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Chapter One

Gwydion’s eyes devoured the golden apple dangling from the leafy tree as he commented aloud. “Like Seren’s hair, dazzling in the sunlight.” The image of her long, red-amber mane burned in his mind. He plucked the apple and tossed it in his hand while heading toward the salmon pond, yearning to steal another glimpse of her.

He plopped down on a moss-covered boulder along the verdant bank, as a silver salmon jumped into the air. Gwydion jerked away from the huge splash as the wise fish landed back in the water. A spicy apple scent danced in the air as he dug his teeth into the nectarous fruit. He ran his tongue across the juice that dribbled onto his lower lip. Sunlight shimmered on the clear surface as he peered into the pond. “I beckon, lucid pool, reveal the lady I desire. Vision of beauty, appear before my eyes.”

The rippling water stilled and Seren’s image broke through. Rounded over even teeth, her full curved lips captured his gaze and he craved a sip of the moist sweetness of her mouth. As he devoured the ripe fruit, his gaze clung to the curves of her body. He envisioned her unclad, bare, round breasts, a seductive belly button in the center of her taut waist, and a patch of tiny red curls between her creamy thighs. His heart raced as his erection stirred, grew hard, stretched tight.

Then, he peered at her shimmering eyes as her lashes swept across the rose-flushed cheekbones on her oval face. His gaze shifted to her white gold-speckled robe as she reached up with both hands and pulled the hood over her head. Walking with the chief of the Ordovices among the herd of pigs, she pointed out those to slaughter. As she spread her arms, draped by the flowing sleeves of her druid robe, he could tell she was reciting a sacred chant.

While Gwydion watched, he heard the footfalls of someone approaching and he turned away from the pond toward the woman now standing above him. Tall, with a luminous complexion, and thick black hair draping her shoulders to her hips, like a mantle. She parted her full lips, stained with lush elderberry juice.

“Happy Samhain, Gwydion.” She had a wicked gleam in her eyes. “Do you plan a tryst with anyone special this feast day?”

“Happy New Year to you as well, Arianrhod, and no, I am going to earth to drink and dance with the mortals for some harmless fun.”

Strolling to the edge of the pool, she glanced at Seren’s reflection. “She’s pretty.”

“She is, isn’t she?” Gwydion didn’t care what Arianrhod thought. It was not her business who he saw or where he went. They were both gods, equal in power. He didn’t care who she spent Samhain with.

“A druidess surrounded by swine.” Arianrhod peered into the pond. “She’s performing a slaughter ritual.” The goddess pressed her finger against her cheekbone. “Do you know she is summoning, you and your brother’s pig?”

“Hydchdwy is no longer a hog. Math transformed him to human form. He’s a great champion at the god’s fortress.” Gwydion tossed the apple core to the ground. “Only you, Arianrhod, would remind me of that horrid year I lived under Math’s curse.”

“Well, what is family for?” she quipped, and then glared daggers into the pool at Seren’s image. “Still, she seems beneath you.”

“Does she?” Gwydion let out a soft chuckle. “I’d like to have her stretched out beneath me, on my pallet,” he said under his breath.

Arianrhod whipped her long black hair across her back and glided, toward the huge fortress with golden doors, four turrets and six thousand warriors guarding the walls. Gwydion shifted his gaze back to the pond and Seren.

* * * * *

The big man clad in a plaid cloak, draped over a green tunic and checkered pants, tugged on the belt at his waist, and then he tilted his neck, banded by a gleaming gold torque, to the druidess at his side. “We will keep the two breeding sows and do our best to get them through winter, which will soon be upon us.”

Seren nodded to Neithon, chief of the Ordovices, and then circled the herd of grunting pigs with their dark-pink ears and musky, rose-colored noses. She chanted, “I invoke one of three, a triad son, sprung from Gilfaethwy the wicked. Hydchdwy the tall, noble swine, great champion of Math, grant the life of these beasts to me and mine for winter meat to feed our tribe. Blessed pigs, we give thanks for your sacrifice.” Seren bowed to the squealing herd.
and left Chief Neithon and the nine warriors of Samhain to their work, while she checked on other aspects of the festival.

* * * *

Seren strolled through the bustling village to the round feasting hall. She nodded to a woman with long brown hair, garbed in a bright plaid tunic over a solid red skirt.

“Greetings, Nyfain.” After flashing a smile at the chief’s wife, she grabbed a rosy apple from a wicker basket full of fruit and dug her teeth into it. “So sweet.” She reached into a basket full of oblong, yellowish, purple-capped turnips and pulled one out to examine it closer. “Plump.” Seren continued inspecting the food for the feast. “Bless the goddess, this is the best harvest.”

Nyfain swept her gaze over the baskets of nuts, fruits and vegetables and nodded. “The land was good to us.”

Seren found all the food so ripe and tempting, she had to leave before she began to feast, now, rather than wait for tonight.

She walked with a spring in her step for Samhain had always been her favorite fire festival. Coming to a sudden stop, she pressed her hand against her forehead, her mind spun with memories, of all the good times she’d had at the feasts with her mother. At their last Samhain together, her mother’s face had beamed as she’d led the tribe in a dance around the roaring bonfire.

But seeing her mother again tonight, to feast together and celebrate this day without time, remained the best thing about this Samhain. Seren lifted her chin, excited for this eve, when the spirits of the dead walked the earth.

As she strolled back through the village toward the hill, Seren glanced at the wood frames hung with pigs’ hides to cure and dry. The nine maidens of Samhain worked hard, salting the meat and storing it away to see the tribe through the dark of winter.

Seren made her way up the hill and waited at the top for the warriors of Samhain, who each carried a bundle of one of the nine sacred woods.

Gwdderig, a lean, towering man with a red moustache and long hair, came forward. “Hail, willow of the streams.”

Seren took the willow logs and laid them on the ground as the first wood for the bonfire.

The warrior, Cynfarch came forward, cradling a pile of firewood against his blue, green, and red plaid tunic. His hair was nearly white, bleached from lime-wash and as thick and bristly as a badger’s pelt.

Seren greeted the logs. “Welcome, hazel of the rocks.” She took the bundle of wood from him and piled it on top of the rest.

Seren welcomed the other men and the logs they carried in turn, saying, “Welcome alder of the marshes, birch of the waterfalls, greetings rowan of the shade, yew of fortitude, elm of the hill, oak of the sun and sweet fir.” Then, she added each pile of wood to the fire.

After the nine warriors had made many a trek up the hill, a bonfire towered before Seren. Chief Neithon handed her a firebrand to light it. The bard of the tribe came forward with harp in hand and strummed a lilting tune as the fire roared in a bright blaze.

Seren raised her hands high, twirling and chanting. “Fire sparks, veil parts, ancestors come near, feast, dance, sing with us here. Great powers abound. Circle comes round. All hail Samhain.”

The roar of the blaze, the cheering crowd, and the magic of Samhain rushed through her like an inferno. Seren slipped off her white gold-speckled robe, which had been woven by her mother and was the last gift from her before she died. Seren longed to see her once more. She tossed the garment to one of the women to hold for her.

One of the nine maidens, Elund, beat the goatskin drum in a savage rhythm. Seren’s skin felt as hot as the fire as she moved in a swaying motion. Needing to bare her body for the gods, she danced to, she untied her hemp belt and her plaid skirt dropped to the dirt. She yanked her red tunic off and threw it down. The haunting twitter of the pipes and the ethereal tone of the harp joined the bodhran in the jubilant song of Samhain.

The nine warriors peeled off their clothes, leaving them nude, except for the swirls of blue woad tattoos embellishing their toned bodies and the gold torques, banding their necks. The men’s bare bodies, rippling with muscles, shook as they danced around the hot fire, chanting, “Willow of the streams, hazel of the rocks, alder of the marshes, birch of the waterfalls, greetings rowan of the shade, yew of fortitude, elm of the hill, oak of the sun and sweet fir.”
“Bright blessings upon you nine sacred trees for your sacrifice.” Seren sang with the warriors as she watched their long, lime-stone-bleached hair sway as they danced.

After admiring their chiseled chests, her gaze drifted to the bulging arousal bobbing between their sturdy, trunk-like legs. Seren ogled Gwydderig’s thick, hard shaft. Her eyes darted to the bounty hung between Cynfarch’s rigid, veined cock. Seren’s most sensitive spot blazed with need as her skin grew hot from the raging bonfire. The wet warmth she felt between her legs confirmed all the warriors impressed her.

The pounding drumbeat pushed her feet higher and faster as she sang. “The gods have spoken, the oak doors open. Dance, the fire sparks. Sing, the veil parts. Bones, ashes, dust transform. Spirits among us, come near, feast with us here.” Seren tingled with energy. “The circle comes round, blessings abound.”

The music stopped and Seren’s feet stilled. As she slipped her tunic, skirt and druid robe back on, she stole glimpses of the nine warriors’ bodies before they dressed.

After dancing nude with the muscled men, her senses were heightened. Since she knew Cynfarch lusted after her, she longed to pull him aside and ride him in a night of pleasure, satisfying her throbbing need. But she couldn’t think of her own desires. Seren never did. She was a druidess, duty came first.

Mustering her strength, she fought her yearnings. Samhain was for family. Ever since her mother had drifted into the deep sleep of death, Seren had anxiously awaited this eve. She headed down the winding path from the hill to the village and into the round, hay-thatched feasting hall.

“Are you enjoying Samhain?” she asked one of the nine maidens.

“Yes, Druidess. It is the best new year celebration ever.” The young woman’s freckled face beamed.

“It is, isn’t it?” Seren sighed as she envisioned sitting with the ghost of her mother and sharing the feast. “Will you gather treats for me, I am off to visit my mam’s cairn for Samhain?”

Her throat tightened. Seren’s father had died in battle with the Silures, when she was young, leaving her mother to care for her. Today, ten months after her mother’s death, she would sup with, talk to, and spend time with her again.

“We have oat cakes, druidess and fresh, juicy apples.” A maiden with long nut-brown hair handed her a wicker basket.

Seren peeked inside at the shiny red apples, crispy oat cakes, plump black pudding links, fat turnips, wild carrots, and handfuls of roasted hazelnuts.

“Druidess, tell me, do you have someone special to couple with around the bonfire this night?”

“No, I need to bring this fare to my mother.” Seren shrugged. She would like to share this night with a handsome man, but as the druidess her days were full with serving the tribe. With little time to kindle a romance, she longed for love, but mayhap it was not meant to be. “What of you?”

“Yes, I will spend the eve with Hywell. He and I shall hand-fast soon.”

“Blessings upon you. He is a good man, a brave warrior.” Seren pulled the white hood of her druid robe over her head. “I need to hasten to my mother’s cairn. Happy Samhain to you.”

“And you, Druidess, as well.” The young woman’s mouth curled up into a bright smile. “Here, for your trek into the dark woods.”

Seren took the lit torch from the freckle-faced maiden. With the basket looped through her arm and a firebrand in hand, she set out for the forest.
Chapter Two

Once she reached the edge of the wild woods, Seren breathed in the musky wildlife scent, mingled with the fresh, invigorating fragrance of evergreen firs. She concentrated on the stillness of the forest, peaceful sounds, chirping crickets and the whistling warble of a black bird composed a mellow yet catching tune. Seren loved the woods as much as her mother had. It was why she’d buried her in the lush denseness of trunks, leaves, and thick bushes. Piled the rocks and built the cairn over her mother’s dead body, next to a majestic oak, tall as a hill and wide enough for a human to hide in. The wise tree had memories that would shake the human mind. The gnarled oak, the heart of the forest, watched over the corpse, long after the woman’s spirit had sailed away on Arianrhod’s ship, Oar Wheel, across the sky to Caer Sidi to rest until she was ready to be reborn.

Seren followed the ancient trail through the thick growth of trees. Thin, leafless limbs stretched over her head. She gaped as one branch seemed to transform into a long, bony arm with lengthy fingers, reaching out to grab her in its clutches. Her heart pounded. As she lifted the torch, shining light on the branch, it appeared as normal-looking as all the other trees.

