



# Time Gate

BY CANDY RAY

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# Foreword

For nearly forty years, I believed that I was going to die in the year 2019. When I found myself still here in 2020, I decided to write about it. A lot of people have written stories during the apocalyptic events of 2020 to 2021, but I hope this one is totally unique. This account contains some autobiographical passages, and most of it is based on my psychic experiences, but with all names and details changed to make it a fictionalised version. Even more so than my other books, it is within the genre of visionary fiction. As far as I know I did not have a previous physical life in the Taiga. However, those sections of the story too are founded on visions.

# Chapter 1. On The Tracks

I've sat here so many times, waiting for events to start in the next street. Meetings, a theatre play, a works Christmas outing. I always arrive early, because of the bus timetable. Today, I'm waiting for a shop to open.

This low wall is ideal to sit on. The building behind it seems deserted; in fact, the whole street is quiet, a contrast with Alfred Road where all the events take place, which is always so vibrant. It has its own street festival every summer.

I study the building opposite, to pass the time. It's empty and run down. Faded lettering on the yellow bricks proclaims 'SCHOOL'. I wonder about it-when did it close?

If I could run all the times together when I've sat here, I wonder how long it would last? Several hours? Imagine if I were to do the same with every time that I have cleaned out the living room? Days, weeks even, of doing nothing else but clean a living room. It would feel like being in prison. Yet spaced out, one room clean at a time, it feels all right.

A week ago yesterday, I took the train to my hometown, London. First a British Rail train, then some local metro lines which had changed completely since I had last used them, till I reached the district where I grew up. I had been wanting to revisit it for so long.

On the way back some signals failed because of the heat wave, and there were several hours of chaos: changing trains, crowded platforms, going the long way round two or three times. When a journey takes much longer than expected, it's like travelling for a week- lots of different journeys all joined together into one. It's like cleaning out the living room for a week, or sitting on this low wall for many hours.

It must be my thoughts that make the timelines cross over. The familiar buzzing sensation starts in my fingers; I look to my right and the public toilet is gone, and there's a cottage made of sweets and gingerbread there instead. It's the witch's cottage from Hansel and Gretel.

In the other timeline, there are still ten minutes to go until the shop opens. In this one I have no idea of the time; all I know is that it is static. As soon as I walk through that gingerbread door I will be standing by the living room window for years, looking out into the garden, waiting for Hansel and Gretel to arrive. When they do arrive, I can choose whether to eat them or walk them home. Yet whichever of the two I do, the

waiting will still be interminable, and I'll be stuck here for years in a frozen cameo of chocolate truffle windows and fresh green lawn outside.

I don't want to walk through that door. I want to escape, back to the quiet street behind Alfred Road. I'm still sitting, but now I'm on the white trellised seat by the front door of the cottage. If I keep still and remain calm, perhaps this will all fade away. But I'm still having the thoughts that started this off, about my trip of the previous week.

In my mind it is the day of the trip: the 23rd, the day of Eris. The train coming back from London is just gathering momentum when suddenly the opposite happens, and it begins to slow down until it is standing still. Everyone stares blandly out of the window at the criss-crossing rails, or else becomes absorbed in a book or newspaper.

After twenty minutes, the passengers begin to fidget and glance at their watches. One makes a phone call to say she will be late. An announcement tells us that something is wrong with the signals; we will have to go a different way round that will take longer, and we will be missing out some of the stops. I don't have to worry about that because I'm going to the end of the line.

At the next stop, another announcement reminds passengers to change here if they want one of the destinations that is now going to be skipped. Some people from my carriage get out, but a lot more get in and it becomes crowded. I feel anxious; I might have to go to the toilet and then it will be difficult to squeeze past those other passengers. Sometimes I worry about that, which is one of the reasons why I sit near that toilet block behind Alfred Road when I am too early.

The train starts up, but soon it stops once again. After ten minutes we are told that another signal has failed, and we must go by a different route altogether. Passengers must stay on until Bognor Regis and then double back to where the line branches off.

This time, it WILL affect me. I clutch the handles of both my bags, even though there is quite a while to go before I will have to carry them. It seems to take many hours to reach Bognor Regis, and by then there are a lot of people standing, some of them leaning on the backs of the seats. I could swear there is a dent in my seat where a man is leaning against it.

At last Bognor Regis is in sight. We taxi in painfully slowly, and when we finally stop, everyone rushes to the door.

On the platform, the crowds are so dense that I can't see past them. I realize that I should have got off at an earlier stop and changed there; some people did that, but I was confused by the instruction to stay on until Bognor Regis. Now I'll have to travel

back through multiple stations that I have already passed through, so I'll be home very late.

Some people are climbing the stairs to another platform. Am I on the right one? I push convulsively to get to the front, my bags swinging. A thickset man in a tweed jacket staggers beside me. He catches my eye briefly- his look says he doesn't want to cry out or swear. He's got this- all he has to do is regain his footing after the clumsy lady barged into him.

He fails, and falls headlong against me. Unbelievably, I'm flying through the air- how is that possible in this crush? Then my face smashes against the hard rail.

I'm face down and I can't see- there's just this endless metal bar. For a split second I think I'm safe, as there was no electric shock. But how will they lift me up? Then the train hits and everything goes different ways: parts of my body, my bags....

That's the other timeline. It didn't happen. It can't happen at all now, because I've lived for a week past that date. There was never that mention on the News:

*"When someone falls on the railway line it's usually a suicide. An accident is very rare, so British Rail will be holding an inquiry."*

I'm back now. The old yellow-brick school is back, and the toilet block, and the shop that I've been waiting for in Alfred Road is about to open.

Bognor sounds such a forlorn place to die.



It was Ella's fault. She wanted something to smash into me, the way my arrow had smashed into her. She didn't care what it was: a power drill, a train, anything would do so long as it drove in like an arrow. She had been the queen, and she was entitled to get revenge on the traitor who had murdered her, so that Hol could be king instead of Stev.

