Buckle up, folks. This issue of Pooka Pages - our Yule gift to you - is the biggest one since the magazine started over 15 years ago!

It all started with a Pooka story about "Brothers" that took on a life of its own and refused to be shortened ... even to accommodate the smaller attention spans of our youngest readers. So, I set it aside and wrote another, shorter story for the issue.

The wonderful members of our Facebook group, 'Pooka's Circle', however, wanted the longer story to be also included in the issue. They reminded me that we also have many older kids among our readers. And, for the littler ones, they suggested I break it into chapters and add coloring pages. Our mini-witches could color while their grownups read to them.

I loved the idea, but simply didn’t have the time. Our coloring page artist, Liliane Grenier, came to the rescue! I think you’ll love the pages she created to go with the story. She perfectly captured the story I was trying to tell ... and her "Elsie" is spot on!

Then, a wonderful Yule poem began popping up all over Facebook. This poem was written about 15 years ago for Pooka Pages. The author, C.C. Williford, and I actually started this magazine together! So, when I asked her if I could include it in this issue, she immediately agreed.

However, this marvelous poem deserved an equally marvelous illustration...and again I thought of Liliane and her beautiful watercolors. Even as a busy mother during the Yule season with a lapful of Etsy commissions, Liliane came through for you brilliantly! The Crone she painted for the poem is perfect... both ancient and childlike, earthy and ethereal.

I’m thrilled to tell you that C.C. and Liliane are now discussing turning the poem into a Yule book that (in my opinion) is destined to become a Yule Classic on the shelves of Pagan Families everywhere. I think, after you read it and see Liliane’s initial illustration in this issue, that you’ll agree. Meanwhile, you can help! Let them know, on our Pooka's Team Page and in "Pooka's Circle" (both on Facebook) how much you’d love to have this book as part of your family's Yule traditions. Your responses may very well tip their decision!

Meanwhile, we have lots in this issue of the fun things you’ve come to expect. Fiona Tinker has an extra exciting Letter from Scotland. Meg, the cat, and Attila the Rabbit, really get themselves into trouble this Yule! MommaWitch Carmen is covering the Elements in her Witchling’s Lessons and Crafty Amber has two projects - one for younger kids and another for our older ones. Fun for everyone!

And so, it’s a big issue filled with wonderful gifts and delights. A very Merry and Magical Yule, everyone!

Lora, Pooka (Grimalkin) and the Team
Yule 2018
A Birthday Party for the Sun!

Maybe you remember that at dinnertime during the summer it was still light out - but now when you eat it’s dark. It’s not that dinner’s being served later. It’s that, since Summer Solstice, the days have been getting shorter and the nights have been getting longer. But that’s about to change! At Yule, the sun is “born” once more. It's his birthday and everyone celebrates! Starting with Yule, the baby sun gets a little bit stronger and stays in the sky a little bit longer each day.

In this Issue:

- Storybook Chair - Feathers
- Coloring Page by Liliane Grenier
- Elsie's Kitchen
- Elsie's Herb Garden - Cinnamon
- Little Book of Shadows
- A Letter from Scotland by Fiona Tinker
- Coloring Page by Liliane Grenier
- The Path of the Witchling by Momma Witch Carmen
- WitchCrafts by Amber
- Pooka's Poetry Corner - Twas the Night Before Yuletide by C.C. Williford,
  Illustrations by Liliane Grenier
- Wee Witchling's Read-Along
- Bonus Story: "Brothers!" illustrated by Liliane Grenier
Pooka basked in the warmth of the hearth as Elsie tidied up the parlor. As he had nothing else to do, he watched her lazily and thought about taking a nap. (It occurred to him that he could make points with his witch at the same time by pretending to meditate!) Elsie bent next to Edgar's perch and picked a black feather up from the floor. Pooka's head, which had been drooping, suddenly shot up.

"Hey! That's Edgar's!"

Elsie tucked the feather in her apron pocket and looked at the cat mildly. "He's done with it," she said.

"How do you know?" argued Pooka. "Maybe he was saving it for later!"

From his perch, the crow cawed in laughter and the little witch smiled. Crossing the room, she sat on the hearth next him.

"Remember when you found out I was saving your whiskers? And I explained that, when a new whisker is growing in, it pushes the old whisker out and it falls to the ground without you even noticing it's gone?"

Pooka did remember and Elsie went on: "It's the same with Edgar's feathers. When a new one is coming in, it pushes the old feather out. So Edgar really doesn't need it any more."

The cat thought about this and then boasted, "Yeah, but you save my whiskers because they're magical. What kind of magic could a crow's feathers have?"

"Crows are very magical birds," the witch told him. "For one thing, they're considered the Messengers between our world and the Other World. When writing in my Grimoire, I use a quill made from a crow feather. I also use a crow feather fan when using sacred smoke to cleanse a room of unwelcome spirits. There are lots of uses for them."

Pooka looked up at the large crow perched in the corner of the parlor. "Well, okay, I guess," he said slowly. "As long as Edgar doesn't mind."

Edgar fluffed his feathers and shook his head. "Nope! All good," he cawed.

Pooka had forgotten all about the conversation a few weeks later when Yule morning arrived. After watching the new sun rise from a hilltop in the forest, the cat, the witch and the crow all returned to the cottage. Elsie warmed up a pitcher of eggnog and slid a pan of fresh cinnamon rolls into the oven to bake. They then gathered around the Yule tree in the parlor to open their presents.

"A catnip mouse!" cried a delighted Pooka and pretended to be surprised.

The girl laughed. "Silly. You know you get one every year!"

"Bauble! Sparkly!" cawed Edgar holding a strand of glass beads and little bells in his beak. He flew back to his perch where he could play with it.
Pooka was already opening another present. As the wrapping came away, he looked up and asked, "What's this?"

It appeared to be a bundle of long, black crow feathers attached to a little ball that was covered in smaller feathers.

"A toy," said Elsie proudly. "I made it for you!"

"I can play with it?" asked Pooka.

The girl grinned.

The cat gave the ball and experimental bat with his paw. It skittered in a wobbly, zigzag fashion across the floor. Pooka leaped up and chased it. He batted it again and it might have gone even farther this time, but Pooka caught it before it had stopped.

Elsie laughed and said she was going to go check on the cinnamon rolls. Pooka scarcely heard her. The little cat was now engaged in an all out mock battle against the Terrible Fearsome Feathered Ball.

His claw snagged a feather and it flew in the air. "You won't escape me!" cried the cat leaping after it. This was the most fun he'd ever had without catnip!

Over and over the ball flew upward, trying to get away. Each time, the Powerful Pooka was too quick for it. The ball finally fled across the room, cowering next to Elsie's desk.

No Mercy! Pooka was on it in an instant, biting and clawing with his hind legs. Suddenly, the bundle of feathers came loose and floated gently around the room.

Pooka sat up, perplexed. What happened?

He realized he'd accidentally broken his new toy... and just when they were having such fun! What to do?

Luckily, at that moment, Elsie came back in the room bearing a plate of cinnamon rolls. She looked at the feathers scattered around the parlor and then at the cat who was studying Edgar with a speculative eye.

