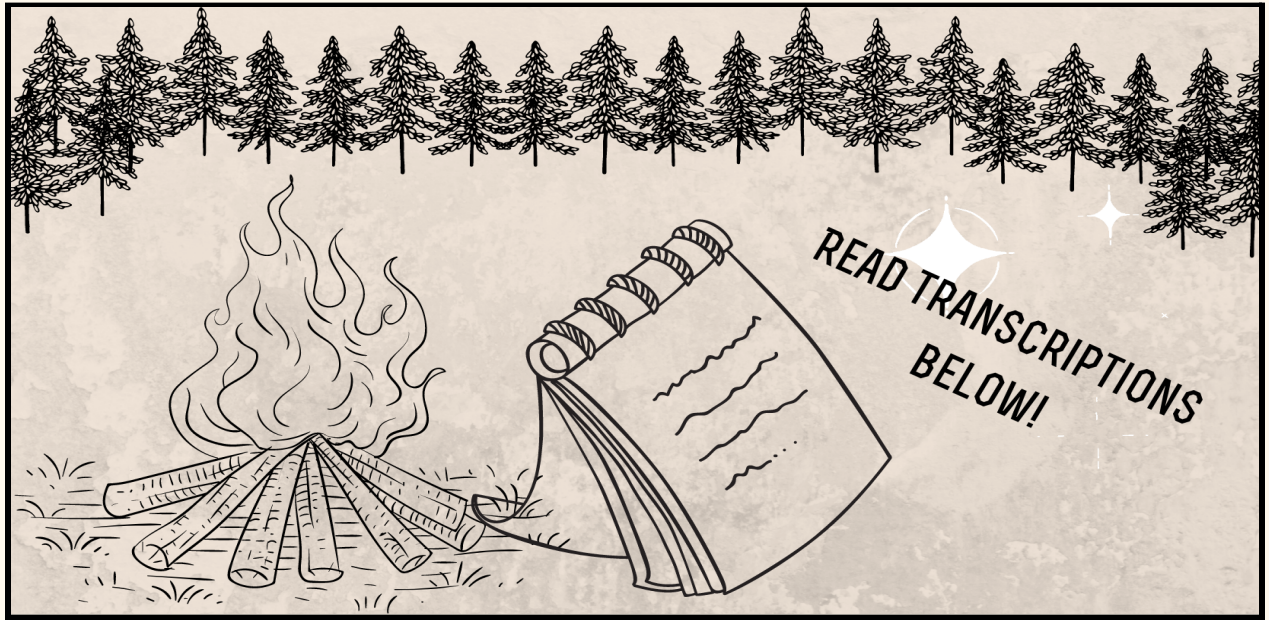




Today in Belville & Beyond

Sundance Thaws Heart of Law?



Petty Thefts Plague Belville; Unclaimed Notes Found in Ashes of Solstice Bonfire

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An epidemic of missing objects threatened to ruin this year’s summer solstice celebration. But in the wake of the party, a heartwarming tale is revealed.

The summer solstice celebration, known and loved by many as the holiday “Litha,” is observed every year on the longest day. This year, however, Belville’s residents struggled to get into the

celebratory spirit. A crime wave combined with the summer heat wave baffled the local police. No one had any hope of recovering their missing property.

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New evidence has come to light suggesting not only an answer to the confusing crimes, but also a tale of unexpected light. Transcribed below, for the readers' perusal, is a set of five notebook pages found at the site of the solstice bonfire. Each page was found marred by fire and ash, but with the proper care and assistance from Belville's own bookshop, the words have been rendered legible.

See what can be made of this:

——Page One

[Dated five days before the solstice]

→ Red reports missing trowel, last seen out on back patio

→ No one in area aside from usual customers on street

→ Dusty lost a set of three screwdrivers, wood handles

——Page Two

[Dated four days before the solstice]

More lost items:

→ Ancient silver coin (Priya)

→ 4 large carrots (grocer)

→ 3 wooden dowels (smiths guild)

→ 1 large brush (Gloria)

→ 2 tubes paint, 1 green
1 cerulean (art studio)

——Page Three

[Date burned off, however we feel confident it was three days before the solstice]

→ Lavender says guests at the inn heard strange singing in woods

→ Location: in clearing halfway up ridge trail?

→ Nothing there

→ Priya says set of 7 flat pencils, all colors, stolen

——Page Four

[Smudged date indicates two days before the solstice]

→ Brick used as doorstep at bookstore missing (Luca)

→ Checked ridge trail again, nothing

——Page Five

[Dated day of the solstice]

→ Witch coming 2pm to scry for Priya's coin

→ Singing on ridge reported (Gloria)

→ Circle found in clearing!!

→ Seven arches, one brick

→ Arranged around coin

→ Tops of arches = pencils

→ Perps: earth sprites?

→ Seem to be singing about duty to sun goddess ...

[end of transcription]

The astute reader will notice that our collection appears to be missing a note for the day before the solstice. A survey of town indicates that nothing was stolen that day, and therefore there was no need for notes.

Luca, resident historian and owner of the bookshop, confirms that earth sprites have been seen before in the forests outside of town.

"They're very shy," he informed us. "And only about three inches high, according to this scroll I found. They talk and worship just like us, but they don't look like what you might expect . . . Some people say they look like large, dark pompoms with tiny little arms and googly eyes."

It's easy to see how an arch as high as, for example, one large carrot might serve as a "henge" for a creature no bigger than an orange. What is more difficult to understand is why, if our industrious note-taker found these sprites and their "standing stones" on the day of the solstice, the missing objects were not returned to their owners.

However, not one of the victims of this crime spree reports any ill-will. It is the personal view of this reporter that they, like the owner of the notes here transcribed, show the proper solstice spirit.

Editors' Note: As of this second printing, all stolen items have been mysteriously returned to their owners. Anyone with information on this, or regarding a certain hidden site in the forest, is welcome to come forward. Additionally, an early run of this story received great attention from Officer Thorn, who felt that unclaimed notes are not newsworthy. Let the record show that we at Belville & Beyond have noted the Officer's concerns and elected to continue running the story anyway. We can only hope that she will find our dedication to our duty endearing.