She would have succeeded if I hadn't met Moona, who was Ella's handmaiden Ymarra in that long-ago previous lifetime.

I met her at an audition for piccolo players, run by a film studio which wanted a film score all made up of piccolos. I wasn't chosen for their specialist orchestra, but I did meet Moona, which was better. I didn't mention that I'm a lesbian, did I?

Moona saw things. She saw that if I left her after only two years, 'renounced her' as she called it, I could avoid the fatal timeline. I've never understood those quantum theories and I wanted more than anything to stay with Moona. Of course, I always had my suspicions that it was her excuse to leave me and move on with her life, to what she saw as better options. But then I started to experience evidence that she was telling



the truth, such as the periodic appearance of the witch's cottage from Hansel and Gretel.

There are alternative timelines everywhere, and you arrive at one every time you choose a road, whether it is a physical road or a mental path to follow. I once saw a film in which a girl entered an alternative timeline through the agency of whether she missed a tube train, whether she got through its door. That's the way it happens.

Of course, you don't usually get them opening up in front of you in real life, so that you can walk into them. That would mean there were black holes around every corner. I had discovered the method for making the witch's cottage appear by chance, when I tuned into a particular invisible energy while thinking intently about time.

I was waiting at a bus station in an enclosed shelter, daydreaming to pass the twenty minutes before the bus was due to arrive. As I contemplated that scary story I once read about the Grim Reaper, (in which negative thoughts about time haunt a woman and induce the Reaper to pursue her), I became aware of what I can only call a shaft of something beaming down on my hands, tickling them. I swished my hands in this invisible beam, and that was when the gingerbread house first materialised. That was also when I learned not to go into the living room, or else I would get stuck in that unmoving position by the window- stuck until I managed to wrench myself free from the invisible strings like sticky toffee, which clung to me.

It happened again several more times, and I had no idea what that strange current of force was. All I knew was that the experience gelled with Moona's advanced understanding of phenomena that she had tried to explain to me, in those final months before she left.

Strange how Moona and I both chose to play the piccolo. It has a thin, high sound, the highest of the wind instruments. When I was a child there were two sounds that always made me turn my head, the notes of a flute and the notes of an oboe. I chose the flute as the one I would learn to play, and while striving to master it I encountered other wind instruments. It was never the low ones like the bassoon I liked, only the higher ones, and when I heard the highest one of all I knew I would have to switch to that. Those ethereal notes, tremulous, pitched so they are nearly up into the next sky above our own; to me they expressed the ultimate in purity, and I wanted to be the one who conveyed them to an audience's ears.

I've always been a hard worker, and I currently belong to two part-time orchestras. But I didn't make the prestigious ones where you can earn a permanent living from it. I suppose I can't be good enough. So I have to supplement it by working in shops,



music shops mainly. I'm versatile enough to give a basic demonstration of other musical instruments to a customer, such as a guitar or a keyboard. Occasionally they ask me what my instrument is, and when I say the piccolo, they often haven't heard of it.

Moona's journey was different from mine. She started by playing the recorder at school, so she told me. Then she decided to expand and include other wind instruments, and she went right across the range while still at school: bassoons, flutes, oboes and finally the piccolo. I imagined her delicate white hands grasping those different instruments, her fingers learning to press and cover the various kinds of stops. I loved it when she painted her fingernails with white pearl varnish like the moon, which went with her complexion and her name.

Wind instruments belong to the air element, and breath control is vital in learning to play skilfully; in-out, control, like the pranayama that is done by yogis. I thought I knew a fair amount about astrology, yoga and other mystical subjects; however, Moona knew more than I did, and she also understood about the black holes and time currents.



The street where I grew up, the one I went to London to visit, was called Border Avenue. At the time I never thought it might be the border of the great beyond. My favourite playground was attached to a flower garden, next to a large church and divided from it by a high stone wall. When Mum or Dad took me there, we would walk down Border Avenue to the main road, turn left at the corner with Bollen's chemist shop on it, and walk up until we came to a little cul-de-sac with the playground at the end. Bollen's Pharmacy is still there- I saw it on my visit. It must be the oldest shop in the district.

It was at that playground where I met Sarah, one day when I was six. We made friends immediately, the way young children do. One minute we were strangers, the next best friends, and we went on the roundabout and swings and see-saw together, chattering incessantly.

When I saw her mother come over to take her home, I went with her and we ran along the street still playing, while my Dad left the playground as well and followed at a cautious distance.

"This is my road," Sarah said as we turned into Spring Street, a beautiful road which I had always loved, with large gardens, and in the middle of the pavement trees covered in pink blossom. As she ran up her own garden path, she invited me to come to her house and play with her at the weekend.

I said goodbye and turned back, planning excitedly for lots of visits to Sarah. But when I got to the end of the street where Dad was waiting and told him about it, to my horror he started shaking his head. “This street is where the rich people live,” said Dad. “You can’t come to play here. They’re not the same people as us on the council estate.”

“But Dad, I must! I promised Sarah I would come round on Saturday. She’ll wonder where I am if I’m not there. And her mother will be waiting for me.”

“That lady we saw probably isn’t her mother,” said Dad. “She’s probably a nanny.”

I was puzzled. What difference did that make? But my parents refused to take me to play with Sarah, and it was too far for me to go alone at that age, so I never saw her again.

Later I found out she had gone to the same high school as me and had been in the year below, but I didn’t recognise her. I got a scholarship to Sarah’s school, which was why I could have flute lessons. Of course, I’d had other friends, but I still thought about the lost opportunity. When I visited London that day and saw Spring Street, almost opposite Bollen’s Pharmacy, I thought of Sarah.

I turned off before reaching the road where the playground used to be and went back to Border Avenue, to have lunch in a café. I had already been to see the block of flats where I grew up. The blue sky and the gardens around the flats were shimmering in the heat wave. The entrances had changed, rebuilt with modern security doors, and the landings inside had softer floors, but otherwise they were still the same, after all these years.

