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WITCH

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WITCH



Welcome to the
September issue of
Witch!

As we celebrate the
mid point, the in
between, the liminal space of the Autumn
Equinox, we welcome in the darker
mornings, the cooler days, and evenings
that smell of leaves and witchcraft.

We hope you enjoy our latest issue, and
we look forward to October and our next
print edition!

Pre orders will go on sale soon at
www.witchzine.co.uk!

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WITCH

FEATURED ARTICLES

SISTERS OF THE MOON BY MICHELLE ROSE BOXLEY

ECO FRIENDLY WITCH BY FAITH BARNES

MANY FACES OF THE OCCULT: SHAMANISM BY KELLY BUCHAN

THE MAGIC OF MIRRORS BY CAROLINE BLANCHARD

MONTHLY CRYSTAL GUIDE - MOONSTONE AND CARNELIAN
BY CHERYL BECKWORTH

WORDS FROM THE WITCHES JOURNAL BY PORTLAND JONES

HONOURING THE CRONE BY FAIRY BEC

WISE WORDS FROM THE OLD CRONE BY NITA SIMPSON

RAVEN AND LUNA'S TAROTSCOPES BY BLACK MOON COVE

DON'T ASK THE MOON BY KELLY BUCHAN

AVONMOUTH - PART III BY HELEN J.R. BRUCE



MICHELLE ROSE BOXLEY



HELEN J.R. BRUCE



THE OLD CRONE



FAIRY BEC



KELLY BUCHAN



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Sisters of the Moon

Michelle Rose Boxley

We welcomed in the full moon in Pisces on Monday. This full moon is known as the Harvest moon as it's the full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox which takes place on 22nd September.

Pisces is a sensitive, feminine, water sign so expect to feel fairly emotional whilst the moon is in this sign. Full moons always heighten emotions so the Pisces influence will amplify this even more. It's definitely a time to go slow, be gentle with yourself and make sure you've got lots of self care lined up. Pisces is a deep and magical sign, ruled by the 12th House of Self-Knowing and the unconscious and the planets Neptune and Jupiter. Jupiter is the planet of expansion and Neptune is the planet of Universal Love and elevated consciousness.

Pisces moon is a wonderful time to connect with the water element which is also associated with the season of Autumn. In the Lunar Temple we are connecting with the Lady of the Lake and the Celtic Otherworld. We will be uploading a guided meditation journey where we will travel to Avalon to meet this powerful Enchantress and will also be uploading a full moon teaching all about connecting with Pisces and the Autumn Equinox.

The wheel of the year is about to turn once again and we welcome in the Autumn Equinox. The Autumn Equinox, referred to by modern pagans as Mabon, takes place on 22nd September this year at 20:20(gmt) and marks the balance between light and dark. In Irish this time of year is called Mi Meadhin Fómhair which means the middle month of harvest. The druids called the Autumn Equinox 'Alban Elfed' which means 'Light of the Water'. In Celtic spirituality Autumn is associated with the element of water and the direction of the West. Both the west and water are associated with the

THE FULL MOON IN PISCES

THE HARVEST MOON

otherworld and so the Autumn months are particularly potent times for magic and also a time to honour the dead and our ancestors.

This ties in with another name for this time of year, 'The Feast of Avalon' - Avalon being the mythical Island known as the Island of Apples which exists in the otherworld with portals in this world (one of which is believed to be in Glastonbury). Apples in Celtic mythology are associated with healing and the otherworld and Avalon was believed to be a resting place for the dead. The Feast of Avalon represents the dying part of the year which we are now in and also the apple harvest. The theme of death runs through all three harvest festivals but is honoured more deeply at Samhain which is the death of the year.

For more, join online for monthly live new moon circles, Lunar Living e-book meditations and more!

Sisters of the Moon Lunar Temple

<http://mysteryschoolofthegoddess.net/2021/08/15/the-lunar-temple-monthly-moon-membership-with-michelle-boxley/>





“This planet is great, this planet’s our core,
this planet is ours, so don’t ignore,
helping is no chore, so let’s keep it alive!
This planet we adore.”

- The Sea Witch Poet

Eco Friendly Witch

Feature by Faith Barnes

Why become Eco-friendly and more Sustainable?

A large part of witchcraft is the deep connection to nature and the earth. This balance between the craft and the world is often thought about when practising. But why think about the environment and sustainability?

Do it for our next generation of witchlings, and to enhance your connection with nature. Do it so that nature still exists, for your future self and family to enjoy it! Treat it just like your book of shadows, handle it with care, look after it to pass onto future generations. Do exactly the same with nature! We don't want to lose this connection with the planet, with our power roots, it is part of who we are as a witch. We want to feel her flourish and grow, as we blossom with her. To feel her thriving, not her pain.

Recycling can be part of this, it can change the planet! It can reduce the need to cut down our precious trees. To produce, collect and mine, the raw materials needed to make new items. In toll, fewer rivers get diverted and fewer animals get moved or harmed. And less pollution gets produced in the air, water and soil, which harms the world.

Sustainability is also an important factor in everything we do, helping us to live on a healthier and cleaner planet. Sustainability is scientifically proven to have a positive effect on the planet by decreasing the number of toxins we produce and lowering our carbon footprint. This doesn't mean you have to suddenly become a protesting, chain yourself to a tree type Eco-witch, not at all! But by doing small thoughtful daily acts, which I'm sure you are already doing within your craft, you too can become an Eco-friendly witch!

One of the most moving experiences I've ever had, was in Canada when I was a teenager visiting family. This is where I felt first-hand, the earth's pain. As you may know, logging is very big there, as it has bountiful trees and forests. But walking through this area after this destruction, moved me to tears.

These ancient trees were ripped to shreds, with broken body parts half hanging off the trunks. Pieces were discarded and carelessly thrown everywhere. Completely decimated. I felt her pain and saw the cruel and violent actions of us human beings, enacted on mother nature.

Recycling, composting, respecting nature, sustainable witchin, and caring about the environment are all key aspects of being an Eco-witch!

You can become an Eco-friendly witch!
To help you on your journey, here are some ideas you may have not have



thought of:

- Plants! You don't have to be a green witch to help the environment! The Eco-friendly witch loves plants, as they reduce carbon monoxide in the atmosphere, creating cleaner air, a cleaner heart, and a clearer mind. Plants also help encourage wildlife, birds and insects to flourish. Each little garden or

plant adds up to make a big difference.

- **Grow your own wild herbs!** The only true way to know that your herbs are natural and organic is to grow your own! Not only does this not use packaging or transport costs. But you get a chance to connect further with nature and to create a magical practice in your daily life.

- **Water!** This magickal element is often wasted when running a bath. If you use all-natural herbal ingredients in the bath, why not give back some of the bathwater to your plants? Or when rinsing vegetables, save this water for the garden.

- **Drying Flower Petals** - If friends and family are not very Eco-friendly, and gift you flowers for special occasions. You can get a second use out of these flowers by drying them to use in your craft. Also, you can ask florists for their leftover flowers to eliminate waste, which can be dried and used in spells too. As they say, waste not, want not!

- **Sustain Resources** - Want to decorate your altar, let's talk about shells! These are a popular choice for many witches to decorate their altars with or to use in spells to represent water. It is better to buy shells through local sellers or to naturally source shells yourself. Did you know that many online shells come from shell farms? This is not only bad for the environment but it's also not sustainable, destroys marine life and is cruel to the creatures too! So, take a deep breath, enjoy that fresh air and energy from the beach, whilst collecting your witchy shells. See a crab stuck on its back? Flip it over and help it back to the sea, small acts of kindness help the planet grow, one tiny creature at a time.

Eco Fact - Bottles and packages that end up in the sea kill over 1 million marine creatures a year. So, let's keep our sea clean! Bottles in bins- hurt no fins!

- **Something Old, Something New** - Why not transform something old INTO something new! Want a witchy cloak? Why not use old clothes or items brought from a charity shop to make your own! You can imbue it with magickal energy whilst making

it. It will have a much more meaningful feeling to it too, one made of love and respect for the planet. A key part of being Eco-friendly is transformation. How you can transform old items into something beautiful; from fishing nets into pretty fairy dolls, broken twigs into wands, or an old t-shirt into a magick spell bag.



Because let's face it, who doesn't love a spell bag to use now and then!

- **Second-Hand Goodies!** Any thrifty witch will love charity shops! And so should the Eco-friendly witch too! You can grab so many items and bargains there for your craft, from bowls, pots, stands, to even bells! This not only helps the charities financially but also the environment too. As there is less item waste, less going into landfills, and one less item which needs to be produced. Also, it is nice to give back to others!

- **Gift Another Witch** - If you're lucky enough to be in a coven or know other witches this can be a great idea! Do you have a lot of witchy items on

your altar and around your home? But you just don't use all of them? Why not do a monthly item swap between friends! Someone else gets to enjoy and share your magickal objects, rather than them just sitting there on your shelf collecting dust or looking pretty. Instead make each item get fully used, loved and enjoyed by many. If you do not have anyone to swap with, as above why not donate these to charity shops instead! In true Marie Kondo style, ask yourself - do you need so many things? This one, that one, this one, No!

