



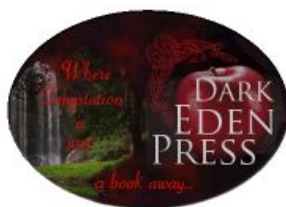
Logan M. Whyte

The Chronicles of the Phoenix: Book One

# Ashes to Ashes

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# **Ashes to Ashes**

## **The Chronicles of the Phoenix**

### **Book One**

**Logan M. Whyte**

## Chapter One

The year was 1384 when my life ended. It was same year my life began anew. For twenty years I'd lived a normal life, going about my daily routine, oblivious to the life shattering changes rushing my way. Even looking back over the six hundred years separating then and now, I can still recall every detail of it as clearly as if it happened yesterday.

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For once, I awoke before my master. I'd lived with him since my parents died when I was only five years old. In the sixteen years since I came to live with him, our mornings came to be almost a ritual in their repetitiveness.

"Devon," my master would always yell. "Get your lazy ass out of bed! We've got a busy day ahead of us."

"Coming, master," was my usual reply.

This morning, my master didn't need to wake me. Today was Beltane, and I looked forward to this holy day more than any of the rest. All the young men of our little community had traipsed into the woods yesterday, returning with a ten-foot beech sapling set up in the village square. While they were gone, all of the younger women in the village were busy preparing the cloth ribbons to wrap around the maypole.

This year, though, was extra special for me. My master informed me I was to play a large part in our celebration. You see, every year the council of elders chose one man to don the horned mask of the God and light the ceremonial fires. This year it was my turn. I was both nervous and excited at the prospect. I wasn't nervous due to the fact I was the one chosen to represent the physical form of the God, but because our tradition was for the God to be sky clad when lighting the Beltane fires. As Beltane drew closer, my nervousness grew more and more at the thought of stepping into the village square wearing nothing but the mask of the God. I realized that the mask would provide me with at least some measure of anonymity. The only other person who would know I played the part would be the lover, or lovers if I so chose, I took this night. The remaining men and women from the village would be paired up and scattered to the woods and fields, each of them offering up their own private sexual sacrifices for the prosperity and growth of the crops soon to be sown in the empty fields.

I judged it to be at least an hour before the sun would rise, the sky turning the leaden gray it always did in those hours before dawn. The early spring nights were still chilly enough to call for the light wool blanket I flung aside. The wooden floors of the tiny bedroom my master gave me were smooth beneath my bare feet as I padded to the small chest at the foot of my bed. I knew the preparations for the Beltane fires would fill the entire day. The rest of the village would be working just as hard as my master and I before we could light the fires and I wanted all of my private preparations completed

before we got started. I listened for any other sounds in the house, straining for the slightest whisper of sound coming from my master's room. I thanked the Goddess when all I heard were the sleepy chirps of birds in the trees outside as they got ready to welcome the new day.

Opening the press, I took out the few things I would need for my ritual bath. I dropped the bar of lye soap, the scrap of cloth I used to bathe with, a couple of beeswax candles, and a tiny leather bag filled with lavender, sage, thyme and rosemary for a ritual spiritual cleansing into a canvas sack. Slinging it over my shoulder, I grabbed a large drying sheet and the clothes I would wear before the fire lighting ceremony, and tiptoed quietly out of my room. I stopped off in the kitchen, where I added a charcoal brazier and a brass pan to my collection of things before I left my master's house and headed to the stream running through the woods just behind his house. I knew no one else in the village would be using the stream this early and I relished the sensation of being one of the few, if not the only person, awake in the entire village. For most of the year, I lived a celibate life, but the night of the Beltane fires I threw that aside. I could find as many willing men as I wanted—and there were always willing men around me—and all of it was to insure a full and bounteous harvest. A night of wanton abandon, everyone in the village looked forward to it.

The wind blew softly through the trees, brushing gently against the leaves, rustling them just enough to create a gentle susurrus of whispers. I drew in a breath and exhaled, relishing the burgeoning spring day. I could hear the murmur of the water as it cascaded over the stones of the brook long before I could see it.

Setting the brazier on a flat rock, I set the candles out, lighting each one, before turning back to the brazier. I started it burning while I filled the pan with water from the brook. Setting it over the fire, I emptied the bag of herbs into the water and let them begin to steep. Folding my legs beneath me, I settled down and cleared my mind, beginning to meditate.

The aroma of the herbs steeping in the water brought me back to reality. Stripping off my clothes, piling them on a nearby rock, I lit the candles, dipped the cloth into the water and worked up lather from the bar of soap. I rubbed the aromatic water into my skin, picturing my bath washing clean my spirit as well as my body. I stepped into the water, shivering lightly as the chill morning air blew across my bare skin. The small pool the stream filled was just deep enough to reach my chest. I moved to the cascade, closing my eyes as I tipped my head back letting the water tumble down my face and chest before joining the water surrounding me.

My hands danced across my skin, washing away the remains of the lather away. I was always proud of my body with its light dusting of dark blonde hair covering my chest, the dark brown of my nipples peeking out. As I ran my hands over my chest, I could feel them harden and stand up at attention. I lightly squeezed both of them, closing my eyes at the glorious feeling the touch of my hands shot through my system.

Releasing my nipples, I slipped my hands down across my stomach, lightly tracing the barely concealed muscle. I slid my hands lower, feeling the change in texture as my fingers entered the light brown curly hair surrounding the root of my shaft. I

wrapped one hand around my shaft, sliding the other down to my large balls, caressing each of them lightly, rolling them around in the loose skin covering them.

I let go of my slowly growing prick, easing my other hand back up from my balls. Sliding my hands back up to my waist, I slipped them to my back, sliding them over the twin mounds of my ass. I parted the cleft between them, running my hands into the cleft gasping involuntarily as my fingers danced over the puckered opening concealed inside. The shock of the water as it washed over the sensitive skin sent shivers through my body.

I lightly ran my finger over the puckered opening, teasing myself by sliding one finger partially inside. With each caress to my asshole, my cock grew between my thighs. I slowly peeled back the hood over the head of my dick, exposing the round, mushroom shaped head, luxuriating in the caress of the cool water as it washed over the head of my shaft.

Easing out of the cascading waterfall, I waded back to the shallows. My prick tapped against my stomach with each step. I stared down at it, watching as the entire length slowly emerged from the water. Once I reached the shallows, I lightly danced my fingers up and down the shaft of my prick, occasionally slipping lower to tease my balls. With each caress, my dick twitched, demanding more attention. I looked down, staring at the crystal clear drops of pre-come oozing from the head. Wrapping my hand around my shaft, I smeared them over my dark red cock head. I closed my eyes, losing myself to the sensation, rolling my head back, moaning and not caring in the slightest if anyone heard me.

I ran my free hand lightly across my chest, feeling the rasp of the hair across my palm. With the same feather light touch, I danced my fingertips across my nipples, feeling them harden and stand to attention once more at my touch.

With slow, deliberate strokes, I began sliding my fist up my shaft, sliding my foreskin over the head of my cock. Opening my eyes, I looked down, watching as the head of my cock disappeared and reappeared. As I continued my slow strokes, I pinched my nipple between my fingers, sending the shock of the glorious pain coursing along my nerves with the sensations coming from my dick.

Releasing my nipple, I slid my hand down my body, dancing my fingers across my abdomen. I felt the change in texture from the light trail of hair when I ran my fingers into the base of the light brown curly hair at the base of my shaft. With the hand stroking my prick, I slapped my rigid dick against my stomach, leaving gleaming drops of pre-come behind with each tap. Twining my fingers together, I framed my cock with my palms, lightly squeezing as I began stroking again. I knew I was losing myself to the pleasure rushing through my body and didn't care in the least.

Releasing my hold on my shaft, I stepped out of the pool and eased down onto the pile of clothes I'd removed. Resting on my elbow, I wrapped my free hand around my cock again, gripping the shaft tightly in my fist causing the head to blush a deep red. I started stroking, quick short strokes, listening to my breathing grow ragged in time to the slap of my balls against my perineum. I soon felt the familiar tightening in my balls as I drew closer and closer to shooting come all over myself. I wasn't ready for

this to be over yet, so I let go of my shaft and rolled down onto my back.

Lifting my legs, I once more began fingering my puckered hole. Easing one finger inside, I danced it across my prostate, arching my back and crying out harshly at the wondrous sensation it sent flying through me. With my free hand, I returned to my nipple, squeezing, pinching, and giving it the occasional tug. My voice cut through the still morning air, incoherent moans of pleasure filling the air around me.

