

THE WITCHES OF WICKEN

by

Tony Leonard

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THE WITCHES OF WICKEN

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THE WITCHES OF WICKEN

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TIME: 1950

PLACE: The village of Wicken in Cambridgeshire.

SET: Rural scenes.

ACTION:

ACT 1:

Scene 1: Early afternoon.

Scene 2: Early evening.

Scene 3: Early afternoon next day.

ACT 2:

Scene 1: Late afternoon the next day.

Scene 2: Late evening.

Scene 3: Just before sunrise next day.

CHARACTERS:

DAISY: May Queen: (18yrs) Typist, slim, proud, snobbish and lively.

THOMAS: Her father: (60yrs) Tall, farmer, recluse, paranoid, superstitious.

PETER: Vicar: (25yrs) tall and slim, idealist, zealous, proud and charming.

NANCY: Housekeeper: (25yrs) well built, jealous, ambitious and violent.

JOAN: House maid: (18yrs) small, gossip, insecure, low self-esteem.

JOSH: Rabbit man: (60yrs) tall and slim, delusional, ambitious, naive.

BERT: His friend: (32yrs) labourer, well built, worldly, lusty, two faced, joker.

CLIVE: Rich Farmer: (62yrs) tall, ruthless, cruel, power mad, sophisticated.

ALICE: A seventeenth century ghost: Nancy's ancestor, ghastly.

WITCHES:

MAYPOLE DANCERS:

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Preface

The prologue begins with the witches celebrating Walpurgis night in Wicken church graveyard, listening to the presence of the Walpurgis knights' horses galloping and leading the Princes and Powers of the air in the thunder and lightning.

In act one on Mayday, a tired Nancy's standing at the maypole with her friend Joan and through her snooping, discovers she's a witch. Nancy's always been jealous of bubbly Daisy and finds out through Joan she's going out with the upper-class vicar Peter and she's devastated, as she also fancies him. After some skirmishes Daisy's unaware of the impending evil and during the maypole procession is seized and humiliated, having her golden locks cut off and crowned the May Queen. The Prince of Powers is heard in the thunder and the villagers believe Daisy's cursed.

Peter comes to her rescue and they arrive at her home and meet her father Thomas a recluse and paranoiac. After Peter leaves, she informs him what happened and learns she's under a generational curse. She listens as he pours out the truth that her mother was ritually murdered in a corn circle. This answers her questions why he made this place his garden and the shrine where he communicates with her dead mother.

Nancy turns up and tells her as the May Queen she's to be sacrificed at the summer solstice and if she should open her mouth, she'll put a death curse on her father.

She's full of anxiety and meets Peter on a picnic, after a while Nancy casts a love spell on the couple and catches Peter undoing her blouse. They're shocked when Nancy invites Peter to her cottage for her silence. After conflict Peter refuses and he can't face up to the slander and decides to leave Wicken, while Daisy faces the music. Later Clive the head of the witches turns up and is delighted to see the back of the vicar. He also orders her to kill her friend Joan as she talks too much.

In act two Nancy strangles Joan with a silk scarf and puts a rope around her neck and throws it over a branch to make it look like suicide. After the murder, Nancy's ghostly ancestor Alice appears who was hanged in the seventeenth century on Maid's head Green as a witch and seeks her revenge on the community and joins the witches.

In the subplot Josh the local rabbit man arrives in Low Drove with his down to earth friend Bert. Josh thinks the community owes him something as he supplied Wicken with rabbits during the war. He fancies himself as a prospective local councillor. After some comical exchanges, they eventually find Joan and cut her down. The local election proves to be a disaster for Josh receiving one vote, while Clive is elected on the council and he and Nancy and the witches torment Josh and he curses the rabbit population. Bert in the meantime hears about the scandal and befriends Daisy and attempts to rape her, Nancy intervenes claiming they only sacrifice virgins. Daisy returns to her father's place shattered and the witches turn up just before the morning sunrise. Peter turns up just in time to rescue Daisy from the altar and he rebukes the Princes and the Powers of darkness. The Walpurgis knights are heard galloping away. Clive and Nancy are left powerless and scarper. Daisy's delighted the Bishop of Ely has offered Peter a new parish in Sussex, on the condition that he weds Daisy.

