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Fellowship & Fairydust

Spring 2020

A COLLECTION OF STORIES, ARTICLES,
POETRY & ARTWORK

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FELLOWSHIP AND FAIRYDUST



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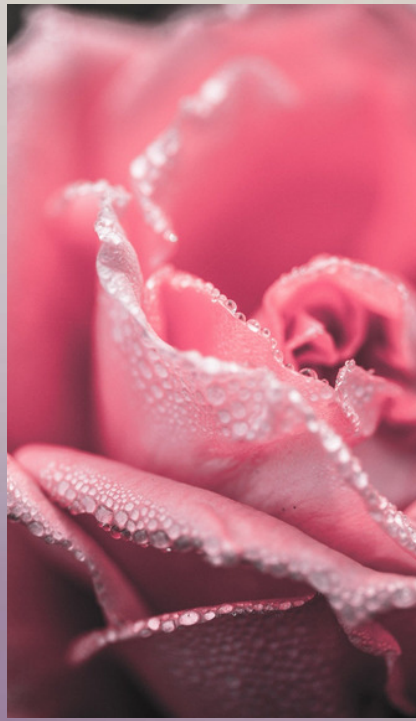


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Editor's Note

There really is nothing which awakens the soul quite like Spring. That moment when you rise and look, once more, out of your window – so sure that Winter will never retreat, that the dark days will never come to an end – only to find that Spring has taken her delicate paintbrush to the snow and fallen leaves; dotting splashes of verdant green, purple, and yellow all about – only then does your soul finally remember the true essence of hope. The Wheel of Year has once again turned, and new beginnings blossom everywhere.


“Spring drew on...and a greenness grew over those brown beds, which, freshening daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps.”

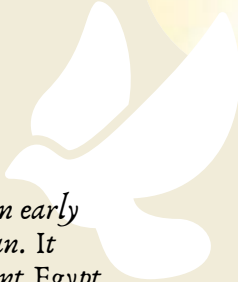

— Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre

Spring is usually a time of plans and projects, of change, rebirth, and transformation. There are many festivals which fall during this season and all of them have to do with new beginnings and the celebration of life winning out over death. This is particularly poignant at this time of global pandemic, which is affecting the lives of so many people around the world. Even as we take the necessary precautions, and enact social distancing for the common good, we must continue to be there for each other emotionally, and to kindle sparks of hope to get each other through these trying times with faith and fellowship of spirit.

For Christians around the world, it includes the liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter, bridged by the Triduum of Passion Week, when the faithful contemplate the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ in first century Palestine. There are many devotions at this time, including the ceremony of the Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday, the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday, and inspiring culmination of the Easter Vigil, when the Paschal Candle is lit in a darkened church, which then proceeds to light all the candles held up by the worshippers. Meanwhile, the priest sings the richly poetic Exultet:

*O wonder of Your humble care for us!
O love, O charity beyond all telling,
to ransom a slave You gave away your Son!
O truly necessary sin of Adam,
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
O happy fault
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!*





The eight-day festival of Passover is celebrated by the Jewish People in early spring, from the 15th through the 22nd of the Hebrew month of Nissan. It commemorates the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt, when God sent Moses to call down divine justice on the oppressors and lead his people to freedom. This story is shared by all three of the Abrahamic Religions. Passover is observed by avoiding leaven and highlighted by the Seder meals that include four cups of wine, eating matza and bitter herbs, and retelling the story of the Exodus.

Spring was the time the ancient Celts would honor Brighid, triple goddess of fire in the hearth (fertility, childbearing, healing), in the forge (craftsmanship, weaving, and the law), and of inspiration (poetry, song, storytelling). Like the mythological Oak and Holly Kings who rule over different halves of the year, the aspects of Maiden and Crone present in Brighid also take turns ruling as the seasons. The Maiden would be imprisoned for the length of the winter, when the Crone, carrying her lantern, rules over the barren land. The prayers of the people would cause the Crone to die and be reborn in her Maiden form

Gifts would be cast into wells and ribbons hung on trees for the festival of Imbolc. During the conversion of Ireland to Christianity, another Brighid would become a saintly abbess and wonder-worker, and legends of spun of Brighid journeying through time and space to Bethlehem, adopting the Christ Child as her own, and rearing Him to reign over her people as High King. Thus Imbolc also has come to be associated with the saint, and this celebration has often spanned the divide between modern-day Christians and Pagans who both honour an aspect of sacred femininity from Celtic spirituality on this day.

Known as "Mary of the Gaels", St. Brighid shares the Season of Spring with the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has been honoured with traditional "May Crownings" across the Catholic world, when statues of the virgin will be crowned with wreaths of flowers, and she will be hailed as "Queen of the Angels, Queen of the May." This is particularly poignant for English Catholics this year, as they celebrate the re-dedication of England under the traditional medieval title of "Our Lady's Dowry." The British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his poem 'May Magnificat':

*"Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
Question: What is Spring? —
Growth of every thing...
All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
With that world of good,
Nature's motherhood."*





In the folklore of the British Isles the Spring Equinox was said to be the day when the dragons would finally awaken from their long winter slumber. Dragons were a big part of ancient culture in Britain (and in much of the rest of the world too) and were considered to be very mystical and powerful beings. At the Autumn Equinox the dragons were thought to take the fire energy of the world – the very essence of life – down deep into the very womb of the earth to keep it safe and kindled through the harsh winter months. In Spring the dragons emerge once more and breathe the light and warmth of this energy back into the earth, birthing new life from it

“It was such a spring day as breathes into a man an ineffable yearning, a painful sweetness, a longing that makes him stand motionless, looking at the leaves or grass, and fling out his arms to embrace he knows not what.” ~ John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga

Just like the dragons in this wonderful old legend, our featured authors have been diligently kindling their creativity throughout the cold winter months ready to breathe new life into it just in time for our beautiful Spring 2020 issue of the Fellowship & Fairydust magazine. We hope that you enjoy reading the fruits of their labours and wish you a transformative and hope filled start to the year.

With Warmth and Blessings,

**~ AVELLINA BALESTRI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
& BETH AMOS, CONTENT EDITOR**



ANNUNCIATION

By Avellina Balestri

Ave, the spring of flower
And summer's fern
Ave, the flow of river
And ice's thaw
Ave, the walls of Nazareth
White as angel wings
Ave, the grace of seed
The death and the dawn
Ave, the hollowed earth
And Woman's womb
Ave, all things reborn
The kiss of God and Man
Ave, the farmer's sowing
And the sun's ascent
Ave, the green of tree
And outstretched limbs
Ave, the cup that brims
And the heart that runs over
Ave, the lilies and the light
And the rough tongue speaking pure
Ave, the peasant girl
And the fear in her eyes
Ave, the soul unsullied
And the hands work-worn
Ave, the servant queen
And the lap of the dead
Ave, the fruit of the womb
And His bed of tawny straw
Ave, the fruit of the tomb
And His bed of winding sheets
Ave, the tears and the trembling,
And the Easter trumpets
Ave, the blue and gold
Of mantle and of halo
Ave, simple and the great
Earth and heaven, wedded one.



Spring Drabbles

By The F&F Staff

Bridal Splendor

By Hannah Skipper

The sanctuary doors open and the bride begins her procession towards the altar, beautifully adorned in a white gown and jewels for her husband. She is the embodiment of creation's crowning achievement. The exclamation point that her Lord had to create before He rested. The Being that made what had been good to be very good. As she nears the altar, she takes the bridegroom's hand. She does this of her own free-will, just as the Church must, of its own free-will, take Christ's hand and forsake all others so that He may lead, support, guide, and love her.

Eggs in His Bed

BY MIKE FLYNN

Colin knew he was different, but this was beyond bizarre. He had woken up this morning, cleaned himself from his ears to his feet, and then gone to make his bed. As he lifted back the covers, he came across an egg! What was an egg doing in his bed? It was a golden foil-wrapped egg. He must have been sleepwalking. But then it happened the next night, and the night after that. Finally, he confronted his parents about it and was horrified to learn that he had laid them. He was the son of the Easter Bunny!



Life is Returning

BY BETH AMOS

Hazel stood in the clearing, feeling the warmth of the sun on her face. Listening to the chittering and chirping of squirrels and songbirds playing overhead.

A light breeze gusted playfully and leaves rustled — such a perfect spring day.

Looking down, she smiled at the tiny sweet violets gathered at her feet and the telltale purple and yellow glow of crocuses just beginning to bud. Life is returning, and Winter, but a distant memory.

With a contented sigh, she sent pale new roots delving into the warming rich-brown earth and stretched her branches, reaching up towards the cloudless blue.




New Life

By Hannah Skipper

At first light, a girl peers through a frosted window to see a tiny new lump resting in the dry brown grass next to a cow. Without a second thought, she dashes towards the barn, tossing on t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers as she runs. Quickly dumping feed into a bucket, she climbs the fence instead of going through the gate. Then she's there, holding out her grain offering in hopes that the cow will look upon her enterprise with benevolent favor as she goes to her knees to acquaint the newborn with its first human touch.





Spring Thaw

By Hannah Skipper

After spending the winter imprisoned under the ice, the warming spring sun invigorates the creek's natural bubbly spirit and gives it the desire to break free. The first breach might have gone unnoticed if not for the loud crack, like a gunshot, that broke through the cold, frozen wall, allowing the first trickle of water to rush for freedom. But the creek won't be content to run free at a trickle, and soon more cracks are heard as the wall of winter's prison gives way under the growing onslaught of spring. The water will not be captured again for a long time.

Going Home

BY HANNAH SKIPPER

A wordless instinct stirs the flock, making them restless for something distant and familiar. The older ones have felt this longing before and readily take to the sky, leading their youngsters to a place the chicks can only imagine. The formation locks onto its course and flies with confidence, trusting that their leader will fly straight and true. As they float on the light warming breeze and turn their faces northward, they call on other flocks to join them. The snow is melting. The ice is breaking up. New blossoms are budding. It is time to go home.

Song of a Faerie

By Rachel Atterholt

She dances on petals of ivory flowers,
her fingers brush the tiny hair of the leaves.

Long wings flow behind her.

I'd think she was an angel if she wasn't so small.

More join her, as the flowers of Spring bloom.

Wings like butterflies, voices like bells,
they usher in a new dawn, a new beginning.

It is fitting that this is my end.

I am resting by a hawthorn tree,
looking out at a hill of stones,
holding the tombs of passage.

One of them calls to me.

And so, they fly around me,
these angels of life, of beothu,
as I breathe out my last,
as I breathe out my bás.

The one from my dreams, the one I saw first,
she creates a sea of flowers,
curling them around my feet darkened with mud
and my fingers dripping with blood.

They curl and weave through my skin,
my hair, my clothes.

I am becoming one with nature again
as I'm swept into a sea of repose?

She lands in the palm of my hand.

My finger brushes against her wings;
like gossamer silk, like pure lace,
and yet as strong as steel.

She smiles at me, a heavenly one,
and, despite my dying, I smile back.

She whispers in a language only Nature hear,
and now I can hear it too.

"Sleep now, and rejoin the Spring,
your death is your end,
but it lets us begin.

Rest now and dream with the angels."

And as my eyes close, as I fall asleep,

I hear the song of the Fae
calling me to the deep,
and so, I have begun.

I am reborn

in the velvet touch of a rose,
in the cloying smell of a jasmine's breath,
and I am new, and I am free.



Earth Sleeps Preparing for Spring



Artwork By Linda Zachri

What Better Place to Ruminare?

By Bernadette Flynn

*For now - I think I'll stop right here
beneath these leafy boughs,
lie back against this rough, warm trunk
and watch the grazing cows.
The sun plays - dappled - pleasingly
across the tender grass.
The sound as bees hum - soothes my soul
as diligent they pass.
A gentle breeze ruffles my hair.
The sunlight warms my skin.
What better place to ruminare
about the joys of Spring?*

*The way the world has woken up
since winters bitter chill
receded back to northern climes
relinquishing its will.*

*Soft beds of grass - now green and lush
and daisy-laden wave.*

*The warm Spring sun makes all about
feel fortified and brave.*

*Dew-decked in all their finery
the daffodils display
a pomp and presence more in tune
with June's floral array.*

*The recent buds have opened up
To greet the world anew
and here I sit - in calm repose
embraced by boundless hue.*

Do the Trees Hear Us?

By Mike Flynn

*Do you think the trees can hear us
as we walk beneath their boughs,
softly treading all around them;
morning mist touching their brows?*

*Do you think that they can feel us
treading the earth over their roots?*

*Do they understand our language,
or, to them, are we just mutes?*

*We can't understand their whispers,
or know what makes them ache.*

*Do they sit in eternal slumber,
or are they constantly awake?*

You can hear them all around us.

Can they hear us living too?