My balls were screaming for release, full and heavy beneath my angrily waving cock, throbbing with each beat of my racing heart. With one finger still in my ass, stretching my hole, I let go of my nipple, returning it to my weeping prick. I gripped it tight, smearing the pre-come around with my thumb as I began to stroke myself again. Once more, I lost myself to the dual sensations of my fist as it slid up and down my shaft combined with the finger buried in my ass brushing across my prostate.

As I lay there, head thrown back, eyes closed, I pictured the God looking down at me, watching my personal sacrifice in his honor. My mind conjured up his image, his magnificent rack of horns gleaming in the pale pre-dawn light, his proud cock standing proudly erect, sticking straight out from his body. I could almost see the desire smoldering in his honey colored eyes.

Once more I felt the same familiar tightening on my balls as they prepared to lift close to my cock before they shot their load from the end of my dick. This time, I didn't stop. My body was aching for release.

With a piercing cry, my ass clamped down on my finger as rope after rope of thick white come shot through the air and landed on my chest. I reluctantly slid my finger from my ass, continuing to squeeze every last drop of come from my cock. I squeezed my deflating dick hard, forcing out the last drops of come, which gleamed brightly against the now pink head of my cock.

Returning to the pool, I washed the sweat and come from my body before putting my clothes back on. As I tromped back to my master's house, I realized my fears about the role I would play in the fire lighting ceremony were no longer haunting me. Sending up a silent prayer of thanks to the Goddess, I slipped into the back door of my master's cottage, went upstairs to my room and waited for him to awaken.

## Chapter Two

"Devon," my master shouted no sooner than I'd finished getting dressed. "Get your lazy ass up, boy. We've got lots to do today and we don't have time for you to lay about in bed!"

I was already clambering down the stairs before he'd gotten through shouting at me. "I'm not the one that's been laying about in bed. I've been up since before the sun rose."

He eyed me suspiciously. "So you have. Well then, since you're already up, let's get started." He turned away and stalked to the kitchen, settling down at the smoothly sanded table. "Are you ready for tonight, lad?" he asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be," I replied, my stomach fluttering with nervous tension.

"You've got a very important role to play tonight. Don't mess it up or you'll have the entire village chasing you into the countryside screaming for your hide."

"Yes, master. I'll do my best, master."

"You'd better," he said, shaking his finger at me. "Now, go and fetch my things. I want to double check that I've got everything we're going to need."

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Before I knew it, I was standing with my master and the village elders as they brought out the ceremonial mask I was to don. Once more, I could feel my stomach churn into knots at the thought of stepping into the square without a stitch of clothing on. This was the only part of our ritual giving me second thoughts, walking to the unlit Beltane fire under the eyes of every person living in and around our small village. The habit of lighting the fires sky clad was one so old even my master didn't know the origin, but we upheld it just the same. I shivered lightly at the feather light touch of two of the village elders as they painted various runes and symbols of power on my bare skin.

Having finished their ministrations on me, they left me beside the fire to let the sigils dry and turned their attention to the pregnant young woman chosen to represent the Goddess. Her face already obscured by her ritual mask, the swell of her stomach and her pendulous breasts the ultimate vision of bounty and the promise of new life.

Finally, the time had arrived. The elders led the young woman away to enter from the opposite side of the clearing and left me alone in the small copse of trees behind the village square. Reverently I placed the horned mask of the God on my head, mentally preparing myself for what was ahead of me. I had one more thing left to do before I stepped out of the shadows. In addition to being sky clad when lighting the fires, the young man elected to light the fires must step into the square with his cock proudly erect in homage to the gift of fertility the God would grant our fields as the pregnant form of the Goddess joins him to bless the coming growing season.

I let my mind wander back to the image my mind conjured this morning - the image of the God watching me as I jerked off beside the pool, his cock as hard as the one I had held in my hand. As the image replayed through my mind against my closed eyes, I could feel a familiar stirring in my crotch as my dick began to swell. Rather than



roll my foreskin back, I left the hood of skin covering the head of my cock with just the slightest hint of the darkening head peeking out.

Now fully prepared for what I was supposed to do, I settled the horned mask on my head, where it rested on my cheekbones, leaving the bottom half of my face exposed. I was ready to leave the grove when I heard the snap of a twig behind me. When I turned to face the direction the snap came from, I caught the barest flicker of firelight dancing across a familiar face.

Daigh Campbell, the village blacksmith, stepped into the firelight, desire burning in his eyes. I couldn't prevent a sneer of contempt from crossing my face. Daigh was one who just couldn't take no for an answer. One year ago tonight, Daigh pursued me with an almost unholy vengeance. No matter how hard I tried to evade him, he just refused to get the hint.

"Oh, how fortunate I am to be the first to catch sight of this," he whispered, leering at me.

"What do you want, Daigh?" I asked, knowing what his reply would be before it left his mouth.

Side stepping the dying fire, he slowly approached me. The light from the fire danced across his massive arms and chest. I felt a brief shiver of fear creep up my spine when I caught sight of the intent blazing in his coal black eyes. The broad expanse of his smooth, barrel shaped chest was bare, the light from the dying fire dancing across his skin. Like me, he was sky clad as well. His massive thighs, bulging with muscle, clenched with every step as he slowly stalked toward me. As he neared, I could smell the stale reek of sweat on him, the sour stench sending bile rising in my throat. Grasping my hand, he tried to place my hand on his erect cock but I jerked my hand away as if I'd tried to touch the red hot metal in his forge.

"You know what I want, Devon," he whispered. Glancing down at my stiff cock, he snaked his tongue out, running it over his lips. With a feather light touch, he traced the veins twisting up the backside of my dick. My dick reacted immediately to his caress, deflating, shrinking away from his touch. His gaze flicked back up to my face, rage distorting his features.

"I will have you this night, Devon Connell! Mark my words!"

He stormed back into the woods. I could hear him as he thrashed through the undergrowth, circling the clearing where I stood. I took a moment to center myself, dismissing Daigh's parting words. Easing down to the ground, I once again tried to prepare for what I was about to do.

Once more using the same image of the God's hard cock, it wasn't long before my own dick was standing at attention again, my balls throbbing, aching to release their load.

Stepping lightly, I walked into the village square, a lit brand sending flickering shadows across my face and body. I held the torch high over my head, my cock lightly tapping my stomach with each noiseless step of my bare feet on the ground.

I felt the caress of dirt on the soles of my feet as they whispered across the village square. My entire focus was on the target. I barely took in the admiring looks of those

around me. I did notice one person. Daigh Campbell leered at me with open lust burning in his black eyes. I quickly looked away from him, disgusted at such a blatantly lascivious stare.

Not wanting to become limp before I fulfilled my duties, I let my gaze roam over the crowd assembled around the bonfire. I could see several people, both men and women, were sky clad just as I was. Some of them, in the spirit of what was to come, had donned masks of their own. Even as I let my gaze slide over the people around me, I recognized about half a dozen of the men by what I could see of them.

I caught sight of Seamus Flaherty's thick cock, and the memories of last year's ceremony filled my mind.

Last year, as I watched him light the Beltane fires, sky clad like many of those around me, my stiff cock leaking drops of pre-come against my stomach, I watched Seamus cross the square. I longed to feel his massive girth buried inside my ass, to breathe in the scent of his skin. During the night, as people paired off, I was shocked when Seamus came to me, still wearing his ceremonial mask.

His blue eyes, framed by the mask, were dark pools of water as they stared into my own. I easily recognized the desire burning there. I felt my ass twitch with longing for the thickly veined cock he pointed at me.

I'd no more than taken his thick shaft into my mouth, teasing him with my tongue when I felt his stiff cock grow even harder before firing his load off down my throat, each pulse of his cock loosing jet after jet of his salty come. I willingly accepted it, relishing in the taste.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, giving me a sheepish look. "I don't normally come so quickly, but I've never had anyone suck my dick before."

"Don't be sorry," I told him as I ran my tongue over my lips. "You and I have all night to discover the things we haven't experienced."

His nervous fumbling for my cock almost made me laugh. It was quite obvious he'd never touched another man's dick before. Gently, I guided his shaking hand to my cock, showing him how to peel back the foreskin to expose my cock head. He stared, fascinated, by the drops of pre-come oozing from the slit, staring at them as they gleamed in the moonlight shining through the trees above us.

I closed my eyes, letting my head roll back as he tentatively tasted one of the drops, his tongue touching my cock with a feather light caress. He tried his best to mimic my earlier attention to his cock, but just couldn't take much of my shaft into his mouth. Before I could say anything to him, he wrapped his fist around my shaft, stroking the base of my cock while his head bobbed up and down, his lips sliding my foreskin back and forth over the swollen head of my cock. I looked down at him where he lay nestled between my knees, his head buried in my crotch. I wanted this to last, but I could feel the familiar tightening in my balls as I prepared to blast my own load into Seamus' warm mouth.

