

Airy Faerie

FAE TV



Flamingo Fountain

We go behind the counter for a little one on one with the guy who is Jerk that everyone in America is talking about.

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Lughmasadh &
Mabon 2010

Airy Faerie



Lughnasadh & Mabon 2010

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

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Back issues can be found at:
www.radfae.org/arts#airyfaerie

Publisher's Notes

With the way time is going I was beginning to wonder if this was going to be our Yule issue. What happened to the summer? Here it is our 2010 Lughnasadh and Mabon Airy Faerie combo issue. Sorry for the delay. The wheel of time seems to be spinning out of control. That seems to be a common theme whenever I talk about time. I know you have all heard me bitch about time before but I want to take a moment to explore an interesting phenomenon. A few days ago I was sending a note to my great-niece. Yes, she's a really great person but in this case I mean my brother's granddaughter. I was congratulating her on the fact that she discovered she is going to have a baby boy. I am going to be a Great-Great-Uncle. Does the great-great make me a Fabulous-Uncle? ANYWAY, meanwhile, I am enjoying being just a great-uncle to another niece's little two-year-old boy. I am about to turn 43, I have been out of high school for 25 years, in a relationship with Phoenix for 9 years, working the same job for 7 years. My little anti-time brain does not seem to be able to wrap around all the years that have gone by. Kids I remember when they were born are having kids! How did this happen. OK, I know HOW the baby thing happened; I am just lost on how so much time has past by so quickly. I don't feel 43, well, sometimes I feel 83 but that is another story, never mind, ANYWAY! I guess the whole point of this babble is to ask, where did the time go? and who let kids grow up so fast? The lesson, if there is one, is to enjoy the moment now. Make the time to enjoy the little things before 5 years pass by and you're wonder where those little things have gone.

Before another year passes by, let's get to the issue here and now, The 2010 Lammas/Mabon Airy Faerie!! This being the Airy Faerie is dose come with its usual "ADULT CONTENT WARNING"! Who knows, maybe one of these years we will have a non-adult-content issue but don't hold your breath. Until that time comes, please be careful where you are when you are viewing this fae-zine. If you share this with anyone please make sure that they really do want to view adult gay themed material and that they are old enough to view it. We do not want to get anyone in trouble over our little mag.

Besides the adult items in this Airy faerie we have poems and stories by some of our favorite AF contributors: Raven BearPaws, Hermes Polyandros, Phoenix, Orpheus and Professor Grin. This issue I stuck to the art and pub note. Trust me it took me long enough to get this written! We would be still waiting for me to finish the first page. With that I am finished!

Enjoy the issue and I hope you had a great summer and that your harvest is overflowing with love laughter and faerie blessings.

Naked Hugs,
DragonSwan

A Cry to the Mother

By Raven Bear Paws

I stood in a field near a big oak tree
I turned my head skyward and cried out
Mother! Where are you for I am lost
I can not hear the music that is your symphony
I can not hear the birds as they sing the morning hello
I can not feel the rays of the warm sun as they pass the horizon
Nor can I see the nature that is your beauty

I stood and listened
I listened so hard my ears ached
But no reply came

I stood in the mountains next to a raging river
I turned my head skyward and cried out
Mother! Where are you for I am lost
I can not hear the river when she speaks
I can not feel the gentle breeze as it blows
I can not smell the nectars of the earth
Nor can I feel your love around me

I stood and listened
I listened so hard my ears ached
But no reply came

I stood in my window bathed in the light on the silver moon
I turned my head skyward and cried out
Mother! Where are you for I am lost
I can not see the moon's light for it has grown dim
I can not see the light of the stars for they do not shine
I can not hear your sweet symphony of the night
For it has grown still
Nor can I feel your arms around me

Why have you abandoned me?

I stood and listened
I listened so hard my ears ached
And then she replied

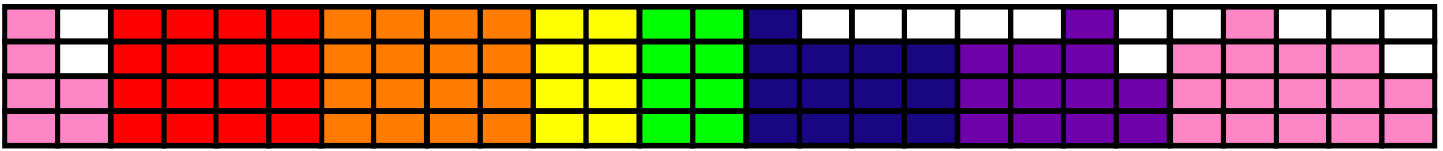
My child,
I have not abandoned you
For I have been with you the whole time
When you stood by my oak tree,
Did you not see his leaves waving in the wind?
That was I telling you I was there
Did you not see my red cardinal
Perched upon the branch of that mighty oak?
He was there to show you my splendors
Did you not see the sun wink at you
As he passed the line of the land?
He was telling you I was there

When you stood in the mountains next to the river
Did you not see the yellow tail salmon
That swam by flapping her tail?
She was telling you I was there
Did you not see the tall grass
As it swayed in the breeze?
It was telling you hello from me
Did you not hear the hawk cry as she flew by?
She was telling you I loved you

When you stood in your room bathed in the light of the moon
Did you not feel safe and warm?
For I was there holding you
Did you not see the star shoot across the sky?
I was telling you I am here
And you did not hear the night symphony
For I quieted it
For your slumber

I am here for you now and always
All you need do is listen
Not with your ears or with your eyes
Or with your nose
But with your heart
And know that I will always be by your side





The 4-F Tarot: Putting U in the Middle of Our Ranch

by Phoenix

In the life of any project, there are those periods with frantic energy where all sorts of things get done. And there are those periods when a snail race has more activity. Unfortunately, we are in one of those latter phases of the project. The health crisis with my mother has its lingering effects that still impact our time and energy. As reported last issue, mother is basically recovered from her falls but since then, much to her disappointment, she failed her exam for being able to be given back her driving privileges. Now, for some folks that wouldn't be an issue. Your city has great public transportation or you hop on your bike and off you go. For her, getting to a bus is a multi-block walk that would be exhausting in its own way and then more walking for whatever distance when she got there. For her, driving is that symbol of independence. She could go to the store when she wanted. Go to a friend's house...an appointment...church. Now, she has to ask someone to take her. She hates that. She doesn't want to be a burden. And she will often do without something so that she doesn't have to ask. That means the task of being taxi driver has flipped from when I was a kid and now it's my turn to give up some things to be sure she has what she needs. I may grumble at the changed situation and lack of free time for relaxing and then I remember that she had to put up with me as a kid, so without having children of my own to torment me as I did her, I guess it's only fair that she gets her turn at doing so.

All of that leads to the simple thought that we do need to spend more time with aging parents, partners and friends. Take some time to appreciate all that they've done. Take some time to help with the things that they can't do on their own. Even take time to appreciate the little things that you can do for yourself such as driving a car or opening a jar of peanut butter without needing to get a custom gadget to help.

Enough with the heavy thoughts and time for the heavy breathing as we think what we want to do to those hunky cowboys or what we want them to do to us.

The cowboy in our cast of characters has an interesting history within the deck. We need to step back to that time before we wrote the first article about creating the deck. Talk about where did the time go! We have been at this for four years now. Back in those days, DragonSwan had his vision for creating a tarot deck. It would be filled with the traditional images but with gay and faerie twists. As we started to get serious about what those twists might be, we started to look at our community's subcultures for inspiration. Maybe the suits would be Leather, Bears, Cowboys and Drag Queens. Or another idea was the traditional suits (coins, cups, wands and swords) but instead of Kings and Queens we might have the Leatherman of Wands or the Cowboy of Cups kinds of court cards. Either way, the cowboys were right there in the ring...or is that corral?

As the dust settled on the new vision of the deck, the cowboy didn't make it in. As we layered in the various animal energies, the horse didn't make the final cut as a solo energy for a card. It does play a part of one of the Magics which will feature a unicorn, but

the horse didn't become the primary energy for one of the Gods, Goddesses, Kings or Kweens. And since we had firmly linked horse and cowboy energies, the cowboy didn't make it into the deck either. When we realized that we were missing one of the major icons of our community, which of course was just the thing we wanted to feature in the deck, we talked about it. Our final justification for the continued exile of the cowboy was that our desire was that as the energy filtered up through the deck, our characters would evolve from having animal/elemental energy as their inspiration into having those qualities and finally into being people who were the embodiment of that energy. The cowboy with that strong rodeo image is about domination over that energy rather than merging with it. We felt that we already had the detached domination represented elsewhere (for instance the surfer who's goal is to not be in the water) so we left the idea of the cowboy behind.

The original concept for the Goddess of Fur was that this was one of the big cats other than the lion who is the God of Fur. This might be the lioness or leopard; something sleek and sensual to contrast with the lion's bulk and strength. And to save you the cross-referencing to back issues, our lion is now more like a bear because he morphed into the lumberjack. The Goddess was our huntress. The original mock up had a panther in a tree watching a hunter in the woods. It was the hunter becomes the hunted kind of thought.

Zoom forward four years and it's time to start putting energy into the actual card. The image of our hunter stalking his prey was too passive for a card of this energy level so it was time to do some rethinking. Images of Catwoman began to come to my mind. Especially those times when she was stretched out on a lounge purring at Batman as she lured him to her latest trap. I'm not sure what made me shift back to the cowboys, but this time instead of them roping the cattle and busting a bronc or two, the image came back of that time at the end of the day when the work was done and the boys were in the mood for a little fun.

