

# Songs of the Oystercatcher

Honouring Brihde through the Wheel of the Year



Heather Upfield

2009

## Introduction

These poems have been inspired by the Goddess Brighid herself. They developed over the course of a year from the original Invocation I made to Bride at Candlemass in February 2008. This is the first poem in the cycle.

The cycle then follows the wheel of the Celtic year, with New Year starting in the darkness of Samhuinn (November), and working through Winter Solstice, Imbolc, Spring Equinox, Beltane, Summer Solstice, Lammass and finishing with Autumn Equinox. The poems contain nuances and subtle correspondences to the Festivals they represent and are intended to be used prayerfully and meditatively during the Festival season.

Living close to the sea in Ayrshire, Scotland, I frequently see the Oystercatcher along the shore and rejoice in the connection between this beautiful bird and Brihde. The poetry is part of their song.

No charge is made for downloading these poems, but I would ask that anyone who does so, makes a donation to a charity in their neighbourhood, and then emails me at [brihdein@live.co.uk](mailto:brihdein@live.co.uk) and lets me know they have done so. Wouldn't it be marvellous if benefits from this poetry poured out into nature and the environment, health and social care, human rights and peace!

May the Blessing of Brighid be always with you  
May the Blessing of Brighid be always with those you love  
May the Blessing of Brighid be always a bright and eternal flame in your heart

Heather Upfield  
July 2009

## AN INVOCATION TO BRIHDE AT CANDLEMASS

1 February

Blessèd Brihde my one desire  
Is you before me by the fire  
Spreading rays of radiant light  
Bringing end to winter's night.  
You're also known as hallowed Bride  
And greeted at this Imbolc-tide.  
Your triple calling speaks to me:  
Healer, forge and poetry.  
Blest Brihde your spirit touches mine –  
The name of Smith is in my line.  
The words I write are breath of Brihde  
My garden heals a world in need  
I thank you for the gifts you send  
Of snowdrop flowers at winter's end  
And in return I send your way  
An Imbolc gift of milk this day.  
Blest Brihde sweet Lady of the Hearth  
Illuminate my faltering path  
Inspire my words and heal my pain  
And help me forge my life again

## SAMHUINN

1 November

Under cover of darkness the Old Year seeps away  
Daily becoming thinner, weaker, more dilute  
Fraying at the edges, ragged, pale and grey  
Washed-out fabric, fragile, feathered jute.  
Under cover of darkness the New Year grows apace  
Daily becoming tougher, stronger, more distinct  
Knitting at the edges, *broderie anglais*, lace  
Saturated colour, pearlised with a deeper tint  
Between the feathering and the filigree  
Shimmering chiffon separates the two  
A strange world veiled in organdie  
Where does old end? Where starts the new?  
This sacred season of Hallowed Eve  
Samhuinn Night - the Old Year's tail -  
Allows for passage through the weave  
For ancestors to cross the veil  
Under cover of darkness mysteries unfold  
The seam is stitched together, memories fade  
But in deepest shadow throughout the winter cold  
There shines the light of Brighid in gold brocade!

## WINTER SOLSTICE

21 December

In the stillness of the Shortest Day  
The rising sun dawns quite alone  
A single sunbeam casts a golden ray  
On a solitary frosted standing stone  
In the forest sheltered from the wind  
A unicorn glimpsed white through falling snow  
Sparkling prisms of glistening crystal ice  
Illuminate the sickled mistletoe  
Ivy entwines the berried holly tree  
A deer slips by unnoticed in the shade  
The sun paints fingers of streaming light  
Across the frozen river of the glade  
The setting sun sinks slowly into dusk  
Darkness gathers early - candlelight  
The pine log crackles fragrant in the open hearth  
The Shortest Day : the Longest Night  
The Queen of Fire and Light puts on her boots  
And wraps her mantle tightly to her side  
It's time for work - a six week journey to the beach  
To bring the world to life at Imbolc-tide

