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Boiled Pins ***by Tony Bonning***

The cow of a crofter who lived near Polmaddy became very, very sick. He asked a neighbour, he said

‘Any idea what’s wrong with this cow of mine?’.

Well, she was known as a spey wife, somebody who kinda knew about herbs and curing these things, not a witchy type...or was she, one might ask...?

‘Do you have a little bit of milk left over from the cow?’

‘Well’ he said ‘it’s not producing any’.

‘Can you get a little bit from it for me?’

‘I’ll do what I can’.

So away he went and he squeezed away at the udder, got a little bit of milk and brought it back to her. She took it and put it into a cauldron and then took pins and needles and dropped them into the milk and began to cook them.

A little while later, there was a knock on the door. She didn’t answer. Again, the knock came. She didn’t answer. Finally, the person went to the window and began to knock furiously on the window. The woman saw it was a neighbour whom she knew to be a black witch. And the woman was saying,

'Please, please, please stop boiling, stop boiling, please because I'm getting pricked all over. It's hurting, it's hurting'.

'Will you leave my friend's cow alone?'

'Yes, yes, anything'.

'In fact, will you swear never to touch any of the cattle round here?'

'Oh yes, yes, anything at all, anything at all'.

And so it was that the cantrip or magic spell was lifted on the cow. And the witch herself moved away from the area. Now, you might wonder what do witches do? What do they say? When they are producing magic spell? Well, let me tell you a couple...

'In the pingle or the pan,
Or the haurnpan o' man,
Boil the heart's-bluid o' the tade,
Wi' the tallow o' the gled:
Haweket kail an' hen-dirt,
Chow'd cheese an chicken-wort,
Yallow puddocks champit sma',
Spiders ten and gellocks twa,
Sclaters twa, frae foggy dykes,
Bumbees twunty, frae their bykes,
Asks frae stinking lochens blue,
Ay, will make a better stue;
Bachelors maun hae a charm,
Hearts they hae fu' o' harm.'
Aye the alder, aye the calder,
And the calder aye the balder.
Taps snaw white and tails green
Snappin' maidens o' fifteen
Mingle, mingle, in the pingle

Join the cantrip with a jingle.
Now we see, now we see
Plots o' pauchin' yen, twa, three.'

Or alternatively,

'Yirbs for the blinking queen,
Seeth now, when it is e'en,
Boortree branches, yellow gowans,
Berry rasps and berry rowans;
Deil's milk frae thrissles soft,
Clover blades frae aff the craft;
Binwud leaves and blinmen's baws,
Heather bells and wither'd haws;
Something sweet, something soor,
Time about wi' mild and door;
Hinnie-suckles, bluidy-fingers,
Napple roots and nettle stingers,
Bags o' bees and gall in bladders,
Gowks' spittles, pizion adders:
May dew and fumarts' tears,
Nool shearings, nowt's neers,
Mix, mix, six and six,
And the auld maid's cantrip fix.'

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