All eyes are on you as you enter their lair. Even the gent feigning disinterest knows that you are there. Even the mountain, forest and night sky are watching to see what you do. Nothing escapes their notice. Are they going to approve of you? Is Felix going to give you a hearty handshake of welcome or is he going to pull you into a musky, sweaty bear hug? Are you ready for the catfight should you pick the wrong companion to show you around? Or are you hoping that the fact that they are comfortable with being nude around each other may be sign that not only do they work together but the play together as well?

Unlike our snake pit filled with guys sucking themselves and having only attention for their cocks, these guys are waiting for you and I have a feeling that they are about to pounce. Even the cat who has spotted supper. I can feel that ear twitch and every muscle tense ready for the moment. It isn't going to be long before the two guys on the fence come over and surround you. At that point you will learn why their slogan is "Putting U in the middle of our Ranch."



Quest for the Crystal Phoenix

Chapter 40: Doubts and Distractions

by Orpheus

Apollo sat up in bed quickly. He wiped a bead of sweat from his brow before it dripped into his eyes.

"Another dream?" came the voice behind him as a hand began to rub his temple.

The prince almost expected the hand to be feminine when he reached up to place his hand over it. He was relieved to feel that it was masculine. "No. Not a dream. A shock of reality is more like it. Each time I wake up in this room I find myself wondering if returning to the future was really a dream and that I am still stuck in the past trying to find a way home."

"Which part of the dream am I?" questioned Manin as he wrapped his arms around the prince.

"You're the part that keeps me in bed and never wanting to wake up," responded Apollo as he turned to give his lover a kiss. "It's this room. It is exactly as I left it. Each time I look at it I can remember things that happened here. Sometimes those memories fill my mind at night. And when I wake up, those memories are more real than reality."

"More real than me?" Manin shifted so that he could sit on the bed next to Apollo.

"You're the part that reminds me where and when I am," Apollo gave his lover a kiss and wandered to look out the window.

"If the room is so unsettling, why don't you take Rondar up on his offer to trade rooms?" asked Manin. "As he says, he's not used to being in the spotlight without your father at his side and you..."

Manin got up and gave the prince a full court bow, "You are the great hero who single handedly brought the Rainbow Forest back to life! The promised one who will restore the Faerie Queen and Her Court to their rightful place of honor in the hearts and halls of humans."

"And don't forget that I'm the one who will reunite the kingdoms and bring peace to the long forgotten country of Wobnair."

"Actually, I hadn't heard that one among the chatter and whispers when I've been out and about these past few weeks," apologized Manin.

"That's fine by me. I got that back in Resquad often enough. Is that who I am?" asked Apollo as he sat on the window bench. "Am I just some foretold legend come to life?"

"I wouldn't say you are 'just' anything. I've seen what you can do. Call down fire from the sky. Make the earth shake at your command. Travel across the countryside in a flash."

"Is that what I am to you? Is that how you see me?"

Manin longed to go over to his lover but remained seated on the bed. "No. I see more than that. I see a man who has an ache in his heart that I can't fill. I see a man whose responsibility will force him to a duty which doesn't include me. I see a man who is destined for great things. And I lie awake thankful for the moments he shares with me. But I have to wonder what he is doing with a common villager like me."

"I wonder that too," said Apollo. "I mean, not the common villager part but I try to figure out why it feels so right to have you near. I don't have an answer. I just know you are here because you are supposed to be here."

"That's pretty heavy talk for so early in the morning," came Rondar's voice at the doorway. "I'm sorry, but I think I picked up something from your father. The door opened to my touch when I went to knock."

Apollo left the window and gave his father's lover a hug. "Perhaps I needed you in here too." He explained what started the conversation.

"The offer stands. I certainly don't need the Royal Guest Suite when I'm as much a lowly guard at heart as Manin is a common villager. We are only noticed because of the company we keep."

"The top weaponsmaster in three kingdoms is hardly lowly," countered the prince. "But Father will be back soon enough and that honor does belong to the King not the Prince. And thus

the honor is passed to the King's Consort

in his absence." Apollo missed his father but he understood why he had to return to Adbalm. He had been absent for nearly three months and Holly kept delaying the Rainbow Forest Celebration. Even Queen Susan felt the frustration of waiting and heeded the call to return home to await the celebration. The prince decided that it must be a royal faerie trait to constantly postpone things until absolutely every invited guest could be in attendance which only made things worse for those who arrived early.

"True. Imagine the field day the *Vidalia Gazette* would have with a 'Prince in the Grand Suite' while his father, a King, is forced to take shelter in The Forbidden Room," said Rondar.

"As much as they love to praise me as a hero, they are certainly quick to forget things like that when they can spin some gossip about a breach in protocol. That would give them their fodder for the day's news," agreed the prince.

Almost simultaneously Rondar and Manin spoke.



"Almost sounds like Queen Rose," offered Rondar.

"Almost sounds like Cory," offered Manin.

Apollo laughed at the twin thoughts. "I wonder if they got that from Amaranth. What would she say about all of this?"

"Ama would have said to give it a fresh paint of coat and some new curtains and you will see the world with a new attitude."

"How many coats of paint did your house have?" asked Rondar.

"Ten that I can remember," replied Manin. He gave Apollo a quick kiss on the cheek. "I have to run. I promised Belkaro I would help him learn more human names for things."

Apollo sighed. "Wish I could join you but duty calls."

"Try to tone down your enthusiasm for going to judge the 375th Annual Faerie Ant and Roach Tap Dance Competition. If I hadn't already promised Belkaro, I would be there with you in the front row."

"I could tell him that you are needed here," offered the prince.

"As much as I love the arts," said Manin as he tied on his sarong. He gave Apollo one more quick kiss before heading to the door. "I think I'll pass so I can continue to love them." With that, he quickly disappeared out the door before his lover could figure a way to convince him to stay.

Without any preamble, Rondar spoke in the wake of Manin's departure. "It isn't just the room, is it? There is something else is bothering you."

"Not really." A flash of black came from Rondar's hand.

"Care to try again?" he asked.

"Which ring do you have? The Pearl of Truth or Wisdom?"

"I don't know. We trade them regularly so people can't figure it out. We've done that so many times now that unless we concentrate we can't tell," answered Rondar as his ring turned white. "But does it matter? Either way, it knows that your words don't line up with your feelings."

The prince stared at the ring on his father's lover's hand as he spoke. "It really is nothing that I can't figure out in time. It's just that..." he stopped as he tried to figure out what to say.

"It's that 'it's just that' part that caused the ring to change colors." Rondar gave him a hug that filled Apollo with a sense of being wrapped in a warm masculine blanket. "You know you can talk to me so what's going on? Did you guys fight about something?"

"No. Manin's the greatest." He pulled out of Rondar's arms and went back to stare out the window. "It's just that I'm getting a feeling like something bad is about to happen and I can't pinpoint it. I know it isn't specifically about Manin, but somehow he's involved."

Rondar placed a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "Would talking about it help?"

"Not yet." Apollo glanced at the ring and it stayed white. "Whether its Truth or Wisdom, it agrees. What I probably need is something to distract me for a while so that I stop focusing on it."

"Well, then, I have the perfect solution. Holly sent me up here to remind you that she's taking over your practice session with Hilda today. So you don't need your weapons and we are to meet in Magic Hall."

Apollo groaned. "I think a new feeling of dread just manifested."

Rondar laughed. "I thought you liked flexing your magical gifts. I still ache from that thrashing you gave us back at Susan's Manor."

"What still hurts? I thought I healed everything."

"Not to worry. I'm just joshing you. At this point, the sting is just mental for having not been better prepared for that test. Based on what Holly said last night, she wants to take a more active hand in both focusing your gifts and helping your guards understand what you will need in the way of protection when you are using them."

"I don't remember her saying that."

"I think a couple of the Hildas were distracting you with peeled grapes at the time."

"That's something else I haven't figured out. One minute she's nine battle ready maidens and then the next she's all coy and sensual. And then she's her old stern single body and sometimes something in between."

"Good luck on figuring that out. If you can, men across the three kingdoms will want to know that secret." Rondar tossed some light weight pants toward the prince. "Now, get ready for your workout."

Apollo quickly freshened up at the basin and looked at himself in the mirror. He rubbed his hand over his growing beard. "Do you think I should keep this?" Rondar laughed in response. "Is it that funny looking?" Apollo asked with a hint of being hurt behind his question.

"No. You look so much like your father and I remember him asking the same question shortly before he got word that his future bride was on her way for her first visit to Adbalm."

"I do?" Apollo looked at his reflection with renewed interest. "What did you tell him?"

"What do you think?"

Apollo thought about his father and brought up different memories over time. "He was always clean shaven when I was young but started growing a beard shortly after the time you announced that you were resigning as my weapons teacher and you two started talking again. So you liked it?"

"Your mother hated it when she first saw it. Adam wore it for the first few days, mostly to spite her feelings and project his own resentment of the pending marriage. But eventually he conceded and shaved. He tried a couple of different variations of facial hair but she always hated it and he would shave again. After she died, I think he kept it shaved as much as honoring her memory as keeping my answer out of it."

"And what did you say?"

"That is between him and me but I can say that if you weren't your father's son, I probably would tell you the same thing." Apollo noticed that Rondar had to adjust his trousers so he guessed that the comment must have had some sexual memories with it.

The prince let him have a moment of silence with that memory while he got dressed. "I wonder why mother didn't like his beard. I think he looks regal with it."

"She probably got that from her father. King William ordered the guards to shave all facial hair as he felt it made them look more honest. Jondar used to tell me that the princess would say as much to him when he guarded her. She agreed with her father and added that with all the fussing that the courtiers spent on creating razor thin lines on their faces she didn't think they would have time for her. Anyway, enough talk of facial fashion. If you're ready, let's go."