"Pooka, don't even THINK about it!" growled the witch.
The Treats Tree

When Elsie was very little, she and Granny Witch had a Yule tradition. In the parlor, of course, would be the big beautiful tree decorated with lights and all the wonderful ornaments saved from year to year.

But, in Granny's dining room, would be a second, smaller tree perched on the sideboard. This was, what Elsie called, "the Treats Tree" and all the ornaments on it were made of yummy things to eat.

Besides fluffy garlands of popcorn, there were gingerbread men, "stained-glass" cookies, candy canes and colorful, sugar-frosted gumdrops hanging from the branches.

Elsie and her young friends were each allowed one treat per day...and it took them forever to pick out which one they wanted.

Perhaps, this year, you and your grownup might like to make a Treats Tree?

Stained Glass Cookies... are easy and fun to make. They're a delicious combination of cookie and candy and make beautiful decorations for your tree, especially with the light shining through them.

You will need:

- Your favorite rolled cookie dough (Granny used her sugar cookie recipe with some peppermint extract added to it)
- A few rolls of assorted flavor Lifesaver candies
- A larger cookie cutter and a smaller one (You can even just use two different sized drinking glasses)
- A drinking straw and some thin ribbon (if you want to hang them on your tree).

1. Sort your candies into plastic sandwich bags according to color. Then, use a hammer or something to smash them up into little bitty bits.

2. Roll out your cookie dough and cut out your cookies using the larger cutter. Place them on a cookie sheet that's been lined with either parchment or aluminum foil. Then use the smaller cutter to cut and remove the dough from the centers of each cookie. (You need to leave at least a 1/2 inch rim of cookie dough all the way around the edges.)
3. Once you've removed the dough from the center, fill the empty space completely with some of your crushed candy. Fill it nicely, edge to edge, but don't make a big old mound of candy bits. If you do then, when it melts, it will run over the top of your cookie and turn out Not Very Pretty.

If you're going to hang them on a tree later, use the straw to poke a hole in the top of your cookie.

4. Now, bake them in a 350 degree oven for 5 - 9 minutes. They'll take a little less time than regular cookies. The candy will melt together like glass in the hole in the center.

When they're done, let them cool completely before removing them from the cookie sheet. Otherwise, they'll fall apart and the melted candy might burn your little fingers.

Afterward, you can decorate the cookie part with some frosting.

Happy Birthday

On Jan 25, Kendall will be dancing her way into her 7th year. Hayley would really like to get a pet dinosaur for her 8th birthday on Dec 13. Tessa is a great entertainer, so her 11th birthday on Dec 19 should be lots of fun!

On Jan 12, Angelo will be 5. (Pooka wonders if Thistle the Fairy knows about Thistle the Cat?)

There will be lots of hot coco for Persephone on Jan 20 when she turns 9. Aerynn will probably be concocting potions in the kitchen on Jan 27 when she turns 3.

On Jan 3, Dana will be 8. Her kitty, Banner, will be there to help her celebrate!

Killian will be 8 on Dec 25. In Roman mythology, this was also the birthday of Mithra, "the Unconquered Sun" - which is maybe why Killian likes starwars and minecraft so much.

On Jan 7, Caelan will be 8 years old. Pooka hopes she gets lots of gems and feathers for her birthday.

And he also hopes that Kaiden's 8th birthday, Dec. 17, is filled with magic and balloons!

Aidyn will be 9 on Jan. 17 and, on Jan 26, Fiona turns 8 years old. Jade, who loves to create things, will be celebrating her 9th birthday on Dec. 23.

There are a bunch of birthdays in one family beginning when Evee turns 2 on New Year's Eve followed by Crais who'll be 5 on Jan 8 and Brinkley who'll be celebrating her 11th birthday on Jan 29. Evee will be dressing up to ride on Crais's train while Brinkley writes a story about their fashion/rail adventure!

Lucy will be 12 on Jan 13 and another Lucy will be turning 12 also on Jan 2. (Pooka says to tell Lucy he's sorry he didn't get to wish her brother happy birthday in our last issue, but he hopes it was a really great one.)

Sweet, silly Aaron turns 6 on Jan 21. Mr. Beane will be joining Belle in celebrating her 6th birthday on Dec 27. (Pooka would love to see a picture she's drawn of Mr. Beane!)
Imagine that every holiday had a particular fragrance. Maybe Beltain smells like roses. Pooka thinks Summer Solstice would smell like lemons and Elsie says Mabon smells like apples. So what would Yule smell like? Maybe pine trees? Yes...but what else? Cinnamon!

During the Yule Season, even supermarkets carry cinnamon scented pine cones to help your house smell like the holiday.

Perhaps because cinnamon is such a common spice in the kitchen, most grownups never think of this as a medicinal herb. But it is...and a powerful one at that!

The next time you fall off your skateboard, horse or bike, sprinkle a bit of cinnamon on your scrapes and cuts (after washing them, of course!) It will kill the germs and bacteria that cause infection and also help your boofoo to heal faster by repairing the skin cell damage. If the dentist isn't your favorite person, a mouthwash made with cinnamon helps to both treat and prevent tooth cavities. It also makes your breath smell really good.

If you know someone (like maybe a grandparent) who has diabetes, tell them you read that cinnamon was really good for this. As little as 1/2 tsp a day sprinkled on a piece of toast has been shown to be effective....and really yummy too!

Cinnamon also helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol - things YOU don't have to worry about right now, but maybe your grownup does. Maybe you could share that information with them because you love them and want them to stay healthy, right?

Elsie uses cinnamon a lot in her baking, magic and herbal remedies, but she doesn't grow it in her garden. Cinnamon comes from the bark of a tree that's only found in a few countries and there are 2 different kinds.
One is Cassia, which is common in grocery stores and fine for baking, incense, potpourris and even scraped knees. But, if you're using cinnamon as an "inside your body" medicine, then the more expensive Ceylon variety is what you want. The Cassia type won't help nearly as much and can actually, taken in large quantities, be a bit rough on your kidneys. (We like our kidneys!)

Magically, Cinnamon is awesome. It's an herb that's said to attract money, success and good luck. Some traditions believe it also brings love and friendship. You'll find it in recipes and formulas for all of these things.
But Elsie told Pooka a Big Secret: Cinnamon is actually more of a "focusing" herb and a "catalyst". That means it's a "Boss" ingredient. It makes any herbs you combine it with wake up, get busy and concentrate on the job they need to do. So, if you're doing a spell to help your grownup find the money for an unexpected expense, you could combine it with herbs like basil (for money) and chamomile (for luck and success.) If you've recently moved and need to make new friends, you could add it to yellow rose petals (for friendship) and orange peel (to attract them.) This common kitchen spice is actually pretty amazing!

Happy Birthday!

