



Publisher's Notes

Hey Sweet Faeries and Friends of Faeries, welcome to the 2009 Imbolc issue of the Denver Faeries' Airy Faerie. The great wheel keeps on turning and winter is turning to spring. We changed our calendars to 2009. We celebrated milestones and personal achievements with friends and family. We celebrated a time of change as America elected and watched as the first African-American became president. Some of us celebrated the Chinese New Year, the Year of the Ox. We plan for the future. And in-between, we cooked, cleaned and went out of our minds. With so much on the calendar I am amazed we have time to breath.

I was going to once again bitch about how time and I are bitter enemies. It seems like I just get my place decorated for Yule and before I can really enjoy it, it is time to box it all back up and haul it off to storage. In my case, I got to work on the art and cards for this issue while Phoenix did the hauling. (Multitasking at its finest!) Instead, I am going to count the blessings I have that keep me so busy.

First off is my job. While it is not the perfect job, I do work with fun people and am grateful to be employed during these hard times. Next on my list are the Denver Faeries. They are my second family, my tribe. I am blessed to have every one of them in my life. I am also thankful for time spent with my extended family. Recently my uncle celebrated his 90th birthday. What a thrill it was to celebrate such an amazing milestone in life. I am very fortunate to have a large family that is accepting of my being gay and they are very welcoming to my lover. While I do not want kids of my own, I have to admit it is very cool to be a great-uncle to my niece's newborn son. Another group that is filling up my time is a pagan group, the Highlands Ranch Pagans, that we discovered when they hosted a public Beltane ritual last year. After joining them for a few private rituals, we have become part of their open and accepting circle. Another blessing is the new gay pagan, men for men online social group found at www.paganmen.socialgo.com. Besides

meeting a bunch of great men, I am enjoying sharing my art with more people and it had also started me writing again. Another blessing is our friends at www.radfae.org who support us by making our back issues available to everyone for us. We can be found in their Arts section. Last, but certainly not least, is my lover, Phoenix. I am grateful for every moment I get to share with him.

And there was one of those sad, bittersweet blessings in our lives since we last chatted. The day after my uncle's birthday, we joined our friend sadalia as he sat with his beloved Tigerling on his last day as a mortal after a two month battle with brain cancer. You can find their incredible love story in the Beltane 2004 issue. As they said shortly after their handfasting that year, "Keep your heart alive: it is never too late for love." Our private faerie memorial was held on the anniversary of that handfasting. I send many thoughts of love to sadalia and the rest of Tigerling's family.

I am very fortunate and blessed to have a life that is so full that my cup truly does run over. Before I begin talking about this issue, I ask that you take a moment to count your blessings and start the year off with a grateful heart.

OK, on with the Imbolc issue of the Airy Faerie. Being who we are, there are images and writings of naked males and man to man sexual situations. Please take this as your "ADULT CONTENT WARNING." You know the drill by now. If you are offended by such material what are you doing opening this in the first place? And if you are of an age or in a situation where you will get in trouble for viewing such material, come back to these pages at a more appropriate time. We do offer a snail mail option if computer access to adult material is problematic for you.

Ok I will now turn you loose to enjoy the 2009 Imbolc issue of the Denver Faeries' Airy Faerie. I hope you enjoy!

Naked Hugs,
DragonSwan

Airy Faerie



Imbolc 2009

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

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Being There or Off the Hook By Phoenix

Being there.
How I hated those words when spoken to me
“If you need something,
Let me know and I’ll be there.”
How sweet the sound and thought,
How sad the reality.
Because when I finally knew what I needed
I was here and they were there
And rarely did something change to bring us together
And the call went unanswered.

Years have gone by and friends have had rough times
I found myself saying the same thing.
I meant every word.
I would go home.
Safe.
The phone never rang.
I wasn’t needed.
I was off the hook.

Then one day a call came,
A son was struggling
The family wondered if they could have him talk to me
They knew I had gone through struggles of my own
I said yes, just let me know when he’s ready
And I’ll be there.
The phone never rang.
He wasn’t ready.
I was off the hook.

Another day, another call
This time he was in the hospital
Struggling for his life
He needed me and called out in a spectacular manner.
But try as hard as I might
Being there for him wasn’t enough anymore
I left my comfortable chair and went to his side.
“I’m here for you, now,” I said.

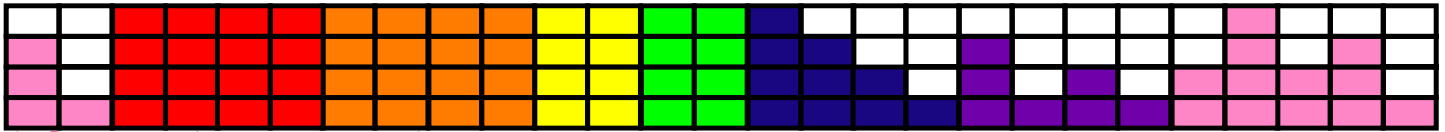
I don’t know how much of a difference I will make
But I do that it makes all the difference to me
If something really happened to him
And I was safe “being there”
Instead of “being here” where I am needed.

**This issue is dedicated
to the memory of**

Tigerling

September 7, 1948 • December 24, 2008

**The Garden of Dreams will be all the more
brighter for having him as their new gardener.**



The 4-f Tarot: Retirement Announcement

by Phoenix

Take a look at the Tarot Meter above. Figuring three or four new cards per issue, it isn't going to be that much longer before we will have revealed all 108 cards. But that will only be the end of Phase One. Then the real fun begins. Phase Two is the refining of images and adding additional layers of complexity that were not incorporated in the foundation established in Phase One. This will be things such as looking at the energy patterns of other divination tools such as the I Ching and Runes. Those other tools found their way to reduce the complexity of universal energies and we want to honor their ancient wisdom in our deck.

It is with a bit of sadness that I announce that one of the previously revealed cards has resigned his position. The stress of supporting the Playful Feather + Fire was a bit too much for the Cardinal. After taking a vacation in the mountains, he fell in love with the view from the top of his favorite tree and has now taken up permanent residence as part of the Magic of Earth which was revealed last issue. He asked us to wait to announce his decision until we found his replacement. The Hummingbird was eager for the position. We, here at Airy Faerie, had first approached these birds for the position but they had turned us down wishing to be considered for one of the Major cards, thus the position had gone to the Cardinal. The Hummingbird has since learned that the creatures on the upper level cards had to share the spotlight and decided that life on a solo card might be good after all. Thank you Hummingbird. Your playful fire is what we really needed!

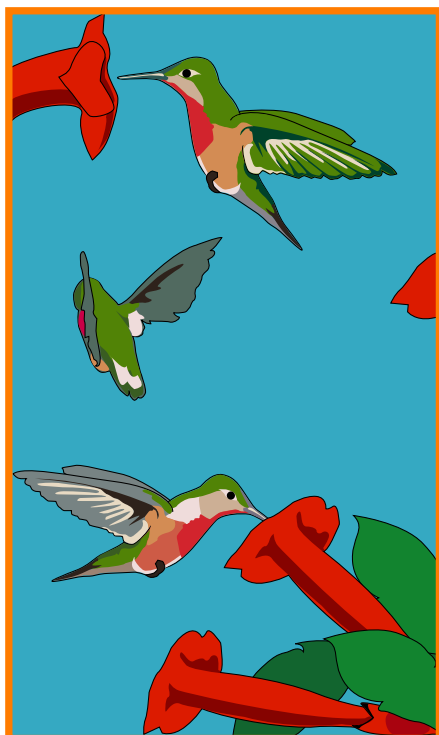
Seriously, when I would do spreads, the Cardinal just kind of sat there and we needed a bit more energy on the card. I truly had thought the hummingbird might be part of one of the Goddess cards,

but that hasn't come to pass. So time to step back and go back to that initial impression. After seeing these wonderful birds again during our summer vacation, it quickly became clear that we needed to showcase them as themselves as our playful feather of fire. Their quick darts and seemingly effortless hovering will add much to spreads.

Enough about the birds, you have been staring at the guys on the right, so I might as well let them go next. In the early stages of coming up with ideas, I started with the images of the traditional Major Arcana. I tried to think of fun ways to interpret the classic image of using DragonSwan's flare for male nudes. Our self-sucking snake pit grew out of the energy of the Oribus who is featured on The Wheel. These guys are that snake biting their own tail. They represent that essence of being complete unto one's self. There is a lot of flexibility that goes into doing that, so that might be the energy you need to tap when interpreting the card during a reading. But there is a bit darker flavor here as well. These guys are so capable of satisfying themselves that there isn't much room for you. In the grand energy grid of the deck, this card is The Void. It is so self-contained that it doesn't really connect to anything. It is easy to sucked into the energy of the card, but it will take a lot of energy to break free of their coils and not find yourself returning to them just as the Oribus represents an endless circle.

On the back cover we have the Magic of Air, the third of the magic of the elements cards. Air is one of those odd concepts to capture visually. You can't see it but you know it is there. How do you know it's there? By its effect on things, which is what we chose to portray. If your next question is "but what does it mean?" then I will say, "How does it make you feel when you see the flag blowing in the wind?" Overall, that is how you should approach all of the cards. Don't stand on the outside looking at it with detached scrutiny. Rather, put yourself in the scene and see how you feel when you see those shafts of light streaming down through the clouds. The same is true for the snakes - get inside that picture and see how you feel when no one notices you because they are so self-absorbed. Are you the snake or the observer? And back to the Magic of Air - are you the Flag or are you the "Wind beneath their wings?"

