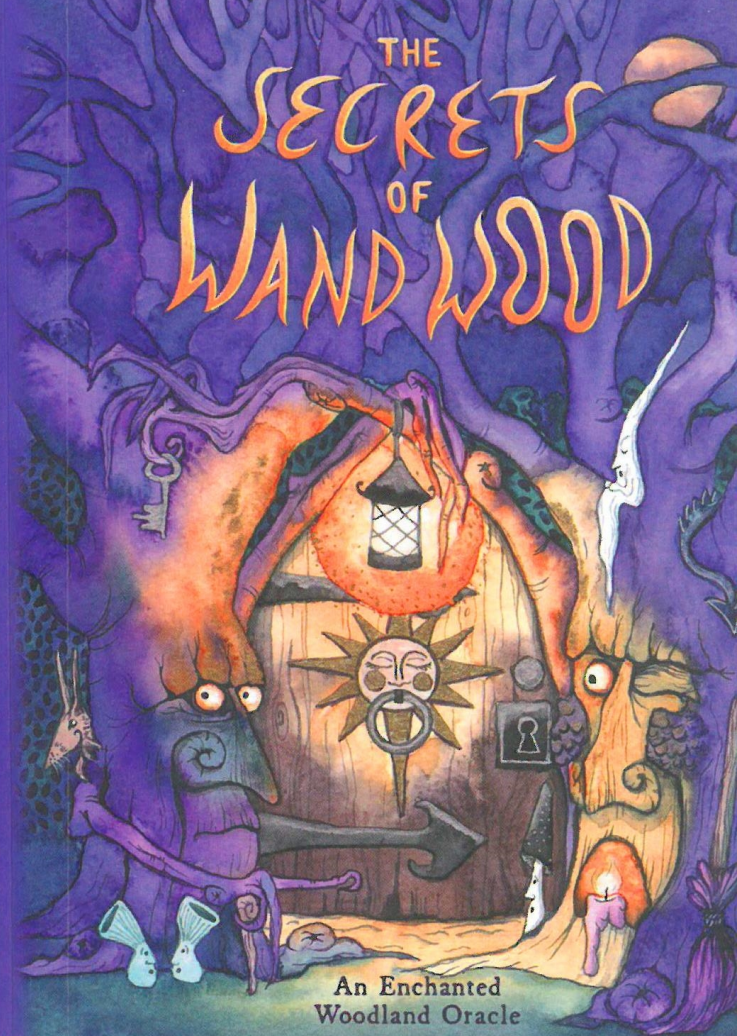


Phil and Jacqui Lovesey are husband and wife creators, custodians, and curators of the world of Matlock the Hare, writing and illustrating a series of books about the most 'majickal' of places.

When not working in their 'Potionary' office, they can often be found deep in Shropshire's 'crumlush' countryside looking for inspiration for their next 'saztacular' creative adventure!

Discover more at:
www.matlockthehare.com



An Enchanted
 Woodland Oracle

THE
SECRETS
OF
WAND WOOD



An Enchanted Woodland Oracle

As Revealed by Matlock the Hare

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*We are each of us our own landscape
of unknowing beauty, its pathways our
unfinished aspirations, always best
appreciated in the mindful glade of the now.*

Phil & Jacqui Lovesey

Contents

Introduction by Matlock the hare,
How to Use the Deck & Glossary.

Cards

Ancestors.....	1
Balance.....	5
Be Majickal!.....	9
Believe.....	13
Be Inspired!.....	17
Be More Witchy!.....	21
Be Surprised!.....	25
Bond.....	29
Breathe.....	33
Calling.....	37
Caring.....	41
Change.....	45
Channelling.....	49
Chaos.....	53
Cherish.....	57
Companionship.....	61
Contentment.....	65
Decisions.....	69
Dreams.....	73

Forgive.....	77
Gratitude.....	81
Guidance.....	85
Hope.....	89
Kindness.....	93
Love.....	97
Majickal Harmony.....	101
Manifest.....	105
Mindfulness.....	109
Nature.....	113
Open.....	117
Opportunity.....	121
Patience.....	125
Pause.....	129
Privilege.....	133
Purpose.....	137
Question.....	141
See.....	145
Silence.....	149
Simplicity.....	153
Tradition.....	157
Truth.....	161
Unlock.....	165
Wake.....	169
Wand.....	173
Wonder.....	177



Introduction by Matlock the Hare

(Majickal Hare of Winchett Dale)

Welcome, dear reader, to Wand Wood, and the many secrets waiting within its majickal splendour. But where, you might ask, would you begin to find such an enchanted place to unlock its many mysteries?

Let us start at the beginning, with me, your humble narrator and woodland guide. My name is Matlock the Hare and I live in a small cottage at the very edge of Wand Wood. As a young apprentice majickal-hare, it became my playground, spending many happy afternoons bounding through its cool serenity once my morning's spell lessons were over.

Later, my training complete, Wand Wood began revealing itself to me as another thing entirely; a conduit between its own hidden secrets and the guidance I sometimes need in times of confusion or uncertainty. Quite simply, Wand Wood is its own complete organic being. Every tree, leaf, bud, shoot, flower, moss, fallen trunk, path, stream and brook combine into one saztaculous, enchanted entity - a living system of concealed majick, revealing guidance to those who seek its wisdom.

Wand Wood will always welcome you without judgment, offering opportunities to connect with ancient natural wisdom. Wand Wood never teaches

but allows you to learn. It is a place both within and without, a path to truths and secrets waiting to be discovered. Wand Wood is everywhere.

Over the years, these woods have become my daily path to the village of Winchett Dale and the many creatures I look after. But as a nervous young majickal-hare who had just completed his training, the thought of being left alone by my master and mentor to take up my duties filled me with dread.

His name was Chatsworth, and when the time came for him to leave for new adventures in faraway dales, he could sense my growing uncertainty.

"Matlock," he said, standing in the doorway of what had been his home for many years, but was shortly to become mine, "these things will take time, as all change does. The village creatures have known me many years, but they will come to know and trust you, too. Just as they did with me."

"But can't you just stay a while longer?" I asked. "At least until they've accepted me?"

He smiled. "They don't have to accept you. But they will, once you accept you are their rightful new majickal-hare."

"I'm not sure my spells will be good enough," I replied. "I still glop-up with my hawthorn wand, and some of my potions are..."

He laid an elderly paw on my shoulder. "Whenever you feel you aren't ready, know that the answers you seek are always far closer than you think."

I watched him leave with a heavy heart, opening the small gate at the end of the front garden and waving before he disappeared into the welcoming shade of Wand Wood. For the first time since coming to Winchett Dale, I was truly alone. Yet over time, I would come to realise the wisdom in my master's words; the answers were indeed closer than I thought, beckoning from the woodland.

Yet on that day many years ago, I was simply a young hare feeling increasingly unsure of his abilities. Everything I'd been so patiently taught by Chatsworth seemed to have deserted me. My mind churned with unanswered questions. How would the village creatures ever accept me? Would any of my spells or potions actually work? What if I truly glopped up and they never trusted me? What if they simply didn't like me? How would I even know when they did?

As the sun gradually gave way to a rising full moon, I was barely aware of the steps I was taking out into the woods. That is, until I painfully stepped on the stub of a fallen branch.

"Crivens!" I yelped, reaching for my foot and seeing

a tear in my long purple slippers. Next, my green robe caught itself on a nearby thorn, evidenced by an unwelcome ripping sound. "By all the breaths of Balfastumous!" I cursed out loud. "Whatever next?"

I didn't have to wait very long.

Up ahead, moonlight filtered through the dark, misting tree line. I turned, trying to work out where I was. Hundreds of times, I'd taken this same path, yet now it seemed completely unfamiliar. I recognised nothing. When I turned back, I caught my breath at the clearing that had majickally appeared in front of me, bathed in silver-blue moonlight. At its centre, the unmistakeable shape of an ancient standing stone, the moon settling behind a large hole at the top, illuminating me like a cosmic spotlight.

I covered my eyes with a shaking paw, peeping as much as I dare towards the stone. Much as I had become used to saztaculous occurrences in and around Winchett Dale, the majickal energy from this stone was unlike anything I'd ever felt. It had, quite simply, *a presence*; something undefinable, incomprehensible — yet also calming, as if reaching into my very soul itself.

And then, I heard the voice.

Matlock, how many times have you come to this place? How many times as a young leveret did you

play amongst these trees, bolting along my pathways to falling asleep on soft mosses after chasing butterflies on a long summer's afternoon? How many times did you wake to find new adventures waiting for you in the moonlight?

You have forgotten all the things you once held so dear, blinded instead by questions that have no answers. Why? Because the 'you' that asks them isn't listening to the 'you' that has no need of them.

All things, Matlock, can be found here in Wand Wood. All life. Thoughts lie in each leaf, tears in each brook and drop of rain. Every step you take, the direction you choose, is made possible here. To falter is merely to chance on an unexpected new path. Your time amongst these ancient trees is only ever time spent within yourself. For Wand Woods is you, as much as you are ever truly anything.

Now it's time for you to explore and fully understand what was once your playground. Open your hare's eyes and truly see. Discover the secrets within these woods and come to know that whenever you are lost, you're really only ever at the beginning. And perhaps, in time, you'll also learn that the questions you ask have no need of the answers you seek, just as a lock has no need of a key, as its job is quite purposed without one.

The wise hare learns that it is always he who places the lock, and that not one, but many different keys will

unlock the secrets, pathways and majickal choices he keeps himself from. All this you will learn in these woods. Do you choose to discover the secret wisdom? To truly see and listen to all the majick that surrounds you?

I found myself nodding, feeling powerless yet strangely excited, cleansed by the moonlight shafting through the ancient stone.

And then, just as suddenly as it started, it was gone, the clearing empty, the moon now high above the trees, glowing celestially as if it had never left the twinkling-lid. I let out a deep breath, wondering if any of it had happened at all.

"Well," said an elderly tree to my left, its gnarled, wooden face inches from mine. "Not often that you see the moving stone. Quite a sight, isn't it?"

"You saw it, too?" I asked.

"We all did," it replied, indicating other trees and creatures scrittling from the undergrowth. "We always do. And generally, it only means one thing. You're lost."

I nodded. "You're right. I have no idea what part of the woods this is."

"He doesn't mean that kind of lost!" A small shrub snorted, rolling into the clearing. "He means *lost*."

I felt as if the whole wood was watching and waiting.

"Yes," I quietly admitted, looking at my torn robe and purple slippers. "I guess I am."

"Your old master, Chatsworth, he knew this day would come."

My hare's ears pricked at the name. "How?"

The tree began to chuckle. "More of your clottabussed questions! We had hoped you'd be beginning to learn by now." One of its branches swung towards me, a small iron key hanging from the end. "The only questions you have to answer are the ones others ask of you. Forget the ones you ask of yourself, because you already know the answers to those. Your problem, Matlock, is you simply refuse to unlock them."

I stared at the moonlit key swinging in the breeze, slowly recognising where I'd seen it before. "Chatsworth wore it from his robe belt," I said. "It's his."

The tree shook its head, its branches sweeping back and forth. "Think again."

I took the key, turning it in my paw, still convinced it was Chatsworth's. He'd worn it from the first time I'd met him until the day he left, never using or referring to it once in all the time I knew him. It was simply part of him, as much as his wand or gathering sickle. I knew each room, every cupboard in the cottage and all their respective keys, but this key — Chatsworth's key — opened none of them.

The shrub was getting impatient. "Come on, hare. It's not that difficult. Who's is the key, and what does it unlock?"

"Chatsworth's," I insisted, as the clearing collectively groaned. "And I don't think it unlocks anything." But in the silence, something stirred within me, a glimmer of an inevitable truth I'd been running from. "The cottage," I whispered, staring at the key. "It's the front-door key. Never used because it's always open."

"So?" The tree encouraged.

I looked into its wooden face, looping the key through the belt of my torn green robe. "Chatsworth's cottage is now my cottage." I smiled at the blindingly obvious, yet previously elusive revelation. "Because I am now its true owner, the next majickal-hare of Winchett Dale."

"Finally!" A yawning cressle-mole squeaked. "Now can we please all get some sleep?"

"Speak for yourself, flappy-paws!" An irate owl hooted. "Half of us are nocturnal, you know."

And it was those same night-creatures that came with me to the cottage, determined that by morning, it would indeed be 'mine'. We started by sorting everything: cupboards, shelves heaving with potions, majickal volumes of books, specimen jars and wands. Not a single item in the entire cottage didn't pass scrutiny for its use or relevance. Furniture, bedding, curtains, plates, rugs, robes, even kitchen utensils, were all inspected by my army of helpers as the cottage gradually became my own.

Outside, the log store was refilled, the overgrown garden weeded and tilled into a set of growing beds, birds bringing seeds and industriously planting with their beaks to be ready for the coming spring.

Next morning, I felt a completely different hare. Perhaps, for the first time, a majickal-hare. I thanked my helpers, watching them disappear back into Wand Wood before turning to my cottage, finally ready to be the majickal-hare Winchett Dale really deserved.

The rest is history. And although there are still bumps along whatever road fate had chosen for me to follow, I always pid-pad along it with the knowledge

that every step, no matter how faltering, is somehow right. And that one day, I too will leave a hesitant apprentice in this cottage before returning the key to the trust of the woods until the time comes when they are truly ready to take it as their own.

As for the secrets I was still yet to discover in Wand Wood, there were many, detailed here in this humble deck of cards that I hope brings you an understanding of not only the majickal-landscape that lies inside you, but also the many saztaculous and unexpected choices we have once we learn to place our trust and intuition in its wisdom and waiting pathways.

I wish you the happiest and most crumlush journey within Wand Wood. And as a wise stone once told me: A lock has no need of a key, for its job is quite purposed without one.

Now, take my paw and let us enter the majickal enigma that is Wand Wood. For there is much I wish to show you.

Using the Deck

The Secrets of Wand Wood aims to help you connect to majickal moments and energies through positive affirmations to bring clarity to nature's own lore. Today, we all too often live our lives at an increasingly rapid and unnatural pace, missing so much that roots us. Isolated moments and instances can become lost in the mayhem, disconnecting us from our true natures.

Born of nature, we live within the rhythms of our own seasons, inhabiting both an internal and external landscape that can seem at odds with one another. *The Secrets of Wand Wood* will hopefully re-connect you, aligning the majesty of Nature with your inner being.

Hopefully, you'll discover a 'saztacular' new world within both these cards and yourself, and the realisation that just as many keys can open a single lock, many new routes can also be discovered - and the 'majick' is always closer than you thought. By connecting instances of your life with your intuition, each card you draw from the deck can have its own personal resonance to your individual situation.

For the Wand Wood you are about to explore is also the fabulous forest of possibilities already within you.

You can use these cards whenever you like, and however best suits you, in preferred spreads, or individually. For just as nature exists within an infinite balance, so the routes to accessing the keys to its hidden secrets are just as limitless.

