

C[⌘]ILLE DORCHA

LUGHNASADH: FIRST GIFT



Cú Bhríde

(Formerly writing as Terence Frelander)

Part 1 - The Turning

TIME OF THE GATHERING



I remember the warmth of the sun on those summer afternoons, standing at the edge of the school field while the smell of freshly cut grass lingered in the air. The familiar grounds seemed different when they were filled with games, stalls and excited voices. Even before I understood why such gatherings mattered, I recognised that something special was taking place.

Fancy dress competitions were sometimes part of the occasion. In one of my earliest, I went dressed as Robin Hood. I knew far less about him then than I do today, but I already sensed his freedom, his adventurousness and his good natured defiance. Looking back, the choice seems especially fitting. Robin Hood is often associated with May Day and the greenwood, but his stories also contain contests of skill, including the famous archery competition for the silver arrow. Although Robin himself may belong more naturally to the festivities of May, the public testing of his skill carries something of the spirit of Lughnasadh.

The coconut shy was always one of the great attractions. The

Lughnasadh: First Gift

coconuts sat high upon their stands, exotic and strange to me as a child, waiting to be knocked down. Winning one would have felt like claiming a treasure from some distant place. I remember the weight of the wooden ball in my hand and the pleasure of taking aim. It was a challenge, but it was also fun. There was excitement in trying, pride in throwing well and laughter when the ball missed its mark.

Other games offered similar tests of judgement and skill. A penny might be sent rolling down a wooden ramp in the hope that it would land upon a particular square, pass into a narrow slot or strike the right target. The prize was often small, but that hardly mattered. The real pleasure lay in the attempt and in the possibility that this time the penny might fall exactly where I wanted it to.

There was exhilaration of a different kind on the bouncy castle. I remember the smell of the warm plastic and the feeling of freedom as I was thrown upwards, landed and rose again. For a few moments the ordinary rules of movement no longer seemed to apply. The school grounds had become a place where I could leap, compete, explore and become somebody else.

The fair itself transformed the familiar schoolyard into somewhere faintly magical. Tables appeared beneath bunting and temporary signs. There were homemade cakes, toffee apples and clouds of candyfloss. There were stalls covered with bric a brac, second hand objects and books that had once belonged to other people. I loved moving from one table to another, wondering whether some unexpected treasure might be hidden among them.

The lucky dip held the same promise of mystery. I could push my hand down into a container of sand and search for a prize without knowing what I would find. I do not remember any particular prize, and perhaps that is because the object itself was never the most important part. The delight lay in not knowing. For a moment, anything seemed possible.

Sports day carried much of the same energy. At primary school there were three legged races, sack races, wheelbarrow races and sometimes a tug of war. Children ran, stumbled, laughed and tried again while families watched from the edge of the field. Parents might be invited to join a race or take their place on the rope. The contests were playful, but they still allowed us to test ourselves before the gathered community.

At secondary school the competition became more serious. There

were running races and athletics events in which speed, strength and technique mattered more clearly. Yet the essential pattern remained. People gathered to witness skill, effort, success and disappointment. Someone crossed the line first, but everyone had stepped forward to be tested.

That same pattern can still be recognised in the great sporting competitions that fill our summers. The Olympics, the World Cup and the European Championship draw people together to watch individuals and teams demonstrate abilities developed through years of discipline. They are celebrations of excellence, but their meaning is not confined to victory. They allow communities and nations to gather, to witness one another and, at their best, to find fellowship across differences.

In difficult times, that aspect of these events feels increasingly important. Competition does not have to divide us. It can provide a shared space in which rivalry is given rules, skill is honoured and people who might otherwise remain strangers stand together in admiration. The games remind us that achievement is worth celebrating, but also that no achievement exists without other people to witness, challenge and support it.

The end of the school year contained another kind of harvest. At primary school, our parents would sometimes be invited into the classroom, where our books had been laid out upon the desks. Pages of handwriting, drawings, sums and projects recorded what we had done across the year. We could show our families what we had learnt and explain the work of which we were most proud.

I had never thought of this as a harvest, yet that is precisely what it was. Months of learning had produced something visible. The books gathered together the evidence of our effort and growth. Before the school community dispersed for the summer holidays, there was a moment to look back and recognise what had been achieved.

