go to the places we have been."

"What has been your favorite?"

"I think collecting the Chimneytop Lemondrop from the cottage deep in the Sugar Plum Orchard. I still don't know how you knew about it since you had said you had never been there."

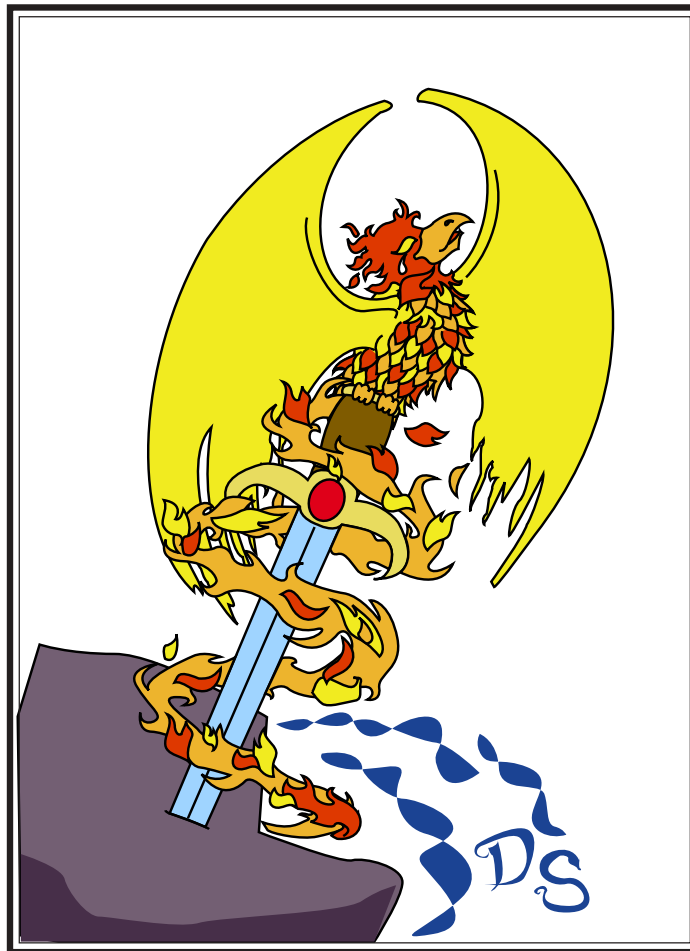
"It was something that Angelo had said about the time his sister and he had been captured by their aunt. He described the cottage as his childhood fantasy of looking like it was made of candy. I think my favorite has been finding the gold coin from the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

I had never met a leprechaun and my teacher didn't include them in his lessons on the magical people. One of the things I have in my notes is the spell Shamus gave me to call to his people so that I can find out if they survived to my time."

"So what did you learn from the Princess about the next task?"

"We are to seek a cloth that is woven of gold that was grown not mined. How is that possible? You are more familiar with the earth's minerals, what could Lilac be talking about?"

"There was talk about someone using magic to turn other things into gold. Most spells just made the object look like gold but it wasn't real. It could be that someone has finally found a spell that works."





"But how do we find them? Gold is everywhere, so I don't think I can just use my earth magic to look for it like I did when we found the needle that was lost in a haystack." Apollo thought for a moment. "Wait a moment...maybe we can. Would gold that is grown truly be exactly the same as gold that is mined?"

"Probably not," said Renaldo. After a moment of thought, he continued. "Gold from a mine would only have solar energy at it's surface. But if it is grown, then it would have that solar energy in its fibers just like a plant."

"So, I'm looking for gold with extra solar energy?" pondered the prince. "There can't be too many objects that match that."

Apollo had Renaldo bring him a piece of freshly mined gold that had not been exposed to sunlight so that he could tune into the base energy before searching for something that didn't match. With the gold in hand, he settled into a trance as he sent his energy through the earth to find golden objects. At first, he was overwhelmed by how much gold was scattered everywhere. He pulled his attention back to the raw ore and concentrated on understanding its energy feel.

"Now, dear earth energy," thought the prince, "I want to find energy that is very similar to this but not quite."

He sent his energy back out into the kingdoms and was rewarded by having less clutter to distract him. He found one golden object that had a high concentration of solar energy so he called to Renaldo and they went through one of Apollo's portals. The object turned out to be a golden statue dedicated to Lord Apollo. The prince stood in awe at the artistry. Even with flowing robes, he could see the rippling muscles that he knew were there. Without thinking, he reached out to touch it.

"Don't do that!" came a shout from across the temple. "Lord Apollo himself will strike you down if you touch the statue without his permission."

The priest's warning came too late as the prince's hand was already making contact with the statue.

"Who dares..." came the thundering voice that filled the temple. "...oh, it's you, my young friend. Why is it that you seem to interrupt my life at the most interesting moments?" The god was standing there totally nude with a hard on. "Dion and I just managed to have a moment alone when I felt your touch. What brings you to my temple?"

The prince explained his current quest and how he was trying to use solar energy to narrow his search. The god agreed that it was a reasonable premise. "Having found this statue that has been absorbing sunlight for many years now, it might be good to compare its solar energy to something like a tree to understand the difference between how different objects absorb and store the sun's warmth. Put what you have learned about gold itself with that new knowledge and you should be able to refine your search even further. Now excuse me, I'm sure Dion is wondering where I went to. Hopefully he hasn't taken matters into his own hands while I've been gone."

As the god disappeared, the priest ran over to the prince and dropped to his knees and began kissing the prince's foot. "Please

forgive me for not seeing you for who you are. I am not worthy."

"Why would you say you are not worthy, good priest?"

"His Worship came at your touch. He reveled his full manhood to you. He gave you guidance. And all that time, he didn't even acknowledge me. I must ask you to ask His Worship what I have done to earn his displeasure."

"I am sure he meant nothing by that. I think he was a bit distracted by what he was doing before he came here and what he hoped for on his return."

"The rumors of his involvement with the Moon God are true?"

The prince had to recount the tale of the wedding fiasco before the priest would allow the prince to turn his focus on the offered lesson. By then, it was nightfall and the priest insisted that they stay the night.

At morning's first light, Apollo turned his energy to finding gold that had living solar energy instead of reflected energy. It was a long search and he had almost given up hope of finding something when he found a small trace of energy in a remote part of the East Blade. He quickly created a portal before he lost track of that faint energy.

At the other end of the portal, he found a woman with a small gold band on her finger. She was startled by the sudden appearance of a young man dressed in fine robes and his dwarf companion and started to run. Apollo called to her but she only stopped when he sent a burst of earth energy filled with his intent to not harm her. She turned to face the prince and, as suddenly as she fled him, she ran toward him and fell to her knees.

"Please forgive me, My Liege, I did not recognize you and your sudden appearance frightened me."

"Easily forgiven, My Lady," responded the prince, offering his hand to assist her to her feet. "but I am not your liege. I am but a distant relative of her family. It is I who should beg your forgiveness for not properly announcing my presence but I am in haste. May I see your ring?"

"It's mine," she protested. "I came on it honestly."

"I don't doubt it," said the prince as he realized that she must think that he was going to accuse her of having wealth not suited for her status as a field worker. "There is something special about this ring that called to me across the country and I would like to see it closer."