- **Spell Burial and Left Overs** - What to do with the leftovers from a spell? You must be careful with what you put in the earth as this can affect the surrounding area, but natural ingredients can be buried. A tradition of old would be to bury glass jars in the ground, but an Eco-witch uses egg boxes, toilet rolls or even recyclable paper! Only bury things that are Eco-friendly, which are biodegradable and decomposable. Also consider items that don't disturb or affect the natural environment, or harm any wildlife. Edible items are a fun thing to use in spells, these are easy to dispose of, as you get to eat them! Eg self-love cookie spell. Moon water is another Eco-friendly witch favourite, use any leftover to feed your plants with a witchy blessing and a moon boost! Another point to mention is that most items used in spells can be cleansed and then reused again! Rather than discarding after every spell, instead, get your cleansing on!

- **Reuse Candle Wax** - That little bitty bit at the end of every T-light, you can gather up and make into another new candle. This is how we used to do it in Victorian times! The candle was the only light

source for a long time, so it was precious, lets bring that mentality back today!

- **The Buzzy Beeswax Way** - Beeswax candles are the best to use as an Eco-witch. Not only do they burn cleaner, with less soot (carbon) but they are also more sustainable than the paraffin wax or soy alternatives. They are all-natural too and encourage more beekeepers to keep bees if they are in higher demand, and we all know how much this world needs bees! What's more, beeswax candles burn hotter than most, which emits a brighter light. On top of that, they burn slower meaning fewer drips causing them to last longer than other candles too! Have I sold you on only using beeswax candles yet? The environment will thank you too.

Eco Fact - Did you know that instead of adding pollutants to the air, beeswax candles actually neutralise it! By releasing negative ions which eliminate dust, bad odours, and even mould when burned! Neat right!

- **Order No More but Collect in Store!**- If you regularly buy items online, remember that every delivery you receive costs the planet energy and valuable resources. From the plastic wrapping around the item, the petrol used in transportation, to the labour used to deliver it to you. Our society is steering towards a very lazy future, with instant next day delivery orders now being popular. Instead, always aim to collect items in-store rather than needlessly wasting resources. If you collect, you also help the planet by reducing the greenhouse gasses produced. So, get off your couch and get down the store, that's what your feet are made for!

- **Supporting Small Businesses is the Eco-Witch Way!** - With more handmade items, less gets mass-produced and wasted. Bring your own bag, recycle any packaging, and give back to your local economy!

Eco Fact - Recycling a single plastic bottle can conserve enough energy to light a 60W light bulb for up to 6 hours.

- **Solar Charge Your Phone!** - We all need a phone in this modern world, how else will we be able to post all our witchy selfies online!?! This is a given, but why not take something you use every day and turn it into a more economical gadget. How though? By



harnessing the power of the sun in the summer months! Doing this not only saves you money but also magically charges and cleanses your phone! Pretty cool right?

- Like a Witch Shop Boss - Do you own a witchy shop? Then all I can say is: Paper, paper and more paper! Move away from plastic and more towards natural paper wrapping. Even then, do you need this wrapping? You can even get plant-based biodegradable wrapping now too! Did you know it takes 1,000 years for a single plastic bag to decompose in a landfill? Not only that, the process of making a plastic bag releases harmful chemicals that affect the planet's atmosphere.

- Grimoire - A witchy must! To record your magical workings and something to refer to. Why not use recycled paper to make the pages of your book special and unique? Or even go digital!

Eco Fact - Every tonne of paper recycled saves 17 trees.

- Round About Town - We are all aware that gases and fumes are harming our planet. To help combat this if you own a car, why not take some trips on public transport, or walk and cycle to work? Use this time to become closer to nature, to restore your connection to her and absorb her beauty. As every witch should be out in nature, in the fresh air and beneath the open sky! Take a moment to focus on your breathing, watch your breath, see it in your mind's eye, air is all around you. Say or think this mantra and just breath: "I am grateful for the connection I feel, the



clean air we breathe and the life nature brings". Isn't that more fulfilling than driving to work, angry and stressed at other drives and people on the roads? I know which one I'd rather chose!

- Natural Does It- Make your own! A little witchy side project to try, you might even love it! If you are good at kitchen witchery or aromatherapy chances are you'd enjoy this too! Natural soaps and shampoos are biodegradable, they do not leave any soap residue which clogs the atmosphere and the waterways! This is because they are made from natural ingredients, making them decomposable. They are cruelty-free, depending on whether you count the hours required to create them! Not only are chemical-free natural products more sustainable but they also protect marine life too. On top of that, they even help your skin as well! Making your own products can save you money, or if you choose to buy, many reputable brands donate a percentage of their profits to restoring the environment. So what are you waiting for? Get your Eco-groove on, dust off that cauldron and start brewing!

Eco Fact: It is estimated that in 2050 there will be one piece of plastic for every fish in the ocean! That's a lot of plastic!

- Feeding Nature with Love - Composting food makes something new and useable out of something old. Doing this has many benefits; it enriches the soil, encourages the production of healthy bacteria and fungi, and you are giving back to the earth! Feeding your plants with compost also helps them grow big and strong. When your organic waste gets piled into landfills, it produces the chemical methane, by composting you reduce the amount of this chemical produced in the atmosphere. Composting doesn't have to be complicated! You can keep it simple, by burying items under your garden or even something small under an indoor potted plant to help, or by going all out if you prefer! Whatever floats your broom :)

- Eco-Friendly Extreme Witching - Uses only naturally found items for their craft! By using only things grown, found or collected from nature. Many witches are already very good at doing this, as most make things from items they find. But why not try and go that extra mile for the month! This will also save you money if you're a witch on a budget! Fallen

feathers, hemp twine and broken sticks - there's one way to create a dream catcher yourself!

Eco Fact - The energy saved by recycling just 1 aluminium drink can, is enough to run a television for three hours!

- Litter Picker Party! Involve friends, family and neighbours by having a litter picking party at your local park or beach. Helping the planet doesn't have to be boring!
- Earth Day - As well as doing daily things to help the planet, you should also enjoy and celebrate her! Be out in nature as much as you can, build this connection, talk to her, tell her what you have done to help, nurture her by watering your plants and trees, add these tips to your book of shadows, or give back to nature in a small meaningful way.

Becoming an Eco-friendly witch doesn't have to be big or scary, it's the simple acts we do daily and involve in our craft to create an impact on the world's environment.

What kind of witch do you want to be? Take all the suggestions in this article, and incorporate a few into your life, see how it makes you feel, good isn't it? Not only are you celebrating your spiritual side but also supporting nature too! And what witch does not want that?

So, you ready to get your Eco-vibe on? Start today to become the Eco-Witch you've always wanted to be!

Smaller Ideas

If this is too much, start with a small act you do every day for a few weeks, read these weekly challenges for some ideas.

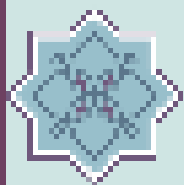
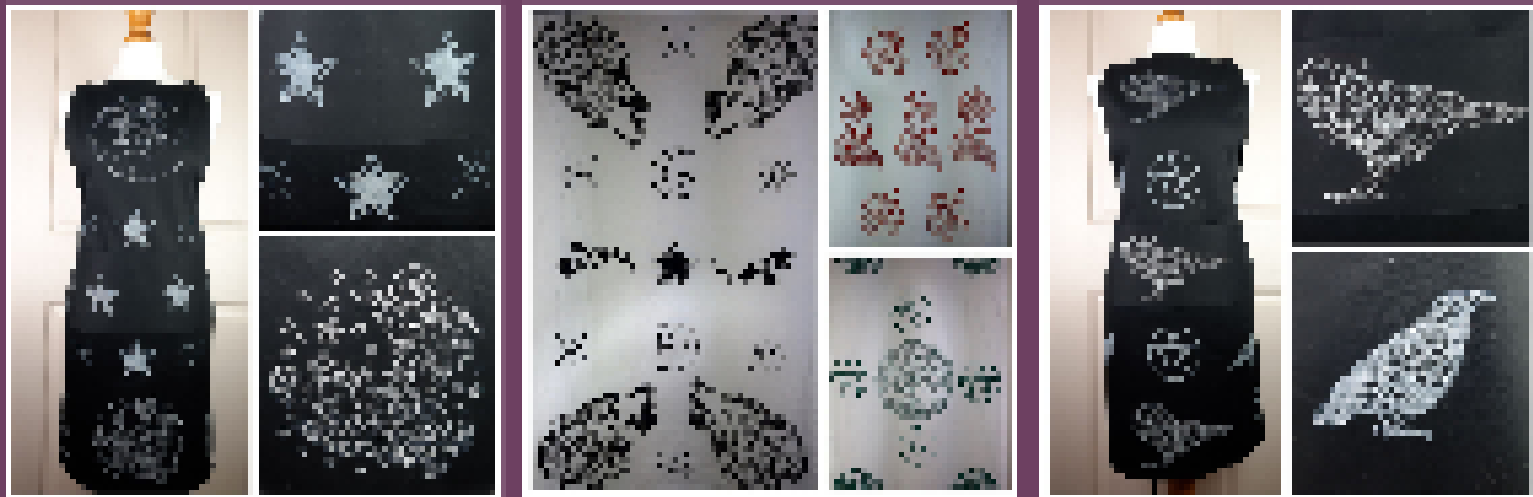
Weekly challenges for the Eco-witch:

- Composting your vegetables for a week.
- Make a game to find as much to recycle as you can in a week.