Dried brown leaves and brittle twigs crunched beneath her feet as she trudged on. The apex between her thighs felt empty and on fire, from gaping at the men’s bare bodies. She craved to be held in the sturdy arms of a warrior as he slid his hard, sinewy length into her pulsating core. The cool breeze soothed her flushed skin. It lifted a few strands of her hair, reminding her of Cynfarch’s long, warm fingers playing with her red tresses. She throbbed again.

Glancing at the basket, she breathed in the strong, meaty scent of blood pudding links, sweet honey, and fresh apples. The aroma turned her thoughts back to her mother. Her lust slacked as she ached anew for the only parent she’d known, as her father had died shortly after her birth. Soft warmth filled her at the thought of seeing her mother’s ghost tonight.

Tears threatened to fall, engulfed by the memory of her mother. The moon had waxed and waned only ten times since she’d fallen ill in winter and death had taken her.

Seren glanced at the white, gleaming orb overhead as she entered a small clearing, but the movements of the wind or small creatures in the dark, caused it to appear as if other people or creatures loomed in the shadows, hiding, watching.

Shaking from the chill wind, she swallowed hard and spoke aloud. “I come to visit my mother. If you are spirits, follow the path to the village and meet with your kith and kin. I have not come for you. Hasten to the homes of your loved ones and leave me alone.”

If they were ghosts, they would listen. She hoped. Seren didn’t have time for a spirit to take over her body on Samhain. After waiting ten turns of the moon to visit with her mother, she wouldn’t let anyone or anything stop her. The pain of her mother’s death reminded her of a minor parting when she was twelve and went to the druid center of learning for fostering, just across the Menai River to the island of Ynys Mon. She’d been horribly homesick away from her mother at that age.

Her mother had been so proud and told everyone, “See how wise my daughter is, so blessed by the gods, the druids took her to foster.”

Few were chosen, training took many years, and a druid’s ranking in the tribe placed as high as the chief’s. Seren was surprised how much older she was now, five and twenty years, still she had a need for her mother. The loss was deep. It had left a hole in her. Warmth and joy would return to her heart tonight when she celebrated her favorite feast day, Samhain, the New Year, with her departed mother.

Just moments ago she’d heard the call of an owl, the chirp of a bird, and the whistling wind, but the forest had grown so quiet she could hear the crackle of dried leaves and the rustle of her elbow brushing across a bush.

As she walked, she glimpsed a creature passing like a black shadow between the spooky trees. It crept in stealth like part of the darkness itself. A shiver shot through her. But the mysterious being didn’t make a sound and seemed uninterested in her. Seren held the torch out as she turned around, searching for anything there. She saw nothing.

Seren kept to the narrow path as she walked deeper into the forest. She’d sensed something. Mayhap a spirit, they came to earth tonight, but she knew it wasn’t her mother’s ghost, she’d recognize her.

There was no turning back. Whatever it was, she would make peace with it. Seren had to bring the Samhain meal to her mother and honor her, yet she couldn’t shake the odd feeling someone was watching her.

Holding the torch high, she chanted. “The torch is burning, the year is turning, by this light, I greet the spirits of
Samhain night.” Seren called out. “Who is there? Be you sprit or man?”

No one answered and she picked up her pace down the dirt path through the thick forest, so dense with trees. Brandishing the burning torch like a bright weapon, she hurried on shaky legs toward the cairn. She gasped, when she nearly tripped over a large fallen branch, but caught her footing just in time.

Out of the corner of her eye, she glimpsed the shadow again. Something was following her. To muster her strength, she took a deep breath. An icy chill crept into her chest. Sensing something behind her, she spun around, but no one, nothing, was there. With a tight grip on the torch, she shifted her shoulders back, tilted her chin up and walked on toward the cairn.

“I am a powerful druid with naught to fear from anything in this forest. It’s Samhain, my favorite holiday and I’m carrying a fine feast prepared by the nine maidens, to share with my dear mother,” Seren said aloud. “Hear me, spirits, trouble me and you shall regret it. I shall call upon the gods and have you tossed back into the otherworld.”

From the eerie silence of the forest, a haunting howl ripped through the air. She stopped in her tracks. It sounded too close. A wolf hunting. There was better game than her. Knowing there was nothing for her to be afraid of, she remained brave, yet her body trembled. With her next steps, she kept her footfalls as light as possible, walking stealthily on the path, to not draw the beast’s attention.

When she came upon the clearing, she held the torch out and gazed at the large, smooth stones, piled one on top of the other. Her mother’s cairn lay in a pool of dried leaves. Her throat tightened and she swallowed back a sob as she moved closer. She couldn’t breathe. Heat radiated from the grave as if her mother stood there. Seren bore a hard stare at the stones as if to call forth the image of the tall woman, with a compelling oval face framed by shoulder-length brown hair.

“Mam…” Her voice choked. “I have brought a basket of Samhain treats.”

Though her mother didn’t appear, she knew she soon would. Her body quivered, not from fear but from joy bubbling in her. She shone the firebrand on an old oak stump in front of the cairn and plopped down on it. Seren stabbed the end of the torch into the ground, so she had light. Facing the cairn, she called out to her mother’s spirit.

“We have a lovely feast.” Seren pulled out a large red apple. She stood, stepped forward, and stooped down to set it on the pile of stones.

When she straightened, she gasped. There, by the oak, facing her, with naught between her and it, but the cairn, loomed a white wolf with pink-tipped ears.

Seren stood transfixed. Her heart hammered at the look of hunger in his amber eyes, glowing like a Samhain fire. Fighting her fear, she remembered her druid training, her knowledge of wolf lore. In a soft, soothing tone, she spoke. “Wolf, we live in peace, you and I and your kind and mine. On this eve of Samhain, it is best you stay with your pack. For those who appear human, this eve, may not be.”

She smiled and he seemed to grin back, but the flash of his white, jagged teeth roused her fears even more. She didn’t want those fangs sinking into her flesh. She took a deep breath. “Do not chew on me, there is better meat for you in the deep dark woods.” His pink tongue, hanging from his huge mouth captured her gaze.

As the beast jerked his neck back and howled, the haunting sound reverberated in the air.

Slow and quiet so the wolf wouldn’t become alarmed, she took one step back. He wiggled his nose as if smelling her. Seren shivered as she gazed at his long snout. The looming wolf took one step closer.

She could not outrun him. If she managed to trick him and get away long enough to hide, he would sniff her out.

“Wolf, look what I have for you.” Pulling out a black pudding link, she tossed it toward him. It landed in a patch of grass at his side. “Food.” She smiled. “Eat your food, wolf. It is good.”

The white wolf never turned its head. With his gaze fixed on Seren, he stared hungrily, as if he thought of her as a delicious treat.

Seren blinked and wondered if it was all the tall trees amid the darkness and the shadows in the night that caused the beast to appear as if his form shifted. She clutched her chest. Her heartbeat quickened as the wolf’s fur and muscles twisted. The beast’s body emitted sounds like the creaking of joints but much louder. Watching the wolf’s body expand while other features contracted made her stomach lurch. She slid her hand from her chest to her belly.

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A voice in her head told her what she saw couldn’t be real. She blinked, yet still the wolf changed before her eyes, his gorgeous white pelt shortened until it transformed into bronze-tinted skin.
A tall man with cascading golden hair and eyes the gray-blue of a stormy, summer sky stood nude before her. Seren blinked again. The man fluttered his hands in front of his body and suddenly he was clothed in an opened white, gold-speckled druid robe and plaid pants covered his trunk-like legs. Heat emanated from him. She gawked at the lush bronze skin of his bare, muscular chest beneath his robe. “Druid robe...shape shifted from wolf to...” As realization dawned, she dropped to her knees. “God Gwydion, it is you?”

“Rise.” With a flutter of his fingers, he gestured for her to stand. “Druidess Seren, bewitched by your charms, I had to follow you to your mother’s cairn.”

Her flesh prickled. “God, what say you, why have you come?”

As his gaze roamed over her body, his eyes gleamed with a sensuous fire. “For you.”

Seren’s heart thundered. “Why have you appeared to me, only, and not the tribe?”

He flashed a white-toothed grin, sending a surge of heat spiraling through her.

In his deep, smooth voice he said, “the tribe does not interest me as much as you do.”

Her breath caught in her throat, but she managed to rasp, “Why?”

Standing before the tall, muscular god, she had an overpowering desire to strip off her clothes. Fiery heat rose from his flesh. She yanked back the hood of her robe and slipped it off, tossing it atop her mother’s cairn. Yet her skin still burned like a Samhain bonfire roared inside her. An actual god, Gwydion, the deity of druids and magic had come for her. Her body went limp, woozy.

Seren longed for Gwydion to draw her to him and crush her breasts against the hard muscled wall of his physique. Her fingers itched to glide down the sprinkling of soft blond whorls on his chest. She wasn’t a fool, she knew the god had come for a tryst only. She could never hand-fast with him. But they could couple around the bonfire and she lied to herself that it would be enough.

As a druidess, she kept the balance and knew she had to embrace what was, rather than yearn for that which could never be. He would never see her as more than a mortal woman he’d come to tryst with for Samhain.

Seren raised her gaze to his face, fascinated by the long, golden moustache framing his parted lips. Shivers of desire raced through her as she imagined his sultry mouth covering hers in a savage kiss. She longed to watch his wet lips part to rasp her name and utter wild groans in the height of love play.

He took a step closer and fluttered his strong fingers in front of his chest again, and this time his clothing vanished and he stood nude before her.

She stepped back, shocked. “God, why did you take your clothes off?”

“No that we know each other, I thought you would prefer to see me bare. Most women enjoy the view.”

Her gaze roamed up and down his chiseled body and then locked onto his loins. She gaped at the plentiful length of his stiff rod. She licked her lower lip. The moist place between her legs throbbed.

“This can’t be happening.” Her gaze drifted to her mother’s cairn. She stepped up to the grave and looked down at the stones. “No, I cannot do this. Not now.” She turned toward him. “I have not come here, this eve, for love play. You are tempting, but it is Samhain. I have come to visit and sup with my mother.”

“She is not here.”

“Yet, she will come. It is the day between time when spirits cross the veil so easily. And I do miss her.”

“I can bring her here.”

“Do you mean to summon her from the otherworld?”

“My sister, Arianrhod assists mortals in transitioning from life, to death, to rebirth. Just as she sailed your mother to the otherworld on her ship, Oar Wheel, she can bring her here to spend Samhain with you.”

“I would love nothing more, yet I cannot be selfish. Mam may be busy, she may even have chosen rebirth.” As her gaze dropped from his face to his broad chest and then slid to his erect shaft, the smoldering fire in her, blazed to a red-hot heat. Knowing she had to resist this urgent yearning, she turned away. She’d come here to see her mother. “Gwydion, conjure your clothes. Please, dress.”

“If you insist.” With a flick of his hand, his clothes appeared again. “Arianrhod can help you. She will know if your mother has been reborn or has some quest or duty that would keep her from you this Samhain.”

Seren set the basket on the cairn. “Then, call upon the goddess so I may see my dear mother.”
“An offering must be given first.”
“Do you mean to the goddess Arianrhod?”
“No, for me, I ask for a kiss.”
“A kiss I can give, Gwydion.” She viewed his full lips curving into a wide, captivating smile. It was getting harder to put her mother first. The pull she felt toward him, the throbbing attraction for him grew stronger.

He moved closer and wrapped his warm, muscular arms around her, leaned down, and ran his tongue across her upper lip.

A shiver of heat shot through her as his warm lips engulfed hers. With a subtle to and fro thrust of his lips, the kiss was more of a massage than a caress. His lips burned into hers. Gwydion forced her mouth open with a thrust of his hot, wet tongue and flicked it in and out. The pressure of her urgent need coiled in her. When his lips eased off hers, Gwydion panted and his face beamed with a red flush.