"How am I to know that you would not take it and disappear into that hole you appeared in?"

"I give you my word as a relative of your queen. I am on a quest to find something special for her. It is a golden object but not a ring. It is supposed to be similar to the energy in your ring so I feel I must be getting close to my goal. May I please see your ring?"

She slipped off the ring and handed it to the prince. When it touched his skin, he instantly knew that this had once been a living plant and not something mined from the ground. He handed it back to the woman.

"How did you acquire such a marvelous ring?" asked Apollo.

She explained that it was a gift from one of magical beings who lived in her field. She woke one morning and discovered the ring.

*-continued on page 10*

## Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

The note with it said that the ring was payment for some of the wheat they had taken from her field. Every month on the dark moon, she would find another trinket on her table. She takes the things to town for sale and always earns more money than she ever would for the few stocks of wheat that had been taken. She admitted feeling guilty for accepting such an overpayment for something so small that she would give it freely if asked.

"At least they are honest. Have you ever met your benefactor?"

"No. The gift is always left after I have gone to bed," she said. "One night I tried to stay up to see them. The gift was left on my doorstep."

"Then you do not know their identity?" The woman shook her head. "Alas, then I am still far from my goal. I shall depart and let you get back to your chores."

"May I offer you something before you depart?" she asked.

"How kind of you, but I have delayed you long enough," said Apollo. He made a gesture toward the cottage, "This is a lovely place, I will return when I have the chance to take you up on your offer. If you learn more of your secretive friend, just speak my name and I will come."

"And what is that name, My Lord?"

Apollo hesitated a moment and then got a hazed look to his eyes. "Laika?"

"What?" said Renaldo.

"Pardon me, I must go back to the castle. I'm being summoned. He placed his hand on Renaldo's shoulder and opened his portal. The two stepped through and he closed it quickly lest the woman accidentally pass through.

"Where are we?" asked Renaldo.

"The pond near the castle in Sharpeton. Laika said to meet him here."

"Is that why you told that woman your name was Laika?"

While they waited the dwarf asked him how he was going to find the person making gold from wheat. The prince said that they wouldn't have to find the person. He had cast a variation of his protection spell on the cottage. Anyone could enter the cottage, but only the woman and the two of them would be able to leave. When the person arrived to leave the trinket, they would be trapped inside. He cast a second spell to protect the woman in case the person got violent when they discovered that they had been caught.

"And since tonight is the Dark Moon, we won't have long to wait."

"Wait for what?" asked Laika. "You can't have been here long."

Apollo gave his friend and Daisy a hug. "What is so urgent that you called to me?"

"Princess Iris wanted you to be here. She has some grand announcement that..."

"Uncle 'Polo! You came!'"

The princess came rushing at him just as he turned at the sound of her voice. He was surprised to see that she was nearly his equal in size despite the fact that she was only three years old. He thought that her wolfbody must be nearly fully mature for her to be so nearly adult-like in her human form.

"And how could I not come to see the one destined to be the fairest of them all?"

The princess blushed at his flattery. "Well, I am sure that I will break some hearts with my announcement." Everyone kept silent as she gathered her strength to say that which was obviously going to be difficult. "I have come into season and have chosen my mate."

Queen Daisy gasped. "So soon?"

"Yes, so soon," said Wolfsun as he walked into the clearing. Rowan was at his side.

"Yes, so soon," echoed the princess. "I have chosen Rowan and have decided to take up my heritage as a member of the Wolf Council."

"Is that why you have been gone for so long?" asked Laika.

"Yes, papa. I don't fit into palace life," she said. "There are not others like me and everyone looks at me like I'm different. With the pack, they are used to wearwolves and I sort of fit in."

"Is that how you really feel?" asked Daisy as she stifled her tears at the thought of losing a daughter. The princess nodded. "Then I don't know how to stop you short of locking you in a tower. And based on family history, I doubt that would work."

"It wouldn't." She gave her mother a hug. "I have one favor to ask."

"Anything," said the queen.

"Not from you, from papa."

"Oh?" said a startled Laika.

"Actually, it is not for her, but for me," said Rowan. "If I am to live among my chosen people, I really need to become one of them. Wolfsun has already traded my blood with some of the other wearwolves so that I am almost able to transform. With the trade of one more, I should be able to complete that transformation. Will you give up some of your wolf blood in exchange for my faerie blood?"

"I have chosen a life among humans, so if the exchange means the happiness of both yourself and Iris, then anything I have is yours to take."

Wolfsun spoke up, "Just so you know, the blood I take will mean that you may never change to wolf again. You may be forever stuck in human form and never run with the pack again."

Laika looked at his wife and then back at his god, "I had given up that hope once before when I was outcast the first time. Now, I have cast myself out and like my daughter find myself at odds with people because of my heritage. But, I have chosen this life and will take that risk. I have not changed to wolf in nearly a year so I think part of me already knew that this day would come."

"So that is your desire?" asked Wolfsun. Laika nodded. "So mote it be."

The great wolf touched his muzzle to both Rowan and Laika and then back again. Back and forth several times as a light bridge formed between the two. A lavender arch grew from Rowan while a red one grew from Laika. The two merged in the middle and slowly the colors exchanged places. When the center was clear, Wolfsun raised a paw and severed the connection and the arches quickly pulled into each.

At the arch's retreat into Rowan, he turned into a red wolf. The markings on his coat almost resembled his former faerie wings as if they had merely been folded along his back.

"You try," commanded the Wolf God, staring at Laika."

The strain was visible on Laika's face and he fell to his knees. "I can't." Daisy started to offer to help him up. "No, let me do this on my own. I need to be able to stand on my own two feet from now on."

Princess Iris changed to wolf. Together with Rowan, the two rubbed against Laika's legs. "I love you papa. Thank you." The two ran off into the forest.

"But what about me?" sobbed Daisy.

Before that thought could be answered, the princess back in human form came rushing back. "I was so eager to be with my mate that I almost forgot. I love you mother, I'll be back."

After giving her mother a hug, she shifted to wolf and ran back to where Rowan was waiting for her. The two disappeared into the darkness of the forest.

"Watch over her, Great Father," said Daisy.

"I will daughter," said Wolfsun. "But I doubt they will need much help from me. Already the pair are highly respected among the pack and few would dare challenge them when they present a united front."

"Where's my brother?" came Amaranth's voice as she emerged from a portal. The nine Hilda's quickly followed and surrounded her. "I felt something happen to him. What's wrong?"

Her voice was on the verge of hysteria. Apollo had never seen the faerie queen in such a visible emotional state over her brother. "He's..." Apollo struggled with how to tell her what had happened.

"He's no more," said Wolfsun.

"What? He's dead?" Amaranth burst into tears.

"Hmm, maybe I didn't phrase that right," apologized Wolfsun.

"Children, I'll leave it to you to explain what I meant. Now, I have a mating to bless." With that he leapt into the air and disappeared.

Daisy and Laika led Amaranth back to the castle. As the departed, Daisy called back, "Will you be dining with us this evening? Or will you be returning to your quest?"

Apollo said that he would welcome the chance for their company while he waited for some information about the person he sought. With a wave and a promise to see him at dinner they continued to the castle. He sent Renaldo up to the castle with them saying that he needed a little time alone to think.

