

**MRS DARLEY'S  
PRACTICAL P<sub>A</sub>GAN  
∴ MAGICK ∴**

**A SEEKER'S GUIDE**

**TO**

**MAKING MAGICK**

**BY**

**• CAROLE CARLTON •**



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*To all who have accompanied me on my  
journey*

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## **:: BOOKS BY CAROLE CARLTON ::**

Mrs Darley's Pagan Whispers (2008)  
Mrs Darley's Moon Mysteries (2009)  
Mrs Darley's Pagan Elements (2010)  
Mrs Darley's Pagan Healing Wisdom (2011)  
Mrs Darley's Pagan Paths to Magick (2012)

## **: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS :**

After writing five books in the Mrs Darley series, I thought perhaps it was time to lay my charismatic next door neighbour to rest. That was however, until quite by chance, I came across Tylluan Penry of The Wolfenhowle Press.

Through Tylluan's belief in Mrs Darley, for which I am indebted, and her brilliant editing skills, for which I am eternally grateful, Mrs Darley has once again been given a voice.

My love and thanks go to my husband for his constant support and who is always there with an untiring ear with which to listen to each Mrs Darley tale.

My heartfelt gratitude extends to all who have read and enjoyed the Mrs Darley series to date and to those who are just about to meet her for the first time.

My final words of thanks and blessings however, must go to the late Mrs Darley, without whom my life would have been so much the poorer.



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## ∴ INTRODUCING MRS DARLEY ∴

Ask a hundred witches how to define witchcraft and they will give us a hundred different answers, for witchcraft and magick are shaped by the intent and skill of the practitioner, whether performed in a formal coven or alone beneath the light of the moon.

My journey into the realms of magick was made through the enchanting Mrs Darley and a selection of her eclectic friends when I lived next door to her on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall during the 1990's.

Mine was a gentle journey into the old ways, for I was a nervous traveller along the path of the wise. Indoctrinated into the ways of the Methodist Church at a very early age and remaining extremely devout until my mid teenage years, I was very aware of the pitfalls of temptation and the wrath of the Old Testament God that awaited those who strayed beyond the confines of the commandments.

Mrs Darley however came in complete contrast to those I had, up until that time, encountered upon the spiritual path. She never thrust her beliefs or ideas upon me, but casually invited me into her magickal life where she gradually eroded away my misconceptions and replaced them with joy and understanding.

This awareness came through celebrating the old festivals, acknowledging the phases of the moon, appreciating the elements which shape our world, exploring our healing senses, researching the witchcraft persecutions and being given a glimpse of the Hermetic Principles which underpin the weaving of magick.

My magickal journey however was not that of the Wiccan or Druid, not that of the Nordic or Heathen traditions, but an eclectic mix of Cornish and European cottage magick, with an occasional sprinkling of more structured ritual. As I was about to discover however, not only had my mentor's magickal knowledge sprung from rather surprising origins, but she was

not adverse – when absolutely necessary – to using magick in ways that made me feel rather uncomfortable.

Over the many moons that have passed since those magical days spent with Mrs Darley, I have continually attempted to carve out my own particular spiritual path.

One of the most precious pieces of advice Mrs Darley gave me was that I should never blindly follow the teachings of others without question. She taught me to incorporate into my spiritual practices only that which felt right and which nourished my soul.

Naturally, along the way, I have sought out those with like minds. I have read and experimented, listened and discerned and yet, I hope I have remained true not only to who I am, but that I have also remained true to Mrs Darley, the enigmatic lady who ultimately gave me permission to be me.



## ∴ CHAPTER ONE ∴

### THE WITCH'S CHARIOT

The moor was in the process of being slowly consumed by twilight as I returned home after my sojourn onto the lane in search of glow worms. It was a warm evening just before mid-summer and the air was sweet and heavy with the unmistakable scent of moorland ferns and wild honeysuckle.

I had just let the five bar gate swing shut when I noticed a shadowy figure approaching from the little path that ran alongside the old pig sties. I stopped, stepped back behind the oak tree and watched, as the unmistakable silhouette of Mrs Darley came into view.