Perhaps this helps to explain why the school year feels so naturally complete in July. It does not follow the calendar year, nor does it end with the deepest darkness of winter. It ripens through spring and reaches its conclusion as the first harvest approaches. The work is gathered, the achievements are displayed, the games are held and then the community rests.

I recognise something of the summer fair whenever I take my own scent creations to a market. Each bottle contains the culmination of a long process. There has been research, experimentation, failure,

Lughnasadh: First Gift

adjustment and patient making. The finished products are placed upon the stall as the visible fruits of that labour.

Taking them to market is both a celebration and an act of vulnerability. I am not simply displaying what I have made. I am offering it to other people and allowing them to judge it. They may stop, smell, ask questions and recognise something meaningful within it. They may also walk past without noticing. The harvest has been gathered, but I cannot control how it will be received.

That uncertainty belongs to the market just as surely as the exchange of goods. The maker brings forward what has been produced and asks whether it has value beyond the private pleasure of creation. Pride, hope, judgement and disappointment all stand together behind the stall.

Seen in this way, the summer fairs and sports days of childhood begin to resemble the older gatherings of Lughnasadh. According to tradition, Lugh established games in honour of Tailtiu after her death from the labour of clearing the land. The gathering remembered sacrifice, celebrated the first harvest and created a place for contests, trade and communal recognition.

The timing matters. Lughnasadh does not mark the end of all labour. Much remains to be harvested, preserved and prepared. Yet an important stage has been reached. The early work has produced visible results. The grain is beginning to ripen, and the community can pause long enough to acknowledge what has been achieved.

This is why contests belong so naturally to this season. Spring is filled with promise and possibility. Lughnasadh is different. By now the first fruits of our labour can be seen. Whether in a field, a classroom, a workshop, a sports arena or a market stall, we are able to look back and recognise what months of effort have produced. We test our abilities, share our work and celebrate together because something has finally ripened enough to be seen.

Yet the first harvest is only the beginning.

For me, Lughnasadh has always carried a distinctive feeling. It is not simply a celebration of what has already been gathered. It is the first glimpse of everything that gathering will eventually make possible. The first harvest quietly points towards the second.

Beneath the warmth of the lingering summer, I begin to sense another season approaching. There is an anticipation that is difficult to explain, a feeling that something within me is beginning to ripen

alongside the fields.

The harvest is not only taking place around me. It is taking place within me as well. Months of experience, learning, conversations and reflection have been gathering unnoticed, just as surely as the grain has been filling in the fields. They are not yet ready to become anything. That time has not yet arrived.

In time, the final harvest will provide grain for bread, fruit for preserves and the materials from which countless useful and beautiful things can be made. The work of gathering gradually gives way to the work of transformation. In much the same way, I know there will come a season when everything this year has cultivated within me will seek its own expression. Experiences will become stories. Reflections will become rituals. Ideas will become books. What I feel now is not the urge to create, but the anticipation of it, a gentle hum beneath the surface that returns at this point every year.

For now, that is enough.

Lughnasadh does not ask me to begin making. It simply teaches me to recognise that the he season of gathering has begun, both around me and within me. The first fruits are both a celebration and a promise of another harvest still to come, a season when everything that has been gathered, from the land and from life itself, will finally be transformed into something I can offer back to the world.



Part 2 - The Grove

THE FIRST GIFTS OF THE HARVEST



Before entering the grove, I begin as I always do, with cleansing.

The warmth of the day begins to soften. Evening has not yet given way to dusk, but the fierce brightness of afternoon has settled into gentler gold. Washing at this point in the season feels less like preparation for stillness and more like preparation for work. The water carries away the dust of the day. Fresh clothes are put on without haste, ready not for celebration alone, but for making.

I sit quietly and allow my breathing to slow.

Gradually the sounds of the house begin to recede. The rhythm of each breath becomes steadier. Thoughts loosen their hold and drift further apart until, almost without noticing, the grove begins to emerge.

The air is warm.

Not with the full intensity of midsummer, but with the mellow warmth of a season beginning to lean towards autumn. The evening sun hangs low enough to cast long shafts of amber light between the trunks

of the trees. Dust and tiny insects drift lazily within them, suspended as though time itself has slowed.

The grove feels different now.

The leaves remain full upon the branches, yet the season has begun its quiet turning. Hazelnuts hang heavy beneath their leaves. Brambles at the woodland edge hold berries that are only just beginning to darken. Ferns stand tall beside the path, their deepest fronds touched with the faintest hint of bronze.