## IMBOLC

1 February

Brihde crossed the machair to the sea  
An oystercatcher in her hand  
She scooped a cup of the rising sun  
And sprinkled sunbeams o'er the land

## SPRING EQUINOX

21 March

Spring is not a time of peace  
It jumps and jerks and wrestles free  
March hares boxing bound wild-eyed  
Buds erupting on the tree

Last year's seeds burst into life  
Hard earth cracks as shoots emerge  
Wild winds storm across the sea  
And whip the flooding tidal surge

A time to leap before you look  
To follow Fool – step off the ledge  
A time of reckless folly, risk  
To dare to balance on the edge

Herne the Hunter heralds havoc  
Dances in a fairy ring  
Mad Hatter louns across the fields  
Then stops, high-fives Green Man of Spring

Bridie wrings a rainbow out  
Cascading colours crown the hills  
Glade and garden emerald green  
And golden dancing daffodils

## BELTANE

01 May

On the fields around the bridle-path  
Young grass sparkles in morning dew  
The day stands tip-toe, waiting, ready  
Beltane sun is shining through

In a dappled blossom-laden lane  
The scent of hawthorn fills the air  
Brihde bestows a glimpse of grace  
As she tends the birthing of a pregnant mare

Lovers circle spiralled ribbons  
Dancing through the May Day morn  
Song and laughter, Beltane bonfire  
Labour ends. A foal is born

## SUMMER SOLSTICE

21 June

In all the wonder of brilliant light  
Of blazing blinding transfiguring flame  
Of the power and the passion of the Solar circle  
Brihde a rose by any other name

Brihde the Queen of Fire and Light  
Who hangs her mantle on the Sun  
Brihde of courage, fortitude and strength  
Brihde of life ere life begun

Brihde of Solstice in exalted glory  
You come with light for the good of all  
But your throne is a daisy surrounded by bees  
For you burn with love for all things small

## LAMMAS

1 August

Bridie drowns in the barley,  
on the way to Lammas Fair.  
Weaves the crop stalks in a circle;  
plaited poppies in her hair.  
Kinsfolk gather at the bonfire:  
contracts actioned; bought and sold.  
A time of measure, introspection.  
Bring in the new, discard the old.  
Blest Lady take me as I am and gather me  
as new-scythed corn  
Open arms in winnowing wind,  
scattering seeds to be reborn.  
Brigid of hearth, your oven bakes  
the harvest of the Lammas field.  
The bread is shared; a mystic glimpse:  
a world at war is cherished, healed.  
The Oystercatcher flutes at dawn,  
a warning in her soulful call.  
The barn is full, the harvest ends.  
High summer preludes autumn fall.

## AUTUMN EQUINOX

21 September

With joyful triumphant liquid trill  
Robin's song announces Autumn's here  
Day and night are equal length  
Darkness comes to northern hemisphere.  
A time of sorrow - Summer's over  
Dreams and hopes turn golden brown and die  
Trees take the risk to stand skeletal, bare  
Throughout the Winter's sharp and icy bite.  
Their boughs are bending, laden down with fruit  
Apple, hazel, beechmast, berry, haw -  
Birds and insects riffle through the feast  
Enough today - when Winter comes, no more.  
A wave of grief floods inland from the sea  
Atlantic breakers empty on the strand  
A curlew gathers molluscs with the tide  
Dunlin harvest food twixt sea and land.  
The oystercatcher, known as *Gille Brihde*  
Dips her beak in sand at evening light  
The setting sun sinks aqueous through the clouds  
Damp and misty, weak, then lost from sight.  
The wind of change rampages from the west  
A time to stall the cattle in the byre  
A time to set the ewes down in the fold  
To shut the doors and windows, stoke the fire.  
From now the year progresses to its end  
Shortened days and nightfall gathering.  
But know that all the while the darkness reigns  
That Brihde will come with sunlight in the Spring.