Harley is turning 6 on Jan 16. Noelia will be 16 on Dec. 25 and her brother Mannix turned 12 on Dec. 11. On Jan 18, we're hoping Gaia has an extra sparkly 8th birthday. Ivy Ceridwen will be 5 on Jan 4 and Pooka hopes she slows down long enough to celebrate the day! Nickolas was born on an extra Special Day - the Winter Solstice AND a lunar eclipse. Pooka hopes his 8th birthday is every bit as magical. Eoghan's second birthday is Jan 18 and he has a bit of extra celebrating to do this year. Stay healthy and whole, Eoghan! You still have a lot of growing to do...
Our little artist, Ashlynn will be 5 on Jan 12 and, on Dec 28, Jeremiah will turn 10. Maybe he'll get enough legos for his birthday to build an entire robot. On Dec 21, Solstice Child Lillian will be 7 and, on Jan 21, Arianna turns 6. Both are big readers so hopefully they'll get some really great books for their birthdays! Morgan has red hair just like Elsie! On Jan 9, she'll be celebrating her 11th birthday with her very own familiar, Kwazii. Triana turns 8 on Dec. 23. On Dec. 28, artistic Danika will be 9 and, on Dec 21, the Winter Solstice, Soren will turn 3. Happy birthday, kids!
Pooka had spent the whole morning chasing Thistle the Fairy over the snow banks and around the bare branched trees in Elsie's garden. Sides heaving, the little cat finally told the fairy: "You win!" and staggered up the steps into the cottage.

The wonderful fragrance of cinnamon filled his nose. Elsie must be baking! Forgetting how tired he was, Pooka trotted eagerly toward the kitchen...but the oven was barely warm and the kitchen was empty. He raised his nose, sniffed the air and followed the scent to Elsie's Herb Room.

He found the witch at her work table. A green candle burned in a brass holder and, from the copper incense bowl next to it, smoke fragrant with basil, sage, patchouli and cinnamon filled the little room.

Her hands were coated with wet clay as her fingers carefully formed and smoothed a shape like a bowl.

"Where are the cookies?" asked Pooka. He didn't see any.

"What cookies?" muttered Elsie. She seemed to be focused on playing with her gooey clay.

"Never mind." said Pooka. "What'cha doing?"

"Making a Money Bowl," Elsie told him. "Now Shhh! I'm concentrating."

Pooka jumped onto the table and peered at the form his witch was molding.

"Not to be critical but it looks a bit lopsided to me," he told her.

"It doesn't have to be perfect," Elsie said. She carefully attached little clay balls at the bottom.

"Those could be bigger," suggested Pooka.

"They're fine!" growled Elsie as she attached the last one.

Pooka's tail twitched a bit. He didn't appreciate her cranky attitude toward his helpful remarks. However, being a cat of magnanimous spirit, he decided to overlook his witch's shortcomings.

"So, what's this money bowl supposed to do?" he asked.

Elsie, who until now, had been hunched over the table, took a deep breath, straitened up and stepped back.

"Business has been a bit slow lately and with Yule approaching, a little extra money would really help," she told him. "Now, hush! Please?"

Ever agreeable, Pooka buttoned his whiskers and sat back to watch his witch at work. She held her palms over the bowl she'd made, channeling her magical energy into it.

"Copper, Silver, Gold and Green,
From sources known and those unseen,
All now flow into this bowl
To meet our needs and keep us whole."
As he watched, Elsie then placed a dollar bill, a penny, a nickel and a quarter into the bowl to "start the magic cooking."
"You add 4 denominations of money," she explained to Pooka. "Four is a magical building block number. It makes the spell and the money grow."
Pooka nodded wisely in agreement and pretended that he already knew that. Suddenly, there was a knock on the front door and an elderly voice was heard.
"Elsie? Are you home, dear? I need some of your lovely rose bath soap! And maybe a jar of that rheumatism ointment?"
The little witch grinned and winked at her cat. "See? It's working already!"

To Make a Money Bowl

On the night of the new moon, combine the kind of clay that dries in an oven with some cinnamon, dried basil and a money bill cut into teeny-tiny pieces. Form the clay into a bowl. Carve money runes and symbols on the outside. Attach balls for "legs". Then dry your bowl in the oven according to the instructions on the package. After it's dry, brush the inside of the bowl with glue and sprinkle it with gold glitter to attract "riches".

On each new moon, "feed" the spell with a silver or copper coin added to the bowl. If a financial emergency arises, write the amount needed on a piece of paper and place it in the bowl along with a few coins of "good faith". When the bowl is eventually full, take the coins and bury them, returning them back to the Earth.
A Letter from Scotland

Dear Little Witches,

There was a lot of hustle and bustle in the Mound of the Sidhe, the fairy mound shared in turn by the fairy courts of summer and winter. Attila the Bun and Meg the cat with half a tail sat in companionable silence – and at a safe distance – watching with much interest. They were particularly intrigued by the growing pile of muddled belongings thrown out of the door and into a messy heap in front of them.

“Well,” said Attila, “the Unseelie Court are not exactly the tidiest of folk, are they?”

“Nope,” agreed Meg. “And to think how neat and clean Angus, Bride and the Seelie Court left it for them at Samhain.”

“Indeed!” agreed Attila.

They both resumed their watching duties. Attila in particular was most observant. He’d always been a very clever rabbit but since he’d moved to live in the Otherworld all the time, he’d become even more brainy. However, this was something completely new and he had no idea what it was all about. His little nose twitched at the mystery. In fact, it twitched so much it led the rest of him to the pile of things. Meg followed, his stumpy tail on high alert, as if it thought it was some kind of early warning system of trouble on the way. Not that Meg would have taken any notice if it were. Meg quite liked trouble – it was interesting.

Attila sniffed. Meg patted. Neither had a clue what this stuff was or what it was for. Attila had a chew. He was still none the wiser.

Suddenly a screech ripped through the air and a voice roared: “YOU TWO AGAIN!”

Attila dove for cover as The Old Woman of Winter’s owl swooped at him. Meg’s back arched and he cursed in cat with the fright he got. Both animals looked like soft, furry snowballs; such was their fear of The Cailleach that their fur stood on end. They looked up into her blue face – and darted behind her, straight in to the mound, desperate to find a hiding place.

“Oh leave them,” they heard The Cailleach say, “they’re always hanging around here, getting under foot and in the way. We have other things to attend to now.”

Neither Meg nor Attila felt brave enough to come out, even after hearing this, so they stayed hidden. And whilst they were hidden, their natural nosiness came back – they watched what was going on.

The Cailleach sang and the sky darkened. The Cailleach whistled and the north wind came, blowing its icy blast into every nook and cranny it could reach. The Cailleach took a hammer
and banged the ground hard with it. Ice crept over the land and icicles glittered from the branches of the trees. The Cailleach softly crooned and the snows came, covering everything in white flurries. The wind howled, the sky answered with thunder and lightning flashed in angry bursts. The Cailleach was the mother of winter.

Attila the Bun and Meg the Cat looked like even bigger snowballs. Terrified, they cuddled in to each other.

“That’s one scary wummin,” hissed Meg.

“Yup,” agreed Attila.

The Cailleach began to dance and chant and as she did, the strange, unknown things on the ground were swept up into a swirling, twirling mess of a tornado. With a shout that almost split the sky, The Cailleach yelled: “Let the Wild Hunt ride!” She flew up into the air, followed by the Unseelie Court and other beings, all shouting and making as much noise as they possibly could, loud enough to be heard over the screaming wind and the banging thunder.