*As we touch or sit around them,
do they feel it like we do?*

*As we whisper them our secrets,
do they listen on, intent?*

*Or do they simply slumber onwards
and ignore what we have sent?*



*As we climb up in their branches,
do they join in with our games?
Or do they wish we were not there,
and that they, alone, remain?*

*As they grow up all around us,
do they remember what we do?
Will they carry this on with them,
when our numbers become few?*

*I hope that they can hear us,
in everything we say,
and know how vital that they are,
in each and every way.*

A MEETING IN THE MARKETPLACE

By George Brainard

The heavy spring rains had finally let up and the sun was shining brightly in the eastern sky. Before my dear Jesse left to meet with the other town leaders, he anxiously surveyed the progress of the seed we planted nearly a month ago. It had survived and our new wheat was starting to sprout through the moist soil. His big smile and gentle sigh, told me he was relieved. It was only Tebet and our harvest is not until Iyyar, four months away. Nevertheless, knowing the downpours didn't wash out our entire crop was truly a blessing from God.

Little Simon was playing peacefully in his corner of our living area. I was tidying up around the house before taking him on my daily walk to the market. After a simple meal, we made our way into town. It was almost noon, so I didn't expect to see many people. Most of the women did their shopping during the cooler times - early morning or early evening. As we entered the food area of the marketplace, I noticed several Jewish men... shopping. Now, groups of Jews do sometimes pass through town, but these men were buying armloads of bread, cheese, and fruit. This strange sight puzzled me, but the merchants seemed very pleased to sell their goods at a time when the marketplace was usually quiet... even to Jews. Trying to avoid eye contact with these foreigners, I pulled Simon close to my side while purchasing a few items for our evening meal. Jesse often came home hungry and I would chide him about how he could work up an appetite by merely talking. He simply explained, "We wrestle with some weighty issues and are called upon to make some tough decisions... so I come home hungry."

It was obvious Simon's little legs were tired so we agreed to sit and talk with one of the vendors for a while. We watched as the Jewish men left the market, headed south and left town. The whole area was peaceful for almost an hour until we heard a commotion coming from the same direction the men had taken. As the shouting drew closer, I recognized that voice. It was that woman... the one who all the women avoid and the men - She cried out, "I met Him... the Christ! He told me everything I've ever done - all of it. Come with me, everyone. Come! You must see Him." Her shrill voice echoed throughout the marketplace and bounced off the walls of nearby shops.

Shopkeepers quickly secured their businesses and headed south, following the shameful woman. Market vendors, who otherwise would be taking naps, hurriedly packed up their goods and followed too. This was definitely the largest crowd she had ever attracted. Many of the town's women watched the long procession... and then decided to join in to see what was causing all the excitement.

Simon and I followed too... but from a distance. Then we saw Him – Jesus, sitting on the edge of Jacob’s well. The Jewish men from the marketplace were standing near Him. It seemed like the entire town was there surrounding them.

I heard a familiar voice behind us, saying, “This is a day we will never forget.” It was Jesse. I turned and welcomed his embrace while Simon hugged his legs. My father had talked about a ‘special day coming.’ Jesse and I discussed it too. I wondered, Is this that day? What does it all mean, my love?

When the crowd settled down, everyone’s eyes were upon Jesus. Jesse and I were awe-struck as well. This was no ordinary man. He even had little Simon’s total attention. As He spoke, many were convinced that they wanted to hear more and they pled with Him to stay and teach in our synagogue. My heart warmed, when He agreed to stay a while. Jesse squeezed my hand.

Early the next morning, dozens of townsfolk were waiting on the portico when Jesus and His disciples arrived. Jesse, Simon and I were among the crowd. We heard that some men had camped out overnight. It was too cold for us to do that. However, we did bring enough food to meet our needs throughout the day.

As soon as he saw Jesus approaching, our little Simon slipped between Jesse and me and ran right to Him. Stunned, I called out, “Simon, come back here!” He giggled and threw his little arms out to Jesus – arms that once only reached out to me. Immediately he was safely in the arms of the Lord. Jesus’ tender smile and heartfelt words said it all. “A simple childlike faith is all I ask from each of you... nothing more. Will you trust Me as this little one does?”

I couldn’t hold back my tears. ‘A little child shall lead them.’ What a lesson... and He has just arrived. When Jesus brought Simon back to us, He placed His hand on Jesse’s shoulder and said, “You have a fine young son here, train him well.”

Jesse beamed and said, “Yes. LORD, I will. We both will.” My cheeks flushed. I sensed that everyone was staring at us, but it all seemed to be fine with Jesus. Simon probably will not remember this experience when he is older. I can tell him, I thought, and I did...

At about noon, the crowd overflowed the building. People were sitting on the portico and leaning in windows. I decided it was time to take Simon home for a nap. He’d missed the previous day’s nap because of all the excitement. Jesse stayed and listened for both of us. He came home late and hungry, but eagerly shared the amazing lessons Jesus had taught. Then he said, “Tomorrow, we are meeting in the marketplace. The synagogue can’t hold the huge crowd.”

The second day we were able to leave Simon with my mother. She treasured every opportunity to spend time with him – especially since she

was unable to have her own baby boy. Simon loved both of his grandmas and the constant attention they gave him, but sometimes he could be a challenge when he came back home.

Jesse seemed somewhat distracted in the marketplace that morning. He asked me several times, "Have you seen David here today?" Although I knew it would be a disappointment, I replied, "No, not today or yesterday. I've seen the rest of his family... but not him."

After two days of intensive teaching, Jesus left Sychar and was on His way to Galilee with His disciples. His words made a profound impact on the people of our little town - especially Zadok, our priest.

Sadly, David never went to any of the meetings and never met Jesus. Of all the people in town, he needed to hear Jesus most.

Jesse and I had prayed so fervently for him... but nothing. I'm sure Jesse was having the same thoughts I was. He needs you LORD. You know it and we know it. When will he know it? How can we get through to his hard heart?

David was not the only one in Sychar who needed to hear from Jesus. Although many trusted Jesus as their Savior, others did not. They didn't even go to hear Him.

The town gossips were spreading some rumors that men who spent time with that adulterous woman were planning to harm her. They were whispering, "These wayward creatures fear she will expose their sins as she confesses her own." I chose to avoid their malicious talk.

The town council had offered to provide shelter and protection for her since she was the one who told them about Jesus. Jesse was quite confident that none of its members had anything to hide... this time.

Jesse told many exciting stories about changed lives in Sychar. I'm retelling a few of my favorites, not naming names, so that the people involved can speak out when they feel so led. Some were already sharing their good news.

The Village Thief

One young fellow thought he was getting away with stealing until he came to faith in Christ. When he confessed his misdeeds to his victims, he discovered they were wise to his thievery and were overlooking it because he was trying to provide for his sickly mother. He now has a job cleaning in the marketplace and is able to meet her needs honestly. I can only imagine his surprise when he learned the merchants would have given him anything he needed if he had simply asked.

The Dishonest Merchant

A crafty old shopkeeper thought he needed to sell defective goods and use a

dishonest scale to make his desired profits. When he repented of his evil ways, villagers flocked to his store and bought more merchandise than ever before. His profits soared from his increased business so he was able to offer better values to his customers and make amends for past crooked dealings.

The Wayward Husband

One town drunk was a slacker who lingered long in the wrong parts of town pursuing evil pleasures. His escapades were known by many ... including his longsuffering wife. He had come home many nights bruised and bloodied from fights at the local inns. Now, thanks to Jesus, he was clean, sober and enjoying the true love of his own precious wife.

The Wealthy Tyrant

Riches were his only god. His sole security was in his ill-gotten wealth. No one trusted him and he had no friends. He was a miserly wretch who had oppressed the poor and betrayed his last partner. But his stately hillside mansion and worldly treasures had failed to satisfy his hungry soul.

When a compassionate person ventured up to invite him to hear Jesus, a half-starved servant greeted him at the door.

We were all surprised to see him come near the synagogue, clutching his fine robe. As he listened intently, he nodded and seemed to be absorbing every word from the lips of Jesus. Right there he trusted Jesus. He stood and left for home, giving coins to poor beggars along the way. Town folk noticed he even walked with a new bounce.

Little by little, he opened his heart to others. He also opened his home to the needy, where his now well-fed servants, now enjoy hearty meals and share them with frequent guests. Many folk wonder what happened.

Zadok

Our kindly priest changed too. He was neither a thief nor even an evil man ... merely a stuffy old man who had become complacent in his religion and judgmental of others. When he met Jesus, everything changed. Now, he radiates a new joy in his ministry.

Jesse and Me


We had thought of ourselves as God's children much like the other people in Sychar, but learned from Jesus that we were wrong. He repeated what He had told that woman at the well. "You worship what you do not know. Salvation is of the Jews." Then, He declared Himself to be the Messiah... the 'I Am' and salvation came only through faith in Him. Overjoyed, we gladly trusted in Him and found His peace.



SPRING POEMS

By Donna L. Ferguson Dudley


The Rainy Day




*She's stomping through the puddles; how she loves to make them splash!
She loves the Spring rains very well, but not the lightning flash!
So, only during gentle rains, she takes her promenades.
Her best friend lives just down the street; she's going there to play!
She's got her red galoshes on, her slicker, and rain hat,
and overhead her umbrella; not much rain gets through that!
But how she loves to smell the scent that showers always bring,
while on the picket fence, a Robin Red-breast starts to sing!
He's happy for the rains to come and loosen up the ground.
He knows that that is when the earthworms are most easily found!
She has her doll and bear, well-dressed, in special rain-gear too!
She's planning out her afternoon, and all there is to do
with her best friend, to play with, while they listen to the rain,
and watch the world get sparkling clean beyond the window pane!*



Heralds of Spring



*Snowdrops, in the midst of snow, their strength and great endurance show.
As one of first heralds of Spring, they flaunt beauty and promise bring,
that other flowers will appear, as season turns in bright new year.
A strange truth: Snowdrops melt the snow around them,
as they, fighting, go upward to drink in rays of sun.
Oh, yes, they are the clever ones!
A red fox saunters through the snow, as on his rounds he blithely, goes.
And squirrel is witness to it all as 'round them flakes, again, do fall.
The trees, through Winter stark and bare, push forth vert leaves,
to promise share, of fecund Nature fertile, e'er God's miracle beyond compare.
A wren sends chatters, scolds, and churrs at passing fox, but undeterred,
fox breathes in chill without a care, while Snowdrops bob in windy air!*



OF STONE, ANTLER, AND BONE: TRADITIONAL BRYTHONIC SHAMANISM AND THE DEER MOTHER.

By Beth Amos



Even amongst members of other earth-based belief systems, it is amazing how often I get the raised eyebrow when I mention that I am walking not only the Druid path but also the Shamanic Way.

“Shamanic? Don’t you think that is disrespectful? How can you call messengers from the Otherworld ‘Spirit guides’? That’s cultural appropriation right there!”

Judgement and misunderstandings are always just a step away.

The simple truth to this is that using such terms and concepts as a native Brit isn’t cultural appropriation at all. Aside from the fact that other Shamanic cultures in the world certainly didn’t use the English language to define their beliefs back in the day, Britain (and Europe too) have their very own Shamanic history left over from the time when arboreal forest covered much of the land. A history which is just as vivid and real as that found in places like Tibet and the US.

So, why don’t we have our own term for it? Well, actually, we do. The archaic term *Awenydd* (along with several other archaic terms) more than adequately express the essence of traditional Brythonic Shamanism, and *ysbryd cyfarwydd* – meaning familiar spirit – has all of the old connotations for a spirit messenger from the other side of the veil. Why don’t we use those terms in a more mainstream fashion then? To put it simply, the majority of people wouldn’t have any clue how to pronounce these terms, let alone an inkling as to what we were talking about. Shamanism and Spirit Guides are well-known terms in modern society, and most people have, at the very least, a fundamental idea of what they mean. As much as I wish the old languages would come back into common use, it simply isn’t realistic to expect that they would – especially as, if the news is anything to go by, a fair number of native Brits today don’t even seem to have a proper grasp on the Queen’s English. Long and short, in general conversation, we make do with the most comprehensible and expedient option that is available to us in modern times.

So, what is Traditional Brythonic Shamanism?

I, and many others, entertain the belief that most, if not all, Shamanic cultures in the world – from the Indigenous American Nations to the people of Tibet etc. are all descended from the same people. What backs up this belief is the significant commonality which all of these cultures share, in terms of beliefs, practices, etc.

On Christmas eve the following year she taught me something vital in a way that, to date, nothing else had been able to express – at least not in terms that I could truly understand. She taught me what death truly is. Late that evening, I came downstairs crying my eyes out because the unthinkable had happened. Mother Deer was dead. She had been killed by a large black bull who had come to threaten the forest and its inhabitants, and her two fawns were now motherless and alone in the world (Yes, I know this is sounding rather like the plot line from *The Last Unicorn*, isn't it? But it would be near on a decade later, several years after the birth of my younger brother, before I would experience this film for the first time, tucked up warm in piles of duvets on the lounge sofa, so this experience was definitely not influenced in that way).

With tear-filled eyes, I painfully recounted the entire incident to my parents, who told me many years later that at the time they were so concerned by my emotional state and the vivid nightmares which I had begun to experience, that they had considered taking me to see a child psychologist to help me process the terrible losses which I had suffered).