The final card for this issue is the Goddess of Feathers (shown on page 19). She has always been our Owl energy representing ancient wisdom. As the energy settled and she found her place among the rest of the flamboyant cards, she humbled herself and became a bird on the ground. When it came time to balance the seasonal energies, she volunteered to watch over the less fortunate during the deepest winter. There is a lot of humility in this card. The Goddess is confined to the wheelchair, yet she pulled herself out of her warm home to feed the pigeons. No one helped her get there. But remember, she is the Owl with that ancient wisdom I mentioned. How often do we see people like her out in the park? And how often do we approach them seeking some of the wisdom that they have to offer? The bird woman is such an iconic figure in *Mary Poppins* for a reason. Are you willing to sit with our Goddess to help her feed the birds?





Quest for the Crystal Phoenix

Chapter 32: Solstice Surprises

by Orpheus

Apollo woke in a sweat. It had been three months since the trees revealed the shape of the bloody axe. Even though the forest returned to its normal cycle of color changes, the axe haunted his dreams. At first it was just the image of the axe, but in recent weeks it was as if he could feel the blade swinging towards his throat.

"Another dream?" asked Hilda FourOfNine who was sitting alert in the chair at the far side of his room.

Apollo sat up and nodded. It had taken him a while to get used to having a guard stationed in his quarters, let alone a female guard.

Amaranth insisted even knowing his ability to cast his protection spells. She argued that while she was pregnant, she would be of limited use to rush to his aid should someone break through the spells and Hilda was the best protection that she could offer. With the power of someone to affect the Rainbow Forest and the prince's dreams, then they certainly had the potential of finding weaknesses in spells. Amaranth assigned Hildas ThreeOfNine, FourOfNine and SevenOfNine as his personal guards while he slept. The trio rotated duties of being in the room, patrolling the hallway outside his suite and outside his window. It had taken some convincing for the Hildas to take up guard duty for someone other than the queen, but Amaranth had won her case by reminding them that if they protected Apollo, then Amaranth could stay secure in the castle and not rush around the countryside in answer to his call for help should the need arise. The prince knew that it sounded good, but he suspected the real reason was that Amaranth was seizing the opportunity to thin out the Hilda ranks that hovered around her.

"I think this was one of the worst so far," said the prince. "I could almost see a face. Whomever is behind this must be getting closer."

"Have either the Queen or yourself gotten any closer to figuring out the mystery of the axe that you are supposed to find? Maybe that would be the clue you need to figure out the attacker as well."

Apollo shook his head. "No, we haven't. No one in the Faerie Court nor the other Royal Courts can think of legends that involve magical axes. And I can't remember any from my time either."

Hilda got a puzzled look on her face and then got a distant look in her eyes. Apollo recognized that as the look the 'sisters' got when

they communicated with each other. "Hilda EightOfNine says to ask you what makes you say that it is a magical axe?"

He pondered the question for a moment. "She may be onto something. An axe doesn't have to be magical to cause harm."

"So what stories involve an axe?" she asked.

"There is the one that cut down the beanstalks during the Giant Wars. Maybe it is a giant seeking revenge." Hilda got a puzzled look. "Oh, right. That hasn't happened yet and that axe wasn't really bloody since it didn't kill anyone directly so I don't think that can be it."

"Is there another?"

Apollo paused a moment. It wasn't as much that he couldn't answer, but more the fact that he was noticing how Hilda's breasts were heaving as she internalized her frustration at not having something active to do. The effect momentarily left him mesmerized. It was with a bit of effort that he broke connection with that luring motion and rejoined the conversation. "I know there is one more, but I keep struggling to remember it."

Hilda put some aromatic herbs on the censer that she kept near the bed.

"This should help you settle back down to sleep."

"Hilda FourOfNine, why don't you have a name for yourself?" he asked. "You are more than just part of a matched set."

"But we are identical. There are nine of us and we had to have some way of identifying which one was being addressed. It was getting a bit confusing when the Queen would ask one of us to do something and all nine of us would

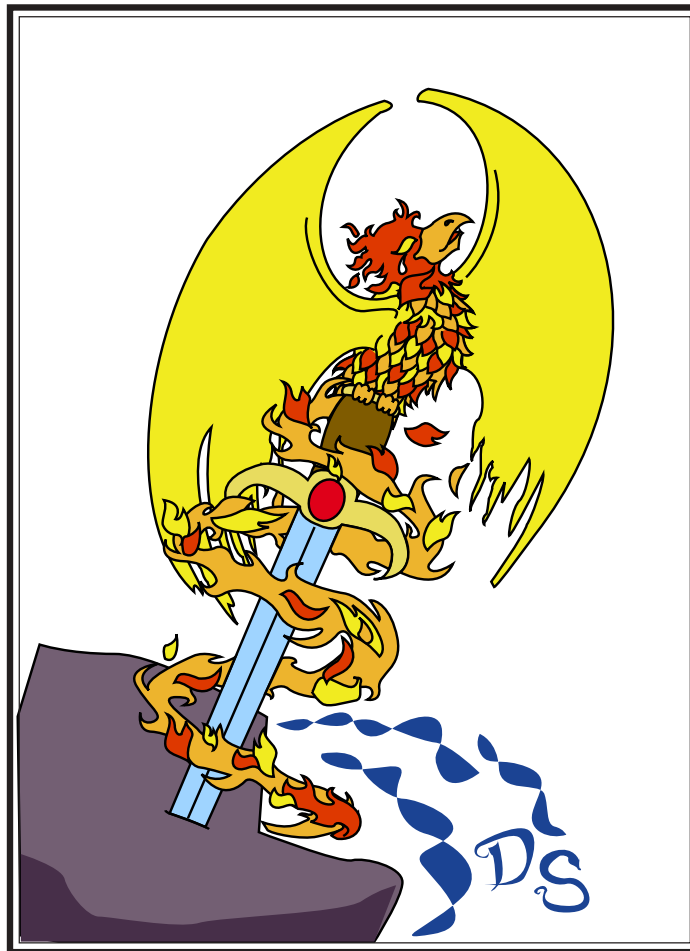
try to do it."

"You are wrong," offered the prince. "You may have been identical the first time I met you, but the more I'm around you, the more I can tell you apart."

"If that's true, then you are the only one. Queen Amaranth can't even do that."

"You all are wearing your hair differently now. Hilda TwoOfNine seems to like to keep her hair in a pony tail while you braid yours into a coronet. Hilda SixOfNine seems to be the only one who can stop an argument between the Queen and her consort. You treat me to herbal sleep while Hilda SevenOfNine lulls me to sleep with the sound of her sharpening her sword."

"A coronet, you say?" She picked up some of the dried flowers



that she had been bundling while he slept. She started to work some stems into her hair. "I like to think of it as a wreath."

"You look like the Yarrow Princess when you do that."

"Then that shall be my name, Hilda Yarrow."

She leaned over to give him a kiss but the herbs had begun to have an effect on Apollo, who chose that moment to yawn. "Excuse me."

"Ever my curse of bad timing. Rest now and we will see what names my sisters come up with when they learn what you told me."

When he awoke, Hilda excused herself so that the prince could get dressed. "Happy Solstice" she said as she exited his bedroom.

"It's the solstice?" thought the prince. He stood at his window watching a light snow fall. His mind went back to the Solstice celebrations back home. It was with a bit of sadness that he wondered who Viola, Lily and Cory had been dancing with since he had gone. "No one you ninny," he said out loud. He reminded himself that everyone said that he would be returned to his time at the same exact moment he had come back to this time. He spent the rest of the morning wondering which of the trio vying for the title of 'Fairest of them all' would be happiest to see him upon his return. And which one might have found someone new while he was on his trip to visit the court of Rysbal? He wasn't sure how he felt about any of them doing that.

It was in a reflective mood that he went to his morning weapons practice with Hildas OneOfNine, FiveOfNine and EightOfNine. As he thought the danger presented by the bloody axe, the prince realized that he hadn't kept up with any of his weapons training since he had come to this time. He didn't have a lack of partners when it came to his gymnastics exercises. In fact, as a result of those practices, CockRobin, FallGuy, Indigo and he had come up with a routine to entertain the queen during one of her Full Moon Celebrations. Apollo did a routine on the parallel bars while the fairies flew in intricate patterns around him. But when it came to actual weapons work, the Hildas seemed to be the only ones in Fransansico who handled bladed weapons. The sisters eagerly accepted his request to work out together.

When he got to the courtyard where they practiced, he thought perhaps the always punctual Hildas had cancelled due to the snow that had fallen earlier in the morning. Since he had nothing else planned for the morning, he set up the target and strung his bow. His first shot was dead center on target. He sent his second arrow and was surprised that it did not split the first as he had planned. Instead, it went so far off target that it missed the target all together. He really had to concentrate on the third arrow. Even then it seemed like something was trying to pull it away from the path his mind had set for the arrow.

"What's the matter, handsome?" asked one of the Hildas as she grew to full size behind him. Her hands wrapped around his waist and her breasts were pressing into his back. "Having a problem concentrating and keeping it straight? I can help with that." He felt her hands wander down his sides and toward his groin.

Apollo felt a stirring as he realized what the Hilda was offering. From the little he could see, he suspected that it was Hilda EightOfNine with her hair in a tight bun. "But what about your

sisters? Shouldn't they be joining us soon?"