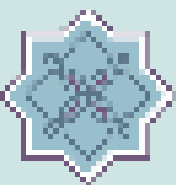
Eco- Facts Sources:

- 1- Eco Fact - Bottles and packages that end up in the sea kill over 1 million marine creatures a year. So let's keep our sea clean! Bottles in bins- hurt no fins! (<https://ismwaste.co.uk/recycling-facts>).
- 2- Eco Fact - Did you know that instead of adding pollutants to the air, beeswax candles actually neutralise it! By releasing negative ions which eliminate dust, bad odours, and even mould when burned! Neat right! (<https://emblahome.com/blogs/news/paraffin-vs-soy-vs-beeswax-which-wax-is-best-for-your-candles>)
- 3- Eco Fact - Recycling a single plastic bottle can conserve enough energy to light a 60W light bulb for up to 6 hours. (<https://www.recycle-more.co.uk/household/recycling-facts>)
- 4- Eco Fact - Every tonne of paper recycled saves 17 trees. (<https://www.recycle-more.co.uk/household/recycling-facts>)
- 5- Eco Fact: It is estimated that in 2050 there will be one piece of plastic for every fish in the ocean! That's a lot of plastic! (World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics (2016)) (https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/news/New-Plastics-Economy_Background-to-Key-Statistics_19022016v2.pdf)
- 6- Eco Fact - The energy saved by recycling just 1 aluminium drink can, is enough to run a television for three hours! (<https://www.recycle-more.co.uk/household>)





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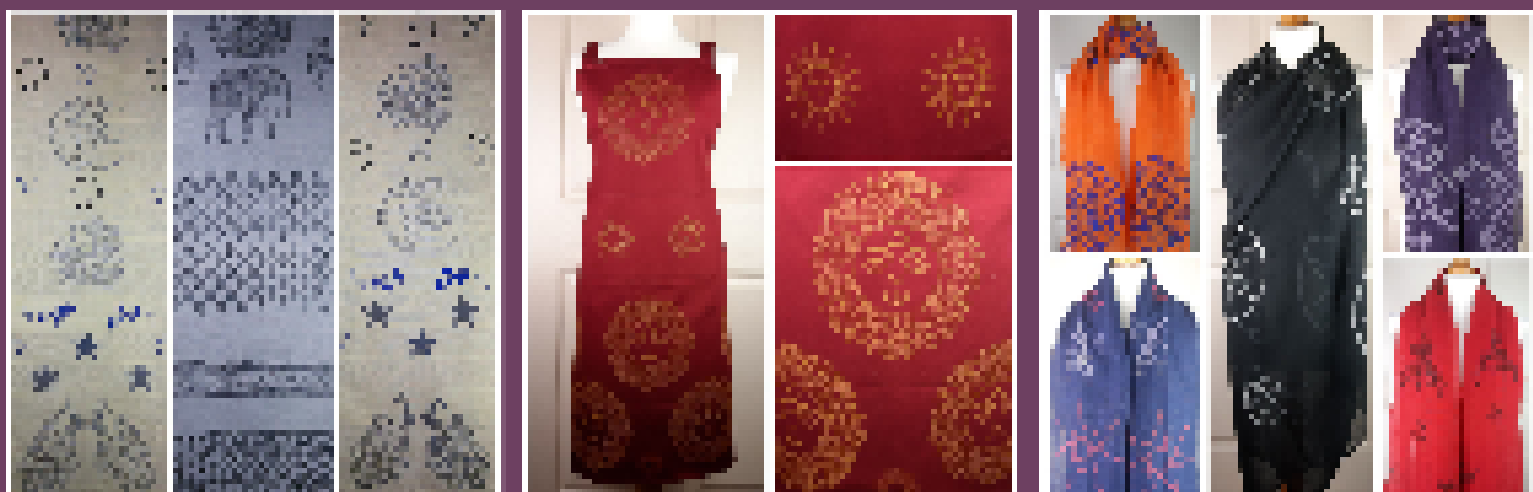
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faerie bargain...*

Gemma's learning fast. So far, she's learned that being consort to the Huntmaster is socially awkward, and that sacrifices really ruin your dinner.

But there's also Adrian's weird powers, the local witch with an agenda and a string of gruesome murders across the moor. Oh, and there's always that one person who wants the end of the world.

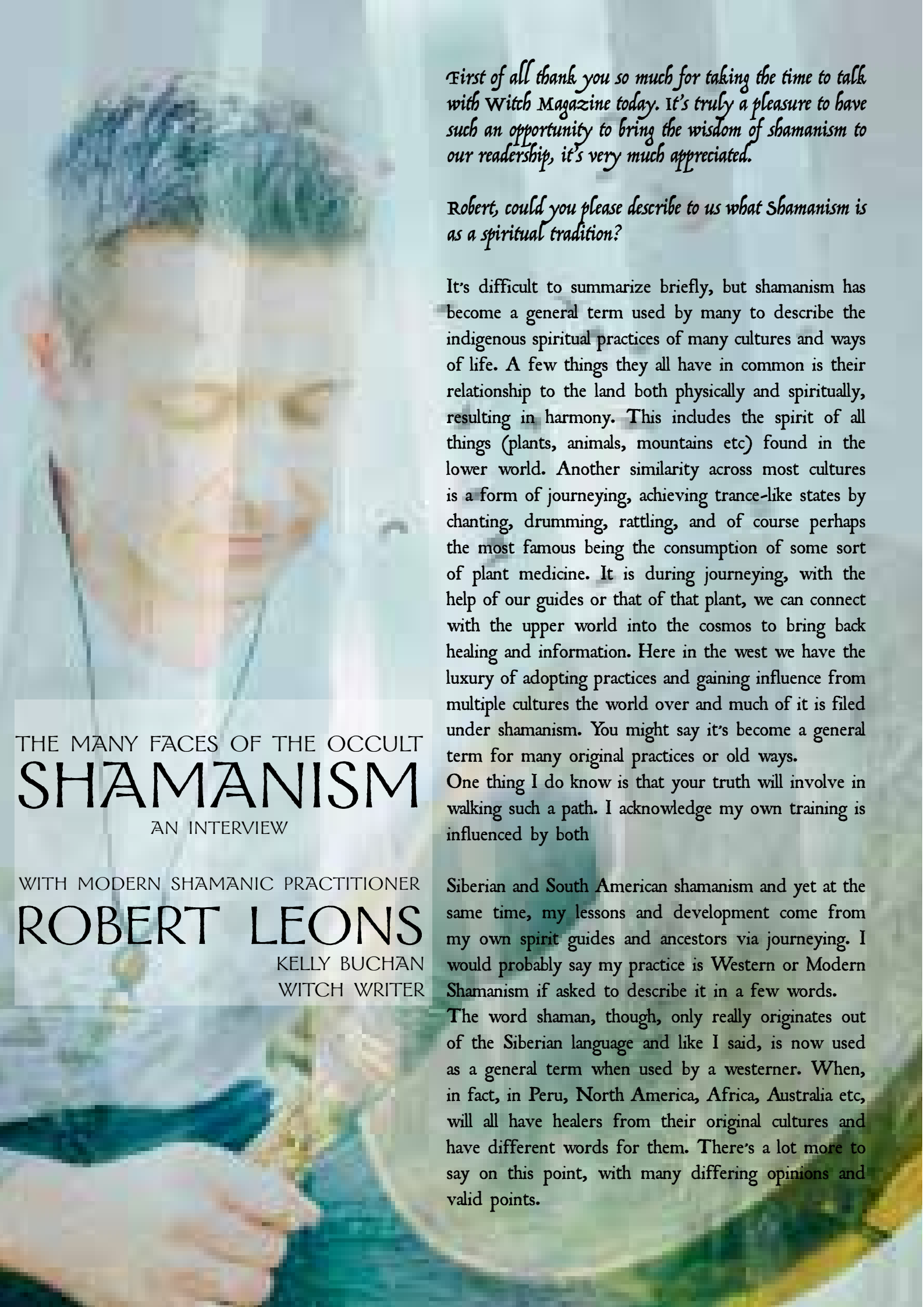
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THE MANY FACES OF THE OCCULT
SHAMANISM
AN INTERVIEW

WITH MODERN SHAMANIC PRACTITIONER
ROBERT LEONS
KELLY BUCHAN
WITCH WRITER

First of all thank you so much for taking the time to talk with Witch Magazine today. It's truly a pleasure to have such an opportunity to bring the wisdom of shamanism to our readership, it's very much appreciated.

Robert, could you please describe to us what Shamanism is as a spiritual tradition?

It's difficult to summarize briefly, but shamanism has become a general term used by many to describe the indigenous spiritual practices of many cultures and ways of life. A few things they all have in common is their relationship to the land both physically and spiritually, resulting in harmony. This includes the spirit of all things (plants, animals, mountains etc) found in the lower world. Another similarity across most cultures is a form of journeying, achieving trance-like states by chanting, drumming, rattling, and of course perhaps the most famous being the consumption of some sort of plant medicine. It is during journeying, with the help of our guides or that of that plant, we can connect with the upper world into the cosmos to bring back healing and information. Here in the west we have the luxury of adopting practices and gaining influence from multiple cultures the world over and much of it is filed under shamanism. You might say it's become a general term for many original practices or old ways.

One thing I do know is that your truth will involve in walking such a path. I acknowledge my own training is influenced by both

Siberian and South American shamanism and yet at the same time, my lessons and development come from my own spirit guides and ancestors via journeying. I would probably say my practice is Western or Modern Shamanism if asked to describe it in a few words.

The word shaman, though, only really originates out of the Siberian language and like I said, is now used as a general term when used by a westerner. When, in fact, in Peru, North America, Africa, Australia etc, will all have healers from their original cultures and have different words for them. There's a lot more to say on this point, with many differing opinions and valid points.

How do your energetic healing sessions work?