“Run!” yelled Meg, but Attila didn’t need to be told. He was already deep in the mound and halfway up a tunnel before Meg even got to the exclamation mark. Meg followed at a rate of knots an Olympic runner would be hard pressed to beat. They did not stop running for quite some time.

They only stopped running when they realised they were out of the tunnel and facing a wall of swirling, thick mist.

“Where are we now?” squeaked Attila the Bun, very much afraid.

“I don’t know!” squealed Meg, whilst his half a tail quivered and shivered, signalling danger and ignored by both animals.

Two little faces and four worried eyes peered into the smir. “Nothing else for it,” said Attila, trying to be brave. He hopped into the mist.

“Not so fast!” hissed Meg, as he leapt after him. Then he added, “I smell fish.”

“Don’t be so daft!” said Attila, feeling much better now that Meg was back to his silly self. “We’ve only just come out of the other side of the mound. There’s not a river that side, so no fish.”

“Oh yeah?” queried Meg. “I smell fish, I’m telling you.”

Just then, Attila stood on something wet and slimy. “Eeeek!” he squeaked, as he pulled a long strand of seaweed from his paws.

“Told you,” said Meg. “Fish.”

Attila did not like this one bit. It seemed to him that time and space was all muddled up. He knew the mound was a place of magic – was that magic so strong its tunnels would take them somewhere else other than behind the house of the Sidhe?

Now Attila the Bun had become quite used to being the clever one in his friendship with Meg the Cat and he did not like this mystery at all. He wanted answers. He wanted certainty. He
wanted to feel smug and all-knowing again. Attila felt himself becoming increasingly grumpy as he stomped along, Meg at his back.

“Psst!” whispered Meg.

“What now?” grumped Attila.

“There are two trees over there, having a fight.”

“Don’t be so ridicul ... OH!”

They both peered through the gloom. It did indeed seem as if two trees were having a fight. They crept closer to see better.

What they saw looked like an oak tree and a holly bush trying to knock lumps out of each other. Little acorns and pretty red berries flew through the air, along with the sounds of grunts and groans.

It looked so strange even in a night full of strange things.

“What...?” spluttered Attila.

“I still smell fish,” stated Meg, blankly, as if seeing fighting trees was an everyday event.

The Oak King and the Holly King stopped their combat and stared into the mist, wondering who had dared to interrupt their seasonal battle.

“This way, if you please,” called a soft voice from behind Meg and Attila. They did not need to be invited twice when the choice was between two angry plants that appeared to be even angrier at being disturbed and a voice that at least seemed to be friendly.

“Careful where you step,” continued the voice. “Just follow me and I will lead you to a place of safety.”

Both animals could make out a human-shaped figure in the mist, but even Meg had enough brains to know this was not likely to be a human because most people folk did not notice how clever animals actually were, let alone speak to them as equals. Nevertheless, they both followed the gentle voice.

Every now and then the figure would stop in front of a house and a noise exactly like a large, wet fish being slapped onto a windowsill happened before the figure moved on again.

“Even I can smell the fish now,” whispered Attila to Meg.

Meg said nothing. No matter how big the adventure, he thought of his stomach. And his belly rumbled at the thought of fish.

“No, little cat,” said the sweet voice, “leave it be. These fish are the only food the elderly and the ill have in this time of little. I bring them food every night and this way they may survive the worst of winter.”

“Who are you?” asked Attila.

“Where are we?” asked Meg.
The gentle voice gave a soft laugh and answered the second question first. “You are on Mainland, Shetland.”

“Shetland!” exclaimed Attila, “but that’s as north of Scotland as you can go! How did we get here from the mound? How did we cross the seas?”

“Magic,” stated the voice, simply.

Attila felt some of his smugness come back at this answer- he’d been right after all. Magic was afoot here.

“Who am I?” continued the voice. “I am a creature of myth, neither man nor beast.” The owner of the voice stopped and bent down closer to the animals so they could see him clearly in the mist.

They saw a creature with a man’s body and the hairy face of a wolf. Before the fur on Meg’s back could shoot up in fright again, a gentle hand soothed it back into place.

“They call us Wulvers. We’re not werewolves, though we might be distant cousins. We walk alone, neither man nor wolf and if no harm is done to us then no harm will we do to others.”

“What about the fish on the windowsills?” asked Meg, who’d not quite finished thinking about his stomach.

“It is what my kind does,” answered the Wulver. “We look out for those who need help, who need food. And we look out for those who are lost in the mists and the nights, taking them to safety.”

“Thank you,” said Attila. “We are definitely lost.”

The Wulver smiled, straightened up and continued walking, with the cat and the rabbit at his heels. There was a glimmer of light ahead and the Wulver headed towards it.

Eventually they came to a clearing full of golden light. There was warmth as well as light and the cold, damp mist was nowhere to be seen or felt. In the middle of the clearing was a small grove of trees. In the middle of the grove sat a beautiful woman, holding a newborn baby. Around her were the animals of the forest, the people of the trees and the Sidhe, including The Cailleach.

“What is this?” asked Meg.

There was no answer. The Wulver had slipped away whilst Meg and Attila were gawping at this new scene before them.

The Cailleach spotted Attila and Meg. “I knew you’d show up,” she said. “You always do. Well, come and have a look then.”
Cautiously, the cat and the rabbit crept forward to the lady and her baby. The feelings of love and peace coming from all those in the grove were so strong it would have been impossible to feel frightened of anything anymore. All was silence and calm and peace.

“What is this?” asked Meg.

“An old story and a new one,” answered the Cailleach, “a metaphor and a miracle.”

Attila looked at her in puzzlement. “I don’t understand a word of that.”

The Cailleach smiled. “It is the turn of the wheel of the year as winter reaches its strongest point. The earth stands still then moves slowly back towards the sun and the time of warmth. The earth mother has a new son too, showing all is well in the growing part of the year.”

“Ah,” said Attila, trying to sound as if he understood all this.

“Is there a party?” asked Meg, in the hope that bannocks might be a part of that.

“No party, no bannocks,” said The Cailleach, who knew Meg of old. “But, if you go home now, I’ll make sure there are some warm, fresh ones at the mound waiting for you, Meg.”

“How do we get home?” asked Attila, plaintively.

The Cailleach looked surprised. “You know how. You’ve always known how. You just click your heels together and...”

But Meg was already gone.

‘Bannocks’ had always been his favourite magic word.

**Blessings of the Solstice to you all! Till next time,**

*Fiona Tinker*
You are continuing your magical journey on the Wiccan Path. In the Samhain Issue you learned about the God and Goddess. In this issue, Yule, we will learn about the elements...Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Spirit.

Never be afraid to ask questions of those you are studying with. It is fun to share and learn. So, find your magical place to sit, relax and have fun on this journey to becoming a magical Witchling with your fourth and fifth very exciting and fun lesson.

What is an Element?

