

## Scrying Through The Pain

“Look Norton, let’s get things sorted before we start. *I’m* the initiated witch and *you* are the apprentice High Priest. I tell you what to do and you do it. Right?”

Norton looked down apologetically at the knife he was holding between his knees. “Yes, all right Persephone, you don’t need to shout. Why are you always shouting at me anyway? You’ve been trying to put me down since primary school!”

“Oh stop your whingeing and listen. That’s *not* a dagger you’re holding, it’s an *ATHAME!*” (She had a way of speaking in capital letters though no-one ever worked out how). She spelled it out. “It’s a symbolic thingy. You know, like your *male* thingy”. She glared pointedly in the rough direction of the thingy in question which Norton was trying to cover with a black handled kitchen knife. He was wearing his brand new robe but he felt naked. He felt as if she was looking right through it and wasn’t at all impressed with what she was seeing.

Effie Bagpuss, resplendent in a huge purple flannelette nightie, (it was her best, it only had the one tear in it - in the left armpit where it wouldn’t show too much), painted a sympathetic look on her battered old face and said “Ignore her Nort, she’s just a bit power drunk. I’m sure she’ll grow out of it once we ‘ave the coven up an’ runnin’. First she changes her name ter Persephone d’Ofey and then promotes herself to High Priestess. Just ‘cos she’s the only one as ‘as a spare room for a temple...”

Persephone tried to interrupt, but Effie simply ploughed on. “An’ what was wrong wi’ bein’ Sharon Duffy anyway? An’ as fer that silver crescent moon ‘eadband... well I ask yer!”

Ivy Bradshaw grinned at her. “Let’s face it Effie, if you were going to be High Priestess wouldn’t you want something a bit more witchey-sounding than Effie Bagpuss?”

“An’ what’s *wrong* wi’ me name, may I ask? Effie was me mother’s name and Bagpuss goes all t’way back ter medieval times - Oxfordshire *Bagpuisses* as we were then! A proper important land-ownin’ family wi’ a country seat ter match. Watchfield Park it were called but it wer taken over by the RAF during the war an’ we never got it back.”

At that, Ivy snorted. “Your *Bagpuss* granddad was disinherited for running off with an actress and all he ever owned was a theatre in Halifax. Leastways that’s what *I* heard....”

“Which *your* drunken granddad set fire to, while ‘e was tryin’ to burgle the place. Leastways that’s what *I* ‘eard!” She was grinning like a Cheshire cat as she said it; the two of them had made it their life’s work to snipe at one another.

The four of them were sitting cross-legged on the carpeted floor of the spare bedroom of 92 Lumbutts Lane. They were bickering, as they’d done the previous month when they’d had their first coven meeting (or moot, as Persephone/Sharon insisted on calling it).

Persephone slammed her flat hand down on the floor, the full explosive effect spoiled by the muffling of the carpet.

“DO YOU THINK WE MIGHT JUST GET ON WITH WHAT WE’RE FOR?” Even she herself noticed the capitals this time. She took a deep breath. “I despair sometimes, I really do. I’ve seen more adult behaviour in *Prime Minister’s Questions* on the tele.”

Ivy glared at Effie, took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

“DON’T” Persephone shouted, before things got really ugly. “Let’s move on and open the circle. Norton, on your feet.”

The scrawny young man scrambled awkwardly upright, wishing that his black nylon robe wasn’t so short - it only reached to his knees. When Ivy had sold it to him she had assured him that it was a proper magician’s robe. “It’s worn by Chinese magicians - they’re all a bit upwardly challenged over there!” she’d told him cheerfully.

“This your big moment, so remember what I told you” Persephone continued. “You can do all four quarters yourself for this first time. You go round to face each of the cardinal compass points and summon the proper element - East is Water, South is Fire, West is Air and North is Earth. The idea is to bring all the elements into the circle, right? Then they protect us till we finish what we’re doing.”

“They protect us?” Norton had his face screwed up, indicating that a thought was struggling to get out. “How - and from what?”

“Ummm...” Persephone wasn’t too sure about this bit, so had to momentarily pause to check her inner workshop manual: unable to find the right page, she rapidly decided to go with what she’d got and look it up later.

“From...oh, *things*.” Now-” she chivvied him into the centre of the circle. “Let’s get this going.”

Norton held out his arm and pointed his knife (*No, it’s an athame!* he reminded himself) and adopted what he hoped was a serious High Priestly expression.

Then ruined it by making it obvious he hadn’t a clue which way he was facing. He was supposed to start from East - where the hell had East gone? He looked around, starting to panic.

Effie took pity on him and waved towards the window. “That way, Norton.”

“No, *this* way” from Persephone, as she took Norton’s extended arm and pivoted him, like a weather vane, towards the wardrobe.

Ivy, smugness personified, burrowed down under her blue cotton robe and produced a miniature compass.

“Bought half a dozen of these last time the sales rep. came to the shop. I thought one might come in handy.... *That* way, Norton.”

“*That way*” was facing a poster of fluffy clouds in a blue sky. Persephone only hesitated a nanosecond. “Oh, of course! That’s why I put that picture there, silly me. East is Air and that’s a metaphor for Air - just remember that, Norton.” She shot a triumphant look at Ivy.

Norton faced errr... East, threw his arms in the air, inflicting fatal stab wounds on the paper globe lampshade above his head with what he now knew to be his athame. BANG (or, since it was Norton) *pop*, and all the lights went out.

Persephone sighed. "Norton, go and get the Hoover from the understairs cupboard..."