Holly and Hilda Harbell were waiting for them in Magic Hall. The lights were dim and it took a moment for Apollo's eyes to adjust. His first thought was directed towards trying to decide if

Hilda Harbell was just herself as part of the nine sisters or the consolidated surviving sister. While she was slim, there was a weight about her energy that made him think that she was the only Hilda present. He had just started noticing the room itself when Holly spoke.

"Welcome to Magic Hall. This room has ancient layers of protections against an imperfectly cast spell from leaving its confines. Within its safety, the queens have all trained their heirs and any other promising students in the use of the gifts of the Greater Magics. I have been using my free time these past few weeks honing my grandson's gifts and now, I turn my attention to you." She paused a moment and walked around the prince, sizing him up with her eyes tuned to magical energies. "I hope you prove to be less of a challenging student."

"He will," said Hilda defiantly. "You may still think of him as the young man whom you saw at his Princing. And you may think of his demonstrations as wild and undisciplined but your mother didn't leave everything to chance. While he might not have been the heir, she didn't want him totally unversed in gifts. Between your uncle and her, they covered most of the basics, just not in the formalized manner in which you learned your craft."

"So quick to defend him?" The queen turned her attention toward the Senior Efgie. "I have to wonder about your feelings for him and where your loyalties may lie should you be made to choose."

Hilda split into her sisters. The nine silver breastplates and gleaming spears picked up the dim light and amplified it. "Fortunately, your mother gave me the ability to defend both without making a choice. And in the case of each of my deaths, we made the right one."

Apollo stared at the sisters. He knew so little about her history in the years between when he met her for the first time in each time period. Was she implying that at least some of her other deaths were the result of protecting someone other than Amaranth?

"Put those spears away, they are not appropriate for this Hall." Hilda did as she was told. "No need to worry, dear," the queen continued. "I do happen to agree that he has a good foundation for his gifts. Now is the time to refine them so he is total control and not at the mercy of the whims of the elements in granting his requests. That may work when attackers are not expecting it but the more he uses his gifts in public, the less is the power of surprise on his side. Of course, the enemy we are most worried about won't be so easily surprised."

Without warning, a lightning bolt streaked down from the ceiling. Apollo had just enough awareness of the change in the air that he was able to push Rondar away from him and jump aside just as the bolt scorched the floor between where they had been standing. The next several moments were a barrage of attacks. Ribbons of sparkling lights flared from a magic wand and danced circles around Apollo's eyes. In the dim lit room, their brilliance was nearly blinding. Wind and rain came from nowhere and drove the prince away from his lone guard. A chill filled the air and the wet floor turned to ice. The attacks were unrelenting and if he had the opportunity to think, Apollo would have wondered where his great aunt and mentor got the power to maintain the energy for so long. As it was, he barely had enough ability to erect a wind shield around him. Even then, the shield was just strong enough to lessen the effects of the pounding weather but not enough to completely negate them. Just as he encouraged the fire spirits to warm the floor

beneath his feet to let him have a dry spot to stand on, several Hildas began their physical assault. One might be at flying size and suddenly change to full size just as she flew over his head while another might attack from the front while yet another slipped in from behind. Apollo had trained with the sisters many times but never had they attacked with such force. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Rondar was struggling with another group of sisters in the same manner. Each time he started to get close enough to Rondar where they might be able to fight back to back, a lightning bolt would crash down forcing them to separate.

After what had seemed like an eternity, Apollo began to notice a pattern. Just as it looked like the faeries would defeat the humans, they hesitated. He began to realize that as powerful as the attacks were, neither queen nor guard actually wanted to hurt them. During one of those hesitations, Apollo reached out his mind to Rondar and found that he had noticed the pattern as well.

"Are we agreed?" thought Apollo?

"Yes," thought Rondar.

That was all that they had time to think to each other for the intensity of attacks picked up. One strong gust of wind sent Apollo sliding on the ice and instead of attempting to remain upright, the prince followed the energy and fell to the ground with a thunk.

"OW!" he yelped as tried to stand up only to collapse back to the floor and grabbed his ankle. He looked over and Rondar was on the ground holding his knee. The wind and rain suddenly stopped and Holly rushed to the prince's aid.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he said as he stood up, summoning the air energy into a tornado that spun the queen in its core. Apollo directed the spinning shaft to lift the faerie off the ground and turn horizontally so that she turned in the air as if she were on a spit over a campfire, only a hundred times faster. Several Hildas tried to attack but Apollo threatened to call a fire to complete the campfire scene so they backed away and collapsed into Hilda Harbell.

Out of the swirling wind came Holly's voice, "I concede."

Apollo directed the wind to turn her upright before slowly down and releasing her.

"Very clever," she said once she caught her breathe. She kept wobbling so she conjured a chair and sat down. "Much better. You know that little trick won't work against a real enemy."

"You would be surprised. If you don't believe it works, ask Belkaro or even your uncle. Anyway, you aren't the enemy which made it all the more difficult as to how to defeat you without unleashing the fury I visited upon my guards."

"Which in part is what I was trying to provoke as much I was hoping that you would use your gifts in a less dramatic manner. How did he do, Hilda?"

"I haven't had a workout like that since you were training little HelaCat. As it was, if he hadn't pulled that stunt, he probably would have set a record for withstanding our combined assault since we've been in here nearly two hours"

"Agreed," said Holly as she stood up. "But it shouldn't have lasted that long." A tinge of disappointment colored her voice. "So why did it? Why didn't you do something like turn either yourself or Rondar invisible so that we wouldn't know where to attack?"

Apollo straightened up and took up the queen's challenge. "I thought about it but between the fact that we were in a closed chamber and the nearness of combatants, I knew that it was too late

for stealth.”

“What about projecting multiple images of yourself?”

“The same answer. The combatant nearest the real me would have already had me in her sites.”

Suddenly the limited light in the room went dark. “Light the candles, Apollo.”

The prince sent out his thoughts to locate the candles and called the fires to light them. In the glow of the relit candles he found that nine Hollys were standing next to the nine Hildas.

“Which of us is real?” they said in unison.

He focused on the energy of each and finally settled on the queen next to Hilda Swordfern. “That would be you.”

That queen disappeared and he felt a tap on his shoulder. “That would be incorrect.” Apollo spun around and found that all of the queens disappeared except for the one who tapped his shoulder. “While you fought steadily, you also fought linearly and didn’t combine your gifts. You didn’t use them to set up conditions where you had the advantage. And you, young man,” she said pointing at Rondar, “what did you do to help? Each time you were threatened with lightning you backed away instead of advancing after the blast. All of that is what we will need to work on during the time we have together.”

“How long would you need?” Rondar asked. “As you know, we have been struggling with how things have changed because of

his physical changes. I’m sure his father and the others could arrange things so that we could be training with you as long as you need.”

“As much as I appreciate the offer, don’t forget my gifts,” said Holly. “I’ve already had the vision of his departing at the end of the celebration so I know that our time is limited.”

“And your visions are never wrong?” questioned Apollo. “Like when you cursed my mother?”

“You impertinent youth,” chided Hilda. “How dare you question the queen’s ability when she is here to teach you.”

“That’s alright, Hilda. I’ve been anticipating this discussion,” soothed Holly. She brushed Apollo’s cheek softly with her hand. “You may look like your father but you have your mother’s eyes; especially when you’re angry.”

“How would you know? Grandmother never let you near the castle.”

“She may have forbidden me, but I answered a higher calling.”

“You think because you are queen, you could disregard that?” asked the prince.

“Not by itself, no. That higher calling came from the child’s grandmother. I was sworn to protect your mother. If that meant doing it secretly and through other’s eyes, well, I did what I had to.”

“But you cursed her and she died exactly as you said.” The prince was getting angry at her evasive response.



Holly hesitated a moment. It was evident that she was thinking about the past. "It wasn't a curse. It was a prophesy of what might be if nothing changed. Sometimes, I wish my gift wasn't so strong that even the ones that are for events in the distant future are able to pierce the veils of possibilities and utter the truth. How I could wish for the gift of seeing 'what might be' so that someone has a chance of changing their fate. But I am cursed with the gift of seeing 'what will be' and unfortunately that day, my sister learned my other curse which is to speak the unvarnished truth at the worst time."

"But according to the story, you said she would prick herself which somehow led to her death. How would a prick as a maiden cause her to eat a papel sedoipen fruit as a mother?"

"I don't think that is right," she said. "I think it was that her hand would touch a prick not be pricked. There are many ways that might be interpreted. Whatever is the correct one, something about it started her on the path that led to her fatal decision."

"So if she hadn't touched something that day, then she might still be alive?"

"One possibility out of an infinite number of possibilities," agreed the faerie queen. "But we weren't here to talk about your mother. In your case, the nearer the event is to the vision, the less room there is that it will change. My vision has you leaving soon after the upcoming gala. It is an urgent vision that tells me that we need to work hard in the limited time we have. After that, you will have time for a brief lesson from your next teacher. Beyond that, you will have to be ready."

"Who is this other teacher?" asked Rondar.

"The vision wasn't clear. I learned enough from the vision to know that there is another, but not enough to learn the details."

"What was my mother like?"

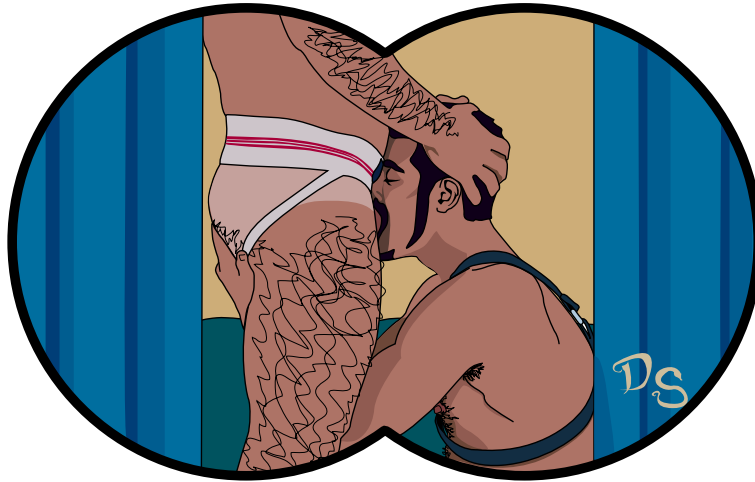
"Why don't you save that question for dinner? You can tell me about my mother and I'll tell you about yours. Right now, I think you are needed elsewhere."