Once everyone was out of sight, he stripped and slipped into the cool waters of the pond. When he returned to the beach, the swan came swimming toward him.

"Good day, My lady," greeted the prince. "If I had known I was coming here today, I would have brought you a treat."

"Seeing you after a long absence is treat enough for me," replied the swan in her dulcet tones. "What has kept you away this time?"

The prince told of some of the adventures he had been on in recent months. "It all seems somehow familiar to me like I should know the rest of the story. The history books of my time don't have a lot of information about this time and I really know I should know more than I do right now."

"Just remember, not all life's lessons are learned from history books."

In her enigmatic way she started to swim off. Before he could

call to her to ask what she meant, he was tackled from behind.

"Somehow I knew you would strip once we left the area," came Laika's familiar growl.

The two quickly engaged in a familiar wrestling match. The element of surprise gave Laika the early upper hand but Apollo quickly recovered and began to get Laika thrown to the ground with regularity. Apollo had never seen his friend with such fierceness in their previous matches and it excited him. He was surprised to feel his own energy rising and knew that the only way to release it was through his cock. He put energy into ending it quickly so he could get Laika to jerk off with him. The prince got Laika on the ground, face to face, cocks pressing together. Instinctively, he began to rub his cock against the one beneath him. Laika twisted beneath him and the prince prepared himself for his friend to try to break free. Instead, his friend pushed his ass backwards against Apollo's cock and it felt good to the prince to continue rubbing his cock up and down along the upturned ass. On one of those thrusts, he felt Laika shift beneath him and he suddenly found himself inside his friend. He started to pull out but Laika reached back and grabbed the prince's buttocks and pulled him in deeper.

"Don't you dare. I've been waiting for this since we first met."

He pushed himself up forcing the prince to sit back on his knees, all the while staying impaled on Apollo's cock. When both were upright, Laika twisted so that he could kiss the prince. "Now, claim your prize."

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## Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

The prince began pumping his cock into the offered ass. He didn't know what he was doing, but it felt good. Laika began stroking his cock. The faster he stroked, the faster the prince pumped his cock into Laika. Just as Laika let out a moan and released his cum into the air, Apollo felt his own release inside his friend.

The two collapsed on the ground. "Don't ever leave me," said Laika. "I need you."

"You know I have to go home," said the prince, "As much as I like it here, I don't belong. I need to go to my time."

"Then take me with you."

"How I wish I could."

They lay spent in the dwindling afternoon sun. Apollo started to put his arm around his friend but Laika pushed him away and sat up.

"You're going to leave me too, aren't you? My brother, Rowan, and even Iris. I don't want to loose you too." The pain of the loss of part of his self echoed in the connection between them.

"I wish there was another way but I don't belong here."

Without a word, Laika stood up and left. He didn't turn when Apollo called to him. When the prince tried to send him some earth energy, he was surprised to find it split in two. A portion went to the figure departing from him. Another part went deep into the forest where it connected to the wolf energy that was in Rowan. The wolf's fur was matted in sweat as he disengaged himself from his mate.



Apollo felt embarrassed by connecting with a friend in such a private moment. It was then he realized some of the source of the passion of his encounter with Laika. Both were still connected to the blood that had been transferred to Rowan and had been swept along with his mating session with Iris. Apollo wasn't sure that it all had come from that connection but that certainly explained why it happened today and not before.

It was in a pensive mood that he put on his clothes and headed to his quarters to clean up before dinner. He wasn't sure what to think about his feelings about his friend. He had felt so close to him during their encounter and he wanted to continue that closeness. But he also knew that it would be wrong. He had to go back to where he belonged. But he felt like he belonged here too. The sound of the swan carried on the breeze even after he had passed out of the grove of trees surrounding the pond. "Follow your heart. In time, your heart will catch up to you."

He wanted to turn and run back to ask what she meant but knew that she would already be gone. The bells rang the call to dinner so he hurried to his rooms to wash up. Renaldo was waiting for him with a fresh set of court clothes laid out on the bed. Soon he was dressed for dinner and they headed to the Great Hall. The silence of Laika continued through the meal and he refused to look in Apollo's direction. He sent a focused burst of earth energy and was pleased that it did not split as had the previous energy. He was shocked when the response that came back was "Leave me alone." Apollo wanted to cry at the thought that he had somehow hurt his friend.

Amaranth noticed the look on his face and asked him to escort her to her quarters. There in the privacy of that sanctuary, she spoke up. "He has much to work through, as do you." She pulled him into a motherly embrace. In that closeness, he let out the tears he had been holding back. "I don't know what happened today but I do know that you love each other. What that means for either of you is anyone's guess. And probably something that each of you will have to figure out on your own. You have a time to get back to and a future kingdom to rule. Any love you have for a person will have to play second to your responsibilities to your kingdom."

"But father..."

"From what you have said, your father knew that and found one imperfect solution. Having tasted the bitter fruit that comes from mixing love and responsibility for yourself, you will have to figure out a better solution when you are forced to make your own choices." She released him from her embrace and tried his tears with her kerchief. "Now, what have you learned of the latest challenge?"

He started to explain the day's adventure when he heard the woman's voice in the wind. "Lord Laika, I need your help. He's gone mad and trying to kill me."

He kissed the faerie queen and ran across the hall to his quarters. With Renaldo at his side he returned to the cottage. As he stepped into the room, he had to dodge some flying pottery.

"What have you done to me, you witch! I give you gold every month and this is how you repay me? Trapping me in your home?"

"I didn't do it," said a very frightened woman.

"She's telling the truth. I did that," said the prince. He used his mind to stop the pot that was flying through the air and gently set it down on the floor.



The thrower of the pot was a small man. He barely came up to the prince's waist. He looked old with deep wrinkled lining his face and beard trailing to the floor.

"I'll kill you for that."

"Cousin," said Renaldo, "that may not be wise. Without his power, how will you get out of this cottage?"

"You are not my family," said the gruffy voice.

"Maybe not directly, but I am a mountain dwarf and you, a forest dwarf. Somewhere in our past we are related. Please listen to what the prince has to ask."

The dwarf set down the pot he had picked up. "The prince? I'm listening."

"Good sir, please forgive me for my trick on you," said Apollo, "but I am in haste and need your assistance and knew no other way to get your attention. I am seeking a piece of cloth made from gold that was grown not mined. Our search for anything gold of this type led us to this house and now to you. Can you help me in my quest?"

He rubbed his chin for a moment. "Prince, you say? I think I might be able to help, but it will cost you that which is most dear to you. Your first born child."

"You would have a long time waiting for that payment," laughed the prince.

"A strapping young man like yourself?" responded the dwarf. "You should have two or three children by now. What maiden could resist your charms?"

"I am waiting for my one true love."

"That could take a long time," grumbled the dwarf.

"About five hundred years is my guess at the moment. Surely there is some other price you can ask for payment."

"Guess my name. If you can't guess, then it's back to giving me your first born child."

"How is he to know your name?" asked the woman. "I don't even know it after all the gifts you have given me."

"Those are different and freely given as payment to you. He wants something and will have to pay a premium price to get it."

"Wait a minute," said the prince. "I should know this. What did grandmother used to tell me?"