His mouth swooped to her ear. Delicious sensation engulfed her as his teeth grazed her earlobe. He blew a puff of hot air into her ear. Seren let out a soft moan. She quivered as his wet mouth blazed a path to her neck. The sensitive skin of her nape tingled.

“What a beautiful torque,” he rasped.

Seren touched the thick, open-ended gold band ringing her neck. “It belonged to my mother.” She’d almost forgotten about her. “Can the goddess summon her now?”

Raising his mouth from her neck, his blue gaze met hers. “Arianrhod will bring forth your mother and after you visit with her, I can be alone with you. I must have you and I will, afore the Samhain moon sets. I am off to tell Arianrhod about this, but I will return soon.”

“Hurry back, “she said in a breathy voice that changed to a more matter-of-fact tone as she added, “and bring Mam with you.”

Seren’s breath caught in her throat while she watched Gwydion spread his arms out and soar into the sky. Flying so high she could no longer see him, he passed through the portal of the dark atmosphere, sprinkled with glistening stars. She knew she should be thinking about her mother, but instead her thoughts were full of Gwydion. Imagining his hot body lying over hers, she wondered what it would be like if they could have more, if he would stay around after Samhain, but she knew that wouldn’t happen.
Chapter Three

When Gwydion landed on the island in the sky, the star Caer Sidi, he shifted his stance to catch his balance, for the star turned as if built upon a giant potter’s wheel.

He darted through the outer yard, past rows of leafy trees with spreading branches, weighted down with gold apples. The sweet scent wafted through the summer air and his ears tingled from the loud buzz of the bees in the orchard. He had to find Arianrhod as soon as possible. He needed Seren and to get her he had to find her mother. After she had her Samhain feast, then and only then could he hope to enchant the druidess into a night of love play. Until he’d seen Seren in person, he’d thought he’d have her out of his mind after one night, but he knew now, one eye with her would not be enough. He might stay on the other side of the portal, on Earth, until long after the New Year festival, but he couldn’t tell any of the gods, especially the goddess Arianrhod. The other deities would be angry. The mixing of gods and mortals was frowned on, though not forbidden, Gwydion reminded himself, not forbidden at all. Gwydion ran to the fortress on the other side which was guarded by six thousand warriors. After entering through the golden gate of the palace, he walked straight to the feasting hall. He dashed pass the central fire where nine maiden druidess’ surrounded a majestic gold cauldron, their cheeks filled with air and their lips drawn into a pout as they all huffed onto the clear, pristine water to keep it bubbling. He darted between short oaken tables and over white stag pelts strewn across the floor, then ran out the back door and down the hall to Arianrhod’s bower.

He flung the white bull hide door flap aside. “Sister.”

The woman, with skin so luminous it glowed like the moon, gave him a quick nod as if she expected his visit. “Hail, brother.”

A bulky, dark, curly-haired god with a thick black moustache sat beside Arianrhod on a pallet of furs. “Greetings, Gwydion.”

“Brother,” he stepped over to Govannon, and in a tone laced with sarcasm asked, “how goes your work at the forge? Making weapons to kill another river god like Dylan?”

Arianrhod fluttered her hand. “That is of no matter, you barge in and interrupt a conversation between Govannon and me. What do you need, Gwydion?”

“I need you to help Seren, a druidess, call forth her mother so they can celebrate Samhain together.”

“If the dead do not come, there is a reason.” She folded her arms across her chest. “What is this druidess to you that you come to ask a favor of me?”

“She caught my eye.” Gwydion shrugged.

One of Arianrhod’s eyebrows arched higher than the other. “I know it is the one you scried earlier in the orchard. If it is a woman you want, why not conjure one from flowers, like Blodueed?”

“That was Llew’s bride, not mine, because you would not allow him to have a wife, and anyway it did not work well.” Gwydion shook his head. “She’s an owl now.”

“Yes, I know. I put three curses on Llew that was one of them. But you ruined all three.” Arianrhod leaned back.

“What are brothers for?” He plopped down on the pile of furs with Arianrhod and Govannon. “Find the mother for me, her name is Carys ferch Delfrig ferch Gruffudd of the Ordovices.”

“You mean for Seren.” Her mouth twisted into a cynical smile. “Do not tell me you have already forgotten that the last time you went after a woman, it went bad for you. Math turned you into a stag, a hog, and a wolf.”

“It was Giffaethwy who took Math’s woman, I merely helped him since he is my brother. That’s all over with now. Math and I are once again the best of friends and in truth, I met Seren as a wolf.”

“Well, that is fitting.” Arianrhod let out a sarcastic chuckle. “It will take me a moment to find this Carys.” She rose to her feet and strode to a tall chest near the pallet. Peering into a laver bowl there, she stared into the lucid water.

When she released a soft sigh, Gwydion knew the image she sought had appeared. “Carys ferch Delfrig ferch Gruffudd heard her daughter’s call, but she is hesitant to cross the portal.” Arianrhod put one hand on her hip and turned toward Gwydion. “She saw you. It frightened her. She knows you’re a god and could not ken why you were with Seren.”

“No.” He drew in a deep breath. “You’re saying my presence stopped her from coming to spend Samhain with her
daughter.”

“Yes, that is what has occurred. Did Carys see something that vexed her? “Arianrhod’s eyes were sharp and assessing.

“No.” He paused, trying to recall everything that had happened. “Well, I did appear to Seren nude when I shifted from my wolf form.”

Arianrhod pointed to the bull-hide door flap. “Get out.”

“What about Carys and Seren?”

“As soon as you left, she crossed the veil to her cairn.” Arianrhod sat back on the pallet beside Govannon. “She’s with her daughter now, sharing a Samhain feast.”

“Then it is done.” He stood and wheeled toward the door.

He sensed a great deal of judgment on Arianrhod’s part and felt relieved to leave. Gwydion walked out of her bower and down the hall at a brisk pace with nothing but thoughts of Seren on his mind, needing to return to her as soon as possible. Even in the little time he’d been back in the otherworld, he yearned not only for Seren but for the earth. Mayhap he would stay in the mortal world far longer than Samhain. There were too many secrets in the vast palace of Caer Sidi. Gwydion needed fresh air and to be around devoted, caring people. He needed Seren.

His fingers ached to roam her curvaceous body. To cup and squeeze her plump breasts and roll her rose-tipped nipples between his fingers. To skim his palms down the silken skin of her lush hips. Then, he would dance his fingers up to the downy mound at the junction of her thighs and slip his finger into the moist heat of her sheath and feel her muscles clench and squeeze. The bulge of his erection strained against his pants. His breath grew shallow.

He came to a sudden stop in the hallway. The image of Seren’s naked body writhing at his touch engulfed his mind so, he’d forgotten to bid Arianrhod farewell. Gwydion turned and strode back to her chamber. He pulled the door flap aside and walked in, but froze at the sight before him. A cold chill swept through him as he watched his sister and Govannon with their heads pressed together, whispering.

“I came back to say thank you. But I have to ask what you two are up to.”

“It is of no concern of yours.” Arianrhod curled her full, elderberry-stained lips into a malicious smile.

* * * * 

Seren spread out her arms and welcomed the transparent glowing image of a tall woman with long brown hair and bright blue eyes peering out of a kind face. When she reached out to the floating spirit, her mother slipped through Seren’s body and stepped out on the other side of her. A surge of tingling warmth flowed in Seren and she turned around laughing. “How did you do that?”

“It is a magic of the spirit, which I now am, until I am reborn again.”

“I miss you so, Mam.”

“And I you.” The tiny lines around her mouth deepened as she smiled. “I heard you beckon to me, but then you summoned a god. I do not ken the druid mysteries and I did not want to disturb your rite, so I waited until you closed the ritual.”

“Do you mean the Samhain bonfire?”

“No dear, the rite you performed here at my cairn. I did not know you had such power. You changed a wolf into a god and then you magically shed his clothing, leaving him bare.” She whispered, “Can you teach me how to do that?”

“Mother, no. The god did that. Gwydion appeared to me and shape-shifted from a wolf to the form of a man, and then displayed his nude body.” She paused, wondering how she would say this to her mother. “It is Samhain and he crossed the veil to drink and make merry, and that is what he wants to do with me.”

“Oh my... God Gwydion.” Her mother winked “So bronze and muscular, in truth the most beautiful male I have ever seen.” A thoughtful expression crossed her face as she drew her lips in. “Do you care for him?”

“I do but let us not speak of him now. Mam, at this moment, I only wish to visit with you.”

“I do not think you should see him. He is a god and you are a mortal woman. If it was for naught but Samhain fun I would see nothing wrong with it. But I can see in your eyes that you feel something deeper for him. He will only break your heart.”
“I cannot say how I feel about him, Mam. I have just met him this eve. But please, I came here to celebrate Samhain with you not speak of Gwydion. I brought food from the feast so we may drink and sup together.”

In the blackness of the deep night, a purple light burst in front of the druidess and the ghost. Gwydion appeared in the colorful magical flash, garbed in his gold-speckled robe and blue tunic. Long, blonde curls framed his smooth, chiseled face and streamed down his broad back.

“You must be Seren’s mother. I am honored to meet you.” He shifted his gaze back to Seren. “Introduce me, druidess.”

“Mother, this is Gwydion, god of magic and wisdom.”

“The honor is mine, god of art and knowledge.” Carys bowed.

“God Gwydion, my mother Carys ferch Delfrig ferch Gruffudd of the Ordovices.”

“It pleases me to meet you.” He smiled at her and then leaned toward Seren. “I have come to partake of your goodies.”

“What say you?” Seren asked.

“Oh my.” Carys giggled.

Seren shook her head. “I am sharing the Samhain feast with my mother. I hardly think this is the time to discuss my goodies.”

“Is it that there are not enough? For I can take the goodies you have and multiply them to ten times as many.”

“Can you really?” Carys’ ghostly image glowed brighter.

“No. I will not need an increase in my goodies.” Seren quipped in fun. “My thanks.”

“Is it not the way of the Ordovices to offer hospitably? Do you really mean to not share your Samhain feast with me, not even as an offering to your god?”

“Oh, you are speaking of the Samhain fare? Those goodies.” Seren suppressed a laugh. “Yes, we have plenty, you don’t need to make more of them with your magic.”

She reached into the wicker basket and grabbed three shiny apples. After handing one to her mother and one to Gwydion, she brought the other to her lips and dug her teeth into the juicy fruit with a crisp, crunchy sound.

He opened his mouth wide for the ripe fruit and bit down. Their gazes locked on each other, until Gwydion had finished the apple. He tossed the core down to the ground.

Seren finished her apple as well and grabbed an oatcake from the basket. She munched on the flat, round treat.

“That looks sweet,” Gwydion said to her.

“It is.” Seren stuck her finger in her mouth and licked off the last crumb.

“Oh my.” Carys giggled as she stood up. “I do have to go.”

“Mother, we have more fare. Samhain has just begun.”

“I must leave, I am busy reflecting on my life so I can prepare for rebirth. I still have a lot of years to reminisce about. Spending this time with you, dearest, has reminded me how much I love this world. I must hasten back to the otherworld and continue the preparation for my next life.” She turned her head toward Gwydion. “Take care with my daughter’s heart. She is a special woman and deserves to be cherished. She is not a God’s plaything.”

“In truth she is a woman above all others and I would never hurt her. You have my word.”

“I told you not to worry about me.” Seren reached out to the glowing image of her mother and hugged the air. “I shall miss you.” The warmth of her mam’s spirit vibrated through her, filling her with love.

“I like him,” Carys whispered to Seren. “But do not forget he is a god.”

“I also like him and I shall never forget who he is.” She stepped out of her mother’s embrace. “Farewell.” Seren watched the ghost grow more transparent, fading bit by bit until she had vanished.

She turned to Gwydion. “Thank you for getting Arianrhod to bring her to me.”

“No, she came here on her own.”

“I am so glad she did, but I feel happy and sad at the same time. It is hard to say goodbye.”
Gwydion spread his arms, welcoming her into his comforting embrace.