I was just about to call out to her, when I noticed that she was carrying something under her left arm. The object was a broom - a witch's broom and, for a brief moment, despite all my magickal training, the old fears I had once harboured resurfaced. For search as I might, I was unable to find an explanation for what I was witnessing. Why would a rational, intelligent woman be sneaking around in the remnants of twilight with an ancient relic tucked under her arm, upon which, if the stories were to be believed, witches once flew?

I watched her walk towards the cottages and waited until she had gone inside before moving out from the shadow of the trees. The full summer moon was now high enough to light my way as I stepped onto the path to make my way home. My walk however was interrupted by a sweet scent emanating from Mrs Darley's garden and I stopped for a moment to smell the buddleia which overhung the dry stone wall.

'Lovely night for a walk.'

I gasped and spun round to see Mrs Darley leaning over the half stable door.

'Oh, I'm sorry dear, did I make you jump?'



'Yes, you did rather. I thought...' I allowed the sentence to trail away.

'Thought what?'

I shook my head. 'Nothing.'

'Thought I was safely tucked away in my cottage along with my broom?'

'I don't know what you mean.' I said.

'Let's not pretend,' Mrs Darley smiled, 'I know you saw me.'

'How?' I was glad of the moonlight to spare my blushes.

'Just as you noticed the aroma of the buddleia as you passed my garden, I too became aware of your perfume as I walked past the pig sties.'

'Oh,' I said, knowing I had no defence.

'My dear,' she said, 'I don't mind in the least that you were curious as to my moonlight sojourn with a broom, for although curiosity may at some point kill the cat, without it she would never gain wisdom. Come,' she opened the lower half of the stable door. 'I have an hour to spare and this seems to be a most appropriate time to begin discussions on the practicalities of making magick.'

Accepting Mrs Darley's invitation, I followed her into her cottage, which, due to its dark slate floor and granite stone walls, felt delightfully cool after the heat of the night.

'Mmmm, it smells wonderful in here,' I said, as I walked over to the table and buried my nose in a vase of colourful blooms.

'Sweet scented night stock,' Mrs Darley replied, 'a mid-summer gift from Phyllis.'

'How lovely,' I replied, turning around in order to take my usual seat beside the fire. To my disappointment however, the hearth was lit solely by a large yellow candle burning in front of the unlit wood burner.

'I'm not used to seeing your hearth without a fire,' I said.

'Well, it is very warm tonight,' said Mrs Darley, 'but I can't let Mid-Summer's Eve go by without acknowledging the God at the height of his power, hence the candle. So, tell me, what exactly did you think I had been doing with my broom?'

'I'm not sure,' I laughed.

'Flying perhaps?'

'No! No, of course not. I'm not that naive.'

Mrs Darley raised an eyebrow, but chose to remain silent.

'But I did wonder why you were carrying a broom back from the field.'

'Well it may surprise you to learn that I had simply been sweeping.'

'Sweeping the field?' I asked.

'Yes. Does that disappoint you?'

'It doesn't disappoint me,' I said, 'but it's not normal behaviour is it?'

Mrs Darley began to laugh, 'Well, when you put it like that my dear I suppose it isn't!'

'So why were you sweeping the field?'

'In preparation.'

'For?'

'For our Mid-Summer Esbat in order to celebrate the full moon. Later tonight I shall be celebrating with a group of women, for this moon is an important time when the energies of the natural world are at their height and it seems appropriate to celebrate the fertility and strength of the feminine as creators and warriors, as campaigners and lovers, as mothers and wise women. We will dance, sing and make our magick for all the women who, in this supposed age of enlightenment, still find themselves bound and repressed.'

I nodded in understanding as the image of the gathering I had once witnessed in that same field a few years earlier sprang to mind. There, beneath the light of the full Blessing Moon, I had once watched as a group of bare breasted women leapt and danced around the mid-summer fire, singing their praises to the full fat orb.

'But why sweep the field?' I asked.