"Slow down," I managed to gasp. "I'm going to come."

Still holding my cock in his mouth, he teased the sensitive underside of my cock head with his tongue, looking up at me with a devilish gleam in his eye. I knew I

couldn't hold back any longer, and with a loud cry I fired my load of come into his mouth. I could see by the look in his eyes the load I sprayed into his mouth took him by surprise. I've got to admit, I was a little surprised at the size of the load myself. As I looked down at him, I saw the dribbles of my come leak out of his mouth and slide down my slowly deflating dick.

I sat up, pulling his face up to my own. I could taste myself on his tongue as I kissed him, my tongue dancing across his teeth, lightly caressing the contours of his mouth. I wrapped my arms around his chest, crushing him against my own. I let my hands caress his broad, well-muscled back, easing them up to bury them in his long, red-blond hair. He moaned into my mouth as I gently ran my fingernails over his scalp, tenderly grasping a handful of it, giving it a slight tug.

Reluctantly letting go of his mouth, I stood, pulling him up with me.

"Where are we going?" he asked me.

"Seamus, this night has just begun. Just follow me."

Neither of us spoke again as I led him by the hand out of the copse, through the empty village, and out into one of the moonlit fields lying fallow, just waiting for the farmers to plant their crops. This night, though, they were solely the sites of the wanton abandon Beltane always entails.

Gasps and moans of pleasure floated to our ears on the still night air. Once, we stopped to watch my master and his lover for the night. As we stood there, Seamus' hand resting lightly on the cleft of my ass cheeks, his fingers brushing across my puckered hole. I'm sure he would have never done it if he knew we were watching his father, Sean Flaherty, eagerly swallow my master's curving prick into his willing mouth.

I looked over at Seamus, letting my gaze slide down his body. His broad chest, burnished a deep brown from the time he spent out working in the fields, was a smooth contrast to my own lightly furred chest. Light dustings of hair lead down from his navel to join the mass of light brown hair surrounding his dick. As I watched, his cock began to lengthen, the pink tip of it deepening as blood began to fill it again. I looked back up at his face, quirking one eyebrow at him.

He gave me a sly wink and a knowing smile. His growing cock giving mute evidence what we were watching turned him on. I glanced back at the two men in the field, lost to the pleasure rushing through their bodies. With a feather light touch, I stroked his inflating cock, teasing him back to his earlier stiffness. He closed his eyes, running his tongue over his lips, moaning deep in his throat at my touch.

I quickly led him away from where we stood, not wanting to interrupt the couple we had watched. The place I'd staked out was not far and we reached it with just a few steps. Trailing Seamus behind me, I led him into a large field, open to the night sky. The freshly plowed earth cushioned our steps as we walked to the middle of the field.

Seamus looked around, his eyes going wide. "What are we doing here?"

"We're going to make sure this land is fertile."

He gave me a slight smirk, moonlight bathing his face in a silvery light. I gazed into his eyes, almost lavender in the moonlight. I could feel the desire radiating off of him, smell

the sexual longing wafting on the night air. I wrapped my arms around him, pinning his stiff cock next to my own, which started to twitch with a life of its own.

## Chapter Three

The sight of a particularly handsome man shocked me out of my reverie. Having lived my entire life in this small village, I knew every person living in and around it by sight. In the years I'd celebrated the Beltane fires, I'd celebrated with well over half the men. Often I'd wondered what the wives of the village would think if they knew that on this night every year, I could have my choice of any of their husbands. Half the time, I had more of them vying for my attention than the women did. This man, though, was a total stranger to me. It took every ounce of self-control I possessed not to stop and stare openly at him.

His pale skin gleamed like marble in the dancing light of the torch I carried dancing over his skin to outline every muscle on his form. He, like several others, chose to honor this night by being sky clad, his smooth, pale body standing out in stark contrast to the hairy, weather browned men surrounding him. I couldn't tell who he was, but it was patently obvious he wasn't from anywhere near here. My guess was he had heard about the festivities held here and came from one of the larger cities on the coast to participate. One glance was enough for me to realize he rarely spent any time outdoors or his pale skin would be similarly burnished the deep bronze of the other men in these parts.

The light of an approaching torch dancing in the corner of my eye brought me back to my duties. Moving with a measured tread, the woman representing the Goddess was almost at the waiting pile of tinder and dried wood that would soon be a roaring bonfire. Holding her torch high over her head, she faced the assembled crowd and recited her portion of the traditional blessing.

"I am the Goddess, strong to conceive and to create, to give birth and to tend. May the lands of this village be blessed with prosperity this night." Turning away from the crowd, she threw her torch into the waiting kindling.

Moving to stand beside her, I turned to face my friends and neighbors, raising my torch over my head I spoke. "I am the God and in my passion is beauty, in my warmth is life. I offer my strength and vitality to this village." Tossing my torch into the slowly growing fire, I took the hand of the "Goddess" and together we turned to face the crowd.

"As the wand is to the earth," we said together, "so is the male to the female and the sun to our blossoming world. Joined, they bring happiness. May the God of Life give peace and prosperity to these lands. May the Goddess bring it forth!"

I looked at the people surrounding me, their faces dancing and wavering in the light coming from the growing blaze behind me. I could feel the heat from the fire on my ass, the slight warmth quickly growing to a painful heat as the dry limbs caught up. Without even thinking about it, I turned to look at the stranger I'd noticed before.

The light from the now leaping bonfire obviously started playing tricks with my eyesight, because I would have sworn I saw flames dancing in his eyes, hidden behind the mask covering the upper half of his face. I let my eyes slide down across his broad,

smooth chest. Despite the cool night air, I could clearly see the glisten of sweat on his fair skin. My fingers twitched, longing to touch those shimmering beads. As I stared at him, I watched as one of the larger ones broke loose, running down across his flat stomach, disappearing briefly in his navel before reappearing to continue trailing down his skin to the pale blonde curls at the base of his erect cock. I ran my tongue out over my suddenly dry lips as I stared in open admiration at his manhood.

I wouldn't say I was lacking when it came to dick size, having both length and girth most men around here didn't have. When hard, I could easily place both fists on top of each other, wrapped around my shaft, and still have part of it exposed. Wrapping my fist around my shaft, my thumb and middle finger barely touched, making the cock the God and Goddess had gifted me one of the most impressive ones I'd ever seen or felt.

This mystery man, however, rivaled even my own size. Rather than pointing up to his face like mine did, his proud manhood stood straight out from his body. I let my gaze caress the length, taking note of each vein as it snaked its way up his shaft. He'd skinned back the foreskin covering the tip of his cock, exposing the dark red head usually concealed beneath. I could see a crystal clear drop of pre-come slowly ooze out of the slit, sliding off the end of his shaft, gleaming in the firelight as it fell to the earth at his feet.

"Rejoice, my children! For on this night will the prosperity of your land come to pass," I intoned, my voice sounding hollow behind the horned mask of the God.

The crowd surrounding the now blazing bonfire began to disperse, some of them heading out into the fields in pairs while some trio's of various combinations of men and women headed out into others. I found myself alone in the square with the pale stranger I'd noticed earlier. The light from the roaring bonfire, sending sparks floating up into the velvet night above to mingle with the stars scattered there like chips of ice, danced across his bare flesh. I'm sure it was just a trick of the flickering firelight, but I could have sworn his eyes burned with the same orange fire.

I started to cross to him when I felt rough hands grab my waist. "You're finally mine, Devon. My beautiful Devon." Daigh's rough voice rasped into my ear as his calloused hands slid down my stomach, his fingers twining into the nest of curls at the base of my cock. I could feel my skin crawl away from his touch even as my cock deflated, shrinking away from his hands.

I shot my elbows back, forcing him away from me. I whirled to face him, anger flooding my body. I reached up and ripped the mask from my face. I wanted him to see the fury in my eyes.

"Daigh Campbell, when will you get it through your thick head I will *never* be your anything? Do you understand me?"

Looking back at it now, I can easily recognize the look he gave me, but at the time I didn't give it a second thought. His eyes went flat as he stared at me. "You say that now, Devon, but mark my words - you *will* be mine!"

"You keep telling yourself that, Daigh," I laughed. "Maybe one day you can actually get someone else to believe it." Still laughing, I turned my back to him and

walked out of the circle of light from the bonfire. Even after all these centuries, I'm still not sure where I was going when I left the square. All I know is if I didn't get away from Daigh, I'd wind up doing something I'd regret for the rest of my life.