An element is part of what allows Mother Earth to thrive and grow. The first four elements are a part of nature and each is connected to a direction. They are Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Earth

Earth is sometimes called Mother Earth because from the earth comes all plant life, which in turn nurtures all animal life and human life. It is a symbol of the Goddess and the power of creation.

Earth Symbols
Dirt, Mud, Flowers, Grass, Percussion Instruments (Drums), Rocks, Salt, Your Sense of Touch, Snails, Trees, Worms, Yule Tree
Colors - Green, Brown, Black during Growing Season
Blue, White during Winter Season
Sense of Touch

Activities for Earth

"Mud" Finger-painting: Clean the table carefully. Put a large piece of paper on the table. Put an old shirt or apron on. Put some dirt in a plastic cup. Add water so it is about as thick as Elmer’s Glue. "Finger-paint" on the paper with your mud paint. This can be a bit messy but it is so much fun. Ask your grownup to paint too and have fun together.

Adopt a Tree - Pick a tree that you really like. Make bark rubbings (hold paper up against the bark and rub with a sideways crayon.) Collect leaves from the tree. Hug the tree and thank it for giving you shade. Draw a picture of animals and other creatures that you think would live under the tree.
Color the Yule Tree (A symbol of the earth and the Yule Holiday) - Don’t forget to add more decorations.
Air

Without air we would not be able to breathe. It is invisible, yet very real and necessary for life. It is like an unseen magical energy.

Air Symbols

Birds, Bubbles, Clouds, Feathers, Flying, Imagination, Learning, Santa’s Sleigh, Sense of Smell, Wand, Wind, Wind Instruments (Flute)
Colors – Grey, Light Blue, White, Yellow

Activities for Air

Windy Day Activities – Go outside and feel the wind blowing through your hair - Fly a kite

Cloud Fun - Lie on the grass and watch the clouds move. Use your imagination and talk about the different pictures the clouds make.

Color Santa’s Sleigh – Why do you think this would be an air symbol?
Fire

Fire is the brightest element. It brings us the warmth of the sunshine and the brightness of day.

Fire Symbols

Candles, Daytime, Firefly, Heat, Ladybug, Lights, Sun, Summertime, Sand, Toasted Marshmallows, Yule Log

Colors – Orange, Red, Yellow

Activities for Fire

Sit outside and feel the heat of the sun and look at the shadows cast throughout the day.

Sun Tea – Ask a grown-up to help you brew Sun Tea. You will need a 1—quart glass or plastic jar with top, water, three tea bags. Fill the jar with water. Add 3 tea bags of your favorite tea. Cover the jar, and set it outside in the sunshine on a warm sunny day.

Color the Yule Log
Water

Water is the cleansing and nourishes us as well. Rainstorms wash the air and the land. The energy of this element is needed for the growth of all things.

Water Symbols

Bathtubs, cups, fish, fountains, lakes, oceans, rivers, seaweed, seashells, snow, tears

Colors – All shades of blue

Activities for Water

Painting Sidewalks and Driveways – Put water in a bucket and use a paintbrush to make wet designs. Watch how long it takes to dry. You will also be using the elements of wind and the sun.

Play in the rain – Run in the rain and dodge as many raindrops as you can. Then splash in puddles. Rain can be a fun water element.

Color your Yule Snowman
Spirit

Spirit is part of everyone and everything. It is what comes from your heart when you about the love you have for others and how much others love you. It is the feeling you get when you want to jump for joy. It Is the way you feel when you hug another or they hug you. Now hug yourself...this is the feeling of Spirit which is in you and all around you. It is what makes you so special and unique.

Spirit Symbols

All Emotions, Happiness, Joy, Kindness, Love, Sadness

Colors – It is any color that goes with your feelings

Activities for Spirit

Color of Feelings – Think about your emotions. Write down what color you think foes with each of the feelings listed here.  
Anger – Happiness – Love - Sadness

Give a Gift of Spirit – The best gift you can give comes from your heart. This year for Yule, give a gift of a beautiful gift of your heart.

Color the Gift Box – While you color the gift box, think about a all the people you can share your gift of spirit with.

If you had to pick one element as your favorite, which one would you pick and why?

My favorite would be earth because I love to work in my garden!

MommaWitch Carmen wishes a very, Merry Yule and sweet, peppermint dreams to you and the grown-ups too.
Happy Birthday!

Lailah Rania will be 11 on New Year's Day and Pooka hopes she gets to see lots of new places in the year ahead.
Happy Birthday to Lyra who's turning 8. Elsie's so glad she's enjoying the Pooka Pages!
Kove Ashbury is going to be 4 whole years old on Jan 21 and Isabelle Rayne will be 12 on the Winter Solstice, Isabelle is a child who understands how magical science is!
When Gwen turns 4 on Dec. 26, she'll probably be busy preparing food for everyone! Pooka hopes Logan will look up from his book or video games long enough to celebrate his 9th birthday on Jan 21.
Lisette has a houseful of little panthers to help her celebrate her 59th birthday on Jan 9.
Hayley is a girl who belongs at Hogworts. Perhaps, on Jan 28 when she turns 10, she'll finally get that letter from them!
Ash will be 6 on Dec 29 and Pooka hopes he gets lots of bottle caps for his birthday.
On Jan 9, Riley will turn 9. Maybe after she's finished celebrating, Riley can help Elsie figure out how to use a computer?
Luna will be helping Draven celebrate his birthday on Jan 22...and then Draven can help Luna celebrate HER birthday on January 29. After all, dogs and kids should stick together!
Shannon's birthday is Jan 15 and she'll be 42 years young. Happy birthday, Shannon!
Dean will be 5 on the 30th and Pooka hopes he gets lots of books that he can read to his animals.
Nature boy, Gwydian, will turn 4 on Jan 14 and Jade turns 7 on Jan 19. Callum will be 7 on New Year's Eve and his brother, Connor turns 5 on Jan 26. They both enjoy the Read-Along stories about his adventures as much as Pooka does!
Callen turns 5 on Jan 20 and enjoys the Nutcracker - which is what Elsie is listening to right now!
On Dec 31, New Year's Eve, Nicholas will be 10 years old. Pooka wishes Nicholas could give him some tips on how to be a great big brother. He's heard that Nicholas is really good at it.
On the Winter Solstice, Luna will be 8 years old. Happy birthday, Luna!
And one family has a bunch of birthdays: Skyler, the "Lego Engineer" will be 14 on Dec 20. His sister, Nika "the artist" turns 16 on Jan 10 and their sister Jessie (the Nature Lover) will be 9 on Jan 15. What a lot of happy birthdays!
Hope and Faith are magical twin girls who will be celebrating their first birthday on New Year's Day and Pooka thinks it's so cool that they have a stuffed doll of HIM. Briella is a Funny Girl who loves telling jokes. She'll be 9 on Jan 26.
Pine Cone Elf

Materials:
Pine cone
Acorn or other tree nut
Pine needles or sticks
Red paper or felt
Hot glue
String or thread
Glitter, markers, paint for decoration (optional)

Instructions:

• Get four small sticks OR Bundle pine needles together to make four small bundles. Use the string/thread to tie a bundle then loop to the back side and tie a double knot.