"The contest! I had forgotten. I bet they are wondering where I am by now."

"Not to worry," said Hilda. "The High Sun time that was announced is just for the gathering of the competitors. Some people find that aspect more entertaining than the actual dances that are performed."

Apollo tried to picture herding a group of ants to a specific location and had to agree. He raced to his room to get some dry clothes and headed to Picnic Park to assume his judging duties. When he arrived, true to what Hilda said, some teams were still straggling in and the gyrations of the handlers were met with waves of laughter from the gathered crowd. With his arrival, the organizers announced that they will follow their traditions and let the teams who had managed to gather all of their competitors on their performance stage start the competition before their dancers tried to wander away. With the initial acts, Apollo strained to see the

actual dance moves of the tiny competitors. Someone offered him a magnifying glass which he gladly accepted. It didn't help. When it came time to make his decision, he really had no real way of telling one group from another so he picked one at random to win the grand prize. Based on the crowd's reaction he guessed correctly. The winner thanked him profusely. It turned out that in his 150 years of trying, this was the first year that he had been able to get the minimal required 75 ants on to his stage so he could actually demonstrate that he had the ability to train the ants to perform. Already he had requests to travel to the far parts of the country to help upcoming performers perfect the art.



True to her word, at dinner Holly told him some stories of his mother's youth. As much as the prince was eager to learn all things about the mother he never knew, he had been distracted during the meal. Rondar wanted to talk to him after the finished. Apollo could tell something was bothering his former teacher by the way he kept avoiding eye contact. Adding to that was the fact that Manin wasn't at the table. He hadn't seen his lover since he left that morning. He could feel something was wrong but

when he sent his thoughts that direction, Manin assured him that everything was under control and that he would tell him everything when they got back. Several hours later, he still wasn't back. Apollo was trying to read his friend's distant energy and nearly jumped out of his chair when Rondar tapped him on the shoulder.

"Are you ready? Or do you want to stay here?" he asked.

Apollo refocused on the banquet hall and realized that he was seeing Holly exiting the room. "Sorry. I was distracted."

"I know the feeling," Rondar agree. "Maybe a bit of fresh air and perspective will help both of us."

They followed the crowd out of the hall and out into the courtyard. Rondar led them to a stairway in the front wall that led up to the Guard Walk. "It always amazes me," he said as they exited the archway. "They love peace and yet they have one of the strongest defenses of all of the castles in the kingdoms."

"They may love peace, but with the aftermath of the Sundering, not everyone was at peace with the faeries. They had to build up stronger defenses so that they wouldn't have to fight."

"That makes sense." Rondar stared out at the Rainbow Forest which was currently decked out in shades of pink and lavender. This seemed to be its standard coloration if nothing was stimulating it. "You wouldn't know it today after that session with Holly and Hilda. I felt utterly helpless and I don't like that feeling."

"I agree. When I trained with Hilda in the past, she was always more aggressive than other faerie but not like that. And where did all of that rain come from? I tried to tap into the source to try to do something but I couldn't reach outside that room."

"So what can I do to help you find that source? I don't even have a clue what you would be looking for. Heck, I know so little

about what it is that you did to us a month ago.”

Apollo gave his former teacher a basic overview of the different magical energies that he had learned about. Rondar sat and listened, nodding at appropriate spots. “It sounds like it all starts with the thing you called Grounding. Let’s look at that to see if something about that could be used to our advantage.”

The prince thought back to his first lessons with Johnny and Viola and led Rondar in an exercise on grounding. He struggled with the process so, with his permission, Apollo linked minds and focused his thoughts. With minds connected, Rondar felt his energy connect to the earth and the forest responded with a recreation of Rondar’s SunsGuard Mark. Apollo ended their mental connection.

“That feels incredible,” exclaimed Rondar. “I haven’t feel this much energy in a long time.”

The Adbalm crest faded in the forest canopy. “That’s weird,” said the prince.

“I thought that was the purpose of the exercise. Did I miss something?”

“Not that, the forest,” he said as the last of the crest disappeared. “Can we try something?” Rondar nodded. “Then let me back into your mind.” As soon as Apollo started channeling energy into his friend, the crest returned. When he stopped projecting into Rondar and focused on his own thoughts, the crest morphed into the phoenix symbol.

“The forest somehow senses that my energy is in your body.”

“Does that mean you could somehow channel your power through me?”

Apollo studied his former teacher’s energy. “You are a member of the Charming bloodline and have all of the magical potential so you should be able to do something on your own. But yes, I think so. Rowan and the cousins worked through me to find Princess Daisy so I should be able to tap that potential and do the same.”

“That gives me an idea,” said Rondar as he gripped Apollo’s shoulders and looked him in the eyes for the first time that evening. “What if we had done that today? Would Hilda or Holly have expected a magical attack from me?”

Apollo got a stunned look on his face at what Rondar was suggesting. “I doubt it. Holly was focusing her attention on me. Her direct attention on you was only when you got too close and it was only long enough to push you away.”

“So something from me would be unexpected and might cause her to focus on me longer than planned.”

“And giving me the breathing space to work around her defenses. Brilliant! It might actually work.” He gave Rondar an exuberant hug.

“Should I leave you too alone?” came Manin’s voice as he passed through the archway.

“Manin!” Apollo ran to his lover and barely stopped himself from giving him a hug. “What happened to you? I thought you said everything was fine.”

Manin was bleeding from several long cuts on his arms and scratches on his face. “I said everything was under control. Which it was...mostly.”

“Let me look at those,” said Rondar.

“Let me stop the bleeding,” said Apollo as he started to tap his healing energy.

“Please don’t. At least not yet.” Manin pulled away slightly. “Rowolfsun said to let them bleed a little so that they wash

themselves out.”

“Rowolfsun? What’s he got to do with it?” asked Apollo.

“Most of these were caused by Belkaro,” he said hesitantly.

“Belkaro!? I told him not to attack any of you in any form of challenge.”

“It wasn’t a challenge, well, not really,” Manin said with some hesitation. He flinched as he touched the large gash on his cheek. “And this one came from Rowolfsun.”

“What?!” came the surprise from both Apollo and Rondar simultaneously.

“You had better start at the beginning, son,” added Rondar seeing the fire rising in Apollo’s eyes. “Before our prince starts hunting for a god and I would be right behind him.”

“We went out in the woods as I told you but after about an hour we got bored and sat down by the creek. That’s when Patrick and Stane and Jana attacked us.”

“What? Wait until I see them! They know better than that,” huffed Apollo.

“Please, don’t get mad at them. I asked them. After the last time I felt helpless. So while you two were doing all that official stuff and the guards were sitting around being bored, they started giving me some pointers about how to defend myself.”

“That seems to be a common theme tonight,” injected Rondar. “Apollo was just giving me some magic lessons for that same reason.”

“That’s odd,” said Apollo.

“How so?” asked Rondar. “That we both felt helpless and asked for training?”

“No,” said the prince. “I’ve been trying to heal those wounds and I can’t.”

“So you admit that you can’t do everything?” All three of them jumped at the sound of a voice coming from the top of a nearby turret. They turned to see Rowolfun jumping down to the floor, morphing to human form as he did so. He was as nude as the first time that Apollo saw him but there was something about his wolfish masculinity that made Apollo stare for a moment. But then, he remembered that the former faerie was responsible for the cut on his lover’s face which brought him back to the situation.

“I’ve never said that, Rowan,” he said defiantly. “I do more things now than when we first met but I’ve never claimed to be able to do everything.”

“From what I heard today, you couldn’t even defeat my niece without resorting to that cheap little trick of yours. How many times are you going to rely on that feigned weakness? Your real enemy is not known for speechifying before she kills. She likes to save the gloating for afterwards when the dead can’t talk back.”

“I realize that,” admitted the prince. “Which is why Rondar and I were just talking.” He explained their theory about channeling his power through others.

“Interesting. I don’t know if that’s ever been done,” said the Wolf God after listening.

“But would it work?”

He thought a moment. “If you were one of the brothers or even your enemy, I would give it a better chance. As it is, I think you would have limited success. It might work once. It might work briefly.” Rowan walked closer to the prince. “But you take your vows seriously. What kind of leader forces others to use the power for him?”

"But it wouldn't be forced," protested Rondar. "We would willingly do it for him."

"Bravely spoken Sunsguard. But should the leader be carrying the burden alone, regardless of how many vessels he uses to divide it?" Rowan stared at each of them for a moment. "Or does a leader use his knowledge to teach others how to carry the load so that the burden is truly divided?"

"But how?" asked Apollo.

"You teach them. As you remembered earlier, there are many around you who share blood ties with you." He gestured at Manin and Rondar. "These two for starters and my children." Rowan chuckled. "Now there's a thought. Imagine my niece's shock when a wolf started swirling winds or creating water fountains."

"Can they do that?" gasped Apollo. "Laika never..."

"The early wearwolves never knew they could. Fenrir just wanted the power that comes from control. The blood in the youngest generation has been thinned so that their human gifts would be weak, but they are there none-the-less." With that he brushed Manin's face and the wound disappeared. He changed to wolf and as he leapt back to the turret, he scratched Manin's arm. "You fought well today. My mark will grant you free passage in all wolf territory. All wolves will know that you are under my direct protection and none will dare challenge you." With that, he leapt into the night sky and disappeared.