The Secrets of Wand Wood is a very intuitive deck. You may well be drawn to your own way of using it, but if you are uncertain, let me explain my own method:

My Method

Begin by accustoming yourself to each of the 44 cards, handling the deck and making it your own. I have a box I keep my decks in. You may wish to keep yours in a box or bag, or simply wrap them in special cloth. Creating a ritual around your card readings can help calm and focus the mind. You may wish to light a candle, incense or find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed.

Next, when I feel ready, I ask a clear, simple question, such as:

What wisdom will support me today?

What energy will help me achieve my goals?

What should I be aware of to resolve or improve a situation?

What is the message for today?

What will help me through this challenging time?

Or anything else I intuitively feel the need to ask.

Then, after shuffling the cards and thinking of my question, I either fan them out and pick the card I feel 'drawn' to, cut the deck and take the top card, or simply shuffle until a card jumps from the pack,

reflecting on the picture to see what message or guidance it offers, reading its meaning to see what further insights it carries. Sometimes, I keep the card with me for the day or place it where I can see it. Other times, I simply hold it in my thoughts.

The important thing is that there is no right or wrong way. Choose whatever method suits you best. And since much of what we call 'wisdom' is learning to connect and trust our own intuition, your own way of using, exploring and discovering *The Secrets of Wand Wood* will naturally evolve to be the perfect one for you!

Finally, I send my very best wishes for your journey. I'm certain Matlock will make a unique guide. May it be full of discovery. And it is as well to remember that as someone who was drawn to this deck, you are already a 'majickal' soul with an appreciation for all that is good, 'saztacularous' and 'crumlush'!

Dalespeak

Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that a place as 'majickal' as Winchett Dale has its own language. Some of the words in this small volume might initially confuse you, and that's really no way to be going on (indeed, the creatures would describe it as 'glopped-up'). So, Matlock thought it only right to include a short glossary of Dalespeak to shed light on words or terms you may initially find confusing! They might even become part of your language too; a little of

Matlock's world reaching into yours, traversing the distance and proving the majickal connection between us all.

Blinksnap — (n) *A mere moment; the time it takes to blink a hare's eye.*

Chickle — (v) *To laugh, or chuckle.*

Clottabus — (n) *A bit of a fool. Clottabussed — foolish, but mostly harmless.*

Crumlush — (adj) *Cosy, warm, lovely.*

Driftolubb — (n) *Spell books used by majickal-hares.*

Excrimbly — (adj) *To be excited, full of joy.*

Ganticus — (adj) *Huge*

Gobflop — (v) *To fail at something.*

Glopped-up — (n phrase) *When something has gone wrong.*

Greep — (n) *A soft guttural noise of pure contentment*

Majick — (n) *Our word for what you know as 'magic'.*

Nifferduggle — (v) *To sleep.*

Oidy — (adj) *Very small.*

Scrittle — (V) *The movement of tiny creatures through the undergrowth.*

Saztaculous — (adj) *Incredible, fantastic.*

Twinkling-lid — (n) *The night sky full of stars.*

Twizzly — (n) *To feel scared; something rather scary.*

So, armed with little more than these words and an open mind, it's time to let Matlock lead you from his cottage, through his garden gate and out into the welcoming surrounds of Wand Wood.





The Seevius Rose

Ancestors

As night descends, and we make our way deeper into Wand Wood, it's easy to sometimes feel a little twizzly. Moonlight casts peculiar shadows in the darkness, familiar paths becoming vague memories. All you thought you knew in the daylight ebbs, swallowed by the night. Are you on the right path, or quite lost? Yet, despite it all, your senses have never been as aware. Sounds become louder, every movement catches the eye. Each footstep is fantastically significant now everything has changed. And then you see her — Lumina, guardian of the Seevius rose, a soft pink glow moving towards you as you stand astonished in the darkness, until finally she stands by your side, waiting, eyes firmly shut, a trail of pink petals disappearing into the night behind her.

You'll probably want to ask any number of things, but this gentle creature will never make the slightest sound. But when you move, so too will she, always beside you, the light from the Seevius rose pooling

at your feet as you move deeper into the woodland. Soon, captured by the crumlush beauty, scent and majick of the rose, your fears subside. You relax, seeing much of the hidden night-time world of the woods; small creatures, wondrous shrooms and mosses, birds, berries and shrubs, all alive and staring cautiously back at you. Wherever you choose to wander, Lumina stays silently by your side. Gradually, you begin to realise that although you are hopelessly lost, you are also completely at home. There are others, too, by your side, as Lumina's rose brings with it the unmistakeable presence of your ancestors. The simple, observable truth of beauty only ever being a glance, a step or fingertip's touch away, has never been as apparent as it is now. When everything seemed at its darkest, when you felt twizzly and alone, you also discovered how much hidden majick surrounded you.

As a young majickal-hare, unsure of myself and my purpose, I would often find myself in these woods at night. Sure enough, Lumina would appear, silently showing me her hidden world of wonder. She never stopped me going anywhere. Once, I fell into a deep muddy pool, and she followed right in behind, eyes closed, silently holding her rose. When I stumbled, she stumbled. And as dawn's early light broke through the trees, she would quietly leave, and I

would return home feeling refreshed, knowing that beauty and majick were always there for me.

These days, I no longer see Lumina. Not that I don't still have moments of doubt, I do. All I do now is simply look for a petal strewn across my path to know that she is always with me.

*Know that in times of uncertainty Lumina is there
with the light of the ancestors, pid-padding by your
side, illuminating the way.*



The Night Keeper

Balance

There, up ahead. You see her? Nocturella, majickal guardian and keeper of the night, whistling to the darkness while the woodland gently sleeps around her.

Don't get too close or disturb, as she ensures the coming, staying and leaving of the night, before departing as dawn rises on a new day.

Nocturella is nature's own majickal balance, the rhythmic harmony between day and night fundamental to ourselves and all that surrounds us. For even though we might fear the darkness and become twizzled within its hidden mysteries, each night is also a necessary journey into dreams, whilst allowing a world of night creatures to be busy about their business as we nifferduggle.

When I first saw Nocturella, I remember sitting quite still, captivated by her crumlush whistling, foolishly thinking she was there to keep me safe. How wrong I was. Her destiny is to be a guardian to nothing more than the night itself, calling to it

at dusk, ushering it slowly away at dawn, loyal to nothing but its silent darkness.

At first, I was disappointed, thinking she would offer me majickal protection, soothe my twizzles and see me safely to the saztaculous light of the new day. Then, as time passed, I gradually began to see the truth writ large in her startling white bark shimmering in the moonlight. Nocturella is balance. It is only the night she offers comfort to, keeping its mysteries safe. In so doing, she teaches us however twizzled the night may become, dawn is never far away. Each night passes and we are once again welcomed into the light. Without night, there is no day. Without either, there is no balance.

While we rest, others wake, content in her darkness, safe as she guards their nocturnal passage. An endless day would be as glopped-up as an endless night. Balance is integral to everything; the decisions and choices we take, the time we need to heal, the rest we need to feel inspired, the joy we take in all that surrounds us. Such is Nocturella's lesson, the gift she brings us, night after night.

And once I realised this, I no longer expected her to cure my twizzles, comfort, or guide me. My decisions were my own. Yet by showing me the saztaculous harmony of simple, unarguable balance, I drew strength knowing she would always be there

to bring both the night and the glorious release of dawn. For without Nocturella, such pleasures would never be known.

Even now, as an elderly majickal-hare, I still sometimes leave my cottage to sit quietly in the night, surrounded by its unique peculiarities, watching, listening, waiting for the dawn, a humble guest in Nocturella's kingdom, invigorated by the balance she brings to all who truly care to revel in it.

Nature shows us the majickal surety of balance, the harmonious inner beating heart of our lives. Look to create balance in your life.



Astrella

Be Majickal!

I've always been curious as to why so many visitors to Wand Wood are surprised when a tree talks to them. Mostly, any initial conversations are all-too brief, the look of stunned amazement on my visitor's face inhibiting more serious questions and discussions. Over the years, I've seen jaws drop, eyes widen, had my sleeve tugged in twizzled shock and far more that as a discreet majickal-hare, will spare the blushes of those with more extreme reactions.

But within a relatively short space of time, most visitors calm their twizzles and become used to conversing with the many trees of the wood, discovering their various personalities, likes, dislikes and just what it feels like to be a tree.

However, there's never any twizzles when first encountering Astrella, our joyous cherry tree, dancing under a clear moonlit sky. And what a sight she makes, twisting and turning in sheer saztaculous elation, gently cradling the new moon as she catches stars from the twinkling-lid above. Her rich red bark

glints and shimmers with so much majick, radiating joy to all who stand in awe before her.

She is, perhaps, the most self-confident tree in Wand Wood, a moving melody of celebration, always completely and infectiously at ease with herself. Indeed I defy anyone not to feel exhilarated in her swaying presence. Many times, even as a majickal-hare of what I can only describe as 'senior-years', I find myself beginning to dance, too, probably with the most clottabussed smile on my face — but feeling crumlush, totally liberated and above all else, majickal.

Of all the spells, of all the potions, of all the tinctures — none come close to these moments, when I dance with Astrella and am cleansed by the purity of majick coursing through every part of me.

And here is the secret, many times you don't have to dance at all — just simply find that way to be yourself, free of inhibitions and expressing how you feel, at one with the universe and everything and everyone that surrounds you.

Granted, others may think you to be a clottabus, but at the same time may secretly yearn to do exactly the same, caught up in the majickal joy you exude. Majick, like love, laughter and joy, is infectious. Spread some majick. Catch stars, hold the moon in the palm of your hand and dance!

*Be sure to make the time to connect to the majick
within yourself and remember what makes your heart
beat a little faster.*



Believe

The Witches' Gift

Believe

Ever since being a young hare, I've always appreciated Wand Wood is more than just the majickal sum of its trees and creatures. Indeed, its many secrets and mysteries are sometimes best explained when it's thought of as just one single living, being. And just as all creatures have a unifying life-force pulsing through them, so Wand Wood has its own meandering brook springing from a cluster of rocks at its eastern tip and running through the trees to what we creatures know as 'the hovel' at the far western edge.

The longer the brook runs, the wider it gets, slowing until it finally pools around a crumlush cottage surrounded by fir trees and rocks.

To reach it, you'll need to borrow the little boat and row across. Inside, you'll find just a simple chair and a fire, always lit. No one knows who keeps the flames alive, but legend tells of a solitary-witch called Eldura who brings fresh wood from the forest when no one can see her. As I have never laid my hare's

eyes on such a thing, I neither confirm nor deny the rumour. But whenever I moor up, I'm always cheered by the crumlush, welcoming glow inside.

It is a place of stillness, available to any creature. And although many others come here, it is always empty, as if sensing I am on my way.

For years, I merely came here to appreciate the saztaculous tranquillity, without realising the majickal importance all four majickal elements; fire, water, air and the earth that surrounds it. And when I sit by the gently crackling fire, I am the fifth; life, joined in harmony with the surrounding woodland, at one with its majick, part of the flowing pulse of Wand Wood itself.

One more thing. Perhaps I wasn't entirely honest when I implied I hadn't ever seen Eldura. Many years ago, as I left the hovel and made the short boat trip back onto land, an unexpected breeze suddenly rippled the moonlit water. Thinking nothing of it, I tied the boat to the mooring post and set off through the woods for home. But I'd barely got into the tree line when I heard the unmistakable sound of the boat being slowly rowed back to the hovel. Next, my long hare's ears caught a voice whispering on the swirling wind.

"This sanctuary," it told me, "is called 'the witches' gift'. It is for all creatures, everywhere. I tend this

fire exactly as these waters tend the woods, so that all may find and know peace when they seek it.” However tempted I was to turn round and see Eldura for real, I knew the spell would be broken. Proof of existence requires far more than sight alone. It is a feeling, an affirmative glow inside, a forever welcome on the stilled waters of our own beliefs. It is a witches’ gift, and Eldura keeps it for us all.

*When we truly believe, we see with our hearts, not
our eyes.*



Be Inspired!

Sleekits

Be Inspired!

Within Wand Wood, there's one place all 'peffa-oidy' (or 'very small', as you would know them) creature-witches visit at least once a year: Sleekits Emporium, purveyors of fine witchy goods to the tiny black-hatted systerhood since time immemorial. Indeed, such is the fame of this minute and renowned house of witchery, that creatures have been known to travel from distant majickal-dales just to watch the near continual flow of peffa-oidy witches landing on their brooms and enthusiastically rushing inside for the very latest potions, hats, brooms, cloaks, wands, cauldrons and shoes - a truly beguiling and saztaculous way to pass an hour or two.

Provided you sit well back, the witches won't bother you, so keenly intent are they on the waiting goods inside. Then, when they are done, watch as they once again take to their brooms and roar up through the trees leaving an array of vivid, colourful smoke trails. It is one of the busiest spectacles in the wood, an absolute 'must' for any visitor!

However, as you may have guessed, there's a lot more to Sleekits than first meets the amazed eye. For the longer you watch, the more you find yourself desperate to go inside and look around yourself. The peffa-oidy witches' enthusiasm is infectious, and the urge to be among them, rooting through the many shelves, cupboards, is almost overwhelming. Get close enough, and you can see the merry throng through the tiny windows, squabbling, laughing and joking as they eagerly seek out the very latest witchy accoutrements.

Alas, there's no spell known to any creature that could render you small enough to enter. But this is where Sleekits conjures up its biggest, majickal secret. You won't leave with a tiny, hat, broom or wand, but something far more saztaculous - inspiration.

Many who come to watch the peffa-oidy witches leave with high-excitement, infected by the enthusiasm and inspired to pursue hobbies and interests they've sometimes never really even thought about before. It's the most majickal thing on offer at Sleekits, and you don't even have to step inside, either!

To this day, it always amazes me just how the smallest things can often inspire the biggest changes, and Sleekits offers it in abundance to a watching, waiting world outside.

Often, after leaving the tiny shop, I make my way back through the woods with a head swimming with ideas, ready to throw myself into something completely new, inspired by the saztaculous excitement of others.

*Inspiration is one of the greatest universal gifts —
and always given freely.*



Be More Witchy!

The Samhain Stone

Be More Witchy!

Now it's time for one of the biggest 'witchy' secrets of Wand Wood. But first, some background. For as long as creatures have lived in the majickal-dales, they have also lived alongside creature-witches. Thousands of them from different covens, all uniting under one common systerhood — *The League of Lid-Curving Witchery*. Some even say the witches were here before us, with ancient legends telling of their journey from across the Icy Seas to these same dales. Today, we largely live in harmony, accepting each other's failings, celebrating our successes and respecting each other's separate cultures.

However, at the very end of October, the witches have one night completely to themselves right here in Wand Wood to enact their ancient tradition of Samhain. Not a single creature will venture into the woods, and those that live here hunker deep in their burrows, keeping well out of sight during the secret, sacred ritual led by one of my oldest friends, Ursula Brifhaven Stoltz, who conducts proceedings with the

due authority of her respected office — Most Tzorkly Grand High Priestess of *The League of Lid-Curving Witchery*.