There was one more place I wanted to visit- my junior and senior schools which had both been in the same street, opposite the ABC bakers’ shop. I remembered chocolate cupcakes with that upturned ridge around the edges, at four o’clock after school.

The café I chose for lunch was in the top section of Border Avenue, just before the road narrowed and became residential for its last few hundred yards. It was situated in the building where the doctor’s surgery used to be in my childhood, and the surgery had been replaced by a modern medical centre around the corner. I recognised some ornamental wrought iron gates outside the café as the same ones that had been outside the doctor’s when I was young.

I stood outside and read the menu in the window, and then I turned around to have a proper look at this end of the street; how it had changed, and what kind of shops were there now.

I recalled another ghost from my past- Judy, who had lived in a tiny flat in that residential part at the top of Border Avenue.

I had been to two of her talks about astrological counselling. What a great idea, to counsel a client based on their astrological chart. It gives the counsellor a point of reference, and a way to bring up subjects that the client has avoided mentioning. I liked the sound of that.

I really liked Judy, as well. You expect counsellors to have a sympathetic nature, and Judy was vivacious as well as sensitive. She was beautiful in a soft, doe-like way. Maybe we could be friends, maybe more, if she wanted to.

When I chatted to her after the second talk, we found we had a lot in common. She was even interested in playing musical instruments. She gave me her phone number and said, "feel free to call me sometime and arrange to come round."

I called a couple of times, but she was always busy. It was a full six months before I finally got to her place and found out that she lived right at the top of Border Avenue, the same street where I had grown up and was then still living. Judy lived in a mews which branched off it.

As I was sitting on a round pouffe drinking tea, Judy told me she had been there for ten years, but she was just about to move house the following week, to an outer London suburb many miles away. I was too disheartened to phone again after that. I attract these situations like a magnet, those doors to timelines that might have been, as they slam shut.

## Chapter 2. The First Quest

My memories of previous lives are very general, like summaries with all the finer detail left out. All I can remember clearly are the big brushstrokes, the major events.

Coniferous forest is known as Taiga. That's the only technical term I'm going to use for the ancient Scandinavian kingdom which was ruled over by Ella. This was before the region was called Scandinavia, before the individual countries like Sweden and Denmark existed.

Stev could only be the king if he had a wife. That was the law of the Pine Tribe. He sent for Ella who lived at the foot of the hunched hills and married her, and together they ruled for five years. Then I took my bow and arrow and shot Ella dead, so that Stev would no longer be king and Hol could become king instead. He was Stev's younger brother, and according to their unusual law he would ascend to the throne if Stev became single again.

The Pine wasn't even my original tribe. There were three tribes in our Taiga forest named after the pine, the larch and the spruce, the trees which surrounded us. Because we were threatened by many dangers, especially during the winter, it had been agreed that the three would not be enemies, nor would they be rigidly divided.

Everyone started off in the tribe they were born into, but you could join another one by adopting their medallion. There was the circular symbol of the Larch Tribe, with flowers interwoven around the circumference. That was my original tribe. Stev and Ella's tribe the Pine had a triangle with a river delta pattern on it. For the third one, the Spruce, it was four horizontal bars with studs at each end. The Spruce people lived a little further away, beyond the hunched hills.

The medallions represented worldly and political power, contrasting with the power of spirit beings which we could all access easily by visiting the spirit world. We were familiar with flowers, also with stone or wooden batons, but none of us had ever seen a river delta; this one had been received in a vision by the original elders of the Pine Tribe.

Changing tribes was supposed to be for helping another tribe, for example if someone had been killed who had your special skill, and there was now a shortage of it in their tribe. But I changed because of love, which was accepted but considered a more frivolous reason.

When I first put on the Pine medallion in Hol's hut, after spending a night of hot passion with him, I felt slightly guilty, the way a modern person would if they changed from their parents' religion to another one. It appealed to me to have a different medallion jangling around my neck, with its bold silver triangle and stylised river delta design. I would have been happy to collect two or three or more different designs and guard them in a pile in the hut, where the wooden beams met at a corner. But of course, I could only keep one, and it had to be the specific design used by the Pine Tribe. I had to hand the other one back formally the next day, to the keeper of medallions in the Larch Tribe.

Converting to different religions is something I have also been prone to, at later periods in history. Sometimes I have done it several times within a few years, and it hasn't made me happy. I start to feel that no-one has ever really got to know or trust me, and that maybe they are right to distrust me.

Switching tribes in the Taiga was allowed and even encouraged; I loved Hol, so why not join his tribe? Yet I found myself thinking of all the other women who didn't do that- who stuck to their tribe of birth all their lives and eventually had a joining ceremony with a man from that tribe.

Although Stev and Ella were called the king and queen, it wasn't equivalent to the monarchs in later societies, for our three tribes lived in settlements barely bigger than a village, and they were only the chiefs of a small community. Hol had no special privileges because he was the king's brother. He lived the same as others in the tribe, and so did I after we were married.

Hol had no intention in those days of becoming the leader of the Pine Tribe; he was happy to leave that to Stev. It was my ambition that caused the slaying of a queen who had ruled well.

During those early days in the Pine Tribe, I went on a vision quest. It was the beginning of Springtime, the traditional time for such quests, and still quite cold. Because it was my first quest, I had to wear a special fur mantle. Wearing the pelt brought us into a relationship with the animal it had come from, and with the rest of the animal kingdom as well. Any of them might approach, to teach us our destiny.

My cloak had come from a deer a bit like a reindeer, but smaller and with simple horns instead of branching antlers. In later times they became extinct. I was hoping that a deer would speak to me because I preferred vegetarian animals. But vegetarianism was just a dreamy ideal that I didn't stick to. All the tribes ate a high-meat diet because in these colder regions, meat was more plentiful than edible plants.

