Secrets of the WITCH

To all the women in our lives, and to our wonderful editor Chloé

J. L. & E. W.

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Secrets of the WITCH

AN INITIATION INTO OUR HISTORY AND WISDOM



WIDE EYED EDITIONS

Dear sister,

If this book has found its way into your possession, then it means it is time for you to begin your apprenticeship. No doubt you've already sensed some of your powers; this manual will help you to develop them, for without knowledge, power is nothing. These pages will explain all you need to know about us and what went before us.

History has rarely been kind to witches. Although there are stories of good fairies, 'white' magic and benevolent and protective forces, we are almost always associated with 'black' or evil magic and a desire to cause harm. Many people believe witches are old women with hooked noses and pointed hats. They believe we concoct horrible potions in cauldrons to curse people whom we are jealous of. Some say that we ride broomsticks by moonlight and worship the devil! They would have you believe that we live on the edge of society, in huts in the depths of the forest, and if we appear young or beautiful it is only a spell to hide our true selves.

But this is not our story. The time has come to retell and reclaim our identity. Are you ready to discover who we really are?



Witches AND FOLKLORE around the world



Baba Yaga

Eastern Europe and Russia

In Slavic mythology, Baba Yaga is an old woman with wild hair who guards the entrance to hell. It is said that her mouth can stretch from the ground to the gates of hell and that she uses it to devour travellers who pass her. Famed for her great wisdom and knowledge, she uses them to help those whom she believes to be worthy and pure. She lives deep in the forest in a wooden house that stands on chicken legs. The gate that surrounds her house is made from the bones of the dead.

The Befana

Italy

The Befana is often unkindly described as a badly dressed old woman who is said to fly around on a broomstick. This might make her sound like a traditional storybook witch, but, according to Italian folklore, she is kind: at Christmas, she brings gifts to good children and charcoal to naughty ones. This legend dates back to ancient Rome and when Italy became Catholic it was rewritten by the Church. The Catholic version says Befana refused to help the Three Kings find the baby Jesus. She later regretted her decision and tried to make up for it by giving out gifts to sleeping children in the hope that one of them might be Jesus.



Yama-Uba
Japan



IN JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY, Yama-Uba is a witch of the mountains. She is an old woman with long white hair who dresses in a distinctive, dishevelled red kimono. She also has the power to change her appearance and trick her victims. It is said that her mouth is as wide as her head, and that her hair can transform into snakes. She lives in the depths of the forest and if a stray traveller crosses her path, she will eat them.

'White' magic versus 'black' magic:
A QUESTION OF INTENTION

FOR CENTURIES, people have believed in two types of magic: 'white' and 'black'. Traditionally, 'white' magic has been seen as the magic of good – a protective and positive natural magic. One form of 'white' magic is Wicca: a modern form of magic founded on the principle that it is immoral to direct magic at a person who is not aware of it. It is forbidden to hurt others. If a Wiccan does hurt another, they are punished by the 'law of the triple return', which means they themself will be hurt three times as badly. In contrast, people have believed that 'black' magic is evil, dangerous and bad. It relies on summoning and invoking demons and other evil spirits. However, the distinction between 'white' and 'black' magic is inaccurate. Magic is magic and the only difference lies within our intentions and how we choose to use it.





Nature as a Magical FORCE

IN ANCIENT TIMES, religions tended to have many gods. Each god would represent a different force of nature, both good and bad. In ancient Greece, some women were priestesses and oracles who had a special ability to connect with the divine realm and decode the signs sent by the gods on mount Olympus. But why did these oracles tend to be women? Women were seen to be more closely tied to the Earth and nature, because they gave birth and were the creators of life. In ancient times, it was believed that this special connection to the course of life gave women the power to read the signs in nature and understand the power of plants, crystals and the planets...

The MOON

THE MOON is very important to us witches. In Greek mythology, the goddesses Hecate, Artemis and Selene are all associated with the moon. In contrast, Artemis' male twin, Apollo, is the sun god.

Hecate was the goddess of witchcraft and magic. She reigned over the Earth and the underworld, presiding over each and every spell that was cast.

As well as being the moon goddess, Artemis was the goddess of hunting. During the Middle Ages, people started to call Artemis a 'witch' too.

In ancient Greece, a group of witches from a town called Thessaly became notorious. People said they had the power to pull the moon down from the sky, brew dangerous potions and read the future. This tale continued into ancient Rome, where stories told of a Thessalian witch called Erichtho, who managed to bring a dead soldier back to life.