The woodland itself has not become a field, yet it cannot escape the season unfolding beyond its borders.

A warm breeze wanders between the trees.

It carries with it an unexpected fragrance.

Not flowers.

Not resin.

Fresh bread.

Faint at first, then unmistakable.

Somewhere beyond the grove the first grain has already become food. The scent lingers only briefly before drifting away again, yet it leaves behind a quiet understanding. The harvest has begun.

I continue deeper amongst the trees.

The altar stands where it always has, but it feels different beneath the evening light. Nothing here has been arranged for display. Glass bottles, pipettes, bowls and polished tools rest in careful order across the stone. Every object has its place. Nothing appears excessive. Nothing unnecessary remains.

The altar waits.

Not in silence alone.

In readiness.

I stop a short distance away.

Someone else is already here.

He stands beside the altar with his back turned, studying the tools with the quiet attention of someone who has spent a lifetime making beautiful things.

There is nothing theatrical about him.

His clothes are plain. His sleeves rolled back. Strong hands bear the marks of honest labour rather than battle. He carries no crown, no jewelled spear, no outward sign of sovereignty. Yet the quiet confidence with which he moves leaves no doubt that mastery stands before me.

Without acknowledging my arrival, he reaches for one of the bottles.

Lughnasadh: First Gift

He lifts it towards the evening light.

Turning it slowly, he watches the oil catch the gold of the lowering sun before gently replacing it exactly where it belongs.

He repeats the same careful attention with each of the tools upon the altar.

Nothing escapes his notice.

At last his hand comes to rest upon a small sickle.

Its blade is polished like pale gold, though worn smooth by long use rather than ornament.

He lifts it without ceremony.

Turning from the altar, he walks quietly to the edge of the clearing where a small stand of wild grain has found its way into the sunlight beyond the trees.

For a long moment he simply stands before it.

Then, with one clean movement, he cuts a single stem.

Nothing more.

He carries it back to the altar and lays it gently across the bottles and tools awaiting the work ahead.



THE FIRST GIFTS OF THE HARVEST

Only then does he speak.
“Nothing is made without something first being given.”
The words settle over the grove as naturally as the evening light.
No explanation follows.
None is needed.
The bread carried upon the breeze.
The stem resting across the altar.
The oils gathered from leaves, flowers, bark and resin.
Even the fragrance waiting to be created.
All have come into being because something first offered itself.
When I look up once more, his eyes meet mine for the first time.
There is neither judgement nor praise within them.
Only recognition.
The tools have been blessed.
The making may begin.

Part 3 - The Practice

GRATITUDE



Lughnasadh has long been celebrated through gathering. Markets filled with voices. Competitions testing skill. Tables shared with family and neighbours. The first loaves broken together from newly harvested grain. There is something deeply human in celebrating what has begun to flourish after months of patient labour.

Yet Lughnasadh may also offer another invitation. One quieter in nature. One that asks us not simply to celebrate the harvest, but to recognise the countless gifts that made it possible.

It can be helpful to approach the day without rushing from one task to the next. If possible, set aside a little time beforehand to prepare the space in which you intend to practise. Clear away unnecessary distractions. Bring together anything you wish to place upon your altar or table. A simple piece of bread, a handful of grain or oats, or perhaps something you have made with your own hands. It need not be elaborate. Lughnasadh honours willingness more readily than perfection.

As evening approaches, gently warm the accord.

Allow the fragrance to settle quietly through the room before the

meditation begins. If the weather allows, an open window may invite the last warmth of the summer air inside, carrying birdsong or the distant movement of the world beyond your home. Lughnasadh belongs to the threshold between labour and rest. The day's work is drawing towards its close. The fields still glow with the warmth they have gathered beneath the afternoon sun.

The important thing is not performance, but remembrance.

This is a season that asks us to notice how little we truly create alone. Every meal upon our table. Every tool within our hands. Every skill we possess. Every kindness we have received. Each has travelled through countless lives before arriving in our own. Gratitude begins when we recognise that nothing we value exists in isolation.

As the fragrance begins to fill the room, allow yourself to become aware of its quiet warmth. The woods settle first, steady and familiar. Gentle resins emerge beneath them, carrying the comforting atmosphere of seasoned timber and well-used tools. A soft golden richness follows, like sunlight resting across an old workbench or fresh bread cooling after it has left the oven. There is no need to analyse the fragrance. Simply allow it to become part of the space around you.

