

# The Witches' Dialogue

from The Stone&Tara Songbook

On a rainy November morning, I was taking a walk with a friend. We found ourselves talking about a man who we knew only vaguely and who had been very ill for several years. We had heard recently that he was dying of cancer. The only thing we really knew about him was that he had lived a fairly miserable life.

My friend told me how she and two other women had once helped a dying man by holding his feet, letting him know that it was safe to let go.

Then we stopped short on the forest road and looked at each other.

'I think we should hold his feet,' one of us said.

'Now?'

'We can always try. Thoughts have power.'

So we closed our eyes, stood for minutes next to an old, gnarled tree, and focused on the man who we imagined as lying alone in a hospital bed.

When we opened our eyes, we were not quite sure how we were supposed to feel. Had something happened? We did feel connected to him. It actually felt like we had cast some sort of spell.

A few days later, I heard that he had died on the afternoon of the day we had stood in the forest.

Years later, I thought about this strange coincidence and a poem poured out of me. Its takes the form of a dialogue between a young, enthusiastic witch and a wise and serene older one. The young woman starts off in a bit of a sensational manner, but the older witch tells her off immediately, explaining that their work is only to be channels of wisdom. The young woman then understands and imagines the end of her own life.

I showed the poem to Stone. 'I can hear music to this one,' he said immediately after reading it. This is how *The Witches' Dialogue* came into being<sup>\*)</sup>. The four-part choral piece has different themes, and the feel of a fugue, very rhythmical, almost bouncy. The themes weave intricately through all the voices, and each verse in the dialogue is sung by a different vocal section. That way, it seems like there are not two people talking, but four. Although the song modulates with every new verse, the modulations are hardly perceivable to both singers and listeners. As if by magic, you find yourself in a different key with each verse. In the final verse, the song comes to rest, staying in the same key, ending softly, and in tender melancholy.

*Tara, September 2021.*

## *the witches' dialogue*

*"say, sister witch, do you remember  
the night we killed old Henry Grey?  
it was the 15th of November  
beneath our hands he passed away."*

*decay had whispered to him sweetly  
and death had lightly brushed his brow  
I held his feet, and you were speaking  
you go, dear soul, you can go now.*

*ready he was, the old man Henry  
he passed the gateway peacefully  
oh for the restfulness when dying  
and breathe that last sigh quietly."*

*"we did not murder him, my sister,  
we helped him leave his wretched life  
our wisdom was our only helper  
no silver dagger, sword nor knife.*

*you are so young still, dearest child,  
so much for you to learn and know  
we pour our powers onto the dying  
so that they would not shudder so.*

*"yes sister witch, this I am wishing  
when through that door I pass away  
will you embrace me with your wisdom,  
and can you hold my feet that day?"*

<sup>\*)</sup>The first recording of this song was done as a virtual choir project in October 2021 with guest witches Katrien Kempnaers (soprano), Paul van den Berg (tenor), and Peter Lecoq (bass). Alto witch sung by Anke de Bruijn. With gratitude to Anne Kearns for planting the seeds for the poem.