"What about them? All that matters right now is that I have you to myself just like ThreeOfNine, FourOfNine and SevenOfNine get you each evening. They keep saying that nothing happens but I know us better than that." She pulled on the prince's shoulder to have him turn around. "So how's about it?"

The prince turned as directed and was a bit shocked to find Hilda EightOfNine totally nude. "Aren't you cold?" he said as he wrapped his cloak around both of them.

"Not anymore, hot stuff," she said right before kissing him.

Apollo was a bit surprised at how bold Hilda EightOfNine was being. Usually, they were all very reserved. But today, not only did FourOfNine try to kiss him, now EightOfNine was offering a lot more. He decided to not think about it and enjoy the moment. His tumbling friends always teased him about not giving details about what happened each night when the Hildas slept in his room. With EightOfNine offering her whole body, he was being to think he might actually be able to have something to share with them at the next tumbling practice.

He had just given into that thought when something in the wind indicated caution. No, it demanded action. He pushed Hilda to the ground and fell on top of her.

"Want to wrestle, do you?" she purred.

But Apollo wasn't listening as he was focused on the two arrows that whizzed about where his heart had been. He turned to see where the arrows had come from and saw two more coming at them. He reached out with his mind and pushed the arrows aside.

He turned and offered a hand to Hilda EightOfNine. "Thought you might distract me with your offer of sex?"

"Can't fault a girl for trying? It would have been fun. Maybe next time you will be luckier."

Apollo wasn't sure where it came from, but suddenly her ironwood staff was in her hands and she gave a blow to his midsection. The prince spent the next hour practicing defensive moves against the combined attacks from staff, arrow and even a battle axe. Before the hour was over, three more Hilda's joined the practice fray. Feeling a bit outnumbered, the prince used his air magic to call his tumbling partners. FallGuy was first to enter the fray. As he came into the courtyard he managed to land a snowball right in the middle of Hilda SixOfNine's face. That turned the tide and what had been a fight with weapons dissolved into a snowball fight. Apollo found that he could create a barrier using the air magic that allowed snowballs to go out but none to go in.

"That's not fair," pouted Hilda OneOfNine.

"All's fair in love and war," responded the prince.

"And which is this?" cooed Hilda EightOfNine as she materialized behind him, dumping a handful of snow down his tunic.

The prince was spared an answer as one of the heralds arrived on the scene with a summons from the queen for all of the Hilda's to attend her. Apollo followed his tumbling friends inside to one of the saunas to warm up. After the rough and tumble time with the Hilda's, the prince was looking forward to some relief in the sauna. He thought

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Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

of the bonding he had with his guards back home and thought that his friends might find a similar bonding after spending an hour with the Lust Maidens, as they called the Hilda Guard. To Apollo's disappointment, his friends kept their towels around their waists. After a short while, he excused himself and headed out to take a cold shower. As the door closed behind him, he thought he heard a "Yippee" from inside and was tempted to go back in to see if his friends had waited for him to leave before they got sexual. But he knew it was time for him to get ready for his afternoon with the queen. So he had to leave thoughts of what was going on without him to the realms of fantasy.

After change of clothes suitable for lounging in the queen's study and a quick lunch in his quarters, he went to his daily session with the Faerie Queen. They met each day to try to make sense of the objects he gathered and the spell that they would need to cast using them.

"Maybe are looking at this the wrong way," said Apollo after an hour of not coming up with anything new. "We are trying to take your known spells and make the pieces fit into the pattern." Amaranth raised an eyebrow that he had learned was her signal that he had caught her interest and wanted him to continue with the thought. "Maybe we should try to find the commonality of all of these things and that will help us figure it out."

"But we tried that," protested Raven Stormcrow, sitting next to his wife. "There is nothing that links all of the objects that we can find."

The deep bass voice of Raven Stormcrow resonated inside the prince, much like the tones of the large drums that he favored in the drum circles. Apollo was thankful of the loose fitting court robe he was wearing to keep away the winter chill. The loose folds of fabric hid the hard on that Raven Stormcrow inspired as he sat there in black leather pants and jerkin, which constantly reminded him of Johnny. How the prince longed to rub his hands under the jerkin and play with a nipple and jerk off together like Johnny had taught him.

"Hey, are you alright?" asked the faerie of his fantasies. "You look like you just went somewhere."

Apollo snapped back to reality as he realized that this was the third time in one day that he had gotten lost in a sexual sidetrack. He made a mental note of finding a way to get away from everyone's watchful eye so he could have some private time with his privates. "Sorry, I was just thinking about that 'all' part," among other things his mind added. "What if they were groups of things worked subsets and not a singular whole?"

As they arranged and rearranged the objects one thing started to become clear. "We don't have anything to represent King Myron," Apollo announced. "We have the arrow from King Oliver and a rose petal from King Kenneth. But what represents the third brother of my heritage?"

Hilda NineofNine who had been watching picked up the swan feather from the 'things of water' pile and moved it to the 'things from kings' pile. "The swan is..."

"No," countered Amaranth, "in that light, this really belongs to a new group." She picked up the feather and placed it to one side. She then added the vial of mermaid tears and papal sedoipen fruit.

"How about the 'things from queens' pile?"

"My ancestresses!" exclaimed Apollo. "But how does the royal swan fit into the family story?"

Amaranth ruffled his hair. "If I didn't pass the story on to pass to you in the future, then I will start the tradition now and not do so today. You will just have to trust me, that that group holds solid."

The prince noticed that she must have been remembering something painful so he didn't press for details. The queen excused herself saying that she had things to finish before dinner. The three attending Hildas followed in her wake. Apollo started to leave when Raven Stormcrow called him over to the window.

Expecting to see something interesting in the trees he was surprised when the faerie pulled him into a passionate kiss. He was equally surprised to realize that the faerie had to actually stretch up to reach the prince's mouth. As he gave thought to it he realized that he was now taller than the faeries, but the passion in Raven Stormcrow's kiss didn't let him linger on that thought for very long.

The kiss reawoke the fantasy of doing sex lesson number one with Johnny and Apollo's cock hardened at the thought. With a bit of hesitation, the prince reached over to run his hand over the faerie's jerkin and had a bit of shock when his hand touched flesh.

"What?" said the prince as he realized that both of them were naked. "How did you do that?"

"I did what all faeries do. I pictured that they were gone and poof, there they went."

"But I didn't see you make any gestures or cast a spell," said a puzzled prince.

"Didn't anyone tell you that stuff is all show?" asked Raven Stormcrow. "The true power of magic comes from here," as he tapped the prince on the forehead, "and here," tapping him on the chest. "It all comes inside. How you give it form is up to you." After kissing him again, "Now, is it a lesson in magic you want? When I saw your dick poking out of your robe earlier, I thought you had other things on your mind."

"But what about..."

"The queen? She is not interested in carnal pleasures right now and has released me to find relief in whatever manner I choose as long as I don't get someone pregnant. Right now, I choose you."

The kiss he gave Apollo left little room for a verbal response. The weeks of celibacy and now finding a partner for shared pleasure caused the prince to climax faster than he wanted.

"Ah, the sweet nectar of life," said the faerie as he licked the cum from the prince's chest. "I think that I will have to tell my wife that I've developed a condition that can only be treated by liberal doses of this particular liquid. I think I'll have to ask DoctorQuack to confirm this assessment of my ailment."

Apollo laughed. "Must be something genetic. Your great-grandson has the same affliction."

The faerie thought their clothing back into being. "Now scoot and get ready for dinner. The Queen has informed me to tell you to dress up in your finest as she is expecting a special guest this evening."

"Who?"

"I am not at liberty to say. She emphasized the nature of torments that she would inflict should I let anyone know of the

details of her Solstice surprise.”

Apollo looked at the canopy of the Rainbow Forest to see if the trees gave any clue. He saw a face form with a big ‘X’ where the mouth should be. It quickly returned to its display of twin holly and oak leaf crowns.

“She also informed the forest of the raging fire that awaited should it decide to reveal a hint.” He gave the prince a kiss on his forehead. “Now scoot.”

As the prince exited the room, he turned back. “Thanks. I needed that.”

The faerie licked his lips. “So did I. Some of the finest medicine a sick faerie could need.”

Apollo returned to his room. He spent the remaining part of his afternoon trying to remember a story that involved one of the royal family and an axe. As the dinner hour approached he freshened up. He had just selected a black and silver outfit as his finest, out of the multitude of finest that were in his closet, when there was a knock at his door. He opened the door to find Amaranth with TickledPink at her side. A large package was in her hands.

“I had some words with Master Dwarf and encouraged him to work faster on completing the cloth of gold for you.”

“Used her magic, she did,” said TickedPink. “She had us working non-stop and five times faster than normal.”

“And are you complaining at the payment?”

“No, Your Majesty. We won’t have to work for many years,” said the dwarf,

“Then hush and let the prince see what we have made for him.”

Apollo opened the box and lifted away the tissue revealing a tunic with a matching cape and trousers in Charming Blue with gold inlays. Throughout, all three pieces were embroidered suns, moons and stars. The outfit reminded the prince of his Princing Outfit of white with gold and silver embroidery and he realized that Amaranth must have made that outfit as well.

“Stop staring and let me see how it fits,” she chided.