When you are ready, close your eyes and allow the grove to reveal itself once more.

Above you, broad branches gather the last warmth of the day beneath their shelter, while ribbons of amber light drift lazily through the leaves to settle upon moss-covered roots and weathered stone. Although evening approaches, summer has not yet loosened its hold upon the woodland. Each breath carries the scent of warm earth, sun-dried timber and the faint sweetness of wildflowers, lingering upon the air like a final celebration of the season now drawing gently towards its close.

As you follow the winding path between the ancient trees, birds exchange their final songs before dusk. Here and there, a squirrel darts across your path before vanishing into the undergrowth, while insects continue their patient work amongst the last blossoms of summer. Nothing disturbs the quiet rhythm of the grove, and with every step the concerns of the ordinary world seem to fall a little farther behind.

Then another scent finds you.

At first it is so faint that you wonder whether you imagined it, but the breeze carries it to you again before allowing it to slip quietly away. Freshly baked bread. Warm, comforting and unmistakable. It drifts

Lughnasadh: First Gift

through the woodland without revealing its source, appearing and disappearing as though inviting you to follow without ever asking you to hurry.

Only gradually do you become aware that the woodland around you has begun to change.

The trees draw a little farther apart with every step, allowing golden evening light to gather between their trunks before spilling gently into a broad clearing. Ahead of you, an ancient oak stretches its mighty branches across the open space, its canopy casting long shadows over a sturdy workbench fashioned from heavy timber. Time has softened every edge. Countless hands have polished its surface smooth. Every mark speaks of honest work carried out with patience, skill and care.

As you draw nearer, your attention settles upon the simple collection of objects resting upon the bench.

A loaf whose crust still carries the warmth of the oven. A carved wooden bowl, its grain glowing softly in the evening light. A leather-bound book, creased by years of careful reading. Close beside them lie well-used tools whose polished handles speak of faithful labour rather than ornament or display.

Nothing has been placed here to impress you.

Everything has been placed here to teach you.

Looking a little longer, the objects begin to reveal stories that reach far beyond themselves. The loaf was once a field of grain, nourished by rain, warmed by the summer sun and gathered by willing hands. The bowl began its life as a living tree, drawing water from the earth and light from the sky before surrendering its timber to the craft of another. The book before you carries words preserved across generations, shaped by minds and hands you will never know. Even the simplest tool is the meeting place of ore drawn from the earth, timber from the woodland and the knowledge of those who learned their craft long before it reached your hands.

Before your eyes ever lift beyond the workbench, another truth has already begun to settle quietly within you.

Nothing before you began as it now appears.

Everything has first been received.

Everything has first been given.

Only then do your eyes lift beyond the workbench.

Standing quietly beneath the broad canopy of the ancient oak is Lugh.

He has been there all along.

Neither announcing his presence nor seeking your attention, he simply waits with the quiet patience of one who has no need to hurry understanding. The warmth of the evening rests upon his face, while shafts of amber light break gently through the branches above, touching his shoulders before fading once more into the deepening shade. Strength is evident in him, not through displays of power, but through the calm assurance of someone who understands both the labour of the hand and the generosity of the earth.

His gaze lingers upon the objects before you before meeting your own.

For a long while he says nothing.

There is no need.

Everything upon the workbench has already spoken of the lesson he came to share.

Only when the silence has been given time to settle does he finally break it.

“Nothing is made without something first being given.”

His words linger within the stillness of the grove long after they have been spoken. Once more, silence settles beneath the great oak. It is not an empty silence, but one filled with quiet understanding, allowing the truth of what lies before you to take root.

Your eyes return to the workbench.

The loaf.

The bowl.

The book.

The tools.

None asks for admiration. None boasts of the skill that shaped it. Each bears quiet witness to gifts received, transformed with patience before being offered once again to others.

Gradually, your thoughts begin to wander beyond the objects before you.

What gifts have been placed into your own hands?

Which have come from the earth itself? Which have been entrusted to you by those who taught, encouraged or loved you? Which talents have lain quietly within you, waiting only for willing hands and an open heart to bring them into being?

The questions ask for no immediate answer.

Lughnasadh is not a season of conclusions.

It is a season of beginnings.

Lughnasadh: First Gift

For every harvest, however plentiful, is only the first gift. It carries within it the promise of bread still to be baked, seed still to be sown, stories still to be written and kindness still to be offered. Every gift fulfils its purpose only when it continues its journey through willing hands.