Their attention turned to Manin's arm. A giant welt had formed where he was scratched but it wasn't bleeding. They were astonished when they discovered that it wasn't an actual wound but rather something similar to Apollo's godmark. As they looked at it, the redness faded until it just looked like an old scar, barely noticeable.

"Well doesn't that beat anything?" asked Manin. "In less than a year I went from being a common villager in a town in the middle of nowhere to being a person who can walk with wolves without fear."

"Speaking of wolves," said Apollo. "I'm missing something in the story you told earlier. I understand your training with the guards but I don't understand how you got the cuts from Belkaro."

"Oh, that. I kind of hoped you forgot that." Apollo stared at him waiting for an answer. "I should have known better. It started as planned. The current training was about getting free when someone attacked so that I could go get help. That part went well. When we finished, Belkaro started laughing about how silly humans looked when fighting. Stane took exception to that and before we knew it we were in a free for all and that's when I got scratched by Belkaro."

"And the scratch from Rowolfsun?"

"I didn't stop when Belkaro yelled so Rowolfsun came to see who had exceeded their authority and I got wopped as a result."

"But why would Rowolfsun..." Rondar stopped mid-sentence.

"Oh, he cried uncle and daddy came to his aid when you didn't stop."

"Something like that." Manin yawned. "Sorry, it's been a long day."

"Indeed it has," said Rondar.

"Why do I have a feeling that this is only just the beginning?" added Apollo.

Two weeks later, the prince looked back at that moment and wondered if he had inherited some of Amaranth's gift of prophesy. His early mornings were filled with true weapons practice. He was not allowed to draw upon his gifts. One result of training with Manin was that they learned that he could project healing energy through his connection with the prince. While Apollo had the ability to heal and fight, having the support of someone else allowed him to put his full attention into defending the attacks which were trying to

turn him into twins. Rondar felt, and the prince agreed, that using magic should be saved as his surprise weapon. The more people knew about his gifts, the more enemies could learn to counter them. After lunch was his sessions with Queen Holly. Sometimes they were with just the two of them where she taught him finer control of his faerie gifts. Other days involved the guards learning ways to protect themselves from different types of magical attacks. He learned how to use Air Energy to give a projected image some weight when an attacker's sword hit a projected shield. He learned to use an attacker's own sweat against them with Water Energy. He learned that drawing the fire out of metal left armor brittle and that same fire could be used to give another attacker a hot foot. Even Earth Magic could be used to make it harder for people to walk. Holly gave the prince many ideas on subtle ways to use his gifts that neither required a lot of energy to enact but also seemed more magical which couldn't be easily traced to the source.

Evenings were when the prince and his guards gathered to for magic training. They discovered that each of the guards, even those with no direct blood connection to the House of Charming had some level of ability to interact with magic. For Toby and Stane, it was purely as a grounding point for the prince's magics. They would serve as the anchors when group energy was used. The twins had their natural connections with each other. With a boost from Apollo, they were able to expand that connection with others. Apollo could mentally link to one of the twins and she would handle the communication with the others, freeing the prince to keep his attention on the overall battle. And since he could connect with any one of the four twins, if Jana was in a critical struggle, he could shift his focus to another. Given time and practice Apollo suspected that they would be able to start projecting without his assistance. Lance and Patrick proved to be excellent conduits for the prince's fire magics while Rondar was able to channel water magic. Each was unable to manipulate the element on their own, but with a connection to the prince they able to direct the energy without the prince's direct guidance. A connection with Belkaro heightened the



wolf's hearing and sense of smell. They figured this was a sign of his connection to air energies.

With the approaching gala event only days away, Queen Holly announced that their afternoon session was to have all of his companions join him for his final test. As he walked into the room, Holly was flanked by Hilda Harbell, Johnny, his mother, and Holly's children, the Royal Princesses and Prince of the Faerie Court. As soon as the door closed, Holly's voice rang out. "Let the challenge begin." Immediately, Hilda split into her sisters and the other faeries took flight.

A crack of thunder echoed in the hall and the torrential rain began. Apollo quickly grounded and tapped into the grounding energy of his guards and suddenly the room was filled with multiple versions of each of his companions. Within a moment of the fray, he turned each of the real versions invisible and they gathered in a common spot as coordinated by Chana. Each guard took mental control of their projections and continued to engage the faeries. Apollo and Rondar connected and began their plan. The prince anticipated the storm and planned for it. He built up a wall of soft air that hugged the walls of the room and slowly moved the edges toward the center of the room. As the faeries claimed victory over their targets, the projected guards disappeared one by one until only a single copy remained standing in a huddled cluster surrounding the prince in the middle of Magic Hall. The faeries flew in for the 'kill' which is when Apollo solidified the wall of air trapping them inside the enclosure and Rondar directed all of Holly's rain into its core. They watched as the cylinder of air began to fill just as any vessel of glass would.

The water was up to the guards' necks when the rain stopped. "Foolish humans. I should let you drown in your own trap," Holly said as she hovered over their heads.

Apollo stopped the projections and released the invisibility spell. "I hope you didn't think I was that stupid, dear Aunt." He began tightening the cylinder which had the effect of forcing both the water and the faeries upward until both were near the ceiling.

"You win," she conceded.

Apollo was about to release the air when he realized that all that water would come crashing down on them. He expanded the cylinder until the water was about half the height of the room and then drained the fire from it, turning it into a block of ice. Only then did he release the air. "Your artists should be able to turn that into something fabulous for the celebration."

Holly dismissed her family and the guards for her final debriefing with her student. As the representative of the monarchs of the three kingdoms, Rondar claimed the right to listen.

"Well played," she said. "I don't think I've ever had my gift turned against me like that."

"It was Rondar's idea," admitted the prince. "He was curious to see just how solid my air walls were. When we tested it with water, he began to think it might be able to be used as more than just as a mere umbrella against your storms so we started testing it."

"And I never heard that humans could project images of themselves. I was always told that was limited to faerie blood."

"And it may be," he said. "I projected through them which only gives the appearance that they projected."

"But how? How did you manage to get them to move independently?" she asked in amazement. "Two weeks ago, you struggled with directing five images of yourself during combat training. I can't imagine how you could manipulate so many images at once."

"I didn't," he confessed. "Each person was responsible for their images. I simply watched everything that was going on in order to lend an extra boost where it was needed."

"I assume this means he passed your little exam?" asked Rondar.

"And then some, my friend." She looked at Apollo. "He even taught me some new tricks, which after nearly five hundred years of using magic is not an easy task."

"I couldn't have done it without you, Aunt Holly," said the prince. "You said that I had been thinking linearly and with your help I learned to combine my gifts. And in helping my guards learn how to protect against magic, they didn't know about all of the rules of what couldn't be done. They wanted to know what could be done, so we figured it out."

Holly chuckled. "Just wait until EEK hears about this. They are going to go berserk when they realize all of the gaps in their codes

related to working magic in concert, especially when they think about the implications of using your gifts through another being."

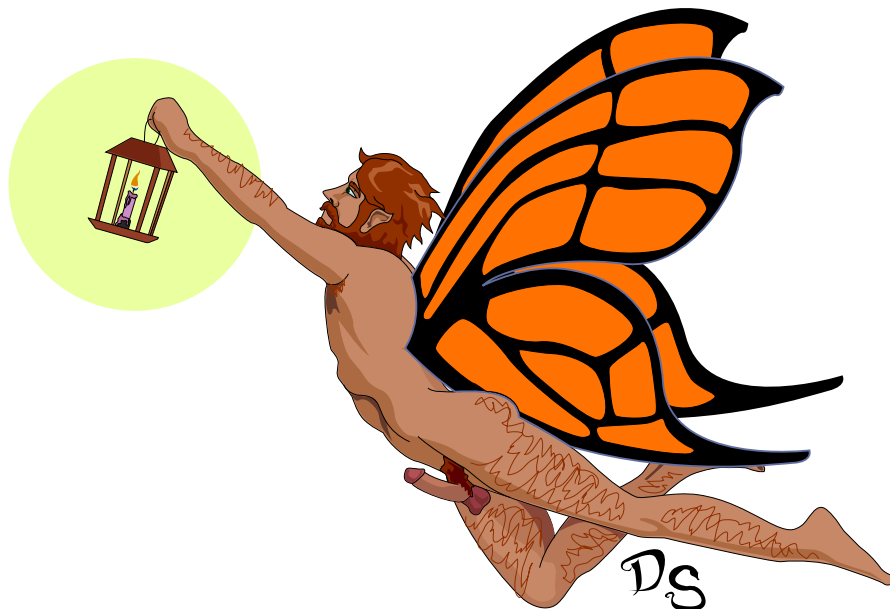
"It shouldn't be news to them. After all, this is how Rowan helped the cousins give me my first lesson," responded Apollo.

"That was before EEK was founded and likely a thing of need. We haven't had the need since then so no one has thought of it."

Holly looked about

the room. "Time enough for talk of ethics later. I need to get someone to get that block of ice out of here before it melts. Now go get cleaned up and I'll see you at dinner."

Apollo and Rondar knew when they had been dismissed and headed out to the hallway. "I'm looking forward to a nice quiet evening," announced Apollo. "Everyone did great this afternoon so I think we deserve a night off."



"Agreed," concurred Rondar as he rubbed his head. "If they others are like me, we all could use some quiet time to practice that grounding stuff you taught us."

As tempted as he was to lend some healing energy, he knew that Rondar needed the practice and had already expressed his thoughts about Apollo's use of energy for something he should be able to do on his own. "A quiet evening it shall be then."