At least this is what she's always told me...

However, one Samhain, I decided to venture from my cottage and see the ritual for myself. Wearing my darkest robes, I made my way stealthily through the woods, lured by excrimbly witches' whelps and cries. Above my head, hundreds on broomsticks roared over the trees, diving down to join their fellow systers. The nearer I got, the more I began to wonder about the 'very serious Samhain ritual'. If anything, it sounded more like the most saztaculous fun imaginable!

Curious, I peered round a large oak to be greeted by the most saztaculous sight as the secret was finally revealed. And just as I'd suspected, far from being a solemn ritual, Samhain was one ganticus party! Games were played, songs were sung and steaming cauldrons of Grimwagel wine were drunk during a long night of dancing and excrimblyness. Indeed, I'd never seen either Ursula or the witches so happy, as if finally, out of the gaze of others, they could revel in their true selves.

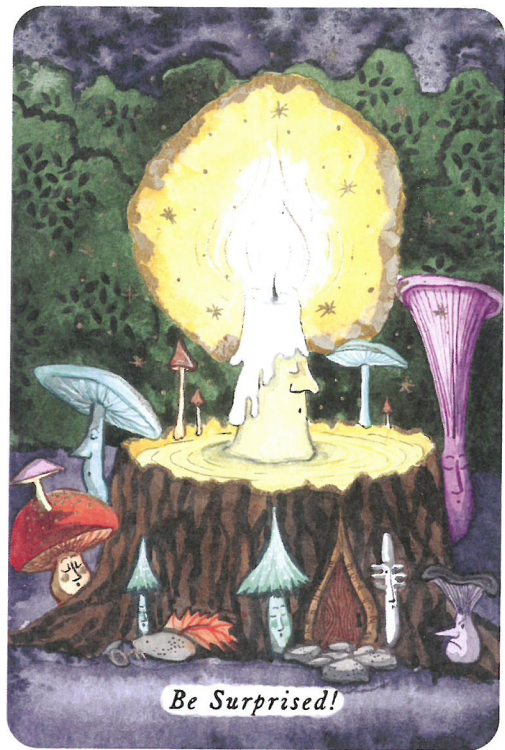
The following morning, long after I'd returned to my cottage and the witches had flown from the woods, Ursula knocked unexpectedly at my door, her face

as stern as I've ever known it. "I sensed you last night. Whatever you may have thought you saw, you didn't."

I respectfully nodded, watching her fly away on her roaring broom, wondering just how many times I too have 'hidden' my true self under the guise of these robes, and vowing to make a lot more time for fun in the future.

It was time to be more 'witchy'.

*By making time for fun, you make time for the
majickal joys of life itself.*



Shroom Candle

Be Surprised!

Ah, the many shrooms of Wand Wood. A veritably saztaculous frungle of fungi, each with their own peculiarities, moods, appearance and differences, representing the wonderful variety of life in this majickal woodland.

There are too many types to list, but take a walk into these woods on a fresh autumn morning and you'll soon see a saztaculous variety scrittling across the forest floor, including broggs, groinks, gilflinks, ploffshrooms and lid-capped twinklegazers, to name but a few.

To some outsiders, it can appear that the shrooms of Wand Wood don't do very much at all. Most often appear quite sleepy, or grumpy. Ploffshrooms spend much of their day trying to fashion and play musical instruments from whatever they can find, while lid-capped twinklegazers have such an irritable disposition, some visitors think it best to avoid them at all costs.

Things came to a head a few years ago, with the

arrival of an important visitor from a neighbouring majickal dale who declared the shrooms of Wand Wood to be 'utterly pointless and completely clottabussed', announcing he would only change his very important mind if he were to witness the shrooms 'lighting a candle, to at least prove they possessed a basic skill'.

However clottabussed the suggestion, it was a challenge we unimportant creatures of Winchett Dale couldn't ignore. A tree-stump was chosen, and within a month our visitor would return. Somehow, without the use of majick of any kind, the shrooms would have to light the candle, and that was that.

Landlord Slivert Jutt called a meeting at the Winchett Dale Inn where a grillon increasingly clottabussed plans were put forward. Perhaps we could distract our visitor while a lit candle was lowered into place from a tree? Maybe I could use a secret spell to achieve the feat? What if we could persuade a grillion fireflies to land on the wick to look like a flame?

None of which was ever discussed with the shrooms themselves, still happily about their business deep in Wand Wood.

But on the appointed evening in question, we discovered we needn't have worried. Before our astonished visitor, the shrooms simply brought a long glowing taper from the woods and lit the candle. As

easy as that.

"What trickery is this?" He angrily demanded.

"No trickery," a plucky ploffshroom replied. "We always do this to welcome a visitor to these woods, regardless of whether they see it or not. It's simply a sign of respect. Which has to be a most saztaculous thing, don't you agree?"

In the years since, I've never discovered if the ploffshroom's words were true or not. Indeed, no shroom has ever mentioned the incident since. But each December, we creatures always keep a candle lit for the shrooms of Wand Wood, a mark of respect for our fellow creatures we know so little about, yet somehow seem to know so much more about us.

*Allow life to surprise you. Remember, some problems
are not ours to solve.*



Bond

The Majick Cauldron

Bond

And so we come to the true heart of the witchy part of Wand Wood. Not that you'll find many witches here, simply this eternally bubbling cauldron, sending its majick steam drifting over the woodland, day and night throughout the year. No one knows who first placed it here, or for what obscure reason, least of all the witches themselves, who'll readily admit that although it is undoubtedly connected to them, they can't give a single reason or explanation for it.

Yet all the while, it majickally bubbles away.

At first, I wondered if the boiling brew might be some sort of ancient majickal elixir, and was tempted to try a sip for myself. And yet the closer I got to the cauldron, the further it seemed to get, as if sensing my presence. Indeed, after a while I gave up, realising this is the closest any creature could approach.

A while ago, I asked my good friend Ursula the white-hare witch if this was the same for her kind.

"Of course," she replied with a frown. "And while

I'll never understand its true purpose, I think this may be a part of it. The cauldron shows that creatures and witches are in many ways the same, as neither of us can ever touch it. Perhaps if we appreciate this, we will also find other similarities between us, too."

I couldn't resist another question. "But what if," I said, "it's merely waiting for the *right* witch or creature to touch it to reveal its true secrets?"

At which point, Ursula smiled in the way only a wise witch can. "Perhaps you are right. Who will ever know? We have both tried and failed where someone else might succeed. But in my mind, the real secret of the cauldron is that it has already touched *us*."

"I don't follow," I said.

"Because we have shared the same experience, it both bonds and marks a similarity between creature and witch. And while we seek to unravel its mystery, it has already worked its hidden majick upon us. Who knows how many others just like you and I will find a connection with these very same questions?" She watched the purple cloud dissipate into the trees. "The cauldron's secret isn't ever to be discovered, but to be felt, ingested and surrendered to. Only then will we truly begin to understand and learn from each other."

"Completely," I agreed. "All this cauldron watching has made me thirsty for a steaming mug of brottle-leaf brew."

"Me, too," Ursula replied. "Another majickal thing we'll always both share and appreciate."

*The most majickal things can't be touched, and yet
they touch us every day.*



Wufflets

Breathe

There are still times in this enchanted wood when even I am lost for words. For Wand Wood reflects the wonderful complexity of life in its own majickally simplistic, beautiful way. Change is everywhere, with new situations and encounters just around the corner, or even sitting on the branch of an elderly apple tree — as in the clottabussed case of the three wufflets I came across just a short while ago.

Mostly, I pride myself on knowing every living being in Wand Wood, be they a tree, creature, rock, shrub or bush. But these three were a real surprise.

Wondering if they were lost, I stopped to ask them. “Lost?” They answered, as if they’d never heard the term.

“Is it the apples you’re after?” I asked, nodding towards the loaded basket. “I don’t blame you, they’re saztaculous.”

“Apples?” They replied, equally confused.

They all stared at me, occasionally blinking in what I have to confess was a rather long silence. I literally

had no idea who they were, or what they were doing. In the end, it was the tree that came to my rescue. "They're wufflets," it said.

Which was something, at least. "Do you know anything else about them?"

"Why would I? I'm just a tree." It shifted slightly on its roots, the wufflets giggling as they wobbled on the branch. "Why would you need to know anything else?"

"Well, I don't suppose I do, really," I replied. "I was just curious."

"And haven't you wondered why they're not the least bit curious about you — a majickal-hare in robes, slippers and a wand?"

In truth, I hadn't. "Perhaps they already know everything about me," I said, wondering why the wufflets didn't seem at all interested.

"Sometimes," the tree told me, "It's as important to accept the things you don't know, as those you do. This is the secret the wufflets teach us. They're simply themselves, doing what they do, for reasons perhaps even they don't fully understand. So, next time you stumble across a creature, flower, tree or anything else you can't immediately name or understand — just breathe, savour the moment, appreciate it for its own sake. For the more we think we understand everything, the less likely it becomes

that we truly appreciate anything.”

Every wise word of which, was true. Nowadays, I try to savour life's unexpected encounters for what they are - rather than who, or why.

*Breathe and savour those majickal moments that
require no understanding or explanation.*



Calling

Winter Wood

Calling

Some mornings, I wake to a saztaculous chorus of birdsong, the outside bathed in the bright, saztaculous promise of a new day, as if calling me to partake in all its waiting splendours. On such mornings, I feel energised, eager to put on my robe and slippers and set about my majickal business.

Other mornings, it can feel more like a chore. Not that I don't appreciate the privilege of being a majickal-hare, simply that it takes me at least two cups of brottle-leaf brew before I venture outside. If it's a day full of potential glopp-ups I'll need at least three cups.

And then there are those majickal winter mornings when a fresh fall of overnight snow lies thick on the ground, and a blanket of white silence almost deafens me with its insistent calling.

It is quite the most saztaculous silence, luring me outside to experience the world made anew, the loudest sound my clouding breath and scrunch of my slippers in the snow. And yet, everything about this

moment is also quite full of majickal sounds, too, a resonant chorus of realisation that once again, and perhaps at the time when I needed it the most, I hear my own calling joyfully echoing from every tree in Wand Wood, as if I am majickally connected and re-filled with my original chosen path and purpose. Doubts drift away on the breeze. Confusion drops and melts on the crisp white snow at my feet. I have heard and answered my calling and am once more liberated, refreshed and ready for whatever lies ahead.

I have spoken to others about this. Slivert Jutt, my good friend and landlord of the Winchett Dale Inn says he sometimes feels the same when staring into the embers of the fire after a long, tiring night at the inn. He often talks of a deep contentment and a smile that won't seem to leave his face.

Ursula Brifhaven Stoltz, a white-hare witch and lifelong friend, hears her calling whispered over the wind when she's soaring high above the Icy Seas on her broom.

And in many majickal ways, it all makes perfect sense. Slivert and Ursula wouldn't feel the same in Wand Wood on a snowy morning. Just as I wouldn't feel the same by an open fire, or high on a roaring broom. Why would we? Our callings are as majickal and unique as we are, and we are each reminded

in our different ways. The secret, I suspect, is to recognise when you are called. For in those precious blinksnaps, so much of who you are can be re-affirmed.

As I make my way back to the cottage, I am careful to tread in the same, snowy footprints, leaving just a single trail, a different majickal-hare that first set out, but always sharing the same majickal calling.

*Learn to recognise and answer your own calling
when it reaches out to you.*



Caring

The Worry Bird

Caring

Wand Wood is constantly alive with the chatter of creatures, trees, plants, shrooms and fungus of all kinds, all contentedly about their business. All except one; a small blue bird called Vara, who from the very first day she broke from her egg has always worried. No amount of assurances from other creatures has ever eased her anxieties. Not a day passes when she isn't concerned about something or other.

If you were to speak to Vara and ask her what she was worried about, finding an answer would simply worry her further. Some creatures, initially well-intentioned, became so fed up with what they perceived as her clottabussed behaviour, that they gave up trying to help.

It is always worse in the autumn, as Vara anxiously begins collecting berries for the coming winter, a huge pile quickly growing as other creatures tut and roll their eyes.

"Doesn't she realise there's more than enough to last everyone without having to make such a ganticus

collection?" They'll say.

"She never learns," others agree. "Once a clottabus, always a clottabus."

And in many ways, the creatures are right. There is always enough food in Wand Wood for everyone, and no real need to hoard. Yet in another way, they are also wrong. For Vara is far from a clottabus. Indeed, those who really know her would say she's one of the most important creatures in Wand Wood — because she completely understands who she is.

"I know I worry far too much," she told me one day. "But it's just who I am. I harm no one and am simply concerned for others." A point she proved by showing me a tree with a dangerously heavy overhanging branch. "If it falls, it could hurt the tree and other creatures below."

So I called the woodland creatures together and we fixed the tree, listening to Vara's other worries, some trivial, and some serious, which could easily have affected many of us.

We all learned something that day; differences so easy to ridicule and misconstrue often come from a very genuine place we frequently overlook.

Now, we let Vara worry as much as she pleases, listening when we need to, helping when she wants us to, and accepting she is strangely never happier than when she's worrying.

One night, as she and I looked up at a bright full moon, she told me she'd often worried it would fall from the twinkling-lid right onto Wand Wood. Had I ever thought the same?

I told her I honestly hadn't.

"That's probably because I do all the worrying for you," she said, lightly tapping my paw.

I smiled, realising that I'd never thought about it that way, either.

By caring, we overlook differences in favour of an empathy which enriches us all.



The Witch of the Wind

Change

Ah, the saztaculous, life-affirming joy of a windy day! For me, little can beat walking in the woods as the wind races through the trees, buffeting my face and rippling my robe, sometimes leaning into a powerful gust, arms outstretched, feeling the majickal change of the wind course right through me.

All weathers have their own moments of spectacle and saztaculous beauty, from the last raindrop falling through sunlight, to the first breath of wind from a gathering storm, reminding us of both our powerlessness in the face of Nature, and the privilege of our place within it. Nature is older, bigger and more majickal than any living being; the wind its very breath, breathing change to everything it caresses.

And one of my favourite sights in the wind? Ventrella — the witch of the wind, her roaring broom slicing the air, creating gusts wherever she flies. She's so quick you'll be lucky to spot her darting through the trees, racing over fields and sweeping low over

sleeping villages. However, listen carefully and you'll hear her song as she passes by.

Once I had the honour of speaking to Ventrella, finding her enjoying a breakfast of berries and nuts on a blissfully calm spring morning. After cautiously introducing myself (it can be very unwise to interrupt a witch while she's eating) I asked her if we would be due some wind later that day.

To my relief, she not only offered to share her breakfast, but also answered my question with frank, yet insightful witches' wisdom.