My full shamanic healings work on all energetic levels with regards to any one thing, which I think is important. It doesn't matter whether or not a client comes in with a physical or emotional symptom.

I start in the energy field, removing any entity, block or drain. Once removed, I use psychic surgery to heal the energy field. I then draw my attention to any chakras that may need aligning/fixing, as they may have been affected by the presence of the removed entity. Then, I drop onto soul level, this is where we journey further onto soul retrievals, past life clearances, DNA work, etc.

Working on all levels ensures a complete healing. Imagine doing a soul retrieval for someone's trauma, when the entities and chakras are still affected by the same trauma. It would be incomplete and could quite conceivably result in the client slipping back to the same point. Often our physical symptoms are an indication of unresolved emotional trauma, this is the same principle.

How did you first come to Spiritual awakening, and what led you to discover Modern Shamanism?

My awakening was completely unconscious. I had no idea what I was doing when I decided to collapse what looked like a successful life to any onlooker. Beautiful wife, flash car, massive house. The truth was I was deeply depressed, unsatisfied, agoraphobic and anxious. I simply didn't understand why I felt the way I did. But an unconscious gut feeling I had deep inside made me stick to my guns.

It wasn't until six months down the line I felt the magnitude of my actions and things went from bad to worse. I'd hit rock bottom and was suicidal for an extended period of time, an habitual response that I found hard to shift for a few years.

Along the way I'd become aware of alternative perspectives, and a resonant yearning for deeper meaning couldn't pull me out of the hole I was in. Then, I found the calling to plant medicine and ayahuasca. This was the last roll of the cosmic dice, so I boarded a plane to Peru in order to spend a month in

ceremony. I hadn't a clue at this stage that Shamanism would be a part of my own future.

Can you describe to us what your first sitting with ayahuasca was like? And how did your month of ceremony unfold?

My first ceremony? Wow. There is zero light in the jungle, so by candle light, each guest in turn approaches the altar to drink a fairly putrid brew. Returning to your space around the edges of the wooden Miloka (ceremonial building).

15 minutes later and the Ayahuasero (Shaman) begins to sing his Icaro's, an unusual rhythmic chant that makes a lot more sense after consuming the medicine. Candles were blown out and everything began to rise within me, fear!

Losing my sense of safety at first, a zip appeared in my vision and out came a demonic looking creature. I shook my head as if to deny it, but that was no use. I ended up losing all sense of reality. The noise, insanity and obscene visions becoming faster and faster. I could not have told you my name. I'd



forgotten where we were, that I'd drank ayahuasca in Peru. I was consumed by a madness I thought I'd signed up for for eternity, my version of hell was standing in front of me, swallowing me whole.

It took several more sessions to begin to let go. And although there were many more lessons over the coming weeks of ceremony, the overall theme was showing me how by opening my heart, fear would dissolve. That love is the ultimate, and nothing can compete.

When reflecting on your childhood, were there any signs shown to you as to where your path in life might lead you?

There were many signs, many traumas. I neglected to acknowledge the accumulation of these traumas, which resulted in me not being able to function in life. Ultimately by way of survival, to gain acceptance and live, I had sacrificed my true identity and connection with God.

I could relight my violent older brother, separation from my Dad at aged 4, the traumas on my local estate growing up giving me PTSD. And all of this before I'd even joined the Army! But really, it's all just detail and I have no regrets. Indeed, I'm grate-

ful for all aspects of my life's lesson. It was long, and it was hard to endure. But I got to where I needed to be and now I'm a Shamanic practitioner, deepening my understanding of self, my relationship to spirit, and standing in my truth.

In many occult traditions, demonic and angelic entities have been anthropomorphised and catalogued. Can the same be said for entities found within Shamanic traditions, or are they unique to each person?

The subject of entities is involved. Deep. Although removing such things may be the first thing to do in a healing session, it's not where you would want to start your shamanic training for sure. Briefly though.

There are several types of entities. From simple attachments with little complexity and minimal consciousness, through to demonic entities and puppet masters which are far more ancient and powerful beings.

All of us need to survive. They are detected in the energy field of a person but can be connected deep inside. A simple one might be attached to the knee for example, and have minor connecting hooks or however the practitioner views things. Whereas a demonic entity can be deep within the energetic field



and can move around it freely, which affects more than just one aspect of it. A puppet master has the ability to exist externally, sending out attachments onto your energy and effecting you that way. Therefore they are harder to detect, and the process of removing them is much more difficult and complex. They are not easy to negotiate with and remove.

Most of the entities I have come across have actually tried to help the person they are attached to in times of need or trauma. These low vibrational times during our lives provide the opportunity for the attachment in the first place. A particular vibration will attract the entity, and despite it thinking it's aiding the person, it's actually keeping them stuck in that vibration. This is why removing them is so important. Otherwise we would be unable to heal fully from the circumstance. Please keep in mind, this is a simple scenario

What advice would you give to someone who is looking to embark on their own journeys into Shamanism?

Well, if you try connecting to your guides and it resonates with you as a path, my advice would be to practice meditative journeying so as to develop your relationships to your guides, ancestors and power animals. Many people connect, and many may do courses in shamanism. Just like everything else in life, the more work you put in, the more you will be rewarded. To connect with such inner power gives us alignment, empowerment and guidance. It gives us the knowledge that we are never alone. But only with practicing connecting to your guides and following the guidance they give, can you truly find your place within that connection and discover its depths.

Don't forget to ground.



Robert Leons can be found on social media, and through his website www.heartwarriors.co.uk. His shamanic healing sessions are available to book online, as well as Shamanic training courses and downloadable self-help content.

Robert shares his own healing journey with an open heart and authenticity to help resonate with others who have struggled, or are struggling. He is passionate about helping others connect so that they too can have clarity, alignment, and step into their own powers and truths. He understands we all have unique beauty and power within ourselves, just waiting to be unlocked. He runs various plant medicine ceremonies, offers workshops and full shamanic healings. These include soul retrieval, past life clearance, DNA clearing, entity removal, and many other tools which he has studied and embraced.



THE MAGIC OF MIRRORS

Caroline Blanchard

Mirrors are all around us.

From the moment we wake up, until the moment we turn of the last lights, we are accompanied by our reflected image. Mirrors are so prevalent that we barely stop to think about their implications. However, many a paper has been written about the effect our reflection has on our psyche, our self-image and even our worldview.

Mirrors entertain, fascinate, and even scare us. A trip to the fun faire isn't complete without a visit to the fun-house mirrors and many movies use the 'Mirror Scare trope' where a reflection suddenly reveals an enemy or foe standing behind the hero.

As long as humans have been around, there have been mirrors. We looked at ourselves in reflective pools or used primitive vessels to create a watery surface to gaze into. As early as 8000 years ago, polished stones of obsidian were used as mirrors. Polished copper, bronze and silver mirrors have been found in civilisations spanning the globe.

An object so intricately linked to our history and past is bound to hold special meaning in our spiritual experience. The first and most obvious magical use of a mirror is beauty spells.

Venus, the goddess of beauty and love is sometimes depicted with a handheld mirror. The astrological symbol of the planet Venus is a stylised hand mirror or necklace.

Mirrors have always been used to accommodate personal grooming practices. How we perceive ourselves, greatly affect how we are perceived by others. Try incorporating a small mirror in your next beauty spell or draw some beautifying sigils around your mirror. Use your mirror to truly look at yourself and begin a journey of self-acceptance and even self-love.

A second, and still widely practiced magical use for mirrors is scrying. Many metaphysical shops sell 'black mirrors'. These can be polished obsidian stones or glass mirrors where the reflective surface is black instead of silver.

Scrying is the art of looking at objects and detecting significant signs or messages. It is a highly intuitive form of divination that uses reflective surfaces such as crystal balls, watery pools, mirrors but can also be done using a candle flame or even incense smoke.

You can very easily make your own black mirror. Find a pretty picture frame and use some paint to paint the glass pane black. Make sure you place the pane with the painted side on the inside of your frame, this way the pane creates a dark reflective surface.

Use your new black mirror in a darkened room lit only by a candle. Relax and gaze into your mirror. Try not to focus too much on the surface, but try to keep a soft-focus or look just beyond the mirror, much like you would look at a trick 3D image. Let your mind wander and see what images appear in your mind's eye.

A third and last magical use I'd like to highlight is the protective properties of a reflective surface.

A Witch Ball is a hollow glass sphere that has been in use since the 17th century. It is used to ward off all sort of evil spirits and ill fortune. Lore says that 'the evil eye' will vanish if confronted by its own reflection, but as one could never be certain where the attack would originate from, a rounded surface had the greatest chance to catch the reflection of the evil foe and ward off misfortune. Our shiny Christmas balls are a modern rendering of this ancient charm, here to protect us from harm during the years darkest days.

Perseus defeated the Gorgon Medusa by shielding himself with a mirrored shield gifted to him by the goddess Athena. Luckily, Medusa has recently received a much-needed positive reinterpretation of her story. Originally a monster with snakes for hair, she has been re-invented as a symbol of female empowerment and emancipation from the male gaze.

The little spell on the next page is designed to harness the power of a shield mirror and protect you from prying eyes.



PROTECTION FROM PRYING EYES

When you need some privacy during your spell work or studies. This spell will keep your magical workings under the radar.