As an interesting aside, a few years ago, I decided to look into the meaning of Bull and from what I gather Bull was considered by the Celts to bring fertility to the land. Yet again we find that ancient pairing of Deer Mother (Feminine aspect – Sovereign Goddess and embodiment of the land) with the Black Bull (darker masculine aspect of fertility – a dream representation of her consort bringing new life to the land). Elen is often paired with the Horned God – Sovereign Goddess to Fertile Consort. The Horned God, however, has two sides – light vs dark – life vs death – Oak King vs Holly King.



Needless to say, I was bereft at the loss of my friend and guide. Whenever I recount this experience, I can see the horrified look on peoples faces. Why on earth would I feel a lifelong connection to a deity who acted in such a cruel way at such a dark and vulnerable time in my young life? The answer is simple – our connection didn't end there.

For several months I didn't dream of Mother Deer at all. I would still return to the wild wood sometimes in my dreams, but it was a dark and empty place now. It was always late autumn or winter, and everything was dead and decaying. The fawns were still there – I could feel their presence and sometimes catch glimpses of them in the distance – but they were hiding. The Bull still reigned over the forest, and without Mother Deer, I could see no way that his darkness would ever come to an end. I was wrong.

It wasn't long after the birth of my younger brother that Mother Deer re-entered my life. More change had arrived in the form of a new baby, and although I didn't have my grandmothers anymore (who had been my best friends for the whole of my childhood to date – there were very few children where I lived at the time), I had a new ally in the form of my new brother.

One night my dreaming mind returned to the wild wood, but I was surprised to see that things had started to change. The snow had receded, and there were buds on the trees and a scattering of crocuses and the like in amongst the dead grass. For a moment I thought that maybe the Bull had gone and I took a few steps forward. It was then that I realised that I could see my brother's pushchair in the distance across a large glade near the far treeline. I ran across to him, wondering how he had managed to find my special place, and it was only as I reached out for the handle of the pushchair that I realised we weren't alone.

From out of the trees came the giant black bull. My brother began to cry, and I took hold of the handle and slowly began to back away from the bull. Seeing the movement, he began to charge, and I broke into a run, desperately trying to get away and to pull my brother to safety. I couldn't let anything happen to him. The bull was gaining on us fast, and he bit at my brother's stocking feet. My brother cried louder, and I was sure that the bull had hurt him. Any moment though it wouldn't matter any more as we were nearing the far treeline and there was nowhere else that I could run – not while pulling the pushchair behind me.

I was so afraid, in fact, that it jarred me back awake again and I found fresh tears running down my face. A day or two later, despite dreading it every time I closed my eyes, I returned to the wild wood. I was still in the same position as where I had been when I woke myself up, but instead of the thundering of hooves on hard earth, I was met with stillness and quiet. Looking ahead, I realised that the trees in front of me were all decked in their greenery again, as they had been before the bull drove all of the life out of them. For a moment, I couldn't work out what had happened, but then a familiar form stepped from the trees. Mother Deer. She looked wonderful – not a single mark or scar to show that anything bad had happened to her. I ran towards her and threw my arms around her neck. I couldn't believe that my friend was back. It was nothing short of magical, and I knew in my heart that everything would be alright now; that I was finally safe again. My brother, who had been silent until then, started giggling and cooing – as babies tend to do – and I turned, half expecting to see that the black bull had gone; somehow destroyed by Mother Deer's renewed presence in the forest. But he wasn't gone, merely transformed. Where before he had been huge, fearsome and terrifying, he was now handsome and strong – death dealer turned protector. I felt no fear at seeing him walking sedately across the meadow towards us.

Mother Deer patiently explained that it had been her time to die and go away for a time, but that no separation is permanent, and even when we are apart, we are still connected. Her fawns came from the trees behind her, but they were now fully grown and looked almost identical to their mother. Years later I would finally recognise the cyclical nature of our meeting – life and death marching with the pace of the passing seasons, the bull's role as both life bringer and life taker – consort and guardian of the Mother of Creation and warden of the winter months when his lady and the wild wood retreated to slumber deep within the rich dark earth. At the time, though, I was just happy to have my friend back.

There is a concept within traditional Brythonic spirituality called 'Kenning' (also the route of 'Cunning' which is another term for the followers of Brythonic earth spirituality, once commonly known as the Cunning Folk) which means 'to know something without a shadow of a doubt and without needing any kind of proof' basically you just ken/know. From that moment on, I knew that I would see my grandmothers again. I knew that my soul had lived many lives before this one and that it would doubtless live many more yet to come. I knew that all of existence was intrinsically linked, that we all come from and return to the same universal life force or world soul, and I knew that souls travel together and that everyone who I meet in this life, I will be meeting again in some form or other in the next.

Until this point, death had seemed so impenetrable and immovable; something that stole the ones you loved from you and swallowed them up taking them away to a place where you could neither see them or feel the warmth of their souls for the rest of your earthly life – and even then there was a chance that you would be parted from them in the afterlife. Mother Deer (or the Deer Mother as I now know her to be) shone a light of true understanding into that darkness that finally allowed my heart to begin healing.

I consider my meeting with Mother Deer to be the first step that I took on my journey through Brythonic Shamanism and the first ray of light illuminating Elen's ways to my sight.



THE DANDELION'S LAMENT

BY CAITEY GEHAN

*A dandelion felt sad
as she watched the other flowers grow.
They grew tall in shrines of dirt
the people made long ago.
Admired for their beauty
while the dandy was just a weed!
The flowers seemed superior;
they seemed superior indeed!
"Who could ever love me?"
the poor dandelion cried.
The dandelion had given up on life
until a rose replied.
"It's true we have a garden,"
the beautiful rose said,
"but you bring joy to children
with wishes in their heads.
They come up to you and pick you up.
then they close their little eyes.
They release their wishes into the air
hoping to gain their surprise."
The dandelion listened to the rose
and realized the words were wise.
for even if others seem more special,
we are special in someone's eyes.*

THE CARPENTER'S FRIEND

BY RAY E. LIPINSKI



I am a beast of burden
not knowing what path to take,
until one day an angel came,
telling me a difference I would make.
Then shortly, there came a virgin.
Her face was humble and faire.
She looked at me with kindness,
in her shadow was Heaven's glare.
I carried her as she carried Him,
The One who would save us all,
through dusty roads and crowded inns,
on a path to a manger's stall.
I sat in silence with head bowed low
as angels wept and prayed.
The promised King of Kings was here,
whose love burned bright as day.
I saw Him again on a shining day,
outside Jerusalem's gates.
A teacher now with followers,
His wisdom to change the worlds fate.
He sat upon my shoulders
as I carried Him so proud,
with crowds laying down their palms,
shouts of joy like a trumpet, loud.
They called Him Master, Counsellor, Friend;
His teachings would change their lives,
but soon that would not matter,
for their palms would turn to scythes.
My joy and pride turned to terror;
no longer hearing my Master's call.
Betrayal and evil took Him,
mankind now bent to see Him fall.
His message of love not wanted,
instead given a cross to bear.
With blood, thorns and rejection,
forced to look at death's grim stare.
The world became dark and empty
as our Savior's life was bled,
taking the weight of all our sins.
The worlds innocence forever shed.
The third day began with promise
as I touched my Master's hand.
Gleaming in robes of white and gold,
under His feet destroyed death's stand.
I saw His greatness one last time,
on the road to Emmaus He drew,
with the company of two strangers.
He smiled at me with eyes so true.
He said Glory! Hallelujah!
I love you, my faithful friend.
I knelt beside His Majesty
and cried "Hosanna!" without end
I am a beast of burden.
I walk freely through this earth,
clinging to His commandments.
My life renewed with His rebirth

STONE WALLS

By Alyssa Roat

There are giant stone walls that separate us.

They're six feet thick and six feet high.
They form a box and close you in,
on top and bottom and every side.

I'm not the one who built these walls.
They were built by no other hand
than yours; you are responsible
for this scar upon the land.

You built these walls up brick by brick,
painfully, hour by hour.
You built them to hide from the light of day
and from the Sun's revealing power.

You sit there lonely, in the dark.
You try to control your world,
but a world that fits inside a box
is dark, and cruel, and cold.

I knock upon the bricks sometimes,
to see if you're still alive,
but you take offense and yell at me;
at least I know you're inside.

I talk to the false front you've put up;
we're what you'd call good friends,
but I see right through your puppet's guise;
I see you deep down in.

Once, I tried to dig under the wall.
Turns out, you were prepared.
The bricks that you have carefully placed,
are thick even deep down there.

I try to chip at the hard, stone walls,
but your puppet gets in the way.
It laughs, and calls, and tries to distract me
from showing you the light of day.

You mock the light from inside your cell.
"I haven't seen it, so it's not there!"
Of course you haven't; you're in a box,
it's always dark in there.

I wish I could just show you light.
It gives us joy and life.

But you stubbornly stay inside your box;
your prison of pain and strife.

When I tell you of light, you mock me.
"That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard!"
Well, it seems to me that burying yourself alive,
is even more absurd.

The Sun loves you, child of darkness.
Come out into the light.
He asks you to take down your walls.
Emerge from endless night!

For light is what gives us life;
you're wasting away in that abyss.
Light shows us how things are,
showing the truth of all that is.

It is only in light that we can see.
In darkness, all is wrong.
Listen, He's calling for you!
But through your walls, you can't hear His
song.

I once lived in darkness as you,
but now I live in the Sun.
He gives me abundant joy and life.
Won't you come unto the One?

For once, I was deaf as you were.
Once, I was blind as could be.
But He knocked down my feeble construction
and in His presence, I could hear and see!

Tonight, I'll knock upon your wall;
Know that He'll be knocking, too.
Listen to Him as I call.
I will not give up on you.

STARLING

By Alyssa Roat

The moonlight glistens off beating wings,
wings of iridescent hue.

Stars reflected in the purple streaks
and the full moon in the blue.

She flies high above the shadowed world,
nearer the heavens than earth.

Flying, always, in the moonlit night,
a lone, unusual bird.

She wings her way close to the heavens,
to hear the music of stars.

To earth she dips with songs on her beak,
melodies to lift the dark.

Companion of stars, and of the earth,
loving light, but knowing dark.

No place, no being can define her,
with her soul filled with the stars.

Perhaps no one ever told her that
all starlings fly in a crowd.
Perhaps no one bothered to tell her
starlings are dirty and loud.

Perhaps she was never informed that
starlings are a common bird,
or perhaps no one explained to her
that starlings are of no worth.

She must not have even been told that
starlings do not fly at night.

Why was she never enlightened that
starlings do not love, they fight?

Perhaps she was not aware that she
was powerless to fight the dark.
Perhaps no one ever told her that
starlings don't fly among stars.

Her habits beyond understanding,
the dark world, in awe, must stand.
Somehow, she knew the stars could be
reached,

or... the stars reached out their hand.



DJERAN EASTER

By Ananda Barton

In Australia

Easter is at the wrong time of the year.

**A festival of rebirth in Autumn,
celebrating an empty tomb with chocolate
eggs,
as the world slides into winter.**

But then,

in Australia,

**Summer is the season of ghosts,
when life retreats,
into burrows and tubers,
hides under rocks to escape
heat and fire.**

**When rivers run dry
and grass shrivels,
like the hair of an old woman.**

In Australia,

**Autumn is the time of resurrection,
grass sprouting,
and creeks coming back to life.**

**When schoolgirls walk in misty rain,
farmers feel hope revive,
and commuters start to carry umbrellas.**

So,

in Australia,

**Easter comes at the right time,
after all.**

Djeran- the 'Season of Adulthood' and the third of the six seasons into which the Noongar, the Indigenous people of South-West Western Australia, divide the year, corresponds to the Northern Hemisphere Autumn / Fall

Nature Finds a Way

By *Beth Amos*

This morning I shared my shower with a small white spider. For many people, this would be a cause for considerable panic, for many more an inconvenience which needs to be removed – an extra job. For me, though, it's a gift.

Since the advent of farming – taking us away from our hunter-gatherer roots – humans have been systematically trying to distance themselves from nature. We build houses and create machines to transport us. We rely on man-made medicines to replace those which nature has provided. We light up the night with garish electric lighting and wear layers of clothing and shoes, all in an effort to keep nature at bay.

Quite why our ancestors decided to travel so far from our intended place in this world remains a mystery to me. As a druid and lifelong naturalist, one thing that comforts me, though, is that while in many ways we have turned our backs and given up on mother nature, she still refuses to give up on us. This little spider, with its determined presence in my shower, is just one of many ways in which I am reminded that nature is still trying to draw us back to where we belong. He found his way past all of the barriers that we humans have thrown up between us and the wild in order to share a very simple, but ultimately primal experience.


At first, he was hesitant, no doubt wondering if I was a threat to him and pondering why I prefer my water



warm rather than cool, refreshing and straight from its source. I was hesitant too, worried that he might slip and fall to his death in the hot, soapy water below. As I watched, though, he began to secure himself to the rough wall with a small safety net of silk, keeping his eyes on me the entire time to make sure that I wasn't going to hurt him.