The day started like any other. I got up from the furry animal skin on the floor of Hol's hut and went to wash in the river. After a more thorough splash than usual in the icy water, I came back and had my breakfast, which was strips of meat fried in a skillet over an open fire.

Hol was smiling and looking at me with pride- he was pleased that I wanted to go on the quest. He picked up the deer mantle and held it out to me. "Put on your cloak- it is time to go out into the forest."

I smiled back and threw the mantle over my shoulders. It felt like a new start, as if my life was about to change. I ran past the huts of our settlement, past the pile of carved big-bellied goddess figures which we revered and kept safe. They resembled others which were later found all over Europe and regarded as fertility symbols by scholars of ancient history. Soon I was running under the trees, with the sharp, spicy scent of the needles and soft ground under my bare feet.

I came to what I felt instinctively was the right place, a small space surrounded by bushes. Then I crouched down on the ground, my eyes closed, entering into meditation. Such a posture was natural for us and not uncomfortable.

The first thing I saw was a black vulture flying through the sky and drawing near, a symbol of death. I had always thought I had a balanced attitude towards death, but this was obviously not so as I involuntarily flinched and turned away.

Then I saw another animal, a big cat coming towards me which I knew was a puma, and in the vision inside my mind it took me onto its back and raced away much faster than I could ever run.

"I'm a guide," the puma said. "I'll take you away from the vulture."

It was such a relief that my guide was not the bird of prey. "Thank you, puma guide," I replied. "But I have a question- should I not control my own quest and escape from evil by my own power?"

"No," said the puma. "That's for later. It would not be safe for you now. For example, you wouldn't think of this."

As he spoke, an avenue opened up in front of us. It was lined with trees and seemed to wind through many miles up ahead, and the ground was an artificial one as if someone had built a road, although in those day there were no roads.

The puma raced along it, and soon instead of passing trees on either side we were passing through various landscapes, each one totally different, which I sensed were different countries of the world. We crossed halfway around the world. Not only had

we gone too far to be pursued, but I had also been shown what unknown parts of the world looked like, when my people had no transport to go and see it for themselves.

When we reached a large, open grassland, the puma stopped. I slid off his back and he sat down. "This is my pampas," he said. "It's where I feel at home, where I feel strong. You need to find a place like that, where you will be strong."

I looked around in wonderment at the South American scenery. I had never heard the word 'pampas' before and had no idea where I was. But my guide had given me an instruction, which was important.

"Thank you, puma guide," I said again. "Where do you suggest?"

"You will have to find it for yourself," he answered. "Stay here for a little while and study my special place, and then awaken. I'll leave you here." He bounded away.

Obediently, as he was my animal guide, I stayed in meditation for a while longer and studied the totally unfamiliar terrain. The Earth was almost completely covered with forests in those days; however, wide open grasslands did exist in certain places. They were simply a puzzle to us if we should glimpse them while in a trance.

Eventually I opened my eyes and stood up and set off back across the Taiga to the Pine Tribe's settlement, pulling the fur cloak behind me. I must remember to find my special place, where I would be strong and happy.

But I never did. Over the next two years, I thought a lot about how I had switched tribes- whether I should have done it, whether I would be fully accepted. I also began to think that Stev was a bad king.

He was constantly talking about being prepared for war. There had always been peace between our three tribes, and for us the other two tribes were the only other human beings we had ever seen. But Stev was convinced that this long-standing peace could end at any time, and he also believed that other previously unknown tribes might stray into our area, strangers who would be bent on killing us. The people called him the Red King, always thinking about bloodshed.

Hol by contrast was easy-going. He wanted the emphasis to be on celebrating festivals and having a good time. There were seven yearly festivals based on different growth seasons of the trees and positions of the sun in the sky at noon, and we all looked forward to a change from the daily routines of hunting, farming and building. There were special meals, communal dances and games for the children associated with the various festivals.

I came to believe that Hol should be the king, with me beside him as queen. Then the Pine Tribe would be happy all the time, celebrating and enjoying life. No longer



would I be the frivolous girl who had switched tribes; I would be the queen, admired and respected, and I would lead them in their revels. There would no longer be talk of war or learning to fight, but endless fun and laughter.

## Chapter 3. The Second Quest

It was the custom to go on further quests in which we would revisit our guide, either at the same time of year as the original one or during the Autumn.

During that first Spring and Summer when I was with Hol, I became friendly with Ella's handmaiden Ymarma. We walked together along the verges of the forest picking flowers, and talking about our feelings.

Ymarma was not married yet because she was spending a few years in service to Ella. Stev and Ella's home was only a little grander than the huts the rest of us lived in, slightly larger and with more decorations on the outside. However, Ella had Ymarma as her maidservant who combed her hair with a flint and washed her clothes, and both Ella and Ymarma wore a special dark pink cloth. I don't know how it was woven and dyed; only certain members of the tribe knew the secret.

We had a lot in common. It started with the same attitudes towards men, although Ymarma could not yet have relationships, and then we moved on to discussing other subjects. In that first Autumn she wanted to join in with my second quest, to go to the spirit world with me and meet my puma guide. This was something we could do easily, entering into another person's quest.

"Ella and I want to unite the tribes," she said. "Not just have people switching between them- truly join them together. If your guide has a special place on the other side of the world, maybe he knows how to unite the world."

I was sitting on the ground outside the hut sorting some nuts we had found, wrapping them in a thin fur cloth, and I paused and looked up at the sky while I thought about it. "I'm not sure that was what he meant, Ymarma, but I would love you to meet him."

There was no need for Ymarma and I to go together into the forest. I was pregnant; we valued every chance to bring children into the tribes and took care of ourselves, so I would be staying within the perimeter of the settlement and meditating near home. Ymarma could go out into the wilds to revisit her own original quest and afterwards she could enter into mine.

