

~ 20 MARCH ~

## The Apprenticeship of Love

*Seven long years I served for thee,  
The glassy hill I climbed for thee,  
The bloody shirt I wrang for thee,  
Will you not waken and turn to me?*

—*The Black Bull of Norroway*, Scottish Folk Story

The Scots folk story *The Black Bull of Norroway* tells of a young woman who goes to a seer to get knowledge of her future love. Her future husband comes to her in the enchanted shape of a black bull. They become separated, and the woman has to suffer many trials to find and win him again: she must climb a hill of glass with shoes of iron, apprenticing herself to a smith for seven years to make them, and in the end must wash her lover's bloody shirt to disenchant him.

This story is nothing less than a tale about the apprenticeship we each serve to love. Although it is told about a woman's love-quest, it would apply equally to that of a man. The first stages of love are often as uncertain and headlong as the heroine's flight on the bull's back: neither partner is sure of the other, and there are many unrealistic expectations on both sides. Love may not be equal at the beginning, so one partner may need to be patient while the other discovers a similar depth of affection. The ability to be constant, consistent, and reliable is one learned over a long period; during this period, many relationships falter or come to grief. The glassy hill of love presents a great challenge to the faithful lover. The spiked shoes of iron are not made overnight. And many a shirtful of wounds may have to be laundered before old loves and hates learned in past relationships are leached out of the present one. Constancy, perseverance, and patience are the skills we learn in the apprenticeship of love.

*Meditate upon your own apprenticeship to love. Where has your story got to? Which qualities need more development?*