A couple of minutes passed in that way while we each acclimated to the other's presence – something which our hunter-gatherer ancestors would have simply seen as expected, made awkward in these modern times because we have put aside or forgotten much of their experience and wisdom.

At last, his wariness of me receded, and my concern over his safety was replaced, instead, with admiration and a clear realisation that – like me – he was perfectly adept within his own environment. He didn't need any assistance in such a simple task.



As I soaped up my hair, I watched him gather the tiny droplets of the warm steam on his front legs and begin to drink. We had formed a connection – my love of hot showers had provided him with a new means for sustaining his life; nature had found a way. After drinking his fill, he too began to have a wash. Both of us enjoying, in companionable silence, the delicately berry-scented water on our skin. Two souls sharing a single primal experience.

Many people look at spiders with fear, or at the very least a mild disgust. I think that one of the main reasons for this negative feeling is a simple lack of understanding. In modern times, the lifeforms that we share this world with, especially its more alien-looking members, by and large, aren't seen as sentient creatures – as living beings with all of the same needs that we humans possess. But all creatures share our primal need for safety, shelter, and sustenance. In fact, all living things share far more in the way of commonality than we do disparity – the evidence is right there before us if we just invest the time and interest to observe it.

Nature finds a way. She recognises that we are one and the same, all part of the same universal web of existence. She hasn't turned her back on us, and we are going against our core, primal nature when we turn our back on her.

Spring of the Fairy Dragons



By Mike Flynn

The moment had finally arrived, and every fairy was busy tending to the chosen flowers in the meadow. This long-awaited time only occurred once every 500 years, and its importance to the world was beyond measure. For you see, this was the year of the birth of the fairy dragons.

Every 500 years, the first flowers of spring were chosen and nurtured by the fairies, as when they bloomed, they would also birth a new baby fairy dragon. Fairy dragons were crucial to the survival of the planet, as each new generation renewed the magic of the world, whose delicate balance relied upon this magic to sustain all life within her. Silf was so excited, as this year she had been tasked with the sole care of her own spring dragon flower. She got up each day at the crack of dawn to go and water the steadily growing plant, watching as it grew taller and taller, and tending to it throughout the day; removing leaves, clearing the encroaching growth of plants, polishing its leaves, and so on. "Hey, Odessa," Silf called, as she flew towards her charge, struggling to carry her two buckets of water and then landing to catch her breath and give her arms a break.

"Hey, Silf, off to water your chosen again?" Odessa replied, flying over to stand with Silf. "Yeh, it's been really sunny today, and she's starting to look a little wilted."

"Let me come with you, I've finished my chores for the day, so I can give you a hand carrying if you like?"

"Oh, that would be great, thank you so much. My arms are killing me."

"It's no problem at all, what are best friends for?"

Collecting the buckets up, Silf and Odessa made their way towards the dragon flower. It was a fairly small plant, and not nearly as grown as some of the other chosen flowers, but Silf was responsible for its progress, and so was determined to help it develop, no matter how much work it took.

Gently pouring the buckets of water around its base, Silf cleared away a few stray leaves that had blown against it.

Wow, it's looking good, I think it's grown a bit more since last time I saw it," Odessa said timidly, trying to be supportive of her friend's progress, even though her charge

was far less developed than all of the other dragon flowers she had seen.

“She! It is totally a she. And yeah, she’s coming along nicely.”

“Is there anything else I can do to help; I could go and gather some more crystal dust for you if you want?”

Crystal dust was a substance found in the caves to the west of Swallows Nook, the home of the fairies. It was used to help nourish the chosen dragon flowers as they developed, as the substance was innately magical. It was hard to gather, as it only formed at the base of certain crystals throughout the cave, and especially at this time, as the stocks gathered throughout the years had already been allocated to each fairy who’d been charged with raising their own dragon flower. But Odessa could see that her friend could use all the extra help she could get, even if it meant spending hours searching for dust.

“That’s a great idea! I’ll come with you, as two sets of eyes are better than one,” Silf said excitedly.

They both flew off towards the cave, chatting about the exciting times yet to come when the flowers bloomed.

It had been three weeks, and Silf had been working hard to help her flower grow. Odessa had been really helpful, and they had searched the caves a few times to find some extra crystal dust, but had barely found a grain.

All of the other dragon flowers had bloomed, except for hers. There were an array of brightly coloured fairy dragons all around the meadow and Swallows Nook. Whites, oranges, greens, yellows, blues, even a few crimsons. Everyone was so excited and happy at the abundance of blooms this year, and at how quickly Spring had sprung. So why wouldn’t her flower bloom?

Silf had done everything she could; no one could have loved and cared for her flower as much as she had. She’d even spent a few nights outside with it, reading it stories, and covering it with blankets of moss to help keep it warm against the night time chills. She felt like a failure. What if it never bloomed at all? It happened occasionally – it was rare, but it did happen. What if her first charge never bloomed? The elders would never trust her with such an important task again. Silf’s heart sank, and she felt like crying with both frustration and sadness.

“What’s wrong, my child,” came a deep, gravelly voice from behind her.

Turning around, Silf saw elder Tarrow hovering behind her. Coming to land next to her on the branch that she was sitting on, she turned to face him.

“Oh, it’s nothing, I’m fine.”

“You can’t fool me young one. When you’ve been around as long as I have, you can see when someone is not themselves.”

Silf sighed, “you’re right. I am just worried about my charge. All of the other dragon flowers have hatched, and yet mine doesn’t even seem ready to bloom. What if it never does? I feel like I’ve failed everyone.”

“Child, you worry too much. Flowers bloom in their own time, and some are late to flower. No amount of work or worry can change that.”

“But, if it doesn’t flower before the end of the festival in three days’ time, then it will be lost. What can I do? I have tried everything. If it doesn’t flower, then I’ll be the only

person who has failed. How could you ever trust me again with such an important task?" Silf rambled, tears welling in her eyes.

"Hush child," he said, wrapping her in his arms, "you haven't failed us. I've seen the work that you have done caring for your charge. If it's not meant to be, then it's not meant to be, you must not blame yourself."

They sat in silence for a moment, a few stray tears tracking down Silf's cheeks, before she regathered herself. Tarrow released her and looked her in the eyes.

"My girl, you need not take such a burden upon yourself. You are strong and determined; this is why we chose you for this task. You must not let yourself give in to such doubts and fears. The universe is full of magic and mystery, and hope can flower even in the darkest of places."

With that said, and a last hug goodbye, Tarrow flew off to go and help prepare for the coming festival.

Strengthening her resolve, Silf flew off to find Odessa. Maybe if she could just find some extra crystal dust, then she could help her charge to bloom.

Entering the cave for the second day in a row, the two fairies carried with them a glow orb each. Imbued with magic that sustained the phosphorescent moss within them, they gave off enough light to illuminate the cave around them. The light flowing from their orbs struck the surrounding crystals in the cave and bounced off them in a kaleidoscope of beams and colours, glistening and sparkling like a million fireflies. Silf was always awestruck when in the caves. Every inch of them, from floor to ceiling, was littered with a multitude of crystals of all shapes and colours. Large, purple amethysts, citrines, and quartz points thrust out from the cave walls at all angles. The surrounding energy from the crystals seemed to hum with the magics they held.

Venturing deeper into the extensive cavern, they both searched the walls, floors, and ceiling, checking around each crystal to see if there was any dust to be found.

Hours later, just as Silf was about to call it a day and go to finish her chores, she heard Odessa let out a shriek.

"SILF, QUICK, COME HERE!" Odessa yelled, excitement lacing her voice.

Rushing to where her friend's voice was coming from, she turned the corner to find nothing.

"Odessa, where are you?" Silf called out.

"I'm over here," Odessa called, sounding much louder than she should considering she was nowhere to be seen.

"Where? I can't see you?"

Suddenly, a hand appeared from the middle of a wall of crystal.

Silf jumped back in surprise, only to see Odessa emerge from the crystal wall.

"How did you do that?" Silf exclaimed in amazement.

"It's an illusion. There's actually a gap between the crystals, but you can only see it when you walk through it. Isn't it amazing!? I found it when I leant against the wall to get a stone out of my shoe. And, you're never gonna believe what's behind it."

"What?"

"Come on; I'll show you," Odessa said excitedly, grabbing hold of Silf's arm and pulling

her through the gap in the wall.

Silf's mouth dropped open in amazement. Before her stood a large, hexagonal, blue crystal, with six smooth sides. Best of all, at the base of this amazing crystal, which looked just like frozen water, lay heaps of crystal dust.

Letting out an excited squeal, she grabbed Odessa up in a big hug. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she exclaimed.

"This should be perfect for your flower," Odessa said excitedly, happiness for her friend lifting her spirits also.

Gathering up all of the dust they could carry, they flew back to Silf's charge to infuse the soil surrounding the flower with the dust. Standing back to admire their work, they both watched as the dust sank into the ground, and a glowing light spread up the budding flower to infuse every part of it.

"Maybe there was still hope," Silf thought.

Waking up the next morning brought both excitement and dread. Silf was excited to see how the crystal dust had helped her charge, but at the same time, she was terribly nervous in case it hadn't worked. Today was the day of the festival, and if it didn't bloom today, then all of her hard work would be for nothing.

Getting dressed, she gathered up a bucket of water to take with her, there was no sense in wasting a trip. She made her way to the meadow, anticipation speeding her flight, even with the bucket of water weighing her down.

When she arrived, her heart sank. Her charge had grown substantially, but it had still not bloomed. She had failed. She sank to her knees in the clearing before the flower, tears welling in her eyes once more. She had gotten her hopes up. She had truly thought that their find yesterday would help and that she had not failed her charge after all.

Odessa found her sometime later, still sitting before her dragon flower, her tears long since dried up.

"Oh, sweetie," Odessa said, swiftly gathering her friend up in a comforting hug.

"I failed, Odessa."

"Oh, no! It's not your fault at all! You did everything you could. These things just happen."

"But it was my responsibility. I was meant to help it bloom. I should have done something else."

"There was nothing else for you to do."

"But..."

"But nothing. You worked so hard; you couldn't have done more than you did. Now get yourself up, brush yourself off, and stop blaming yourself. Let's go to the festival, maybe some of Bramble's nectar will help cheer you up."

"I'd rather stay here, Odessa; I don't really feel like being around people at the moment."

"But Silf, you can't just sit here feeling glum, you need to shake yourself off and let everyone help you feel better."

"Thanks, Dess, but I really just want to be alone right now. You go and have fun. I may come and join you later."

"Ok, but if you are not there by the time they start the mulberry dance, I'm coming back for you."

Looking back one last time, hesitant to leave her friend, Odessa flew off towards the festival. Alone and feeling depressed, Silf moved closer to her charge, running her hand down one of the leaves that dangled to the side of the stem.

“Well, I tried little one,” she whispered to the flower. “I wish there was something more I could have done.”

Hugging the stem of the flower in a gesture of goodbye, she leant her head against it, tears once again forming.

“I’m so sorry,” she choked out, her voice raw with emotion.

The tears ran down her face and dropped onto the stem of the flower, dripping down to pool on the ground at its base.

Suddenly, the ground around her charge began to glow. Silf jumped back in surprise, not knowing what was happening. The glow grew and grew, spreading up the stem of the flower. What was happening? As the glow reached the bud of the flower, it began to coalesce, growing in intensity until it hurt Silf’s eyes to look at it. Then, in a blinding flash of light, she heard a popping noise. Blinking back the blindness, she looked towards her charge, only to find that the flower had bloomed into the most brilliant purple crocus blossom; a fine, purple dust settling to the ground all around it.

She had ventured over to the magnificent bloom to get a better look, when she saw, nestled within the stunning purple petals, a perfectly formed baby purple fairy dragon, stretching itself out and unfurling its wings.

Her heart swelled with joy as she stared at the magnificent creature. It looked up at her with big, soulful eyes, innocence and wonder in its expression. She gently approached, not wanting to scare it, when suddenly it launched itself at her and showered her with licking kisses.

Giggling and gathering the baby dragon up in her arms to take a better look at it, she got a sudden flash of image and thought in her mind. The dragon was thanking her for taking such good care of her and helping to give her the strength to emerge into this world. She also introduced herself, saying that her name was Starfire. Silf welcomed her new friend and told

After they had chatted for some time, Silf made her way to the festivities, Starfire perched on her shoulders, with her tail encircling her neck. As a new-born, her wings were not quite ready to work yet, but within a day she would be flying about with the rest of the fairies and fairy dragons.

Arriving at the festival, everyone’s mouths dropped open in amazement at Silf’s new friend. Purple fairy dragons were amazingly rare, and no one had seen one for centuries. Everyone congratulated Silf on her success and they were soon buzzing about Starfire in sheer awe. Odessa squealed with delight when she caught sight of them both, over the moon that everything had worked out okay.

Finally, once everything had settled down again, Tarrow came over to where Silf and Starfire were sitting. Silf was enjoying some well-deserved nectar, and Starfire was enthusiastically wolfing down some of the delicious acorn bread and cloudberry pie that was traditional fare at the Spring festival.

“So, I see that all of your worry was for nothing, little one.”