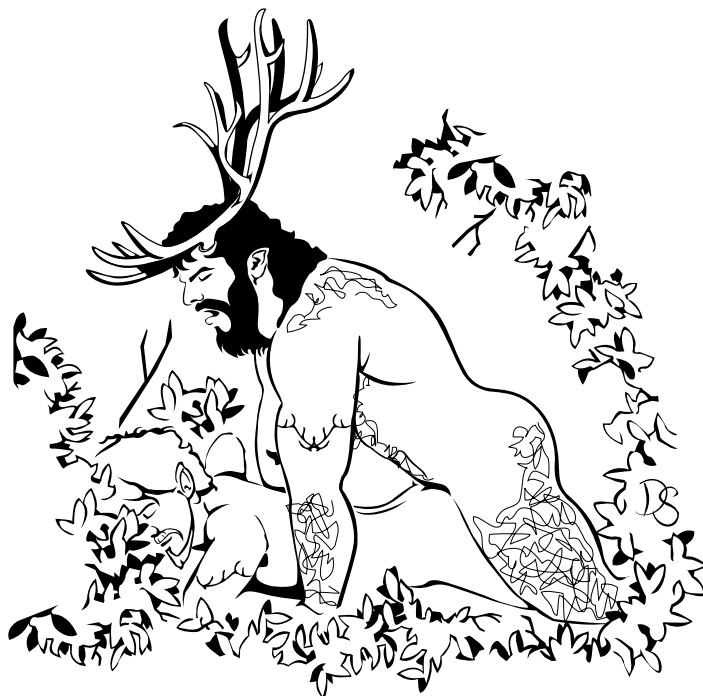
The prince started walking around the room and soon was mumbling to himself. He started circling the dwarf hoping that seeing him at different angles might trigger the memory. After a few minutes, the dwarf spoke up, "What are you doing? Trying to cast a spell that will force me to tell you that my name is SkunkPoo? Well, let me tell you, it won't...Oops, I shouldn't have said that." He covered his mouth with his hands to stop himself from saying anything else.

"SkunkPoo?" said Renaldo. "That really stinks."

"That's it!" shouted Apollo. "Hey, dickie dickie, the king's in a pickle when guessing the name is part of the game." He started to circle the dwarf again as he spoke. "The one he says will really stink but when you touch him like Johnny..." he stopped behind the dwarf and suddenly reached out and pinched the dwarf in his sides. The dwarf jumped up in the air and started laughing so hard that his face started changing color.

"No fair," said the dwarf between laughs.

"...he's name is TickledPink. That's your name! TickledPink!"



The dwarf gasped at the sound of his name and his laughter turned into choking. The woman ran outside to fetch a pot of water. TickledPink saw the opportunity to escape and ran toward the open door. He ran face first into the invisible barrier.

"Hey! How'd she get out when I can't?"

"You didn't ask My permission." Apollo righted a pair of overturned stools and gestured to TickledPink to sit in one. "Now, how long will it take you to make me a piece of cloth with your magical gold?"

"How big?"

"Hmm, the princess didn't say. She just said a piece so I can't imagine that it would need to be big, maybe the size of a lady's kerchief."

"Something that size, maybe two months to make the gold, another to spin it into thread and another to weave it into the kerchief. So what is that? Five months?"

"If you do it in four, then I'll let the Faerie Queen know about you. She is looking for new material for magical slippers. After the tragedy of Queen Ashleigh Ellen and her crystal slippers, people have been asking for golden slippers. I'm sure slippers made from your gold would be lighter and more flexible than the heavy slippers being produced with the mined gold."

"The queen, you say? This is turning into a better night than I thought."

"I will check on your progress in four months." The prince gestured and removed the spell. "You are free to go but if you are not here in four months, I will know how to find you." The prince sent a burst of earth energy to the dwarf so he could feel his touch.

TickledPink turned to face the prince and dropped to his knee. "As you command, your majesty." He then stood and ran into the night.

Apollo began to pick up shards of pottery. The woman began to protest but the prince stopped her. He said that he was partially responsible for the mess, so he was equally responsible for helping to clean up. As they finished, he reached into his pouch and pulled out several coins and handed them to the mistress of the house.

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## Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

“Just a small token of my gratitude, Lady Marigold. I hope these can help you replace your broken things.”

Her eyes got wide when she saw how much he had given her. The prince knew he had given her more than she had probably seen in her lifetime. “Renaldo, we have disturbed this good lady’s evening’s rest long enough. It has been a long day and it well past time that we should have sought our own slumber.” He brought her hand to his lips. “We shall see you again in four month’s time.”

He led Renaldo out of the cabin and they stepped into a portal back to the caves.

“You know that she is never going to wash that hand,” said Renaldo.

“You are probably right, my friend.”

“One thing puzzles me. How did you know her name? You never asked and she never volunteered it.”

“I knew because...” the prince thought a moment, “I knew for the same reason I knew TickledPink’s name. They were part of a story that my grandmother always told me at bed time. That’s it!”

“That’s what?” asked a puzzled dwarf.

“The swan told me that not all lessons are learned from the history books. This story wasn’t a history lesson. It was a bedtime story told by my grandmother, who learned it from her mother. And I know what we need to do next. Renaldo, go get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be a very busy day.”

By the time Renaldo woke in the morning, the prince had already been up for several hours. He had made a list of things that the hero in his grandmother’s story needed in order to break the enchantment so the hero could marry the princess. When Renaldo arrived in his quarters, Apollo was busy crossing things off the list that they had already gathered.

“Good news to start your day – if my theory is right, we are over half way through finding everything we need. As soon as you are ready, we have a lot to do today.”

Renaldo made quick order of eating and soon they were entering their first portal of the day. The first stop was back to the pond at the Sharpeton castle.

“I’m surprised that you came here,” said the dwarf. “After your reaction after being here yesterday, I would think you would stay away for a while.”

“Ordinarily, I would think about it,” responded the prince, “The story says ‘and in the light of the dawn, he gathered the feather of a royal swan.’ I figure the lady of this lake might know something that will lead us to that swan.” Renaldo got a puzzled look on his face. “I’ll tell you the story later, then it will make sense.” He faced the water, “Dear Swan, I need to speak with you.”

He settled on the shore and waited. In a few minutes she came swimming toward them and he tossed her the bread crumbs he had saved from breakfast. “I need a favor from you,” he started. “One of the things I need to gather in my quest is a feather from a royal swan. I didn’t know that swans had royalty. Can you tell me how to find a member of your royal line?”

The swan ruffled her feathers. “Who do you think you have been talking to? I hope you don’t think ordinary swans can talk.”

“My apologies. I had thought that it might be you but you have been so silent about yourself I dared not hope that the challenge



would be so easily met.” He reached over and picked up one of the feathers that had been cast off when she ruffled. “May I please take this with me?”

“Since you ask so nicely, yes.”

“Thank you. And thank you for your advice about history lessons yesterday. It has proven to be just what I needed to hear.”

“You are welcome,” she said as she swam away.

“That was easy,” said Renaldo. “What’s next on your list?”

““A bowl that makes the temperature just right,”” quoted the prince.

“The King of the Bears is said to have something like that,” said Renaldo. “Father is jealous because as you know, if you don’t eat quickly in the caves, the food gets cold very fast.”