I found myself back at the same pool where I'd bathed that morning, the moon turning the water to molten silver as it rippled over the stones. The gentle murmur of the water as it splashed over the rocks soothed my rage. I stalked around the pool, pausing from time to time to kick a pile of fallen leaves out of my way. Childish, I know, but it made me feel better. I could still feel Daigh's hands on my skin, feel his breath against my ear.

On impulse, I stepped into the pool, intent on washing away the taint of Daigh Campbell from my skin. The pool was typically cold, but this was the first time I'd decided to use it this late at night. My skin instantly broke out in goose bumps, a shiver coursing down my spine. Gritting my teeth, I kept wading through the water until I'd reached the deepest part. With the water barely halfway up my thighs, I folded my legs beneath me and sat on my heels, a gasp escaped my lips as the icy water enveloped my crotch.

I closed my eyes, letting the water surrounding me cool the flames of anger coursing through my system at Daigh's proprietary attitude. I'd never given him any encouragement, never even looked at him twice, but he still stalked my every step. I tipped my head up to stare into the night sky, trying with every ounce of my being to force Daigh Campbell and his obsession with me out of my mind.

I heard the rustle of leaves and the snap of a twig as someone approached the pool. I crept to the edge of the pool, my hands curling into fists I intended to use when I caught sight of Daigh. I was shocked to catch sight of the pale stranger I'd noticed back in the village square.

"So this is where you ran off to, Devon," he said, his voice oddly resonant.

"H-How do you know my name?"

"Don't worry about that now," he whispered, his voice somehow reaching me despite the distance between us. I looked up at him, the upper half of his face still obscured by his mask. From where I still crouched in the water, I could see the moonlight dancing through the wealth of reddish gold hair spilling across his shoulders. "I promise you, all of it will make sense when the sun rises."

He stepped into the pool, not even flinching at the temperature of the water. He kept wading through until he was right beside me. I could have sworn the water actually warmed up as he approached me.

"Who are you?" I asked, still crouched in the now warm water. "I know everyone in this village and you're not from around here."

"Oh, I've seen you, you just haven't seen me," he replied, his voice warm. Having reached my side, he knelt beside me, the upper half of his face still obscured by the mask he wore. I reached up to remove it. I wanted to see his face. He caught my hand in his own, bringing it to his lips. A shiver crept down my spine as he kissed my palm, his full lips warm on my water-cooled skin. I could feel my cock twitch at his touch. I still wasn't sure who he was, but it was quite obvious my body was eager for

the touch of his.

He ran his tongue out, lightly caressing my palm before trailing it up to my fingertips. He parted his lips and slid one finger inside his mouth. I closed my eyes, letting my head roll back between my shoulders as he licked and suckled my finger. I took my hand away from his mouth, placed it behind his head and pulled him close. I could feel the heat from his cock where it rested against my thigh, just as I'm sure he could feel mine as it rested against his. I took his mouth with my own, reveling in the softness of his full lips. He wrapped his arms around my chest, his hands caressing my shoulders. The kiss we shared was nothing short of electric. I'd kissed my fair share of men on Beltane Eve, but this man was something like I'd never experienced before.

His tongue pushed at my lips, seeking entry. I parted my lips and allowed him inside. Our tongues wrestled, tasting and caressing each other as he ran his over my teeth and palate. I pushed his tongue aside to taste his mouth, his tongue moving aside to welcome my invasion.

He released my mouth to run his tongue down across my jaw, tracing the line back to my ears. His breath was warm as he nuzzled the nape of my neck. I wrapped my arms tightly around his chest and I could feel the pounding of his heart as it fluttered beneath his well-defined chest. I could feel my own heart racing, forcing blood into my cock, which now stood fully erect, pinned between our stomachs.

"Come with me, Devon," he whispered into my ear. "This night has just begun for us. This will be a night neither of us will ever forget."

I didn't question his words, just following his lead as he took my hand and waded out of the pool. A light breeze came up, sending shivers down my spine as it blew across my bare, wet skin. My companion didn't even falter in his steps, almost as if he didn't feel the night air. I could see he was working his way back to the village square and the still burning bonfire.

I hesitated, pulling back from him. Of all the places I wanted to be tonight, in full view of anyone still in the village wasn't one of them. "Don't worry," he whispered, turning to wrap his arms around me in comfort. "No one is left in the village. The bonfire will be all ours, for this one night. Besides, can you think of a better place to honor the God and the Goddess than in front of the fire lit in their honor? You, who fulfilled your destiny as the God for this one night, deserve nothing less and I intend to see you receive your true reward."

In the back of my mind, I still worried about Daigh. What if he were to find us there? What would he do? On the heels of those questions, came the knowledge I didn't care what he saw even if he did find us. Maybe if he did catch us together he would finally realize I didn't want anything to do with him and would leave me alone. His constant attention was beginning to wear on my nerves.



## Chapter Four

The bonfire still burned, the empty square flooded with flickering light. My companion led me to a spot right beside the fire, far enough away so sparks falling from the fire couldn't burn us, but still close enough to feel the full heat coming off of it.

He eased me down to the warm earth, settling down beside me. I looked into his eyes, the flickering flames dancing in their depths. His hair seemed alive, throwing back orange and red reflections from the dancing firelight. I couldn't help myself - I had to feel the touch of his hair on my hands. I twined my hands through the red gold mane where it tumbled across his shoulders. I have since learned the caress of silk is the only thing which ever comes close to the feel of it.

He wound his fingers into my hair, his fingers caressing my scalp. No man had ever caused such sensations to send my senses reeling like he did. I pushed him down onto his back, once more unable to resist the temptation of his mouth. His lips parted, inviting my tongue to once more invade the warm, moist interior. I slid my free hand up his bare chest, marveling at the hairless expanse. I could feel each muscle where it lay barely concealed beneath his pale skin. I let my hand continue up the thick column of his throat where I could feel his pulse beat against my palm where it rested against his neck.

I drew his tongue into my mouth, allowing him to explore my own as I had explored his. The pounding of my heart filled my ears. I could feel my blood racing, my cock swelling. I slid my hand down across his chest, tracing the outline of the muscles on his stomach as I let my fingertips dance through the nexus of pale curls at the base of his shaft. I bypassed his shaft, letting my hand slide down to gently caress his heavy balls. He moaned into my mouth as I rolled them around in my hand, one finger pressing against the sensitive skin beneath them. He spread his thighs, giving me better access to his crotch. Encouraged by his actions, I let my hand slide down, my fingers searching for his puckered hole. He let go of my mouth and gasped aloud as I lightly caressed it.

I looked down at him, his eyes closed and his head thrown back, baring his throat, his lips parted as he moaned and gasped at my caress. With gentle pressure, I slipped one finger inside his ass, letting my finger lightly caress his prostate. An inarticulate cry escaped his lips at the first touch, his stiff cock twitching and another burst of pre-come erupting from the tip. I stared at the clear drop as it slid down his shaft to settle into the mass of reddish hair at the base. I could see it glisten where it lay, as well as many other drops had leaked from his weeping dick making his curls sparkle much like the stars above us.

I couldn't resist the sight of his weeping cock and slid my body down between his open thighs to look up at his proud cock. I took a minute to just take in the sight of it. My eyes traced one of the many veins twisting back and forth up the length before drinking in the sight of his mushroom shaped head. Already dark red with the blood engorging it, I could see the gleaming trails left behind by the drops of pre-come

leaking from his slit. As I watched, yet another drop formed, winking at me in the reflected light of the bonfire.

I dipped my head down, snaking my tongue out to lick away the drop of bitter honey he offered me. I was shocked at the taste, almost as sweet as honey with no bitterness at all. His cock was hot as it pressed against my lips. I'm sure my own aching prick was probably as hot as his. I enveloped the head of his cock in my mouth, my tongue fluttering against the sensitive underside as my lips rotated over the flared hood. He moaned in disappointment as I slid my finger out of his ass. I looked up across his stomach and chest to see him watching me as I continued to let my head bob up and down on the end of his shaft. As I slipped two fingers inside his puckered hole, his head rolled back and a moan of delight escaped his parted lips. As my fingertips brushed across his prostate, I could taste another surge of his sweet pre-come leak from his cock head. I let it trickle out between my lips to let them slide easier down his shaft. I could feel the thick veins on his shaft as they slid past my lips as I eased my mouth down to the mass of curls at the base of his prick. I nuzzled his pubic hair, feeling his cock where it was buried in my throat vibrate with the moan of delight coming from my throat.

I parted my lips and inhaled as I let my mouth glide back up to the head of his prick. I knew the contrast of the cool air on his warm shaft would soon have him reeling. I left my lips parted and exhaled as I slid my mouth back down to the base of his cock. I continued alternating the cool air of an inhalation with the warmth of my exhalation until I could feel his already hard cock grow even harder. I clamped my lips around the base of his shaft as he cried out and the first of a dozen spasms rocked his cock as it shot jet after jet of his seed into my throat. I continued lightly massaging his prostate as I swallowed every drop of his come. My mind spun at the size of the load as well as the total lack of salty taste. I'd never experienced anything like this before and I didn't want it to end.