Ingredients:

A Pocket mirror

A black felt pen

Timing:

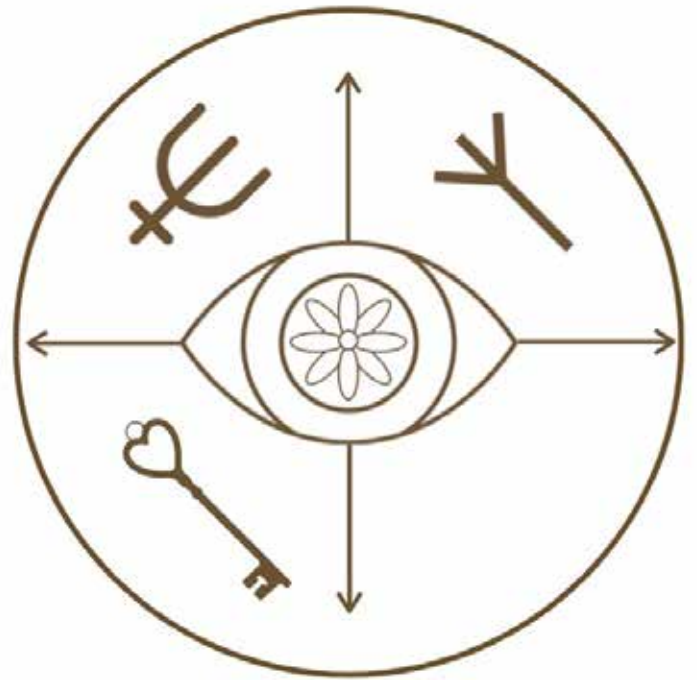
Saturday (Protection, Banishment, Limitations, Boundaries)

Waning Moon (banishing)

Take your mirror and contemplate situations where you feel you don't have the privacy you need to work in peace. Now visualize that people are averting their eyes, walking away from you or are "blind" to your working and writings.

When you feel ready, while keeping these images in your mind, draw the symbols (above) on your mirror. When you feel the need for privacy, turn the mirror counterclockwise or widdershins while chanting:

*For my eyes only,
only I can see.
From prying eyes,
deliver me.*



- The mirror itself will act as a reflective shield for prying eyes.
- The eye is a powerful protection from the evil eye.
- The rose has a long history of keeping secrets ~ the latin phrase sub rosa means under the rose or confidential
- The key is another symbol for locking away secrets
- Algiz is the rune of protection
- Neptune is the sign for the subconscious and things that are hidden
- The blank space should be used to draw your initial or personal magical sigil (bottom left corner)



MONTHLY CRYSTAL GUIDE

CHERYL BECKWORTH

GROUNDING GODDESS

This month we celebrate Mabon on the 22nd, as you may have noticed the nights are slowly starting to creep back in and get earlier.

Mabon is a celebration of the Autumnal Equinox, a point of the year where both day and night, light and dark are equal (this also happens again during the Spring Equinox).

At this point of equal day and night, we are experiencing equal amounts of energy from both the sun and the moon. So the equinoxes are all about bringing us balance and harmony.

So it seems fitting for me to talk about two crystals this month rather than one!

First I want to talk to you about Moonstone, I love moonstone, it's so shimmery and beautiful. This Stone comes in so many varieties: green, peach, black and rainbow to name a few - I think my absolute favourite is Green Moonstone. The Romans has the belief that this beautiful stone was created by solidified rays of the moon.

MOONSTONE & CARNELIAN



How beautiful is that?

This is the crystal we are going to be using to represent and connect with the moon's energy.

Moonstone is found all over the world Mexico, America, the Austrian Alps, Madagasc, Norway and Poland to name just a few places.

Moonstone is associated with the inner goddess, a symbol of fertility and sensuality.

This feminine stone is empowering and gives the gift of increased intuition due to being linked with the crown chakra, the perfect stone for cleansing the mind of negative emotions.

With the Moonstone by your side, channel its healing powers during meditation, to help you to clear the mind and centre yourself.

I use this crystal when doing any type of Moon Magic, but as well as connecting with the moon's cycles I also use it when connecting with my own personal cycles too.

On the opposite side of the scale we are going to bring balance by adding in Carnelian, this will help us connect with the energy of the sun and light. It ranges in colour from brownish to a bright fire like red orange, found in Brazil, Indian and Egypt.

Carnelian restores your energy levels and motivation, and also stimulates creativity. I think it's perfect to have with you when starting any type of project - a new business, a painting, when writing as it really helps to bring out the passion and fire in your belly:

It gives courage, in ancient times warriors just to wear carnelian around their necks when going into war! It promotes positive life choices, dispels apathy and motivates for success.

It helps in trusting yourself and your perceptions.

Linked with the Sacral Chakra, fantastic to work with your reproductive system too, I use this in my womb healing treatments. But also will bring more vitality to your sex life and increase fertility so perfect to pair with moonstone for this desire too!

Wishing you all a blessed Mabon,

Much love as always,
Cheryl xxx



Words from the Witches Journal

I have a large wooden cupboard in the alcove off my living room where I keep my 'witchy' stuff ~ a large crystal ball on its stand, my wand made from a twig fallen from a tree, slightly bent, with rough bark left where I hold it, polished shaft narrowing to the tip. The gorgeous scent of essential oils fills the air as I open the doors.

PORTLAND JONES
WITCH WRITER

This month I took out a cardboard box with a deep purple lid. Inside were loose leaf papers, some handwritten, torn from random notebooks that I was working in at the time, some were printed pages as I researched topics on the internet. At some stage I had collected them together in totally random order - I have never claimed to be organised!

I spent a good morning looking at these scattered papers, promising myself that I would in the future put them in order, perhaps by date, perhaps by topic. Then again, I probably won't. The joy of discovering and remembering things was a pleasure in itself.

In 2010, I had looked in some detail at the Autumn Equinox - the history, the meaning and what was associated with it. I shared this with coven members at our weekly meeting.

We decided to remain with our preferred Autumn Equinox, rather than adopt the newer name of Mabon.

At the end of our learning session, I passed out a quiz. Simple questions - what day is it celebrated? Name three foods associated with the festival. What colours represent this time? The last task was to name one activity you are likely to take part in during the Autumn Equinox. This session would lead into the planning of the ritual, making sure that we were all aware of the meaning, and could voice how we would like to celebrate, so that the ritual would be meaningful for all attending.

As I lifted pages from the box, I found the hand-written notes in large dark letters that we would use at the 2011 ritual, just short notes to keep us on track with what we had planned. At many rituals, we like to write a reminder to ourselves of what has been good since the last ritual, and what has not gone the way we want

write them down, we consider what changes we would like to see in ourselves that would help us change the situations we didn't like, to improve the future.

These notes are then burned in the ritual fire. We watch them writhing in the flames till they are nothing more than ash.

At each equinox we celebrate the battle of the Oak King and the Holly King to remind us of the change of the seasons. Often this battle is acted out with much enthusiasm to encouragement and laughter. So far we have escaped serious injury.

I started a new journal in autumn 2020, not just any old notebook, but one that looks the part. (I honestly truly believe that anything will serve adequately to record what you need, but sometimes it is just nice to treat yourself to something special.) The first thing recorded is a tarot reading. It was so accurate as a description of where things were for me at the time that I wanted to keep it, to see if the suggested outcomes would come to pass.

We were in the grip of Covid 19. On the day of the autumn equinox, there was an update from the government on the new measures that would be in place for the next six months, on top of the local measures in my area due to a higher rate of infection - up to six people at a time only, and no more than two families to mix at anyone time.

While this would be hard for many people, it felt particularly devastating for my family. My six children, partners and grandchildren added up to fourteen - a close knit group who spent a lot of time together, delighting in each other's company. I recorded my feelings at the time, including my understanding and agreement that this needed to be done to prevent the spread of Covid. I had

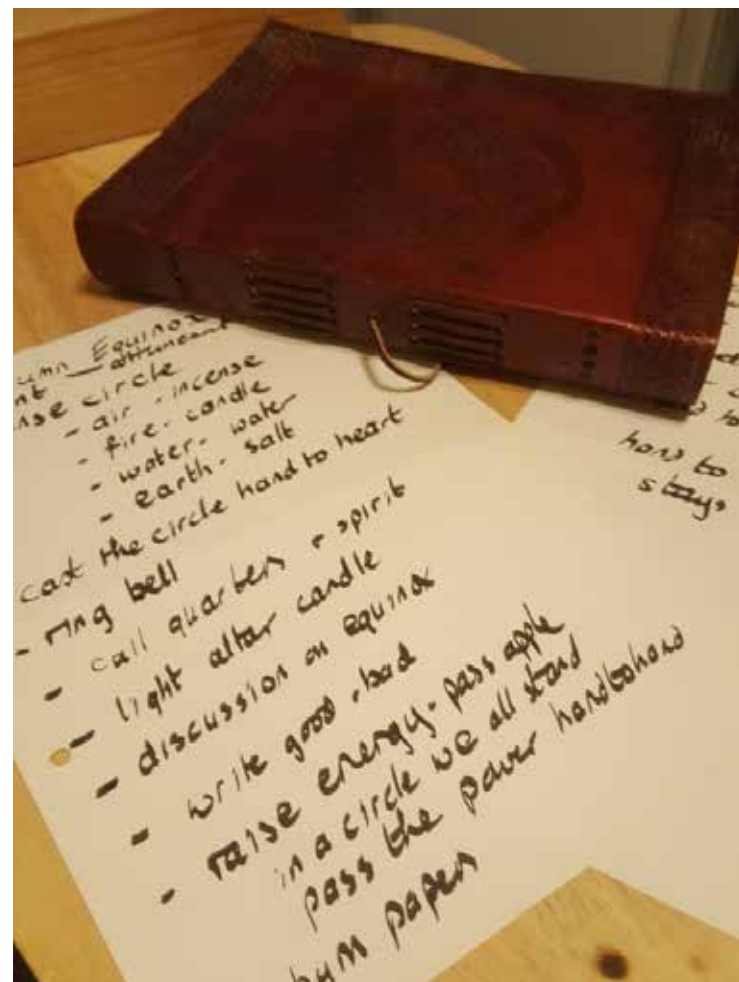
no desire to put my loved ones at risk.