“That confirms what the story says about the owner of the bowl. Now, where do we find him?”

He sought out Rowan. As Leader Regent of the Wolf Council, he would be certain to have knowledge of the King of the Bears. Rowan directed them to the area to the southern tip of Adbalm.

“Three Bear Forest! I should have thought of that. Thanks.”

He gave Rowan and Iris a quick hug. He directed his earth magic to find bears in the forest and then sought to figure out which had the feel of being the King. When he found a large group of bears together, he knew he had the right bear so he opened his portal.

King Bruin was quick to anger at the sudden appearance of a stranger in his forest but the prince was able to calm him down with the assurances that he was unarmed.

“I am on a quest and am seeking a magic bowl that I believe is in your possession,” said the prince.

King Bruin said that he indeed had a bowl that was believed to be magic. He said that the food inside was always at the perfect temperature for whomever held it. He said that he could never part with such a marvelous devise as his chef’s were forever serving food that was too hot or too cold for his tastes.

“What if I were to get you something better?” He called to Amaranth, who promptly joined him. “I need a favor. If I wished for something would you grant it?”

“I would if I could, but you haven’t been born yet.”

"What if I were to wish for something?" asked Renaldo.

"That's an interesting thought. We have never granted wishes to your tribe as your king has always frowned upon magic as frivolous and didn't want your people tainted with its stench. I was surprised when he granted Princess Laurel Lilac asylum in his caves."

Renaldo looked crestfallen as he had thought he had a found a way to contribute to the quest. "And I suspect that you had something to do with that. Am I right?" Renaldo nodded. "Well, that doesn't mean I can't do it," said Amaranth with a bit of defiance in her voice. "I will just have to ask his forgiveness once we are done. What is the wish?"

Apollo whispered into his friend's ear and Renaldo repeated his words. "I wish that a second magic bowl be created that would make the contents of the bowl the perfect temperature for the King of the Bears and that if another were to try to eat from the bowl, the food would either be too hot or too cold depending on the King's feelings for the person."

The faerie queen waved her wand and soon a second bowl appeared. King Bruin quickly saw the benefit in having a magic bowl that no one else could use and traded bowls.

The prince pulled out his list and marked off the items he had gathered. "Next is 'a petal fallen when love's not true. The curse was ended when he said I love you'. And I know where to find an enchanted rose."

"That may not be possible," said Amaranth. "Belladonna has altered my spell so that no petal can fall while the love still flows between she and Kenneth. Since he is dead that love will live on as long as she does."

"I think I know how to get at least one petal to fall," said Apollo.

He spread out his energy seeking the familiar touch of BeBeep. He found the enchanted toad resting in a pond near the castle in Riangler. As soon as he stepped through his portal, he grabbed the toad before he had a chance to jump into the water.

"Let me go. I'll give you warts if you don't."

"I happen to know the truth about you, Your Majesty, so I know that isn't true."

"How could you possibly know the truth? Did my wife send you?"

"No, but it is because of her that I sought you out. I have two questions to ask and then I'll set you free. Do you love her still?"

"Of course. She is the most beautiful of all creatures."

"I guess you haven't seen her recently," said the prince. "What do you think about the cruel trick she played on you that turned you into a toad?"

"I hate her for that." The toad croaked in pain.

"That's what I needed to hear. Thank you." He released the toad, who promptly disappeared into the water as Apollo knew he would. "Now to the castle."

When they arrived at Resquad, Apollo led Renaldo straight to the sealed doorway in the tower. Only it had not been sealed yet. He opened the door and found the rose under its dome of glass. On the bottom of the jar was a single petal that was beginning to wilt.

When Apollo started to gather energy to build the portal to the next stop in his quest, Renaldo placed a hand on his shoulder. "Don't you think we should at least tell the Queen that we were here?"

"I don't have time. I can feel it inside that if I don't do this soon, I'm going to be trapped and never be able to return home."

"But the queens have promised that the spell will get you back to that exact moment that you left. To all your family and friends, it will be like you never left. Do you doubt them?" asked the dwarf.

"Let's get to our next destination and I will tell you more about the story but I don't want to have the queen or GoldenRod see us. They will only delay us with questions I'm not ready to answer."

The next portal led them to a beach at the edge of a seaside cliff. He told his companion the tale of a prince who was cursed by an evil witch to live as a wolf. The limited powers of his faerie godmother were only enough to allow him to change him back to human on the night of the dark of the moon. In order to break the curse, he had to gather many things, but he could only gather them on the one night he had hands.

"And they broke the spell and lived happily ever after?"

"Basically. Don't you see? A wolf that becomes human to marry the princess? I am living the life that Laika is supposed to have. I need to go home so that he can have the rewards of that happily ever after."

Apollo handed Renaldo some coins and sent him into the nearby town of Cliff Port to get some food for them while he completed the task that brought him to this place.

He sent some energy into the waves. "Queen Annette, I know you are near for I can hear your song on the wind. I wish to have an audience with you."

In a moment, a figure appeared from the waves. Her long auburn tresses covered her bare chest. While she stayed in the water, the ebb and flow of the waves revealed her long tail. "I heard your call. Queen Annette is dead. I am Alone." Apollo caught the flash on her finger as the pearl on her ring changed from white to black. "How may I help you?"

"That may be your name, but you are not alone. There are many who love you." The pearl changed back to white. Apollo explained his quest and that he now needed the tears of a mermaid who once walked on land.

"The ocean is filled with my tears and I have none left to give. I cried when I left my father's court and I cried when I returned. There is nothing left that could bring me to tears," she said. Again the pearl changed colors.

Apollo told her the tale of the joint wedding of the twin rulers of Adbalm. He talked of the gem covered gown that sparkled as the queen walked down the aisle and how handsome the king was in his wedding robes. He spoke of the sacrifice of giving up magic that their common mate had made as their wedding gift. He spoke of the near death of a god at their feast and the grand love that saved him. As he spoke, the mermaid began to cry. Apollo handed her a handkerchief to try her tears and reclaimed it at the end of his tale.

"Thank you for the tears," he said.

"No, thank you. I should have been there," said Alone. "I mean, Queen Annette would have been proud."

"Your secret is safe with me," said Apollo pointing at her ring. "See, your ring agrees. So why weren't you there? Surely, you couldn't believe that your husband had fallen under Belladonna's

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## Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

charms and had been seduced by her?"

"If it were only that simple," she said. She had nearly been fooled by the tales of Belladonna and had been considering returning to the ocean. And then, when Kenneth attempted to kill her by throwing her over the cliff, she knew she would never have peace again while she walked on land. "I could not continue to live in that atmosphere of hate and petty bickering over beauty. And it wasn't Belladonna who drove a wedge between Oliver and I. He was a changed man after he killed that boy."

Apollo got her to tell the tale of the Brogrim Challenge that went wrong. The brothers had set up the challenge and it was Oliver's turn to shoot. Myron managed to tackle him just as he fired the arrow at the boy with the apple on his head. Oliver lost control of the arrow and it struck the boy in the chest.

"The arrow that killed without touching a bow! That's the next item on my quest."

Alone continued by saying that Oliver never accepted his responsibility. He blamed his brothers and only thought of how to make them pay. It was in that act that she began to distance herself from him. "I knew that he never really loved me. I was just another pawn in their cruel games." Her ring turned black.