Sometimes we would do a more everyday kind of meditation, as part of our normal routine, and that too could have a psychic dimension, with other people joining us in our inner world. In those ancient days before calendars and other devices for measuring

time, we would count the sunrises. If for example we wished to meditate every three days, we would count three sunrises.

Early in the evening on that Autumn day I sat down at the edge of the settlement, wrapped in several layers of loose clothes but not the special fur cloak this time. My dark-blond hair was parted in the middle and held in a bone circlet to make a ponytail.

We did not surround the settlement completely with a fence, but there were sections of wooden fencing made from the evergreen trees. In times of danger guards would stand beside these short fences, armed with spears or bows and arrows and accompanied by a dog that looked something like a husky.

I put my back against the fence, sitting and leaning this time rather than crouching, because of the weight at the front of my body. Then I entered into the quest.

The surroundings that I could see in my mind were like a clearing in the evergreen forest, and my guide the puma came loping towards me. I greeted him and stroked the fur at the back of his neck. Then I looked up and saw Ymarma approaching us, in her pink robe. She was gliding like a ghost- after all, she was in her spirit form.

“Greetings, Ymarma,” I said. “What would you like us to show you?”

“The pampas! If we unite that faraway place with our forest, it means we can unite our three tribes as one people.”

“I will show you,” said the puma, and we both climbed onto his back. This time he didn’t open up a pathway, he raced in a semicircle to reach the other side of the world.

Ymarma jumped off his back and looked around wide-eyed at the flat grassland with its waving grass stalks. “I never knew such places could exist!” she cried.

“The days will come,” said the puma, “when humans will go to other parts of the world and find out what they are like. Your tribes can’t do that- they have to stay in the Taiga and find their wisdom there.”

Ymarma looked sad. “We cannot use this to unite the tribes,” she said. “It is too different. No trunks and leaves, no open space and shade. It is like a new world, not the other side of the same world. Queen Ella will have to do as you said and find wisdom to unite us in the Taiga.”

“Or we can stay as we are, three tribes,” I interjected. “It is all right.”

“I have a dream. But never mind.”

I liked Ymarma so much, she was my closest friend, but I didn’t like her dream. Uniting the tribes meant no separate kings or queens, no power, and I was inspired by the power as represented by our respective medallions.

“I will have to leave your quest now and return to my own,” Ymarma continued. She raised her arms and flew up into the sky like the kite birds we sometimes saw above the forest.

The puma inclined his head in a farewell. “We will go now to the moon,” he said to me.

It felt like we were soaring into the sky in the same way that Ymarma had done, except that we then landed on another ground, a grey and dusty one with no green plants. There was a silvery mist all around us, and in the distance I could see what looked like little fairy-sized settlements half hidden in the mist. There were no living creatures near us, and the sky was black.

“Let’s play!” exclaimed the puma, and he began to chase me. In my mind I saw the dust scuffed by our feet as we ran.

He put his paw over me playfully, and then suddenly held me down hard, with the paw pressing on my neck and head. “See, if I do this, I could be attacking you as if I were catching some small creature like a mouse. Or alternatively, it could be protection. Your enemies will not come near because of my sharp claws.”

It was good to have a strong protector, I thought, and hoped he would say more. But instead, he pulled his paw away and abruptly changed the subject. “Let’s play dressing up. I will have to wear jewellery, as animals don’t wear clothes. You wear some jewels, and wind them around me as well.”

Suddenly I was wearing many pendants, not like the medallions with our tribal emblems but those that our people made for decoration, and jewelled pins and wrist bands. The puma hooked some of them away and pulled them around his own body, and we laughed and chased one another for some time with the ornaments swinging and trailing. I was very happy.

As we were running along, the darkness gradually increased until I could hardly see the puma. I paused, my knees splayed and half-buried in the shifting dust and asked, “why is it so dark here?”

“This is the dark side of the moon,” the puma replied. “It is all the same moon, yet one side is always dark like this, for we need both darkness and light. But take care if I put my paw over you here- I really might kill you like a mouse. You will have to go back to the other side, for there I will always defend you.” He raised one front paw in the air.

Struck with fear, I jumped to my feet and ran like crazy away from him, back to where the light increased. I looked behind and he was following at a loping pace, a placid look on his face, but I was subdued as I sat waiting for him.

When he reached me, we played for a little longer, then he said, “Now we will put the jewellery away until another time.” A treasure chest appeared on the ground with an open lid, whereupon all the jewels and decorations flew into the box and the lid slammed and clicked shut. The scene faded, and my consciousness returned to where I was sitting by the section of fence.

What I remembered most clearly was that my guide would defend me, which was a good feeling. But it wasn't my place to make enemies- I was a young woman and soon to be a mother, and I must concentrate on protecting my children to strengthen the Pine Tribe. Yet somewhere within I felt myself to be a rebel, and that confused me.

## Chapter 4. Holding Back The Tide

The foam crested wave of a tsunami, curling and towering as it rushed towards the shore. The terror of what you push below the surface of your mind: being drowned or crushed or trapped under a fallen building. The reality of realising that I hadn't really cared when it happened to other people, and I had seen it on the News.

Then, something worse. I survived the initial hit and found myself in a world with food gone, electricity gone, clean water gone, the fragile supply chain of essential medicines broken. *So now we will die more slowly, or nearly die, before help arrives.*

I remembered in earlier years trying to be strong in times of trouble; eating breakfast in a cold kitchen, grateful that I had something for breakfast and grateful that I still had a kitchen.

But this was a new level where I would be struggling for survival, not caring any more whether I was strong, unable to think of anything but the next breath. Most of my generation had never got to that level, but now, after the tsunami, we would.

I wasn't supposed to be there. I was meant to miss it, killed by that train in Bognor Regis. Who would have thought, back in the summer of 2019 when I went on my trip, that if I survived the disruptions would begin? Now they had culminated in the ice caps melting.