'Well, the first step in creating a sacred space in which to make magick is to cleanse both the area and the self. You may remember when we performed the purification ritual at your cottage that I asked you to clean it first of all and then take a purification bath before we began?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Well, when we perform an outdoor ritual the preparation remains the same. We sweep the space "widdershins", that is anticlockwise, or against the sun, in order to brush away any negative energies. It becomes particularly important from a practical point of view when we are outdoors and barefooted as we don't want twigs or stones embedded in the ground where we dance.'

'Well that makes perfect sense,' I said 'but why don't you just use an ordinary broom, why does it have to be one of those?'

'Because brooms like these, or besoms as they are called, have been used for hundreds of years to sweep the floors of every home in the land. In fact the majority of tools we now consider to be magickal were once ordinary household objects. It was said that during the witch hunts many true witches would disguise their wands as besoms by attaching a few hazel twigs at one end.'

'Wands?' I was unsure whether or not I had heard her correctly.

Mrs Darley nodded. 'Why of course my dear, surely any witch worth her salt would have a wand?'

I looked at her with a half smile, wondering whether she was teasing. 'Why, of course,' I echoed.

'Ah,' said Mrs Darley raising her finger, 'I can see the sceptic rising within you.'

'Well to be honest it does all seem to belong to the realm of fairy tales. I mean why would you want a wand, or any prop come to that, to make your magick? After all you've only just finished teaching me that the majority of magick is carried out on the mental plane'

'And indeed it is - in fact you have just made a very valid point. However the purpose of magickal tools is to act as a mental focus. They are symbolic and, as such, bypass the critical conscious mind to make an immediate connection with the subconscious, thereby providing us with an instant understanding of their deeper meaning.'

‘So what you’re saying is that a symbol, like a magickal tool, allows us to experience a deep and immediate connection to something rather than simply having knowledge of something?’

Mrs Darley nodded.

‘Give me a “for instance” with regard to magickal tools,’ I said.

‘Well, let’s look at the wand about which you are so sceptical. In many magickal traditions the wand is representative of the element of fire and immediately a witch takes it in her hand she sees the flames, feels the heat, and acknowledges the fiery salamander. Within the circle it represents strength and courage, power and determination.’

‘Ok, I’m fascinated,’ I laughed. ‘So will magickal tools form part of my training?’

Mrs Darley nodded, ‘In part yes, although it is important that you don’t become seduced by the so-called tools of magick.’

*‘Seduced?’*

‘Yes. You see, my dear, it is so easy to become enchanted by the pretty things of magic... the wands and the athames, the chalices and the pentacles, the cups and the cauldrons, and lovely though these things are, in themselves they are not magick.’

‘Rather like falling for a handsome face I suppose,’ I mused. ‘It doesn’t necessarily equate to being in love.’

‘Exactly, and of course, you must remember that not everyone who is a practitioner of the magickal arts will choose or even want to use tools. Magick can be likened to shoes - there are many types and sizes and what may suit one person or one occasion, may not necessarily suit or be suitable for another.’

‘So you can tailor magick to suit your purpose and your preferences?’ I asked.

‘Certainly you can,’ said Mrs Darley, ‘although I’m sure the ceremonial magicians, those who follow a stricter regime, may disagree with me. However for the weaving of cottage magick, all you need is a little imagination, the forces of the natural world and something which corresponds with your desired outcome. For this is magick that can be performed on the wild open moor,

upon the dew soaked grass, at the edge of the sea, or in your cottage before a roaring fire.'

My mind immediately replayed images of the times we had spent together over the past few years. I remembered watching the Equinox sun rise over Dartmoor, getting our feet wet dancing in the Celtic Summer, standing with our arms outstretched on a deserted beach in order that we might feel the power of the wind and weaving our Black Moon magick beside Mrs Darley's fire one misty June evening. I shivered in the realisation that all these memories were in themselves simple acts of magick.