"What a very splurked question from a clottabussed majickal-hare! Whether or not I intend to bring the wind, the question you should ask is if you intend to do the same? For it is simply a timely reminder. Will you allow the winds of change in your own life? If so, what will it be? Does a typhoon need to sweep through, or will the lightest breeze suffice? Don't ever ask me again, hare, for these are questions only you can answer."

Without another word, she took to her broom, powering up into the early morning sky and sending a powerful gust in her roaring wake.

After, whilst not a single puff of wind blew across Winchett Dale, it soared through me with the urgent changes I needed to make to so many things I'd previously been putting aside.

That night, as I headed exhausted to bed, I thought of Ventrella, most likely flying through the night above a faraway land or dale, hoping that when folk wake, they might find the inspiration to bring change into their lives. Whether individually - or collectively, as one, coming together to insist on a better life for all.

As I drifted into sleep, my dreams were full of what a truly majickal day that would be.

*Just as the wind brings change to the outside, we
must also let it course through our own lives.*



Channelling

Truckleberry Thicket

Channelling

There are some creatures in Wand Wood it is wise to avoid. Not many, and thankfully other creatures remember to steer clear of them. Mostly, such behaviour only lasts a short while. Older trees can turn grumpy at the thought of another winter without leaves but are back to their cheery selves come the spring. Disidulas have been known to become extremely annoyed in mid-summer if their favourite bathing bog dries up, whilst every woodland creature knows never to laugh at a witch if she's landed awkwardly on her broomstick.

However, there is one creature who seems permanently glopped – the ever-grimacing truckleberry thicket, forever pounding Wand Wood, face set in a fearsome frown, eyes peering from under a heavy brow. And the most peculiar thing? Every other creature loves him and frequently seeks him out.

So what is the secret of the truckleberry thicket? To understand, we must look at that most common of emotions, anger. Here in Winchett Dale, we call

it 'getting russisculoffed'. Don't worry, it's just our word, but means the same as yours in so far as there are many degrees and levels, depending on the situation. Whenever a creature feels russiculoffed, they seek out the truckleberry thicket, joining him to pound the woods together, being as russiculoffed as they like; safe, complaining and shouting for as long as they need.

And then, majick begins...

Once the anger has subsided, a brand new truckleberry grows on the grumpy thicket, proof that if allowed to expire in its own way, anger can indeed be both positive and fruitful.

Next, the berry is eaten by a yellow-beaked calmwing, who, in return for the favour, will stay with you for as long as you need.

It's a saztaculous service that has saved many a pointless argument throughout Winchett Dale. Creatures here have learned their anger is as important as any other emotion if channelled in the right way. Indeed, many wonderful changes, have occurred in the aftermath of pounding beside the truckleberry thicket.

But what of the thicket itself? Is he ever able to rid himself of his own perpetual anger? Here's what he told me.

"Me russisculoffed? Never. I've always had this

face, even as a young sapling. Underneath, I'm perfectly happy. I love pounding, I nearly always have company, and it's crumlush that I can feed the calmwings."

And then, he winked at me with those fierce, staring eyes.

"And you should hear some of the stuff I've been told over the years! Never a dull day, ever. What about you? Are you russiculoffed and want to pound about for a bit?"

"Not today," I said.

"Ah, well, there's always next time," he replied.

"You know where to find me when you need me."

I did, and I have, many times since.

*Anger, if correctly channelled, is a saztaculous
majickal catalyst for positive change.*



The Charging Sporrit

Chaos

Blink, and you'll miss her. Turn to the nearest bush, and she's already gone. Become distracted for the oidiest blinksnap, and the charging sporrit is away, frantically hurtling into the undergrowth; urgent panting her only legacy.

Or, wait a while. Keep perfectly still and listen, and soon those pounding paws return, flashing by in a totally different direction before disappearing just as suddenly.

And so it goes on; sun-turn after sun-turn, moon-turn after moon-turn, throughout the year, an unstoppable, clottabussed force of sheer speeding joy, racing through Wand Wood with no seeming purpose whatsoever.

Some have wondered if the charging sporrit ever sleeps, with numerous night-time sightings proving she doesn't. Others wonder if there's more than one, as the distances she covers seem quite majickally impossible. One blinksnap she's speeding by your feet, the next she's dashing between distant trees,

the furious pace never letting up. Is she lost? Chasing something? Being chased? Trying to deliver an urgent message?

All relevant questions. But as she'd have to actually stop to answer one, quite impossible to ever know.

For some, this 'not knowing' might be endlessly frustrating. For answers are what we also constantly crave and chase after, sometimes with as much intensity as the charging sporrit, herself.

But here in Wand Wood, we have a different approach. Rather than asking why the sporrit always charges, we look at the majick she creates in her wake. I've often heard the phrase 'looking at the bigger picture', and the charging sporrit is a saztaculous example, creating new pathways in the woods, allowing older ones to recover and grow over. Often, she'll re-seed parts of the woodland with pollen and seeds collected in her coat on her high-speed travels. Once, she even burst into my cottage early one morning, racing around my sitting room and knocking four jugs flying and leaving them in pieces as she bolted back outside. But after a while of grinding my hare's teeth, I came to realise that I never really used them anyway, and filled the shelf with far more useful items, instead.

The charging sporrit is the eternal, irrepressible spirit of transformation. To try and understand her

motives is as futile as comprehending chaos itself. It is the transformation she brings that is important, offering new pathways, opportunities, solutions and connections, all from her clottabussed chaos that neither knows nor needs any real explanation.

When you feel a charging sporrit hurtling through your life, look for the majickal transformation she brings, rather than answers to questions she'll never stop long enough to give you.



The Solstice Stone

Cherish

The midsummer solstice is one of the most majickal times of the year, and one I always spend with Ayaani, my drippl-familiar. Because for her, the longest day is also her favourite. And not because we get to spend it together, either. For Ayaani, it is something far beyond having more time with her master. It's an annual pilgrimage, a yearly excursion through the woods to her favourite tree to silently watch the last of the sun before I take her back to the cottage, sound asleep in the hood of my robe.

The day starts early, with Ayaani making great ceremony of baking bread for the evening to come. I know as well not to disturb her during the process. To even try would be pointless, so committed is she in the task.

Later, after a crumlush supper of niff-soup and brottle leaf brew, we set off out into the woods, Ayaani scrittling ahead as I carry the breads in a basket behind. At the base of the tree, we stop while Ayaani calls to the sun in a series of soft clicks and

whistles.

Once, when we climbed up on to her favourite branch, the moving stone of Wand Wood was there, awash with exotically perfumed blooms, seemingly waiting just for us. Ayaani perched on the top, bathed in the sunlight until the very last rays slowly receded over the horizon and her long day was finally done.

As I thread my way back through the darkened woods, I am reminded that I am not a majickal-hare simply because I have a familiar, but because I also try my very best to be there when she needs me, indulging her idiosyncrasies and looking out for her as best as I can. Seeing the bliss on her face as she watches the sunset, I'm also reminded of the symbolic importance of the moment; we are already half-way through the year, another six months have passed in each other's company, journeys have been made, adventures had, glopp-ups overcome. Yet because of and despite it all, we always share this majickal night together, our own silent secret, far from the celebrating creatures in the village.

It is one of the many important keys to Ayaani and I's relationship; a lifelong partnership that chose us rather than us choosing each other, both of us realising that I am no more her 'master' than she is ever my 'familiar'. Instead, we are simply 'us', and every summer solstice, as we sit high in the trees,

I like to think we both look forward to the next six months knowing our truth will always be realised within this one simple acceptance.

*By cherishing others, we cherish ourselves and all
that surrounds us.*



Companionship

The Altar

Companionship

Come with me now to the far northern side of Wand Wood, where the tree line gradually gives way to the crumlush green slopes of Chiming Meadows, to a most majickal altar, resplendent with exotic carving, gifts from the forest and a lone raven keeping vigil.

It is quite a sight, and at first encounter almost takes one's breath away. But closer inspection reveals the real reason for its presence here.

You'd be correct to assume it's a place of pilgrimage. Many creatures from all over the woods come here throughout the year, not to sing or dance, but to witness a saztaculous fundamental truth enacted each night as the moon slowly rises into the twinkling-lid above — the ceremony of the lamp.

To visitors, it probably looks quite glopped and mundane, a disappointment when it actually happens, with many wondering why they bothered turning up to see such a thing. So just what is its secret?

What happens is this. You see the small door in the stump underneath the carved top? A strivet

mouse lives in there, and at the appointed time, will venture outside holding a glowing stick, greeting the assembled creatures with a warm smile. Next, she'll scrittle up onto the table, open the lamp the raven holds in its beak and light the wick, before scrittling back down, bowing to the crowd and quickly disappearing back inside her house.

And that's it. That's all there is to see. And yet the creatures leave blissfully content, some even stopping to leave small gifts on the altar on their merry way.

Once, a confused visitor turned to me and said, "Is that it? Just a mouse lighting a lamp? After we came all this way?"

I nodded, every word of it true.

She looked at the happy crowd of creatures on their way home. "Why did they come?"

"You mean, what do they see in it? Nothing that you didn't. And everything that you did. Just a mouse deep in the woods, lighting a lamp. Why don't we ask them?"

So we set off, catching up with the crowd, my visitor asking many creatures the very same question, and receiving lots of different answers, from the completely clottabussed to the utterly saztaculous, dozens of explanations as we all made our way slowly through the moonlit woodland.

After, I asked my visitor if she had found the answers she was looking for.

"No," she smiled. "But I made a lot of new friends." The lamp of companionship had once again been lit and was already working its crumlush majick.

To be joined in companionship on life's majickal journey is a truly saztaculous thing.



Contentment

Kutoja

Contentment

One of my most crumlush joys is to take a walk in the comforting darkness of Wand Wood at night after a long day being majickal in Winchett Dale. Tending creatures with potions and spells, sorting minor disputes and the general welfare of the village can sometimes still prove a taxing business, even after my many years of experience

Hence, the need to sometimes venture out at night to forget the day and lose myself in the quiet serenity of the wood. And one of my favourite sights? The one we are looking at now — Kutoja, high in the trees, quietly about her knitting, having successfully found the key to her happiness many years ago. If you look carefully, you can see it, up above her basket, trailing the thread.

I once asked Kutoja “You found the key to your happiness, the most precious thing anyone could seek, yet you simply hang it from a branch. Why?” She answered without dropping a single stitch from the long scarf she was knitting. “Winter will be

along soon. Creatures will need warm clothes to see them through."

"So you're waiting to use the key when spring arrives?" I asked.

Her needles never stopped knitting. "Spring? What a clottabussed majickal-hare you are. I'm using the key right now. I use it all the time. Can't you see?"

"I see it takes your woollen thread," I replied.

"But you don't really need the key for that. Why not simply loop the wool over the branch above?"

All around, small creatures slept, cosy in her many knitted creations.

Kutoja smiled, turning to me. "The key to happiness, Matlock, is to find and realise your own contentment. I have known creatures who are happy, yet far from content. Here, I am as content as I ever need to be. And that is the true key to my happiness."

Ever since, Kutoja has always knitted, providing crumlush woollen garments for any creature of the woods that wants or needs one. Many keep her company throughout the night, silent but for occasional snores, also completely content, the key somehow working its majick on them all.

Once, she knitted me a brand-new pair of long purple slippers. I thanked her and told her how happy they made me.

"I'm glad," she said, pulling thread through the key and setting to work on yet another garment. "But more than 'happy', I hope they bring you much contentment in the months ahead."

They absolutely did, and perhaps that was the key.

*That which makes us content can make us truly
happy.*



Decisions

Keeper of Locks

Decisions

As a young majickal-hare, there were many times when I felt unsure. Sometimes, it would be a decision weighing on my mind, occasionally keeping me up at night. And it was always to this tree that I returned, Ordu, a magnificent elderly beech that we creatures know as the Keeper of Locks.

It's easy to see why. Standing proudly as one of the oldest trees in the wood, you'll soon notice the large wooden door covered in locks at the base of his trunk and the single key hanging temptingly beside.

On first glance, it appears little more than a puzzle, a majickal game of chance set deep in the woods. Which lock fits the key? What lies behind the door? However, the grinning presence of the two dark twizzlies staring at you on either side soon gives the unwary visitor pause for thought.

Try to take the key, and Ordu's voice rings out over the woodland, "Approach if you are lost. Try if you are unsure. Think on what is revealed."

All of which, I'm sure you'll agree, can initially feel

a little intimidating. Yet, there's no reason at all to feel the least twizzled, as all Ordu wants is for you to realise that sometimes decisions and choices have many separate effects and causes, as evidenced by the number of locks.

I like to think of it this way: am I really certain I have thought through the results of any decisions I might be mulling over? Ordu will show me. If I can unlock all of the locks with the single key, then I have considered everything, and my decision will most likely be right for everyone. However, if certain locks refuse to be open, then there are still things I must think about. In such a case, I thank Ordu and return home, knowing there is more to be thought about and done before I can proceed.

Now, you're probably wanting to know what lies behind the door if all the locks are opened? I would too if I were you. And here's the secret. The door never, ever opens, because it's not Ordu's door you're opening — but yours. All the creatures who come here for guidance simply hang the majick key back on the hook and return home, either to think further, or to open the door on another chapter in their own life-journey.

After a few visits, most creatures don't feel the need to return to Ordu and his many locks, discovering that merely imagining themselves at his door helps

them make their own decisions and choices without actually being there — proving, in quite the most perfectly clottabussed way, that all the time they were trying to open his door, he was giving them the wisdom to open their minds to the wider consequences of their actions.

Just like I told you, there was never anything to be twizzled about.

Any choice or decision is rarely the unlocking of just one door.



The Underground Owl

Dreams

Meet Cresius the owl. Or not, if it's during the winter, when you'd be extremely lucky to catch even the oidiest glimpse of him. For while his fellow owls mostly settle themselves in their roosts, Cresius has found his own uniquely unorthodox way to pass the time; hibernating deep in his very own crumlush burrow, warmed by a slowly burning stove whose small chimney breaking the surface is the only clue he's underneath. As soon as the first snowflakes fall, he makes his way carefully down into his winter home burrow, lights the fire, pulls on some blankets and drifts into contented nifferduggles.

All well and good, you may say. But where is the secret wisdom in an owl deciding to hibernate in the ground. Surely, it's his choice where he decides to spend the winter?

And you'd be right. Where an owl spends any of his or her time is entirely their own affair, only a clottabus would suggest otherwise. Yet as the only hibernating owl in Wand Wood, the obvious question

to ask, is why? But herein lies the problem, as Cresius will either be nifferduggling underground, or flying free in the woods for the rest of the year. However, thanks to a chance encounter many moon-turns ago, I finally managed to ask him the same question, saving you many fruitless hours trying to track him down.

Here's what he told me.