I finally let his now limp cock slide from between my lips. I slid my body back up his and once more took his mouth with my own, letting him taste his come on my tongue. He took over, easing me down onto the packed dirt of the village square and pinned me beneath his body. Far from feeling confined, I felt comforted, almost as if nothing could harm me as long as I stayed within the sheltering warmth of his body. He shifted his body, easing his legs between my thighs, forcing them wider. He let his tongue slide from my lips to trail down across my neck and down to my chest. I could feel the touch of his tongue as he began to circle one nipple, his fingers mirroring the movement on the other. His teeth lightly nipped at the hard node where it peeked out of the light dusting of hair on my chest. He squeezed and pulled at one nipple while he gently nibbled and suckled at the other. I soon lost myself to the sensations racing through my body.

He left a trail of kisses on my stomach as he traced the light dusting of hair trailing across my stomach to join the nest of wiry curls at the base of my achingly hard cock. His supple fingers eased into the cleft of my ass and lightly touched the puckered hole buried between them. Just as he'd done, I gasped and moaned as his fingers gently

pushed inside to stroke my prostate. He continued stroking my prostate as the warmth of his mouth encased the head of my cock. He fluttered his tongue against the back of my head, mimicking every move I'd done on him. I was disappointed when he slid his fingers out of my ass, only to be shocked when I felt the warmth from his mouth replace it. He licked and probed my puckered hole while he squeezed and stroked my cock. I could feel the moisture from his tongue as it coated my hole. He blew across the moistened skin and I shivered at the feel.

He rose up to his knees and I looked into his eyes, once more catching sight of the flickering bonfire reflected in their depths. I reached up to caress his bare chest, marveling again at the hairless skin beneath my fingers. I flicked my thumbs across the tight buds of his nipples and gently pinched them. He bit his bottom lip, his teeth even and white. He reached down and lifted my calves to his shoulders and I felt the head of his cock seek entry as it pressed against my slick hole.

"Take me," I whispered. "I'm yours, this night and any other night you want for as long as we both live."

"Do you do this willingly?" he asked me, his voice deep and resonant. "You must submit to this of your own will."

It was a strange question, but I was too lost to the sensations coursing through my body to question him. "On this night, or any other, I submit to you of my own free will."

He reached up and removed the mask covering the upper half of his face. I only caught sight of it for a split second before I felt his cock slide into my body. In the years I'd celebrated the Beltane bonfire with the men of this tiny village, I'd never experienced such sensations. I knew from my attention to his dick earlier how massive he was. But, strangely enough, there was no pain at his intrusion. I felt him rock his hips, causing his shaft to brush against my prostate and it took every ounce of self-control not to come all over my chest at that moment.

I felt his wiry nest of curls nestle against my balls as he reached full penetration. He paused, his cock buried to the root on my willing ass. With an agonizing slowness, he slid his shaft out, leaving just the tip of his head inside me. I felt empty, as if part of my soul were leaking out with his retreating shaft. Before I could think too much about it, he slammed back into me, once more filling me with his cock.

Alternating between quick, shallow strokes and the long slow ones, he continued fucking me, bringing me closer and closer to the edge of ecstasy. I looked up at him, his sweaty hair clung to his forehead, his chest glittering with beads of sweat. As I looked up at him, I watched a bead of sweat fall from the end of his nose only to land on the head of my cock where it mingled with the clear drops of pre-come weeping from the head.

He settled down onto the soles of his feet and continued thrusting into me as he wrapped his fist around my cock. He slid my foreskin back, exposing the deep red head of my cock buried inside. His thumb teased the sensitive underside as he started stroking my cock in unison with his cock thrusting into my ass. I felt my balls rise close to the base of my shaft as they prepared to loose their load when I saw hands wrap

around my lover's neck.

He let out a yelp of surprise as Daigh forcibly yanked him away from me. I watched, frozen in place, as his body flew across the square to land in a heap beside my master's front door. Daigh turned back to me, his eyes blazing with rage as he approached me.

"You bastard," he growled. "You turn me down for this stranger? When you could have the most available man in the village? Who do you think you are?"

He kicked me in the ribs. I felt the air rush out of them and the pain of his kick rushing in. He reached down and jerked me to my feet, his hands bruising the skin on my arms. He drew his fist back, and I watched, helplessly as it rushed to my face. I felt the impact as his ham sized fist slammed into my mouth. I could taste blood and knew he'd loosened, if not knocked out, several teeth. He gibbered like a mad man, continuing to rain blows down on my bare skin. He knocked me to the ground, stomping on my arm. Pain rocketed into my brain as I both heard and felt the bones snap. He drew his foot back, ready to kick me again and I rolled away from him and stumbled to my feet.

My breathing ragged, my left arm hung useless at my side, the fingers curled into a claw. I spat blood and wiped my mouth with the back of my useful hand. "Do you think this is going to change my opinion of you, Daigh? Why can't you realize I will *never* be with you? I'd rather die first!"

"If that's the way you want it, Devon, that's the way you will have it!" He rushed me, quicker than I realized he could be. I realized too late what he planned to do. Lifting me over his head, he staggered to the bonfire. The time he'd spent hammering at his forge, combined with the rage flooding his system gave him a strength I didn't think a human being could have.

"This is your last chance, Devon. Will you be mine and only mine?"

"I'd sooner burn in the flames of that bonfire!"

"So be it then. If I cannot have you for my own, no one ever will," he growled, hatred filling his eyes as he threw me into the roaring bonfire.

## Chapter Five

The screams of pain ripped from my throat were quickly drowned out by the roar and crackle of the bonfire burning around me. To this day, I don't think there are words to fully describe the pain someone feels when being burned alive. Flames licked up my thighs, arms and chest, the stench of burning hair and skin in my nose. I could feel my skin tighten and crack open to add even more pain to what was already threatening to overwhelm me. Somehow I found the strength to stagger out of the fire only to fall into a smoking heap no one would recognize as human. The stubs of my fingers clutched at the packed earth of the village square, seeking some coolness to alleviate my scorched flesh. The reek of my body smelled like one of the mutttons my master would have me cook for him, yet one I would never fully be able to forget.

"My God, my Goddess, please help me," I managed to whisper in a voice cracking with agony. "I beg of you, help me!"

Every inch of my body screamed in agony, the stench of burning flesh and bone flooding my nose. I couldn't stop the writhing of my scorched body, each slight movement sending even more agonizing pain shooting through me.

I managed to open my eyes, the light from the bonfire flickering over the packed ground. I could see the fire still burning out of the corner of my eye. It must have been a trick of the dancing light, but I could have sworn I could see two forms standing inside the flickering flames. Even as I denied the evidence before me, two glowing figures stepped out of the fire. The God, his glorious green robes billowing around him, the horns of a stag rising above his head stood next to the Goddess, her blinding white robes skimming the packed earth, a headdress of stars slowly rotating over her head. They knelt over me, four hands gently easing the pain of my blackened skin.

"Be at peace, my son," She told me as She caressed my brow.

"We have heard your plea," He said, His hands gently easing my agony. "And We have come to answer it."

"Yes, my child," She whispered. "But there is a price that must be paid."

My companion crawled between us, blocking them from my view. "You can't ask it of him. It is too much for a human to bear."

The Goddess stood, anger flashing in her eyes. "You would presume to tell Us what We should or should not do? Do not forget who it was that gave you this form! We can just as easily take it away from you."

"I am truly sorry, my Goddess," he said, bowing his head before Her. "I spoke in haste and would never presume to tell either of you what to do."

"Relax, my love," the God said, placing His hand on Her shoulder. "He only speaks the truth. Maybe it *is* too much to ask of Our child. Would it not be better to let him cross into the Summerland? To join his ancestors?"

"Should we let him make the choice?" She asked, looking into His eyes. "He has given so much to Our service already. Do We really ask more of him?"

My companion turned and cradled my head in his lap. I could see tears in his

eyes as he stared at me. Even as I stared at him, I could see the tears flow down his cheeks only to fall onto my face. The glowing forms of the God and Goddess circled us and knelt beside me. My lover looked up at them, determination in his eyes. "I will choose for him. I will give this life you have given me to save his. For as long as I have loved him, I would do it even if it weren't needed, I would give up my life, so he might continue to serve you both."

The Goddess looked down at me, the light from the stars circling her head setting sparks in her eyes. Her voice was tender as she spoke. "My child, would you take this sacrifice? Knowing what comes with it?"