Princes of the air: demons ruling over nations. Powers of the air: demons ruling over cities, towns and large rural areas. They also infiltrate political and religious institutions and work through human beings, Hitler being a prime example.

Cernunnos: The Green Man a Celtic nature god. Belenos: A Celtic sun god.

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Spinney Abbey: An Augustinian order, where three canons murdered a Prior. A farmhouse now stands on the ruins, just outside Wicken Village and is haunted.

Prologue

CLIVE: Hark the chiming midnight bell,
Summon the Prince of Power from hell,
I see him there in Devil's Hall,
Makes the thunder flashes fall,
I hear some goblins grovel and growl,
Curse those hounds of hell that howl.
My spirit at one with the Prince of Power,
There in hell this midnight hour,
Knights light up in the flashing storm;
Hearken to their battle horn.
I watch them mount their skeleton steeds,
Breathing out their brimstone breeze,
Wait there on unhallowed ground,
Hear the drawbridge lowered down.
I see the hundreds of Walpurgis knights
Ride into the starry heights,
Where the heavens flash and flame;
In a storm that brings no rain,
Wield their glowing swords and shields,
Reflect like fire in the Wicken fields.
I hear the riders' horses' hoofs,
There above those moonlit roofs,
Thunder flashes in Wicken Fen,
Awake the ancient spirits and men,
And blue flame from will of the wisps,
I hear them hiss at Walpurgis.
See those knights all gather round,
And wait to take the hallowed ground.

I guide the Prince and Power of the air,
Who's chosen a Wicken virgin so fair,
I see her presence brighten her way,
There in the middle of the day,
Walk across Maid's Head Green,
Her mincing steps so clearly seen;
Betray her heart so full of pride,
A sense of purity she cannot hide.
Her family curse she'll not escape;
Nor her fortune, nor her fate,
I'll offer her as a human sacrifice,
There in the summer solstice,
And ignite the power of ancient rites,
Raise those spirits on pagan sites.

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WITCHES: Before the cauldron glowing red hot,
We scrape our fingers inside the pot,
This powder dried from boiling broth,
We kindle in sparkling flames of wrath.
First, we add an adder's tongue;
Mix with bits of dragon's dung,
Sprinkle with some seasonal herbs,
Stir with blood from new born birds.
Toads once buried at Dragon's Green,
Their bones once moved and danced upstream,
Young bats blood that's burned to a crisp,
That we silvered in moon's eclipse.
We throw this powder high in the air;
See the spirits flash and flare,
Casting our witch's magic spells,
Arouse the demons that dwell in hell,
We invite these demons, fiends and beasts,
And greet them here at Wicken feast.

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ACT 1 SCENE 1 Early afternoon

NANCY and JOAN are standing on Wicken village green in their summer dresses near the maypole placed at stage centre.

- NANCY: (Yawns) The sun's shining, it's May day. (Yawns)
- JOAN: Yawning again Nancy, you sound as though you've spent a night on the tiles.
- NANCY: More than that Joan. I heard bones rattling in their graves when the Walpurgis Knights' shadows passed over in the moonlight.
- JOAN: I were fast asleep... thank goodness... Walpur... knights, what on earth were you doing in a graveyard?
- NANCY: (Looks around and whispers to JOAN) Walpurgis Night. (Sighs) Witches' night!
- JOAN: Funny you should say that Nancy, I bumped into Josh Martin he was telling me how scared stiff he were... wandering around in a fenland storm after dark. He saw will of the wisps with lanterns lighting up the marshes, ghosts of the dead groaning and ogres crawling out of the pits and -
- NANCY: (Cutting in) What an atmosphere...!
- JOAN: It were that alright. I'll... have you know lots of children had the most terrible nightmares all over Wicken. How can you stand there and rave about last night! (Pause) Well... say something!
- NANCY. Surely, even you must have guessed?
- JOAN: (Pause) You're... a witch (Steps backwards from NANCY)
- NANCY: (Yawns) At last the penny's dropped.
- JOAN: That black cloak in your wardrobe and those books on black magic. That witch's broom standing in the corner, that black cauldron in the inglenook-
- NANCY: (Cutting in) That's what you get for snooping.
- JOAN: (Shakes) Have you heard the latest about Daisy?
- NANCY: Stop your grass hopping and listen to me. If you so much as breathe a word about this so help me I'll...