Seren stepped into the circle of his strong, bracing arms. No other man had ever made her feel this secure. Her skin tingled as he held her. No other lover had caused her heart to throb whenever he was near, the way Gwydion did. As her hips pressed against his thighs, a hot shiver ran through her.

Winding her arms around his smooth, broad back, she tilted her chin and peered at his strong, pale gold face, and the sensuous flame in his eyes. Seren felt his breath hot on her cheek. He leaned down until his warm, wet mouth touched hers. She ran her fingers through his long hair and yanked on the strands, pressing his mouth tighter to hers. When the deep, lingering kiss ended, she untangled his yellow curls from her fingers.

He flashed an even, white-toothed grin. “There is something to be said for the mortal way of undressing. Here, let me help you.”

“No, Gwydion, I am a druid and it is Samhain. I must return to the hill fort, there is much to do for the feast.”

“I’ll come with you.”

If he came back to the hill fort, she could lie with him later tonight. Seren felt ready to jump on him and ride him hard right now, but her duties as a druidess waited. “Can you come in wolf form? I am not ready to explain to the tribe that I entered the forest for the Samhain feast with my ancestor and left the woods with a god.”

“As you wish.” He folded his muscular arms across his broad chest. “Noble wolf, cunning hunter, howling in the night, I call upon my magic to shift to your form.”

His muscles twisted, some expanding as others contracted. She watched his smooth, bronzed skin and his curly, untamed yellow hair change to thick, white fur. She gazed upon a large wolf, with sharp fangs, and yellow eyes.

The empty basket swung from her elbow as she brandished the torch in her other hand and strode with the white wolf through the woods. She glanced up at the leafless branches overhead, catching a glimpse of the full moon as Gwydion’s furry body brushed against her leg while they headed to the hill fort.

Stepping out of the dense forest into the clearing, Seren moved at a springy pace to match the wolf’s fast paws. As they passed under the wooden arch of the gate to the hill fort, Gwydion whimpered in approval as he gazed at the carved wolf head, the tribe’s totem.
Chapter Four

Everyone in the village stopped in their tracks and stared at the wolf. Every time Gwydion drew near to anyone, Seren’s tribesmen stepped back. She read the fear in their eyes and knew the wolf could smell it.

“He will not harm you,” Seren called out to her tribesmen. “He is tame, he will not bite.”

In truth, he wouldn’t hurt them, yet he was anything but tame. Anyone with a body as wicked as his had to be wild. Seren couldn’t wait for Gwydion to shift into human form and crawl into her bed. Now her mother had returned to the otherworld, Seren could couple with Gwydion and explore every inch of his body, if she could make it to her roundhouse without someone in her tribe slaying him in his wolf form.

“Do not be afraid,” she called out to the villagers again.

Seren hadn’t realized he should have come as a man, because she was thinking of her own needs and not the tribe’s. She must look moon mad, walking through the village with a wolf, bringing him near the pens of herds and flocks, by the slabs of salted pork the nine maidens had worked so hard to prepare to feed the tribe, and around the small children. Someone called out to her, interrupting her silent musings.

“Hail, druidess.” As the chief approached, his plaid cloak flapping in the night breeze, he studied the wolf.

Seren observed a glint of awe in Neithon’s wide eyes. Though the chief called her name, he focused all his attention on the wolf. Three of the nine warriors, Gwydderig, Meilyr, and Hywell joined the chief, their eyes all holding a glint of fear.

“Chief Neithon, the wolf will not harm us. I say this as druidess of the Ordovices. No one need fear him, the gods revealed this to me,” Seren said in a soft, soothing tone.

A wave of relief coursed through her. All the men and women who had shied away and glared at Gwydion’s beastly form now stepped forward.

The chief walked up to Gwydion and stopped a breath span from him. He gazed into the beast’s glowing, yellow eyes. “What is this? You are not a wolf, you are immortal.” He bowed.

“How did you know?” Seren asked.

Meilyr stepped to the chief’s side. “Druidess, he bears the pink-tipped ears of the otherworld.”

Seren shook her head. How had she forgotten? Any noble would know that.

The bard spread out his arms and opened his mouth, framed by his thick red moustache. In a deep, reverberating tone he sang out, “Release the transformation, shift from the beast, reveal your true being, present your real shape.”

The wolf howled as he stretched and twisted. Part of his body expanded as other features contracted and his thick, white fur shortened until shifting into bronze-tinted flesh.

Seren’s heart raced and she gasped at the tall, nude man who stood before her. He waved his fingers in front of his chest and right before her eyes, suddenly, he was clothed. Her pulse still pounded. The firm muscles of his thick arms and chest filled out his blue tunic and gold curls spilled down to his shoulders. Seren let out a soft chuckle, as she noticed all the women who had gathered around, gazed upon the portion of his bare chest that peeked out from his white, gold-speckled robe.

The chief glanced at him and then shifted his gaze back to Seren. “He is a god. He sparkles and shines.”

“Yes, this is god Gwydion, Chief Neithon,” Seren replied.

The warriors stood with their mouths agape. Seren had to hold back a giggle.

“God of wisdom, welcome to our hill fort.” Neithon turned to Seren. “What a great Samhain. Well done, you brought the god for the mating ritual. We do not need a druid or warrior to stand in his place for the rite, we have the actual god. I take it you will perform it with him, in proxy for Goddess Agrona.”

“Does he speak of the ritual coupling, Druidess?” Gwydion gazed at her and winked.

Her mouth went dry. She shivered. She couldn’t give herself to him with the entire tribe watching. Seren had never dreamed of standing in proxy as goddess Agrona, to mate with Gwydion. The chief needed to be quiet. This was the worst idea he’d ever had.

“No, Chief Neithon, I have chosen one of the nine warriors as well as one of the nine maidens for the rite. It is the will of the gods.”
“I thought that was why you summoned him.” Neithon shifted his gaze from Seren to the god. “God of wisdom, I ask your forgiveness in that I mistook the reason for your presence. I know now that you did not come for the ritual.”

“Not at all chief, I have not declined, it’s a great honor to celebrate Samhain and I am sure, the warrior chosen to stand in my place would gladly relinquish it to me.” With elbows bent, he held his hands out and grinned. “And if I am playing myself, the role of my goddess would be Agrona, but I know she is unable to come. The part should be played by the most powerful druidess of the tribe. Who would that be, Chief Neithon?”

The big man grinned. “Why the very druidess you are standing with, Seren is most powerful, god Gwydion. You honor us by accepting our druidess as your paramour for the Samhain fertility rite.”

“I think it is madness, but so be it,” Seren agreed, since she had no choice.

He’d tricked her into the fertility rite. How could he consent to this? Do this to her? Seren didn’t want to play Agrona as she made love to Gwydion. It would remind him of his coupling with the goddess, and Seren wanted Gwydion and everyone else to know he might be the tribe’s god, but she wanted him for her lover, hers alone. Forget Agorna, he was Seren’s now.

Though she hungered for his touch. Longed to feel his warm palms blaze a path from her breasts to her thighs and caress her tingling skin, even as she envisioned their naked bodies melding together as one, as his hard flesh flowed into her like warm honey. She desired intimacy and privacy. Seren needed Gwydion to herself. Especially, if there was any chance, of having more than a tryst with him.

As they strolled, side-by-side up the hill to the bonfire, she whispered in his ear. “I do not want this. Not in front of the tribe.”

“I can turn them all to frogs.”

“No.” She jerked away. Rage boiled through her that he would joke about her feelings. “This is a bad idea.”

Reaching out to her, he laid his hand on her shoulder in a possessive gesture and tilted his head to her ear. His hot breath fanned her face as he whispered, “You said you were not ready to explain why I was here. The chief kenned I came for the rite, so I thought you would want me to go along with that.”

“No,” she answered curtly, but she did not pull away this time.

He withdrew his arm and shrugged as he kept a brisk pace at her side. “You have engaged in sex magic before for festivals.”

“Yes.” As they strode on, she slowed her gait while she pondered his words. “But never with someone that I longed for.”

A huge, lecherous grin filled his face. “My thanks.” His tone oozed with masculine pride.

They came to a stop at the top of the hill, standing before the roaring bonfire. As the onlookers gathered around, Gwydion slipped off the druid robe and yanked the blue tunic over his head, then let them both fall to the ground. He blazed like the fire he stood before and his heart pounded. Sliding his long fingers to the gold clasp at his belt, he unfastened it, then climbed out of his pants and kicked them to the side. The crowd cheered, but he had no cares for what they thought, he saw nothing but the woman before him. While scrying her in the sacred salmon pond, he’d watched her from afar, and now he would have what he long desired. Seren. With his eyes locked on her, he waited for her to disrobe and bare her body to him.

His gaze devoured her as the gold-speckled druid garment swished around her bare legs, as her lithe feet kicked to and fro in a fast pace around the fire. As she slipped off the robe, it hit the dirt. Moving to the rhythmic beat of the drum, she unraveled the knot of her hemp belt and her plaid skirt dropped to the ground. Seren hoisted her tunic over her head and threw it down.

Hurrahs rang out as they danced, circling the fire. Gwydion’s heart raced to the rhythm beat of the bodhran as he jumped and kicked his feet in fast movements. Catching Seren gazing at his crotch, he knew his erect rod bobbed as he danced. In turn, as she leapt and swirled to the music, he ogled her jiggling breasts. Dancing up to her, he reached out, and in each hand he cupped a soft, jutting breast.

She came to a halt. Through this tryst, by his power and that of the goddess, the tribe would prevail against their enemies, including those that came with winter; sickness and starvation. The cheering tribesmen pushed in closer to
witness Samhain sex magic.

As he squeezed her soft flesh and pinched her erect nipples, Seren’s breath grew shallow. She threw her head back and moaned. He moved behind her so the crowd could view her bare body and worship her as the goddess Agrona, while he knew he coupled with Seren alone.

Standing behind her, he captured her breasts with his hands, kneading her smooth, warm skin and rolling the nipples with his thumbs.

Cupping one breast, he slid his other hand down her taut stomach to the nest of curls between her thighs and spread the petal-like folds. She moaned as he plunged two fingers into the tight sheath and pumped her. He moved his foot between her legs and nudged them apart into a wider stance. She arched back, unconsciously giving the tribe a better view. He envisioned what she looked like, openly exposed before them, his fingers inside her petal smooth center, her breasts bouncing with the rocking motion. He scanned the onlookers, all with their mouths open and stark hunger gleaming in their eyes. They would all couple about the fire tonight and many babies would be conceived this eve. Thanks in part to the lusty body of his woman. Seren. Gwydion’s skin felt so hot, as if on fire, and his heart beat so hard he could barely breathe. His shaft ached and swelled to the point of pain, so great was his need for this woman. Her tribesmen saw her as Goddess Agorna, but though mortal, to Gwydion, Seren far surpassed any goddess. At that moment, he knew he would find some way to stay here in this dimension, on earth, with Seren, well after the fire festival had ended.

As the crowd watched, he knew Seren shut her eyes and didn’t give a thought to the onlookers as he brought her to a writhing state. The god and goddess would reward the Ordovices for bringing them this pleasure and bless the tribe during the New Year.

He slid his hand from her breast to her smooth back and down to her lush bottom. Then he slipped his palm across the tight flesh of her ass. As he thrust his hand into her, the pulsating walls of her body clamped down on his fingers and she bucked against his palm. As he thrust his fingers deep and higher, she mewled and trembled in climax.

Gwydion panted. Easing his fingers out, he spun her around, facing him, then crushed her to him. As her erect nipples rubbed against his chest, a shiver of warmth surged through him. He held her in his tight embrace, as he lowered her to the ground. She sank beside the hot fire, sprawled on her back.

He stood above. “Spread your legs.”

Still wet and throbbing, she obeyed him.

He dropped to his knees and stared into her pink pussy.

The crowd shouted with joy, all waiting, longing for this moment to watch the god and goddess mate.