"For me, winter is the most majickal season, a chance to slow down, rest and dream, responding to the guidance Nature gives us in the shorter days and longer nights. It is a time to do less, hunker down and restore our energies. And when we truly allow ourselves to just that, I dream. Within those dreams are the seeds of so many saztaculous and excrimbly ideas; plans for the future, new experiences I may wish to try, places I have yet to visit, and so much more. So, when I wake in the spring, I am rested and ready to face the year ahead, keen to turn those dreams into reality."

It is advice I've always followed. Not that I hibernate, preferring instead to use the winter months to slow right down in my own way, letting my mind wander wherever it needs to go, content that come the spring I shall feel energised and excrimbly to set whatever plans I now have in majickal motion.

There's a reason why Nature rests in winter, and it's

a wise majickal-hare who follows her example.
Next winter, be more Cresius!

*Make sure you allow yourself to dream, as dreams
are the seeds you plant for your future.*



The Clottabussed Oak

Forgive

Ah! Prepare yourself to be greeted by a most saztaculously extraordinary tree; the clottabussed oak. Forever grinning, laughing or chuckling, this ancient oak has mastered one of life's most important lessons — he knows how to forgive himself, laugh and learn from all the many clottabussed things he's done.

To spend time with him is to sit down and listen to tale after tale of glopp-ups, accidents, misfortunes, and misunderstandings he will gleefully describe in detail; a continual catalogue of embarrassing anecdotes and mishaps going back over his many happy years in Wand Wood.

The longer you stay, the more you feel yourself laughing along, recognising much of the same clottabussedness in yourself, before telling him your own tales, too.

Many's the time when, after doing something particularly clottabussed (most likely after getting the recipe for a potion wrong or forgetting something

vital because I have too much on my mind) I'll set out into the woods and share my tale with this ever-grinning oak. At which point, he'll laugh, then tell me something equally as clottabussed he's done recently, too.

And in such a state, the joyful meeting of two clottabussed minds sharing together, it's impossible not to see things as he sees them.

"For goodness sake!" He tells me between guffaws. "You're just a hare. Forgive yourself. How could anyone expect you to mix potions correctly with those paws?"

And he's right, of course, something I realise as he eagerly moves on to his next tale, the burden lifting as I accept it is perfectly normal to occasionally be a clottabus. Further, not to be able to laugh and share the experience with others is perhaps the most clottabussed thing of all.

Just like the oak, I am grounded and rooted by knowing who I am. I have strengths and weaknesses, and try to accept both equally, celebrating my successes, learning from my failures, and laughing and forgiving my clottabussedness. For they are all parts of life's majickal journey, and saztaculous to share with an understanding, wisdom-filled, laughing oak.

*Not to be able to forgive yourself for doing something
clottabussed is perhaps the most clottabussed thing
of all.*



Gratitude

Ursula's Blessing

Gratitude

Of the many blessings mid-winter brings me, Ursula's visit is one of my favourites. Friends over many years and adventures, this solitary white-hare witch continues to bring much of her 'tzorkly' wisdom whenever she comes to stay. And if you were to ask her exactly what 'tzorkly' meant, she would explain that it is an ancient Parlawitch term expressing the creed of the creature-systerhood, and means 'to rise above', allowing witches to put valuable emotional or physical distance between themselves and what may appear to be all too consuming problems. Sometimes this can be as simple as riding high into the twinkling-lid on their brooms. Other times, the distance can be meditative. But in both cases, valuable fresh perspective is gained, with solutions often glimpsed or found to previously worrying problems.

But back to Ursula's winter visit to Wand Wood. Although I know she's pleased to see me, a large part of me also knows she's come for a more important

'tzorkly' reason; to deliver her annual blessing to a small rock deep in the woods. And if this seems rather clottabussed, then be sure you don't let Ursula know, as the sting of her wand can last up to a week! But for now, let us watch this simple ceremony in the quiet of the woodland as Ursula closes her eyes in deep contemplation, her wand raised over the sleeping rock, then twirled three times before lightly touching its head. Later, it will wake, completely unaware of her visit, the only clue two sets of footprints in the snow.

I once asked Ursula why she came so far to perform something so mundane on an unknowing rock? However, this time she didn't sting me with her wand, instead offering the following 'tzorkly' explanation. "This rock," she corrected me, "is far from mundane. For rock is the foundation of our Earth, lying at the bottom of the deepest oceans and connecting lands that you or I can only guess at. Likewise, it also rises to the highest mountains, where we can look towards the horizon knowing there are others beyond our understanding and imagination that we'll never see. Yet this knowing — this majickal grounding — is shared by us all, connecting us to our ancestors, each other, and the generations yet to come. Only when we become 'tzorkly' do we truly rise above such clottabussed notions that any one single piece

of anything is mundane.”

I nodded, still a little worried she was about to sting me with her wand.

“When I bless the rock, I bless our Earth and everything that walks, scrittles, pid-pads and swims upon it. It is my blessing, and I send it out to everyone and everything. Including you, Matlock.”

Later that day, after Ursula had departed on her broom, I climbed the highest mountain I could find, giving thanks for the ground beneath my feet and sending Ursula’s blessing to all those that lived over the distant horizon that I would never meet.

Including you.

Always including you.

Feel gratitude for our saztaculous Earth and find your own way to honour this most majickal of gifts.



The Majick Chime

Guidance

The longer I've known Wand Wood, the more I've travelled its many paths or meandered through its numerous trees, the more I've realised its majickal, reflective relationship between it and me. I always tell visitors to think of this enchanted woodland as a space both without and within themselves. All of the places you can visit here with me are already deep inside you, your very own Wand Wood, the perfect, caring guardian travelling alongside and offering wisdom wherever your journey leads.

However, whilst I firmly believe every word to be true, there's a third, equally more important and saztaculous aspect to Wand Wood; as a conduit to universal guidance channelling majickal knowledge from beyond both ourselves and the woodland.

And the perfect place to find it? The hollowed oak, its lamp already lit, soft mosses beckoning you to sit in calm contemplation before gently ringing the bell and calling to the universe for whatever guidance you may need.

Here in Winchett Dale, creatures believe the bell is heard and answered by Oramus, the ganticus spirit of the moon. Find a full moon on a clear night and you'll see his form leaping on its surface high above in the twinkling-lid.

In other dales and the many lands beyond it, creatures and folk of all kinds have their own version of Oramus, and that, to me, is fine, and very much the majickal way of things. Nonetheless, I like to believe that when we are lost, we all call to the same guidance, no matter what form it takes, the belief in a universal wisdom far more important than a name. As you sit here in silent tranquillity, the pure chime of the bell reflects your pure intentions to be open to whatever messages, guidance and wisdom may come. Know in those moments that you are centered within this majickal old oak, you are also a part of everything beyond it, truly connected to the majickal essence of everything.

Sometimes, when visitors leave, they ask me how they can find such a place within their own lives. I tell them to find a quiet spot, close their eyes, remember this crumlush place and ring a small bell. Its chime will lead you right here, then be heard way, way beyond it.

*Whatever your belief, make time to commune and
ring the bell of connectivity.*



Hope

The Midnight Chorus

Hope

Midnight in Wand Wood is a most saztaculous time. To be out in the darkness amongst the trees and scrittling night creatures as one day finally gives way to another, is a majickal privilege. Especially when you glimpse the night chorus drifting through the woodland and hear its majickal refrain, and you become privy to one of the best kept secrets of Wand Wood.

Allow me to explain. Days are, by nature, shy and reluctant, with each one as alive as you or I and hesitant for what the future holds during their brief tenure amongst us. Imagine for a moment, being tomorrow, waiting to take your place in the long line of days passed, completely unaware of the world you're about to be born into. As your time draws closer, you might overhear tales from previous days of creatures that had been only too glad when their day had ended, having had the most glopped up day, ever. And then think to yourself, is it ever really the day's fault, or simply events that take place within

it? Such are the nervous thoughts swirling round a day's mind as they hesitantly prepare to be born on the chime of midnight.

Hence the need for Mionetti and her midnight cauldron of singing jimbles, their soothing chorus calling to the anxiously waiting new day, assuring it that for everyone who will remember it as glopped, there will be many others whose memories will be nothing less than saztaculous: those that will fall in love, those who will share birthdays, and those who, for any number of majickal reasons, will experience something unexpectedly crumlush during its all too brief time amongst us.

And — so far, at least — Mionetti and her jimbles have always managed to coax each apprehensive new day to take its place at the head of the long line of its predecessors, before taking a deep breath and be born at midnight, allowing us to wake in the morning, no matter what the future holds.

Once, just a blinksnap after midnight, I caught sight of Mionetti drifting through the trees. "Where do you go, now?" I asked.

"To safely deliver yesterday to all the other waiting yesterdays, who will re-assure them their day will always mean something quite majickal and saztaculous to someone."

The jimbles were already asleep in the cauldron,

tired from singing. "And then?"

"I visit tomorrow, who will be waiting just as timidly as today was."

"What will you say to it?"

She smiled. "That it will be born in the quietest time. And that for all the creatures who will complain at its arrival, it also represents hope for everyone. For this is the secret constancy of days, they bring time for hope amongst us all. And be it today, tomorrow, or a thousand tomorrows hence, one day will live to see a brand-new world of hope, knowing all its forbears played their own majickal part in it all."

I wished Mionetti well, then turned to greet the new day with the same hope in my hare's heart.

Remember with each new day, hope is born.



The Porternut

Kindness

Autumn is one of the busiest times in Wand Wood, and also one of my favourite times, watching the bustle of scrittling creatures collecting food for the coming winter. And amongst the chaos, one small, often-overlooked creature, perhaps even my favourite – the berry-collecting porternut.

Always busy, the porternut barely says a word, scouring the ground for fallen berries, scooping them into his net and filling his shell with precious winter bounty he collects for creatures who aren't as quick on the ground as the others.

In some senses, it's simply the majickal purity of a selfless act, a creature helping others at a time when speed is of the essence. Take too long and the berries will rot, a precious food-source wasted. And it would be easy to assume that as autumn begins to crest into winter, the small porternut puts up his aching legs and takes a well-earned break. But you'd be wrong, for the truth is that he collects in all weathers, all seasons, right throughout the year, be

it berries, nesting materials, seed pods, or anything else woodland creatures require.

But to learn the secret of the porternut, we must first begin to look at ourselves. I like to think that my cottage door is always open to creatures, yet there have been times when I've been less than pleased to return home to find a gaggle of creatures asking for potions, or a late-night visitor wanting my help. Sometimes, I'm certain they hear me grinding my hare's teeth! Yet the porternut never appears to get frustrated or tired as he goes about his daily business. And for a while, this vexed me. So much so, that after a particularly long night tending to a twizzled disidula, I sought him out and asked him how he remained so calm.

For once, he stopped what he was doing, putting down his net of purple berries. "Do you want advice?" He said. "Or one of these crumlush berries? They'd make very good ink for your quills. Look saztaculous in a potions book, they would."

"I'm sure they would," I replied. "But it's advice I want."

He frowned. "Oh, dear. I'm not really that sort of nut. You should go and see a majickal-hare."

"But I already am one," I sighed.

"Excellent!" The porternut cried. "Look in the mirror and ask yourself the same question."

Sensing the conversation would only get more clottabussed, I took some purple berries and headed back home. Perhaps you're wondering if I ever asked my question to the mirror? I didn't have to, as the little porternut had already given me the answer; I was good at what I did, just as he was good at what he did. Together, we accept our limits and differences, yet still try to help others within them. To this day, I use his purple berry ink for all my writings — a permanent meeting on parchment of our two separate worlds, filling pages I dearly hope will help others whenever they need them, in dales and worlds far beyond my own. For this is the secret of the porternut; even the tiniest, most insignificant act of giving can touch many hearts, far, far away.

The secret to giving is always the purity of the act.



The Oldest Leaf

Love

Age, I was often told as a youngster, is a most peculiar thing. And now, as a majickal-hare of 'certain-years', I'm ever more inclined to agree. The rare privilege of negotiating and celebrating life's four seasons is something I've only really begun to appreciate in the late autumn of my life. Indeed, many things that once seemed utterly clottabussed have strangely become quite rational.

Which brings us to where we are now, Wand Wood's very own shrine to the vagaries of age — the oldest leaf, growing from a tree-stump, guarded by Fickle, the spirit of time, and tended by Eternus, a small white stag who grazes underneath, both equally devoted to the care of this one, extraordinary leaf.

Approach too closely and Fickle, in an impressively stern voice, will immediately demand an answer to the following riddle: 'How can something so old look so young? How can something so fragile be so strong? How can you unlock the secret of the leaf?'

Which, to the uninitiated, can seem rather

overwhelming at first. However, when you've been in these woods for a while, very little will ever surprise you. Which is also getting some way towards the answer. Time, and our many experiences within it, sometimes bring a lazy familiarity. How many times do we ever look again at what we've already seen? How much do we miss by assuming we already know all we need to?

The riddle of the oldest leaf cannot be answered by words, for it is a feeling, a saztaculous knowing that grows within you over time itself, an appreciation for those timeless things we must never ignore — hope, wonder, nature, and most importantly, love.

Try to answer with words, and Fickle and Eternus will merely shake their heads, politely telling you to return when you are ready.

However, to those who have the answer, it is a saztaculous thing to behold. Once, I had the rare privilege of watching a tiny, yet elderly strivet-mouse approach the stump to stand silently before the leaf, nodding and smiling to itself.

Upon seeing her, Eternus could feel the crumlush warmth from her heart, which despite her years, and all she had seen and done, still radiated with that most pure and majickal of things, love.

Fickle bowed, and the mouse slowly scrittled away. It remains one of my fondest memories from these

woods; simple, blissful, and elegant. A creature who radiated contentment, made young by always turning to love, not hate.

And as Fickle and Eternus watched the mouse silently disappear amongst the trees, I'd never seen them more content, either.

*A love of life and each other keeps your heart young
whatever your age, for it knows nothing of years.*



Majickal Harmony

The Bog Toad

Majickal Harmony

Step cautiously now, as we head deeper into the wood. Up ahead, you may just make out the familiar glowing light of Lumares, the bog-toad. And what a saztaculous sight he is, his huge purple eyes scanning for the oidiest sign of life. If a single creature steps or scrittles too close, Lumares lets out the noisiest 'Blaarp!' you've ever heard, enough to twizzle the life out of you! Many times, he's startled me, almost sending me off my feet with the sudden noise.

So for now, it is probably best we stay a little way off and simply admire this ferocious looking creature, before wondering perhaps, just why it is that Lumares has to be so twizzly? And, of course, this being Wand Wood, there are always two answers; one obvious, the other a secret to be discovered.

To the obvious answer first, and one that should come as no surprise. Without Lumares' twizzly warning, many an unwary creature might have strayed into the deep, unforgiving bog that is his home with the

most glopped consequences. Sometimes, we all need to be startled if we are heading down the wrong path. Many times, I have been grateful for just such a revelation, bringing me to my senses to reconsider potentially clottabussed choices I may have made.

The second answer — the secret to Lumares' loud blaarp — isn't as obvious, until you stay a while and watch from the safe distance he has guided you to.