"There you are Your Majesty." Apollo turned to see Gofer, one of Queen Holly's pages coming down the hall. "King William and Queen Rose have just arrived with Princesses Viola and Lily and Lady Cory in attendance and have requested that you join them for High Tea in their chambers."

Apollo and Rondar looked at each other and started laughing. "So much for a quiet evening," said the prince. To Gofer, he added, "Please tell the King and his guests that I would be honored and shall join them as soon as I have made myself presentable after my afternoon exercises."

Gofer flew off as Apollo and Rondar headed to the shower.

"I wonder how the girls are getting along these days. They were constantly trying to make themselves more impressive by bringing out the worst in the others," pondered Apollo.

"Probably doing better without you saying that one of them is the fairest of them all," responded Rondar. "Who is the current leader for the title?"

"Of the three of them, I think the current honor belongs to Lady Cory but then there's..." Apollo stopped walking as a wave of doom rolled over him. "Oh, God. Cory was ready to kill Viola when she thought she stole Manin from her."

"So?"

"What is she going to do if she realizes that Manin holds my heart now?"

"One or the other of you is going to be dead," speculated Rondar. He held up his ring and it shown white in the dim lit hallway.

"That's the truth!" exclaimed Apollo.

Sunsets

by Hermes Polyandros

West is of water and emotion in what I believe.
West is the place of repose, and rest I perceive,
But West is the place of sunsets
Nature's enchanted painting
Hues and colors ever shifting and changing.
Each sunset is different in the way it moves me.
Two sunsets last Spring, I did see
Illumination fixed in my memory, permanently.
With high icy clouds overhead,
The sun setting's light shown under them,
A spectacular show
Hues of red, set against bluish-gray,
Purples and oranges spread across the sky;
Reflected on a mirror lake,
Dark trees on islands silhouetted,
Set everyone running to capture it on cameras,
But only my mind's eye recorded it complete,
Shifting colors that marked the end of Friday.

A second sunset burnished trees, cabins,
Boardwalk and all,
With a golden light of heaven,
Sending news of, "everything's all right."
The sky's canvas, and the land too,
changed slowly from gold to red
As the sun westered at the day's end.
Oranges and reds marked its western fall,
Again reflected in the mirror lake
Framed in dark silhouetted trees,

As they shifted to blue-greys and purples,
As the light did fade,
The crescent moon shown silver,
At the end of Saturday.
I need no camera, I see it still
two glorious, yes glorious, sunsets, in my mind
Etched in memory, I see them still.



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Something in the Beard

By Phoenix

It started off as a normal busy lunch rush. I could hear Norland barking out the commands that made the Meat Rack famous for being able to get food to tables in five minutes from the time the order was entered into the computer. Many of our regulars handed Steven, our host, their order as they walked in. As soon as Michael started clearing a table, Steven would enter the order before seating them. All we had to do is get drinks to the table and zip back to Norland to snag the food from the window as soon as it came off the grill. It was a precision dance that we had developed over the ten years we had been open. It hadn't always been that hurry, hurry, rush, rush. We used to have time to flirt with customers but as companies shortened lunch hour to a mere thirty minutes, we had to pick up the pace to allow people time to actually taste the food they ate. Dinner at the Meat Rack was a bit more slow paced since we actually wanted to keep the few diners we had at the tables after downtown workers started heading home to the suburbs. It made us look busy. But at lunch, we didn't need any artifice to look busy. We were busy.

That particular day my part of the precision choreography was about to take a tumble. It started when I noticed a lady up front talking to Steven. It looked like she was trying to find someone. Now, during the rush we have a strict policy of not seating incomplete parties, so if she didn't see her friends waiting, then the chances of them already being at a table were slim and none. I dismissed the scene and headed to the kitchen to pick up the food for my next table. As I stood filling my tray, Steven came to me and said he would take it for me and that I needed to go talk to the lady I had seen up front.

"I know you're very busy," she said as I approached, "but do you recognize this man?"

She handed me a picture. It didn't take me more than a nano-second to identify him. That was my fantasy man, my dream lover and unrequited lust mate. His steel blue eyes stared out of the picture while I was lured into his lips which were framed by a thick black moustache and beard. I don't know how many times I wished that I could serve him something that wasn't on the menu.

"He's my brother," she continued. "I haven't heard from him in months. His phone is disconnected and he's not answering email. Jason was always talking about how great the food was here and how one waiter always had a way of making him smile. He said the waiter was cute with a perfectly trimmed goatee and a butt that makes people want to grab it as he passes by. You seem to match that description and well, I hoped that maybe you had seen him."

I blushed at her description as it was basically true, except for where her brother was concerned. The one customer I really wish would grab my ass and he never did. I had to disappoint her by



saying that I hadn't seen him in over a year. I offered to check with the others when things quieted down.

"Please call if you see him." She handed me her card and disappeared out the door.

The next part of my shift was hell. I couldn't stop thinking about what might have happened to Jason. At one point I was so distracted I actually dropped a tray of food. I don't remember the last time I had done that. As I cleaned up the mess, I could vividly remember the first time I dropped food. We had been open for business for about a month. It was our lunch rush, a whole three tables walked in at the same time. I think that was as busy as we ever got that first month. Anyway, Steven worked the big table of six while I got the couple and singleton. As I approached the gentleman seated at table four, I immediately noticed his thick beard. It was jet black and by thick I mean it had to be a good inch thick, all neatly trimmed like a well manicured lawn. I wanted to run my fingers through its lushness to see if it was as soft as it looked. I asked if he wanted anything. He looked up from his menu and that's when I melted into his blue eyes. He responded in a deep southern voice "Yes, I think I'll start with your phone number." I blushed and he then proceeded to give me his order, Monte Cristo – save the raspberry stuff for the needy children – and iced tea. While his sandwich was being prepared I was lost trying to figure out how serious he was about wanting my number. He was so dreamy and I was so lonely and horny. Steven and my relationship had already faded to just friends by the time I agreed to his idea about opening the diner. We would be working together and maybe things would work out. Our search for the perfect cook led us to Norland and those two were so into each other that it became obvious that there really was no hope to rekindle that old flame. Meanwhile, Mr. Man of Fantasy, nice trim body with a face I could stare at for hours on end, had just asked for

Something in the Beard and the graphic on this page were originally published in *Beard Tugs in celebration of beards and the men who wear them*. Thank you Yogabear for the fun challenge of featuring a beard as something more than just as part of the character description. You can get more information on the book at <http://www.yogabearstudio.com> or in the Ostara 2010 issue of *Airy Faerie*.

my phone number. I was so focused on how to smoothly ask if he was serious without seeming too eager that I hadn't noticed that Steven had left the tray stand out in the middle of the aisle and tripped right over it. Only quick reflexes on Jason's part saved his food from falling to the floor. I knew he thought I had to be the biggest klutz and threw all hopes of exchanged numbers to the wind. At the end of meal, I told him that we were picking up the tab because of my oops. That's when I noticed that his jet black beard was covered in the powdered sugar from his sandwich. I tried to stifle a snicker but he picked up on it and I had to tell him. Rather than being upset or embarrassed, he simply asked if I wanted to lick it up for him. Just then the door opened and I turned to see who had come in. By the time I turned back he had wiped his face clean.

"You have an order up." Michael's voice brought me back to the present. Sitting in the middle of a crowded diner during rush was not the time to get lost in memories. Back to work.

When the lunch rush peaked, Steven kicked me out early for my afternoon break. "You look like your best friend died and you didn't even know where the dude lived. Go home and get some rest before you come back to close."

I wanted to smack Steven but he was right, like usual, when it came to perceptions about my choices in partners. But Jason was different. He was one of our regulars and used to make it a point to sit in my section. After that first time, he came in like clockwork, every Tuesday and Thursday, precisely at 11:32. I learned that he was a law clerk for a firm in our building and he had classes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. He ordered everything on the menu once before settling on his favorites. When I asked him what made them so special he told me that they came out the fastest which then gave him time for dessert which in turn meant that I had to come back to the table more times. He would flirt with me like that but never again asked for my number.

And as I sprawled on my couch, I realized that he was right. Those were the fastest meals we made back then and those are the only thing on our lunch menu these days. I must have been thinking about his words when we pared down the menu a few years ago. I'm surprised that he didn't say something when we introduced the new menu. Oh! That was about the time that he stopped coming to my section. That really hurt.

I never understood what I did that caused him to stop. He was one of my favorite customers. Fun, witty and gorgeous as all can get. He would sculpt his beard in different ways. Sometimes it was trimmed thin while at other times he let it grow to its fullness. Sometimes it was just the moustache and goatee, and even sometimes it was just the goatee. But there was always something there. And no matter the shaping, there was always something in it when he finished eating. I long had given up the thought that he was just a sloppy eater and realized that it was a game to see how I would react. That became clear when the thing in his beard was the pen I left for him to use to sign his charge.

I also had confirmation when he asked what I thought about the latest beau he brought in. He was almost always alone for lunch, but every few weeks he was accompanied by someone for dinner. There were some regulars with him. Those were his drinking buddies getting food into the system before a night out to the town. Other times, it was obvious that it was a first date. Those didn't bother me. I certainly could have wished it was me but he was happy and smiling and that's all that really mattered, right? The next time he

came in for lunch he would ask what I thought about his latest fling. I often said that his companion had never said a word about the gravy caught in his beard so I knew that it wouldn't last. He agreed which then made me know that he was well aware of the dribbles.