Seren gasped as his body covered hers. As he pressed against her, he didn’t notice anyone but Seren. His breathing grew ragged as she snaked her soft, smooth palm down his body from his chest to his crotch. He gasped as she grabbed his shaft. His flesh tensed beneath her warm fingers. She slid her hand up and down his flesh. Fiery sensations filled him. As she guided the tip into her entrance, he groaned from deep within.

“Gwydion, you’re huge.” Her voice was soft and breathless.

“Like a beast,” he rasped.

“Yes,” she said on a sigh.

He released a wild, guttural groan as his arousal slid in a bit more. Her passage was so hot and tight.

She arched forward and raising her knees, she wrapped her smooth legs around his back. He flamed like the roaring fire near them.

As he slid deeper, she stretched over his iron-hard flesh. Gwydion throbbed as he pushed further into her. She gasped as he fully imbedded her. He drew almost all the way out of her and then lunged with one hard thrust. As he pressed deeper, he felt her muscles clench around his cock. His breath rushed in and out as he pumped her. He felt a sweat break across his skin. With each slamming thrust, she whimpered in sweet agony. Groaning low and deep, he pounded into her. Seren screamed with ecstasy, shuddering. Gwydion bucked within her in a jarring, pulsing explosion as he groaned long and low. When he pulled out of her, everyone cheered.

The tribe would be blessed, for as Gwydion’s seed spilled into the dark goddess, Agorna’s womb, the seed of the next New Year grew. This ritual of sex magic assured there would be spring after winter. The Ordovices tribesmen continued to yell hurrahs as Gwydion stood, he helped Seren to her feet, and with a shake of his hand both were fully clothed again.
Gwydion gathered her into his arms. “Enough of the tribe and the gods and your duties, it is time you enjoyed Samhain. Not as the tribe’s druidess and not as goddess Agrona, but as Seren.” He lifted her, cradling her as she wrapped her arm around his shoulder and carried her off.

“Over there.” Seren pointed to a timber hut, crested with a generous dome of straw. Holding her, he hurried toward it and once there, he yanked the bull-hide door flap aside.

Inside, he laid her down on the pallet. His fingers fluttered to her white cowl and he slid it down the back of her neck. Peering into his eyes, she found they seemed to be azure one moment and lapis the next. Light and dark.

“God Gwydion, as a druidess, I have a question for you. I wonder, of your two sons; Lugh is a god of light, a sun god, the other, Dylan, is a dark god, as he lives in the depths of the ocean, so light or dark, which are you?”

“You know the answer. As a druid god, I am both, light and dark. I keep the balance. I am the balance.”

Sitting on the pile of furs, she focused on his full lips, hungering for another taste. Seren’s skin tingled as his fingers brushed against her neck and chin as he slipped the gold-speckled robe off her shoulders, it slid down her back and pooled onto the bed. Seren tossed it on the floor. Grabbing the hem of her long tunic, she hoisted it over her head and threw it on the pile of clothes while she watched Gwydion flutter his fingers and his garments disappeared.

“Why did you not let me tear them off you?” she quipped.

“I want you now. I cannot waste time fumbling with mortal clothing.”

A soft giggle spilled from her. Gwydion climbed onto the pallet, nude, and positioned himself so her hips squeezed between his knees. Seren slid her arms around his shoulders and ran her fingers down the smooth plane of his back. He groaned.

As he glided his hands over the sensitive flesh of her breasts, kneading and shaping, his touch felt so smooth and hot against her skin, her nipples tightened. His wet mouth covered hers. Grazing the softness of her mouth with his tongue, he slipped it between her parted lips. Blasts of heat surged through her, as he thrust his tongue in and out of her mouth and she dug her fingers into the smooth flesh of his back. The moist, empty sheath between her legs throbbed, aching to be filled as a shortness of breath hit her.

Panting, she slid her palms from his back to the firm muscles rippling down his arms. Seren mewled as Gwydion lowered his mouth to her breast, whisked her tingling peak with his tongue, caught it between his teeth and gently tugged, then pinched the other nipple.

On fire, Seren couldn’t breathe. Thrusting her breasts forward, she let out soft mewls of delight like a purring cat as he squeezed, stroked and sucked her flesh.

By arching her hips his swollen erection shifted and pressed hard against her lower belly, jolting every fiber of her being. He moved his mouth down her body, licking and kissing, then swirled his tongue around the circle of her belly button. A hot shiver shot through her as his tongue slid between her thighs.

“You are so wet,” Gwydion rasped.

His fingers felt like firebrands, as he spread the folds and stroked the spot that ached to be filled. Seren saw by his intense expression, the pressure in him had built to near agony. He needed release as much as she.

The hot point of his eminent length squeezed into her. She winced. She arched forward, raising her knees. She wrapped her legs around his back and braced for his long, thick erection. Though open and ready, she stretched further as he thrust. Gwydion nudged deeper into her. She gasped as he impaled her. Seren molded to him and melted like burning wax. His shallow panting fell into the same rhythm as hers. He drew his cock back until he was almost out of her, and then thrust deep into her core. Seren’s breasts tingled from rubbing against his warm chest while he pumped her. She moved with his body, meeting each thrust. Entangled like a Celtic knot, their bodies rocked. Seren whimpered between ragged gasps as Gwydion pumped his large cock into her throbbing passage. Groaning low and deep, he pounded into her. Seren gripped his lower back with her legs, pulling him higher and deeper. She shrieked as her fiery center clinched around his shaft. They’d just begun and she was ready to burst. Shivers shot up her spine. Trembling, she plunged over the crest. Waves of pleasure filled her with liquid heat. The musky scent of his arousal flooded her nostrils.

A tormented expression of sweet agony crossed his face as he trembled in release. As she sucked in quick breaths,
a ragged groan tore through her lips. Panting, she quaked beneath him, still impaled on his shaft.

After a long time, he pulled out and swung over to lie at her side. “You’re a rare jewel, Seren,” he rasped.

“I want to stay here, to sleep with you and make love to you when we wake in the morning.” Hoping he would stay ‘till dawn and beyond, she closed her eyes and drifted off into a dream of her and Gwydion entangled in love play, again and again, and long after Samhain.
Gwydion opened his eyes to find dawn light streaming in through the doorway of the roundhouse. Seren lay nude next to him. Women, even goddesses, always sought him out, but no one had ever brought his blood to boiling as fast as Seren. Watching her from afar, scrying her, he’d planned a time and place they could meet and shape-shifted into a wolf for her. Last night after she’d drifted to sleep, his mind had spun, wondering what she thought of him until he fell asleep, snuggled against her.

With a tilt of his head, he kissed her lips as gentle as a whisper. He watched her squirm. Her long lashes fluttered, her eyes opened.

“Good morn, druidess.”

“Gwydion.” She reached out and wrapped her arms around him. When she released the embrace, her brows furrowed. “I have to dress, there is so much to do. If you are staying, you can come with me to help. Since the leaves have fallen, it’s time to chop down ash trees for wood to craft spears and chariots.”

Always so busy as a druidess, he’d noticed every time he scried her image in the salmon pond. That was why he’d hesitated in telling her he wanted to stay past Samhain, sure her first response would be, she didn’t have time to spend with him beyond the festival. So he would share today with her and speak to her of staying later.

“I’ll come, my druid wands are fashioned from ash. But first.” Leaning down, he pressed his lips to hers in a slow, drugging kiss.

When their lips parted, Seren swung her feet onto the floor. “I so want to stay abed with you, but there is too much to do.” She stood up and gathered her clothing.

With a flutter of his hands across his bare body, Gwydion dressed magically.

“I also must check on the two breeding sows we kept from slaughter. Then get salt licks for a stag hunt, so we can feast on fresh venison this final day of Samhain.” Seren pulled on her last piece of clothing, the druid robe.

“The sow and the stag are animals I’ve shifted into like the wolf, so I can help.” Stooping down, he passed through the narrow doorway. Silently, he vowed he wouldn’t let her out of his sight. The more time he spent with Seren, the easier it would be to persuade her to offer her hospitality and much more for even longer.

Seren led Gwydion to the chief’s roundhouse where the nine warriors waited, each clutching an axe in their hands.

Gwydion raised his arm in greeting. “Hail, I have come to honor the sacrifice of the ash trees.”

The warriors all nodded at him in response.

Following the dirt path to the forest on the hill, they entered the woods.

Walking under the canopy of thick leaves, Hywell tilted his head toward Seren and asked, “Is Gwydion your patron god?”

Keeping up with the others at a steady pace she nodded her white-hooded head at him. “Yes, he is the patron god of all druids is he not?”

A lark sang out from a high branch as the little group passed beneath it.

“Yes, this I know, but I did not fathom you so powerful you could summon him to appear in human form,” Hywell said.

“I will come any time she calls, I assure you, in wolf or human form.” Gwydion flashed a predatory smile.

“It is the trees, not I, we must think of now.” Seren pointed to an ash looking a bit scraggly without its bright green leaves. “There is one.”

“Here are three others.” Gwydion gestured toward tall, thin trees with long branches reaching for the sky.

“This will be enough wood for our chariots,” Meilyr said.

“Sturdy Ash, as you give to us we give to you,” Gwydion chanted, inclining his head toward the warriors. “Hand me a skin of water.” Taking one from Hywell, the god poured the clear well water onto the roots. “The tribe needs your strong wood for its chariots. We honor the sacrifice you make to give us this great gift. The charioteers will
drive them bravely and only the finest ponies will pull them in battle to honor your memory.”

After Meilyr handed him a small pouch, Gwydion picked a fallen leaf off the ground and shook the herbal blend from the pouch onto it. As he held the leaf, Meilyr struck his flint and lit the spark to the blend of incense. The heady scents of mugwort, betony, woodruff, wormwood and wild dagga clung to the air, like the scent at the bottom of a log embedded in a forest floor for ages.

Gwydion held his hand out to the tree, focusing his mind on its essence. “In wisdom and love, we accept your sacrifice. We are honored by your bravery and dedication in befriending us.” Having the tree’s permission, he rose and watched reverently as Gwydderig swung his axe into the trunk.

Seren bowed her cowl-covered head. “Farewell, sacred ash.”

Gwydion moved to the next tree and performed the same ritual. Gwydderig was still chopping the first tree when Hywell swung his axe into the second. With Gwydion at her side, Seren moved to the third tree and performed the rite for it. Meilyr flung the blade of his axe into its trunk. Though the happiest moment of any life is when they give themselves in sacrifice, a heavy sadness came over Seren as she watched the first ash tree fall.

She whispered in Gwydion’s ear. “Let’s go.”
Taking her hand in his, he led her away.

Gwydderig called out, “Where are you two headed?”
“To check on the sows,” Seren said.

They passed the thick growth of trees and shrubs until they were back on the narrow path to the hillfort.

Feeling a sense of loss, her voice broke as she said, “Trees are silent guards, they are the listeners and they hold knowledge mankind has long forgotten.”

Gwydion came to a stop and still grasping her hand, he pulled her to him and wrapped his arm around her shoulders to comfort her. “As a druidess, you must always protect the trees, but you do not have the right to rob them of sacrifice. The chariots made from the ash will be strong for the trees are strong, it will be resilient for the ash is resilient, and they will enhance the skills of the Ordovices warriors, for the tree is wise.”

“It is true.” Seren felt like a light, warm breeze flow into her at his soothing words.

“Were you saddened by the slaughter of the pigs yesterday? “Gwydion asked in a soft, comforting voice.

“No. Mayhap because it is food and it seems more necessary than wands and chariots.”

“But it is not, all make up the cycle, all are important and everyone and everything’s sacrifice for the tribe is necessary.” Gwydion’s deep blue eyes mellowed and his mouth eased into a smile.