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- JOAN: Alright...now I see why you're leaving the farm? (She fiddles with her handkerchief)
- NANCY: No, I've been offered more money.
- JOAN: You haven't told me where yet.
- NANCY: Clive Bradley's farm. Now that's enough, you know too much for your own good.
- JOAN: What... at Spinney Abbey, it's enough to give anybody the creeps. I've heard there's rattling chains in the cellar, gurgling sounds under the floorboards, you must have heard about the three monks who murdered the prior. What the devil's got into you?
- NANCY: (Laughs) You're right there and some of his fiends.
- JOAN: I don't feel too happy about-
- NANCY: Me being a witch?
- JOAN: No... I don't. (Stamps her feet)
- NANCY: (She points her finger at JOAN) I'll repeat, if you just breathe a single word, I'll put a curse of death on you, is that clear...?
- JOAN: (Shakes) Stop it...you're frightening me.... I'll have a word with the classy vicar, you see if I don't...!
- NANCY: (She grabs JOAN) Keep it shut or you'll be dead! (Pushes her away) Now what's this you're piping on about Daisy?
- JOAN: It's...it's about her and...shush... here she comes.
- NANCY: Look at Miss prim and proper, I've got some plans sorted out to take her down a peg or two.
- JOAN: (Whispers) What's that...?
- NANCY: Not now, I'll tell you later, just be nice to her.
- ENTER DAISY**
- DAISY: (Bouncy and smiling) Hello girls.
- JOAN: Hi Daisy.
- NANCY: It's a lovely day.

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- DAISY: (Affected) I feel so full of the joys of spring, the red and pink may blossom looks so beautiful adorning the hedgerows. The golden globes of buttercups will soon be glowing and lighting up the fresh green meadows. (Turns and looks in the audience) It looks as though the crowds are gathering.
- JOAN: (Whispers to NANCY and imitates DAISY) I'm so full of the joys...
- DAISY: (Turns sharply) Stop showing off.
- NANCY: (Trying to control her laughter) She's only having a bit of fun.
- DAISY: I wouldn't call it fun.
- NANCY: Don't forget our Daisy's a sensitive toffy nosed Ely high schoolgirl.
- DAISY: That... was years... and you've got some room to talk, you're not exactly a dimwit, reading all those weird and wonderful books. -
- NANCY: (Cutting in) Keep you bloody nose out of my business!
- JOAN: (Finger to lips) Hush... calm down, people are watching.
- DAISY: Good point, it looks as though the whole of Wicken's turned out. (Looks around) Where... have the other maypole dancers got to?
- NANCY: Having a booze up in the Maid's Head.
- DAISY: (Shouts) What! Let's hope they'll be sober enough to dance.
- NANCY: They're celebrating May Day.
- DAISY: That may be so but don't you think it's about time they showed up.
- NANCY: Alright, go and have a word with them.
- DAISY: You know I don't go into pubs.
- NANCY: You're far too straitlaced and stuck up, (Turns to JOAN) isn't that so Joan?
- JOAN: She needs to let her hair down.
- NANCY: (Grabs JOAN'S arm) Some of us keep up with the times. Come on Joan, a glass of ale will go down just nicely.

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EXIT NANCY AND JOAN

DAISY: (Speaks to herself) Good riddance, she's been such a thorn in my flesh for years; I wonder what she'd think if she knew about Peter. (She doesn't see PETER approaching)

ENTER PETER

PETER: Hello Daisy. (Touches her on the shoulder and startles her) Sorry I didn't mean to startle you.

DAISY: Peter, it's so good to see you... sorry I was miles away.

PETER: Look...I'm not in total agreement with-

DAISY: (Cutting in) What's the matter?