“You were right as ever Tarrow; I didn’t give up just like you said not to.”

“And to help bring a purple dragon into the world too – that is indeed a special honour. You must have truly loved your charge, as that is no easy feat.”

“What do you mean?” Silf asked, confused by Tarrow’s cryptic words

“The reason that purple dragons are so rare is because they bloom so late. Most are not successful, as they bloom after the festival, and so do not bear dragons. Only true love for one’s charge can help to bring forth such dragons.”

“But I thought every fairy loved their charges?”

“Oh, they do. It’s a great honour to be chosen to care for a dragon flower. But therein lies the confusion between duty and true love. Yes, others care for and look after their charges, but it’s a truly special person whose love goes beyond mere duty or honour.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Because, young one, that wouldn’t have helped. Knowing that you need to love something doesn’t mean that you unconditionally love it, it’s just another task to complete. Selfless love comes from the heart, not the mind, and so you had to discover this for yourself. But I will tell you a little secret,” he paused for dramatic effect.

“What is it?” Silf asked, anticipation spurring on her words.

“The love that births a rare purple dragon forges a bond between you both – bond that cannot be broken. You have a friend for life in Starfire now, and where all the other dragons may move on around the world, Starfire will always be close.”

“Really?!”

“Yes, she is bound to you, as you are bound to her. You will be able to communicate mind to mind, no matter the distance, and you will be able to feel each other’s emotions.”

“Did you hear that Starfire?”

Starfire glanced up from her feast, her face full of cloudberry pie. Her voice whispered in Silf’s mind followed by a wave of emotions, “I will stay with you always.”

Joy bloomed within Silf, before another message crossed into her mind.

“I like pie!”

Silf looked at Starfire and burst into laughter – she was sure that this would be the beginning of many an adventure with her new dragon friend; how grateful she was that Starfire was ok.





THE WAY OF THE CROSS

By *Luis Gutierrez*

All of earth is in conflict,
dualistic from the positive and negative
energies
of subatomic particles on through to its
magnetic poles.

All of life made of earth is in conflict,
dualistic from life to death
and all of the fears and desires throughout it.

Man, made of earth, is plagued
by this duality that purveys all of his reality
from emotions to thoughts
and in all his action and reflection alike.
Nothing on earth or in life can free him
from such duality, division and decay
and all of his history is a failed attempt
to go down to the binary ones and zeros
of his aim towards artificial intelligence and an
immortal,
united and collective awareness to free himself
of it.

Heaven is absent of duality.

Only G-D in Heaven can save Man.

G-D becomes Man and enters duality.

He reveals Himself as the way to, the life of, and
the truth of Heaven.

The Cross is made of earth.

It is the tree of duality.

It is the tree of life.

Each beam is one thing opposing another.
It's center where all opposites meet and cross.

G-D as Man foretells what he foretold as G-D.

G-D as Man is crucified upon the Cross.

G-D as Man endures the Cross and is freed of it.

G-D as Man returns to Heaven.

G-D as Man remains the Spirit.

The Cross stretches and tears apart.

It divides, and it destroys.

The Cross unites and makes whole.

It reconciles and transforms.

The Cross resurrects the life within us.

It empties, raises and overflows.

Heaven always awaits.

Duality is almost there.

What endures overcomes.

What remains is reborn.

What is, returns.

Learning to Love Spring

By *Hayden Wand*

It took me twenty years to love Spring.

For many, Spring is a symbolic time of beauty, regrowth, and new beginnings. For me, it was only a reminder that my beloved colder months were ending, ushering in another humid, all-too-hot southern Summer. Spring brought new flowers, sure – but also loads of bright yellow pollen drenching everything in sight and swarms – and I mean swarms – of love bugs.

Needless to say, Spring and I were never on the best of terms.

The thing is, I was never happy that I disliked Spring; I enjoy enjoying things. But Spring (and Summer) always tended to amount to nothing more than disappointment – and runny noses.

That changed a couple of years ago. Or rather – I decided to change it. Perhaps, I thought, I was always so focused on what I didn't like that I was glossing over and forgetting all of the good that Spring can bring. If God looked at all He made and proclaimed it "good," shouldn't I be able to look at His creation and do the same? Especially during a season so symbolic of His own work in us? One of my favorite Bible verses is Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Maybe, I wondered, it was time for me to find Spring beautiful. To focus on the beauty of creation rather than its inconvenience. So, a couple of years ago, I decided to list everything about Spring that I liked. (I admit it – I thrive on lists.) What did I discover? I discovered that I love the breezes and the "in-between" cool weather. I love rain showers, especially when I'm dry and warm inside. I love the blooms of Spring – the azaleas and wildflowers that I see Spring up around me. Even more so, I love that the changing weather inspires something inside of me – to make changes in my own life for the better. Leo Tolstoy wrote in *Anna Karenina* that, "Spring is the time of plans and projects." For me, that's been especially true this year, and I love it. By embracing Spring, I've also been able to embrace the creativity that's been lying dormant inside of me for months and focus on creating art – whether it be with watercolors, journaling, or graphic design. I turned my room inside-out with a deep cleaning that's made my life feel fresh with new beginnings. Most importantly, I've been allowing myself to face change head-on inside of hiding from it.

I didn't expect all of that to happen when I decided to "like" Spring. But by finding God's creation beautiful in its time, I've also been encouraged to find what's beautiful in my life as well. And for the first time, I can truly agree with the cliché that Spring is a time of new beginnings.

Growing Again, Not Yet Blooming

By David Hardesty

*“Lord, I’ve been trying to be understood
And Lord, I’ve been trying to do as you would
But each time, it gets a little harder
I feel the pain
But I’ll try again.”
~Big Star, “Try Again.”*

Spring doesn’t come easy in my section of the Ohio Valley. Even, maybe especially if, the winter has been mild and there hasn’t been much snow; the ground is a brown mush, and the rain and clouds feel constant in February. One’s mood (at least mine) often reflects the soggy gray and brown environs. There an extra stratum of irritation for me, because due to my neighborhood topography and nearby soil erosion, the rains do a number on my house’s crawl space. I’ll spare you the details.

But March has settled in after a couple of days and, as I write this, we are finally having two straight days of sunshine, along with the usual breeziness. Daffodils – not yet blooming – are finally peeking out of the sludge. Some of the trees are starting to bloom. Birds sing brighter. And laughter, the real stuff – at my cat, and my youngest son’s jokes, at Mystery Science Theatre 3000 – leaps out of me without irony. Spring is here, and in the spring a middle-aged man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of grilling and yard work. Things are looking up.

Ash Wednesday was last week. The weather was colder and – surprise – dreary. Forgive me fellow Catholics for I have sinned, but I must confess I do not enjoy Ash Wednesday. The ashes and hymns are nice, and it’s not so much the fasting, which isn’t easy for a guy who likes to eat – rather, it’s the overarching themes of death and the dust to which we shall return. I can see how many may need this reminder, but as a 46-year-old man with cardiovascular disease in my genetics who has faced some mystery symptoms (benign bumps and what-not), I don’t feel like I need to be reminded of my mortality. Yet I believe in grace, in forgiveness, and God’s all-encompassing love, so I should be ready for oneness with God in paradise. I love much of this earthly life too, but I don’t think I’m so tied to the material world that I’d refuse eternal life.

Maybe the death I fear or really grieve is the death of the person I used to be – the wonder and fascination with everything. Maybe I’m dying a little bit every time I give in to my weaknesses. It didn’t use to seem this hard to be faithful.

From about the age of 10-14, I was the typical altar boy. I lived three blocks from my parish church, so about every other week, it was my turn to serve 6:30 am daily Mass through the week. Afterwards, I would drag myself in a daze to my classroom, long before the other students or even the teacher got there because it didn't make sense to walk or ride my bike home for only a few minutes, then have to come back. But I loved it. Every day I served, I was filled with this moment of peace, that in retrospect, I understand gave my often confused and slightly turbulent adolescent mind an almost Zen-like bliss. Or maybe that's just the way I remember it. But do I ever still remember it! Every time I smell the same carpet cleaner that they used in the carpets of the sacristy, every time I smell a candle being lit. Funny, isn't it, how scent evokes the strongest and most immediate memories, but it also comes flooding back to me every time I hear a cheap organ play a post-Vatican II hymn. Especially the ones by Dan Schutte and John Foley, S.J., which were ubiquitous in Catholic liturgies in those days.

As with many cradle Catholics, even the ones who matriculated at 16 years of Catholic school, as I approached young adulthood, I began to see the world differently, with all its nuances and complexities. This is understandable; regardless of schooling or lack thereof, I think it's natural for people as they age to have a less literal, more complicated view of their faith, or of religion and the spiritual world in general. I began to study other religions and belief systems and realized they might have kernels of truth or even pearls of wisdom which I may not have considered before. This is natural, and probably good – as an adult, I put away childish things, etc.

What isn't good is that my faith became drab and compulsory for me. It was something I had to do or was supposed to do. Gone was that peace I felt as a youth and the smells, the hymns, the multi-hued magic of the morning sun shining through a stained glass window. Really, these things were still there, they just "hit different" as my own adolescent self would say. It was just the same old church stuff – I'd rather have been out acting foolish with my friends, watching a Fellini movie, or listening to Digital Underground. It was the same smells and bells, the same songs, the same scripture readings, the same Form II of the Mass the celebrant seemed to pray 75% of the time, which was okay with me because it's the shortest one. I also committed the same sins over and over. This isn't a confessional, so I won't go into details, but I bet most of them would be familiar to you.

Gone, except on rare occasions, was the peace, the fulfillment. I'd love to tell you I had a Paul-on-the-road-to-Damascus moment, where the light pierced my foggy obliviousness, and I sang Alleluia! And I gave away my possessions to the poor and suddenly lived the Gospel, fierce and flawless. But spring just doesn't come that easily for me. Maybe that's what is meant by "practicing Catholic." I have to practice because I'm not that good at it.

So, I trudged along and eventually tried praying a bit more and taking Mass and Lenten sacrifices more seriously, started volunteering for various causes dear to me, and advocating for the poor and the environment. I somehow developed a muscle, one that lent me a more subtle peace. The flabbiness of self-indulgence wasn't quite as obvious anymore.

I finally had a feeling that I was on the right track again, but no matter how I faltered, I'd still be loved – much of this change I also owe to domestic life. Once you clean up vomit for the third time at 4 am, hearing "Gather Us In" for the 24-thousandth time isn't so daunting. And there are the good things – the joy of seeing my wife's loving eyes every day, the love and satisfaction I get from seeing my sons grow and discover things for themselves. I hope they keep the wonder, the feeling of Grace in their lives.

Yet even in this era of improved spiritual health, I had some serious setbacks. The clergy abuse scandal hit me hard. I was fortunate not to fall prey to clergy molestation myself, but there were some people near and dear to me who weren't as lucky. Like most of the faithful, I felt the betrayal and disappointment in the Church started by Christ himself, which is supposed to model holiness and humility, but instead sold out the afflicted way too often to protect its power and reputation. I was also annoyed and disappointed to see so many otherwise good religious people, many of whom are family, get snookered by the worldly cheap grace and prosperity gospel of a certain political viewpoint that often seems to exalt power, mammon, and cruelty over anything Jesus represents. This is not the time and place to get polemical, but let those with ears hear.

Even after these setbacks, I keep reaching, keep struggling for Grace. Spring doesn't come easy, but I hope to continue to see those flowers pushing through the mud, eventually blooming. If it's slow and with setbacks that's okay – there's beauty in the struggle.

*“...My heart of silk
is filled with lights,
with lost bells,
with lilies and bees.
I will go very far,
farther than those hills,
farther than the seas,
close to the stars
to beg Christ the Lord
to give back the soul I had
of old, when I was a child
ripened with legends
with a feathered cap
and a wooden sword.”
~ Federico Garcia Lorca*



He Looked at Me Too

BY HANNAH SKIPPER



“He stopped and looked at me,” Bambi told his mother, as he watched the majestic Great Prince of the Forest, stoically moving toward the trees.

Yes, I know,” the beautiful doe, Fern, answered, as she watched her mate, Briscoe, disappear into the shadows of the forest.

“Why was everyone so still when he came into the meadow?” her young fawn asked curiously.

“Everyone respects him,” Fern replied, “For of all the deer in the forest, not one has lived half so long. He’s very brave and very wise. That’s why he’s known as the Great Prince of the Forest.”

Her mind traveled back in time, remembering when the Great Prince had first looked at her too.

It was one of those beautiful spring mornings in which the dew clings to everything and the sun’s rays cast a radiant golden glow on everything they touched. Most of the forest animals were awake, no matter what their habits were; the early risers busily called cheery greetings to anyone they saw, and the nocturnal creatures tried to get settled in their beds despite all the noise. Fern stood alone, grazing peacefully on the clover growing near a softly babbling brook at the edge of the meadow, just beyond the safety of the trees. It was her first season to be interested in stags, and she stole fugitive glances toward the young ones who playfully sparred nearby.