With his arm wrapped around her shoulder, she walked at his side past round huts and entered the center of the village. They stepped up to the pigpen of hazel wands and withies woven between stakes. Gwydion pulled the small gate of the pen open and leaned down to the large sow, making sure she was well. Her belly was large and she would give birth soon. Seren could not take her eyes off Gwydion as he ran his masculine hands along the pig’s smooth skin. A fire leapt inside her. There was something oddly sensuous about the sight of him so concerned and caring to the pregnant sow.

Heat rose on her skin, as if standing next to a bonfire. Her flesh itched for his touch. Before she knew it, she grabbed him. He wrapped his warm arms around her and she leaned toward him. Their lips met in a slow, drugging kiss. She slid her palms up and down his broad back.

A searing need built in Seren and she whispered, “We have time before the stag hunt.”

“Let’s go,” Gwydion rasped.

With their arms around each other, they rushed off to her roundhouse.

Seren ducked and darted inside. Gwydion followed, grabbed her by the shoulders and lifted her arms. He danced his thick fingers down the sides of her tunic and grabbing the hem, hoisted it up, pulled it off her and tossed it the floor. He waved his hands and once more his clothes disappeared. She felt the heat of his gaze upon her breasts and nipples. She roamed her eyes over his nude body, the virile bronze chest with small blond whorls, the hard slab of his stomach, the narrow hips and tight buttocks. But it was the hard, prominent swell of flesh between his lean, muscular legs which drew her full attention.

A deep moan escaped her lips at the heat of his palms pressing against her breasts. Seren burned as he squeezed
the tender mounds of flesh and pinched the swollen peaks. His hot lips swooped down and kissed her nipple. She flamed as his tongue whisked and his teeth nudged the sensitive, swollen peaks while his palms molded and shaped her breasts.

“Lay down on your back,” Gwydion said in a husky tone.

The swollen bud between her legs pulsated with need as she dropped to the ground and spread her legs. He kneeled over her, fully bare. “Seren, squeeze my cock with your soft breasts.”

She watched as he rubbed the fiery tip of his erection over her nipples. He nestled his thick erection between her breasts and slid it back and forth. Her body tingled as she felt the moisture spill from the head of his hard staff.

“Open your mouth.” Gwydion slipped his virile flesh between her lips.

Sliding her mouth up and down his cock, she milked him until he withdrew his aroused flesh. Seren swallowed as her heart pounded.

He rested his warm palms on her thighs and spread her legs until they were shoulder-width apart. Seren felt his honey-warm fingertips fondle the folds, as he pushed his long finger into her.

“You’re so tight.”

She watched his hand move between her legs, working her into a fervor.

“Fuck my finger, Seren.”

She ground his finger as he slid it in and out. When he withdrew, she felt hollow, empty.

“Why did you stop? Please, Gwydion.”

“Seren, I have something better, magical. Spread your legs as far as you can.”

She watched him peer at the apex of her thighs.

“That’s the most beautiful blossom I’ve ever seen,” Gwydion whispered hoarsely.

He waved his hands as if conjuring an object, but she couldn’t make it out. Seren felt something smooth and hard prod her entrance. Her passage stretched around the item in his hand.

“What is that?”

“My ash wand.”

As it slid in all the way, she thrust her hips.

“Push it out of you,” Gwydion rasped.

Following his command, she clenched her muscles and thrust. Gwydion waved his fingers in the air and the wand vanished.

“My wand floated in that tight well of yours. Now my cock needs to sink into your hot, wet core.”

Arching her body, she craved his flesh, sought to meld into him, so they could burn together in one blaze. As his hardeened erection pressed against the entrance of her sex, she gasped.

He plunged into her moist heat and pleasure filled her as her passage enveloped his flesh. His thick cock sunk deeper into her. As she whimpered with desire, she thrust her hips and drew him higher into her. Her breath rushed in and out in shallow pants as she strained against the girth and length of his hard heat. As she raised her knees, he moved upon her with slithering strokes. Shivery waves of passion rocked her body.

He pulled out of her and paused for one moment, then plunged into her depths. She gasped and shrieked. The fiery walls of her passage constricted and contracted as he pounded into her. She shrieked at each slamming thrust. A rush of maddening sensations seized her. On the brink of release, she mewed as he thrashed wildly. She clinched. He groaned as he burst inside her and his hot juices flooded her. Seren cried out with uninhibited ecstasy.

When he withdrew his rod, she cuddled against his body, both were glistening with sweat.

“We promised we’d go on the stag hunt.” She rose up on her elbows, leaned over and as she kissed him, spirals of ecstasy shot through her. “They will be waiting for us.”

Pushing into a standing position, she threw on her clothes and covered her head with the white hood. Gwydion dressed magically as she grabbed two spears from their place in the roundhouse and handed one to him.
“I have made many kills with it. It will serve you well today.”

“My thanks.” He leaned over and covered her mouth with his, pressing his warm lips against her tingling mouth. When he released her from the kiss, she led him to the corral. “We drove the horses in from the outer pasture the other day.”

“My thanks for lending me a mount.”

“Of course, you are coming to help on the hunt.” She pointed out a muscular yet sleek black stallion. “He is our best and the chief wants you to have him.”

“The Ordovices are indeed hospitable.” Gwydion flashed a wide grin.

“The chief will be honored and of course, the horse is yours as long as you care to stay with the tribe,” Seren said, hoping he would take the hint.

Gwydion saddled and mounted the steed and goaded his horse into a gallop at Seren’s side, riding toward the forest’s edge.

* * * *

Outside the deep woods, Cynfarch, Gwydderig, Meilyr and Hywell each stood with their horses, reins in one hand and a spear in the other, ready to mount and chase a deer at a moment’s notice.

“Greetings,” Gwydderig called out to the druidess and the god. “We put out salt blocks.”

Gwydion and Seren swung off their horses and walked them to the side of the clearing to hide from the deer, but ready to mount once a stag was spotted.

As they waited, a few birds landed near the block of salt, looked it over, and flew away. A squirrel scampered over, stood on his hind legs and even crawled on top of the salt lick, with his curiosity satisfied, he scampered up the nearest tree.

“He is so cute,” Seren whispered into Gwydion’s ear.

“Pesky creatures.” Gwydion laughed. “We do not have these creatures in the otherworld, too bothersome.”

“What else do you not have in your realm?” She tilted her head toward him.

“We don’t have you there.” As he smiled, an eager look flashed in his eyes.

Out of the corner of her eye, Seren noticed a movement and turned her head. She gasped and pointed to a large red stag with long, branching antlers, strutting out of the forest. He dipped his snout to the salt. After taking a lick, he jerked his neck and looked to one side then the other, scanning the area. He leaned down again and took a few licks, then stared straight ahead at Seren; he’d sensed, smelled, spotted her. The stag thrust his rear legs back and bolted towards the woods. Seren jumped on her horse and goaded it to a gallop. The chase was on to try and head him off and steer him away from the forest, but to everyone’s horror the stag managed to shoot pass Cynfarch’s mount and dart into the woods. Seren and Gwydion charged into the leafy canopy of the dense forest.

“I wish we had brought the dogs.” Seren said to Gwydion as she rode at his side. “But we didn’t want to frighten the deer at the salt lick.”

“I will transform.” Gwydion vaulted off his horse.

As his body twisted and lengthened in some areas and shortened in others, his face distorted with pain until he shifted into a large white wolf, staring at her with burning amber eyes. He raced off, on the trail of the stag as Seren and the other mounted warriors followed.

A wolf’s growl pierced the air as they rode on. Seren drew her horse to a halt as she sighted the white wolf. He’d cornered the large, antlered deer. Gwydderig rode up, aimed and launched his long spear, but before the weapon could strike, the stag and the pursuing wolf darted away, as if vanishing from the spot.

A wolf’s howl reverberated through the woods.

“It’s Gwydion.” Seren goaded her mount to a gallop toward the sound, and reaching the spot, reined in her horse upon viewing the white wolf and the large roan stag in a small grassy clearing up ahead.

Grabbing her whetted spear, she aimed and threw it with all her might. It soared straight into the deer and pierced its red hide. The stag dropped to the ground.
The wolf’s body stretched and twisted until he had transformed back into the form of a man. Gwydion stood before them nude, but with a wave of his hands, once more he was fully clothed.

“Well done, Seren. You are the champion.” Gwydion grinned.

Cynfarch, Gwydderig, Meilyr and Hywell cheered her name. After hauling the stag onto Seren’s horse, Gwydion threw a calling spell out to the mount he had left when he’d shape-shifted to a wolf. The steed trotted up and he swung onto the saddle and followed Seren to the feasting hall.

* * * *

After the nine women of the Samhain feast skinned the stag and set it on a spit, four young boys took turns turning it over the central fire in the round hall. Seren sat at a short, small table with the other warriors and Gwydion.

The oldest of the nine women placed a huge, juicy stag joint on Seren’s plate. “The champion portion is yours, for you landed the killing spear.”

“I give this to our guest, for if he had not shifted into a wolf and trailed the great stag, the kill would never have been made,” Seren announced.

As the feasters cheered, Gwydion’s teeth tore into the leg of venison.

Leaning closer to him, Seren whispered. “I know it is not as grand a feast as you have in the otherworld. But I trust you find it filling.”

“In truth lady, it is savory as any fare found in my realm.”

She sighed with relief and hoped this meant he might stay longer. She pulled out her dagger and cut into the slab of venison that replaced the champion portion she’d passed to Gwydion. Seren stuffed a generous chunk into her mouth. The gamey taste wrapped around her tongue and she took a gulp of heady mead.

When Elund stepped forward with harp in hand and played for the crowd, Seren grabbed Gwydion’s hand and pulled him to the center of the hall.

They kicked up their feet and raised their arms in a fast foot-stomping dance, but when the tune finished, he whispered in her dainty ear, “Let us go back to the pallet in our roundhouse.”

“I meant to ask you the same thing,” Seren said.

With her hand in his, they ran out of the feast hall past the corral and the chief’s large roundhouse, until they reached her smaller one. She ducked inside and wheeled around to Gwydion as he entered.

“This time, undress the normal way.” She grinned. “I want to watch.”

“As long as I get to watch you as well.” Gwydion unpinned the huge gold brooch holding his cloak and let the plaid brat drop to the floor.

Yanking the tunic off, he unfastened the belt, his plaid pants dropped to his ankles, and he stepped out of them. “Now let me watch you.”

While she admired his well-endowed member, she shed her clothes. Seren’s heart hammered as he scanned her body. This close to him, she couldn’t miss his musky scent. His heated gaze met hers and he dipped his head, their lips touched. As his warm lips explored hers, a hot ache grew in her throat and she let out a soft moan. Seren’s mouth throbbed with passion as the kiss deepened.

Grasping his muscular shoulders, she slid her hands down his firm body until she knelt before him. Fascinated with the blue veined column of flesh, she ran one finger down the impressive length. Lifting the virile rod of flesh, she parted her lips, and swirled her tongue over the head of his member. As she drew his phallus deep into her mouth and slid up and down his erection, he twisted the strands of her long hair around his fingers.

She loved the taste and the heat of his hot flesh filling her mouth. Sucking hungrily, she milked him until he jerked in spasms and burst in her mouth, her hands dug into the flesh of his thighs. Seren eased her mouth off of him and he helped her up to a standing position. Taking her hands in his and walking backward, he tugged her with him until his ankles hit the pallet. He stretched out on the pile of fur. Desire spiraled through her as she climbed on top of him. Her long red hair fell forward as he wrapped his broad arms around her. Seren tilted her head and crushed her lips against his.

Her pulsating entrance hovered over his erection as she eased down until he was planted inside her. As she sat on
him, ready to ride, he bucked, thrusting deep into her. Seren moaned as her muscles contracted around him. The incredible heat of his palms sliding down her back had her aflame. Only he could pound out the red-hot fire in her. She slid up and down the long, wide rod of flesh that hammered and stretched her. As he moved his hands down and squeezed her ass, she gasped hard. Seren moaned as he ground into her flesh. Their bodies thrashed together. She hung on the edge until she clenched and exploded into a pool of liquid heat.

