

# The Witch's Survival Guide

Spells for Healing from Stress and Burnout

An extract

**Jennifer Lane**



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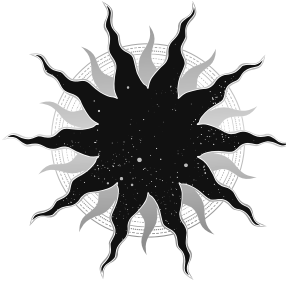
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# Opening



The sun is shining and I am sitting in a hedgerow. We are in the midst of a heatwave; I watch the long, shining grasses in the fields as they catch the sun's rays like blades of gold. My daily walk consists of a loop past tumbledown ivy-strewn cottages, through cow fields and then over the canal and back around. I am allowing myself an extra-long lunch break, giving me plenty of time for a saunter in the sun.

The hill rises in front of me as I walk past hawthorn trees that had only a few months before been almost entirely white. Now they are hazes of green. Inside their branches, I hear the peeps and questioning pips of a robin, its ragged-looking breast about to shed its summer plumage. I turn the corner onto a cobbled lane bordered by hedgerows. On my left is an incredible tangled mass of brambles, nettles and more hawthorn, and on my

right an abundance of ripening pink rosehips. I smile at the jumbled disorder of plants. The modern mind has been arranged by society to keep our roads and gardens razor-tidy to within an inch of their life (quite literally); disorder and unconformity can sometimes set people on edge. But not here in the countryside. These hedgerows might appear unkempt to others but so many creatures depend on this messiness. Right now, the hedgerows are buzzing and quivering, humming and alive. Bees, ladybirds, shrews, sparrows and caterpillars all watch, confer and wait around me. A baby blackbird scuffles out of the brambles as if sharply shoved by the roots below it. It is still white around the mouth, a sign of a new fledgling. I give it a wide berth and a respectful nod as I pass slowly. It doesn't jerk away back into the foliage, only bobs its knees like a dipper as if returning my nod.

An alcove in the hedge makes a convenient sitting spot – so long as I don't move much and risk making an enemy of the dog rose bushes around me.

I realise then how encompassed I am by the four elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Above me, the sun is blazing, leaving no doubt over its fiery nature; the air is filled with the sounds of birdsong and the occasional swell of crickets. Directly behind me in the full shade of trees is a small lake inhabited by minnows, sturgeons, coots and a lone heron. And how could I forget the earth? The flowers around me, the ground below my feet – the earth element is blooming everywhere at this time of year.

## OPENING

I sit for a while storing this memory up for winter like I am gathering fresh fruit to survive the darker days.



As a green witch, the spring and summer months are by far my favourite of the year. While I might come across as calm and maybe sometimes even aloof, inside I'm squealing like a giddy child when I see the first celandine of spring. Those happy yellow faces along the pathway make me hop around in glee.

But why do spring and summer excite me so much? Surely witches were born for long autumn nights with leaves riffling about their ankles?

When the first notes of September's crispness crinkle the morning air, my body starts to recoil. This means that the darker months are coming. For many, autumn means pumpkins, rainy afternoons curled up with a book and – of course – Halloween. But my favourite Pagan festival isn't Halloween (or Samhain as it is known in the witching world), it is the beautiful May Day festival of Beltane held under budding sunshine; I sometimes wish there was a world I could exist in where I was perpetually surrounded by the white fuzz of spring blossom.

I have had seasonal affective disorder (SAD) for as long as I can remember. When the daylight begins to fade at 3.00 p.m., so does my energy and, with it, my happiness. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists,



approximately three people in every hundred have SAD<sup>1</sup> but, in my experience speaking to friends, family members and colleagues each winter, I think that this number is much higher. It's something I had always tried to control but had been predominantly unsuccessful – until I rediscovered my witchcraft practice.