'Sometimes though,' Mrs Darley's words interrupted my thoughts, 'there is nothing quite like joining with others, especially at the Sabbats when we celebrate one of the eight festivals of the Pagan year. We do of course meet at other times, such as when we feel the need to work magick for a communal purpose or perhaps on the night of the full moon as indeed is our wont tonight and this is known as an Esbat. It is on these occasions that I enjoy the more formal aspects of casting a circle using ritual tools and powerful words.'

'In that case, I will look forward to learning about them,' I said, 'but for now can I just ask you a quick question about the broom?'

'Of course my dear, but then I must go.'

'What about the flying stories?'

'Ah, the witch's chariot,' Mrs Darley smiled as she stood and picked up her broom. 'Tell me, what do *you* think?'

'Well, they can't possibly be true...'

'And yet?' questioned Mrs Darley.

'And yet, although my conscious mind says "Don't be ridiculous, of course witches can't fly", somewhere in the depths of my subconscious there's a whisper of "What if?"'

'Then why not pay a visit to the library this weekend and look up flying ointment? Examine the ingredients, investigate their effects... for then and only then, will you be able to decide on the viability - or not - of the witch's chariot.'



Practitioners of the magickal arts have long been familiar with arcane plant lore for healing, spell work and their hallucinatory properties. These wise men and women would make preparations of psychoactive drugs including belladonna, mandrake and hemlock, which they would blend together with goose grease and apply to the soles of their feet, their underarms and genital areas thereby ensuring that absorption was both quick and efficient. The effects of these potent plants brought about 'flights of fancy' or drug induced 'trips' where the user quite often experienced the feeling of flying, eventually leading to these potent concoctions being referred to as 'flying ointments'.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century records of a man called Jordanes de Bergamo tell us; '...the vulgar believe, and the witches confess, that on certain days or nights they anoint a staff and ride on it to the appointed place or anoint themselves under the arms and in other hairy places.'

In northern Europe, those who availed themselves of these ancient plant recipes were referred to as *gveldriga* meaning 'night rider' or *myrkrida* meaning 'rider in the dark'.

The earlier Anglo-Saxons referred to the night traveller as *haegtessa* meaning 'the hedge rider' for they believed that such a person was capable of crossing the hedge or boundary that separated this world from the next. In time, 'the hedge' often became confused with a real hedge which is why many superstitions abound about certain protective plants being present in garden hedges, such as hawthorn, rowan or juniper. This is also where the popular term 'hedge witch' derives, which today refers to a lone practitioner of the magical arts.

Eventually the boundaries between these night travellers and the Church's misguided definition of witchcraft became blurred. This led to confessions of broomstick flights being sought as evidence of Devil worship from those wrongly accused,

regardless of the fact that the witch finders *knew* that the cause of these night flights were the effects of hallucinogenic plants.

The first confession was made in 1453 by a Frenchman called Guillaume Edelin who declared under torture that he had made a pact with the Devil which allowed him to fly around on his broom. Seven years later in 1460, five women confessed to receiving a salve from the devil which they rubbed on both their hands and a wooden rod that they placed between their legs after which they flew, ‘...above good towns and woods and waters.’

In *The Triall of Witchcraft* by John Cotta in 1616, Cotta refers to an Italian woman who had, after rubbing flying ointment onto her body, fallen into a trance from which she could not be wakened. Eventually she came round of her own accord and was convinced that she had been flying over mountains and seas regardless of the fact that she had been watched constantly whilst in her entranced state and had not moved.

The Church however wanted to play down the fact that these night flights were caused by psychoactive drugs. They wanted flying witches to be in league with Satan as this not only kept their parishioners fearful, but placed the Church in the position of the protector of souls. This gave them ultimate control over the population, the persecutions and ultimately the possessions of the accused.

The torture of witches in order to extract confessions of flying with the aid of the Devil therefore continued and unsurprisingly, many of those accused of witchcraft confessed, ultimately adding fuel to the evocative flying broomstick.