'There are many joys in having a larger family, but the worries multiply, increasing with each new addition. At least it's a good worry, born of love.'

And here we are a year later, the Covid threat still present, but the restrictions easing.

Our celebration will be different again this equinox, but no less meaningful. Bright blessings to one and all.

Portland Jones
www.portlandjones.com



Honouring The Crone

Fairy Bec
Witch Writer



I call my Mum “The Old Crone” and she has started to use this title within our spiritual business (Rubek) together. We regularly do events hosted by Fairy Bec and The Old Crone. I refer to her as The Old Crone very casually and I have had people saying things like “You can’t call your Mother that!” but actually, yes, I can. She is an Old Crone. She is my Old Crone.

What images do the words ‘Crone’ and ‘Hag’ conjure up to you?

To many it is a useless, wrinkled old grumpy woman standing at a cauldron behaving like she is slightly insane. However, ‘The Old Crone’ was originally an archetypal figure and respected wise woman. In fact, the word ‘crone’ actually derives from the word ‘crown’ so you could imagine that the village crone had the same status as a Queen. The word also derives from the word ‘chronos’ which is latin for time. A Crone is a woman who is accepting the passing of time by aging gracefully. Something that my Mum is nailing, and I love watching people’s jaws drop when I tell them she is seventy in October.

I call my Mum ‘The Old Crone’ with the greatest honour. She is my High Priestess, my Old Crone. Somewhere, probably in the land of misogyny, the term has been twisted into one with negative connotations. The fear of the power within the crone has been met by a fierce attack leading to a change in social perception.

In ancient times, every village had a ‘Crone’ or ‘Hag’. She was called upon to be present at every birth, death, illness, and celebration as she had the knowledge, experience and stash of herbs to support any situation.

In the Hindu culture (and I am sure others) the matriarch of the house is the most important person. It is the Maternal Grandmother who initiates choosing the name of the newborn child. She sits in a room, gets herself in a trance like state and when she is ready, she emits a sound. That sound then becomes the start of the child’s name which the parents choose. So, for example, she may emit “Ssah” and the child might then be called “Sarita”.

'The Hag' potentially has even more negative connotations for some reason. It sounds like a derogatory word doesn't it?

We were in Glastonbury recently and an older lady on a table nearby referred to herself as "The Hag" and immediately got told not to put herself down. She corrected them explaining that the terms "Hag" and "Crone" actually used to be terms of high respect and that they should be reclaimed. I had a chat with the lady about it and it was lovely to hear more of a resurgence of people claiming back things that have been trampled down in our culture over many years, centuries even.

In our western culture, we seem to lack the respect of our elders as things stand right now. Something I think needs to change.

HONOURING THE CRONE WITH A RITUAL

To me, crone energy is at it's strongest around Samhain. I feel it start to awaken at Mabon and, for me, it lasts through to Spring when I start to feel more of the Maid energy with the rebirth of the Earth. Therefore, working with crone energy is most ap-

propriate in the Autumn and Winter when I can feel that connection more easily.

If you want to honour the crone with a group ritual, I recommend that you gather together with a feminine focus. Gender is a social construct so it should not matter which sex you are but when you gather the focus is on female, yin energy.

Bring items to honour the crone such as images and statues of Witches, Hags, Crones, Baba Yaga. You can also bring things that depict the moon and in particular the triple goddess (Maid, Mother, Crone).

The spiral and the seed are used a lot in crone magic. Crystals that I find work well with crone energy are Unakite, Septarian, Ancestralite, Rose Quartz, Amethyst and Lapis Lazuli.

I also turn to rosemary this time of year and we will usually make a tisane using rosemary, honey/sugar and other seasonal fruits and herbs for everyone to drink.

Place your items for blessing on the table when you arrive and take them home with you when you leave.



Place them somewhere prominent or key within your home as this helps you to continue to use the heightened crone energies through the season.

Here is a very basic version of what we do within our 'Circle of the Crystal Moon':-

Opening the circle:-

The High Priestess will ask "How do you meet?" to each person in turn. They respond with "In perfect love and perfect trust" and step forwards into the circle.

Once the circle is open, call in the guardians of the watchtowers of North, East, South and West whilst lighting a candle for each corner.

Personalise the ritual:-

Within the ritual, you can do what you like. Go with what feels right for your group at the time.

- You could bring pictures of elder women in your family or whom you admire who have passed on and talk about them and what they achieved. This would align with 'El Dia de los Muertos' so you could have a Mexican feast too.
- The Crone is knowing, trusting and in control so you could talk about how to bring that energy back into your life more.
- You could meditate on the qualities of the crone, dipping into some shadow pathworking if that feels appropriate.
- You could have a healing focus and give distance healing to those who need it.

As a circle, we also write affirmations and wishes on small pieces of paper, fold them up and put them in a vessel for burning later on that night. (Be safe. Use a fire proof dish and burn them outside in an open area. Make sure that you tend to the fire until you are sure it is fully out.)



Closing the circle:- Give thanks to the guardians of the watchtowers and blow the candles out West, South, East and North.

Close with "How do you part?" and repeat "In perfect love and perfect trust".

All repeat "It is done. So mote it be".

As a circle, we will then eat, drink, make merry and do so some divination together for each other.

Join
Fairy Bec
for one
of her
upcoming
events!

Development Group:-
Divination

zoom
3pm



£7 a session
£5 for the recording

Sunday 10th October
Cards

Sunday 24th October
Pendulum

Altars and Sacred Spaces

Sunday 7th November
Introduction: Different
types of altar

Zoom 3pm
£7 (Recording £5)

Sunday 21st November
Pathworking Meditation

Personal Energy &
Breathing

Sunday 5th December
Energy Out

Yang

zoom 3pm
£7 (Recording = £5)

Sunday 19th December
Energy In
Yin

Wise Words from the Old Crone

How do I begin to be a Pagan?

I am sometimes asked questions about being a Pagan practitioner, a Witch, a card reader, a circle caster and one which crops up a lot is 'How did you start to do this? Meaning card readings and best of all, 'How do I start? Where do I begin? How can I fit into this practice and do I need special tools? These questions get me so excited that another person is interested in our community and craft but it is not the most easy question to answer.

So much depends on what is already known, what is understood about magic and the Craft and where the person asking is coming from in terms of spirituality and beliefs. It is also about what it is you want to give to the Pagan community as well as what you want to get out of it.

I am aware that some people think our Craft is just about telling fortunes and dressing up with a pointy hat. Well that's OK if that is what you want to do. I know that some hopefuls just want to be able to tell fortunes either with cards or other artefacts just for themselves or also for others. I am very gentle and explain to them that our Craft is so much more and that fortune telling is only one small part.

To address the 'How do I start, I have several suggestions to these queries and I would recommend the person read a few books on a subject where their interest lies, such as crystals, tarot reading, pendulum use.

I know of some newbies who have said to me that they don't really know where to turn for advise as it is not always simple to tap into. Some have bought several different pendulums, several different packs of tarot cards, oracle cards, runes and so on hoping that one will work for them. When one does not resonate immediately they try another and want a quick fix.

I do explain that our Craft is not a quick fix and most of us who practice regularly have learned our craft over many years and built up our practice. My advice is to stick with one method first and give it a chance, and give yourself a chance to understand what it entails, for instance, to read the cards. Do read books on a subject of interest. There is no stigma attached to that, how else can one learn especially when you are a lone practitioner? However one can read all the books in the world and not understand the fundamentals. It is advisable to really get to know one method before moving on to another. Give it a chance. Have patience, you will be repaid.

Most important to me, is to google the wheel of the year. This gives a basis to the sabbats and a rhythm to the practice and framework with which to operate. It also gives an insight as to which pathway they wish to follow. Is it Pagan, is it Wicca, is it fortune telling?

When my own daughter was a young and keen teenager, she sat with me while I read the cards at psychic fairs and spiritual gatherings and she made notes for the person I was reading for. She jotted down the salient messages on pretty, decorated paper and this was rolled up and tied with a ribbon and given to the querant. By doing this she was learning her craft and is now a very competent Pagan practitioner herself. Whoo Hoo.



I do sometimes loan out some of my collection of books and artefacts which will guide the person asking how to, and also suggest they attend a psychic fair, a spirit and destiny fair or similar and chat to people there in order to meet others who can help them. I also invite them to one of my Tarot and Card Reading Workshops. Another thing would be to buy a couple of magazines of which there are plenty around. Including this wonderful example and now it is possible to have printed copies I am already loaning them out as well as encouraging everyone to purchase their own copies.

If I am asked about rituals I advocate they buy some tea lights and incense and practice some deep breathing exercises and jot down a few notes as to how that makes them feel. I do tell them about rule of three and the Witches Rede, just to ensure they don't start practicing rituals which can cause harm in any way to themselves or others, and to take things slowly, little steps lead to giant leaps. For this pur-

pose I sell spell pouches with all they need to make a start and precise instructions. Most important advice here is to be careful what you wish for!