"You have asked for our help," the God whispered. "We may help, but it will come at a price. Do you willingly accept this?"

My body was screaming in agony. I could feel my skin drawing tight, the stench of scorched bone and flesh making my stomach clench. "Y...yes," I managed to croak.

Their gaze left my face and turned to my lover. "You realize what will happen to him, don't you?" the God asked.

"You will explain to him what we have done for him? As well as the repercussions?" the Goddess said.

"Yes," he answered. "I will tell him everything. I just regret it had to happen this way."

"I know, my child," the Goddess whispered to him. "We regret it probably as much as you do." She looked back down at me and placed her hand on my forehead. "We have heard your plea, my son. You have served Us well. Be at peace."

The glowing aura surrounding both the God and the Goddess flared, the brightness of the combined light almost blinding me. When I opened my eyes again, they were both gone. I looked up into the eyes of my lover, his face haggard and his eyes filled with tears.

"Come, my love," he whispered as he lifted my scorched body from the ground. He stood and turned away from the bonfire. His lips once more found my own, and I felt a strange sensation flood my body. Rather than the searing pain I felt when Daigh first threw me into the flames, all I could feel were the feather light touches of my lover's hands.

He carried me through the woods until we were back at the clear pool where we'd met earlier. With the care a mother would take with an infant, he lay me down onto a bed of fallen leaves, the scent of earth flooded my nose. He knelt above me, an unreadable look in his eyes before his body covered mine. I could feel his passion as clearly as I could feel the slowly inflating cock as it throbbed back to life. I raised my arms to wrap them around his neck and froze. The blackened skin of my arms was gone, my skin looking just as it did before Daigh threw me into the fire.

"How is this possible?" I asked.

"Shh...all of it will make sense in the morning," he whispered.

His mouth once more pressing onto mine stopped any other words I tried to say. All too soon, I was lost to the pleasure coursing through my body as he turned his attention to my now clear skin. Gone was the searing pain I'd felt earlier. All I could

feel, aside from his lips as they latched once more onto my nipple, was the sun warmed earth on my bare back and ass as the rippling of the small waterfall filled the silence around us.

I could feel my cock begin to throb as blood raced to fill it. His tongue trailed down across my stomach as he positioned his body between my thighs. He bypassed my cock and drew both of my balls into his mouth. He rolled them around with his tongue as he slid two fingers between my cheeks and teased my hole. I writhed and moaned loudly when he slipped them both inside me, his strong fingers unerringly finding my prostate once more. It took every ounce of self-control I had not to come as he stroked it.

He released my balls and looked up at me, his eyes filled with the twinkling starlight above us. I whined as I felt his fingers slide out of me, but he just laughed at me. He grabbed my hips and pulled me onto his lap. I felt his weeping cock glide between my cheeks and settle against my puckered hole. I tried to push down, to impale myself onto his throbbing cock, but his strong hands held me back.

"There will be time enough for that, my love," he told me.

"I want to feel you inside me," I told him.

"And you will, but only when the time is right," he replied, his tone cryptic.

Any other questions I had were soon lost as he returned to kissing my chest, his warm mouth homing in on one nipple as his long, supple fingers pinched and teased the nipple his teeth and tongue weren't teasing. I threaded my fingers into his hair and pressed his head into my chest, urging him on. He pulled me closer into his body, pinning my cock between us. I ground my cock against his stomach, moaning into his mouth as I explored the folds and ridges inside with my tongue. He slipped one hand between us and wrapped it around my cock. His free hand slid up between my shoulder blades as he slowly stroked my cock with his fist.

He trailed his hand back down my spine, his finger nails gently scratching at my skin. I could feel my skin rise with goose bumps as he slid his nails down to the cleft in my ass. He turned his hand and slid his fingers between my cheeks, once more teasing my hole.

I reached back and grabbed his cock, my fingers sliding up and down his shaft in the pre-come trailing down it. I pushed away from him and guided the head of his shaft to my pucker. I didn't give him a chance to deny me what I craved as I literally sat down onto his cock. I welcomed his massive cock as it invaded my willing body. I could feel the wiry nest of curls at the base of his shaft tickle the skin of my balls as I rested for a minute, just savoring the feel of his cock inside me.

I looked down at his upturned face, his amber eyes burning with passion. He kept his cock buried inside me as he settled me down onto my back. I pinned him in place with my thighs, overlapping my ankles where they stuck out behind him.

With an agonizing slowness, he slid his cock out of me. I could feel every ripple of the thick veins snaking up his shaft as it slid out of my ass. He left just the head of his cock inside me, teasing me with it as he thrust into me with short, quick strokes. He kept me off balance, never settling into a rhythm I could try and match, alternating

those short quick strokes with deep thrusts. When he was buried dick deep inside me, he would grind his hips and I could feel his cock writhe around inside my ass, occasionally brushing against my prostate.

His supple fingers encased my cock, rolling my foreskin up and down to alternately encase and reveal the swollen head of my weeping cock. He matched the strokes of his hand with the thrusts of his hips. I could feel my orgasm building, edging closer and closer with every stroke and thrust.

"I want to see you come," he whispered, his voice thick with passion. "I want to feel your ass clench my cock as you shoot. Come for me, my love."

He stroked my cock faster and I knew the point of no return was coming quicker than I wanted it too. I felt my balls pull in close to the base of my shaft, on the heels of the sensation came the exquisite pain that flooded my body. I could feel jet after jet of my seed erupt from my cock. I felt my ass clamp down onto his cock with each spasm of my erupting prick.

An inarticulate cry shot from his mouth as I could feel his thick cock get even thicker as he shot jet after jet into my ass. I welcomed the come he pumped into my body, desperately wishing there was some way I could keep him encased in my body. I'd never felt so complete.

He lay down on top of me, pinning me to the ground. I could feel his heart pounding in his chest. I knew my own heart was racing as fast as his. Before I could complain about his weight pressing down on me, he rolled off to my side, pulling my head onto his chest. I lay there, his heart beating beneath my ear, and sleep overcame me.



## Chapter Six

As sunrise drew closer, a chilly breeze came up, rustling the leaves surrounding us. As I stretched and sat up, I glanced up at the sky. To my right, through the trees, I could see the horizon where the sun stained the sky. Overhead, the stars began to pale in the light from the rising sun. To my left the inky blue-black of the night sky still reigned. As I stared at the sky as it slowly grew lighter, the silvery trail of a shooting star sliced through the sky.

My lover stirred in his sleep beside me. I rested my head back on his chest, the gentle throb of his heart soothing me. I wrapped my legs around one of his, my knee resting in the hollow of his crotch. I draped my chest across his, letting my fingers dance across his stomach. I marveled at the sensation of the muscles barely concealed beneath his skin. The dark areola surrounding his nipples stood out in stark contrast to his pale, almost ivory, skin. I let my fingers glide over his smooth skin as they headed to one of them. As I watched, it tightened and stood erect when I gently stroked my fingers across it. I could hear the change in his heartbeat as I continued squeezing and gently pulling at his nipple.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw his limp cock twitch. I turned my head and snaked my tongue out, unable to resist the temptation of the nipple so close to my mouth. I let my fingers continue to pinch and tug at one nipple while I circled my tongue around the other, spiraling in to the hard nub nestled in the center of the dark ring of flesh. I felt the change in texture on my tongue when it reached the areola. He moaned, deep in his throat as he rolled his head.

I felt encouraged by his reaction and double my efforts. I kept my eyes open and watched, entranced, as his cock continued to grow. As I nibbled and sucked on his nipple, his cock grew harder. I could see the ropy veins on his shaft throb with each beat of his heart. His short foreskin left the tip of his cock head exposed. I stared at it as it darkened from a fleshy pink to a dark red.

"Is this how you always wake up your lover?" he murmured. I could hear him as I felt the vibrations in his chest transfer to my chin.

I rolled on top of him, his cock pinned against my stomach and leaned in to kiss him. He wrapped his arms around me, one hand sliding up to twine his fingers into my hair as the other slid down to cup the curve of my ass. He drew my tongue into his mouth where I explored every ridge and fold of his palate. I moaned into his mouth as his fingers slid between the cleft in my ass to caress the pucker hidden between them. I felt my cock twitch to life as blood rushed to fill it.

He rolled me over onto my side and slid his knee between my thighs. I ground my hips against his leg. Wave after wave of pleasure coursed through me as the sensitive underside of my cock rubbed against his thigh. We stayed joined at the lips, my exhalations filled his lungs. The very air around almost crackled with the intensity of his passion.

"Devon...wait," he panted. "There's something I have to tell you."

"Tell me later. I want to feel you inside me again."