The witch’s broomstick often was, and indeed still is, referred to as the ‘besom’, a word which derives from the Germanic *besmo* or the old English, *besma*, both of which simply mean broom. It usually comprises of a wooden shaft made of ash, which symbolises the male principle and the broom itself made of birch which symbolises the female. In magickal usage it is sometimes used to represent the element of air and has been a symbol of protection and purification in magickal rituals for hundreds of

years. Today however, the dagger or athame are more popular alternatives.

The besom has always retained an air of romanticism and was once known in Ireland as 'The faery's horse' or, as was Mrs Darley's preferred terminology, 'The witch's chariot'. Even W.B. Yeats preferred the word besom over that of broom as illustrated in his 'Supernatural Songs' from which the following is taken:

*Why should I seek for love or study it?  
It is of God and passes human wit;  
I study hatred with great diligence,  
For that's a passion in my own control,  
A sort of besom that can clear the soul  
Of everything that is not mind or sense.'*

W B Yeats, Supernatural Songs V

Unsurprisingly, given their history, many superstitions abound with regards to brooms and besoms. For example, 'Brooms bought in May sweep the family away'. Other beliefs state that if a child is beaten with a green broom his growth will be stunted while if a newcomer is due to visit your home, you should ensure you place a broom across your threshold. Those who are well meaning will step over it, whilst those with bad intent will pass by and not enter. Positioning a broom on its end by the front door with the twigs pointing upwards will ensure that negative energies are kept away.

During Pagan weddings, or Handfastings, the happy couple are invited to jump over the besom in order to bring good luck to the marriage and to symbolise crossing the threshold from one life into another. This custom is thought to have originated from the slave culture of the American South. There, slaves were not allowed to marry and therefore arranged their own ceremonies where they would jump over a broom in front of witnesses, a custom which may, according to author Danita Rountree Green, have originated in Ghana.



The author T Gwynn Jones in his 1930 publication, *Welsh Folklore*, tells of couples placing the besom at an angle across the doorway. The groom jumped first, followed by his bride and if neither of them caused the broom to fall then the marriage was blessed. Most Handfastings were made for a year and a day, after which time the partnership could be broken by jumping the broom from inside to outside of the threshold.

An old Celtic superstition suggested that if a woman jumped over a broom on the May Day festival of Beltane, then she would soon become pregnant.



I couldn't resist and that is my only defence. After leaving Mrs Darley's cottage, I returned home and waited a good hour before considering it safe enough to venture out once again. I quickly made my way across the path alongside the pig sties and through the gap in the dry stone wall which led into the swept field.

To both my surprise and disappointment, the field was empty and feeling somewhat cheated out of the theatrical performance I had promised myself, I turned to make my way home. It was then however, that I heard the distinct sound of laughter coming from the field below and quickly ran down to the low stone wall which separated the two fields.

As I reached the wall and peered over the top, I gasped at the spectacle which played out before me. Here were at least nine women with broomsticks between their legs, running around the perimeter of the field chanting something inaudible. As the chant built to a crescendo they leapt into the air and the sound of their laughter danced out into the night.

I watched them for some time, mesmerised by their energy and enthusiasm, yet feeling quite bewildered at this rather unorthodox behaviour. Eventually the bizarre ritual came to an end and, realising they might return to the field I was now

occupying, I began to run back towards the safety of my cottage, to contemplate what I had just witnessed.

I could accept absolutely Mrs Darley's earlier explanation of using the besom to sweep the field for both practical and symbolic purposes, but *dancing round on a broomstick*? That was a different matter altogether and my curiosity tormented me for the remainder of the week. This was, in the main, due to the fact that I was unable to think of a way of bringing up the subject with Mrs Darley without actually admitting that I had been there and seen them.

On Saturday morning I decided to act upon Mrs Darley's suggestion to visit the library, hoping this might provide some of the answers I craved. Sadly, I was disappointed with the information available and knew that I would have to ask the librarian to order in some specialist books if I was to make any headway in unravelling this fascinating subject. I did however return home with an idea of how to discover more about the strange spectacle I had witnessed only a few nights previously, even if it did mean telling a tiny white lie.