She couldn’t tell whether she was hoping that one of them would stop and speak with her or if she was afraid that it might happen. All she knew was that watching their fine muscular necks bowing up as they shoved each other around and their sun-dappled golden-brown coats sent shivers down her spine. Her heart wanted to burst into song as she watched their graceful legs leaping through the tall grass or heard their racks crashing together in play. Suddenly, all the young stags ceased their antics and stood perfectly still, alertly watching the forest on the other side of the meadow. A hush fell over the land and Fern couldn’t help but feel afraid.

She ceased her eating and alertly swept her gaze over the vast meadow, barely moving for fear of attracting the attention of some unseen foe. Then, to her overwhelming relief, she saw Briscoe, the Great Prince of the Forest, stately walking down the ranks of young stags, as if he were a king reviewing his troops.

He was a number of years older than she and already the Great Prince when she was born. As a young fawn, she’d learned to have great respect for him. He was her protector, her mother had said. He would keep her safe.

Now, Briscoe stopped, surveying the meadow and everyone in it. His eyes roamed over and around her several times as he searched for any possible dangers then, finally, he looked directly at her.

Instinctively, Fern eased backwards, toward the shelter of the forest. She wasn’t afraid of him, but his special attention made her as uncomfortable as it made her excited. He’d never paid the slightest attention to her before, so why now? Had she done something wrong?

A giggly magpie in the branches above her head made her ears burn with embarrassment. Imagine the gossip that she'd attract because the Great Prince had singled her out? He couldn't possibly be interested in her, could he? Wasn't it he who'd often been heard saying that his duty was to protect the forest creatures and that that came before any passionate desires he might have?

He kept coming toward her, and though he never ran, it seemed to her that his pace quickened the more she backed away.

Thus, she faced a dilemma.

It was clear that he wanted to speak with her and she knew that it would be rude to run from such an esteemed stag, but that giggly magpie chattered all the more as Briscoe approached. Fern felt as if she might melt into a puddle and become one with the brook if she stood beside it any longer.

If she'd looked past the Great Prince, she really would have melted into the brook, for every stag's eyes were fastened on her, the object of the Great Prince's attention. Luckily, she couldn't take her eyes off Briscoe. For the first time, it dawned on her just how beautiful he was.

Before, he'd only been her leader and protector. But now... he made her weak in the knees. He stopped in front of her, and she involuntarily quivered as she looked into his soft-brown, mesmerizing eyes. His breath was warm on her face. She'd never really thought about how tall he was before now.

Lowering her eyes, she waited deferentially for him to speak first. The magpie seemed to have gone silent too, but Fern knew instinctively that it was still there, peering down at them with far too much interest. Her ears burned again, and she felt the urge to dart away.

As if he could read her mind, Briscoe shook his magnificent rack at the little intruder on their private affairs, and the bird flew off with a squawk. Briscoe's laughter was low and soft as he watched this expected reaction to his strength and status. After a moment, Fern was able to join in with his mirth, relieved that the magpie was gone.

*They laughed together for several seconds before Fern suddenly remembered who was standing in front of her. Her giggles silenced abruptly, and she lowered her eyes again. *Have I done something wrong, your majesty?*" she asked demurely, wondering again why he'd single her out.*

"Not at all," he replied, looking perplexed for a moment, then slightly amused.

"Then why...?"

Her voice trailed off as his stature and gentle demeanor mesmerized her all over again.

"I'm getting old," he responded softly, matter-of-factly.

"I always thought," he continued, "that a great Prince's duty was to only look after the forest and its creatures, but lately I've felt the burden of my age."

"I won't last forever, Fern," he said, coming to his point, "and there must be someone to take my place when I'm gone."

She blushed with pleasure when he spoke her name and felt a thrill race through her body when he told her his deepest thoughts. Still...why had he chosen to tell her all of these things?

"I don't understand, your majesty."

Again, he chuckled gently, and she felt as if she could walk in the air.

"Yes, you do," he replied.

Then, making his intentions clear, he added, "I've been watching all my does for some time now, and you're the one that I've fallen in love with. I want you to be the mother of the next Great Prince."

The meadow seemed to go silent, and Fern felt dizzy in her happiness. The two deer stood motionless for what seemed like an eternity, then slowly she raised her head, and he lowered his. They closed their eyes when their noses met in the middle.

Shrill bird cries broke Fern's reverie, the sound sending waves of alarm coursing through her body. They must flee at once!

"Bambi!" she called alertly, her eyes and ears swiveling in all directions, hoping to see or hear her little fawn.

She barely noticed Faline and her mother dash past her as her alarm grew to outright panic. "Bambi!" she called again, terrified.

Then she saw Briscoe charging toward her, guarding their young son every step of the way. She turned and fled with them, back to the safety of the thick foliage.

Her sides heaved from their mad dash and the strain of realizing just how close she'd been to losing the two deer that she loved the most in this world. She couldn't imagine the forest without either of them. Briscoe was standing beside her, calmly watching, but where was Bambi?

She made a quick scan of the bushes but saw nothing until her mate nodded toward the little fawn. Bambi was tucked safely into the thickest bushes and Fern smiled with relief.

Briscoe stepped forward and, once again, she raised her head as he lowered his, and their eyes closed when their noses met in the middle.



[Author's Notes: I chose Fern for Bambi's mother's name because it reminds me of the forest, but it's not too flowery. I think of Bambi's mother as having a down-to-earth personality despite her status as mate to the Great Prince and mother to the future Great Prince. I chose Briscoe as the Great Prince's name because it sounds a bit lordlier, but not incredibly highbrow. It is an English name that combines two words with Old Norse elements and means "birch wood"]



Triskels and Animals in Celtic Art

~ By Nick O'Connor



Some of the oldest symbols associated with the Celts are spirals, which appear on Neolithic objects that have been dated as earlier than the oldest writing. In fact, Celtic spirals are almost as recognisable as Celtic knots. Many spirals can be seen at the Newgrange burial mound, but there are several interpretations from the cycle of rebirth to the mother goddess. However, we're starting with a very recognisable form – the triskel.

The triskelion symbol or triskel is three conjoined spirals around a central point. The origin of its name (triskelēs) is Greek and means three legs. Nature and the movement of life is one well-known meaning of the symbol, describing the past, present, and future, but it is not the only meaning, as we shall see. The symbol also shows strength in Celtic culture and determination in adversity.

It's a three-branched design with interlocking spirals, which gives the impression of movement. The triskel was often used as a basis for more complex spirals in Celtic art. In post-Celtic (Christian) Ireland, the symbol came to represent the Holy Trinity, ie God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But there is little doubt that the spirals found in the ancient relics of Ireland were put there, because they represented things or ideas that were sacred to the indigenous people. And, as such, this shape would have been pre-Celtic – perhaps 2000 years before the Celtic culture took root in Ireland.

Some of the earliest forms of the Irish spiral or triskel shape have been dated to 2500 BCE at the main entrance to Newgrange chamber tomb in Meath and, similarly, to pottery that has been found in archaeological digs in Marne (France) and Mintraching (Bavaria). The triskels vary slightly, but are recognisable as double or triple spirals.

It should be noted that historical research into other ancient cultures reveals that the triskel design was also common in Greek or Mycenaean art, Korea, Japan, Sicily and Scandinavia.

What is the symbolism of a triskel?

There are many interpretations of the symbolic meaning of triskels and the list below shows just a few of the more popular suggestions.

- The triskel reflects the commonality of natural spirals, such as could be seen anywhere. Examples might include the spirals of sea shells, snails, plants, river eddies, etc.
- The Celts divided their world view into threes, ie the three material domains of earth/ sea/ sky are a common reconstructionist belief.
- Another threefold concept was the Celtic belief in the spiritual, celestial and present world; many Celtic deities are represented as having three faces.
- Celtic society was split into three – druid priests, warrior kings and artisans/farmers.

- Triskels and spirals can be seen as water-based symbols with their curves and impression of fluid motion.
- Another threefold interpretation is to see the triskel as showing the seasonal cycle of time, i.e. life-death-rebirth. Each person's life starts at the centre, moves forward and wind back to the centre.
- The triskel is connected to the mother goddess, Manannán, but some people also link the symbol to the goddess, Brighid.

The directional aspect of the triskel is important too. The first impression is that all three branches move outward from the centre so as to show forward energy or progress.

Clockwise spiral movement tends to be linked with solar energies and harmony with the Earth, while widdershins spirals are associated with the manipulation of nature.

Thus, the rotating, curved shape of a triskel's branches would be seen as symbolic of active movement, i.e. almost of life. Some historians and archaeologists have gone further by correlating a triskel with a symbol for the sun, because the Breton word means three rays and each day, people could see the sunrise, midday and sunset – three phases.

Actually, it might be a good idea to pause for a moment and reflect upon this point – triskels seem to be the embodiment of the symbolism of the number three. It's a very common, magick number that's important in the Trinity, in alchemy, in Islam and all sorts of other faiths. Where else can we find examples of the power of three? Here's some suggestions:

- Primary colours of blue, red and yellow.
- States of matter – solid, liquid and gaseous.
- Spatial measures – height, length and width.
- Time - past, present and future.

Bear in mind that most of the spiritual beliefs and myths in Celtic culture were passed down through the generations via rites, storytelling, music and dance, but rarely in writing.

Therefore, it's difficult to know exactly what were the meanings of the triskels and spirals. Much of what we know now came later from the post-Celtic illustration and writings of the Romans and Christians – and from the Arts and Crafts movement too.

Celtic artwork enjoyed a revival in the late Victorian/ Edwardian era – and just after. Some could be termed decorative speculation and some were reconstructionist beliefs, based on early jewellery, medals, pottery and coins unearthed from Celtic settlements. In these historical artefacts, common themes incorporating triskels could be seen, as shown below.

- Water designs, to show fluid movement, eg the Aberlemno Cross or the Book of Durrow.
- Rotational designs were popular on torcs, helmets, medals and coins, eg the Killamery Cross and the Clevedon gold torc (200 BCE).
- Triskels were sometimes included in wider designs that showed plants or flowers, eg bronze bowls from 400 BCE from the Ardennes, third-century BCE horns from Brentford and door handles from 800 CE in Meath.
- Triskels also turned up in historical jewellery like brooches, buckles or necklaces, eg from Meath (700 CE), Silchester (100 CE) and the Donore Disc (700 CE). The Tara Brooch, found in Ireland in 1850, was made around 700 CE in Meath – Queen Victoria had a copy of this brooch, which has multiple triskels in its design.

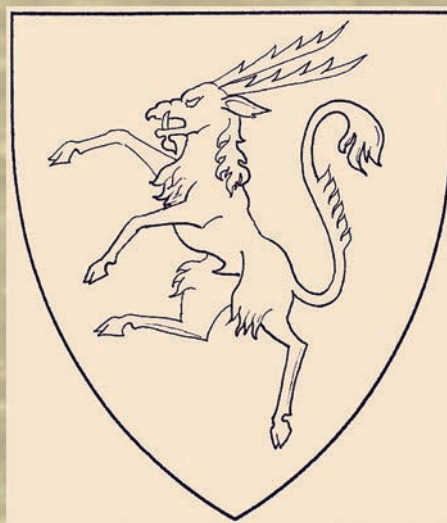
Other triskel-related artwork included fusion with Celtic designs, such as triquetra, interlaces and labyrinths – and also animals. Animal-related triskels have been retrieved from all types of sources, but the most popular designs appear to be those involving birds, dragons and horses.

A few examples might be the Obermenzing sword scabbard (100 BCE – bird triskel), the Donore Disc (700 CE – dragon triskel) and a door handle from Donore (also 700 CE – horse triskel).

Animal symbolism

From triskels to animals. This part takes us a step further by considering the legacy of the Celtic animal symbols in early British heraldic themes.

For example, let's look at the yale. Unlike common Celtic animals like boars, lions, eagles or horses (that were included regularly in families' coats of arms), the yale was a weird, mythical creature, first adopted by the Duke of Bedford in the 14th century, who was brother to the king (Henry V). Later, it was part of the livery of the Beaufort family and can be seen on the gates of St John's College, Cambridge. What does it look like? Here's a picture, as the odd mix of a lion's tail, boar's snout and great horns that point in different directions, tend to defy description.



Animals and the Celtic culture

The Celts, in common with other ancient civilisations, used many animals in everyday life, eg: cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, dogs, and horses.

There was also hunting of deer and fishing too. It has been suggested that, as wolves, bears and wild boars were revered as part of druid worship rites, these animals may have been hunted less. It should be remembered that horses were used in war too, to pull the small chariots and to bear the warriors in battle.

Thus, it is not surprising that many pieces of Celtic artwork include animal representations. Horse, deer and bird decorations from ritual statuettes have been found in archaeological digs in Hallstatt in Austria, that date back to 700 BCE.

It is likely that the Celtic tribes in southern Europe absorbed some cultural influences from neighbouring peoples at that time, eg Greeks or Phoenicians, because some Celtic artefacts have been found with artists' impressions of mythical beasts, eg winged horses and gorgons. The 4th century BCE was a major artistic period for the Celts, right across Europe. This style was called La Tène and included numerous animal themes in artwork, such as jewellery, weapons, coins and small statues.

