

• **SAMPLE CHAPTER** •
NOT FOR RESALE DISTRIBUTION



THE
SONG OF AN
EMERALD DOVE

a story of courage and
a different kind of holy war

Copyright © 2005 by

XANNA VINSON

All copy rights reserved. This is a work of fiction; consequently, all references to real people, locales, products, or historical events are used fictitiously. All other characters, names, places, or occurrences have originated in the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

www.harvestshadows.com

While riding south with the women on that November day in 2005, she opened the newspaper. It was hardly a slow news day. It never was anymore. She hoped that the papers and the network news teams didn't feel the need to use shock value to improve their ratings. The war was supposed to be over, but the kidnapping of another American had been the lead story on every broadcast for days, and so far the photographic images had been limited to a ten-year-old photograph of the Philadelphia native and a more recent one of him, older now, clad in a bright orange prisoner uniform and surrounded by hooded men with automatic weapons. But today's headlines had changed. Today he was no longer a captive. He had been executed. Beheaded. And the Al-Jazeera television station was reportedly broadcasting footage of the execution. Yvonne didn't want to see it. Didn't need to see it. The women had already seen worse. She remembered when the images first began to make sense...

1998 – The Summoning

~ Chapter I ~

“It’s worse than a nightmare,” she remembered saying to the others, “because we wake up and know it’s real — somewhere, some time, it’s going to be real!” She reread the typed message.

draw together as many of your sisters as you can, for they will be needed for the grave work ahead. there is a big problem / / so huge you cannot conceive of it until it shows itself full strength. none but my children can show the world the way to remove this horror. it will take longer than you have ever worked my will in the past, but it must be done.

She slipped the notebook into the drawer of the end table. The guests would be arriving soon.

Yvonne had other, more troublesome, things on her mind, but at sundown she had slipped into her Wiccan persona as easily as stepping into a comfortable nightgown, and as Lady Aurora, the high priestess of the Circle of Selene, she had greeted each guest at the door.

Yule was a sabbat of renewed hope, and it celebrated the belief that the sun would come up early once again, after the darkness

of winter had been defeated. The men knew the routine, for this was the tenth time that many of them had met for Yule at Aurora's.

Upstairs Annwyn donned a heavy woolen cape over his black velvet ceremonial robe, trusting that this additional layer would serve him well during their long outdoor ritual. He stepped up to the small table and solemnly lit the short red pillar candle that he had placed within the pair of antlers to serve as a backdrop for a large scallop shell filled with salted water. He placed his hands palm-downward above the bowl and uttered a blessing over the water, asking its service to purify each of them so that they might be fit to create and occupy the sacred space of the night's ritual. He dipped his index finger into the water and then drew a salty pentagram on his chest, bowed reverently, and stepped back from the table. Then he motioned to Sigmund to perform his own self-blessing.

After each of the sixteen men had finished, Annwyn extinguished the candle. They all filed wordlessly down the stairs and through the house. Earlier in the evening, Annwyn and Aurora had placed a pile of evergreen branches and holly boughs on the back porch. Now the men each took an armful of the greenery to their circle. Three small flashlights cast narrow beams of light as they climbed the winding path up the wooded hill, leaving the first footprints in the previous night's snow. The narrow path meandered to the right up the hill and then swung sharply left across the ridge and back again, ending in a small glen. The clearing there was large enough for the men to create a circle beneath the tall trees.

The air held a chill, but the winds had died down and the silence that always follows a snowfall had erased all sound from the night. They switched off the flashlights and pocketed them. Annwyn led the men into the ritual space and motioned to them to place their pine boughs and holly in a border around the eighteen-foot wide circle. They adjusted the boughs in the darkness, with

only the moonlight and the white snow to guide them. Then Sigmund removed two of the overlapping branches to create an entryway into the circle. He and Annwyn placed them on the thigh-high section of willow trunk in the circle's center. They carefully arranged the boughs around the single red pillar candle that had been awaiting their arrival. Except for the crunching sound of the snow as the men moved into position, there was total silence.

Annwyn struck a match and lit the candle. Then, in a voice so deep and vibratory that the sound of it seemed to issue from the earth itself, he proceeded to call out the names of the Old Gods. He raised his arms to summon the spirits of the Ancient Ones to enter this sacred space and, as he did so, the first snowflakes of the night floated down through the feathery pine branches above them.