• Hot glue your sticks or bundle into your pine cone to make the legs and arms. You can cut your pine needles if you want.

• Take your acorn and hot glue it to the top to make the head.

• Cut your red paper or felt into a triangle. Then fold into a cone shape and glue shut. Then glue onto the acorn head.

• Now you can decorate your elf’s face, limbs, and body with glitter, markers, and/or paint!
**Egg Ornaments**

**Materials:**
- Eggs
- Thumb tack
- Paperclip
- Bowl
- Water in a second bowl
- Paints (I used acrylic)
- Paper
- Glue

**Directions:** Have your bowl ready to catch the egg yolk and whites. Take a thumbtack and poke a hole in the top and bottom of the egg. Make the hole in the bottom slightly bigger than the top. Turn the egg so the bottom hole is upright. Take the paperclip, unbend it, and put it in the bottom hole. Now twist the paperclip to break up the yolk inside. This will make it easier to get the egg contents out through the bottom hole.

Remove the paperclip, hold your fingers over both holes in the egg, and shake it up a little. Flip the egg so that the bottom end is over the bowl. Now put your mouth over the top hole and blow out the egg contents. It may be slow at first but don’t get frustrated just flip the egg back over and use the paperclip to stir the egg contents some more. Then try to blow it out into the bowl.

Once everything is out, then you need to rinse out the egg. To do this place the bottom of your empty egg into the second bowl with water in it. Draw the water into the egg by using your mouth or a syringe to suck the water up. Place your fingers over both egg holes and shake the egg. Hold egg over sink and blow out the water. Repeat the rinsing process three times.

Let your egg dry. Once your egg is dried you can cover the large hole in the bottom with paper strips and glue (papier-mâché). Once the glue dries you can paint and decorate your egg however you like. To make it a hanging ornament, take a paperclip or ornament hanger and put it into the hole in the top of the egg.
Twas the night before Yuletide and all through the glen
Not a creature was stirring, not a fox, not a hen.
A mantle of snow shone brightly that night
As it lay on the ground, reflecting moonlight.

The faeries were nestled all snug in their trees,
Unmindful of flurries and a chilly north breeze.
The elves and the gnomes were down in their burrows,
Sleeping like babes in their soft earthen furrows.

When low! The earth moved with a thunderous quake,
Causing chairs to fall over and dishes to break.
The Little Folk scrambled to get on their feet
Then raced to the river where they usually meet.

“What happened?” they wondered, they questioned, they probed,
As they shivered in night clothes, some bare-armed, some robed.
“What caused the earth’s shudder? What caused her to shiver?”
They all spoke at once as they stood by the river.

Then what to their wondering eyes should appear
But a shining gold light in the shape of a sphere.
It blinked and it twinkled, it winked like an eye,
Then it flew straight up and was lost in the sky.

Before they could murmur, before they could bustle,
There emerged from the crowd, with a swish and a rustle,
A stately old crone with her hand on a cane,
Resplendent in green with a flowing white mane.
As she passed by them the old crone’s perfume,  
Smelling of meadows and flowers abloom,  
Made each of the fey folk think of the spring  
When the earth wakes from slumber and the birds start to sing.

“My name is Gaia,” the old crone proclaimed  
in a voice that at once was both wild and tamed,  
“I’ve come to remind you, for you seem to forget,  
that Yule is the time of re-birth, and yet...”

“I see no hearth fires, hear no music, no bells,  
The air isn’t filled with rich fragrant smells  
Of baking and roasting, and simmering stews,  
Of cider that’s mulled or other hot brews.”

“There aren’t any children at play in the snow,  
Or houses lit up by candles’ glow.  
Have you forgotten, my children, the fun  
Of celebrating the rebirth of the sun?”

She looked at the fey folk, her eyes going round,  
As they shuffled their feet and stared at the ground.  
Then she smiled the smile that brings light to the day,  
“Come, my children,” she said, “Let’s play.”

They gathered the mistletoe, gathered the holly,  
Threw off the drab and drew on the jolly.  
They lit a big bonfire, and they danced and they sang.  
They brought out the bells and clapped when they rang.

They strung lights on the trees, and bows, oh so merry,  
In colors of cranberry, bayberry, cherry.  
They built giant snowmen and adorned them with hats,  
Then surrounded them with snow birds, and snow cats and bats.

Then just before dawn, at the end of their fest,  
Before they went homeward to seek out their rest,  
The fey folk they gathered ‘round their favorite oak tree  
And welcomed the sun ‘neath the tree’s finery.

They were just reaching home when it suddenly came,  
The gold light returned like an arrow-shot flame.  
It lit on the tree top where they could see from afar  
The golden-like sphere turned into a star.

The old crone just smiled at the beautiful sight,  
“Happy Yuletide, my children,” she whispered. “Good night.”
Edgar, the Crow, hopped over to examine Pooka's pile. "Ooooh... shiny red ball!" Edgar exclaimed.

"Mine?" Pooka looked at Edgar's pile. "I'll trade you for a star," he said. Edgar bobbed in agreement. Then his eye spotted a gilded walnut. He held it up in his beak. "Trade for sun?" he asked.

"Okay," said Pooka. The cat batted experimentally at a pinecone in Edgar's pile. The pinecone
rolled nicely across the rug. "Trade you the pinecone for my gingerbread man?" he asked. "Okay," said Edgar happily. Just then Elsie came into the room carrying some presents. She stopped in the door and glared at them. "Pooka! Edgar!" she said. "You boys put those ornaments back on that tree immediately!"
Chapter 1

Pooka loved the way the thin layer of snow on the cobblestones gave a slight crunch beneath his paws. Small white lights sparkling in the shop windows reflected in his eyes and his little black nose was filled with the scent of the pine wreaths that decorated each lamp post. In an apartment above one of the stores, someone was listening to the Nutcracker Suite. He stopped and rose on his hind legs, his front paws braced against the cold glass of Bakery Shop window. Rows of gingerbread men on snowy white platters winked at the little cat. They seemed to be saying: Come eat me, Pooka! But Elsie was getting too far ahead of him. He caught up with his witch as she mounted the stairs to the Post Office. Friendly, rosy cheeked neighbors greeted her as she entered.

"Happy Yule, Elsie!"
"Merry Christmas, Greta!"
"I love this time of the Wheel," sighed the cat happily. He sat on the steps to wait for Elsie. She emerged before his bottom had time to get too cold, a packet of letters in her hand. With their shopping done and herbal wares delivered, it was time for lunch at the cafe'. As they waited for their cheese omelets, Elsie opened her mail.

"Anything interesting?" the cat asked.
"A Yuletide card from my friend in the Netherlands and another from Auntie Fiona in Scotland and, oh, here's a letter from Aunt Tilly." Elsie was silent for a few moments as she read the letter. "She wants us to come for Yule."
"That's nice," said Pooka. "I'll help you phrase a polite "Regret"."
"I think we should go," said the girl.
"WHAT?" exclaimed Pooka.
"Well, she comes here a lot for sabbats, Pooks. And I think Yule with Aunt Tilly and Uncle Tiberius at their manor might be fun."
"You've got to be kidding!" objected her cat. "Grimalkin will be there."
Elsie looked at him sternly. "And that's another good reason for going. Grimalkin's your brother, Pooks, and Yule is a time for family!"
"Easy for you to say," grumbled Pooka. "You don't have a pesky little brother."
As Yule approached, they prepared to leave. Pooka reluctantly packed his catnip mouse and his special cuddle blanket in Elsie's suitcase.