The animals depicted include: bulls, deer, snakes, dragons, horses, and birds.

Note: within a hundred years or so, the growth of the Roman empire influenced the Celtic culture so much that La Tène sort of morphed into a Romano-Celtic fusion. Not so much in Ireland, though, where the Roman influence was weaker.



Let's look at the animal symbols often portrayed by Celtic artists - in a little more detail.

1. As mentioned above, horses were important as both farm animals and for use in battle. Some archaeological digs have found the remains of Celtic leaders buried alongside their horses. For example, the Celts revered the horse goddess, Epona, and the hero, Cú Chulainn, had horses with human intelligence.
2. The bear was a royal symbol, connected to the safeguarding of the universe.
3. Birds were seen as arbiters of human fate and could be both magickal and possessed of healing qualities. Key bird symbols were swans, crows and owls. The Badb was a Celtic crow goddess, also known as the Morrigan.
4. The eternal cycle of the seasons and crops, as reflected by life itself, often can be seen in depictions of the god, Cernunnos, with his great antlers that also fall and regrow. Deer and stags recur in Celtic artwork (see the picture below of the coin from the 1st century BCE). Interestingly, for pagans anyway, while Christians were keen to identify the horned god as Satan in their images, one well-known tale has St Patrick choosing to transform into a stag to escape attack.
5. Dogs were useful animals, valued by Celtic farmers and war chiefs alike. The name of the hero, Cú Chulainn, means dog of Culainn and, today, the Gaelic root, Cú (meaning dog), has given rise to names like O'Connor!
6. Wild boars may have been hunted, but their ferocity made them creatures of worship by the druids, who linked the wild boar with the god, Taranis.
7. Bulls were worshipped in their own right by the Romans and Cretans. Some Celtic kings and queens adopted bulls as their symbols of power, to show strength and majesty. The Irish tale about the brown bull of Cooley, which was stolen from Ulster is indicative of a bull's value.
8. One thing that's important is that dragons appear in Celtic art, but not until much later. They're key to Welsh Celtic tales, but not so much in other parts of the Celtic landscape. Now, if we were talking about the Saxons, different matter completely.

It is important to note that many of the Celtic artists tried to show animals as they were in real life, whereas later pieces have animals in a much more symbolic form.

Animals as religious symbols

- After La Tène, the next distinguishable period in Celtic art was post-400 CE, when the Christian influences were at work. Many Celtic crosses and illuminated holy books contain animal decorations in a Celtic style, eg:

- The Book of Kells
- The Book of Dimma
- The Book of Durrow
- The Lindisfarne Gospels.

There are several animals that were seen as important to early Christian/ Celtic art and many of these were attributed to saints or to heavenly themes in an allegorical sense.

Particular examples are:

- The eagle of St John
- The peacock from the Book of Kells was symbolic of eternal life promised to all Christians
- Fighting dogs from the Book of Kells and the Papil Stone in Scotland (from 7th century CE)
- Wolves from the Book of Kells
- Wild boars from the Witham Parade Shield (2nd century CE)
- Deer from the Book of Kells and also the Cross at Tibberaghny in Kilkenny
- Many people have seen the white horses, eg at Uffington, but later on horses were included as symbols in the Gospel Book of St Gatiens (8th century CE)
- The ox of St Luke in the Books of Durrow and Kells, as well as the Echternach Gospels (7th century CE), the Lindisfarne Gospels and a winged ox of St Luke from the Book of Armagh (9th century CE)
- The lion of St Mark in the Books of Durrow and Kells.

Here's a couple of examples of symbolic animals that date from this period of Celtic art, after La Tène, but before the Normans took control, the ox from the Book of Kells (9th century CE) and the lion from the Book of Durrow (7th century CE).



Celtic animal symbols and heraldry.

Many Celtic lands were conquered by the Normans about 1000 years ago and this new culture superseded the Celtic style. In some areas where the Viking influence had been strong and the Danelaw prevailed, much of the Celtic artwork drew upon Viking styles too. It was not until the Arts and Crafts revival in the 19th century that some of the pseudo-Celtic artwork was reintroduced. Several times so far, I've referred to derivative styles, ie symbolic animals that were taken from the cultural art of neighbouring locations. After the Norman Conquest, many noble families in Britain began to adopt some of these symbolic animals into their familial coats of arms, eg the unicorn of Scotland, the lion for England, the yale (see introduction), the dragons of the Longworth family and the wild boar of Douglas, Earl of Morton.

And some of these adoptions can still be seen today, not only on flags or portraits, but in everyday objects too. Take the griffin or gryphon, for example, which was a symbol of kingship and bravery in Minoan Crete and was adopted as a corporate logo by the now-defunct Midland Bank. That was not the fate in the wonderful tale of the Vauxhall griffin, which dates back 800 years.

It all started in the reign of King John – he had a problem in that the royal treasuries were almost empty as a result of the Crusades and there was no money for a regular army. Taxes raised some income, but not enough, so the king began to use hired troops to fight his battles for fixed rates of pay. One of the most loyal troops of mercenaries was led by Falkes de Bréauté from the Netherlands and he chose a coat of arms that included the fierce, warlike griffin as its emblem.

When Falkes de Bréauté grew too old to fight, the king rewarded him with an estate on the south side of the River Thames. His lands and manor house were known as Fulk's Hall. OK, fast-forward now to the 19th century (1857) when London had expanded and was in the grip of the Industrial Revolution. Fulk's Hall had become Vauxhall and it was now an iron works, turning out industrial machines and supplies for the new railways. After a while, it became the Vauxhall Motor Co and built cars for the new automotive industry, but the company could not decide on a logo, until some bright spark remembered the original owner's livery – and that is why all Vauxhall cars still have a griffin on them.



A Spring Epiphany: Reflections on Lent and Love

By Avellina Balestri

I remember a day in spring last year, somewhere between St. Valentine's Day and Lent, and I had some small religious epiphany. I was in a dentist's waiting room, and the TV was playing the live-action version of 101 Dalmatians. The scene was of the marriage of Roger and Anita, and without expecting it, I found myself transfixed by the background.

The painting showed the body of Christ being taken down from the cross, about to be placed in the arms of the sorrowing mother, and all at once I imagined the tears trickling down her face and the blood trickling from his heart, and it felt that everything around me dissolved in that one moment, the TV, the dentist office, the spring day, and it all was caught up in the utter emotional intensity of that picture painted upon me.

I sat down in one of the shabby chairs and felt as if I had just been granted insight into some mystery that touched upon every single person in that room, but I could not tell them. But what can you say? Look, everyone, behold the Lamb of God! Behold the sacrifice of our salvation, behold Him slain from the foundation, and from the root of ourselves! Behold the dead king who won our souls by right of conquest! How can it be, and so very few see?

And then, still in that waiting room, like a little slice of purgatory, I pulled out a book from my bag to pass the time, "The Reed of God" by Caryll Houselander, the British Catholic author and mystic. It was my project leftover from Advent, bleeding over into that frozen in-between time that straddles winter and spring, Christmas and Easter. Yes, the readings of a liminal space, between the age of grace, the end of the world, and the taste of a new creation.

The passages that fell before my eyes were all about searching for the lost Christ Child as the Virgin Mary had, and finding Him in the faces of all men and women:

"In our seeking for the lost Child, our contemplation of Our Lady becomes active. The fiat was complete surrender. Advent was a folding upon the life growing in our darkness. Now the seeking is a going out from ourselves. It is a going out from our illusions, our limitations, our wishful thinking, our self-loving, and the self in our love... We do not have to discover in which of several people Christ is to be found; we must look for Him in them all..."

And perhaps it is the heart, the sacred, pierced, burning heart we see on holy cards that is blazing silently in everyone, in meekness and humility, begging to be sought out and found, even as it is burning with the passion and the pain, and the fire that He wished was burning all over the world, and which will burn on when all the world is consummated. It is lit from the Spirit of God and the soul of Mary, and her tears only feed it, as does His blood.

Looking upon the sorrowing virgin, weeping over her pierced son, is suddenly not so very different than looking upon the ecstatic Theresa of Avila, twisting her body in rapture at the angel's dart. Two women, crying out, in the writhing pain that is love, in the utter passion that is God, breaking us, and binding us to Him. And here He is broken like bread, torn in the flesh, and here we mourn, and we swoon, caught up in all our senses by this invasion of our world by the Glory of the Lord.

Perhaps that wounded heart is the crux of what we mean when we say chivalry, that sternness in battle and mildness in hall, toppling tables and healing lepers, that which pours itself out for others unto the last drop and makes us look upon the wounds sin has wrought, and feel compassion. St. Valentine died, legend says, for the love of his Lord, and in the place of his friends. For who has more love, than he who dies so that his friends may live? And yet the blind girl he befriends and heals carries on the message in her heart and plants the pink-blossomed almond tree over his grave.

How do we live, then? We who are His friends? Are these things bound by time, or beyond it? We, like all Christians, dare to die with Him, to be the buried seeds that crack open and flower. We dare to be watered by the life-blood of God. We are all knit into this reality, the pulse of our hearts beating into His, if only we might stop to realize it, and allow ourselves to be expiated, to bleed out and die so that through love we might find a new rising and a new dawn.



Love's First Sight

By Hannah Skipper

One beautiful spring morning, Cupid was lazily reclining on the divan in his bedroom, lulled half asleep by the soft, warm breeze that gently rustled the curtains hanging over his head. Everything was peaceful and quiet.

Suddenly, the blissful calm was shattered by a thunderous sound rumbling up from the ground that shook everything out of place. Startled to full alertness, the god sprang to his feet and took a swift glance outside. This isn't Jupiter's doing, he realized, his eyes widening. There was only one other explanation.

"Mother," he murmured softly.

No sooner had he uttered her name than Venus flung his heavy door open and sailed into his room in full fury.

"Take your arrows and fly to my rescue, at once!" she ordered, almost wailing with livid anger, "In a town many miles from here lives a terrible maiden who men have seen fit to honor as if she were me!" Venus' eyes blazed with jealous fury, "Man has allowed my temples to fall into utter ruin because they love her more than me! I will not stand idly by while that foul wretch receives the kind of honor that is due only to me! Now, go!"

Cupid watched as his mother worked her way into a full-blown rant, her eyes gleaming with vengeance, "I want her to fall in love with something so hideous that men will run from her presence rather than bear the sight of her lover! But, my son," she cautioned, "if you can't find any monster that fits that description, you must ask every god and goddess if they will create something especially awful for her. And you must tell me if one of them dares to refuse you!"

"What's the lovely maiden's name, mother?" Cupid asked coolly, snatching his bow and a full quiver of arrows off the wall, happy to do her bidding.

"Psyche," Venus spat, as if the name had a vile taste.

Instantly, Cupid sprang out of his open window. Flying low and fast over the hills and dales, he searched for hours for the lovely girl while considering what kind of awful beast that he might make her fall in love with.

Thinking back to similar cases, he remembered the other girls who his mother had ordered him to ruin. He'd made some fall in love with rocks and others with worms or insects. Once, he remembered with harsh, almost disgusted, laughter; he made a particularly enchanting girl fall in love with the waves of the sea, dooming her to an endless cycle of ecstatic joy when her lover rolled in and paralyzing grief when he left.

His mother's fury against that girl had been particularly unrelenting, and Venus never tired of watching her hapless ritual, even when the pitiful thing had grown old and gray, wrinkled and weathered because she refused to leave the beach.

Of course, it was not as if Cupid relished the business of ruining the lives of the fair maidens who roused the jealousy of his mother, and thinking about the men who forced the goddess' hand with their misplaced adoration always provoked his bitter anger. If those fools would only give Venus her due, their beautiful maids could be left alone! His mother wasn't against the happiness of mortal man. In fact, she, the goddess of love, rejoiced whenever a handsome man chose a lovely bride to be his own. But she was a goddess and must be given her due.

Suddenly, the sounds of happy girlish laughter made him pause in the middle of a thickly wooded forest. Then, moments later, he was startled to hear the same voice cry out in pitifully despairing tones. Perplexed, he flew closer and, parting the branches of a moss-covered oak tree, stared into a wide, flowering meadow.

What he saw knocked the breath from his lungs.

She was a maiden of exquisite delicacy. Tall and slender with waves of shimmering blonde hair that fell to her knees, the gorgeous young woman wore a thin, almost revealing, robe that looked fit for a princess and was adorned with simple but regal jewels. So light and graceful was her step that it seemed to Cupid as if she danced instead of walked across the grass, stopping to give each man in the large crowd that surrounded her individual attention.

It must be her, he thought, excitedly. Psyche!

Out of habitual obedience to his mother, he silently drew an arrow from his quiver and smiled grimly when he spied a wart-covered toad hopping towards the top of a rock formation near where Psyche was standing. It wasn't a Minotaur, Cyclops, or any other horrible monster for that matter, but he could always hope that his mother wouldn't really care once the deed was done and her temples were restored to order.

Setting the arrow against his bow, he pulled the string taut.