After thanking her, Apollo picked up the box and went into his bedroom and changed into the outfit. At first it felt a bit snug in some places but overly large in others. But as soon as he thought that, it seemed like the fabric adjusted to a perfect fit. He glanced in the mirror and thought of the princes of every story that his grandmother had told him.

“Ah, perfect, you are bound to turn some heads tonight. Too bad I’m out of circulation, otherwise I would give the maidens the run for their money,” said the queen as he entered the room. Turning to TickledPink she added, “See, I told you that your wheat-gold would be the perfect shade to compliment Charming Blue.”

As Apollo offered his hand to the queen, to escort her to dinner,

“I am remiss in saying that you look radiant this evening. Is that a new gown? I don’t believe I’ve seen you in those deep reds and greens before.”

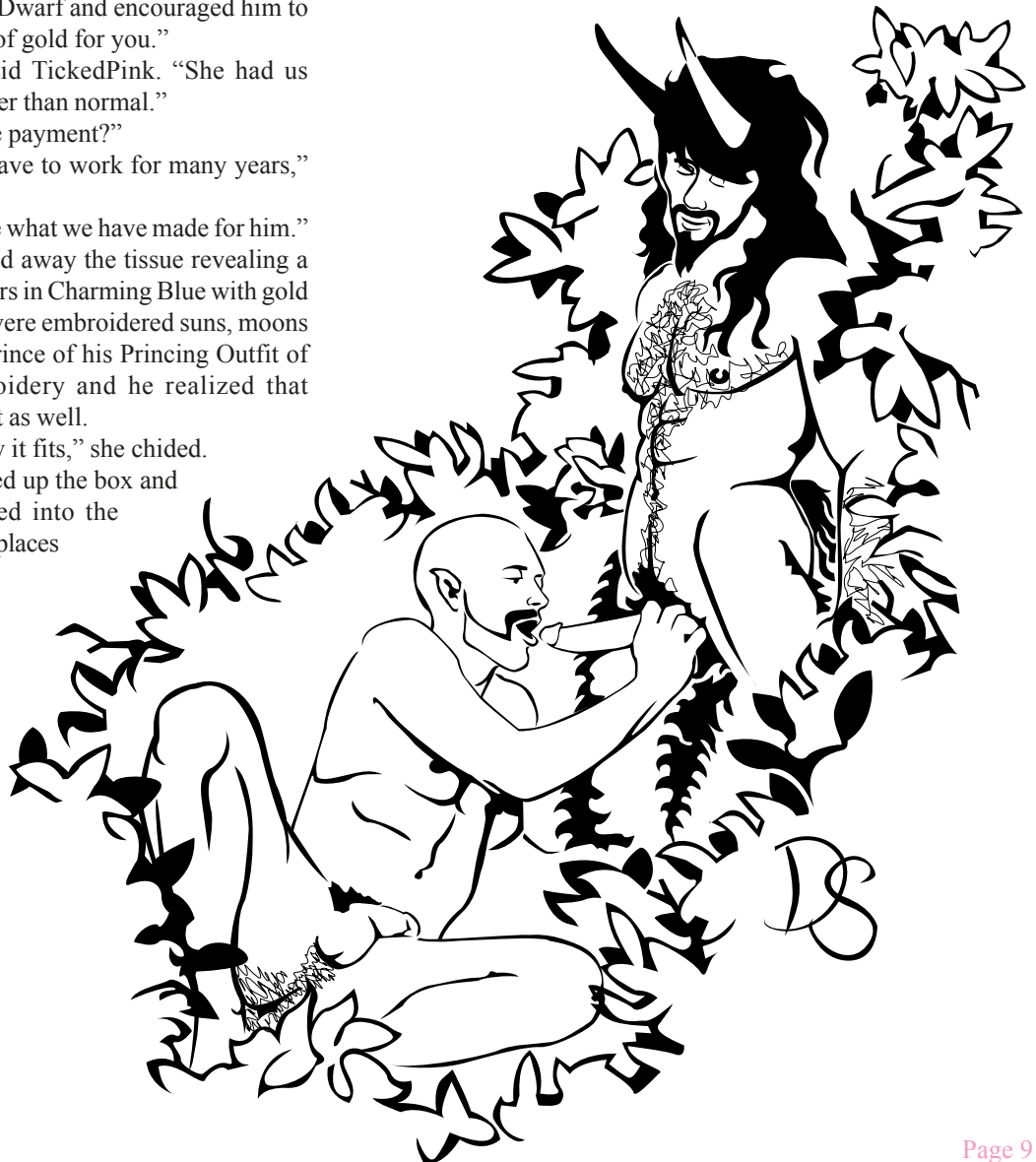
“No, but I only wear it at the Solstice,” she said. They chatted as the walked toward the Great Hall. As the approached the doors, Amaranth said, “I wanted you to have a new outfit for the Solstice because...”

She gave a signal to the heralds and they opened the doors.

“Surprise!” “Happy Birthday” came the shouts as he stepped into the room.

Apollo stood in disbelief at everyone who was there. Standing in front of the gathered crowd were Queens Daisy and Ruby Rose, GoldenRod, and even Lords Apollo and Dion. Part of his disbelief lay in the fact that he hadn’t even connected the Solstice with his birthday. A part of him didn’t want to acknowledge growing older in this time because it might mean that he really wouldn’t be able to

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Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

go home.

Amaranth insisted that the birthday boy, no, the birthday man now that he was eighteen, lead the procession to the High Table. As he walked through the cheering crowd, he kept looking for his friend Laika. During dinner, Daisy noticed his constant surveillance.

"He didn't come," she said with a bit of a tear gathered in the corner of her eye. Before Apollo could press for details, "We'll talk about it later."

"Where are Angelo and Angelina?"

"They couldn't attend because..."

Ruby Rose interrupted her, "Let them tell him for themselves." She fumbled in the folds of her skirt and pulled out an ornate hand-mirror. "'Ruby to Angelina, are you ready?'"

Apollo watched as a light began to emulate from the mirror. Ruby Rose handed the mirror to the prince and he watched a fog fill the oval and then dissipate revealing the image of Angelina.

"Greetings cousin, and Happy Birthday, nephew. Angelo and I wanted to join you today but both of us have nasty colds and the doctors have ordered us to stay in bed." Angelina's comments were punctuated with sounds of coughing in the background.

The prince wished them good health and sent them a little earth energy to help the healing process. When the mirror clouded back over, he continued to stare at it with wide eyes. "Is this one of the mirrors you made for Queen Angelica?" he asked looking at Amaranth, who nodded in response. "There is evidence that they have survived to my time but we have not found them. Now that I know what I'm looking for, it should be all the easier to locate them." Handing the mirror back to Ruby Rose, he added, "This could be one of the best presents that you could have given me."

"Speaking of presents, we have another surprise for you," announced the faerie queen.

At her words, the heralds blew their trumpets and in walked the

Hildas. They were not in their familiar leather uniforms. Instead, they were in matching black gowns that sparkled with thousands of beads. The gathered crowd oohed and aahed as the transformed warrior maidens made their way to the front.

"You have caused quite a stir today, young man," said the queen, "when you opened their eyes to their individuality. They wanted you to be the first to hear the names they have chosen for themselves."

As each announced the name that Apollo had known for each of the sisters, their gown changed from the singular, common black to a unique color that ran the spectrum from a deep garnet to a purple so deep it was almost black. With that announcement, the music began to play.

"With nine equally lovely maidens to choose from, it is going to be difficult to choose which one to ask to dance first without offending the others," said Apollo.

Hilda Harbell, in her deep purple, said, "You claimed that you could tell us apart. Prove that by dancing with us in the order in which you knew our names before."

Everyone watched as he surveyed the collective Hildas. People were surprised when he didn't go to one of the two standing on the ends of the rainbow spectrum. Instead, he offered his hand to the Hilda in the sky blue gown. "Hilda Arrowroot, I believe you are the first on my dance card this evening. Am I correct?"

"You are and I would be honored," she said as he escorted her to the dance floor.

The couple did two dances before the prince returned Hilda Arrowroot to her sisters. After dancing with Hilda Myrtle, in her orange gown, and Hilda Moonwort, in her violet gown, Apollo announced a break for some water. After chatting with the sisters during the next song, he was about to ask Hilda Yarrow, in her yellow gown, to join him when Queen Daisy cut in on his dance card. As she danced, she told the prince about Laika.

"He disappeared several weeks ago. I was hoping that you might use your powers to help find him. I've been worried about him ever since...well, since the day that Iris left home. He's been more wolf-like since he lost the ability to change than he ever was before."

The prince told Daisy that he couldn't sense Laika with his magics. He said he was certain that he was alive but somehow blocking the connection. The two agreed to meet before Daisy returned home to see if their combined effort would reveal where Laika was hiding.

The song concluded and Apollo escorted the queen back to her seat. He had just returned the sisters to ask Hilda Yarrow to dance when a bright light came flying into the room. The crowd gasped in fear as the phoenix circled the prince and flew to the entrance and hovered.

"I think he wants something," offered Amaranth as she came to his side. "As we have seen in the past, he seems to react to your emotions. What were you and my goddaughter talking about?"

"Laika! Perhaps he knows where to find him!"

The phoenix darted back into the room and circled the prince. This time, when the bird headed toward the exit, Apollo ran after it. A portal opened in the arch of the doorway and the phoenix

disappeared inside. Hilda Ironwood was closest and quickly shrunk to flying size and managed to grab the hem of Apollo's cloak just as he disappeared into the portal himself.