As I got ready to head back to the diner, I struggled to remember the last time I saw Jason. He had just started dating someone. I saw a couple at my table and walked up and had the biggest shock of my life. The beard was gone! It was the first time in the six or seven years that he had been my customer that he had a naked face. No stubble, nothing. I didn't know what to say. It certainly was still a handsome face but it wasn't his face. It was soon after that when he stopped coming to my tables. He would sit at his table with his back to me but I could tell that the beard was still gone. That lasted for a year or so and then he disappeared. I don't know what it is about him. I've had a lot of regulars over the years, and none of them touched me the same way as Jason did. As I looked back on the past couple of years, I realized something had been missing which was having that one special customer that I looked forward to serving. For the others, I did a job. But for him, he was there because of our connection.

Thankfully, it wasn't a busy dinner that night. I wasn't in the mood for drama, either with a customer or from back in the kitchen. A quiet evening is just what I needed. My last table had left and I took a quick break before starting my side jobs. Steven poked his head in the break room and told me that he had just sat someone at my table. I slipped my shoes back on and headed up front. A table for one, so nothing to get too excited about. I approached and asked if I could get him something to drink.

"An iced tea and a side of your phone number would be nice."

I looked down and there were those blue eyes staring at me above a beautiful lush beard. Just as full as ever only there were silver threads running through the jet black mass. "My sister said she stopped here and I figured I had better get in before you got worried."

"Too late," I said.

Since he was the only guest in the diner at that point, I violated our rule and sat down with him. He explained that his ex had gotten abusive so he had moved out, changed his number and email and his sister was stupid and had never updated her records. In fact, the number she was calling was from his bachelor days and hadn't been his in several years. Once she actually talked to their mother and got the right number she felt pretty stupid. "Now, I'm hungry. Do you still have the Monte Cristo on the menu?"

It was only on the lunch menu but I knew I could get Norland to make it for me. He'd grumble but he'd do it. When I placed the order, he didn't grumble. In fact he said that he would have been surprised if he had ordered something else and then he winked at me. Norland doesn't wink. I grabbed one of our business cards and scribbled my number on the back and delivered it with the ice tea. I put the tea on the table but hesitated handing him the card. I put it in my shirt pocket. "Why did you stop sitting at my tables? Did I do something wrong?"

He said he had two reasons. The primary one was that his lover was extremely jealous. If anyone looked at Jason with less than casual glances, he would go in a rage. His lover liked the food at the Meat Rack but Jason knew that it was only time before either I or Jason would say something flirty and set him off. Steven brought the food to the table. It was a tray with two Monte Cristos on it.

"Norland says that if he has to make one of these, then he might as well make two and he knows that you haven't eaten. So sit and catch up."

I sat down as ordered and we ate in silence for a few minutes. Jason turned around and gave Norland a thumbs up gesture. "Good as always," he said as he turned back.

"So do I get to hear the other reason?" I asked.

"Let's finish eating then I'll see if you get the other reason."

I had to admit that the sandwich was good. It is one of my favorites but I don't think I asked Norland to make me one in a long time. Sharing it with Jason just changed its status from one of my favorites to being my favorite. We chit chatted about this and that and finally the sandwiches were gone. And as ever, there was a trail of powered sugar enhancing that beautiful salt and pepper beard.

"You have sugar in your beard." I said.

"So do you," he responded. I started to wipe my goatee but he stopped me. "I have an idea."

He stood up and grabbed my hand and led me to the restroom. He ushered me in and locked the door and proceeded to lick my goatee clean. I can be slow at times but that wasn't one of them and I returned the cleaning favor. I finished cleaning his beard and moustache and he pulled me into a kiss and I melted.

He held my hand and played with the wedding band on my finger. "Does this belong to someone?"

I told him that it was from my ex, Steven. I tried to stop wearing it but my finger always felt naked so I kept it on. "Good, because I was about to ask if your lover liked three ways because I don't want to lose you again."

"Again?"

"That's the second reason, I stopped coming to your tables. My ex made me shave. He hated how it felt and how things got caught in it. That first night you saw me shaved you looked so hurt. And even though I kept it shaved for him, he never looked at me with more love in his eyes. In fact, while I was shaved, he never looked at me with as much love as you would, and I only knew you from here."

He kissed me and I placed my hands on the sides of his face and let my fingers feel the silkiness of his beard.

"Now, can I have that phone number so we can meet outside of the place or do I have to make love to you in this bathroom?"

Someone knocked on the door. "We're locking up. See you in the morning."

I kissed him. "Do I have to choose? Why not both?"

The Naughty Young Faun

By Raven Bear Paws and Paul J. DuBois

There once was a young faun named Hebert
who was widely known as a pervert
be it goat or Lad
He would push in their ass
and smile the whole time while doing it.

Young Hebert's cock was enormous,
the young lads would line up to adore it
as he would spread their cheeks
and plunge it in deep
his pleasure all around be repeated

Young Hebert's luck was a plenty
young lads would spread for him daily
as he said with a grin
as he wiped the cum from his chin
a young faun's needs be sated

When it came to pleasuring, there were none better
Young Hebert's appeal was unfettered
Each lad moaned with delight
as he stuck it in tight
the n)ughty young faun was cumming.



Story Game

Chapter II: by Phoenix

At the direction of the old lady, Brian ran down the hall to get some towels from the bathroom. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a flash of something purple reflect on the metallic surface of the corridor. As he spun around to see what had distracted him, Brian nearly lost his balance but was prevented by a pair of hands steadying his shoulders.

"Easy there, fellow. This must be your first time on a PM4M Galaxy Class Explorer."

Brian turned and saw a tall, dark haired, beefy man in a purple commander's uniform that looked like it had been painted on him. The deep V of the neckline plunged nearly down to his navel, exposing the highly defined muscles of his chest. As he absorbed the vision of the man, he really did have to wonder if there really was fabric covering the skin. The details of the cock that was showing through the pants were enough to make Brian's mouth water and think that he could suck on it without need of needing to remove the uniform. All he could do in response to the man's statement was to nod his head.

"Then welcome aboard the MMC Sinking. I am Captain Apollo. And you are?"

"Brian of Terra." He extended his hand to the captain for a handshake. The captain's grip was firm and warm. Brian was a bit surprised when the captain used that grip to pull him toward him. The slightly lighter gravity of the ship made the task all that much easier and Brian found himself in the captain's embrace. As the bodies contacted, Brian's thoughts about the captain's uniform were answered as he felt flesh meet flesh. Apollo gave Brian a kiss that he felt surging through his body and made a bee-line to his cock, which leapt to life at the passion in the kiss.

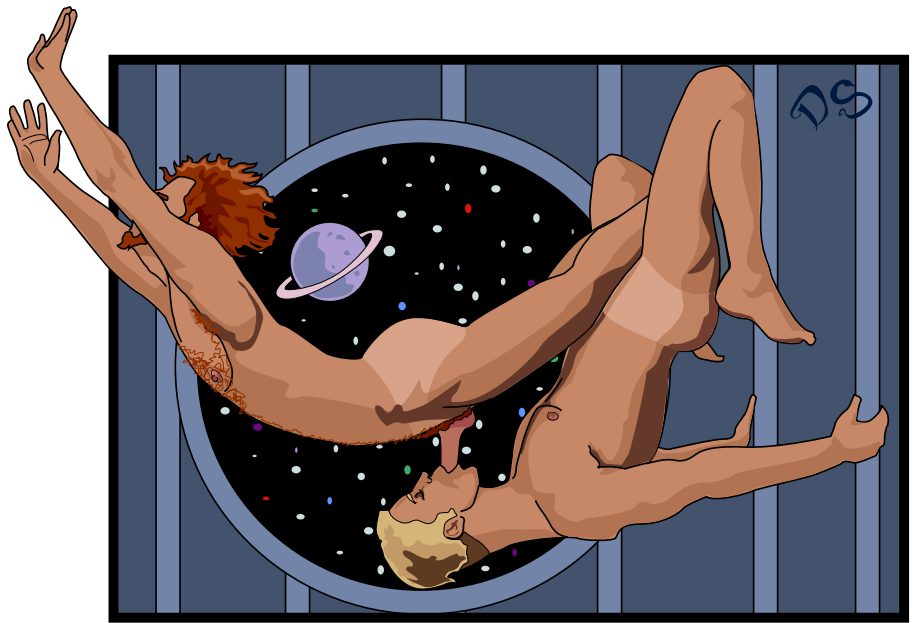
"We'll have to save the rest of your welcome for later," said Apollo. "I don't think it is going to be much longer so we need to get you to the observatory or you will miss what you traveled sixty-nine light years to see."

The captain grabbed Brian's cock and led him down the corridor in what seemed like a familiar gesture to him. The captain issued a command to the turbolift and gave Brian another kiss as they sped on their way to the observatory.

Brian was surprised by the sights he saw as he stepped out of the turbolift. The room was full of beings of a wide variety of shapes and sizes. He saw fauns and elves in conversation. Nymphs were dancing to the sounds of the drummers. Horned beings were strutting through the crowd. Brian had to laugh as one of the tallest and proudest got his antlers caught in one of the chandeliers. A maiden in a shimmering blue gown made her way through the crowd at their arrival.

"Ah, there you are," she said giving the captain a quick pat on his butt. Looking Brian up and down, "And now I can see what kept you. I am..."

A loud gong silenced the crowd. At the sound everyone started rushing to the windows. The captain beckoned Brian to follow him up a short flight of stairs to the captain's lounge where they would



be able to see things without the crush of bodies around them.

Brian stood in amazed shock as he saw the planet below them. It was swollen, with a huge bulge on one side. The captain put his arm around Brian's waist as they stood watching the bulge stretch away from the planet. Brian stood transfixed at the sight that was unfolding before him. He was momentarily brought back as he felt another arm reach around him. Half expecting the blue gowned maiden, he was surprised to see a red-haired man in another painted on purple uniform. It was then that Brian realized that he too was in purple. He saw the blue maiden on the other side of the captain, her head resting on his broad chest.