Gwydion let out a long, uninhibited groan as he stiffened against her. A tormented expression of deep pleasure-pain crossed his face and he burst inside her.

He drew out of her and lay at her side. Wrapping his arm around her shoulder, they snuggled and drifted off to sleep together.
Chapter Six

Something woke Seren. She was startled to see the translucent image of her mother floating above her.

“Mam, you have come to visit. Now?”

“Ware, Seren, Gwydion is in danger. You must warn him.”

“Of what, Mother? He is a god, how can he be in danger?”

“In truth, jealously is at foot and his days may be numbered.”

“What say you?”

“Tonight, when the war drum beats, tell him to shift into a wolf.” She flashed a loving smile and vanished.

Seren sat up in bed and glanced at Gwydion lying next to her, his eyes closed in sleep. Yells pierced the silent night. She heard the patter of people running past her roundhouse. Then the rhythmic beat of a war drum.

Gwydion’s eyes flew open and he eased off the pallet into a standing position. “Do they call the warriors for battle?” He asked as he briskly pulled on his pants and tunic.

“I know not.” She slipped her tunic on, wrapped the plaid skirt around it, tied the hemp belt at her waist, and fastened on her heavy woolen cloak with a round brooch pin. Last she pulled on the druid robe her mother had made for her.

“Gwydion wait.” She reached out and grabbed his arm before he ran off. “While you slept, my mother came to warn you of danger. You have to turn into a wolf.”

“What danger? Let me go out and see what is happening. I will shift if I need to.”

Seren followed at his heels and spotted Hywell, vaulting onto his mount. “What is happening?” she asked.

“Hurry, Seren, Gwydion, you are needed, it’s a cattle raid.”

“We can’t lose the cows, we’ll never make it through the winter.” Seren pulled her druid robe tighter against the bite of the icy wind.

“I am off to join the other warriors to chase the raiders,” Hywell said.

Running to her horse, she mounted as Gwydion swung onto the saddle of his steed. Upon reaching the pasture, Seren pulled her mount to a stop along with Gwydion and Hywell, but though she could hear the bleating of the few cows the raiders had left behind, she couldn’t see them. A thick gray fog enveloped the field.

“It is like being blind.” Hywell’s voice rose in volume. “Why is the mist only here? The sky is clear at the village.”

“They used the magic of druid mist to sneak up on the herd,” Seren said.

“Indeed, but their mortal magic is no match for mine.” Gwydion’s voice rang with the power of a god. “They won’t get far.” Mounted on the horse, with his arms spread, he chanted, “Shroud of mist, vanish at my command. Fog be gone. I break your stealth. Fade around me, beneath me and above me until you disappear.” In that moment, the heavy blanket of mist lifted.

“They cannot stop us. We will get them.” Seren tilted her chin high.

Hywell bobbed his head. “They just rode off. Herders ran into the village, yelling, alerting us. The other warriors and I grabbed our spears and mounted. I was the last. The rest are up ahead, chasing the raiders.”

“What tribe?” Seren asked.

“The Silures,” Hywell said, with an edge to his voice.

“Gwydion, heed my mother’s warning. Shape shift into a wolf, then you can sniff out the cattle and the raiders.”

“No, I must stay in human form to cast a barrier spell they can’t escape.”

“I will perform the spell.” Seren was too irritated to hide the frustration in her voice. “I beg of you, take my mother’s warning to heart.”

“I must cast the spell,” Gwydion said in a soft yet firm voice. “I can freeze the raiders in place long enough for the warriors to catch up with them.”

“Do it,” Hywell said.
“No, he is in danger,” Seren snapped.

“It is our only chance. If we lose milk and beef, the entire tribe could starve during the winter.” Hywell shook his head.

“What harm could possibly befall me? The Silures cannot hurt me if I turn them to ice first,” Gwydion said.

“My mother would not warn me unless the threat was real,” Seren said. “I myself sense danger, but it may not be from the Silures. You must be careful.”

“Seren, he is a god,” Hywell said.

“Yes, what could happen to me?” Gwydion said.

Rather than answer, she peered into Gwydion’s eyes. “Swear to me, you will take heed.”

“Yes, I will return to you unharmed.” Gwydion pulled his wand from the pouch tied to his side and brandished it high. “I am ready.” He swirled the ash stick, decorated with Celtic spirals, through the air in a sweeping motion.

“Foes of the Ordovices
Your raid is condemned.
I forbid your flight.
Winter’s embrace,
Shall halt your escape,
Frozen like ice.
For the tribe to find.”

A blue light with the power of a lightning bolt shot from Gwydion’s wand. Seren and Hywell clung to each other during the mighty blast, and they watched, knowing everyone in the village could feel the surge.

“It is done,” he said to them.

“Now you must shift into wolf form,” Seren said to Gwydion as she released her hold on Hywell.

After Gwydion eased off his horse, his body blurred from one form to the next as his limbs shortened and his flesh shifted into a pelt of white fur. The wolf stood before Seren once more.

Hywell gasped. “Gwydion, do not get too near the cattle, you will spook them.”

The wolf nodded, and as he darted off, Seren goaded her horse into a hard gallop. Hywell followed.

Musing on her mother’s dire warning, Seren vowed she wouldn’t let anything happen to Gwydion. At that moment, she realized she couldn’t bear to lose him. She knew she’d fallen in love with a god. Yet she dreaded telling him, for she was but a mortal. How could she compete with the beautiful goddesses he’d known?

Though he’d only been in the village a short while, she’d known of him all her life. As a druidess, she’d heard all the stories about him, the god. The good and the bad. Seren knew he helped his brother sneak into Math’s fortress and couple with that god’s woman, Goewin. That was why Math turned him into a stag, a sow, and a wolf, and his brother into a hind, a boar, and a she-wolf. Yet once the punishment ended, Gwydion made peace with Math. He was fair and just and able to change for the better. These were the traits she loved about him the best. He’d transformed her life since he’d been here. She didn’t realize how lonely she’d been until he came. If only he would stay. But now, she needed to make sure no harm came to him. Seren felt danger in the air. It hung heavy about her and a cold chill swept through her.

She drove her mount past the edge of the forest and toward the mountains as Hywell rode at the rear.

“There are the other warriors,” Hywell yelled to her, and pointed off into the distance.

“They found them.” Seren rode up to Meilyr, Cynfarch, Gwdderig, and the other men who surrounded the frozen Silure warriors and held them at spear point.

At that moment, the Silures flinched, awakening from the freezing spell. Their mouths dropped open and their eyes widened with shock as they each found the whetted point of an Ordovices’s weapon at their flesh. With the Silures captured, Seren spurred her horse forward to round up the stolen cattle that had wandered off when the raiders fell under Gwydion’s spell.

Glad to hear the hooves of Hywell’s mount behind her, she yelled out to him, “Look for the cattle while I find
Gwydion*

The moment she spoke, both the lowing of frightened cattle and the howl of a lone wolf pierced the air. She drove her horse at a gallop toward the noise.

* * * *

Gwydion heard Seren call for him, and howled back. This caught the attention of a huge bull that stalked toward him. Gwydion was more than a wolf, he was a god, he refused to show any fear toward this beast. Hard as stone, he met the bull’s beady black eyes stare for stare. The bull snorted and kicked up dirt, then cast his large head down. The beast released a rumbling bellow. It charged, hooves hammering the dirt as it barreled forward, straight for him. Gwydion eyed the deadly horns and the brown bulk of muscles coming at him.

In wolf form, he leaped into the air just before the bull would have rammed him. Gwydion jumped over the beast, landing unscathed. He’d faced the bull and won that match. Gwydion was too agile, too quick, and too smart for a simple beast. It didn’t matter how big he was. The bull would leave him alone now, and let him drive it back to the tribe.

Just as Gwydion was preparing to shape shift to human form to herd the cattle back, a sudden piercing pain riveted his body. A spear stabbed his side. Scarlet blood pooled on the ground. He fell wounded, dying as a wolf.

* * * *

Seren’s scream rent the air as she vaulted off her horse and ran to Gwydion. The coppery scent of his blood hung on the air. His chest moved slightly with his shallow breathing and he whimpered softly, but he didn’t move. An inner pain ripped through her.

She petted his head in silence as Hywell rode up. She’d never even had a chance to tell him she wanted him to stay. She needed more than a tryst with him. Even though he would have most likely said no, she should not be robbed of the chance. Now he lay dying. No, she had to save him. Seren took a deep breath and forbade her eyes to cry or her body to tremble. She had to be strong for Gwydion, for the tribe, she was a druidess. She had forgotten about the tribe for a moment. First she needed to cast a calling spell to round up the cows and the bull and get them back to the village.

She threw her arms into the air and chanted. “Damona, divine cow goddess, summon the cattle of my tribe, bring them together to be herded home, come cattle come, hear my call.”

The bleating of cattle could be heard as cows trotted toward her and the bull strutted forward, as gentle as a puppy.

Seren turned her head toward Hywell. “As you drive the heard back, you’ll pass the other warriors. Send some of them here.”

“No, some of them will send the raiders back to the Silure village, but the other warriors will ride here for the cattle. They are probably on the way now. I am sure of it. Let me get the man who did this.” Hywell galloped off on his mount in the direction from which the spear was thrown.

Kneeling beside the dying wolf, Seren pulled off her robe and stuffed it into the wound to staunch the blood. “Gwydion, change back into human form. You were wounded as a wolf. Shift back.”

The wolf howled in agony as his body stretched. Seren embraced him, trying to offer comfort and lessen his pain. His front paws became arms and his legs shifted to those of a human. His head compressed and his scarlet-soaked fur changed to flesh. Her arms were wrapped around Gwydion’s muscular shoulders as he lay at her side.

“Are you all right? Though the spear still pierces your side, in your human form it is not in as vital a place as when you were a wolf.” Her voice broke. “Gwydion do not die. You must live.”

“Yes, I shall live. You are right, in this form the injury is no longer fatal, as a wolf it was a mortal wound, but in the form of a man I will live.”

“My mother was right.” Seren brushed a tear back from her eyes. He would live. Slowly, she took a deep breath. “Yes, my dear Seren, your mother saved me. Still it is bad, you must pull the spear out.”

Seren knew the moment she yanked it out of him, it would cause him great pain. Her fingers shook as she wrapped them around the shaft of the spear. Forcing her fear aside, she clenched her jaw and pulled back with all her might. As he yelled in agony, the spear came free.
Laying his hand on the wound, which bled excessively, a white light glowed from his fingertips. “Scarlet river, flow no more.” The bleeding stopped. “Healing light, cure my pain, return my might.” His skin pulled together, the deep gash closed, leaving his flesh smooth and whole as if there’d been no wound.

Seren examined his side where the weapon struck. “Not even a scar remains. You had the power to heal yourself all along.” A great weight had lifted off of her. He was unharmed. All was well. Now she just had to muster her courage to tell him how she felt about him and to ask him to stay.

“Yes, if my wolf form had died, I would still have been able to live in my god or man form.”

“That is why my mam delivered the warning.” A warm glow flowed through Seren, her mother had saved Gwydion.

“Yes, she knew if I died in the form of a beast, I would still live in the form of a man.”

“All is well. The Silures will not raid us again, not anytime soon, we have the stolen cattle back and you are healed.”

She heard the sound of a horse’s hooves and turned to see Hywell riding up. “There is more. He comes with tidings of your assailant.”

Hywell reined in his chestnut stallion and eased off the saddle.

“Did you find the spearman?” Gwydion asked.

“Yes.” Hywell shrugged and in an awed tone said. “But it isn’t a man or a woman.”

“What say you?” Seren rose to a standing position and folded her arms across her chest.

“It was a god, wasn’t it?” Though calm, the tone of Gwydion’s voice had an edge to it.

“Yes.” Hywell glanced at the blood on the ground and then at Gwydion. “He vanished when we came upon him. But you have recovered well. I feared you were near death.”