The portal led to a clearing in the Rainbow Forest that Apollo recognized from some of Raven Stormcrow's drum circles. Like before, something in the wind demanded that he duck. Without questioning the feeling, dropped to his knees just in time to see an axe swoosh where his head had just been.

"What divine luck," came a voice that Apollo barely recognized as Laika's. "I had been trying to figure out a way to get you out of the castle and here you are."

"Put the axe down," demanded Hilda Ironwood. Her upraised fist had all the more force behind it as she grew to fighting size. When it connected with Laika's jaw, he was forced to step back. Gone was the fancy gown and Hilda Ironwood was in her black leather, standing between the prince and the former wearwolf.

"What? Am I not worthy of your attention now that you send your bitch to do your battles for you?" Laika snarled as he swung the axe toward the faerie.

Hilda ordered the prince to stand back as she manifested her quarterstaff. The staff was almost a blur in her hands as she began to strike Laika. He swung the axe wildly trying to block her attacks. Apollo heard a loud snap as one of his swings managed to connect and broke off a piece of the staff. Hilda was momentarily stunned by the fact that something could break her ironwood staff. Laika seized the moment to swing at the faerie. Hilda was too slow in shrinking to flying size and the axe managed to connect with her arm and she screamed out in pain. At her cry, the clearing filled with her sisters.

Apollo used Laika's attention on Hilda to try to circle behind him so that he could tackle his friend and knock some sense into him. Just as Laika was swinging toward Hilda the prince leapt forcing Laika to loose control of the axe. At the sight of the full Hilda guard, Apollo ordered them to tend to their sister. "I'm his pack leader and he's my responsibility."

"Oh, now you are willing to accept your duties?" snarled Laika as he picked up the axe. "Your pack leader killed my brother with this axe. And where is he now? Run away with his tail between his legs, just like you did after I sacrificed my soul to be with you. You are not fit to be a pack leader and by Pack Code, I invoke a Leadership Challenge. Only one of us will be allowed to leave this challenge alive."

"I don't want to hurt you, Laika. I don't accept your challenge."

"You have no choice," said Wolfsun as he stepped into the clearing. "Once issued, the challenge must be met."

"And if I don't?"

"The Wolf Wars will be rekindled and this time there will be no way to appease the dishonor you give to the Council. The first to fall will be the princess and her lover."

"What if we just battle and stop as you did when Rowan battled you?"

"That would be a sign of weakness," said the wolf god, "And Council would have no choice but to hunt down the survivors. And when they kill you, there will be nothing to refrain them from rekindling the Wolf War."

"Enough of this talk," said Laika. "Either you are too weak to be a true pack leader or you are strong enough to put me out of my misery." Without further words, Laika started swing his axe at Apollo's head.

Apollo managed to duck the blow but he was unarmed and had no real protection from the sharp blade. He called upon he air magic to create a wall of air between them. A loud clang was heard with the next blow. It was as if the axe had struck a stone wall. Confident in his barrier, Apollo stood up to face Laika.

"Why are you doing this Laika?" he asked.

"You discarded me like I was worthless," said the wearwolf between swings. "I gave up my blood to be with you. I gave my everything to be with you. I asked to join you when you returned to your other pack and you turned me down. What is left for me? A pack without a leader is nothing. I have no choice but to kill you and take over before you destroy the rest of me as well."

With sudden burst of energy, Laika swung at the barrier with so much force that Apollo could feel the impact. On his next swing, Apollo released the air and leapt backwards. The momentum of the unresisted swing caused Laika to spin around, giving the prince an opening to tackle his friend. Laika lost his grip on the axe and the two began to wrestle. Laika fought with a wildness that the prince had not seen in his friend. It was as Daisy had said. He seemed more wolflike now that he couldn't change.

Apollo finally got Laika pinned to the ground. Wolfsun handed the prince a knife. "Now finish it," commanded the wolf god.

"Yes," begged Laika. "Kill me."

The plea stung at Apollo's heart and he relaxed his grip slightly. Laika sensed the change and broke free and grabbed the axe. "No more games," he said. "Let's finish this."

"Yes. Let's finish this," said the prince. He stood up and held his arms out wide. "I'm not going to fight you anymore. If you want to be pack leader so much, then do what you have to do." He sent all of his feelings for Laika into his earth energy. He put all of the love and respect he had for his friend into whatever threads of connection he could.

Laika started the fatal swing and then stopped himself. "Fight, damn it!"

"No," said the prince. "No more fighting."

"But I'm not supposed to win!" cried Laika.

"And I'm not supposed to be here," said Apollo approaching his friend. "Hand me that axe and we will figure it out."

"I hate you," he said, spitting at the prince while he prepared to swing the axe yet again. Apollo called for the fire from the sky and a lightning bolt shot down at Laika, who promptly dropped the axe.

"I hate you!" he shouted as he started to run from the clearing. "I hate you and will be back to claim pack leadership!"

"What are you going to do with that upstart cur?" asked Wolfsun. "Give me the word and I will pass word to the Council to take care of a traitorous coward who ran from a Leadership Challenge."

"I choose mercy. He is lost and confused over not being able to be both wolf and human. He needs to find out who that new person is. When he finds that out, then we will continue the challenge as originally planned."

—continued on page 12

Quest/Crystal Phoenix continued

"Humans!" snorted the Wolf God. "That mercy is going to be your downfall. But if that is your choice, then so be it. Let it be known that Laika, Son of Verlorok, is no longer welcome in the Pack. A coward who runs from the challenge that he issued has no place among true wolves!"

Wolfsun dashed towards the woods but disappeared before he entered their dark embrace. Apollo stared at the woods trying to find where Laika had gone so he could follow and talk some sense into his friend. He tried to send some earth energy but only found darkness.

Apollo jumped at the tap on his shoulder. "We need you," said Hilda Yarrow. "Hilda Ironwood is dying. She is asking for you." The normally stoic battle maiden was nearly in tears as she spoke.

That quickly brought Apollo's senses back to the clearing. In focusing on Laika, he had forgotten that one of the Hildas had been injured protecting him. "How is that possible?" he said as he rushed to where the Hildas were gathered. "It didn't seem like her injury was that deep."

"It didn't matter how deep," said Dion as he cradled Hilda Ironwood's head in his lap. "The fact that she was cut by iron makes it a hundred times worse than it would be for one of us. Not only is iron like a poison of which is keeping the wound fresh, it is a poison of the soul as well. The only thing we have been able to do is to channel the pain."

"No! There has got to be something we can do," said the prince.

Apollo dropped to Hilda Ironwood's side and began to channel healing energy. He put his hands around the cut and tried to will the edges to knit back together as he had done with cuts on his own body. He tried to divert the blood away from the cut to slow down the bleeding. He tried to find something in the information he learned from Lilac's crystal about iron poisoning. He tried to pull the poison to himself but it was bonded to her heart. With each failed attempt, he felt the faerie get weaker. "You can't die on me!" he shouted.

He felt Hilda Ironwood reach up to him with her good arm and pull him toward her. She tried to lift her head so she could sit up.

Apollo bent down so that she could stay flat but she had enough strength to meet him halfway and kissed him. In that moment, she faded from sight. Hilda Harbell screamed and the remaining Hildas began a dirge of remembrance. They shrank to flying size and soon the dirge was like the howling of the winter wind.

"It's not fair!" shouted Apollo to the nothingness around him.

"Life isn't fair," said Lord Apollo as he materialized behind the prince, placing his hands on his shoulders.

"Why didn't you stop it?" asked the prince through his tears.

"Once the challenge was issued, you were under Wolfsun's laws and we couldn't interfere," offered the Sun God.

"No, Hilda Ironwood. Why couldn't you stop her from leaving? I know that the three of us together could have done something."

The Moon God pulled the prince to his side and the Sun God joined them. The two gods held their mutual godchild as he wept.

When his sobbing stopped, he asked, "But why? She wasn't supposed to die. The wound wasn't that great. We should have been able to save her."

"As great a healer as you are becoming, even I with my powers can't save everyone."

"But why was she even here? She was supposed to be back at the castle protecting the queen."

"I thought you knew," said Dion. "She loved you. You are the only one who doesn't treat them as freaks because they handle

weapons. And now you know the risk they are taking to protect both the queen and yourself."

It was too much for the prince. His best friend hated him and now, someone died to protect him. He looked at his new outfit, now all torn and covered in blood. "I want to go home."

Dion summoned Moonbeam and the winged horse descended from the clouds. "I'll take you back to the castle."

"No. I mean I want to go to my home. I don't belong here."



Communion

By Tom

He flashed heaven at forty odd years,
Still hard,
My hand shimmying up those legs
To the lap of god.

Time hangs golden
We have time
“Bless me father,”
And I open wide for an act of religion
As I take in the full flower
De-luce
And light breaks through my body
As I receive communion

I am

By Raven Bear Paws

I want to live in the light again
I want to bask in the radiant glow of the sun.
I want to feel its warmth as it washes over me.

But I can not!

For its cleansing truth burns my tender flesh,
Reducing my bones to ashes.
I have sinned they scream.
I have sinned for what I am.

A lover of men

But am I not the same?
Do I not love like the others?
Do I not cry the same tears as they do?

“No!” They scream
In deafen tones that shake the ground
On which I stand.
I stumble back and think again of the sun.

Do I not laugh like they do?
Do I not get angry like they do?
Do I not feel pain like they do?