"In your heart, you know that's not true. I know that he loves you."

"Then why doesn't he come and call for me?"

"He's a changed man and is ashamed of what he has become. Until he is ready to accept the truth and face himself, he won't be able to. But I will find a way to bring you together," said the prince. "But it will take a while."

"When will that be?"

The prince thought a moment wondering how to tell her it could be five hundred years. "When it is time to pass on your ring to someone who will need it to face Belladonna."

"You seem to understand it better than I. Why don't I just give it to you as a gift?"

"Thank you, but I already have a gift from you." He pulled Oceana's Horn out from under his tunic. "Your daughter passed this one to me. No, the ring will be safer in your care here in the ocean, far away from those who would only appreciate its beauty and not its true worth. At the right time, you will return it to your father. Then, you will know that your waiting is nearly finished."

"You speak as if you can predict the future."

"In a way, I guess that's true."

When Renaldo returned with the food, the two had shifted the conversation to Apollo telling tales of what Angelo and Angelina had done since she disappeared. The mermaid departed while they ate. At the end of the meal, Apollo decided to return to the caves for some rest. The visit with his fore-mother was tiring and he already knew how stubborn Oliver could be. He wanted some time to prepare for that visit.

That evening Renaldo announced that he was not going to be able to join the prince on the following day's journey. The mine guards had reported seeing a strange beggar woman in the area and both he and his father felt that it had to be the Dark Queen. It was their opinion that the concentration of magical things that the prince was gathering was starting to attract her attention and would soon be making an attempt to claim them for her own. "If she were to come down here and find the princess, who knows what harm she would do! I have to stay and protect her."

Apollo was actually glad for the distraction. He had a feeling that he would be better able to get information from the former king if there were no witnesses. He started his journey in the morning by going back to the Valley. He wasn't certain if the centaurs had established villages yet, nor if Oliver had joined the herd. But he was certain that they had to be in that general vicinity so the search would be easier. He was about to send out his energy when a centaur approached him.

"Greetings, friend," said the centaur, "What brings you out this far from your village?"

"I am in search for a teacher of your kind. I have heard that none are better teachers than a centaur. I have learned that there is one among you who is well versed in human ways and I seek his wisdom so that I may earn favor in my princess's eyes." He noticed a flash from the ring on the centaur's hand.

"You have your aim set high if you are wooing a princess."

"My aim is always true," replied the prince. He pulled his bow from his shoulder and shot an arrow into the center of a knot in a tree across the clearing and reached for an arrow to shoot a second. Before he could send it flying to split the first, an arrow from the centaur's bow had already done so. The prince sent his arrow to split the centaur's.

"Very impressive," said the centaur. "I am called Ctholbêahâssêsbut."

"Then this is my lucky day for you are the very centaur I was searching for," said the prince. "I need to be honest with you as it is not your teaching I seek. I am on a quest to return home in a far kingdom and must obtain some objects so that the faerie queen will grant my wish."

### Get Your T-Shirts by DragonSwan

CafePress.com is a web site that offers artists the chance to get their artwork to the public by printing it on shirts (multiple styles and in most sizes), bibs, mugs tote bags and the like. I have a different 'shop' for each of the four designs that are currently available (the one here and the kitten on the back cover plus the head of Aries from our Beltane issue and a holiday dragon.)

Since this is not an adult site, I have to keep the images child friendly. Yes, my muse can be child friendly! He likes cartoons as much as I do! So while this doesn't help get you all of the sexy graphics on a t-shirt, it is a start. This will be just the beginning!



<http://www.cafepress.com/AJMDENVER>

<http://www.cafepress.com/ajmAries>

<http://www.cafepress.com/ajmholiday1>

<http://www.cafepress.com/AJMHoliday2>



"Jade Rose? Has she stooped so low as to asking for payment? I would never believe that."

"No, the queen's name is Amaranth Morningstar," said Apollo.

The centaur flinched at her name. "Then, from her, I could believe it. Let me give you a warning. Never trust her magic. It will come back to haunt you. It may seem like she is doing you a favor but it will always go wrong."

"Is that what you truly believe? The love you have for Queen Annette will live through the ages."

"Had. She left me and as a result, I turned into this." The ring turned black as he spoke. "Confounded thing. I wish it would stop that. It is driving me crazy."

"Why don't you take it off?" asked Apollo.

"I..." he hesitated as he played with the ring. "...I can't."

"Because you still love her and somewhere inside you know that she is not to blame for your condition. It was your brother's wife who put the curse on you."

"But if Annette hadn't died, then I wouldn't be like this."

"She's not dead," said the prince.

"Then why doesn't she come?"

"She can't," he offered. "And she wonders the same about you."

"And have her see me like this? Now telling me about my wife is not what brought you here, is it?"

Apollo explained that he needed the arrow that had been involved in the death of a child. It took him a long time to convince the former king that he wasn't planning on using it as some part of revenge against the brothers. When he finally agreed to let go of it he led the prince to a freshly constructed corral located under the trees. While he rummaged through his sacks to find the arrow, Apollo spied a strange creature hiding in the shadows. With a little encouragement, he coaxed the creature to step into the light. It had the head of a horse and the lower body of a man.

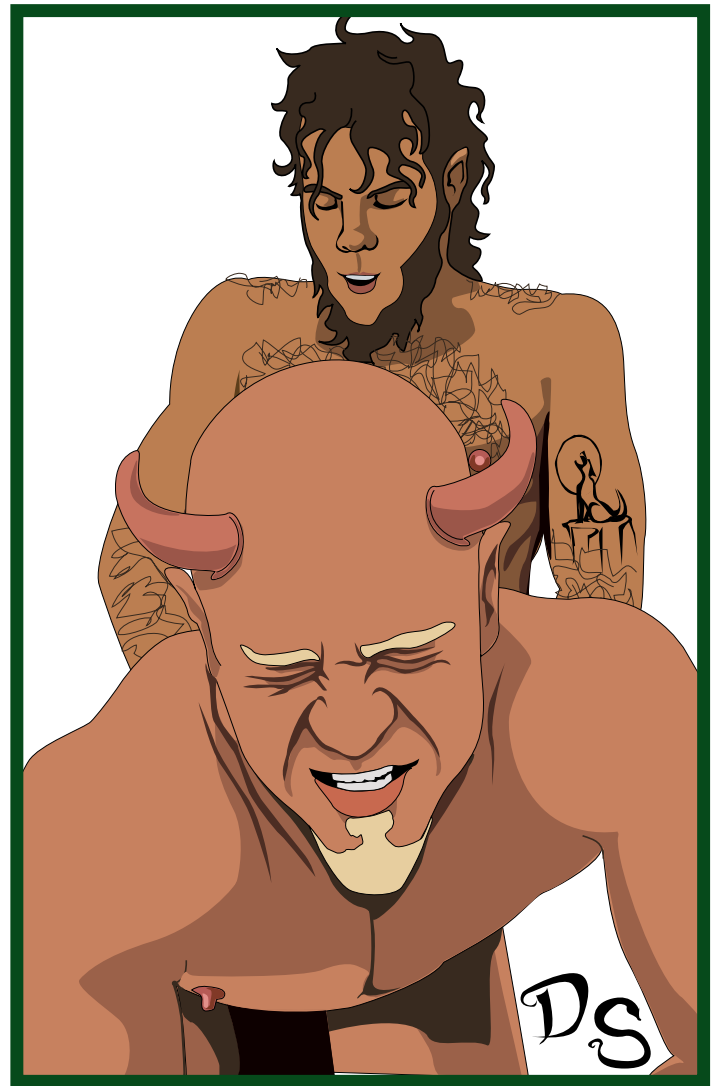
"I call him the Horn since he is half horse and half man. I had to bring him out here," said Ctholbêahâssêsbüt. "The centaurs feel that he is an abomination and want to kill him. But he is part of me and I have to protect him. Here's the arrow. May it bring you more luck than it did me."