He pushed me away, his gaze intent as he stared into my eyes. I could tell from his look there was no way—no matter how hard I tried—I could get him to make love to me one more time. He sat up and drew his knees up to his chest. I could tell by the way he sat whatever it was he wanted to tell me was something I didn't want to hear.

"Look, I think I know what you're going to tell me," I said as I mirrored his pose, my legs rested against his ribs as I rested my torso against his legs. "You're married. You're not the first married man who has spent Beltane with me, and I'm sure you won't be the last. Don't worry, what happens on this night stays between us. I promise."

"It's a little more complicated than you think it is, my love. I don't have much time and you've got to know this before I have to leave."

"Leave? What do you mean leave? Where are you going?"

"I'll explain, just be patient."

He looked up at the sky and sighed before he started to speak again. "You've got to let me tell this all the way through without stopping. I know part of it won't make much sense, but you've just got to trust me."

"Okay, I'll keep my mouth shut. Just tell me, what's so important?"

His voice was barely above a whisper as he started to speak. "I've loved you from the first time I saw you at the Beltane fire three years ago. You were so glorious with the light from the flames dancing across your skin. Instantly I knew I would give anything to spend the rest of my life with you." He turned to face me and I was shocked to see tears in his eyes. "But now, because of an idiotic blacksmith, all of it's gone. You must understand. This body—the one which has given you so much pleasure—isn't the one I was born with. I begged the God and Goddess to grant it to me so I might live my life with you. I can't tell you the number of times I stood before them and pleaded for a human body. Finally, after years of begging they granted my wish."

He chuckled then. "They offered me clothes, but I didn't take them. I knew no one would think it strange I was sky clad. After all, everyone else would be as naked as I around the bonfire. And then you stepped out of the shadows."

He sighed, a far off look in his eye. "You were just as glorious as I remembered. But to see you in the role of the God? It was more than I could have ever asked for. The sight of your cock, bouncing against your stomach with every step you took, would have gotten me hard if I hadn't already been throbbing with desire for you. You have no idea how magnificent your body truly is, my love."

He reached out and cupped my face in his hand. I pressed my cheek into his palm and could feel the words he spoke were true. His gaze turned dark, though, as he started speaking again.

"I hid in the shadows and waited for the villagers to leave. I was just about to approach you again when the smith turned back up. I can understand his desire for you. In some ways he and I are much alike - actually in more ways than I care to admit."

"You are *nothing* like Daigh Campbell," I told him, repulsed at the very mention

of his name. As soon as his name left my lips, the memory of last night flooded back to me. "Last night...in the square...Daigh...he..." I ran my hands over my arms to prove to myself the scorched skin was gone. A ripple of fear snaked up my spine.

"Yes, Devon it really happened. You didn't dream it. He threw you into the bonfire. Do you remember what happened afterwards?"

"Did They really appear? Please tell me I dreamt it all!"

"No, my love, it really happened. And now..." he sighed deeply, "...comes the hard part. I don't have much time to tell you this, so please just hear me out." He stood and walked to the edge of the stream. The surface of the water rippled and threw back the reflection of the stars overhead. I stared at his bare back, my eyes wandering across the muscles barely concealed beneath the skin. His pale skin made him look like a ghost as he stood there. He looked up at the sky as he started to speak. "I didn't want you to find out like this. I'd much rather you never even found out in the first place. You see, when I begged the God and Goddess for this body, they didn't want to give it to me. For a creature of the Summerland to be given human form is something They've never had to face before. But, I persisted. I wouldn't give up on you."

"A creature of the Summerland? What do you mean?"

He turned back to face me. Tears streaked down his face. "I am so sorry, my love. Wherever you go, for as long as you live, please remember I did what I did out of my love for you."

I scrambled to my feet and started walking toward him. I'd taken no more than two steps when he threw his arms over his head and raised his face to the sky. A warm wind blew up out of nowhere and rustled the leaves in the clearing. I felt frozen in place. I knew, somehow, something monumental was about to happen and I didn't want to stop it.

As I stared at him, a pale nimbus of light enveloped him. Wisps of light began to spiral around him each one growing longer and brighter. My mind registered, in shock, what was happening. I sank to my knees and watched as the love of my life burst into flames before my very eyes.

## Chapter Seven

Within seconds, a roaring blaze, much like the one Daigh threw me into last night, lit up the small clearing. My stomach lurched as I saw the body of my lover reduced to ashes in seconds. As quickly as they appeared, the flames subsided. I rushed to the spot where he had stood and knelt beside a pile of ash. I felt the sting of tears fill my eyes and I let them flow down my cheeks. My hands shook as I reached out to touch the ashes.

I threw my head back and roared at the sky. "No! You can't have him! Bring him back!"

As I looked at the stars above me, two of them flared brighter with a light, which filled the small clearing. Even as I stared at them, unsure of what was really happening, they extended into shafts of light that settled on either side of me. I had to close my eyes to shield them from the incandescence. When I was able to open my eyes again, my jaw fell down in shock. Standing on either side of me were the God and Goddess, a nimbus of light around each of them.

"Fear not, my son," the God said as he placed his hand on my shoulder. "For he isn't truly dead. This is a necessary thing."

The Goddess pulled me to my feet and pulled my head down to her shoulder. "Shh...do not weep for him, my child."

"I...I don't understand," I wept. "How can he *not* be dead? I watched him burn." I brought the handful of ash up to Her face. "How can you say he's not dead with this the only thing left of him?"

Gently, She closed my fingers with the ash, and guided my hand back to the remainder. She pried my fingers open and I watched as the ash settled back to the earth. "Watch, Devon, and you will see We speak the truth. Come, it won't be much longer now."

Moving as one, they led me to a fallen tree at the edge of the clearing. The God helped her settle down with as much tenderness as if he helped her take a seat on a throne rather than a half rotted log. He looked back at me, took in the sight of my bare skin and shook his head. "You can not witness the rebirth of a *tine éan* naked. It just will not do."

*A phoenix?* I thought. *Can there really be such a thing?*

A brilliant shaft of light enveloped me and I looked down at my body to find an ankle length white linen robe wrapped around my body. The Goddess smiled up at me. "Much better, my love," she muttered to the God. "Now, young Devon, come sit beside me. It's not every day one of Our children gets to witness such an event."

Rather than sit beside her, I settled to the ground at her feet. I knew I could never be worthy of taking the God's place at her side. She rested one hand on top of my head and I felt her fingers twine into my hair.

I turned to look up at her. "I...I don't understand. A phoenix?"

The God sank down beside her and placed His hand on my shoulder. He

gestured with his chin back to the pile of ashes and whispered one word to me. "Watch."

I followed his gaze back to the pile of ash. No breeze blew, but I could see the ashes stir with an unfelt wind. When I tried to stand, both the God and Goddess held me in place.

They both placed one hand on my shoulders before they spoke. "It is time, my child," the God whispered.

Wisps of amber light snaked out of the ashes and began to spiral up to the stars. As I stared, they divided and each fragment grew brighter. The wind was still, but the ghostly lights whirled faster and faster. I rubbed my eyes to clear my vision because there was no way I could possibly be seeing what I thought I saw.

"Your eyes do not play tricks on you, my child," the Goddess said, her voice shaking with laughter.

I crawled closer to the swirling ash and peered deep into the pile. As I watched, fingers writhed up out of them. A hand followed them, with an arm close behind. My jaw fell open as I watched my lover climb out of the pile of ashes, the amber wisps of light caressing his bare skin. His mane of reddish gold hair whipped around his face, his chin tucked down against his chest, his eyes closed. The lights flared once into a brilliance rivaling the rising sun and when they faded away, he stood there again, his pale skin unmarred by the flames which had consumed him only moments before.

As his feet touched back to the bare earth, he looked up at his audience, his eyes automatically seeking mine. Tears coursed down my cheeks as I tried to get back to my feet. He crossed to me and knelt in front of me and pulled my head into his bare chest. I couldn't believe I could hear his heart beat again. I pulled away from him and stared at the God and Goddess in disbelief. "How...how is this possible?"

"Such is the nature of the *tine éan*," the God told me.

"At their appointed time to die, they burst into flames and are consumed only to be re-born from the ashes," the Goddess said. She stood and crossed to where we clutched each other and placed her hand on my lover's shoulder. "It is time for you leave this plane. Your place in the Summerland awaits you," the Goddess muttered.

"I know," he whispered. His voice was distant, hollow, like part of him was already gone. "I just wish I could have told Devon everything I've done for him." He looked at me and my heart nearly broke at the love glowing in his eyes. He wrapped his arms around me and held me close to his chest. I felt tears sting my own eyes. "Oh, my Devon! If only you knew how much I loved you."