PETER: I don't go along wholeheartedly with Maypole dancing it's got pagan origins.

DAISY: Come...most people think it's just a bit of harmless fun. I look upon it more as a tradition.

PETER: (Uneasy) Sorry it's rather difficult for us clergymen, most of the villagers have turned out, but I must say these customs aren't compatible with Christianity.

DAISY: Sorry I can't get out of it at this stage.

PETER: Of course not. (Nervous cough and dithers) What I meant to say how much I enjoyed our walk yesterday afternoon through the flowery meadows.

DAISY: And me...

PETER: Tuesday's my day off; I wondered if you'd care to join me in a picnic tomorrow afternoon?

DAISY: Sounds a wonderful idea.

PETER: I shall look forward to it.

ENTER NANCY AND JOAN

(They drink beer from their glasses and observe PETER and DAISY at stage right)

JOAN: (Drains her glass and puts it down) That were nice. Daisy hasn't wasted any time. (NANCY remains silent) They've been going together for a couple of weeks now; it could be longer. Are.... you alright?

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- NANCY: (Drains her glass and puts it down in temper) No... I'm not alright... that bitch has really got my goat this time. Why the hell didn't you tell me about this before?
- JOAN: (Messes about with her handkerchief) Steady on it's... not my fault; I only found out yesterday, I tried to tell you earlier but you jumped down my throat.
- NANCY: And rightly so, I'm not exactly having a wonderful day.
- JOAN: I didn't know you were sweet on the vicar, and you go to church, I'm confused, you said you're a witch.
- NANCY: Keep your voice down, we witches go to learn the bible and create confusion in the church.
- JOAN: Are you sure... it's got nothing to do with the vicar...?
- NANCY: (Smirks) I'll have him defrocked in more ways than one. (They laugh out loud and DAISY overhears)
- DAISY: You've had too much to drink...
- NANCY: Hypocrite... you drink communion wine.
- PETER: How dare you there's a world of difference between boozing and drinking communion wine that represents the blood of Christ.
- NANCY: (Shakes and stumbles) I... I...feel... (Peter steadies and releases her) Thanks...
- PETER: Anything you'd like to tell me?
- NANCY: (Yawns) No, I'll be fine, I've just been overdoing things this past week.
- DAISY: Would you go and round up dancers Joan.
- JOAN: (Looks at NANCY) Shall I, or shan't I?
- DAISY: Haven't you got a mind of your own? (Pause) I'll go and do it myself. (Goes to stage left)
- EXIT DAISY**
- PETER: I think I ought to be going
- NANCY: There's no rush, are you enjoying your new parish? (Rubs her hand up and down the maypole)

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PETER: (Coughs and ill at ease) Yes, so far, I think I preached a pretty good sermon last night. I didn't see you at Evensong.

NANCY: (Takes her hand off the maypole and looks away) No, as I've said before I've been rather busy.

PETER: Busy the operative word, I visited a couple of families in Wicken last night they were terrified... nightmares apparently.

NANCY: Word gets around. Wicken Fen's all that remains of old East Anglia and we get haunting from time to time. Evil spirits still roam around Spinney Abbey. There are lots of ghosts about when the fen fog's looming around.

PETER: I understand that, did you experience anything unusual last night?

NANCY: No... I stayed at home, isn't that so?

JOAN: If you... we had a great evening together.

PETER: Right, I'm off, enjoy your maypole dancing.

NANCY: Bye...!

EXIT PETER

JOAN: That didn't go very well.

NANCY: (Sighs) No it didn't, you nearly let your tongue runaway with you.

JOAN: It's not my fault that he's on to you.

NANCY: I doubt it, he's fishing

JOAN: I'm not so sure, why were you so upset when he mentioned the blood-

NANCY: (Cutting in) Keep your big mouth shut, okay.

JOAN: Alright...! keep your blouse on...

NANCY: I think he believed me about my whereabouts last night.

JOAN: He might, but one thing's for sure you can forget about him.

NANCY: Don't you believe it, where there's a will there's a way.

The MAYPOLE DANCERS are
heard at stage right.

JOAN: Sometimes you make me shudder...!