But he couldn't release it. No matter the loyalty that he felt towards Venus, he couldn't bring himself to ruin this mesmerizing girl! His fingers grew white with tension as he told himself again and again to complete his mission, and yet still, he could not.

Gritting his teeth, he began to consider other options. Maybe his mother would be pacified if he made one of her many suitors fall in love with her. Then she would be married and out of the way.

Adjusting his aim, he scrutinized each man as they admired her, making her happy with their attention. But time and again, Cupid rejected them when they turned away from her beauty and grace.

These men don't deserve her, he thought. If a man can't love Psyche without one of my arrows piercing his heart, he doesn't deserve her! Then, suddenly, the powerful truth that had been needling his heart from the first moment that he'd seen her became clear. He couldn't make any man fall in love with her because he himself was in love with her!

As the realization welled up in his heart, Cupid began to feel as if he was suffocating, knowing that loving Psyche would expose her to the full onslaught of his mother's fury. But, with every moment, her beauty and grace grew on him until he couldn't imagine living another day without her.

Shuddering, he still tried to put his feelings aside by thinking about what his mother would say and do when she inevitably found out. He didn't like the consequences, but no matter how he looked at the situation, he still felt as if he had no choice. He was in love.

With his mother's fury in his mind's eye, he could only whisper three words.

"I am finished."



SPRINGTIME BLUES ~ by Amanda Pizzolatto

Pascal woke with a start as Rapunzel bounced out of bed.

"Come on, Pascal! Time to get up! It's the first day of spring!"

Pascal grunted and rolled over. Rapunzel groaned.

"Oh, come on Pascal, you promised to get me some flowers!"

He opened one eye ruefully and sniffed before opening both eyes and walking into Rapunzel's hands.

"Oh, thank you!" She rushed to the window, chatting the whole way excitedly. "Okay, I'll lower you down, and I'll do some chores while you gather the flowers. Think you'll need fifteen minutes?"

Pascal shook his head.

"Alright, sweeping and mopping?"

He nodded.

"Great! I'll get a vase set up before I get you." Rapunzel flung open the window and gasped. "Snow! Snow on the first day of spring?" It was true; there was a fine powder coating the ground below. Rapunzel moaned. "I wanted some flowers!" She sighed and backed away from the window. "Well, Pascal, I guess you can head back to bed if you want."

He squeaked and patted her shoulder, reassuringly. Rapunzel chuckled. "Thanks, Pascal. Well, there's always tomorrow."

"Aw, come on, snow isn't that bad." Rapunzel and Pascal froze and looked at each other in shock. Who was that talking? Rapunzel glanced around for some kind of weapon and saw a frying pan. She picked it up and tiptoed back to the window.

"Who, who said that?"

"Huh?" She couldn't see anyone at the window, and she knew someone wasn't down on the ground. So, where was he?

"You, I'm talking to you. Who are you?"

"Wait, me? You can hear me?" A face popped down into the window, a boy around Rapunzel's age was hanging upside down from her roof. A blue cape fell over his head of white hair. Rapunzel screamed and hit him with the pan.

"Ow!" He fell off the roof but didn't fall to the ground below. Rapunzel screamed again and hid behind her mannequin. He came into the room, a staff in his hands, and feet not even touching the floor.

Rapunzel watched, mesmerized. "How, how are you doing that?"

He glanced down at his feet before floating down to the ground. He looked at her and grinned. "Oh, I can use the winds to get around." The grin vanished, and he touched his nose gingerly. "But why'd you go and do that for? I have a perfectly good nose; thank you very much."

"Oh, oh, I'm so sorry. It's just... no one ever comes here besides Mother."

He blinked at her. "Wait, am I the first person you've ever met besides your mother?"

She bit her lip and nodded, holding the pan to her chest. "Why's that... whoa, that's a lot of hair."

Rapunzel gasped and leveled her pan at the boy. "What, what do you want with my hair?"

"What do I want with your hair? What do you want with your hair? I've never seen that much hair in my life, and I've traveled the world!" He moved some of it aside with his staff. "No wonder you don't leave this tower! You have all this hair to take care of. Why don't you cut it?"

"What? How could you even suggest that? I can't cut my hair!"

He put up his hands. "Alright, alright, forget I even mentioned it." He glanced around the room. "So, this is where you live. With your mother, right?"

Rapunzel began to lower the pan. "Um, yeah. You're not; you're not going to cut my hair or want to use it?"

The boy looked at her, confused. "What? It's your hair; you do with it what you want. I'm just not used to seeing so much hair on one head." He smiled softly. "Or a cute girl like you cooped up in this tower." His eyebrows furrowed. "Who, by the way, can somehow see and hear me? How?"

She blinked. "Wait, no one can see or hear you except me?" She glanced at Pascal. He shrugged, he seemed to be able to see the boy.

"Well, yeah, your lizard could already see me, but most humans can't."

Rapunzel took a step forward. "Who are you?"

The boy took a bow. "I'm Jack Frost."

Rapunzel curtsied. "I'm Rapunzel. But what makes you special?"

"I'm the spirit of winter."

"The spirit... of winter?" Rapunzel gasped. "Oh, so you're the one who made it snow out there!"

Jack winked. "Bingo."

Rapunzel crossed her arms and huffed. "Well, you do realize it's the first day of spring, right? I'm supposed to have flowers, not snow!"

"Oh, well, sorry, Miss Rapunzel, but I didn't realize having snow today would vex you all that much. I was just trying to vex the Easter Bunny."

Rapunzel blinked. "The Easter Bunny? But, Easter's not for another two weeks!"

Jack grinned. "I know, but Bunny's coming up today, and it really gets under his skin."

He bowed again. "But I promise I won't bring snow next year if it pleases you."

"Oh, um, alright. But why do you like getting under the Easter Bunny's skin?"

"Jack Frost!" Rapunzel yelped at the yell and ducked behind the mannequin again. Jack just grinned even wider and stepped to the window.

"Aw, what's wrong, don't like a little late snow?"

"It's spring, you bloody show-pony! Now get down here and clean this up!" Rapunzel inched towards the window and peeked out. A large rabbit stood below, thumping his right foot as he glared at Jack Frost.

Jack sat on the window ledge. "What? You expect me to melt the snow? You know I can't do that, Bunny. That's your job."

Bunny huffed. "You have a point, but you have to stop making it snow! It's spring now, stay in your season!"

"Where's the fun in that?" Bunny glared at him. Jack just grinned impishly back.

Bunny threw up his paws. "Fine! But you'd better not make it snow any later in spring

ever again!" He tapped the ground, and he jumped into the hole that opened up under his paw. The hole closed and a little flower popped up defiantly on top.

"He looked really mad," said Rapunzel as Jack burst out laughing.

"Aw, come on, just a little harmless fun."

"Well, I think you should leave him alone."

Jack thought for a moment. "Nah, I'm going to make it snow really hard one Easter. That's going to be loads of fun."

"Why do you like making him angry?"

Jack shrugged. "He makes it way too easy. I'm just trying to get him to loosen up and have a little fun." He looked at Rapunzel. "Just like you."

Rapunzel took a step back. "Me?"

"Oh yes, you, you sound like you need to get out and have a little fun yourself."

Rapunzel took a couple more steps back, shaking her head. "Oh no, Mother forbade me from leaving the tower. So many people want to use my hair for bad things."

Jack raised an eyebrow. "Really? I don't think they even know about your hair! If they did, they'd be talking about it a lot." He kicked some of it again.

Rapunzel picked it up and brought it closer to her. "Well, that's why I stay here so that no one can find me and my hair."

He shrugged. "Uh, alright, whatever you say." He pointed at her. "But you still need to get out and have some fun. I mean, haven't you ever wanted to get out and just do something?"

Rapunzel chuckled nervously. "Well, there is one thing . . ."

"Yeah?"

"It happens on my birthday, which is in the summer, but, um, every year, there are these lanterns that float in the sky, and I would so like to see the place where they start rising into the sky."

"Ah, that does sound pretty cool," said Jack with a big grin. "But why haven't you gone to see it?"

"Because someone will see me and want to use my hair." She clasped her hands.

"Maybe, when I'm older, Mother will take me to see them herself!"

Jack tilted his head. "How old are you, Rapunzel?"

Rapunzel crossed her arms and smirked. "I'm going to be eighteen this summer."

"Really? Wow, you're practically an adult!"

Rapunzel gasped and pressed the pan close to her chest. "Really? Oh, then maybe Mother will let me go this year!" She bounced and squealed.

Jack smiled softly as he ran his fingers through his hair. "Well, I certainly hope you will, you really should get out more." He tapped his fingers on his chin. "And as a matter of fact, since I really can't come out in the summer..." His face broke into a huge grin. "Oh, I could do that!"

"Um, do what?"

He winked. "Just you wait and see."

"Wait!" But he had already flown out the window. By the time Rapunzel got to the window, he was a speck in the morning sky. She let out a huff. "My first friend since you, Pascal, and he's left me hanging!" She burst out laughing before jumping with joy. "I have a new friend!" She stopped and clapped her hands over her mouth. "Oh, but I

can't tell Mother about this, she's going to freak out." She let out a breath. "Keep it cool; I've got to keep it cool Pascal."

Pascal squeaked and pointed with his tail.

"Oh, yes, I could do my chores while I wait." She grabbed the duster. "Though I do hope Jack doesn't come back when Mother does, or that she gets here when he's here. That would be awkward."

Pascal nodded in understanding.

"Well, let's get to work then." She did her usual routine, Gothel came by for lunch and left after dinner. But there was no sign of Jack. Rapunzel began to wonder if he would be coming back at all when a soft wind pushed a few snowflakes into the tower.

Pascal noticed them and pointed them out to Rapunzel.

She gasped. "Jack! Jack, are you back?" There was no answer. She put her head out the window, looking around for him. She heard a snicker. She glanced up, and Jack kissed her nose. She giggled. "What was that for?"

"I'm Jack Frost, I nip at your nose," he replied with a huge grin on his face.

Rapunzel covered her nose and giggled. "It's cold!"

Jack chuckled. "Precisely."

"So, why did you have to leave?" asked Rapunzel as she stepped away from the window. Jack flew in, his hand behind his back.

"A surprise."

Rapunzel eyed the hidden arm. "Do you, do you have scissors?"

"Well, I did use scissors on these." He pulled his arm from behind his back to reveal a large bouquet of flowers. Rapunzel's hands flew to her face as she let out squeals of delight.

"That's... there's... I've never seen so many different kinds of flowers before!"

"An appropriate apology for covering all your flowers in snow, I hope."

Rapunzel took the bouquet. "Oh, Jack, they're lovely!"

"So, you forgive me then?"

Rapunzel hugged him. "Of course!"

He gasped and backed away quickly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I should have asked first if..."

"Oh no, it's fine. I'm more worried about you. I am cold; after all, I'm the spirit of winter."

Rapunzel giggled. "Oh no, I'm fine. I didn't feel cold at all, in fact..." she took a step closer, "may I hug you again?"

Jack opened his arms wide, his smile nearly as wide as his arms. "Sure!" Rapunzel nearly toppled him over with the force of her hug. But she couldn't help it, she was so happy to have made a new friend, and she would never complain about seeing snow in spring ever again.



THE ALLEY

By M. C. Pehrson

She saw him coming,
And a thrill of recognition
Passed through her.
Oh, the alley was rather dark
As she struggled to keep pace
With her long-legged brother,
Yet she felt sure it was him
Up ahead.

Coming their way,
Rapidly coming closer.
It had been daylight when
The two teens set out,
But darkness came early
This time of year
And the city lights were blazing
When they left the store,
Each bearing a new purchase
In a crisp paper bag.

Her brother figured the alley
Was a good shortcut home.
Their parents might not have agreed,
But tonight they were on their own.

And he was coming.

She had secretly loved him
For a long time,
An all-consuming girlish devotion
For a grown man
Forever out of her reach.

It was more than just
The difference in their ages;
You see,
He was a priest.

Onward he came,
Wearing the customary
Black suit and Roman collar
That set him apart;
How handsome he looked!

Oh, slow down,
Slow down,
The girl inwardly begged,
But they were just two schoolkids
To him,
On a night like any other.

As they passed,
He spared them a fleeting glance,
A hurried greeting
In the Irish brogue
That gave her such joy.

He did not for an instant ponder
The remarkable twist of fate
That had brought them together
In a dim Van Nuys alley
On that long-ago autumn night.

And then he was gone.

But the girl –
Oh, she tucked that magical moment
Into her heart
And treasured it
For the rest of her life.



Credits

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AND ASHLEY WENGERD**

Upcoming Issue - Travel & Pilgrimage

The next themed issue will be on the subject of Travel and Pilgrimage. If you would like to submit a piece for consideration, we are looking for non-fiction, fan-fiction, original fiction, poetry, literary & media analysis, artwork/photography on any topic. Each piece must subscribe to our submission guidelines - which can be found on our website;

WWW.FELLOWSHIPANDFAIRYDUST.COM

All submissions sent to Fellowship and Fairydust will be considered for inclusion, but any which don't get selected for the special themed issues will still be published on the magazine's blog page, as usual.

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