When writing my book *The Wheel: A Witch's Path to Healing Through Nature*, I put witchcraft to the test. I was chronically exhausted and constantly breaking down in a pre-pandemic world from burnout, which has been defined as mental exhaustion from continuous effort. I felt trapped in a toxic workplace environment that had motivational slogans on its walls but senior management who shattered coffee mugs against the wall if they didn't get their way. I felt so lost. How had I ended up at this place? How could I get out? But it wasn't just this specific workplace; it was office culture as a whole – something I had struggled with since I got my first job at age twenty-two. And to make things worse, as soon as autumn and winter hit, I felt practically useless. I was existing in fight-or-flight mode and struggling with the strange physical and mental symptoms of anxiety and deep depression.

What I experienced is scarily common. The modern world has pushed so many of us to breaking point. Edged us away from the world's seasonal cycles until our minds almost forget them. But our bodies cannot.

Humans were not designed for constant notifications, emails, meetings and commuting. We were meant for a

very different life – one that connects us with swaying trees, wild creatures and the rush of the elements across our skin. We were meant to feel the magick of being at one with nature.

However, the patterns of our lives have become unrecognisable from what they would have once been even 200 years ago. Stress has been said to occur when ‘aspects of the environment overwhelm people. That is, people feel stressed when too much is expected of them, or when events seem scary or worrisome.’<sup>2</sup> In the short period that technology has revolutionised the world, our bodies have not been able to keep up with the new fast-paced lifestyles forced upon us, leaving many people with burnout, feeling frantic and out of control. While stress has always been a factor in human lives, the imposition of targets, long days, blue light and crowded commutes has compacted our stress. The UK’s Health and Safety Executive estimated that in 2020/21 there were 822,000 workers affected by work-related stress, depression or anxiety and found that these conditions accounted for 50 per cent of all work-related instances of ill health.<sup>3</sup>

Society gives us neither the time nor resources to cope with stress – and the longer periods of pressure continue, the more likely they are to manifest as long-term trauma in the body. Common side effects of this include feeling overwhelmed, strange physical sensations, having racing thoughts or difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping, panic, dissociation and avoidance. These symptoms are

very similar to those of someone experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.

But there are things that can help.

In order to heal our minds and bodies from the stress that the world's current structures perpetuate, many studies have recommended living a life in nature and one that is connected to the earth. Being exposed to the rush of running water, the sound of birdsong on the air, the thrum of the sun's pulse and the unshakeable green world around us has the power to reset the mind, body and soul. The elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water have what it takes to make us well again.

Back in 2018, between fitful moments of sleep and the stress-related pain that rocketed through my knuckles and wrists, I knew I needed to do something to get me back to myself. The nature-loving child I had once been felt like a scuffed school photograph lost at the bottom of a drawer. Who was I now that I had lost my connection to my childhood self?

What if I could return to and reconnect with the green and natural lives my ancestors would have lived? What if I could tap into the deep magick that resides in the plants, trees and ancient places of this world?

What if I could use magick to heal?

I decided to rekindle the love of witchcraft and magick that had got me through my early teens. Back in those days, there had been lazy Sunday afternoons copying out Celtic Ogham into a paperback journal, trance-like meditations

on my bedroom floor surrounded by my favourite teddies, and the frequent days lying in my grandparents' garden soaking up the energy of the beech and pear trees that bordered it. Perhaps these things weren't the average past-times of a thirteen-year-old but, hey, I never professed to be normal.

This connection with nature has always been a big part of my craft. The green, natural world offers us the tools and medicine we need to help us come back to ourselves and shed the anxiety of modern life.

That is why I'm writing this book.

In this book, I want to share some of the knowledge, rituals and spells that have helped me to heal from a world that was not intended for soft, caring or spiritual people. This book gives spells, rituals and elemental magick for those dealing with the stresses and strains of home and the outside world of presentations and deadlines. Through guided spell work, those with a love of green and positive witchcraft can manage stress and anxiety, harnessing the natural forces of the four elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water – to cure and restore their souls.

Witchcraft brought me back to myself. This book shows you how you too can take back control of your busy life through the healing power of the craft.

Here in the hedgerow, I am reconnecting to the joy of the natural world. The elements cluster around me, touching my skin, waiting to hear what I might ask of them.