Half an hour and a calming pot of tea later, the four of them re-gathered in the spare room-cum-temple. Small table lamps provided the lighting this time, placed in the four corners, well out of Norton's reach.

He took his place, took a frantic guess at East (His memory was even shorter than his robe). "Oh great and mighty guardian of the errrr East, Element of um... Water, no! Fire, no! AIR, I summon and call you... thee up to witness our rites this night and I bid errr... thee hail and welcome."

Persephone let out her breath.

"That was... quite good, Norton. Lots of room for improvement but you're getting there," she said encouragingly. "Now for South... no, that's Widdershins. You have to go Deosil - that's right..."

"I wish you'd make up your mind. Is it right or is it wrong?"

"Goddess give me strength. I mean you turn right, not left."

"So why don't you say so. And what's all this diesel and widow's shins stuff?"

"I *did* explain all this last month but you just don't listen, do you? So, once more, with feeling. Deosil is clockwise and Widdershins is anti-clockwise round the circle. What's so difficult about that? Now, get on with it."

In spite of Persephone's bad tempered prompting he managed to get round to North, stumbling and stuttering all the way until he could slump down in his place with a profound sigh of relief.

Persephone took charge again, flounced her multi-coloured, multi-layered lace and silk.... well let's call it a gown. It was far too elaborate to be called something as common as a robe. "I think, since this is our first attempt at a real ritual we might try a bit of scrying. Now, we haven't got a real crystal ball or a proper scrying mirror so I've filled my biggest saucepan with water, which I think will be just as effective. Of course a *cauldron* of water would be more Wiccan but we haven't got one of those either.... So, we all gather round and gaze into the pan, let our eyes go out of focus and see if anything interesting appears in the water. I'm hoping we might learn something about the future of our coven"

Eyes down. Long silence..... lots of heavy breathing.

Ivy: "I've a couple of nice ones in the shop."

Effie: "Nice what?"

Ivy: "Crystal balls."

Persephone: "Does everything have to be business, Ivy?"

“Girl’s got to make a living.” said Ivy, testily. “Look, I’ll give you a good discount, only cost you a fiver each. Got a nice mahogany-look base too. I’ve only got plastic cauldrons though. Takes months to get real iron ones all the way from Taiwan.”

(Ivy was the proud owner of Todmorden Occult And Demonic Supplies on Bacup Road, known to all the local wags as Toads ’R’ Us).

Effie: “Yer can’t boil up frogs toes an’ stuff in the plastic ones. They melt.”

“WE ARE NOT THAT SORT OF WITCHES!” Persephone bawled. “There will be no boiling of frogs’ bits or anything else while I have any say in the matter”.

Pregnant silence, more heavy breathing. A boy racer with a big bore exhaust roared past outside. The water vibrated, ruining reception.

Still more silence....

“*Something moved!*” Norton’s startled squeal rattled the windows, putting an end to the deeply esoteric discussion.

All three women jumped and there was a chorus of yelps, along with a ripping sound from Effie’s ‘robe’ as she flexed her biceps in an instinctive reaction.

Norton pointed to the saucepan. “There, in the water.”

Needing to avert his eyes from the horror of the parts of Effie the newly enhanced hole now revealed, he fixed his gaze firmly on the saucepan again.

The water seemed to be bottomless and black. The frightening part of it all was that the more he looked the more he seemed to be drawn forward. He felt he was about to fall in head first. He dragged his eyes away and shuddered.

“I, I... I think it was a whale.”

“What, a whale in a saucepan?” Effie scoffed.

Norton pointed a trembling finger. “Look for yourself.”

The old woman leaned over the pot, her robe sliding perilously forward, gaping and sagging.

Norton shut his eyes.

“Oooh... Bugger me....” he heard her murmur.

She straightened up, looked around.. Y’know, I think the lad’s right.”

Ivy snorted. “You’re imagining things, yer daft old cow.....”

“I buggerin’ well am not...!”

“Language!” Persephone jumped in. “Ladies, this is a sacred place...!”

The three women leaned forward in perfect unison, banging their heads together over the water. Ivy yelled in pain as the pointy bit of Persephones crescent moon headband took a small chunk out of her forehead.

Norton, resisting the urge to suggest it was ‘a meeting of minds’ was still not quite able believe what he had seen. He leaned forward for another look.

He failed to notice, until too late, that his glassed, on their loop of string, had hooked themselves around the handle of the pan. He sat back.....

Persephone screamed in fury. “That’s one fitted bedroom carpet you owe me Norton Standish! Now, go and get the mop from the cupboard by the kitchen sink and get it all mopped up.”

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Somewhere in a place that was not a place, a whale which, in the absence of anything to compare it with, was neither large nor small, popped into existence. looking, if such a thing is possible on a whale’s face, completely confused and not best pleased.

*There’s no way you can win with these mortals, is there? First they drag me away from a great game of “How High Can You Jump?”\* - which, incidentally I was winning by a mile - and then..... Well, I don’t really know what then, but here I am, wherever ‘here’ is..... Ah, well, look on the bright side, I’ve not been away very long. Who knows, if I get a shift on and don’t get lost on the way I might just make it back in time for second half....*

\* It’s a rarely considered fact that whales, being a bit under-endowed in the limbs department, are pretty limited in the number of games they can invent. Once you’ve done the jumping bit and chased a few dolphins you’ve more or less exhausted the possibilities.

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Thanks for reading!  
Brian & Val Dobson