



## Beltane in Lockdown

Circling the Maypole in Our Plague Year

by Levannah Morgan

2020 IS CERTAINLY the weirdest Beltane I have experienced in forty years, and I expect it is for everyone else, too. I have to say that living in lockdown and self-isolating in a tiny village in East Devon with a garden and plenty of deserted rural foot-

paths has not caused me much hardship. We are all looking out for each other here; kindly neighbours shopping for those of us who can't do the six-mile journey to the nearest shop, and all of us borrowing, lending, and swapping whatever is needed.

Compared to fellow witches and pagans in cities with no access to outdoor space, I feel very privileged. Nature is recovering from human abuse, for a while at least. How clean the air feels, how quiet it is without traffic and aircraft. At dusk, bats flit over the stream and the otters seem bolder than usual. I am woken every morning by the dawn chorus. All in all, I have been feeling very lucky.

Then at Beltane, it really did hit me. For those of us down here in the West, in the bottom left hand corner, Beltane—or May Day as most of us still prefer to call it in our old-fashioned way—is probably the biggest day of the year. It's the day when almost everyone in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset turns pagan for the day, when people go out in the streets to dance and sing and a kind of wild, infectious collective joy takes over. During the day, we are likely to be found joining in with one of the Obby Oss or maypole customs, or some other form of dancing and carousing. Then, as the sun sets, the fires are lit in gardens and woods and moors, and on hill-tops and we make our circles and celebrate the marriage of goddess and god. All of it is wild, erotic, and glorious. It's our day and everyone knows it. You know how it works. We are a necessary part of the process. We are part of it, not separate. The gods need us

## FIDDLER'S GREEN



to celebrate their rites and we must dance and sing and bring in the May. That is how it works. That is what we are for. But not this year. We are not allowed out; not together at least.

In a magical reverie, my mind ranges back over many May Days. Of that wild, unstoppable surge of energy when the Red Oss bursts out of the stable in the Red Lion for the first time and longing and joy rush together and the press of the crowd and the thump of the drums knock the breath from the body. Of bathing the face in cold dew at sunrise. Of hedgerows weighed down with hawthorn blossom like snow. Of the endless miles of bluebell woods on the journey through North Cornwall. Of sitting there, truly entranced, amongst uncountable millions of bluebells. Is it their colour or their smell that brings hallucinations? Both, and visions of faerie. Of the cold, damp night on the hilltop when mist came up from the woods below and sent us spinning into the spirit world. Of a baby, now a beautiful young

woman, conceived with the aid of magic when her mother brushed the skirts of the Oss. Of dancing in the shallows of the icy sea. Of the west rose window at Exeter Cathedral, a flaming ruby pentagram lit by the setting sun. Of the pungent tang of wild garlic. Of a young roebuck who ran right across our path. Of a policeman dancing, wreathed in primroses and bluebells. Of a slow journey home that felt like a royal progress through woodlands and fields where the unfurling leaves and the blossom seemed to be just for us. Of voting in an election where everything changed and everything stayed the same. Of a song that can only be sung on that day and in that place. Unite and unite and let us all unite. Of those gone before who are always there with us and those yet to be born. Of cold, clear well water. Of the great Oss dying and the crowd weeping; a real death and a terrible mourning then a mad leap back into life and joy. It seemed like hours but was only seconds and time had stopped working anyway.

Of drumbeats and heartbeats and the spaces between them. Of leaping the fire and turning to see a big brock badger keeping watch in the west: bless you Tanglefoot. Of garlands thrown onto the sea. Of the sun setting behind us at Wistman's Wood. Of a handfasting at first light on the cliffs, surrounded by unseen spirit hosts. Of the brimming excitement of a day that feels like high tide all the time.

This year the streets of Padstow and Minehead and Helston are silent. The Obby Osses will not leap forth amongst us and dance. The Flora Day procession will not weave its stately way through the town. Our towns will not be garlanded with branches from the greenwoods, but we must still bring in the May, together alone. It's up to us. So with all the unseen hosts of those who have danced before you and will dance after you around you, get up and dance, and bring in the May. We are with you. We are all with you and you are all with us. It's time to dance together in spirit as we always have and always will.

•

*Friends that in the Circle stand  
Heart to heart and hand to hand  
Bringing Beltane to the land  
Let the Sleeper Wake!*

•

*Levannah Morgan  
May Day 2020*