“No!” They scream
You are not but an abomination
A scar on the face of humanity
Again I stumble back and think of the sun
And I weep. I weep till there are no tears to shed



I must hide what I am
I must hide it deep in the very soul of my heart
I must cage it like man cages a bird
Or a wild beast they do not understand
I must kill what they do not want.
Then I can live in the light?

“No!” They scream
For you will be but a fake
A carbon copy of a human being.

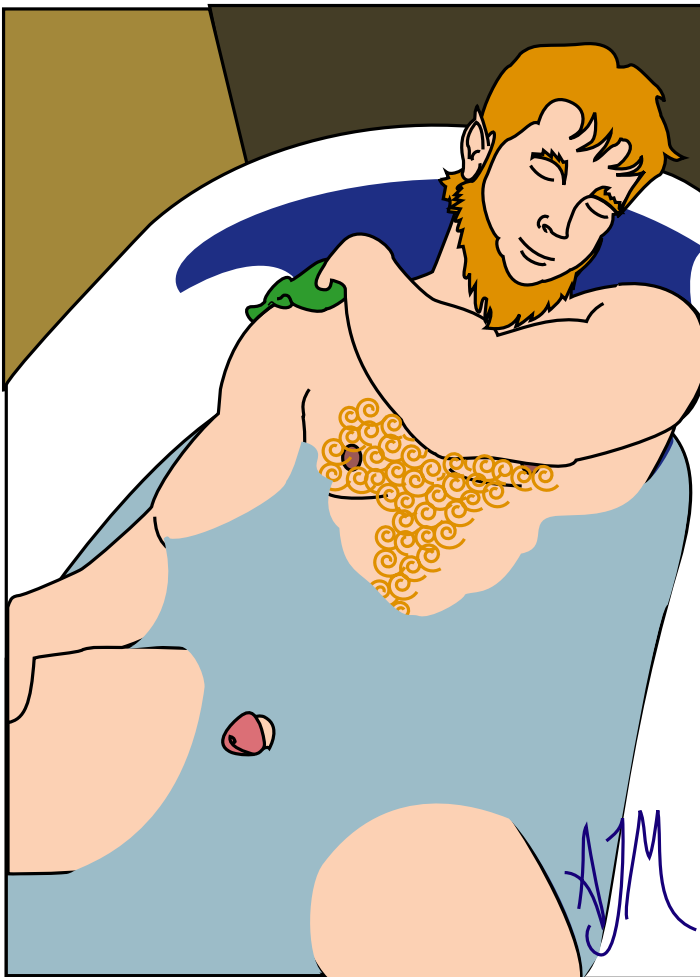
I stand tall
I am what I am!
I will stand in the light
For as long as it is the truth
I will not burn.
I will not hide my beast of burden
I will not cage my animal

For those who have screamed No
Turn and look away for you are not
Worthy of this man
Again I stumble back for the light is
Radiant and cleansing
Again I am at peace and one with the world.

The Cubby Diaries: Hurricane Vente - Part 2

by Cubby

I don't know how long we stood there in shock. Somewhere along the line, someone guided us back inside and sat us down at the table furthest from the windows. Sean (I can remember his carrot-top hair through the murky haze of that moment) brought us some hot chocolate. After a few sips I could tell there was a bit more in the cup than just chocolate and milk. The warm liquid was just starting to have its calming effect when Aunt Bea, as everyone in the diner called the owner of the Tin Cup Café, sat down at our table. She asked for the keys to our car and then handed them to Officer Stanton, who was the one to first tell us of the problem. As he took the keys, Aunt Bea began to tell us how she'd arranged things. Officer Stanton was a boarder at her house and he was going to give up his room for us and sleep on the couch. We started to protest but the deep voiced officer insisted saying that it was common for him to sit on the couch after long patrols and find himself waking up there in the morning. He said the only difference was that this time Aunt Bea was giving him permission to do so. She swatted at him with her towel as he left to transfer our stuff into her van.



Phoenix: A graphic from the Autumn 2003 issue - I thought it would be fun for our new and long term (I know better than saying old) readers to see how much DragonSwan has grown as an artist in these pages. This comes from a time when he was just starting to explore the possibilities of creating his art on the computer.

We helped Aunt Bea empty out her cooler and loaded the food into her van. She made sure that the officers and troopers knew to pass word that while the diner was closed during the storm, the kitchen at the house was open to anyone needing a hot meal. She, Sean, and the two of us got in the van and headed into the darkness of the storm. Thank Goddess Aunt Bea was driving because I know there is no way I would have seen the turn off to their property.

Even in the darkness, I could tell it was a cute old-fashioned farmhouse. It had two stories and a large wrap around porch. We quickly got everything inside. Aunt Bea insisted that we sit and relax and let them take care of us for a while. She got us settled in the living room while Sean took our stuff upstairs and she got her kitchen stocked up. It was only in the comfort of a pair of wing-backed chairs that we realized that we hadn't called home yet. It was already hours after we normally called, so I was certain that the family was going to assume we had found a playmate and were going to want full details. We tried calling but there was no signal. I went into the kitchen to ask Aunt Bea if we could use the phone to phone home. She had no problem but it seems that the Phone Gods did since the line was dead.

Sean gave us the quick tour and led us up to our room. Between the driving in the storm and the shock of seeing a power line on top of our car, Peter and I were pretty wiped out. It didn't take long for us to strip and stretch out on the bed for a much needed cuddle. I woke at a sound in the room and saw Officer Stanton rummaging in a drawer. His hair was wet and he was only wearing a towel. When he realized that I was awake he apologized saying that he was looking for his muscle rub. He had twisted his back trying to help a motorist out of a ditch earlier in the day and it was hurting. I got out of bed and went over to him and proceeded to start giving him a back rub. I not only found the problem spot, I also felt his hand brushing against my cock. "Maybe I was mistaken and am rubbing the wrong muscle," I whispered as my growing hard on touched his buttocks. He asked what my friend would say about his buddy playing with a guy. Peter reached over to a pair of discarded jeans that we had seen in the corner and pulled out the gold hankie. "He probably would wonder if you are still a single looking for two." By way of an answer, Officer Stanton reached over to his nightstand and pulled out a pair of condoms and handed one to each of us. "Which one wants to go first?"

Needless to say, Roger, didn't sleep on the couch that night. OK, he didn't sleep much that night. He admitted that he had come up with a fairly thin excuse to come into his room. He hadn't been positive about us since we had confused Bea when she had asked if we knew Judy. He figured that by entering his room he would be able to get some clues based on how we were sleeping together. When we hadn't answered at his knock, he knew he should be safe for a little reconnaissance mission. Peter and I ran our fingers through the thick pelt of black hair that covered his chest. "Has anyone told her that it is Dorothy not Judy?" He secretly believed that she actually knew but liked to play innocent to trick the boys into revealing themselves. If he were to correct her, then she would know for certain about his sexuality and in his case she might be nervous about him living in the house with her son. We told him

Airy Faerie

that his secret was safe with us. Peter added that if he ever needed something from the room, he just needed to come in.

For some reason, he needed to do so each evening while we were there. Roger was lonely in that small town. He loved his job but being a visible member of the community didn't leave him many opportunities to lure the local closet cases into the bushes. The most he could hope for was a blow job at the truck stop about twenty miles from town.

That took care of our nights. The first day, the storm was at full force so we spent it playing games in between helping Bea cook meals for the weary, hungry patrolmen when they stopped by for a meal. As soon as the storm let up, Peter had Officer Stanton drive him to the local vet clinic to offer his services. Dr. Keyes was more than happy to have someone else help since many of the animals had injuries and he was going to be busy tending the live-stock and needed someone to help with the family pets. I borrowed Bea's van and drove up the highway looking for a working phone so I could call home. The damage was widespread and it took me nearly two hours to find an area with phone service. It was good that I called because Jim was going crazy and was about to go to the media with a reward for information about our whereabouts. Jim said that he would come get us. I went back into town to help Bea at the diner while Sean helped the town start to repair broken windows and the like. After a couple of days of helping Sean when he needed an extra pair of hands to hold something while he nailed it in place, dishwashing at the diner and a couple of sleepless nights (no complaints, mind you), Bea noticed my eyes drooping and ordered me home for a nap. She put up the "Be back soon" sign and took me back to the house.

Rather than a nap, I decided that I wanted to take a bath in the deep claw-foot tub in the bathroom. I lit some candles and filled the tub and settled in. I was lost in thoughts about how to tell everything to the clan when the door opened. Sean hadn't seen any cars and didn't think anyone was home. He needed to go to the bathroom and had assumed that the wind had closed the door. He kept apologizing but I told him that I was used to it at home. I don't know what it is but Aeris has this uncanny knack of walking into my bathroom when I'm in the tub. I'm thinking that his faerie name should be Otter based on how he liked to play in the water with me.

I started to get hard thinking of playing with my young cub so I quickly pulled the curtain semi-closed before Sean thought that I was 'glad' to see him and start some religious argument. I had noticed how much he liked to quote Pastor Thompson and didn't want to get into the evils of being gay. With the curtain granting him some privacy, I told him to go ahead and use the toilet.

It took a moment before I heard the sound of a steady stream of piss and finally the flush. I drifted back into my thoughts as he washed his hands. Passed the edge of the half-closed curtain I could see him standing at the sink. He was staring at the mirror as if in some grand debate with himself.