"Thank you," said the prince. "And have faith, some day your curse will be over and you will be reunited with Annette."

"And when will that be? I've already lost track of how long it has been since I saw her."

"It will be when you are old enough," said the prince. "I have one more task to complete and then Queen Amaranth will have to grant my wish." Apollo bowed to the former king and opened a portal to a small cottage in the woods near the caves.

"An apple a day kept the doctor away, but an apple like this needs true love's first kiss," he quoted to him self. He knew that had to be a reference to one of Belladonna's papel sedoipen fruits. Knowing that the Dark Queen had often come to visit her mother, he figured that this would be a good spot to begin his search for the tree that bore such poisonous fruit. His first search yielded the core of the apple that Princess Daisy had eaten on his first visit to the cottage. It had been thrown down the well that once held her captive. With the fruit in hand, it was easy for his earth energy to find the parent tree. A quick portal later and he stood under its



branches.

He started to pick one of the fruits but as he reached for it he thought about all the lives that it had claimed. The prince realized that he had the power to destroy that tree for all time and save all those lives including his own mother. He reached down and gathered energy so that he could ensure that the tree would not survive.

"I would not do that if I were you," said Amaranth emerging from a portal of her own. "Using your gifts for revenge will only lead to great harm."

"But if I destroy it, think of the lives that I will save," countered the prince.

"Yes, but then you will have changed your past. You may not be able to return home," she said. "Your mother might be alive, but then you might not meet your friends. Something will be different and your time will not be the same as you left it."

Letting go of the energy, the prince started thinking out loud. "And if I destroy the tree, then how would Rondar prove his love for my father? And that would mean Belladonna would find a new poison that I would have to figure out."

"Exactly," said the faerie queen. "At least the fruit of this tree is

*-continued on page 18*

## Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

a known danger. As long as she thinks that she has a working poison and clever plan, she won't have reason to create new ways to kill."

"And a known danger is far easier to watch for," said Apollo, "especially when the opponent doesn't know that you know." He paused as he thought for a moment. "And, if I put some energy in watching the tree or trees, I will have a way of knowing that she is planning something."

"Now you are sounding like you are thinking instead of reacting. The more I am with you, the more I am sure you will be a great king. I could only hope that I will live long enough to see you again." She held out her arms to give him a hug.

"You will," he said.

As they embraced the queen had a jolt and quickly pulled away. She got a very pained look on her face and grasped her stomach.

"What happened? Are you alright?" asked the prince, fearing that somehow she tapped some of the energy that he had built up to destroy the tree.

"I'm fine," she replied. "At least I think I am. I just had a vision of seeing myself meeting you. I was old and you were all in white."



"That was the day we met," said Apollo.

"That vision was very clear. I don't have visions."

Amaranth was still holding her stomach, so Apollo turned his earth energy toward her. "But your daughter does."

"Robin's not here," she said. Then she realized what he meant. "You mean I'm pregnant? Oh my!" She got quiet for a moment. "I think you are right. But to have a vision and share it before I know she's here?"

"It means that she comes from a very powerful family and is destined to be a great queen when it's her time."

"Oh dear. This is going to be very inconvenient. Once Hilda finds out, she is never going to let me leave unattended. I bless their sense of duty but I wonder if it was wise to create nine of her. They are smothering me with their protections. I had to order them to stay at the palace so that I could come talk to you alone before you misused your gifts."

"Maybe you could get them to limit direct protection to just one at a time."

"That's an idea. I wonder if she will allow that."

"She will."

"You sound certain, are you sure that will work?" She hit her head with her hand. "What was I thinking? You know things about me that I haven't lived yet."

"Actually," said Apollo, "in this case, I know things about Hilda's sense of duty. You will not have a more loyal guard."

Amaranth created a portal back to her quarters before Belladonna came and discovered them in her orchard. The queen had the prince tell her of all the things that he's collected. She laughed when he told her about TickledPink.

"So when you get that golden cloth, you will have everything you need for the spell?"

"As far as I know," replied the prince. "At least that is everything that my grandmother had in the story she told me."

Just then, Raven Stormcrow entered the room, "Is it true?"

"Is what true," asked Amaranth and Apollo in unison.

Rather than saying anything, he took them to the window. The leaves of the Rainbow Forest were all shades of pink with a royal crown blazing in the center of the canopy. "Well, there's your confirmation, Your Majesty. And it looks like it's going to be a girl."

As they watched the colors shift between shades of pink and the crown faded as soon as they started paying attention to the forest. Apollo soon noticed a pattern developing. The darker colors formed designs that matched the objects that he had been collecting. He expected the pattern to stop when it formed an apple but the phoenix shape that had appeared the night he created his first portal became visible. With the recognition of the symbol came a gasp. The pinks turned black and the phoenix turned into a blood red axe.

"Oh my!" gasped the queen. "Is the forest trying to say that there is one more thing to find?"

"Or a warning that someone is going to try to kill me?"

Amaranth grasped her stomach. "I think my daughter just said that it's both."

# The Gabby Diaries: Hurricane Yente - Part 1

by Gabby

It was a dark and stormy night...I have always wanted to say that and in this case it was true. Peter and I had been driving for hours when the storm hit. Not that it was unexpected since the reason we were on the road was to try to get ahead of that storm. It won the race. But for all the wanting to say that opening line, I'm probably ahead of myself.

Peter's grandmother turned 90 this fall. His Aunt Jessica decided to throw a big surprise party in her honor. Nanancy (that's really Nana Nancy, but you know how kids collapse names into cuter names that somehow stick – well, that is Nanancy for you) lives outside of Tampa. Peter hadn't had a real break from the clinic in months and I had never traveled through the Gulf States so we decided to pack up the Tahoe and do a road trip. We weren't in a real rush to get there, so we gave ourselves time to stop at some of the fun places between here and there, and a different set of stops for the trip home. Now, honesty compels me to admit that one of the lures to doing the road trip rather than flying was the simple fact that I would be alone with Peter for an extended period of time. Don't get me wrong, I love my clan and I am grateful to have each of them in my life. But I think I can understand how Grams and Grampa Joe felt at the end of the day when their seven kids were off to bed or doing homework and it was just the two of them sitting on the porch watching the stars. With all of the activity at the house, we were looking forward to a little private time.