Many, of course, would have already scrittled away, too twizzled to remain. But here they'd be missing the secret. And what a crumlush one it is when you know.

For Lumares is love struck, surfacing from the bog each night to watch for any sign of Muya, his lifelong partner, who comes to his call shortly after any unwary creature has scrittled away. If we wait a while we will see her, lured by his twizzly blarp, which to her is the most crumlush sound.

So, what do we learn from this curious, majickal symmetry? Quite simply, that even in moments we find twizzly, Nature looks after us. Sometimes, when we take a wrong turn, we need to be reminded, and whilst this might be traumatic for a short while, we are safe to learn from the experience. And perhaps more importantly — and so often forgotten — the mistake we felt we made might have many unforeseen benefits to others, far beyond our own imagining.

Lumares never intends to twizzle us, he is merely looking for love. But in doing so, we are saved from a glopped-up accident, and he and Mura are once again united.

It is a near-perfect example of Nature's own majickal harmony that plays out all around us, a secret we must never forget, or ever take for granted.

Things we may think of as a mistake often have unknown benefits to others, and are therefore part of life's majickal symmetry.



Manifest

Full Moon Teapot!

Manifest

Were you ever to visit the small Potionary in my crumlush cottage on the edge of Wand Wood, your eyes might be drawn to a small nook and the plain old biscuit jar standing inside. Next, you'd have some questions. Why would I keep such a thing and give it such a special status? What does it contain? Here, I suspect you would be none the wiser for the telling. To find the answer we need to venture out into Wand Wood and find Selvar, the creature who first introduced me to his full moon tea ceremony some years ago, and the same reason I now keep my own jar-of-plenty.

You'll find him on the eve of the full moon in the holly grove. Now, settle and watch as he sits cross-legged and carefully places an ornate teapot on an ancient holly stump. It is an object of curious, yet quite saztaculous beauty. After gently removing the lid, he reaches inside and takes out a series of small items, holding each in turn for a few moments before ceremoniously placing them around the teapot, one

by one. Then, in total silence, he closes his eyes and contemplates for a while before leaving the stump — which has now become his very own altar to the blessing of the shindinculous full moon.

The following morning, Selvar returns, carefully replacing all his treasured items back in the safety of the teapot until next time.

So, what are the items, and why does he do this every full moon? Every trinket, be it merely a humble acorn, a feather, piece of cloth or even a key, has a far greater significance, symbolizing all that Selvar holds dear in his life and wishes to continue to manifest, keeping him thankful and close to everything that is important for a happy and contented life.

This seemed to me such a saztaculous and crumlush way of reminding oneself of all we truly value, and the things we never want to take for granted. Sometimes they are memories, reminders of occasions, family and friends. Other times, an item might symbolise intention; a desire to make good and manifest something saztaculous in the future, be it for me, or someone else.

Which is where we return to my old biscuit jar in the Potionary. My very own jar of plenty. What have I placed inside it? What secrets do the contents hold? Well, that would be of little use to you. Perhaps the

better question would be, just what would you put
in yours?

*Find symbols of all that you hold dear so you too can
fill your own jar of plenty.*



The Gate of Mysteries

Mindfulness

There are many sacred, majickal places within Wand Wood, just as there are within all of us, some hidden, some obvious, some avoided and some long forgotten. But perhaps the most majickal of them all greets us now, the lamplit Gate of Mysteries, its posts proudly sporting a steaming goblet on one, and an owl, one eye scrutinising you as you approach, the key to the gate's lock held firmly in its razor-sharp talons.

What do you do? Approach and try to take the key? Who is to say it will fit the lock? And if it does, and the gate opens, what waits for you on the other side? Peer through, and all you see is a gently rolling dale, with no hint of majick or mystery.

Yet still the gate draws you closer, almost against your will. No matter how much you try to resist, one foot keeps following the other, urging you drink from the goblet. And as you do, it reveals the secret majick of the gate with a question. Do you wish to take the key, open the lock, pass through and surrender to the will of the unknown? For to do so

will reveal what truly lies on the other side, the greatest mystery of all - your future.

To date, I don't know of a single creature, which when faced with the absolute certainty of knowing, has chosen to take the key. Many have drunk from the goblet and reached for it with trembling paws. Some have even got as far as to open the lock. Yet none have gone through. Not one.

Forgive me. I lie. One has. Me.

Allow me to explain. Long ago, as a very young apprentice, Chatsworth, my majickal-hare master bought me to this very same spot. It was the middle of the night, the wind swirling around as he told me about the gate.

"Step through, and your future will be revealed."

It was too tempting. I quickly drank from the goblet, took the key and opened the lock, drunk with excitement of just what lay on the other side.

The gate opened.

"Are you sure, young Matlock?" My master asked.

"It may not be as you expect."

But my long hare's ears were hardly listening, and a blinksnap later I was through - to just a gently rolling dale. "There's nothing here!" I cried, disappointment welling. "It's just like it was on the other side!"

"Now look back to me," Chatsworth calmly

commanded. "To these woods and where we are now. Where would you rather be?"

"With you," I replied, walking back through the gate.

"There's nothing majickal over there, nothing."

"Because it is yet to happen," Chatsworth said. "The future is a majickal mix of fate, destiny and chance. What truly matters is the now." He smiled at me.

"That, and the future we can actually control."

"Such as?" I asked.

"Such as should we go back to the cottage for a crumlush brottle leaf brew by the fireside?"

It was a future that became a reality, that became the cherished memory I'm telling you now. And I dearly hope you have many like it, too.

Make sure you treasure the now, as this is the only time that truly matters.



Into the Woods!

Nature

Sometimes, I'm asked what the most glopped-up thing is about being a majickal-hare. My answer is nearly always the same; the days when I am too busy to get out into Wand Wood. Some folk assume it might be many hours spent working in my potionary, perfecting spells and majickal cures, or the responsibility of tending to the creatures of Winchett Dale, sorting their petty disputes, giving advice and tending to their ailments. Yet the truth is that no matter how long my day has been, it's always made better by the thought that I can wander into the woods at its end.

For me, being out and about in nature's saztaculous creation allows me to feel both separate and a part of it; an observer, but also a participant. And it is precisely in those times, when my sole reason for being deep in the woodland is simply to be amongst its lovely, majickal abundance of trees, plants and scrittling creatures, that I quite forget about the waiting world outside, absorbed instead by the joy of

both the place, and a deep, comforting feeling of my own belonging within it.

How I love to scrumble and kick my way through the leaves in autumn! What crumlush joys there are in walking barefoot on dewy mosses in the early morning! What endless discoveries can be made by watching the many creatures playing in the trees! What peace can be had by simply sitting against an ancient trunk, closing my eyes and listening to first drops of falling rain rolling from the leaves above! Here, I am no longer Matlock the majickal-hare, I am simply me, another of Nature's creations that she will always welcome, allowing me to forget everything and fill me with her own unique majickal energies, whatever the weather, or however I'm feeling.

And after, when I leave the woods, it is with a large hare's grin and a spring in my step, ready to face the waiting world outside once again, any previous problems somehow diminished by my saztaculous time in the woods.

It is something I urge you to do if you are ever feeling glopped-up. Simply head for the nearest woods and ingest every sound, sight and smell. Run your paws over aged bark, listen for creatures scrittling nearby. And most importantly, feel the very real connection between this place and yourself.

For we are all creatures of Nature.
Who knows? Perhaps one day, we will even bump
into each other in this most majickal playground.

*Hear the calling of the wild wood, to mud, fungi,
birds and breezes.*



Reflection

Open

However many times I visit Wand Wood, it always seems to be for exactly the right amount of time, something I only tend to realise upon my return. Stranger still, as I look over the distant tree line from my cottage window, I slowly realise my original reason for visiting has faded; an elusive memory majickally overtaken by the powerful resonance of whatever new and saztaculous thing I learnt in my time amongst the trees.

So many times, I set off knowing exactly what it is I need to do. Perhaps it is finding a particular shroom, berry or herb for a potion, or the need to visit a certain creature. Sometimes, it is merely to wander the woodland with little else on my hare's mind than simply to enjoy its crumlush beauty. And yet come my return, I realise I was called to Wand Woods for another reason entirely, one I had no conception of when first stepping through the gate for the beckoning mystery beyond.

It is then I realise the true journey was only ever

one I took within myself, and that whatever I confronted, learnt from, was twizzled or surprised by, was something a part of me needed me to know. I was both student and master, with Wand Wood my enchanted classroom.

And perhaps this is Wand Wood's final, most saztaculous secret; it is both within and without; always waiting, listening, watching, calling you, its many majickal places and crumlush encounters leading to new realisations.

These days, as I set off into Wand Wood, I try to do so with an open mind. I am an elderly majickal-hare now, beneficiary of many saztaculous adventures with crumlush friends, yet I still know these woods have so much to show, challenge and teach me. The key given to me by my master all those years ago still hangs from my belt, its true purpose, I now realise, to remind me to unlock the doorway to my mind to let the majick in, however it chooses to do so.

It is simply just a metal key, of no apparent significance other than to remind me that I alone have the choice to be open or closed. And yet, of all the things I treasure; moments, friends and memories — this one key has taught me the most important lesson of all, to listen intuitively to whatever calls me.

Often, upon my return, I'll quietly look out over Wand Wood from my window, wondering how much

more it has to teach me. It is both an answer I shall never know, and a quest I will continue to be charmed, amazed and enjoy for as long as I am blessed to live in this crumlush place.

It is the majick both within and without, always patiently waiting to reveal its many saztaculous secrets to us all.

Come, take my paw and let us venture out into Wand Wood together. For there is still so much to discover!

Life is one long adventure and being open to its secrets will create the most saztaculous of journeys. Remember, there are always more secrets to uncover!



Opportunity

The Winter Stone

Opportunity

For me, little can match the excitement of waking up to a glistening, majickal covering of frost on a cold winter's morning. Almost immediately, I make preparations, having a warm brottle-leaf brew before dressing in my warmest slippers and robes, keen to get outside and feel the distinctive crunch of frost under my feet as my breath billows into the crisp dry air.

All is quite wonderfully saztaculous. But the beauty is merely part of my joy. For I am also heartily glad to know that my old friend and bringer of the frost, Stryllis, has once again visited my homelands. As old as Wand Wood itself, he sprinkles his iced diamonds throughout many a winter's night. As a young apprentice majickal-hare, it was simply the glittering spectacle I appreciated. But as I grew older, I began to see the majickal secret behind it, as revealed in the frost on the surface of the moving stone; a previously hidden map of Wand Wood, its pathways, trees and brooks made vivid in the crystal

whiteness. And at the bottom, sculpted by Stryllis, a small doorway.

One morning I watched as a small creature appeared. Stryllis, his long fingers scraping over the cold rock, asked his question. "Tell me what lies behind the door, and you may enter."

The creature blinked, uncertain. "I don't know. But it must be majick."

"Why?" Stryllis pressed.

"Because it wasn't here before."

"Perhaps," Stryllis suggested, "it's always been here. It's simply that you've never needed to open it."

The small creature thought about this. "Can you tell me what's inside?"

Stryllis laughed. "By mid-morning, I, the stone, this doorway and the frost will be gone, quite melted away. So, here's the real question. If something is that fleeting, is it ever really worth knowing?"

Inevitably, most creatures leave at this point. But I once asked Stryllis if any had decided to try the door.

He studied me with his piercing blue eyes. "What lies hidden is never truly lost, merely waiting to be revealed. If all secrets, all majick, all opportunities were constantly to hand, where would the mystery lie?"

The sun rose higher, melting away the frost. "But you haven't answered my question."

Stryllis too, began to fade. "Those who try the door have no need of it. Those who don't, leave with majick in their hearts, eager do discover more. A closed door can open many more doors for those who choose to seek them."

I've seen the same scene many times, every time the same, creatures always leaving Stryllis and the stone intent on finding permanent new pathways rather than fleeting ones, inspired by something as simple as a frosted doorway which will vanish mere blinksnaps after they've gone. Such is the way of beauty. Sometimes, just a glimpse is enough to remind us of its saztaculous permanence.

Opportunity is often found in the most unexpected places. What lies hidden is never truly lost.



Patience

The Spring Stone

Patience

As winter subsides and the days gradually lengthen to make way for the first crumlush breaths of spring, a freshness you can see, smell and almost touch fills the woodland. The long nights and cold days retreat, bringing yawning, slowly stretching creatures from their winter burrows. The saztaculous beginnings of buds appear on branches, and all around is majickal change.

It is also time to once again glimpse the moving stone of Wand Wood, this time rising from a small pool to provide a safe haven for a sazpent's egg.

And the thankful sazpent's name? Variana. Every year, with the coming of spring, she places her newly laid egg in the moving stone, knowing it will be safe until early summer. And what excitement courses through the woods when it finally hatches, the tiny sazpent slowly emerging, encouraged by creatures of all kinds who have come to witness this most majickal moment.

But in the weeks before hatching, I will often simply

sit by the pool and silently watch Variana carefully guarding her precious treasure, reminding myself that a long, hard winter can take many, many forms, but in some cases, necessary ones. Winter is Nature's night when the land rests, spring is its morning, summer its day, and autumn its slowly descending evening. A natural, repeating cycle, with each season as essential as the others, all four infusing the rhythms of our lives with joys, sadnesses, challenges, crumlush memories and saztaculous celebrations.

For just as Variana waits patiently for the moving stone to rise from the pool, so we too must sometimes simply wait. I've heard you creatures in the Great Beyond have an expression, 'This too, will pass'. In Winchett Dale, we say 'the stone will always rise' — and know it to be true, however long our winters appear to take.

Once the new hatchling has arrived, Variana will take her tiny sazpent away, sitting it between her wings as she flies back up into the twinkling-lid. The stone will slowly sink back into the water as an excited throng of young creatures leap in to try and follow it. But as always, there will be nothing to show for its presence, the majick cycle once again complete.

Afterwards, I will sit for some time after the others have gone, before putting a fragment of the empty

shell in my robe pocket and setting off home. There, it will join the others in my collection, one for each year of my time in Winchett Dale, a crumlush reminder that majick will always nurture and care for us. And when the time is right, and we are truly ready, she will also come to release us from within our many winters.

*Our lives, as in nature, have cycles and rhythms.
Learning patience within the limitations of the
moment releases us from many frustrations.*



Travellers Rest

Pause

There are times — and perhaps this is one of them — when a journey becomes a chore. What began as a definite ambition meanders into the unknown. Sometimes it's life that pulls us from the path. Other times, it can be something as simple as the unintentional action of another. But nearly all the time the result is the same. Each step becomes more wearisome, the way back looks suddenly more appealing than carrying on. We are, to all intents and purposes, quite stuck.

The same is true of these very woods we stand in now. So many paths to choose from, so many undiscovered opportunities to reach your chosen destination. Thankfully, most journeys are without incident, with new and saztaculous delights waiting around each corner. But sometimes an inner voice takes charge, telling us to turn back, and to continue risks losing sight of the very thing we set out to find in the place.