*I don't want to survive for this. I would rather have died.*

There is such a to-do about being suicidal in our society. Life is seen as something so precious that you must under no circumstances be allowed to take your own life; you must be persuaded not to, brought back from the brink. Yet in some other cultures, especially those of the past, it is accepted. There is the sati of widows, the hari-kari of the dishonoured warrior. Was I really so wrong to want to enter the timeline in which I would die on the railway line, to avoid what would be a much more unpleasant fate, and very likely a slower death, in a devastated society?

It had been ten years since Moona left me in 2016, and now I was a few weeks short of my fortieth birthday. I knew where Moona lived, but it was no use trying to contact her, for she had made it clear that our relationship was over. There had been other relationships, but nothing serious or lasting. They had been lean years emotionally, and the worsening state of the world was a constant source of anxiety for me, so I was more than ready to opt out.

I needed to find the gingerbread cottage. Even though I was wading through water waste-high, with screams and roaring wind echoing all around me, I would have to try and enter that reverie which always made it appear. I must think about time- the way it is too fast, or too slow, or seems to stand still; the way I was thinking when I sat behind Alfred Road in 2019, the last time I encountered the cottage. I would have to go first to a time before 2019 and then inside the cottage, to the timeline where I die. Then it would be real- this time, I would die.

There were people everywhere shouting out names, falling against floating wreckage and half swimming, yet they seemed remote somehow. I felt alone in this struggle. I grabbed at a thick tree trunk, amazingly not uprooted like the others, and wrapped my arms around it. How could it feel so wet when I was already soaked through? Closing my eyes, I strove to concentrate on time.

*Imagine if this was cyclic? I recited in my mind. If it happened every year, all the tidal waves would merge into one and it would feel as if it had been going on continuously. The times in between would vanish – irrelevant, like a broken necklace with long and uneven gaps between the beads which has become all string, nothing but string. A permanent inundation of the Nile, with no seasons of farming in between while waiting for the mud to fertilise the crops.*

As I contemplated this, I strained the fingers of one hand a few millimetres away from the tree trunk and felt for the time current with its characteristic tingling and tickling, until at last it was there. The chaotic sounds of the tsunami grew silent, and I was dry- actually dry.

I willed myself to a time before 2019, and at first I seemed to be floating above green fields. There were no clues as to when this was, and the next moment I plunged down and landed on the ground.

Slowly the witch's cottage came into view. A reverse of the fade-out at the end of a film, this was a deepening of colour and shadow, a materialisation before my eyes.

*This is the pivotal point. This is where I die in that freak accident, just after visiting the places of my childhood.*

Going home to die is a familiar concept, probably based on migratory habits in animals. Did I want to give in, and go home to die? How long I would survive after the tsunami was unknown, also how much I would suffer in the post-tsunami world. Many would take that chance, any chance, if it meant they might live a while longer. I made my decision. The coward's way out perhaps, but it was my choice.



I walked up and pushed the gate which was made of twisted coral-orange barley sugar, and when it swung open, I walked up the garden path to the gingerbread door. The doorknob was made of yellow chocolate buttons like the ones on the face of a gingerbread man. Would it turn? It looked fixed in its position. I grasped it, and it turned.

The door opened into a short hall opposite the kitchen, which I entered. I had never noticed before how it was like a quaint little kitchen from a nursery rhyme with neat wooden furniture, wooden cups and saucers, even a wooden bread bin. I hadn't been in there before, only into the living room where I had experienced myself being trapped completely static for an aeon, rooted to the floor by the window. What kind of escape from the tsunami would that be? I lingered in the kitchen, not wanting to enter the living room.

Maybe I could make myself a cup of tea? It seemed ridiculously banal, but it would give me an excuse to stay longer in the kitchen. The mundaneness of tea drinking felt crazy in the context of a place that seemed to exist only between dimensions. Two realities that clashed- one normal and the other bizarre.

The kettle looked old-fashioned, like a 1950's one, grey shiny metal with a swan neck spout and a black loop handle. I picked it up and went over to the equally retro sink with its splayed tap handles.

Just as I got there, I was startled by a sudden noise at the door, a snapping and crunching. I turned, troubled, almost as if it were that scene in the living room that I was trying to avoid.

There was a sense of inevitability as I went to the door and opened it. It was Hansel and Gretel: pigtails, German peasant clothes and everything. They were breaking pieces off the gingerbread door and eating it. Hansel jumped when he saw me. Gretel looked guilty and tried to hide a jagged piece of gingerbread by putting it behind her back.

"Children, please do not eat my house," I said. "I need my house to live in." I had the impression that I was saying a script.

Hansel put one arm protectively around his younger sister and said, "I am sorry, Madam. We are lost. Can we come in and shelter for a while?"

There was a trail of small white breadcrumbs on the ground, winding away across the clearing where the cottage stood and into the thick trees of the forest.

"See, your trail is there," I said. "The birds have not eaten it, even though you eat my door. Let me walk you home."

“It is a long way,” said Gretel. “I’m tired. I don’t think our parents want us- they left us in the wood.”

“I will make them take you back,” I said. “We must all choose correctly. The birds chose whether to eat and left your trail in place. You can choose whether to eat my house. I can choose whether to eat you. Come home with me.”

I threw my arms around them and hugged them.

“All right,” said Hansel. “Gretel, come on. Let’s go home.”

I began to follow the breadcrumbs with them, still with my arms around their shoulders as we walked. We entered the wood, and it grew dark with the clustered crowns of thick oak trees above us and moss and withered leaves underfoot.

Then a sensation of something snapping, boomeranging backwards, and the whole Hansel and Gretel scene disappeared. I was in limbo, hanging in the air in some cobweb-grey in-between place that was neither the present nor the past, and was in neither of the two timelines. Moona’s face was swimming before me.

“You fool, Lydia!” she exclaimed. “If you rescue Hansel and Gretel, you go back to the tsunami timeline. You have to eat them to go to the other one, where you die.” Before I could react or reply, Moona vanished.