The first part of the trip was not as uneventful as we had expected. We stopped at a couple of rest stops and took some "bad boy" pictures of us getting naked at every opportunity. We did have a bit of fright when a big old papa bear ranger pulled into one stop just as I had gotten out of my shorts. My heart started pounding with thoughts of being locked up when Peter turned around and saw what had gotten my attention. No sooner had Peter turned when the ranger let out a squeal and rushed over to give Peter a big hug. It turned out that Ranger Nick had been the bouncer back at Chaps when Peter has been working as a bartender. Ranger Nick gave us the lecture on the evils of indecent exposure and then offered to take pictures of Peter and I standing naked in front of the sign welcoming us to Boner Springs. He took us back to his station and gave us a list of his network of friends in the Park Service and the Highway Patrol who love to look at naked men. After all, who is going to file a complaint about guys standing outside naked when an officer is already talking to them? With that list of cell phone numbers tucked away, we thanked Nick in the best manner we could think of.

After that little bit of fright, we decided to keep our belts buckled as we ventured further into the Bible Belt. We only did the public nudity bit when we were able to connect with one of Nick's friends, which was not very often. Generally, when we called, Nick's friends were either off duty or at the other end of their territory. As much as it would have been fun, I can't say I was too disappointed since this trip was to be about time for Peter and I to be alone. Here was the Universe assisting in that matter. With that realization, we relaxed and knew that if there was to be a playmate on the trip, the Queer God would bring him to us and we didn't need to spend energy trying to find one.

There isn't too much to tell about this part of the trip. There is some beautiful country along the way but our tale really begins once



we got to Nanancy's party. Or I should say, when we got to what should have been Nanancy's party. We spent a day getting reacquainted with my friend Figment over at EPCOT and then headed to the party at the appointed time and place. We waited with the rest of the guests...and waited...and waited. A teary eyed Aunt Jessica finally arrived and announced that Nanancy was gone and would be unable to attend in any other way than in spirit. A gasp rose from the gathered crowd as the realization of the tragedy of death on her birthday settled in. "What happened?" was the outcry. That's when Jessica confessed that she forgot to make arrangements with someone to get Nanancy to the party and she slipped out of town without telling Jessica. Apparently Nanancy competed in her community's Senior Olympics and had won a trip to Hawaii to represent them in the Senior Decathlon. The word from her friends was that she was still a bit weak in her Shuffleboard technique after her hip surgery but her Gin Rummy and Cribbage skills were the stuff of legends and it was felt they should carry her to victory. It seemed like every else knew about Nanancy's trip and I'm guessing that Nanancy told them to not tell Jessica so that she would get the real surprise. Nanancy hated birthday parties and this would be the perfect way to send a message to not plan any more.

Being ever resourceful, I quickly found the florist in Nanancy's hotel and had them deliver flowers to her. I had them sign it with a simple message that had our cell phone number and that she was to call while the delivery person waited. The florist checked with the front desk, who confirmed that she had just made a purchase at the poolside bar so we set things in motion. We waited for a few minutes in quiet anticipation and when my phone rang everyone jumped. "Thank you for the lovely flowers but who are you?" came the puzzled voice on the phone. At my signal everyone shouted "Surprise" and I passed the phone over to Peter. Thank heaven for unlimited minutes and a freshly charged battery because we passed the phone around to everyone so they could give her their own birthday greetings.

The following morning we drove over to St. Petersburg to visit my folks. As we ate lunch, we heard the weather report that announced the approach of a hurricane. The storm was expected to avoid the area so we continued our visit in blissful ignorance. It was

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## The Gabby Diaries continued

only after we got on the road two days later that we discovered the effects of being anywhere near one of those storms. That, and we discovered the fact that the storm was going to avoid St. Petersburg had nothing to do with the impact that it had on our planned route home. It was getting close to six o'clock when the combination of the growing darkness and torrential rain made us realize that we were going to need to start looking for a place to stay for the evening else we risked driving off a bridge without knowing it.

It was soon after making that decision that we passed a lone bicyclist. He looked miserable in the pouring rain. We wondered what had brought him so far out into the storm and how far he had to go. As we talked, I remembered that we still had Buck's bicycle rack on the Tahoe. I had taken him for one of his mountain rides the day before we left and forgotten to take it off in the rush to get things packed. Peter stopped the car and let the cyclist catch up. He came up beside us and tapped on the window asking if he could help us. He was grateful of our offer when he learned that we wanted to help him. A few minutes later his bike was racked up and he was busy apologizing for getting the seats wet. He had such a cute face in the frame of his hood that I was so tempted to tell him that if it bothered him so much that he was free to strip. Somehow I managed to refrain from embarrassing him and simply handed him a couple of the towels that we had for keeping bare butts from sticking to car seats. He slipped off his jacket and neatly folded it before placing it on the floor and then sat on one of the towels while drying his hair and face with the other.

His name was Sean and he had gone out to his aunt's house to make sure everything was shuttered up. He was supposed to have left several hours earlier but each time he tried to leave she would have one more thing that just had to be done before he left. It was only after the rain started that she realized that he really did have to get going. Sean's mom was going to be beside herself when he hadn't returned yet. He directed us to a turn-off and we headed into Smallville, USA. I think there were only a couple of dozen buildings on the main street, one of which was his mother's diner, The Tin Cup Café. Beatrice was ready to tear into her son for being so foolish for being out in the storm and for dripping all over her clean floor but Peter turned on his charm by asking for some of her great cooking that Sean had been praising. I had to smile at his tactic since he hadn't said a word about his mother other than she was going to kill him.

Peter's words were prophetic because the fried chicken she served was some of the best I have ever had. When Beatrice took our order she claimed that we seemed familiar. We said that we had never been in the area. She insisted that she knew us and would figure it out as she never forgot a face. While we were waiting for the food I had a chance to check out our new young friend. He was young – maybe in his mid-twenties. He had a long, lean frame which was probably all muscle from all of the physical activity needed to keep a small farming community alive. His carrot-top hair was almost flame-like when he wandered back into the shadowy areas of the diner. He kept himself busy filling oil lamps and other little chores that Beatrice insisted had to be done immediately. After Beatrice brought our plates she started to leave and then she looked like a light bulb went off and came back to our table. "Do you know



Judy?" she asked. When we didn't know whom she was talking about she got that disappointed look since she seemed to have been expecting some kind of positive response to her question.

As we ate her most excellent chicken, Sean wasn't the only male scenery to watch. There was a steady stream of highway patrol and state troopers stopping for food. About halfway through the meal, the tones coming from the officers was making it clear that we were going to have to head out soon and find shelter for the night. We were just about to say good-bye when a loud crack of lightning right outside the door shocked everyone into silence as the lights went out in its wake. Sean was just about to go out the door to check on their generator when it opened on its own. Well, not exactly on its own. Silhouetted in the doorway was a broad shouldered, deep chested, narrow waisted man. His deep Southern voice seemed to echo as he shouted to a couple of the patrolmen who had been seated near us to come help with the downed power line.

"Do you boys own that Tahoe that is parked out front?" he asked as he walked up to our table.

"Yes," said Peter. "Do you need us to move it?"

"I would not recommend that right now."

He directed us to follow him outside. The top of the pole struck by the lightning lay embedded in the roof of the Tahoe. Sparks from the live wires were arching over the hood.

"I don't think you boys are going to be going anywhere for a while," he said.

**...to be continued**