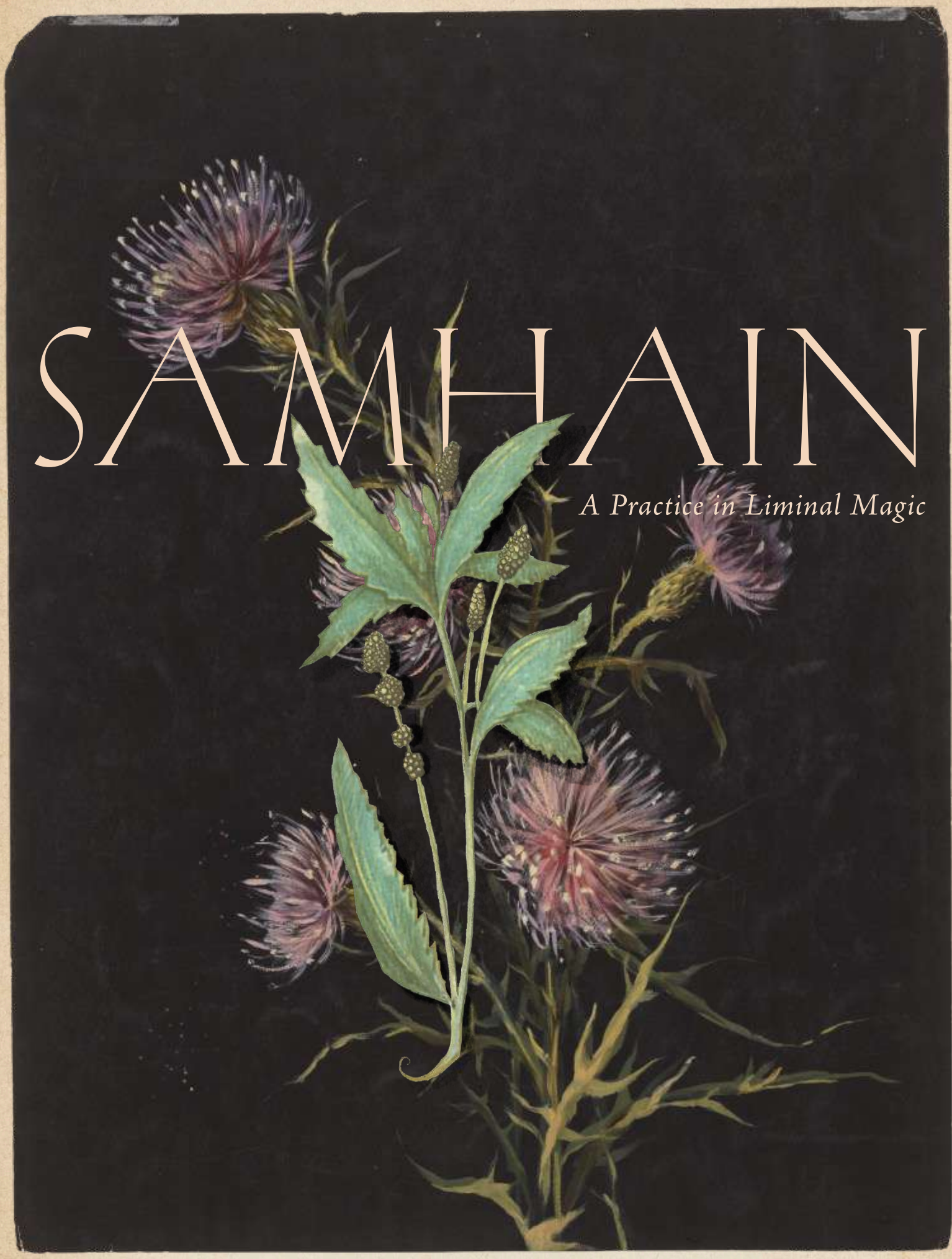

SAMHAIN
A Practice in Liminal Magic

Samhain has no shortage of wonderful rituals. Ancestor altars, dumb suppers, offerings for the dead, candles in windows. This year, we've been thinking about another side of Samhain: its strange, in-between nature, and what kind of magic might be possible when we explore the thresholds in our own lives..

Samhain is often described as a time when the veil between worlds grows thin. But what if we took that idea a little further? What if we looked at all the strange, in-between places in our world, including the ones we find ourselves living through?

Suppose you're caught between an old life and a new one. Something has ended, but its presence still lingers. Or something wonderful has begun, although you can't quite see what shape it will take. These are liminal states, and they offer some rather interesting possibilities for magic.

The little Samhain working that follows uses this idea. You'll find a threshold in your own life, pair it with a place or object that exists between two states, and use a simple drawing to work magic upon it. All you need is paper, a pencil, and a willingness to see what might be possible when the usual boundaries become a little less certain.



I. Strange Liminal States

These are examples to help you get a feel for liminality and the many forms it can take. Use them as a starting point, then look for thresholds in your own life and surroundings. You may be surprised by how many you find once you start looking.

Birth, the passage from life inside the womb to life outside it.

Dying, the passage between life and death.

The moment between sleeping and waking.

Pregnancy, carrying another life inside your own body.