I’ve always thought of myself and Moona as witches in a minor way, because of our esoteric interests. But the witch who eats Hansel and Gretel? That was a gross stereotype from a legend that emerged in less civilized times, accepted easily by a child’s mind but reverberating with horror and cultural wrong in the mind of an adult. I was most unlikely to have any children of my own, but I cared about other people’s children.

I had seen that side of Moona before and I accepted it because I loved her, but it would be very off-putting to a more faint-hearted psychonaut than myself.

So, what to do about this glitch in the process? I could try to will myself back to the cottage, but when that small hand rapped on the door, my response would still be the same- every time. Like Sir Percival’s answer to the Grail question, it would forever be that answer.

I would have to go to the beginning of the sequence instead, the part where I was sitting in the cottage garden prior to going in, like that day behind Alfred Road. That had got me into the timeline where I died at the station.

I pushed forward from the limbo, aiming for the cottage garden, but it seemed to be too late, and instead I moved back to the Earth. The world solidified around me, and I had indeed travelled back in time. I was with Moona, on that trip we went on in 2015.

We had gone on holiday for a week to a small town in northern England, ‘up north’ as they say. Neither of us had visited the north very much, and we were looking forward to a new experience.

Not far from our hotel was a zodiacal monument erected by some historic lord of the manor which Moona wanted to study-and so did I, although I wasn’t an advanced astrologer like she was. I held her hand as we walked around it, studying the designs, as it was a remote area, and we were alone. We were both wearing print dresses. Mine was pink and white, flared with large flowers, and hers was pale blue and slimline. We never dressed like boys.

“The tide is turning,” Moona said.

It was near to the Summer Solstice, which was why we had chosen this weekend, and we both knew the monument would have significant symbolism for us, although Moona understood far more of the details than I did.

It was during that weekend that Moona first mentioned the timelines. She was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the hotel room, engaging in a mixture of chart sketching and visionary utterances during which she looked up at the ceiling. “Strange! If you die young, I will become famous, though whether as a musician or a psychic I’m not sure. If we leave one another sometime later this year, or next year, you won’t die. I mean, not till later. One of us must make a sacrifice. Do you remember the synchronicity in that TV show?”

“Yes, but I was just reading things into it, surely? Like I always do.”

“No, that was definitely real. You shouldn’t put yourself down, Lydia. You have a great gift.”

That evening I sat on the balcony and played my piccolo, but it wasn’t uplifting the way it usually is.

I would have to correct the timeline. I would have to stay with Moona- yes, that was what I wanted, to stay with her forever. Except that it wouldn’t be forever, it would only be four more years, until I fell under that train.

In our world you grow up thinking that you can never have a second chance. You can certainly never get your youth back. Yet these things had happened for me when I was just on the verge of reaching middle age, and it was an incredible opportunity to secure the future I wanted, the love I craved.

The next day after we got back from our trip, I asked Moona to meet me at the Prince’s Theatre, the one in Alfred Rd as it happened. We sat in the café on the ground floor with lattes and chocolate eclairs on the table, and I announced a plan. “Let’s get

season tickets here and go to all the plays this year. We can easily afford it, and afterwards we can critique the plays to one another.”

“Hmm.” She stirred her coffee and looked around dubiously. “It’s an idea, but are either of us that keen on the theatre? I prefer the parties after we play in concerts. Especially at the Rose Bowl, they have the best ones. If both of us try to get accepted in as many concerts as we can, we should be able to go to all the parties till the end of the year.”

“Yes! I like the sound of that. We’ll do that instead.”

A year of after-performance parties with Moona would be fabulous, plus before them I would get the chance to play many pieces and interpret them in my own way, striving to make it the most moving experience both for the audience and myself. Or I could listen to Moona doing the same. To see one another as often as possible, more holidays and day trips, and after that, I hoped, a civil partnership. Surely she would see that it was wrong to keep on about the future being fated? Surely, if she loved me, I could persuade her to take each day as it comes and stay with me, and together we would live for each day?

I touched her hand briefly, before reaching for my serviette. “It will be fun. I would love to play in all the concerts we can get.”

“Yes, nice,” she said lightly, and tucked into her éclair.



Russel, the manager of the orchestra at the Rose Bowl, watched appreciatively as I played my audition piece.

“You’re definitely in for the August event,” he said. “We’re stretching ourselves this time, but you’re easily good enough. You must have been practising endlessly.”

“I take my playing very seriously.” I waved the piccolo like it was a baton, as if I were conducting the whole orchestra, although that was Colin’s job, and occasionally Russel’s when he had to step in to deputise.

“We’re thinking of touring Europe next year. Just the core players in the orchestra, and a few reserves. Why don’t you come along?”

“It sounds good. But...I would like it better if my friend came along too, Moona.”

He looked dubious. “Most pieces only require one piccolo. I know she plays other wind as well. She would need to have kept it right up to date, though. When did she last play bassoon at a concert?”

“Oh, she told me it was some years ago. She prefers piccolo, like me.”

“There you are, then. I could give YOU a place, though. We might even make a good profit.”

“There’s my job in the music shop- I’m not sure I could tour and then go back to it. Can I let you know nearer the time?”

“Of course.”

Men never understand about Moona, I reflected. Not all orchestras are male dominated, but the Rose Bowl’s was a bit; Russel, Colin and most of the lead players were men. I made up my mind to let the idea of touring drop and be gradually forgotten.

Moona tried as well to land parts in the local concerts, in accordance with our plan, but she wasn’t as obsessive about it as me. They say that in every relationship there’s always a lover and a beloved, and I was certainly the lover- the more ardent one, the one doing all the work.

It was a strange situation, living the rest of 2015 all over again for the second time. Except that this time things were happening differently; each little everyday decision I made was a new one, and gradually the outcomes were changing. It looked like I was on course for achieving my aim.