Whenever this happens to me, I say aloud one of

the most powerful majick spells I ever learned. Just three words; 'I am lost', which, if said with genuine conviction, summons the travellers rest you see before you now — a place that simply asks you to *be*, and nothing else.

Take a look. Step between the trees into the waiting glade you've unlocked by your honesty. It neither judges nor ignores. It listens but never speaks. It provides yet asks for nothing in return. Take a drink from the waiting goblet, slip into the gently steaming waters and become part of everything, yet belong to nothing. Experience the crumlush majick of finding everything the moment you had the courage to admit you were lost.

Sometimes, I can pass a whole moon-turn here, yet when I am ready to leave and continue my journey, I discover it has been a mere blinksnap. The glade disappears as silently as it first appeared, and I am returned to the exact same spot where I first called out for its simple comforts.

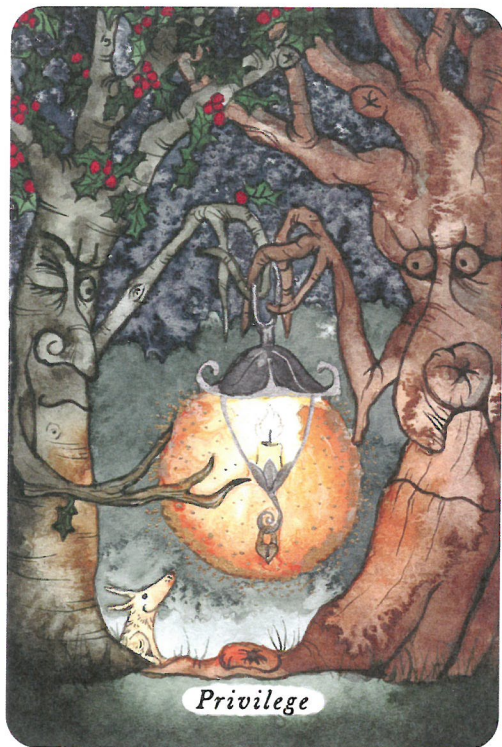
The travellers rest offers no startling guidance or insights, no unexpected paths or hidden short cuts. That's not its purpose. The healing majick comes from your own honesty, your willingness to ask for time and space when you needed it most. To admit we are lost is the first step to truly finding ourselves. Many times, I have never completed journeys

I confidently began with high expectations and ambitions. But in losing my way, I've discovered more about myself, often returning wiser, more confident of the limited abilities I am fortunate enough to possess.

Today, as an old majickal-hare, I still begin many journeys. Old age hasn't dimmed my desire to learn and explore both myself and the saztaculous world around me.

And the part I look forward to the most? Simply getting lost.

When you feel lost call on The Travellers Rest, give yourself time to heal and re-discover that which is you.



Privilege

The Holly and the Oak

Privilege

There are many saztaculous times to be out in Wand Wood; at dawn's first light, a late summer sunset, the first flakes of winter snow, spectacular storms, and so many others. Each is as vivid, different and majickal as any other, reminding me of not only the fragile majesty of this good Earth, but also how honoured I am to be a part of it.

So many times that it becomes difficult to choose a favourite. However, there is one occasion I never miss, the annual handing of the light from the holly to the oak on the winter solstice, a silent ritual watched by all the woodland creatures, our faces lit by the majickal glow of the lamp signalling the return of the light for another year.

The ceremony is sublimely simple. Creatures gather at the empty Winter Solstice glade, where youngsters woken from sleep wait silently with their mahpas, pahpas friends and family. Indeed, it is as if the whole woodland waits. Even the wind ceases. And then you hear them coming, both trees slowly making

their way into the glade at midnight. Not a single word is exchanged as the oak takes the burden of the light from the holly to hold it proudly for the next half-year, before slowly making its way to the Summer Solstice glade to return the light to the waiting holly for the following six moon-turns.

Now, as a ceremony, I'll be first to admit that it appears to lack a certain spectacle. And therefore, a visitor might well be confused as to why it is held in such reverence. Surely, it's just two trees symbolically marking the year's mid-point? Further, once you've seen it, you're quite likely to give it a miss next year and stay safely tucked up in bed, instead.

Which, of course, would be to miss the point, entirely.

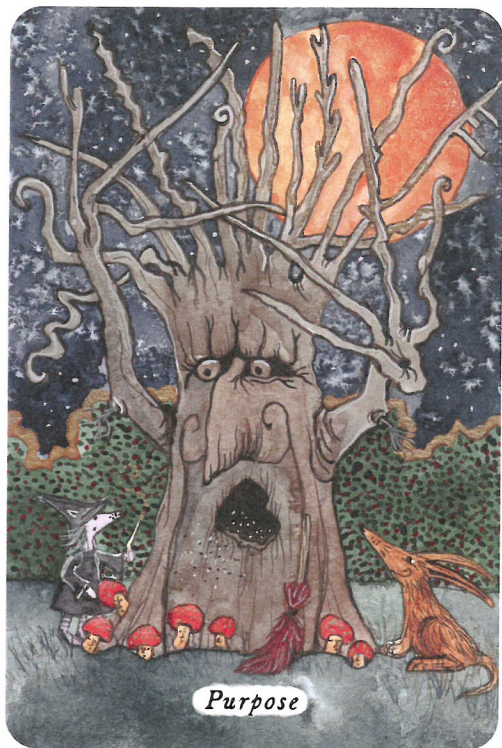
For the silently watching crowd, the ritual is an important reminder of the difference between a privilege and a chore, as both trees see their turn with the light as the former, not the latter, proudly protecting and holding it throughout all weathers, day and night — a joyful honour, not a burden.

This is what we creatures come to see and re-affirm in ourselves; those things we might perceive to be burdensome can also be seen as a privilege.

Sometimes, after a long day delivering healing potions and tending to the creatures of Winchett Dale, I'll

return to my cottage with nothing but a crumlush brottle-leaf brew on my mind. And most likely, it is on these occasions that my dripplle-familiar will want an extra-long bedtime story. And yet, tired as I may be, the look in her small bright eyes as I begin to read soon makes me smile deep inside. I am making her happy and am honoured to do so. It is just one of many times where I try to hold the light within myself as high and proudly as the holly and the oak.

Hold onto your light. Allow it to illuminate every corner of your life with many saztaculous, crumlush and joyfully privileged moments.



Purpose

The Wand Tree

Purpose

There are many myths, legends and stories about wands that try to answer a multitude of questions about them. Does a wand choose you, or do you choose it? Which wood is the most majickal? Does the wand have the power, or is it with the user? Can another creature ever use your wand?

Yet rarely am I, as a regular wand user, ever asked what happens when one breaks. They are, after all, little more than twigs, and no spell you could utter would ever make them more so.

Another question I've never been asked: How many wands have you broken in your life? The answer — over a hundred, the latest being just last week when I sat down rather too heavily in my favourite chair by the fireside to hear a familiar muffled snap beneath me, necessitating a trip to the majickal tree you see before us now.

Her name is Satara, and because of her tree's arrangement of branches, it would be easy to assume that she is the single source of wands in Wand Wood,

and those who require a new one must get it here. But this, of course, is to ignore two majickal truths. Firstly, the name of this entire enchanted woodland, and secondly - just like life itself - nothing is rarely that simple.

Satara's story begins as a young sapling, when it became apparent she could grow branches of different kinds: oak, ash, beech, chestnut, hawthorn, yew, birch and many others. Some of her branches even fruit during the summer, and her spring blossom is a riot of saztaculous colour. She is, quite simply, one of the most extraordinary trees you'll ever meet.

Yet Satara hated feeling different, yearning to blend in with other trees in the woodland, wondering why it was she couldn't ever be or feel like them.

However, as the years passed, creatures came to see and appreciate her uniqueness, marvelling at what appeared to be wands of all shapes and sizes on the tips of her many branches, and quickly deciding that regardless of whatever tree they took their own wands from, they would always be brought to Satara for her approval and majickal blessing.

Over the years, this small yet important ritual has given her a unique purpose, she couldn't have imagined when just a mere sapling. Satara is now herself, not just a curious mix of many other trees. Once, I asked if she had the choice, which one tree

would she most like to be. "The one that I am now, the one that has been taken to other creatures' hearts," she replied, blessing my new wand. "I don't know why I am the way I am, but I know that I have become something to others, a majickal part of their everything."

Which I've always thought was quite the most saztaculous answer.

To find that which, despite our differences, gives each of us purpose, is the most crumlush of things.



Witch Stone

Question

Rocks, stones, standing stones, moving stones, boulders and even pebbles, all have their place in Wand Wood, most insisting it's been their home for far longer than the first tree broke the ground as a hesitant young sapling. And it would be hard to argue otherwise, not because they are necessarily wrong, but because the one thing all the rocks, stones and pebbles of Wand Wood enjoy most is arguing. You tell them one thing, they'll try their utmost to persuade you otherwise, often with quite furious faces.

There is, however, one stone that takes life less seriously — the Witch Stone, whose reputation as trickster and mischief-maker is legendary. No one is safe from her japes, and all who have encountered her have tales to tell.

Once, she managed to convince the entire village of Winchett Dale that their homes were built upside down and needed immediate re-building in order to stop creatures falling up into the sky. Perhaps you're

thinking only a complete clottabus could ever believe such a thing, yet within hours, creatures were setting to work with hammers and saws, determined to turn their lives upside down on the word of a stone they already knew full well to be a trickster.

Another time, she spread the infamously clottabussed rumour that Winchett Dale was shortly to be at the mercy of twizzly creatures disguised as large raindrops. It took me an entire week to calm everyone's nerves.

When a curious visitor once asked me why I wasn't angry with the Witch Stone for twizzling the creatures and giving me so much extra work, I took them to the stone for the answer.

"So, here's the secret," the stone told my visitor. "Firstly, I have so much fun doing it. You should see some of the things those creatures believe!"

"But isn't it rather cruel?" My visitor said, taken aback by the laughing stone in the witches' hat.

The Witch Stone composed herself. "But in the process," she replied, "the creatures gradually learn to question things, wondering how and why they could be tricked by something so obviously clottabussed. For it is only through knowledge that they learn to trust their own convictions, rather than blindly following rumour. So perhaps, in many ways, I am also one of the greatest teachers they have."

After, my visitor asked me if I'd ever been tricked by the Witch Stone.

"I'm sure I have, many times," I replied. "Perhaps she was tricking us both just now. The truth is we'll never know, which is why we have to question so much about ourselves and the world around us to find the right answers."

"She also told me I would be truly wise one day. Was that a trick, too?"

"Even if it was," I replied, "what's to stop you? Then one day, you'll know a mischievous talking stone in a witches' hat has played her own majickal part in it. Which, I think, would be rather saztaculous, don't you?"

Remember to constantly question all that surrounds you - and be careful of stones wearing witches' hats!



See

Shadow-Creepers

See

There, you see them? Up ahead, cowering in the shadow of that tree, a group of shadow-creepers, perhaps the most misunderstood creatures in Wand Wood. And yes, I'll agree, at first glance they can look quite twizzly as they watch you with their huge green eyes. Yet this is the moment not to be startled. Trust me, you are perfectly safe. Stand quite still and slowly let them come to you, seeking out the shelter of your shadow and waiting for you to move. All they'll do is harmlessly scritch along behind, before suddenly peeling away to another tree.

And that could be only time you ever see a group of shadow-creepers, which would be quite glopped, as you'd be missing their saztaculous secret.

To find out, we firstly need to understand they are merely using you as safe passage to their next shadowy home. They move in groups because daylight twizzles them. In fact, most things twizzle shadow-creepers, including you. Yet despite this, they still somehow find the courage to come to you.

Now, the more astute visitor to Wand Wood will want to discover more about these nervous little creatures. To do so, it's your turn to approach slowly and cautiously. Soothing words can help. If they're startled, they'll be off into the undergrowth. But if they trust your intentions are simply to get to know them, they'll allow you to settle close by.

And that's when you really begin to 'see', looking into their bright green eyes and realising that these shy creatures have so much knowledge, wisdom and experience, simply because of the life they've led. Sometimes mocked for being too timid, or ignored for being thought of as clottabussed or boring, the humble shadow-creeper soon learns to keep opinions to themselves, retreating into their own shadows deep within themselves.

And yet, looking into those eyes, you now see they each have so many tales to tell and memories to share from a locked store of knowledge you've opened by something as simple as trust.

Of the many things shadow-creeper have taught me, the most important has been never to assume those who might appear shy or timid are in any way less important than anyone else. For they are likely to be far stronger, made so by the very fact so many others perceive them to be weak — a most clottabussed mistake when you begin seeing them for

who they truly are.

Sometimes, I'll spend the entire day talking to shadow-creepers about their saztaculous lives and majickal escapades. We laugh, sing and sometimes even dance together in the shadows. Afterwards, I return home, fortified by their strength and courage, hoping in my hare's heart that just one or two will still be following on behind.

*It is never how loud our voices are, it is the integrity
with which we speak that is important.*



The Coven Tree

Silence

At the furthestmost edge of Wand Wood, where the woodland gives way to the hedgerows and gently rolling hills of Winchett Dale, stands one of its best loved trees – the Coven Tree, where tzorkly-sprites gather every night to sit, silently contemplating amongst soft, flickering candlelight on its ancient branches.

Now, I appreciate, it looks a bit intimidating. Indeed, it is hard not to get a case of the twizzles on first sight, but its fierce looks are simply to warn away those who might not respect the sacred silence it offers to creatures who come far and wide to seek it. For me, it is one of the most saztaculous sights in the woods. Asleep during the day, the Coven Tree wakes as the last of the setting sun gives way to night, opening the door in its trunk to allow a procession of black-hatted tzorkly-sprites out and up into its branches where the earnest contemplation begins.

At dawn, as the first shafts of sunlight break over distant hills, the procession silently descends as one,

passing back through the doorway in a ritual enacted every day for longer than any woodland creature can remember. The door closes and the Coven Tree sleeps.

Now, we're here to discover secrets, and in such a tranquil place, there doesn't seem to be any. At first sight, everything seems rather obvious, the ancient tree providing a saztaculous, sacred place to simply lose yourself in your own thoughts. Indeed, I defy anyone not to close your eyes and do the same, such is the majickal power of this tree and its attendant sprites.

However, there is more going on here than first meets the eye. The longer you sit by the tree, the more you discover the saztaculous pleasure of simply being in silence amongst others. Neither the sprites, nor the tree will ever talk to you. No questions are asked, no answers sought after, and yet somehow there's a majickal intimacy at work — the crumlush privilege of being absolutely at one in the silence with others. Other creatures will come and go, staying for as long as they need without a single nod or word being said. Yet, in a most majickal way, everything has been said, the purest simplest acknowledgement of being with one another in silence, truly connected in the one crumlush experience.