When at last you look towards Lugh once more, he simply inclines his head. There is neither farewell nor command, only the quiet acknowledgement that your time within the grove has come to an end.

Slowly, you turn and leave the clearing behind.

With each step, the scent of fresh bread begins to fade, yielding once more to warm earth, timber and leaf. Birds still call amongst the branches overhead, while the first coolness of evening gathers beneath the trees. Before long, the woodland path carries you back to the place where your own journey began.

Take a slow, gentle breath.

Become aware once more of the fragrance surrounding you. Feel the chair beneath you, the ground beneath your feet, the sounds of the world around you. Carry with you the lesson of the grove, not as something to be remembered, but as something to be lived.

Before Lughnasadh has passed, make something that was not there before.

However humble it may seem, let it become your own first gift of the harvest.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

Part 4 - The Accord

THE ACCORD IN THE SEASON OF THE GATHERING



Aonta an Chéad Bhronntanais was created as an expression of Lughnasadh's first gift.

By early August the wheel has begun to turn away from the fullness of midsummer. The light still lingers warmly across the land, yet something has quietly changed. Fields stand heavy with grain. Hedgerows offer their first fruits. The work of spring has become visible at last, though the greater harvest still lies ahead.

This accord was created to inhabit that feeling.

Not abundance completed, but abundance beginning to reveal itself. The quiet satisfaction that comes from seeing the first signs that labour has borne fruit. The moment when gratitude naturally arises, not because everything has been gathered, but because the first gift has already been placed into our hands.

The accord therefore gathers around the atmosphere of Lugh's workshop beneath the old oak.

Warm woods form its foundation, carrying the quiet reassurance of seasoned timber worn smooth through years of patient craftsmanship.

Lughnasadh: First Gift

Gentle resins settle amongst them, adding warmth without heaviness, like sunlight resting across an old workbench late in the afternoon. Soft traces of wax and honeyed richness emerge gradually, recalling the gifts of hive and field without ever becoming sweet. Everything unfolds with quiet purpose. Nothing feels hurried. Nothing seeks to impress through excess. The fragrance reveals itself in the same patient way that skill itself is acquired, little by little, season after season.

The accord feels made rather than manufactured, and this remained important throughout its creation. Standing opposite Imbolc upon the wheel, Lughnasadh offers a natural companion to Bríde's season. At Imbolc, the forge is first lit. Inspiration awakens, skills are learned and the first spark of creation is encouraged. By the time the wheel reaches Lughnasadh, those early beginnings have matured into something tangible. The hands that first learned their craft now shape timber, grain, metal and cloth into objects of purpose and beauty. The fire of Bríde has not been left behind. Rather, it continues to burn within every act of careful workmanship, finding its fulfilment in the gifts that Lugh now invites us to recognise.

For this reason, the fragrance does not seek to portray the abundance of a completed harvest alone. Instead, it lingers within that quieter moment when labour gives way to reflection. Fresh bread rests upon the workbench after leaving the oven. Well-used tools are laid aside for the evening. Warm timber still carries the memory of hands that have shaped it throughout the day, whilst the gentle sweetness of beeswax recalls both the patient work of the hive and the quiet generosity of the land itself. Everything within the accord speaks of honest work completed with care rather than haste.

In many ways, this is the true spirit of Lughnasadh. The first loaf may still be imperfect. The first carving may retain the marks of the knife. The first words upon a page may yet require revision. None of these diminish their worth. They remind us that every craft is built through patience, practice and perseverance, and that the first fruits of our labour are worthy of gratitude precisely because they mark the beginning of mastery rather than its conclusion.

It is this atmosphere that **Aonta an Chéad Bhronntanais** seeks to capture. Not simply the scent of wood, resin and harvest, but the quiet contentment that settles over a workshop at the close of a day's labour, when the first gifts of the season have been received and there is time, at last, to pause and appreciate what patient hands, willing hearts and the turning of the wheel have brought into being.

Lughnasadh: First Gift

© 2026 Terence Freeland

Published by Dark Forest Books
London, United Kingdom

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form without written permission from the author, except for brief quotations in review.

Cover design by Terence Freeland
Illustrations by Terence Freeland

This seasonal companion forms part of the Dark Forest cycle of scent and invocation.

The moral right of the author to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.