

It was cold – a dank clinging cold that seemed to be inside the very marrow of my bones. My feet slipped on the wet muddy ground and I pulled my deerskin cloak closer, but even that brought no comfort. I was so unbelievably cold and wet. Normally, the soft supple skin would enfold me within its warmth and comfort; pictures would form in my mind of the generations of deer that had gone before my time on this earth. Today, the herds were but a distant memory as the weather closed in on me, Grandmamma and my 11-year-old sister, Trieainia. ‘Oh for the warmth of a fire,’ I thought, slipping and sliding on the muddy, sandy ground. I drew nearer to my Grandmamma for warmth and reassurance. The mist continued to swirl around; creating strange shapes, transforming the winter trees into mystical, ghostly forms, making me think of weird creatures waiting to pounce on us. The tree branches, outstretched like big cat claws, loomed towards us and they seemed to be calling and drawing us nearer and nearer through the ghostly mist that hung and hovered, drifting through the tree branches. I shuddered and my imagination took flight, thinking of the world they inhabited once their time on Earth was spent. The trees that died in winter, I knew, were taken to the gods of the winter forests to stand forever in a cold dark world of evil black bats and animals that fiercely guarded their own territories. How, I wondered, could they live forever in that bleak cold desolate land, covered in black icicles, never again to feel the warmth of the sun on their boughs or the kiss of a butterfly in the spring? Always to stand guard over a despairing landscape of frozen black ground and ice packed pools and lakes, never to hear the babbling of a summer’s silver waterfall as it gurgles and babbles into the stream. Instead, they stand frozen forever in a black eternity.

I shook the Winter of Despair from my mind, thinking how strange it was that the weather had changed so suddenly. It had been quite bright and spring-like when the three of us had happily left the settlement to walk to the six Standing Stones of the Mystics. I had invited Trieainia and Grandmamma to accompany me to The Stones as I was going to ask the most powerful of The Stones, Myllou, if I would ever see my betrothed again. Deimuiss set out on a lone hunting trip some 18 months ago and to my horror and utter despair, he has never returned. I remember the day he left; it is seared on my soul forever.

I knew he was going hunting that morning. I had kissed him farewell and watched as he mounted his beautiful black stallion and headed off in the direction of the six Standing Stones