And after, I return to my cottage, filled with the

experience and ready to tackle whatever fate and the day has in store for me, knowing the coven tree will always be there, waiting without judgement in the welcoming silence.

Find your Coven Tree and know that sometimes simply being amongst others is enough. For even in silence, we are all connected on one majickal journey.



Arborella

Simplicity

I've always enjoyed wandering the woods in autumn, a most saztaculous season, full of fiery colour as the low-lying sun burns the skies crumlush reds and pinks, misting its majickal haze through drifting fog. There's a chill in the air, marking a burst of activity as creatures gather fallen nuts and berries to store in their burrows prior to winter.

Most prominent amongst them is Arborella, one of the many sprites in Wand Wood, distinct in her long black hat and broom sweeping falling leaves to keep the pathways clear and provide piles of crumlush winter bedding for those creatures who will need it. In fact, despite the fact she tends to the woodland throughout the year, autumn is by far and away both her busiest and happiest time. Firstly, because it is when she gets to see her good friends, the hernesprites, normally hidden in the dense, leafy canopy. Come the autumn, these gentle, antlered sprites are revealed sitting on the bare branches, eager to catch up and share majickal times with their

good friend. Secondly, Arborella finds tidying and keeping the paths clear immensely rewarding.

"Autumn," she told me one day, "is the time when you can take so much joy from the majickal changes all around. There's nothing more satisfying than clearing a path and the saztaculous feeling of achievement it brings. Each blinksnap, every sweep of my broom, I am simply focussed on this one task. And when I look back and see all I have done, the pleasure is quite ganticus for such little effort."

As she spoke, a group of creatures took leaves from her pile, before scrittling away to fill their burrows.

"You see?" Arborella said. "Everyone is busy with simple things, and there is much joy to be had in that alone."

When I returned to my cottage at the edge of the wood, inspired by her words, I took out my own broom and swept the path to my door, leaving the leaves in a pile for those that might need them. Then I made a brottle-leaf brew and looked out over my tidy garden and the creatures disappearing with much-needed winter bedding.

Arborella was right. It had been a simple yet saztaculously satisfying thing to do, and the reward was right in front of my satisfied hare's eyes for me to see.

*Often, the most pleasure can be found in the simplest
of tasks.*



The Broomstick Tree

Tradition

Many woodlands are alive with myths and legends passed down through the years by word of mouth to the astonished ears of others. Wand Wood, you won't be surprised to hear, is no exception — as evidenced by the tale of one of its most majickal residents, the broomstick tree.

At first sight, its name should come as no surprise, standing tall like an enormous, upturned witches' broom, and surrounded by a ring of majickal shrooms, it's one of the most saztaculous trees in Wand Wood — and also here that groups of eager young creatures are taken to hear the tale of the broomstick tree for the first time.

The story goes like this. Many, many moon-turns ago, an infant witch became lost as she flew high above Winchett Dale. A powerful storm blew in and she plunged to the ground, her tiny broom arrowing into the ground as she was thrown clear at the last. Soon, creatures found the dazed young witch, taking good care of her until the older witches arrived.

They were so relieved to find her, and grateful to the kindly creatures, that they cast a spell on the tree so it would forever grow as an upturned broomstick to serve as a permanent majickal reminder of the respect between creatures and witches.

Next, the young creatures listening to the tale dance around the tree, so remembering the story and its sentiments from that day forth.

Except, of course, as is so often the case, the reality is rather different from the myth.

The broomstick tree is simply an ordinary witch hazel that we adult creatures of Winchett Dale take turns to tend and clip to look like a broomstick, keen to impress the message on our youngsters in the most saztaculous and memorable way possible.

And in turn, these youngsters will one day do the same to their own offspring, preparing the tree, before leading them here to tell them the tale.

A secret deception? Perhaps. But the lesson of mutual respect is always remembered and adhered to from that moment on.

I once asked my good friend and white-hare witch, Ursula, if witches have a similar tale for their young systers.

She looked at me in quiet bemusement. "To be taught respect. Why would we? We respect all creatures because you already respect us."

Proving that it doesn't matter how tolerance and respect are taught or adhered to, as long as it's passed on to others. And seeing as ours has its roots in an ordinary witch-hazel, it seems quite majickally appropriate to me.

Myths, legends and traditions have much to teach us.



Truth

Truth Seeds

Truth

There are days which seem to capture my mood perfectly. Sometimes, I wake to saztaculous sunlight streaming through my windows feeling as bright and cheery on the inside as it is outside. Other times, when the skies are leaden grey, it can be a struggle to even heave my old hare's bones from under the covers to face the day's challenges ahead.

I've often wondered about the correlation between the two. Which exerts most influence over the other? If I am 'feeling' sunny, does it matter if there are grey skies overhead? Likewise, if I am tired or down, can something as simple as the weather really improve my mood? And I have no consistent answers. For just as I have sometimes wept on a saztaculously sunny day, I've also found myself feeling in utterly crumlush spirits on a dull one.

But there is one place in Wand Wood famed for its never changing weather, an area no bigger than my small cottage garden, yet continually shrouded in a majickal mist. We creatures call it the Glade of

Truth, coming here whenever our minds are clouded by a problem or fogged with a difficult decision, seeking out the majickal truth-seeds drifting within its mysterious swirl.

And if all this sounds rather clottabussed, then let me take you back to the beginning: mood and weather, within and without. At the Glade of Truth both perfectly align, the weather always matching your mood. By entering the mist and being totally honest with yourself about your problems or concerns, you share them with the mist itself, which in turn releases truth-seeds, each with their own wisdom to share the very blinksnap you pluck one from the air. Sometimes they are a reminder, sometimes an unexpected solution, sometimes something you may have overlooked. But all the time, if you honestly listen to yourself in the mists of your dilemma, their advice will ring true.

On occasion, the seeds have told me things I didn't really want to hear, but knew I had to acknowledge to move on. Other times, I've felt quite stuck, and yet one simple truth freed me.

Over time, I've had to visit the Glade of Truth less and less. Not that I don't still have clottabussed problems to deal with, but simply that I live by what is both within and without. These days, when I feel the mists and fog of confusion, I simply take

a deep hare's breath, close my eyes and look for those honest truths I have either forgotten, avoided, or not yet seen, all drifting within a paw's reach and patiently waiting to be heard.

And afterwards, when I have a strategy to deal with whatever issue was clouding my mind, I suddenly find that the day always feels much brighter, majickal and more saztaculous. Whatever the weather.

Close your eyes, breathe deeply and pluck a truth seed from the mist, see what is forgotten or overlooked.



Unlock

The Keeper of Keys

Unlock

Look ahead. There, in the cavern. Do you see her? The Keeper of Keys, one of the most important creatures in Wand Wood. Mostly, she sleeps. But now she wakes, waiting for us as she curls and keeps safe a mountainous pile of keys of every description. Belhalla, saztaculous sazpent and keeper of secrets. The first time I stood here as a young majickal-hare, I couldn't help but feel curious and twizzled in equal measure. The doorway behind, where does it lead? Which key would unlock it? And would I ever have the courage to take one from between Belhalla's curls and try?

And then, perhaps just like you now, I noticed the bell hanging from the tree, seemingly calling me to pull the rope and ring it.

"What do you think will happen?" Belhalla suddenly asked me.

"I'm not sure," I replied. "But you have so many keys, a secret doorway, and this bell. It's all so curious. It must surely be part of something

saztacularously majickal.”

“Curious?” She said. “Perhaps the most curious thing is you, Matlock.” She shifted her long red curls around the pile of keys. “I am not here to keep these keys to myself, but to protect you from the many false paths they lead to. The bell tells me that although you may be lost, your search for answers is merely a distraction from the real truth you need. None of these keys will ever open the doorway behind me, not one of them.”

“But I don’t understand,” I said. “There’s nothing here? No secrets, no answers?”

“On the contrary,” Belhalla hissed. “Everything’s here. You just need to know what it is you seek to unlock. What is it that you really search for? Of all the doors in your life, which is the hardest to ever open?”

And then, as I puzzled over the question, a tree by the entrance raised its branch and offered me a single key. “Myself,” I whispered. “The hardest thing to open is myself.”

Belhalla nodded. “Yet that particular key is often much closer than you think, overlooked in favour of others you assume will give you knowledge and secrets you aren’t ready for.”

I took the proffered key from the branch.

“Unlock your mind, Matlock. Be curious, be honest

about your faults. Forgiveness is the first step to betterment, the beginnings of a journey to find majickal, hidden truths about yourself and the world around you. This is the secret of the Keeper of Keys — it is never me, but always you.”

From that day to this, I have remembered her words.

*Knowledge and guidance can only be found once you
have truly opened your own inner being.*



Arla

Wake

There are days when, regardless of what I'm doing or how busy I am, I never seem to feel awake. My body goes through the motions as my mind orders and tends to whatever it is I need to do, yet deep down, I feel my spirit in what I can only describe as a waking slumber. In those moments, the sights, sounds and colours of the world around me become duller, muffled and distant. And on such days, I sometimes make it my business to seek out Arla the most joyous tree of Wand Wood.

And she's not hard to find, either; her chiming bells cut through the air, especially brightly on a frosty morning, and there is no point in trying to wish her 'Good morn'up', as she'll be gone before you utter the words. Arla is a force of nature, and just like the 'Witch of the Wind', she just is, and that is that. But watch as she passes; the trees open an eye, the birds are encouraged into song and even the dilva beetles have more of a jaunty gait to their step! Here's the thing to remember — Wand Wood, in so

much as it is anywhere, is everywhere, and as much a part of you as it is the place by my home. When you feel weary or jaded, it's time to seek out and wake your very own slumbering 'Arla', then lose yourself in the joy of the moment. Shake the tree, break the silence, with whatever makes you feel alive; loud music, sing, whoop, playing an instrument, ring a bell, cut through the air with noise, and feel alive. Many is the time an unexpected visitor has called to find me dancing round the cottage, perhaps even singing at the top of my voice. And whilst a few no doubt think I'm a proper clottabus, others smile, or sometimes even join in. But whether anyone else is there or not, is irrelevant. For I am waking myself, feeling the joy overwhelm my tired senses to fill my life with its true and saztaculous colours once more. The one time I managed to speak with Arla she explained it to me thus. 'Think of a thunderstorm,' she said. 'The energy it brings as lightning splits the lid, garrumblooms rumbling all around. Nature knows when things are too still, so brings the storm to wake the land once more. And after, the air is fresher, leaves, trees and buildings washed by the rain. Everything gleams. Everything has woken up once more. When you feel life is too still, Matlock, be your own storm, wake the sleeping possibilities all around you.'

I still dance and sing, knowing that after, life will
once again be gleaming.

*When life feels muffled and dulled, bring in some
sound. Wake your soul and see how much brighter
your world becomes!*



Matlock's Hawthorn Wand

Wand

Over the years, many folk have asked me about the choice of wood for my wand. Why Hawthorn?

Here's what happened. Many, many moon-turns ago, when I was first starting my majickal apprenticeship, Chatsworth, my master, took me deep into the heart of Wand Wood one spring morn'up and asked me to choose a tree. Not really knowing what to do, I pointed to the nearest one. At which point, he laughed, telling me to choose a tree that speaks to me, instead.

In my usual clottabussed way, and failing to understand the deeper significance, I replied that surely all of them could speak to me? Sighing, Chatsworth patiently led me through the woods, getting me to examine many trees, until I came upon a small hawthorn on a rocky outcrop. Don't get me wrong, she may have been short, but she looked at least a grillion moon-turns old, with the kindest smile and quite the wisest eyes; a relief, as frankly I found many of the trees in Wand Wood

quite twizzly. Her name was Sona and she asked me my name. We spoke for a long time, laughing as the spring breeze shook her branches and covered me in blossom.

Sona, I knew in my hare's heart, was my tree.

Next, under Chatsworth's careful supervision, I asked her if I could take a small twig to use as my very first wand. She nodded, proffering a branch. Ever since, I've always made time to visit Sona to catch up with all that's been happening in her part of the woods, in return telling her all the latest news and majickal goings on in the village. Often, we can talk for hours, barely noticing the time, but I always leave with happiness in my heart.

Over the years, I have learnt much about hawthorn. It is the tree of passion, of fertility and much majick. I often use its blossom, leaves and berries in my tinctures and potions. This ancient tree exudes happiness and joy, from clouds of creamy blossom in spring, to fiery red berries in the autumn.

To this very day, I still use hawthorn for my wands, always asking Sona politely whenever I need a new one, making sure never to take my saztaculous friend for granted. For of all the trees in Wand Wood, she is quite possibly my favourite - but that's probably a secret best kept between ourselves.

*Take care of your heart. Let the majickal hawthorn
show you the way. Feel her joy fill you and spread
that joy to others.*



The Lunar Shroom

Wonder

Saztacularous things happen at the time of the full moon. Majickal forces exert their influence, driving the tides and calling to every living creature, even dormant seeds and shrooms nestling deep underground.

And the same is true of Wand Wood, where the connection between governing forces above and the recipients below is never more marked than at the time of the full moon — as embodied by the saztacularous lunar-shroom.

To find one, simply venture out into the woods a week before the full moon, and there on the ground you'll see the white round beginnings of a sleeping lunar-shroom starting to poke through the soft earth, rising in readiness for what lies ahead. Over the next few nights, as the moon waxes to fullness, the lunar-shroom grows to reveal its familiar shape that perfectly mimics the moon above, until on the night itself, it finally wakes and opens its eyes to stare up in wonderment at its likeness until dawn, before once

again closing its eyes and sleepily disappearing into the forest floor until the next full moon, the whole majickal cycle repeating itself month after month.

All well and good, you may say. But whilst this is charming, what is the secret you promised? What can I learn from such a thing?

To begin, you need to understand things from the lunar-shroom's point of view. Spending most of its time asleep either underground or growing, when it finally opens its eyes, it naturally assumes that the full moon is forever there, always shining down from above. The lunar-shroom has no knowledge of days, only fully moonlit nights, as this is all it ever knows during its brief waking state.

Which brings us to the secret. All too often, we too can assume our superior knowledge - or what we assume to be wisdom - will be enough to convince others of our opinions. I know full well there is daylight, that the moon only waxes full every twenty-eight of them - but to even try to convince a lunar-shroom would be a clottabussed folly. What I may be aware of means nothing to the shroom and would only serve to confuse it.

So, the lunar-shroom teaches us the value of understanding others. The lunar-shroom does me no harm, indeed, the sight of it silently staring up into the twinkling-lid always makes me feel crumlush.

And I know that although our 'worlds' are very different, we are in that majickal moment intimately connected, no matter how fleeting the encounter. I have no desire to live like the shroom, missing daylight and the saztaculous variety of my life. Likewise, the shroom has no desire to live my life, either. It is content with what it already has; the perfection of a fully moonlit night. I may have knowledge, but it has only ever wonder. The secret is that both are as majickally important as each other.

We don't all need to have the same experience to find our place in this world, each of us has our own uniquely majickal part to play.