If they are local to me I invite them to join in my Circle Of The Crystal Moon and attend a circle casting (currently on Zoom) so they can work out which part of the Craft they want to find out more about, and if this is for them. In my circles there is always a certain amount of education and information given out and discussed which is always helpful. Members are guided and encouraged to take part as we always include a meditation and a chant. Each casting is different and tied in very closely to the wheel of the year. The very best part of pagan life in that nobody needs to follow strict rules and regulations as in some religious practices, but work out one's own pathway.

Of course some covens are very strict and follow very tight rules and that is also fine and sometimes it is a good idea for someone new to see this side of the Craft. This is not for me as I am much more laid back and relaxed about the circles I cast, and my coven meets are just as much about laughter and good company. (oh and a certain amount of alcohol and nibbles).

I know it is not always possible to join a group, a coven, a grove, especially if you don't know where to look but so much has been on zoom over the last 18 months it has been a boon to be able to reach many more hopefuls. My own circle has grown and introduced newbies to a great craft and practice.

So mote it be.

Blessed Be

The Old Crone

theoldcrone5@gmail.com

Raven & Luna's Tarotscopes

Forecasts For Your Sun Sign

LIBRA

The Hermit, 3 of Cups, Queen of Swords

Find balance between when you want to connect with people and when you really don't. You don't always have to be busy or doing things as you could find yourself becoming extremely drained or even ill, so rest! Don't just put in boundaries, assert them and hold yourself accountable when you don't. Something could happen that will give you a reason to pause and evaluate what you're doing with your life. There may be an disrespectful person that you need to distance yourself from.



SCORPIO

King of Pentacles, The Moon

Your finances may be impacting your mental health or keeping you up at night - look to someone you can trust to help you with this. You could be full of pent up energy that is causing insomnia, find a healthy outlet. Invest your money in spiritual or emotional self-improvement.



CAPRICORN

3 of Pentacles, The Hierophant

Business is booming! Thinking of starting a business? This the green light. Collaborate with like-minded others to get a task done. People will look to you a lot for help, make sure they aren't taking advantage. You may do something that will gain another's respect or may even meet your idol!

SAGITTARIUS

Ace of Swords, 5 of Pentacles

Do you use sex as a weapon? Withholding to get your own way isn't just damaging the relationship, you're missing out too. You may feel a dip in your (sexual) drive - wait it out and give your body what it needs. Do something different to stir up passion in your life.



AQUARIUS

8 of Pentacles, Ace of Cups

Work on self-love, heart healing and looking after yourself. Gift yourself time to do something creative or learn to put yourself first for a change. A loved one may gain a promotion, recognition or a payout. You may meet a new love interest at or through work, or start working with a loved one.

PISCES

3 of Wands, King of Swords

There could be team building exercises coming your way or the need to work with others to get a task done. If you're doing group work don't be passive - you have something to add? Say it! There may be a need to look back at your past to understand what you're capable of.



CANCER

3 of Cups, The World

You may spend this time connecting with people, especially those you don't see very often. You could go on a holiday with friends or get a visit from a childhood chum. Travel plans or a get-together should go well. Communicate your needs to those around you.

ARIES

5 of Pentacles, 3 of Swords

There may be a set back, misunderstanding or disappointment - the good thing about being forewarned is that you can prepare what you will do next or how you will react. Be mindful of your words, impulses and actions as you may be able to avoid this.



LEO

8 of Wands, 10 of Wands

Things may be happening very fast. Perhaps you feel like you're juggling too much or a lot seems to be happening at the same time without any respite. There could be news that will lighten your load or get things moving forward if you've been stuck in the same cycle.

TAURUS

King of Cups, Ace of Cups

You may become overwhelmed with emotion. Perhaps there's someone in your life who's struggling or who's very draining. It could also be that this is a difficult time of year for you. Be patient with yourself, reach out to a loved one for support and give yourself what you need. Open up to love.



VIRGO

9 of Pentacles, The Chariot

You may buy or sell a car. Also any vehicle checks you have should go well. Things will be feeling very comfortable indeed with stability at home and a forward movement with something, especially regarding money. You could go on an exciting trip or finally sell a property.

GEMINI

9 of Cups, Knight of Wands

You may be feeling quite jovial and driven. Perhaps study or work is going well - you're feeling quite positive or even fulfilled about it. You could gain a good outcome for something that you found difficult or have insight into what it is you want to do with your life.



Raven and Luna are
High Priest and Priestess for Black Moon Coven.

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Pagan Poetry
&
Fiction

Photo by Klaire Dawn Ader

DON'T ASK THE MOON

Kelly Buchan - Witch Writer

I wrote a song the other day, and gave it to
the moon. In hopes she'd read it over and
whisper me the tune.

"Oh darling girl", she said to me, "Your words
are out of sorts, I can't gift you a melody
when your heart is bound in knots."

"I can give you moonlight, and cosmic dreams
galore. But your hearts desire can't come from
me, don't ask me anymore."

I took my song just yesterday and gave it to
the sun. With a yawning smile he closed his
eyes and sang a slow wee hum.

"My darling girl" he said to me. "This isn't any
use. Your heart has lost its beat you see, it's
had too much abuse".

"Music doesn't come from searching outside in
the dark. Look within to find it, you should
maybe ask your heart."

So I took my song this morning, and tried to
find my heart.

T'was engulfed in thorns and dotted blood.
Like a dreadful piece of art.

"My darling girl", she sobbed at me. "Please tell
me that we're done. How many times must you
squeeze me dry? This isn't any fun."

I cleaned her up as best I could, and showered
her with praise. Her beat restarted readily, but
her wistful eyes were glazed.

"Remember when we danced til dawn and sang
of hope and grace? Why must it come to an
another end? I hate this awful place"

I lulled her into slumber, and let her rest some
more. I asked the moon and sun to help her
heal her open sores.

I took my selfish little song, and burned it
'neath the moon. 'Cause my broken heart can't
catch it's breath to whistle me the tune.

Avonmouth

Part III

Helen J.R. Bruce

Witch Writer

Illustration by Haz John

With dawn came the thaw. Branches creaked and shed their burden of snow with blessed relief. The once frozen river laughed as it tore apart its tight skin of ice, carrying the fragments on to the sea. Over the fields, the jackdaws and rooks circled as fallen stock turned soft enough to eat.

Iris woke early. Leaving her younger sisters asleep, she wrapped a coat over her nightdress and crept outside to the makeshift stable. The snow on the floor was turning to slush, and she hitched up the hem of the dress as she stepped between patches of emerging green grass. Raising her face upwards, she marvelled at the blue sky and the first soft touch of sun on her skin. Spring had returned.

There was no sound of stirring from the stable. With the warming of air, and the sweet singing of birds, the icy depths of the river seemed a long way away. Long enough to just be a dream, or a story recalled in the strange moments between sleeping and waking. Iris wondered if she would find the stable empty and the makeshift bridle undone and discarded. Or would there be nothing at all; no proof that her battle with the kelpie was anything more than a hallucination brought on by cold and hunger. She peered over the top of the door.

The air was cool and smelt faintly of damp earth and water. A creature which looked like a huge black horse stood placidly in the shadows. Iris clicked her tongue softly and the animal stirred. She felt the instinct to draw back as it approached, the recollection of hunger and sharp teeth vividly returning, but she forced her shaking hands to still. Raising one palm, she allowed the kelpie to sniff it. When there was no sign of being devoured, she dared to rest her hand softly of the sleek fur of its neck. The skin beneath was warm and firm.

“What’s your name?” she asked, in the sing song voice of animals and children, “What shall I call you?” the kelpie whickered softly and snuffled at her hand. “Oh! You’re hungry!” she bustled back into the house, taking the last of their oats and mixing them with a little warm water from the pot over the embers of the fire. It was making her own stomach rumble, but she brought it back outside and presented it to the hungry animal. The kelpie sniffed it hopefully, but turned sadly away. “What is it?” asked Iris, reaching to check the knots of the bridle, “why don’t you like it?” The kelpie pressed its nose to her shoulder and pushed the arm with the oat mix away. Iris heard one huge hoof scrape on the floor and the creature tossed up its head and snorted, baring rows of sharp teeth.

Of course, thought Iris to herself, this isn’t a horse. “Alright, I understand,” she patted the kelpie reassuringly on the neck. Not wanting to waste the oats, she shovelled some into her mouth and left the rest on the table for her sisters. They’d be waking at any moment, but she still wasn’t ready for questions, so she tied fresh string to the sled and slipped quietly away.

The rooks showed her where to go. They squabbled greedily amongst themselves, testing the carcass of the sheep with the sharp tips of their beaks. Iris shooed them away. She hadn’t forgiven them for laughing at her on the edge of the forest, and felt almost righteous in taking their meal. Dragging the stiff sheep onto the sled, she began the much slower walk back home. Meltwater was

turning the fields to mud, and her trusty winter boots were heavy with clay. Casting a look back, she felt bad for the farmer, but he would be busy with other bodies to find.

There was the sound of movement from inside the house and the still air felt disturbed. Iris eased open the bolt on the stable door and pushed the sled with the sheep on inside. Sniffing the bloodflecked wool, the kelpie whickered with soft delight. Bright teeth flashed and Iris nodded to herself. "Avonmouth, that's what I'll call you." The kelpie looked up at her briefly, acknowledgement in its marshgreen eyes, and then fell back to its meal.

"Where have you been?" asked a voice. Iris locked the door hurriedly, turning round to face a tight lipped Jane.