“I have a good healer.” Gwydion flashed a smile at Seren, and then turned back to the warrior. “If it was Govannon, he is only doing Arianrhod’s bidding. This is what happened to Dylan.”

“Yes, he speared his nephew, Arianrhod’s son,” Seren said.

“Yes, Dylan was vulnerable, due to the curse that made him turn mortal on moonless nights. Govannon threw his spear at the God Dylan on such a night and killed him.” Gwydion closed his eyes for a moment as if remembering the sea god, who was rumored to have been his son.

“He speared you as well.” Seren buried her face in her hands, taking a moment to muster her strength.

“Arianrhod ordered him to kill Dylan, and she must have commanded him to murder me, also.” The muscles of his jaw flicked angrily and his eyes narrowed.

“But why?” Seren jerked her head up and met his gaze. She wanted to scream. He’d almost died, due to the crazy goddess.

“She ordered me dead because she is jealous of you.”

“I do not understand why a goddess would be jealous of me.” Seren shook her head.

“Because she knows I love you,” Gwydion said, in a deep voice simmering with passion.

Seren was speechless. Warm joy bubbled inside her. “I was about to tell you the same thing. Does this mean you will stay with me longer than Samhain?”

“Yes. Forever cariad.” Gwydion rose, stood before Seren, and pulled her into his arms.

Crushed against his muscular body, wrapped in a cocoon of warmth, she gazed into his eyes, smoldering with fire.

“I love you.”

Her words were smothered as he moved his mouth over hers, devouring the wet heat of her sweet lips.

Easing his mouth from hers, his eyes gazed into hers. “It would seem we have just met cariad, but sweetheart, I have longed for you from afar. I scried you in the pond of the wise salmon, and even he said you were the woman for me.

But my heart revealed this truth long before the ancient fish did. Your beauty enchanted me. I love the sweetness of your voice, and your smile melts my very soul. But Seren, your spirit, your love for your tribe, your devotion to
the gods, your joy in the land and all life upon it and your commitment to family all come from this tender, sensitive, caring heart.” He splayed his fingers against her chest where her heart lay, gently massaging the spot. “You are a rare gem, and as a dragon must hoard its treasure, I have to have you. I crossed the veil of mist from the otherworld for you, and I will not leave this world without you. There is no force of nature, nor any god or any man that can change that. Certainly not Arianrhod.”

Stepping out of the embrace, he grabbed the spear she’d pulled out of his wolf form. He waved his free hand and the weapon vanished. “I will deal with Govannon and Arianrhod later. There is something more important I must do now.”

Suddenly his strong, warm arms enveloped her again. Her sensitive breasts crushed against his firm chest. His musky, woody, masculine scent wafted in the air. Gwydion’s hot, full lips pressed against hers. Molten heat flooded her as her lips molded to his for what seemed like forever.

Reluctantly, he eased his mouth off hers.

“We should get back to the village,” Hywell called to them, as his mount nickered. “Must we?” Gwydion’s mouth pulled into a wry smile.

Seren wanted to tell him no, just ignore Hywell. “I fear he will not leave without us. And the tribe will worry if we do not return. I am their druid,” she shrugged, “and you are their god.”

Gwydion’s masculine laughter rippled through the air. He led Seren’s mount to her and helped her into the saddle, and then climbed onto his horse.

When they rode into the village, the other eight warriors, who had driven the bull and cows back, stood before the chief.

“Hail, Gwydion, Druidess Seren, and Hywell.” After greeting them, Neithon waited for the three to dismount and step forward, joining the others. He addressed all of them. “You are champions this day, having returned the herd and presented it to me. The tribe is grateful. A feast will be held on the morrow to honor you, nine warriors of Samhain, as well as Seren, and Gwydion.” He pointed to them.

As the warriors cheered, some young men of the tribe ran forward and drove the herd to the pasture nearest the village where they would graze for the winter.

* * * *

Seren leaned in to Gwydion and whispered, “I need to look you over more closely and make sure you are healed and all is well.”

A sensuous glint shone in his eyes. “Yes. I think you do. Let us go back to your roundhouse.”

Hand in hand, they walked at a fast pace, nodding at a few people who went by until they reached the thatched hut. Once they passed through the door, Seren grabbed Gwydion by the shoulders, peered into his eyes, and asked the all-important question. “Did you say you loved me?” She held her breath, awaiting the answer.

“With all my heart.”

She leaned toward him and looked up to peer at his arresting face, strong chin, compelling eyes, and firm, sensual lips. His mouth covered hers in an all-consuming kiss, his lips tasted like warm honey.

Gwydion raised his mouth from hers and he peered at Seren, her pulse pounded.

“Does that kiss mean you love me too?” he asked in a low, smooth voice.

“In truth it does.”

As he waved his hand in front of her, Seren’s clothing vanished.

She felt cool as she stood nude before him. “That trick of yours isn’t fair, but it does hasten things along. And that is good because I can’t wait. I need you now.”

“But I want to go slow, to explore every inch of you,” Gwydion said in a deep, masculine tone.

As he scanned her body, she felt the heat of his gaze. As she felt his warm fingers against the small of her back, he pressed his lips against hers. The wet kiss sent a delicious sensation spiraling through her. Easing his mouth off hers, he ran a trail of feathery kisses down her tingling neck.

Gwydion slid his hands down to her breasts, her hot flesh tingled. Seren’s plump mounds throbbed when he
squeezed them. His tongue whisked the erect peak, searing her nipples.

He ran his hands across her stomach, his fingers left a trail burned into her skin. Gwydion dropped to his knees. Seren squirmed and let out a mew of pleasure as he swirled his wet tongue around her belly button.

With fiery possessiveness, he grasped her hips and buried his face in her crotch. She trembled as his scorching tongue licked the folds. Her breath came in quick gasps as he sunk a finger inside her. Seren’s passage clenched as he stroked her to ecstasy. Between ragged breaths, she released a desperate moan. As she shuddered with pleasure, he gently withdrew his finger.

“My turn,” Seren rasped.

Releasing his tight grip on her hips, he stood. Seren’s heart hammered as she eased the white and gold-speckled druid robe off his broad shoulders. It fell to the floor. She slipped her hands to his tunic, pulled it off him and tossed it down. Gwydion shook his head and his cascading golden hair fell in place, streaming down his back. She grasped the belt at his flat waist, untied it and pushed his plaid pants down to his ankles. He stepped out of them and slipped his shoes off. Her gaze roamed over his deep blue eyes, smoldering with fire, the powerful set of his shoulders, his chest rippling with muscles and down his firm torso to the thick, rigid flesh of his loins.

She pressed her hands against his hard chest, splayed her fingers and stroked his bare skin. After skimming her palms down the sides of his body, in a serpentine motion, she gripped his sturdy thighs. Her pulse quickened, as she dropped to her knees before him. Seren wrapped her fingers around the hot, slick flesh of his bulging cock. He groaned as she stroked the fiery flesh, sliding her hand up and down from base to tip. Opening her mouth, she stretched her lips over the fullness of his arousal. As she sucked the smooth, hard flesh, he rocked against her mouth and released an uninhibited moan of satisfaction. When she eased her lips off his hard cock, Gwydion knelt down so they were both on their knees. He pushed her onto her back and moved over her, so her thighs nestled between his.

Fiercely, his mouth covered hers and his moist lips twisted over hers. She met the press of his lips as her mouth subtly thrust against his. His tongue grazed the softness of her mouth and slid between her parted lips. Seren moaned as he plunged his wet tongue in and out. Blasts of heat surged through her.

As she slid her hands down the smooth plane of his back, the fiery point of his arousal prodded the moist folds of her heated entrance. With a powerful thrust, he sank deep into her pulsating passage. Seren bucked with the impact.

He pumped fire into her. As he pressed harder, her moans came deeper, more desperate. Seren’s heart beat erratically. When she arched into him in a frenzy of need, he drove further into her throbbing center. As her body rocked to the rhythm of his thrust, she squeezed his cock, grinding it. She sucked in a quick breath as she moved against him, gyrating in slow, insistent circles. A deep, guttural moan rose from him as he plunged higher and deeper into her.

She clenched, whimpering and trembling in spasms. Her body stilled and her pounding pulse began to slow. She took a deep breath.

Gwydion eased out of her, still panting. “Seren…Seren …you make me so happy.” His lips curved into a wide smile as intimate as a kiss.

“I as well.” She pulled up and rolled over so she was positioned on top, her body covering his warm, bronze flesh. “Gwydion, I could lay with you like this forever happy.”

“Forever.” He reached up, twined his fingers in her hair and pulled her head down to his, then brushed his firm lips against hers. “You know the lore of wolves.”

“They mate for life.” She pressed her lips against his in a tender, tempting kiss.

His hot breath fanned her cheek as he rasped, “You know the lore of gods.”

“They are immortal.” Seren ran her tongue against the rim of his moist lips. “I am human though.”

Gwydion covered her mouth with his in a hungry demanding kiss. When he eased his lips off of hers he said on a sigh. “Magic. Your love for a god has changed your life cycle.”

“You mean forever as in evermore? We will be together always?”

“Yes.” Gwydion’s smile filled his face, and his voice rang out with enthusiasm. “I can’t wait for Samhain. I shall have Neithon hand-fast us on the morrow at the feast for the nine warriors.”

“In truth?” Seren leaned her head back and sat up. “I don’t think you asked me if I would hand-fast with you.” She crossed her arms over her bare breasts in a feigned protest.
“You are right.” Gwydion took her hand in his. “Seren, will you wed me?”

“I have to think about it.”

The knot at his throat bobbed.

“Well, you do have gorgeous eyes and full lips.” She ran her finger slowly across his mouth. “A large, thick pleasure weapon and an even bigger heart.” She patted the left side of his chest where his heart beat. “Then, so be it. I will hand-fast with you.”

He embraced her and rolled over so he lay on top. “We must celebrate and I know just the way.”

Seren’s trill of giggles filled the air. “You want me again. That quick?”

“Always and forever,” he chortled as he thrust into her.

Every vein in her body tingled with near intolerable pleasure. A fire spread from her quivering core, through every cell and into her hammering heart. Seren and Gwydion experienced the sensation of liquid fire flowing and pouring into each other. There was nothing in all the realms but her and Gwydion, loving each other as they drifted in mindless, euphoric bliss.

About the Author:

When Cornelia Amiri was five years old, she saw a Walt Disney’s The Sword and the Stone and has been interested in Celtic history and mythology ever since. She has over a dozen published works including novels, articles, columns and short stories.

She lives in Houston, Texas with her family: a son, a granddaughter, and a cat.

More Books by Cornelia Amiri from Eternal Press:

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![Druid Bride](image)

by Cornelia Amiri

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Romance Historical Celtic
Novel of 57,000 words

She carried the seed of rebirth, so what had fallen would rise again. The ghost of her ancestor sent Druidess Tanwen from Britannia to the strange foreign tribe of the Caledonii to wed Brude, son of the chief. But Brude is not about to marry a druidess, even though she has the most beautiful body he’s ever seen. Never mind if his blood boils and he can’t stop thinking of her. He will not wed her. Yet the fate of Caledonia rests in the hands of the Warrior and the Druidess. Will they put their differences aside to fulfill their destiny?
Bronwyn is kind and resourceful, a healer ahead of her time who cares for her aging father and two young sisters. She can entrance a man with her sweet voice, the beauty of her face. She’s an impoverished peasant who lives in the dark, suspicious times of fifteenth-century England where such a woman is feared. Witches are believed to be everywhere, waiting to ensnare a powerful man...like Edward the Fourth of England, who comes across her one day singing in a tavern and makes her his mistress.

Edward’s powerful adversary, The Earl of Warwick, seeks to take over the throne of England. Bronwyn is torn between the two; one she loves, the other she loathes. One cherishes her, the other wants to possess and control her. As battle lines form, and the country is torn apart by political upheaval and bloody carnage, the two sides wrestle for the crown. Who will she end up with? When she’s condemned to burn as a witch, which man will save her and which will let her die?
Table of Contents

Start