He looked up at the Goddess. "I...I haven't told him everything. I know I promised I would, but I just can't."

"Do not worry, my child," she told him, pushing wealth of red-gold hair away from his face. "I will tell him what he needs to know. You must go now. The Summerland awaits you."

"You stay here, my love," the God told His eternal love. "Tell our child the sacrifice made for him and the unfortunate price he must pay." He pulled my lover from my arms and to his feet. The Goddess wrapped Her arms around me, the comfort

of Her presence easing the pain of my heart as it shattered into a million pieces.

I stayed within the shelter of the Goddess's arms as her consort led my lover away. A hazy fog rolled in and, as I watched, the God led my lover into it. Before he stepped into the afterlife, he turned to look back at me. It was more than I could bear. I broke free of the Goddess's grasp and ran after him, fully intent on leaving this life without him behind and taking my place at his side in the afterlife with my parents and those I loved already there. As I rushed across the clearing the fog disappeared. I fell to my knees, staring down at the only thing left of my lover. Tears streamed down my face, the sobs ripping from my throat cut through the still morning air. With trembling fingers, I traced the outline of his footprints in the soft earth and felt, once more, the comfort of the Goddess's arms wrap around me.

"Come away, my son," she whispered, her voice rich with compassion. "There is much you must learn this day, for this day is the first day of a new life for you."

"You bring him back," I yelled as I stood to face the Goddess. "I know you can do it. Please! I beg of you! Bring him back to me!"

"My child, I can not do it. He has made his choice. He gave up the life We gave him to save yours." Her face was tender as she spoke, her eyes filled with sadness.

"Fine, if you won't bring him back then take me to him! I don't want to be here if he can't be with me. What is the point of living if I can't live with him?"

"You would throw away the gift he gave you so easily?" Her eyes flashed with anger. "We gave him the life he gave up for you because of his love for you. I know you, Devon. You are not so cold hearted." Peace flooded into me as She wrapped me up in her arms. As she held me, the nimbus of light surrounding Her flared with a brightness rivaling the rising sun. The Goddess led me to the fallen tree at the edge of the clearing. She sat down and pulled me down beside her.

"He tried to tell me something, but I couldn't understand what it was."

"Yes, my son. I know, and now he has gone Home, it falls down to Me to tell you what he could not."

She turned to face me, took both of my hands between Hers and began to speak. "My child, the decision to give the *tine éan* human form was not an easy one for Us to make. What happened is exactly what We feared. When he first came to Us and spoke of his love for you, We first thought it was just a passing fancy. Yet every year on Beltane Eve, the God and I would watch him as he watched you. It soon became quite obvious his feelings went beyond a mere passing fancy, which is why We gave in to his wish and bestowed upon him his human form." She chuckled. "I wish you could have seen how fast he rushed to be by your side once he changed into his human body. We both followed him to see what your reaction would be."

I felt blood rush to my face at the memories of my activities last night.

"There is no need to feel shame, my son. What happened between the two of you was nothing but the utmost expression of love between two men. My love and I both enjoyed your actions. Unfortunately, what We did not consider were the actions of Daigh Campbell." At the mention of his name, Her face hardened and I silently thanked the heavens Her fury wasn't directed at me.

“It is because of his actions – which he will pay for – your love has crossed to the Summerlands. But, he did leave you with something. When he chose to give his life up so you might live, he gifted you with his perpetual life. Take heed to My words, My child, for every twenty years on the night of Beltane Eve you will die. But do not fear, for just as you saw your lover re-born from the ashes, so shall you live again.”

She stood and pulled me to my feet beside her. “And now, there is one more thing I must attend to before I take my leave. Lead me to the home of Daigh Campbell. He must pay for what he has done.”

## Chapter Eight

The Goddess didn't bother to knock at Daigh's door. She just gestured with her hand and it literally shattered into millions of splinters. I stayed close to her heels as she strode through the whirlwind of splinters and entered Daigh's house. A blinding nimbus of light surrounded Her as she strode about the shambled interior. As I looked around it soon became obvious Daigh wasn't here and, judging by the mess scattered around, he wasn't coming back.

Fury marred her perfect features as she strode back out to the village square and stood beside the remains of the bonfire. She knelt and drew a circle in the packed earth with her finger. "Go hide in the woods, my son," she told me. "I want you to only come out when I call for you."

I scurried to hide behind the bole of an oak tree bordering the bonfire square and peered back out to see what She had planned for Daigh. I was too far away to hear the single word She whispered, but I saw a dark funnel descend from the clear blue sky to touch the earth inside the circle in front of Her. Just as quickly, it dissipated leaving behind only a cowering Daigh Campbell trapped inside it. He looked in disbelief at the enraged face of the Goddess and groveled on the ground.

"You know why I have called you, Daigh," She told him. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"My Goddess, I beg for your mercy! It...it...it was all Devon Connell's fault. If only he'd accepted my love for him none of this would have happened!"

"So because he rejected your repeated advances gave you cause to murder him? To use My sacred fire to complete your deed? No, Daigh Campbell, rejection is no excuse! You must pay for your actions. But it shall not be Me who decides your fate, but one you know quite well."

She turned to face me, raised Her hand and beckoned me forward. I didn't want to have to face Daigh again, but I knew better than to resist. With a slow tread, I stepped out from behind the tree and slowly walked to Her side. When I reached her side, I looked at Daigh and almost hid behind the Goddess at the rage still burned in his eyes.

"What do you say, my son? What shall be his punishment?"

Rage filled me as I stared at him. I wanted him to suffer, to feel the pain he inflicted on me, to feel what it was like to have the one person you love snatched away from you. I stopped myself before the word "death" could escape my lips. No, death was too easy.

"Speak the word, and I will send him to the Summerland and he will never bother you again."

I don't know why Her words surprised me, but they did. She knew how close I came to pronouncing Daigh's death sentence. I stepped closer to the circle where Daigh knelt and looked down at him.

"I curse you, Daigh Campbell. But not with death - I curse you with eternal life.



You will live out the remainder of time alone, but not as you are. You will live out eternity as the most hated and reviled of all things in the sky." I turned my back to him and faced the Goddess. "A raven. Give him eternal life as a raven. Since he is so fond of picking at the scraps others leave behind such should be his fate."

She didn't speak to me again, she just nodded and gave me an enigmatic smile before She walked past me and approached Daigh. "Your punishment has been decided, Daigh Campbell." With no further words, she raised her hand over his head. I stared in horror as his skin began to writhe. His nose lengthened into a dark beak, his eyes slid to either side of his head and shrank down to yellow orbs. His hair appeared to slither back into his skull, the purplish-black feathers of a raven quickly taking its place. For a moment, he looked like some freakish cross between a human and a bird before he shrank down into his final form. His beak parted and a harsh caw split the air. I could see the panic in his eyes and, for an instant, regretted my decision.

The Goddess flapped her arms at him and he took flight into the sky. "Be gone with you!" She yelled and watched as he flew away.

I was shocked to realize the sun was up, just barely over the horizon. It felt like hours since I'd watched my lover die back beside the stream.

"And now, my child," the Goddess told me. "Now you must leave from here. Your time here is complete and there is nothing left for you to do."

"But...where will I go? What will I do?"

"I can not tell you. But know this, you will know what to do when the time comes. Be well, my son. Know the God and I both love you." Having given me Her benediction, the aura of white light surrounding her flared into a brightness rivaling the rising sun and She disappeared.

I felt lost and alone as I stood in the empty square, the harsh reek of the spent bonfire in my nose. I quickly returned to my master's house and padded up to my room. There was little here I wanted to take, aside from some of my clothes. I stuffed them into a sack and went back downstairs to the kitchen. I knew when my master returned and found me missing he'd be furious, but there was nothing I could do. I was acting on orders from a much stronger authority and wasn't about to question them.

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Sunset found me miles away from the only home I'd ever known. I looked out over the ocean as it pounded against the tumbled rocks at the base of the cliff. The tang of the salt water blowing into my face brought with it the indescribable scent of life from its depths. I stumbled over a hummock of grass as I walked back down to the small campsite I'd set up in the shade of a small copse of trees.

The brace of rabbits I'd spitted to roast haunted me with their aroma as I approached them where they lay spitted over the fire. The aroma of the spearmint tea wafting from the brass kettle over the iron brazier I'd "borrowed" from my master made my mouth water.

As I washed down the last of the rabbit and lay back to stare up at the stars, the

momentous events of the day crashed down onto me at once. My hands started to shake and my eyes burned with tears with the realization I'd never see the one place I called home again.

I closed my eyes and found myself swept away with memories of the lover waiting for me in the Summerlands.

**The End**