After a few moments, each man made himself as comfortable as possible, sitting on snowy ground or dried leaves, or squatting in a circle around the altar and its single small flame of hope. In the darkness, its pinpoint reflection shone in the eyes of the encircled men. The flame symbolized the waning light of the winter sun, and the men now meditated on the fear that must have gripped their ancestors as they witnessed the hours of daylight being snatched from them as the seasons moved on. *What could they possibly do to reverse the course of diminishing light?* And so the chant began: "Horned One, Comforter, guardian forsworn. Deep within the shadows, wait to be reborn." They each joined in and the chant continued in the darkness that surrounded them and the tiny beacon....

In the guest room, the women had finished donning their robes and capes and now prepared to perform their own candlelit self-blessings. It would be the love and faith of the Goddess that would awaken the Light and bring the world out of winter's darkness. They would represent that love and that light tonight.

Having delayed until the men had already left for the hilltop, Aurora went first and consecrated the salted water, and then performed her self-blessing. The others followed her, knowing that the priests had to be left alone for a long-enough time, raising doubts in their minds that the women were ever going to join them. It was an intentional and integral part of the ritual.

Raphaela and Brianna each lit a white taper and placed them in silver candleholders while each of the others lit individual white votive candles. The group then stood in a circle while Aurora led them in a guided meditation.

“Breathe deeply and evenly. Deeply and evenly. With each breath draw in the pure white light of the flame which you hold before you. Breathe out the darkness and fear within your heart and soul. Breathe in... and out. Slowly close your eyes and concentrate on the afterimage of the flame. Breathe deeply and draw its beautiful white light deep into yourself. Draw in its beauty and its peace and its hope for all mankind, for the planet, and for the Ancient Ones. Draw it into your hearts and feel the flame growing and glowing there. Feel it light up your entire being, transforming you into a beacon of hope for all whom you encounter. Breathe in deeply and feel the warmth and brilliance radiate from your heart to light a path before you.” After several moments, she continued, “When you have achieved this sacred brilliance, open your eyes, for we have work to do this night. So mote it be.” Aurora listened as one-by-one they each opened their eyes and repeated the affirmation, “So mote it be.”

Raphaela and Brianna stepped to the doorway of the dining room, followed by the others, as Aurora lit each of the eight sabbat candles on the Yule log. They all began the women’s chant that would soon announce their entry into the circle on the hill. They walked slowly across the kitchen and out the back door to the porch, down the pair of steps to the snow-covered backyard,

and across it to the woods, following the fresh trail left by the men. “Lord of Death, Lord of Light, strength returning on this night,” they sang as they walked.

Sixteen women in capes and robes walked before Aurora in the moonlight as fluffy snowflakes floated in the still air. Tonight the neighbors, tucked into their snug winterized homes, were busy watching television and were once again oblivious to the melodic chant of these women, and unaware of their belief that the continuation of all life was being ensured by their small procession tonight. A short gust of chilly wind blew Aurora’s knee-length hair out behind her as she followed a short distance behind the women. She raised her cloaked arm to shield the candles and lost not a single flame to the sporadic gusts.

The women sang as they climbed, reaching out for branches to steady their steps through the icing snow. Oceana struggled to keep up with the others, determined to join in the ritual on the hill at least one more time before her ravaged knees prevented it. A deep night’s chill was descending on the woods, and their hands were feeling the bite of the winter air. As always, their purpose and the gift of the guided meditation worked to create an inner warmth that bided them through the cold ritual.

The rolling landscape added to the impact of their candlelit procession, for the men stirred from their reverie only when the priestesses had approached within fifty feet of the circle and the glow of their candles became visible in the darkness as they crested the ridge. The women’s voices grew to dance above the sound of the long-repeated chant of the men. The priests stood as the women approached the circle, a vision of angels in the cold dark night. “Horned One, Comforter, Guardian forsworn... Lord of Death, Lord of Light...” The songs blended into one and soon they were all singing the chant of light and rebirth as the high priestess brought the beautiful Yule log, symbol of the promise of increasing light, into the circle.



HARVEST
SHADOWS
PUBLICATIONS™