'Hello, dear,' said Mrs Darley as I stood on her doorstep later that afternoon. 'This is a nice surprise, come in, come in. Perhaps I could tempt you to take a glass of gorse wine?'

'You could indeed,' I laughed as I entered the coolness of her lovely cottage.

I noticed that the scented blooms of the previous week had been replaced with the bright yellow flowers of St John's Wort. This was a mid-summer plant of protection and so important in our little corner of the Celtic world. The old Cornish tin miners once used it to decorate the perimeters of the mine shafts in the belief that those working beneath the ground might be kept safe.

I walked over to my favourite fireside chair and instantly became aware of a rather peculiar aroma which was certainly not one I would normally associate with Mrs Darley's cottage.

'Oh, ignore the smell dear,' said Mrs Darley as she breezed in from the kitchen with two glasses of gorse wine, 'I've cleaned the slate floor with milk this morning, just to bring up a bit of a shine.'

'So that's why it always looks so lovely.' I said wishing that mine looked half as good.

'The use of milk is an old Welsh custom I believe,' replied Mrs Darley. 'But enough of domesticities, is this purely a social visit, or is there some ulterior motive?'

'Oh dear,' I said, 'You make it sound as though I only come and see you when I want something!'

'Not at all, my dear, I was merely enquiring as to whether this was a magickal visit or simply one where we discuss the price of sprouts.'

'I don't think any conversation with you would ever involve something as mundane as the price of sprouts,' I laughed, 'but now you've put me on the spot, I have to admit that I am here on a magickal mission.'

'Good,' said Mrs Darley. 'So what subject has sparked your interest today?'

'I went to the library this morning.'

'And?'

'And I was reading something quite interesting about witches and broomsticks, apart that is from the usual flying association.'

'Go on,' she said, her eyes more brilliant and watchful than usual.

'Well, it mentioned something about witches in the past using their broomsticks to gallop around the fields.'

'Did it, now? And?'

'Well, that was it really. It just said that was one of the things that witches used their broomsticks for and I just wondered if you could shed any light on why they would do such a thing.'

'How very peculiar that a book would mention this strange practice and yet not offer any explanation as to why,' said Mrs Darley.

'That's just what I thought,' I said.

'And in which book did you discover this nugget of information?'

*She knew. Somehow she knew what I'd seen that evening.*

'Oh, I can't remember now,' I blustered. 'It's a shame really because I actually wrote down the titles and authors of the books

I looked at but must have left it in the library....' I allowed the sentence to trail away.

Mrs Darley looked at me and I found it impossible to hold her gaze. There was an uncomfortable silence.

'So what made you think that *I* would know?' she asked.

I laughed, attempting to lighten the atmosphere. 'Well, you know the answer to most things.'

'But what if I said I didn't know the answer to this particular question?'

'I wouldn't believe you,' I said.

'Well you must be basing your evidence on something.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well to suggest that I may not be telling the truth, you must be certain that I *do* know the answer.'

'I'm not suggesting that you're not telling the truth,' I said quickly, 'it's just that when it comes to magickal matters you usually know.'

'Well my dear, I'll tell you what I think. I think you know that I know because you came down to the field on Wednesday night.'

I felt my face blazing with colour. It shouted the truth louder than I could ever have protested my innocence. I sat for a moment trying to muster an element of composure.

'OK,' I said at last, throwing my hands in the air in a gesture of compliance, 'yes, I watched you from the top field. I know perhaps I shouldn't, but knowing you were holding an Esbat I was curious and I couldn't resist. I suppose I'm itching to put this creation of magic on the mental and spiritual planes into practice on the physical and just wanted to see what it entailed.'

'Well, at last!' said Mrs Darley, jumping to her feet and clapping her hands. 'Do you know how long I've waited for you to show some passion, some curiosity, to connect with your fire element and to express your desire for magickal knowledge?'

I shook my head. 'So you're not annoyed with me then?'