"Those stairs are getting to be a bit much for this old lady," said a woman dressed in black as she settled in next to the redhead.

The five stood in awed silence as they witnessed the scene before them. The bulge had now stretched out far enough from the planet that they were two spheres connected by the thinnest thread. A gasp came from the crowd as a ball of gas erupted from the nearby sun and was making a direct line toward the part that had been the bulge. A scream rose as the fireball made contact severing the thread in the impact. The bulge erupted in flame. A solar wind swept the burning ball away from the planet and towards the sun. Brian was expecting it to fly into the sun but it stopped just short of plunging into the sun. It was like two suns shining together; one large and one small.

"He has his daddy's eyes," said the old woman.

Brian did a double take at the scene in the windows, for in that moment the planet disappeared from sight. Something was strange in the way everyone stepped away from him and he jumped at the tap on his shoulder. When he turned, he saw a woman in a green gown the color of new leaves in spring.

"I choose you as my child's godfather," she said. Her voice filled the observatory and everyone turned from the windows and their private celebrations to look at them. "What shall you name my child?"

Tune in next issue to see who picks up the next chapter Brian's tale

I do not Need to be Rescued

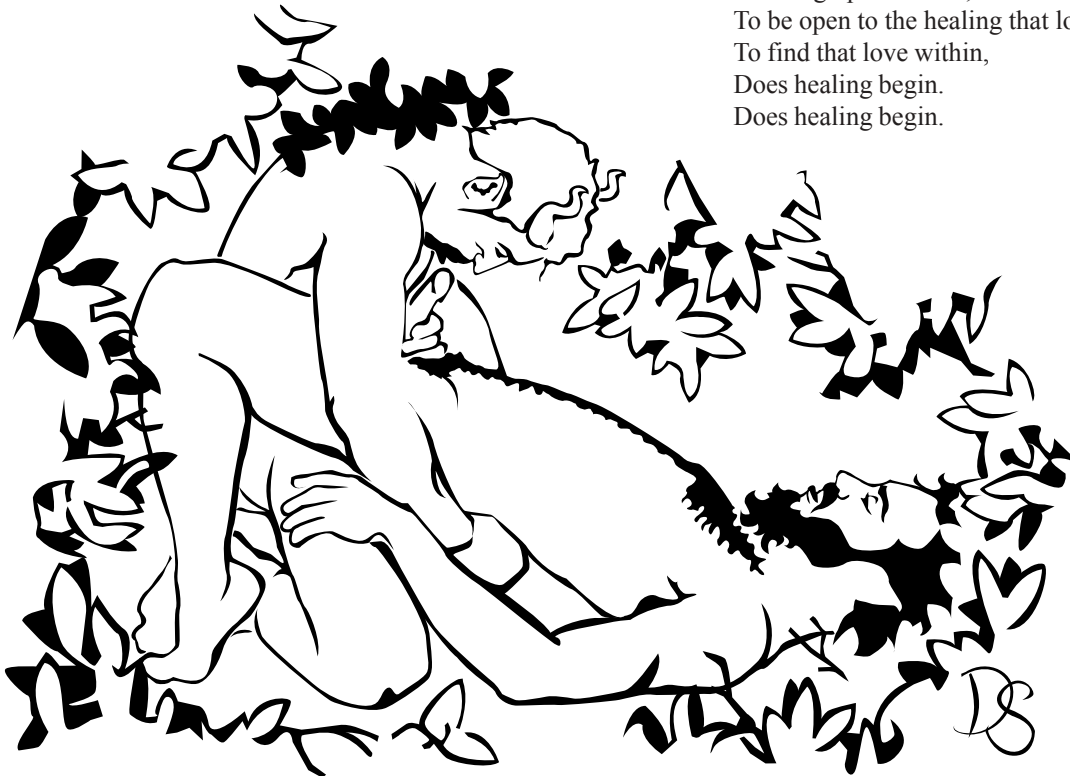
by Raven Bear Paws

I have spent most of my life
 Locked away in a stone tower
 Waiting for some non-existing prince
 To come and rescue me
 But I say this, I do not need to be rescued
 That I will not fall into society's confinements
 That I am a modern man
 Of this ever growing metropolis
 This is my crossing point
 This is my time to improve
 Time for me to throw away empty fantasies
 and become the survivor I know I am
 The corpuscular flow of emotions sting
 Like a junky's arm after finding his fix
 This was not the solution I was looking for
 I stomp my feet like an ill tempered child
 Do you hear me Prince Charming
 I will not be rescued
 Not now, not ever
 I cherish my independence
 And no shady prince will ever take that away
 I have found a new lease on life
 That does not include me laying sleepy
 In some glass coffin waiting to be kissed
 By a frog
 That's right princey
 Move it along there's nothing to see here!
 Go look in Snow White's tomato patch
 Because I do not need to be rescued

Healing

by Hermes Polyandros

Healing is the power of renewal,
 When the body renews damages done,
 While in the course of life's journey.
 Some healing is simple and straight forward;
 That nick, that scrape, that bruise, that bump.
 Other healing is more complicated,
 Where large systems are affected,
 Great damages done, long times in recovery.
 Some are invisible,
 Where all that is seen is not seen at all.
 Some never heal, but the pain lives on
 Leaving scars on the soul,
 Like the scars on the body, but not visible to the naked eye.
 Healing is a process.
 Healing is natural.
 Healing is a divine gift,
 A gift given that transforms
 That which was damaged
 Into that which is renewed.
 Even those on the soul can be healed,
 Even these can be called into you
 By connecting all of you together,
 Making whole that which was broken.
 It is the living gift, that of healing,
 And only in living can it occur;
 Only in life can this holy magic come about.
 In living and moving, breathing the air of life;
 In living and moving, eating the food of life;
 In living and moving, drinking the waters of life;
 In living and moving, feeling the warm glow of loving,
 Of being open to love;
 To be open to the healing that love can bring;
 To find that love within,
 Does healing begin.
 Does healing begin.



The Maiden and the Hare

by Professor Percival "Perry" Grinn

Prince Hubert von Hasenpfeffer was in a stew. Not quite literally, at least not yet. The prince hated being a rabbit. At the moment his tirades of the ills of being a rabbit stemmed from the fact that he was hanging upside down with his foot caught in some rudimentary snare. This was the fourth time this week. It was bad enough being a rabbit, but he never realized the powerful curse when he fled the witch. Her last words to him as he fled her house were "You are going to be an easy catch." He realized that he had been lucky so far. Each time he found himself in a trap, some lad or lass would free him and then scamper on their way, never taking time to listen to his tale of woe.

Hubert sighed as he tried to twist so that he could gnaw on the rope. He stopped when he heard the sound of a twig breaking. His heart raced. "Could it be the hunter coming to claim his prize?" he thought. "Can I try to look too skinny or too sick to eat?" Along the trail, he spotted a maiden in a blue dress skipping as if she had no cares. He watched as she tripped and thought that she should have been paying attention to the ground and not the sky. But then, as she picked herself up, she saw him hanging there. It was love at first sight. Hubert knew in his heart that this was the maiden he had been waiting for. She was the one who would end his dreary existence as a rabbit.

"Oh! You poor thing," she cried. She fumbled in her bag and found a knife and cut him down. She wasn't quite fast enough to catch him as he fell. With the wind knocked out of him by the fall, he just lay there. "Oh! I'm so sorry." She picked him up in her arms. Hubert looked into her beautiful blue eyes and melted. She was everything he had hoped. He wiggled his nose. "Oh, please help be become human." He thought real hard for her to kiss him with true love's kiss. He could feel that she had the power to make

his mind and body whole. But he knew that she had to feel it too in order to break the curse that forced him to remain a rabbit.

The maiden took him to her home and made a bed for him of fresh straw. She fed him the finest vegetables from her garden. Hubert thought, "Hey! She knows I'm a prince and knows how to treat a guy right. With pampering like this, I could almost get used to being a rabbit." He wiggled his nose at her and she giggled that he looked so cute when he did that. "I know I'm right. She's the one. But what does she think of me?"

The weeks flew by and one day the maiden took him from the safety of the quarters that she had prepared against the forest foxes that had on more than one occasion tried to dine on a royal feast. She took him to town and told him that his was going to be in a race. If he won, she would grant him his fondest wish. "I knew it," he thought. When the race started, the turtle didn't have a chance. Hubert ran as if he had a fox on his tail. He zoomed to the finish line. The maiden swept him off the ground. "I knew it. You aren't a real rabbit. They would have been distracted by the piles of carrots along the path. I love you Mr. Bunny."

"That's Prince Hasenpfeffer," he thought but as he looked at her blue eyes beaming at him, "but if you want to call me Mr. Bunny, I guess I can live with it. I love you, too."

She held him so that she could look at him and kissed him. POOF, Hubert fell to the ground with a thunk. Standing next to him was a bewildered beautiful rabbit with blue eyes. They rubbed noses and hopped into the woods.

The prince was truly enchanted. When he scorned Wild Hariette's advances, she cursed him that he would never free from snares until he found true love. When he found that love, he wanted to be the best Mr. Bunny he could be and gave up his dreams of being human if only his love could hop through life at his side.

As for the maiden, she learned that you are no bunny until some bunny loves you. And when some bunny loves you, nothing stays the same.

The Fairy Door

By Raven Bear Paws

By the moon, we spot and play
with the night begins our day.
Garden fairies come at dawn,
bless the flowers then are gone.
Dance around the toad stool thrice,
to thee we sing of Titania rite.
Blessed is the grass at dusk
as we spread the dew of love.
You may look high and low
but may never see us
for we know
Our light is what the humans seek
so behind the fairy door we do peek
with the fading lamp light's glow
the fairy door comes and goes
but when dawns light does come to break
to sleep we go till another day.