Becoming a parent before you feel like someone's mother or father.

Adolescence, when childhood is ending but adulthood has yet to arrive.

Menopause, when the body begins operating according to unfamiliar rules.

The ageing body, when its familiar strength, appetites and capabilities begin to change.

The period after a relationship ends, while you still feel married or attached.

The strange interval between receiving life-changing news and feeling its reality.

Living in a new country while still feeling that another place is home.

Grieving someone whose death you understand intellectually but cannot quite believe.

Falling in love before either person has acknowledged what is happening.

The moment before confessing something that will permanently change a relationship.

Recovering from an illness after the symptoms have disappeared but before you trust your body again.

The period after making an irreversible decision, before its consequences become visible.

Forgetting a language you once spoke fluently while beginning to think in another.

The period between deciding to leave a life behind and physically departing from it.

Becoming older than a parent was when they died.

The moment when an idea has become too real to remain a daydream, but hasn't yet taken physical form.

I. Strange Liminal States

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An abandoned cicada shell, still clinging to the tree where its occupant emerged.

The mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the sea.

A crossroads where four paths meet.

A threshold stone worn hollow by generations of feet.

The strip of wet sand between the advancing and retreating tides.

A hollow tree that is still alive.

A border crossing between two countries.

An abandoned house that remains furnished.

A school corridor during summer holidays

A bridge over a river that has dried up.

A snake's shed skin, retaining the shape of its former body.

A ferry crossing,

A tidal pool temporarily separated from the sea.

A mirror in an empty room.

An empty office building after everyone has gone home.

A frozen puddle thawing from underneath.

The shifting edge between candlelight and darkness.

A stone standing partly in running water and partly on dry land.

An old path slowly disappearing beneath vegetation.

The ruins of a building whose foundations remain beneath a newer one.

A Samhain Magic Practice

At Samhain, the boundary between the living and the dead is said to grow thin. This makes it a special time to work with things that exist between two states. Think of a doorway, a bridge, or the place where a river meets the sea. Each one joins two different worlds. We also have times like this in our own lives. We might be leaving something behind, starting something new, or waiting to see what happens next.

In this little Samhain working, you'll draw a doorway and use it to work magic on one of these in-between moments in your own life.

You will need:

Paper
A pencil and eraser
A candle (optional)

1. Find your in-between things

Things that exist between two states are called liminal.

Think about something in your life that is changing, but hasn't yet settled into its new shape. It might be a new relationship, a house move, a creative project, a change in your work, or something you haven't quite found the words for yet.

We've included some examples of liminal states to help you find your own. Read through them for inspiration and then write down your own.

2. Decide what you want your magic to do

Think about your situation and what you would like to happen. Do you want to welcome something new? Protect something precious? Bring something closer? Move forward? Close a door that has been left open for too long?

Choose one clear purpose for your spell.

For example, perhaps you're moving to a new country. You might wish to carry the love, friendships, and happy memories of your old home into your new life.

3. Draw your doorway

Take your paper and draw a doorway. It can be as simple as three lines, with two sides and a top. Leave the space inside it empty for now. Think of the doorway as the place between your life as it is and the change you wish to make. On one side is where you are now. On the other is what you hope to bring about. Write a word or draw a small symbol to show what you want your magic to work upon. For example, if you're moving to a new country, you might write Old home on one side of the doorway and New home on the other. Then write the word Love beside the door to stand for the love you wish to carry with you.

4. Work your magic

If you wish, light a candle beside your paper. Look at the doorway you've drawn and think about what you want to happen. Now use your pencil to make it happen on the page.

In our moving example, you might draw a line carrying the word Love through the doorway, from your old home into your new one. As you draw, say aloud, May the love I have known travel with me, wherever I make my home. You can use your doorway for other kinds of magic, too. Draw something passing through it to welcome it into your life. Draw a door closing to keep something out. Erase a barrier to open a way forward. Or draw a protective mark upon the door to guard whatever lies behind it. Whatever you want your magic to do, show it happening in your drawing. Speak your intention as you make each mark. Take your time. You are making a small change on paper with the wish that it will find its way into the world beyond it.

5. Close the crossing

When you've finished, look at your drawing and the change you've made. Fold the paper once, bringing the two sides together, and say:

Between one world and another,

I have made my mark.

The crossing is done.

If you lit a candle, put it out.

On the night of Samhain, place your folded drawing beneath your pillow. Before you fall asleep, picture your doorway and ask for a dream that might reveal something more about your crossing. Samhain is said to be a night when the veil between worlds grows thin, and dreams may offer strange glimpses of things we cannot see while awake. Maybe you'll find yourself in an unfamiliar house, meet someone you haven't seen in years, or be given an object whose meaning you cannot quite understand. Pay attention to the people, animals, places, and strange little details that appear. When you wake, write down anything you remember before the dream slips away. Even a small detail may become important in the days that follow. And if no dream comes, your spell is still complete. Take your drawing from beneath your pillow and unfold it. Look at the doorway you made and the crease running through the paper. Your little paper threshold has spent the night between waking and dreaming, and now it has returned with you. Keep it as a charm, or tuck it away somewhere safe.



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