'Annoyed? Why on earth would I be annoyed? Do you remember when you overheard the conversation between Phyllis

and me beneath this window and you heard me say that I didn't think you were ready to embark upon this magickal life?

I nodded. 'Yes, you said I never pushed for knowledge and that I always seem to be afraid and I remember feeling quite hurt that you would think that of me.'

She nodded in her thoughtful way, 'I can understand that, but as you now know, had you waited to hear the rest of the conversation you would have had a very different perspective on the whole matter.'

I smiled. 'I know.'

'Well, I've been waiting ever since for you to show some initiative, to do whatever it takes to glean knowledge and now at last you have.'

To my surprise she took my hands, pulled me to my feet and began spinning me round and round until we both fell into our respective chairs out of breath and laughing.

'Goodness me,' said a familiar voice, 'it seems as though I've just arrived in time for the frivolities.'

'Phyllis,' I gasped, rising from my chair to give Mrs Darley's dearest friend a hug. 'How lovely to see you.'

'And you too,' Phyllis replied, her kind face breaking into a smile.

'Hello Phyllis dear,' said Mrs Darley, standing to greet her friend, whilst simultaneously attempting to tuck stray wisps of hair back into the elegant bun that had become rather dishevelled during our spinning around the lounge. 'Come in and sit down while I get you a glass of gorse wine. Our friend here has something to ask you.'

'Then I'm all ears,' said Phyllis squeezing my hand and smiling.

I felt braver now. 'Why would witches gallop and leap around the perimeter of a field on a broomstick?'

'Why, to encourage the crops to grow and to illustrate the height they are expected to reach!' she replied. 'I'm not sure whether I ever mentioned that my maternal grandmother grew up in the Highlands on a little Scottish croft?'

I shook my head.

‘Well, I can remember her telling me about an incident in her youth. It was a moonlit night and she saw a group of witches mounting their bune wands before dancing off into the fields beneath the Seed Moon just after the crops had been sown.’

‘A “bune wand”, did you say?’ I asked.

Phyllis nodded. ‘Yes, a bune wand was a staff, or wand which had been carved into either a phallic shape, or forked stick to represent the horned God and upon which witches were said to go “abune” or above the ground in order that the crops might know how high to grow.’

‘Oh.’

Phyllis laughed. ‘You sound quite disappointed. Did you expect a more exotic answer?’

‘Yes... no... I’m not sure,’ I said.

‘What reason did you want me to give?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Well I’m sorry if my answer hasn’t lived up to your expectations, but often the bare facts fail to compare with our imagination.’

‘But I thought you were going to work magick on behalf of repressed women?’ I asked, turning towards Mrs Darley as she reappeared with Phyllis’ wine.

‘And indeed we did, but farmer Trevago was also worried about his crops as this has been a very dry summer, so he asked us to perform a bit of sympathetic magick.’

‘And will it work?’ I asked.

‘Wait until Lughnasadh,’ smiled Mrs Darley.



The following poem was inspired both by my introduction to the witch’s broom by Mrs Darley and my subsequent research into this fascinating subject. ‘The Witch’s Chariot’ attempts to capture how, by application of what we would now deem to be rather

dangerous ingredients, the mind becomes unfettered and as such allows the user to believe that they could undoubtedly fly across the hedge, between the worlds.

## THE WITCH'S CHARIOT

The herbs are cut, the ointment made,  
Beneath the summer's waxing moon.  
The voices call, 'Tis time, 'tis time,  
We cannot bide, it must be soon.'

Beneath the stars my flesh is bared,  
The charm is sung, the salve applied,  
And now my mind begins to race,  
The broom awaits its Sabbat ride.

Across the blackened, savage, seas,  
Above the sand, the rock, the stone,  
Beneath the milky, moonlit, sky,  
I see the dwelling of the Crone.

For here amongst the Godly realms,  
My ears hear secrets never known,  
Such things as I have never dreamed,  
Whilst I am dressed in flesh and bone.

But as my herbal brew wears thin,  
The other world grows faint - unfurls  
And to the ways of men I fly,  
Across the hedge, between the worlds.