Edgar, Elsie's crow, stowed his assorted "Sparklies" in the folds of her clothes. He then hopped happily into the bird cage that would sit on Elsie's lap during their train ride. Edgar loved traveling!

A couple of hours later, the train pulled into the seaside station of Aunt Tilly's village. Uncle Tiberius was waiting. He hugged his niece, loaded her bags into the old roadster and soon they were zooming through the village and up the hills toward the old manor house.

The closer they got to their destination, the smaller Pooka in the back seat seemed to become. As the car slowed to a halt in the long circular driveway, he hoped he'd shrunk himself to invisibility.

His hopes were shattered when he heard a kitten squeal: "Brother!" and a small furry body landed on top of him. Grimalkin grabbed Pooka's head in both paws and licked him until
Pooka's face was soaked with kitten slobber. He seriously would have preferred a paw shake and a polite "Hello".

He staggered out of the car, shook his face and proceeded to wash himself thoroughly.

Aunt Tilly appeared in the doorway, arms open. "My dear child, you're here!"

Elsie disappeared for a moment inside her large aunt's hug. Then she looked over her shoulder and called, "Coming Pooka?"

"Depends," grumbled Pooka, who was still washing himself. "How soon is the next train home?"

The big house had lots of bedrooms and one of them was saved just for Elsie's visits. There was even a special perch in there for Edgar.

With Aunt Tilly in the lead and Grimalkin bouncing along in the rear, they ascended the big staircase, down the hall and into Elsie's room.

Pooka used his paw and firmly slammed the door in his brother's face. He heard an "Owe!" on the other side.

Aunt Tilly was saying, "After you've unpacked, meet me in the kitchen. Cook and I've been busy all day getting ready for our Yule celebration."

A short while later, Pooka reluctantly followed his witch down to the kitchen. When they got there, a wave of enticing smells greeted his nose. Pooka's tummy growled so loudly that even Aunt Tilly heard it.

She laughed and ladled some stew into a bowl for him. With a wink, she dolloped a bit of whipped cream onto a small plate and set both on the floor next to the warm stove.

Pooka wrapped his tail happily around his body and tucked into the stew. Gradually, he became aware of a rapid lapping sound next to him. He looked, just in time to see his little brother licking the last of the whipped cream off plate. That was supposed to be HIS!

Pooka's paw landed a hard thud on his brother's head. "YOU weren't eating it!" he said.

"I was going to!" yelled Pooka.

Grimalkin grinned and licked his whiskers. "Too late!"

"You boys play nice," admonished Aunt Tilly.

The grey tabby kitten burped and gazed up at her with an angelic expression. "Okay," Grimalkin chirped sweetly.

Pooka growled under his breath.

The next morning, Pooka woke to find Elsie gone and his little brother in the room. The kitten was pawing through their suitcase.

"Look what I found!" cried Grimalkin. His head rose with Pooka's catnip mouse dangling from his mouth.

"That's mine!" yelled Pooka and sprang after him.

Grimalkin raced from the room with the mouse captive and Pooka in hot pursuit. Down the staircase and out the door, through the garden... Pooka finally caught up with him by Uncle Tiberius's fish pond.

"Give it back!" the cat yelled.

Grimalkin's eyes were a bit crossed as he taunted Pooka: "I think your mouse likes me better than you!"

Pooka launched himself through the air and tackled his brother on the snowy bank of the pond. The two of them wrestled until Grimalkin broke free. He dropped the mouse and batted at his big brother wildly with a paw.
One of his claws caught in the pentacle that Pooka wore around his neck. The cord broke and the pentacle went flying into the pond. The brothers jumped apart and watched as it slowly sank to the bottom and out of sight.
"Elsie gave that to me. And it took me a long time and a lot of hard work to earn it," said Pooka slowly. "I will never, Ever, forgive you."
He turned and slowly walked back to the house. He didn't even stop to retrieve his beloved catnip mouse.
Grimalkin stayed on the bank for a long time, staring into the depths of the cold, black pond.
Chapter 3

Pooka found Elsie curled up by the hearth in the library of the manor. He leaped into her lap, landing on top of the book she'd been reading. The little witch immediately noticed the pentacle missing from his neck.
"What happened?" she asked, so Pooka told her.
He thought that, like him, she'd be furious. But she wasn't. She tried to cuddle and comfort him.
"You know, Pooks, sometimes when something goes away from us, it's because the God and Goddess have something better in mind."

Pooka squirmed angrily out of her arms. He refused to believe her or to be comforted. She didn't understand! The only reason his beloved pentacle was gone was because his little brother was Evil. AND a pest.

After dinner, in the drawing room, Uncle Tiberius passed out mugs of hot spiced apple cider and lovely warm eggnog. Aunt Tilly and Elsie produced plates of warm cookies. A tall evergreen tree dominated the room, glittering with lights, blown glass ornaments and shiny beads. Pooka strolled over to admire it. An elf ornament dangled before him. Experimentally, he batted the elf with his paw. The elf danced and swung. A gray paw appeared and gently batted the elf back to him. Pooka swatted the elf again. The paw returned it. Then Grimalkin's eyes and ears appeared as he peaked up through the pine boughs. Angrily, Pooka hit the elf, really hard this time, and it flew off the branch and went rolling across the floor. He turned and stomped away from the tree.

He found a spot under a chair on the opposite side of the room, away from the warm hearth and the laughing humans gathered around it and, best of all, away from his little brother. It seemed a good place to be alone and sulk.

He wasn't alone for long however.

An emerald eyed feline with fur as black as his own approached and settled next to him.
"Hello, Mother," said Pooka sullenly.
Aunt Tilly's familiar, Serendipity licked his ears and forehead. "I heard what happened today," she said quietly.
"Stupid Grimalkin! All he ever does is cause trouble," growled Pooka.
Instead of arguing or lecturing him, their mother sighed and nodded in agreement. "He can be a paw-full."
Then she chuckled. "I remember when you were his age. Blessed be! All the trouble you managed to get into!"

There was an uncomfortable silence as Pooka thought about this. "I guess I still do," he admitted reluctantly.

Serendipity purred, "Yet, we all love and put up with you. And we always will."
With a final kiss, she strolled back over to Aunt Tilly's lap.