"A penny for your thoughts," I said. He continued to stare at the mirror but I heard him take a deep breath before he asked if I was gay. I admitted that I was. He must have come to some conclusion with that inner debate because he slowly turned around

revealing the fact that he hadn't zipped his pants and had a raging hard on sticking out.

He said he had never been this near a naked man and it was always a struggle to get hard when he went to bed with one of the girls in town. He had stopped at the local truck stop a couple of times when he fetched supplies for the diner and liked the feel of moustaches on his cock through the hole in the bathroom stall. He even liked the feel of a man's penis in his mouth the few times he sucked on one.

I was starting to turn into a prune, so I pulled the plug out with my toes and stood up so I could look him in the eye. "Are you gay?" He reached out tentatively and touched my cock. "I think so. God help me, but I think so." He started to sob so I stepped out and pulled him into an embrace. He pulled away from my touch so I thought I might have crossed a line but he pulled off his t-shirt and dropped his pants and returned to my embrace. He gave me a light kiss at first and the final round of his inner debate must have concluded because I could feel his next kiss all the way down to my toes.

Between kisses, he helped me dry off. I picked up the pile of our discarded clothes, grabbed him by his stiff cock and led him naked across the hall to Roger's room. With the door closed, I dropped down to my knees and began to swallow his seven inches of young man-flesh. I had just maneuvered him to the bed for some sixty-nine action when Roger entered the room. "What do we have going on here?" he said in his most authoritative voice. Sean cringed and if he could have faded into the sheets, I think he would have.

I replied that it was about the same as the first time he had come into the room when two were looking for one. It didn't take long to get Roger out of his uniform. It took longer to get Sean to realize that he wasn't in trouble. The way those two were going at it, I felt like an intruder. I excused myself and got dressed to head downstairs.

I heard Bea puttering around in the kitchen. It appeared that she had been crying but quickly wiped her eyes at my approach. She said that Joe, one of her former cooks, had come home to check on his family and told her that she looked like she needed a break. He grabbed her apron and pushed her out the door. Bea said that on her drive home she had finally realized why Peter and I seemed familiar. She had watched each episode of the remodel program and it never occurred to her that she would ever meet people like us in person. "What's it like?" she asked. I started to talk about how nice everyone was but she stopped me. "No, I mean being gay." I went into my stock response about how we really are the same as anyone else. She had a waitress's keen way of drawing more out of me just by asking simple questions as we sat drinking some tea. I found myself talking about the clan and realized how much I missed them. When I finished, Bea must have been in a confessional mood of her own because she told me that she suspected that Sean was gay and that she hoped that he would eventually find someone as wonderful as Peter had found with me. Sean's tenor voice from the doorway caught his mother off guard when he told her that he thought he had. It seemed like another prime time to make a graceful exit.

The Cubby Diaries continued

That night, Peter and I were surprised when both Roger and Sean joined us for some night exercises. Sean was nervous about the fucking aspect of gay sex so Roger figured that seeing it in action might help serve as some inspiration. The fact that he took to fucking Roger like a duck takes to water makes me think that what he was really nervous about was not being able to measure up to Roger's standards in a sex partner. The fact that Roger shot his load over his head tells me that Sean had raised the bar on Roger's new standards.

Jim and Aeric showed up at the Tin Cup Café the following day in a brand new Tahoe. I think Jim nearly broke my ribs in his bear hug. Aeric was almost in tears as he hugged me. Bea was busy trying to figure out how to shuffle things for sleeping arrangements when Jim held up the box for our inflatable mattress and said to give them floor space in our room and they would take care of the mattress. That evening, Jim joined Peter in playing with Roger and Sean. I spent my time holding Aeric. He had gotten pretty torn up over the thought of loosing me. Other than Uncle

Phil, he had never had anyone close to him die and he didn't want to experience that feeling with me. I just held him that evening like I had when he had first told me that he was gay.

Jim spent the next day contacting the local insurance agent and got the claim started to have old Tahoe totaled. Two days later we said our good-byes. As we got into the car, I watched Roger standing on the porch with his hand on Sean's butt and realized that Hurricane Yente lived up to her name. She brought two people together in her wake. The two promised to come out for a visit. As we drove off, I was getting hard at the thought of introducing those guys to the full clan. Peter must have been thinking the same thing. As he rubbed my crotch he asked if I thought they would want to return to Smallville after visiting the Paradise Chalet.

"Take me to paradise," I said as I slipped down my pants.

"Home, James," he said.

"Yes, Sir, Master Peter."

It was to the sound of laughter at the old family joke that we entered onto the highway and were finally heading back home.



The Story Game - Chapter 1

by Raven Bear Paws

Editor's note: The Story Game was started by Raven Bear Paws on PagenMen.socialgo.com as a challenge to the writers in the group. The concept is simple. He created chapter one and someone else has the challenge of writing the next chapter. Each issue, with the agreement of the current participants in the Story Game, we are going to pass on this fun tale created by a group of writers, each focused on creating something new and then sitting back and laughing as their friends scratch their heads and try to figure out what comes after their chapter's cliff hanger. Each supplemental chapter will be by someone other than the person who wrote the previous chapter. If you want to join in the game, come play with us out on the PagenMen group. If you want to read ahead...same thing. Naked Hugs - Phoenix

It was cold in the tiny apartment, the heat had been turned off and it was the coldest day of winter. Wrapped in his quilted blanket Brian sat in the window watching the snow fall gently on the street below. "Sigh". Providence seemed to be asleep this afternoon. A few passer byers scurried into cafés to warm themselves from the afternoon chill. It was only two weeks away from Yule and again he was going to spend it alone. His now ex-boyfriend had moved out three days ago to be with his much younger boy toy.

"Why is it all men seem to leave around the holidays?" He said out loud. "It's just not fair!"

He had devoted six years to Jeffery, trying to be the perfect lover. Tears welled up in his eyes as past memories danced in his head; it began to hurt all over again. Out of the blue Jeffery had packed all his belongings, looked into Brian's eyes and spoke the words he thought he would never hear.

"Brain, I can't do this anymore! The whole witch thing is freaking me out and I just don't love you anymore!"

With that said Jeffery picked up his bag and walked out of his life, leaving him in this shitty apartment on Federal Hill to freeze to death. He knew someday Jeffery would regret his decision and coming crawling back once he tired of his fuck toy but that day was to far away. Brian got up from his seat at the window, wiped his eyes and headed to the kitchen to make a hot cup of tea. He jumped when someone pounded on the front door.

"Who is it?" he called out.

But no answer came. Brain slowly walked to the door and peeked through the tiny peep hole. Through the bubble shaped world of the lens he saw no one out there. Slowly he turned away.

"BAM, BAM, BAM" came the pounding again. Brian's face blushed with the anger he was feeling just then. He tore through the locks, twisted the knob and ripped the door open. The hallway was empty. Not a living soul could be seen. Slowly Brian began to close the door when he looked down. There sitting on the door stoop was a gift wrapped in the shiniest red paper he had ever seen.

"Who could have left this?" he thought to himself.

He hadn't seen anyone walking away. Could this be a gift from Jeffery? Brain bent down and picked the package up. When he laid his hands upon it his body was filled with a strange and pleasant energy. There was something special in this package he just knew it. Closing the door behind him he brought the box to his tiny kitchen table, sat in one of the rickety chairs and stared at the dancing

Imbolc 2009

Highlands Ranch Pagan Meetup
And Living Earth
Present:



DragonSwan and I have been meeting many new friends this past year. You have already seen some writings from Raven Bear Paws whom we met on the group noted in The Story Game.

On a more local level, we have met some great new friends in a group known as the Highlands Ranch Pagans. For those of you not in the Denver area, Highlands Ranch is a suburb of Denver. We first met them last year at Beltane when they hosted a large public ritual at one of the parks in their area. That was their first public event. They had so much fun and positive feedback that this year they are planning a three day festival at a ranch one hour north of town.

For their first foray into something of this scope, they have invited Wendy Rule, Lunar Fire, Tuatha, Cheri Shanti, Muse of Turiya, Airana Saraham and Mountain Trance Medicine Band to provide entertainment to the attendees. There will be workshops, vendors and rituals. There will be family friendly areas as well as "The Wild Woods" for more adult activities. There will be areas that will be clothing optional during parts of the day and there are plans for a sweat lodge to be present.

As you can see from the logo for the event, DragonSwan is already involved in helping with the artwork and both of us are involved in the planning. If you are looking for something new to attend this year and want to make a visit to the Colorado foothills, think about joining us for Beltania, May 8-10.

Go to www.BeltaneFestival.com for more details.

images he could see in the shiny red paper.

"It was now or never!" he said.

He slowly removed the wrapping to expose a white box beneath it. The box had no name or printing on it.

Strange he thought. He set the paper aside and examined the package. He could tell it opened from the top. Slowly he pulled the top flap open and peered inside. Brian felt his heart race. Could it be what he thought it was? Could it be the very thing he had always wanted? He reached into the box...

...to be continued next time by ???

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The 4F Tarot : Self-Improvement

By Phoenix

With a skipped issue causing the following issue to be double packed and extra space allotted for the Quest last issue, it has been a while since I did an article about using the 4F cards in a reading. Time to get back on track.

I started with a simple three card spread and as we have been increasing the number of cards we have created, I am able to present more complexity in the sample spreads. We had worked up to a seven card spread with each card representing a chakra. This month's spread comes from *Illustrated Tarot Spreads* by Heidemarie Pielmeier and Marcus Schirner. It is called "Self Improvement."