"Just checking the horse. Looks like second winter is finally over," Iris gestured to the sapphire sky. A few thin clouds crawled lazily across it and songbirds flitted from tree to tree.

"The sun!" cried Martha in shrill delight, running through the open door in her nightdress and shoes. She turned a circle on the damp grass with a wet splashing sound.

Iris smiled and opened her arms to her youngest sister. "We will be busy now. Let's have a good breakfast." Lifting Martha like she had when she was younger, Iris carried her back to the house in a hug. Jane hesitated for a moment, glancing back towards the dark of the stable, but practicality bettered her curiosity for now.

That evening Iris sat up late cutting strips of brown canvas from her father's old cloak. She restitched the hem and then plaited and twisted the pieces into the shape of a bridle. Very early, before dawn had crept into the sky, she stole into the stable and settled the new bridle on the still sleepy kelpie. Only when the new straps were well tightened did she cut free the harness made hurriedly from rope. With the very first light she finally slept.

Her sisters woke before her. It was the smell of fresh bread which finally lured her downstairs, and she found Martha eating hot slices straight from the oven.

"Come and try this!" Martha cried, "you can almost imagine the taste of melted butter!" Iris smiled to herself and sat down at the rickety table.

Jane sliced the loaf and then leaned thoughtfully on the back of a chair. "That was neat work with the bridle," she said. Iris froze with a slice of bread halfway to her mouth. Had Jane been in the stable? Did she open the door? If if she did, what kind of gruesome sight had greeted her eyes?

"Did you go in?"

Jane shrugged. "It needed fresh water. Why have you gone so pale?"

Iris forced a chunk of bread into her mouth and chewed slowly while her mind raced to think. Could those sharp teeth really have torn through a sheep with no trace? She had been waiting to handle the animal more before her sisters came too close, just in case its new gentle nature was limited to the person who put on the bridle. But nothing seemed amiss. She let the tension fall from her shoulders. "Just hungry," she smiled, "thank you for that. Next you can help me drag out the old plough."

It took a full day to plough the small field by the house. The huge horse pulled the contraption with ease, although Iris wasn't used to steering and the freezing weather had turned up a fresh batch of stones. But by dusk it was done, and the next day it was planted. That night Iris scoured the fields and finally found another dead sheep in the deep shadow of a ditch.

The day after that the three girls went back to the forest. They gathered up the pile of cut wood and dragged it back home to be cut for new floorboards or split up for burning. Martha rode on the back of the horse while it pulled the timber behind, and waved at the few folk they passed as if she was a queen. In the hedgerows, fresh leaves unfurled and insects collected pollen from pale yellow

primroses. But there were no more dead sheep, and Iris came home empty handed. That night she heard the kelpie kicking at the door of the stable.

Waking early, Iris followed the dawn to the fields, with her father's gun over her shoulder. She shot three startled rooks, and offered them with an apology to the kelpie. The animal eyed them critically, but seemed to make do in the face of hunger. Iris hung the gun back up in the rafters. The kelpie made much of their work easy, but she had no hope of sustaining the amount of meat it needed to eat. She sighed to herself as she slipped back inside the house.

"Where have you been?" asked Jane.

Iris finished hanging her coat on one of the hooks by the door. "Just checking on the horse," she replied, with her eyes on the ground.

"We heard shots," said Martha quietly, "we were worried."

Iris felt her shoulders tense. Panic crept like ice through her muscles, spreading sharp crystals that tingled and stung. She had never lied to her sisters, even in the hardest of times. In that moment, she made a decision. "I heard them too. But there's nothing to worry about, I promise." Her voice sounded shaky, even to her. Jane tightened her lips in suspicion. But the day was brightening, and there was enough work to be done without digging for secrets.

It was almost midnight when Iris slipped out into the darkness. The moon hung low and full, like a luminous pearl, and she was grateful for the silvery light. Opening the stable door, she led the kelpie down the track that led away from the house. Its black fur caught the pale moonlight and glinted like dark water. The night was quiet and still, disturbed only by the steady hoof-falls and step of boots. Even the forest was silent. It loomed like a low black cloud, and Iris knew the river ran beside it.

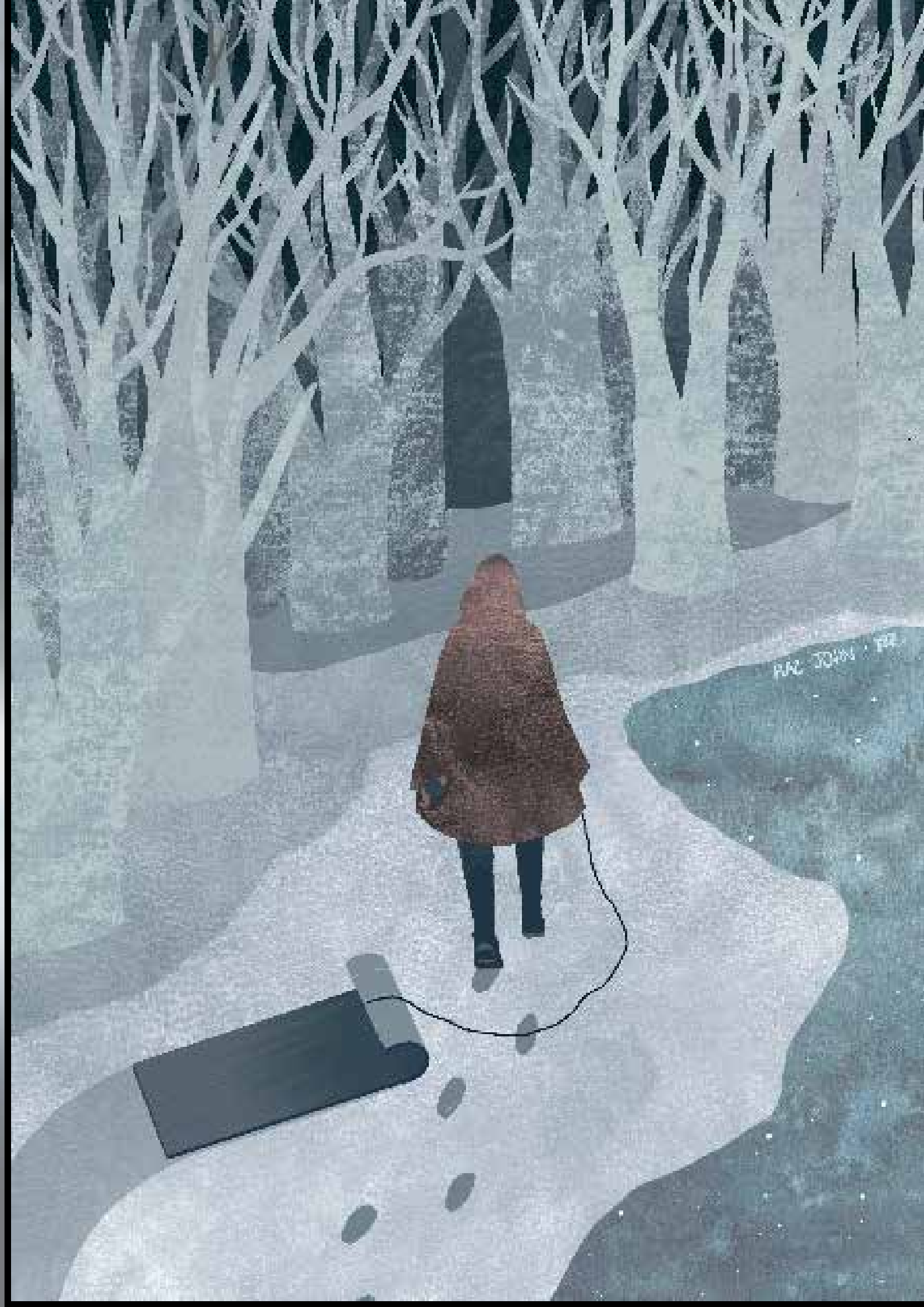
Halting at the bank, she took a deep breath. The air smelt of fresh grass and wildflowers. The recent chill had passed without leaving any lasting mark on the land, and the river bubbled and sang as it raced unimpeded along its serpentine path.

"Avonmouth," said Iris softly, "Thank you for the ploughing." She untied the chinstrap of the bridle. "Thank you for the riding and dragging our wood." She loosened the cheekstrap and let it hang free. Her heart drummed in her chest, rattling against her ribs like twigs on a window. But there was no going back. Who was she to take folklore and tame it? Who was she to take a story and strap it between pages that were clearly too small? She gathered up the reins and pulled the bridle off gently, over the kelpie's head.

"When I was very young," she said, "my father would tell me stories of all the animals that lived in the forest. There was the tricky fox, the wise owl and the grumpy old badger. He said that the wild held everything we needed to learn." She slipped the straps free from the creature's nose. "I've learnt something. I've learnt to look beyond fear." Closing her eyes, she rested her hand on the soft fur for a final time. "And that's freedom."

She felt muscles tense, coiled beneath the skin. The kelpie reared up, tossing its mane like green weed caught in the current. Snorting, it bared teeth that could devour a sheep without trace. Iris stood firm. The empty bridle hung from her fist. The rooks were still asleep, so there was no one to witness that night on the edge of the forest. But of there was, they might have said that the kelpie bowed lightly before turning away. They might have said that those seaglass green eyes held for a moment the soft glint of kindness. They might have agreed with the bright eyed young woman, that wild things deserve to be free.

Iris turned for home, her head held high. She wondered if she might carve her own wooden horse.



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