This gave Pooka something even more to think about. He realized that, no matter how much mischief he got into or how many mistakes he made, his family and friends always forgave him. And, no matter how angry she got sometimes, he knew Elsie still loved him.
During the night, more snow fell. The next morning, Aunt Tilly suggested they hitch up the horses and take the old sleigh into the village some last minute shopping. Edgar the Crow perched at the front of the sleigh, flapping his wings and cawing, "Let's go!"
Pooka jumped aboard eagerly, nestling himself in the lap blankets and between Elsie and Aunt Tilly. To his surprise, his brother held back. Elsie noticed also and said: "Pooks, go see what's wrong?"
Reluctantly, Pooka jumped back out of the sled.
"Get on," he told his brother. "Everyone's waiting for you."
Grimalkin shook his head.
Pooka sighed. "If it's because of what happened at the pond...."
"No. It's not that. I'm scared," the kitten whimpered. "In the barn, one of those big horses stepped on my paw once. It swelled up huge and really hurt."
Pooka took a deep breath and tried not to roll his eyes. Instead, he told Grimalkin, "Look. The horses are harnessed to the front of the sleigh. So just jump in from the back and you'll be fine."
"What if, while we're going, I bounce out and their huge feet stomp on more than just my paw?" asked the kitten.
Pooka told him, "Sit between me and Elsie. We'll make sure you don't fall out. You'll be fine." Grimalkin's eyes gleamed up at him in adoration as the magnitude of this offer dawned on him. "You'd really let me sit between you and your witch?"
Pooka felt the absence of the pentacle that was no longer resting against his chest. He decided to end the conversation before he re-thought his offer.
He smacked the kitten on the rump a bit harder than was necessary. "Up you go," he growled. But he realized it felt rather good, protecting his little brother.

That night was Yule Eve. Aunt Tilly's coven arrived bringing all sorts of delicious things to eat. A feast was spread out on a long table in the dining room. For their ritual later, an altar was erected before the hearth in the drawing room.
As the people milled about, laughing and talking about the new sun that would be born the next day, Grimalkin hesitantly approached Pooka.
"I want to show you something," he said.
"I'm not interested," said Pooka stiffly. He was quite comfortably curled up in his witch's lap.
Grimalkin sat at Elsie's boots, his eyes very large. "Please?"
Pooka was still irritated but he sighed and said, "Okay."
He followed his little brother round to the back of the Yule tree. Grimalkin raised up on his haunches and batted a green ornament with his paw.
"There's the Pickle," he whispered. "Whoever finds it in the morning gets to open the first present. So, now, that can be YOU!"
"Umm...okay. Thanks," said Pooka. He turned and walked stiffly away. Why did his little brother think this was such a big deal? What did it matter who opened the first present?
Uncle Tiberius sat at the baby grand piano. His long fingers flew over the keys and soon everyone was gathered around it and singing Yule songs.
Pooka sat on one of the couches by the hearth and listened. He scarcely noticed at first when a small body snuggled up next to his. Eventually, however, he looked down and realized Grimalkin was pressed against his fur, snoring happily.
Pooka's tummy growled and that mug of eggnog someone had left on the dining table looked awfully inviting. But, with another glance down, he decided to stay put and let the kitten sleep. Eventually, he too fell asleep.
Several hours later, the cat was woken by his witch stroking his head. "Wake up, Pooks. It's Yule morning."
Pooka yawned and gazed around the dark room. Grimalkin was gone and part of him missed the warm, furry body that had cuddled so trustingly next to his. "The new Sun will be up soon!" whispered Elsie. The cat rose to his feet and stretched stiffly. He wasn't about to miss seeing the Yule sunrise. "Let's go."
Aunt Tilly, Elsie, Uncle Tiberius, Pooka, Grimalkin and their mother, Serendipity all piled into the sleigh again. This time, Grimalkin leaped up without hesitation and immediately snuggled between Pooka and Elsie. Edgar flew alongside as the horses pulled them up a winding road, across several fields and then to the top of a tall white hill with a clear view of the eastern sky. Then, they waited.
From a basket, Aunt Tilly pulled out a thermos of hot cocoa and warm gingerbread for everyone. Their breath came out in streams of white vapor in the frosty air. Suddenly, Edgar cawed and Grimalkin cried, "Look! The sky's getting lighter and sort of pink at the bottom!"
They all watched, transfixed, as the tip of a small orb of pale light peaked over the horizon. It rose, slowly and majestically, until it finally cleared the hills in the distance. The Wheel had turned and the new sun was born.

They all cheered and hugged. The horses were turned back toward the manor.

"Hey, brother?" said Grimalkin softly. "When we get back, it will be time to open our stockings." For some reason, he didn't sound very happy at the prospect.

"Yes," said Pooka. "It will be fun! So, what's wrong?"

"What if there's nothing in mine? I've been in trouble a lot this year," his little brother confessed. "I haven't exactly been my best Self."

"Yeah, me too," admitted Pooka slowly.

When they arrived back at the manor, everyone burst into the drawing room. Aunt Tilly and Elsie moved about lighting the lamps. Uncle Tiberius knelt on the hearth to build up the fire, nearly singeing the cats who were jostling to get past him. Grimalkin leaped onto the elderly man's back and batted his and Pooka's stockings down.

"They're both full!" he cried happily.

The brothers dove in, pulling out and playing with their various kitty treats. The grownups, Elsie and Edgar were right behind them, exploring their own stockings.

After everyone had oohed and awed, Aunt Tilly commanded the center of the room and called out: "Who's got the Pickle?"

Grimalkin nudged Pooka.

"Umm, I think I do?" he said. He went to the spot his brother had shown him and batted the ornament gently.

Uncle Tiberius ceremoniously laid a small package in front of him. "To you, then, is the honor of opening the first gift. A very merry Yule to you, Sir Pooka."

Intrigued, Pooka shredded the wrapping with his claws. A silver pentacle was revealed, attached to a delicate chain. In the center of the pentacle gleamed the exquisite figure of a small cat.

Grimalkin said shyly, "It's from me. Well, me, Uncle Tiberius and Aunt Tilly. I told them what I did and that I was really sorry and wanted to fix it. I know this doesn't make up for losing your special pentacle. But I hope it does make it just a little bit better?"

Pooka gazed at the beautiful pentacle and said gruffly, "You didn't have to. I mean, I really love it, but you know I'd have forgiven you anyway, right? We're brothers."

The joyful and relieved kitten threw himself at Pooka, wrapping his paws around his neck and covering his face with raspy, slobbery kitten kisses.

Pooka jerked back and shook him off. Okay. He could have done without THAT. When the heck would Grimalkin learn to just shake paws?

He began to wash himself. Meanwhile, everyone else was smiling.

The following morning, he and Elsie were loading their luggage in Uncle Tiberius's roadster. Edgar perched on top of his traveling cage as Elsie and Aunt Tilly hugged goodbye.

Grimalkin scampered up with Pooka's old catnip mouse between his teeth.

"Don't forget this!" he said.

"You can keep it," said Pooka. "I got a new one for Yule."

"Thanks! It always did like me better!" grinned Grimalkin. He waved a paw. "See you at Imbolc!"

Pooka waved back and Uncle Tiberius started the car's engine. Elsie looked at Pooka quizzically.

"What?" he asked.

"See you at Imbolc?" she said.
Pooka squirmed a little. "I sort of invited Grimalkin to join us for Imbolc. He asked Aunt Tilly and she said 'yes'!"
Elsie raised her eyebrows.
"Well, he IS my little brother, you know!" the cat grinned sheepishly.

The End