Before I dive into the readings, since I have pulled a couple of spreads from this book, let me take a moment to share some thoughts about this particular book before you rush out trying to find a copy. It has some wonderful new spreads to try. It also has some serious flaws. Some of the spreads don't *feel* like the authors really thought through everything about the spread, hence my need to rearrange the cards of our five-card spread back in the Litha 2008 issue. Others are incomplete. They illustrate a multicard spread yet the description of the meaning of the cards in the spread is one short of the number of cards illustrated. So while they present some very nice ideas, you will have to do some thinking on your own.

The spread I chose for our eight card spread is not one of those problematic ones. As I played with it while selecting cards for my examples, I found that this spread, full of its "who am I?" questions, is a great fit for the 4F Tarot. DragonSwan and I are drawing images from our community, the various people we see, the icons and

stereotypes that are around us, the places we go, dream images and omens, and some out right fantasy (sometimes all in one card). When I place a card such as the Goddess of Feathers (opposit page) as the "Who and how am I card?" it is very easy to transport myself into that scene and ask why am I feeling like I'm alone? or is it that I'm feeling great because I'm taking the time to care when no one else does? How does that feeling change if that same card becomes "Help from the spiritual world?" I think I just changed into one of the pigeons and the Goddess is there to help nourish me, even in the dead of winter.

I would highly recommend that you try this spread with your own favorite deck especially when doing a reading that is centered on a soul-searching kind of question.

Once again, I want to say that I am not custom building the spreads used for these readings. I shuffle the deck and pick at random just like we do when doing readings. I think you will quickly see why I like this spread for the deck. And in case you are just joining us, I will reference each of the issues where we have published the card so you can go to that image while you follow along with the spreads. The day will come when you can pull the cards from you deck and lay these out for yourself.

Spread #1 (pictured right)

My boyfriend asked me to move in with him. Should I?

The cards: the prairie dog (Samhain 2007, page 20), the roadrunner (Imbolc/Ostara 2007, page 4), the Goddess of Air (Beltane 2007, page 15), the retriever (Mabon, 2007, page 10), the Goddess of Flowers (Ostara 2008, page 17), dandelion/caterpillar (Samhain 2007, page 9), Lovers of Fire (Ostara 2008, page 13) and Baby of Fins (Beltane 2008, page 6)

Who am I? I am a cautious creature looking for danger everywhere. Hey, I'm asking a deck of cards if I should move in with someone, yes, I'm being cautious. **How do I want to be?** Let's hit the road, I'm out of here! No kidding, I'm a scared little prairie dog about to lose their identity. What do you expect? **How am I supposed to be?** I'm standing here flying a kite and he's probably out in the bushes! I'm probably right about hitting the road. **Where did I come from?** We did have fun didn't we? and hey, that's not my lover in the bushes, he's the dog at my feet wanting me to pick up that ball and play! **Where will my destiny lead me?** A puppy! Isn't he so cute?! Can I keep him? **My purpose in life?** I see a change coming. **Help from the spiritual world?** It's like the Fourth of July when we kiss. **Help from my soul?** Honey, you are already hooked! What are you waiting for? Time to let him reel you in!

Spread 2

Half of my department was laid off. Should I start looking for a new job?

The cards: the squirrel (Litha 2007, page 16), the guppies (Beltane 2007, page 19), the turtle (Samhain 2007, page 19), the flamingo (Mabon 2007, page 14), the Goddess of Water (Imbolc/Ostara 2007, page 7), the peppers (Lammas 2007, page 17), the Trickster (Ostara 2008, page 7), and the chicken/eggs (Beltane 2007, page 4).

Who/How am I? I'm jumping, at least I'm thinking about that which is why I turned to the cards for guidance. **How do I want to**



While not the clear, sharp images you will see on the cards themselves, we are going to try to find ways to give you some thumbnail versions so you can start to see the cards together in a spread.



- Card 1 Who and How am I?
- Card 2 How do I want to be?
- Card 3 How am I supposed to be?
- Card 4 Where did I come from?
- Card 5 Where will my destiny lead me?
- Card 6 My purpose in life/my mission
- Card 7 Help from the spiritual world
- Card 8 Help from the soul

be? There are two groups, in this case, I'm in the group that is still employed. I like it that way. **How am I supposed to be?** I'm a turtle, slowly moving on land but have found grace and lightness by moving from the land out to the ocean. **Where did I come from?** I'm standing on one leg. I am getting a distinct feeling that the cards are also pointing out the energy it takes to get that large bird in the air. I'm also getting the feeling that they are not saying "you have a good job, keep it". **Where will my destiny lead me?** Out into a cold lake? But wait? Isn't that steam rising from the water? Maybe that's a hot spring! **My purpose in life/my mission?** Which pepper...um, which job offer do I want to accept? **Help from the spiritual world?** The trickster! Time out. I think I was just told to be careful about which pepper...um, job to consider. It might not be what I expected. Maybe I should hang around for a while. **Help from the soul?** I've already starting hatching. The fact that I'm asking the question is probably a good sign that I should start looking. The cards aren't going roadrunner fast. Rather it is the turtle's steady progress that is the lesson when making the selection because there are a couple of zingers waiting to trick me if I don't pay attention.

Spread 3

My landlord is raising the rent. Is it time to move?

The cards: Magic of Earth (Yule 2008, page 3), Baby of Fur (Litha 2008, page 6), Kween of Air (Mabon 2007, page 19), Baby of Flowers (Ostara 2008, page 10), polar bear (Yule 2006, page 9), Lovers of Earth (Litha 2008, page 13), grasshopper/wheat (Litha 2007, page 20) and Kween of Feathers (Beltane 2008, page 14).

Who/How am I? I feel like that tree growing in the rock. This is an impossible place to live, yet here I am. **How do I want to be?** I don't want to move. My love for the space is like a leash that keeps me tied here. **How am I supposed to be?** I should try to find some balance between my feelings and my pocketbook. **Where did I come from?** I hate moving and going through the junk is about as productive as trying to get rid of weeds. **Where will my destiny lead me?** Right now, I'm kind of feeling like those bears losing their habitat. **My purpose in life/My mission?** Reaching out to someone, perhaps? **Help from the spiritual world?** I am the grasshopper and probably haven't made the wisest choices when it comes to spending money. What I think I need is the energy of my friend the ant who knows how to save for winter. I need to reach out to someone to help pay the rent. I need a roommate! **Help from the soul?** Come here my siren call!

Spread 4

My lover died a year ago. Am I ready to date again?

The cards: The Sanctuary (Imbolc 2008, page 7), Love (Beltane 2006, page 7), Meditation (Lammas 2007, page 5), Kween of Fins (Samhain 2007, page 5), the camel (Imbolc/Ostara 2007, page 11), Baby of Earth (Litha 2008, page 20), Lovers of Fur (Litha 2008, Page 5), and Baby of Water (Beltane 2008, page 20).

Who am I? I am the tender of this shrine, which then I guess is then the grave of my lover. **How do I want to be?** I said that I was wanting to go find love and I want it to be all sunshine and light...just like it was before. **How am I supposed to be?** The storm is raging



and I still need quiet time. I guess that pretty much answers the question. **Where did I come from?** A man grieving over the loss of something. That pretty much describes my feelings this past year. I miss him. **Where will my destiny lead me?** Out to the dessert to dry the tears. **My purpose in life?** Wait a minute, I just headed out to the dessert right? And now the deck hands me a bucket and a shovel. Either I should keep shoveling more dirt on the grave until those memories are truly buried or I should start building a few walls around my grief. **Help from the spiritual world?** I am still struggling. There is a part of me that wants to hold on to my grief. That is all I have left of my lover. I really am not ready to open up to someone new. **Help from my soul?** First it was toys for the sand, now it is toys for a pool. OK, I get it, time to leave the sanctuary. Get away from that safe, comfortable space and have some fun with my toys. I may not be ready for a new lover, but that doesn't mean I can't go out and have some fun. Want to play in my sandbox? Oh, you have a pool? That sounds fun too!

As I said, I like this spread. It is going to become a mainstay when I doing reading using the deck. It is short and simple and quickly gets to the heart of the matter.

Mother of the Moon

By Raven Bear Paws

She gathered me to her
Beneath the waxing moon
She spoke to me of love and strength
And to her I must be true.

She handed me a willow branch
And a chalice for to drink
And in my hand she placed a star
Which made me begin to think

She called me one of her wood land children,
A child of the heath
And spoke to me of the sacred laws
And the rule of three times three.

She Spoke:

Mother most do call me
Nature I do entrust
Mother, maiden, crone I am
The Goddess from up above

I say to thee with open arms
I take you with in my fold
But abide ye by my Wiccan Rede
And all to you shall be known.

I placed my hands upon her feet
For I knew what she said be true
And there I pledged my legions
To the mother of the moon.



Father of the Woods

By Raven Bear Paws

Father of the Woods,
take me into your dark embrace,
and dance with me beneath the spreading willow
naked as the day I was born.

Love me,
for I am your child
of the hearth
forever servant to your will

Sing to me Honored Father,
for your voice
sends shivers down my soul
I can feel the ever growing passion
swell within my heart

Love me
Horned Father of the woods
love me
for I am your whim and lover
worshiper: at your feet.

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