I became fascinated by books about time travel, both fiction and non-fiction, but nothing that I dipped into was accurate about the reality I was experiencing. I also wanted to know why it had to be on that particular day 1n 2019 that the accident would happen. Moona did psychic readings but of course I couldn’t ask her, or she would have been onto my plan to change our joint destiny. So I consulted a couple of other psychics we knew who I could trust to keep the details confidential.

One of them, Jeanne, was known for her skill in psychometry and I gave her the most recent photographs I had of the places in London that I would be visiting on that day in 2019.

She spread them out on the table and sat with her eyes closed, her fingers touching them lightly. Her breathing grew deeper, and she seemed to be in a light trance.

“Remember the healing angels,” she said softly. “They ask you to join them, to become a healer. The gate with the vine is the gate to Heaven. When you passed through it you were innocent, trusting- you knew you would be healed.”

The meaning was veiled, but I felt sure I understood it. The iron gate outside the old doctor’s surgery had an embellished design of leaves and grapes. It wasn’t in the photo I had given her, which only showed the area near the junction where Bollen’s Pharmacy stood. However, I did take a photo of that gate on my trip to London on that fateful day- a photo which I couldn’t give her, because it belonged to the future.

Innocent and trusting? I suppose I was when I used to go there to the doctor's, because I was still a child. Not like later, when I was inclined to suspect doctors of over-prescribing, and scandals in their private lives. I had studied healing a little, although I didn't consider myself qualified to practise any of the systems I had looked into, and I also remembered having dreams about healing angels. They seemed to float up and down in a shaft of pink and blue light. My dreams were always brightly coloured.

"One of your other photos has a gate to Hell in it," Jeanne continued. "That's why it is the day of your death- both gates are before you."

I don't believe in the Christian Heaven and Hell. But I knew which photograph she meant, and that too was from 2019, and not one of the ones I gave her. I realised it must be gates that hold the secret: the gate to the witch's cottage, the leafy iron gate and other gates that are hidden. The time current is only a conduit which leads to time gates opening out onto the great beyond, in a starless sky of black holes.

## Chapter 5. The Third Quest

At the beginning of the three-year period when I was having my first two children and starting to raise them, myself and several other young women in the Pine Tribe formed a group and began to learn how to shoot with wooden bows and arrows.

The men did not discourage our interest, provided that they were still the guards and hunters. They believed that it would only be appropriate for women to hunt animals or stand guard on those rare few occasions when we were not occupied with the children. Sometimes when the men were not listening, we joked about how surprising it was that they were not afraid we would shoot them. That never seemed to occur to them.

I was proud of my accuracy with the bow, and I liked to practise hitting stones and small fruits. The fruits were better because the arrows sank into them instead of glancing off, making it clear how accurate I was.

Most of us kept up our regular meditation every few days, and at the quest times in Spring and Autumn we undertook the special meditations. My third quest was in Spring when my son Beya was one year old, and I was expecting my daughter Chlo.

Once again, I was sitting on the ground against one of the sections of fence at the perimeter, my hair loose over my shoulders this time and beige cloth wound around my body and legs.

Normally any younger brothers and sisters I had would have looked after Beya while I was questing, but they were still with the Larch Tribe and although I visited them often, they were not near enough to babysit for me. Even though they were only a couple of miles away, they were busily engaged in tasks for their own tribe. I had to leave Beya with one of the girls in my archery club instead. A shame- I would have liked him to get to know his grandmother and her other children, but it was another disadvantage of having switched tribes.

This time after I closed my eyes, I saw a rugged mountain with a green plateau part of the way up, wrapped in swirling mist. We could see mountains in the distance, beyond our Taiga, but we had never travelled near enough to climb them. This mountain was exciting because it was in my meditation landscape; I had made it myself and it was all my own.

I floated up the mountainside until I reached the plateau and came to a stop, standing on it. After a few moments the mist cleared, and I saw many big cats sitting



in rows. None of them was my familiar puma guide who was so wise and friendly. These cats looked fierce, and they were all identical to one another, black like panthers with dry, spiky fur. They reminded me of the predatory cats in a fairy story that was told to the children in the Larch Tribe, which I had heard when I was very small.

“Greetings,” I said, my voice trembling a little. “Are you the cats from the legend?”

“Yes, we are,” one of the panthers replied.

I was not sure I wanted to continue, but asked as I had been taught, “what do you wish to show me?”

They did not respond, but then in the blink of an eye all the cats changed simultaneously into Pine Tribe medallions like the one I was wearing around my neck. The plateau was covered with row upon row of river deltas hanging from strings, so that it looked like rows of some exotic species of ground bird standing on the grass.

The panther who had spoken before asked, “How will you recognise your medallion now? You could lose it among us. It could be any one of us.”

I thought quickly and replied, “I will add a scent to it. I will give my medallion the scent of pine leaves, to distinguish it from you.”

I willed the perfume to attach to my medallion, and it was somehow difficult to do, but after a few minutes the pendant appeared to accept it and it smelt of pine. Then the panthers changed back into their original form, and I felt angry with them. Why had they tried to take away my power, that I wielded for the good of the tribe?

The meditation pictures faded and turned into evergreen forest, and I opened my eyes, having come back much more quickly than usual. That third quest was troubling.

It was soon afterwards that I began to plot against Stev and Ella. The best plan would be for Ella to have an accident- one caused by my bow and arrow. Then Stev would be single again, and Hol would automatically become king because he was married.

Of course, it saddened me about my dearest friend Ymarma who was so close to Ella. She would be grief stricken, but maybe in time when she got over it, she would become my maidservant instead.

I would have to make it look as if I had been aiming at an animal, and Ella had walked in front of it. I started to track the paths Ella followed when she went on solitary walks in the early morning, and I had to think carefully about whether I would leave markers.

When the men were hunting, they would leave twig and glue markers at places frequented by herds of animals. The glue was made from the blood of an insect. We

women who were learning to shoot had practised this as well, but to the more experienced male hunters in the tribe it would look very suspicious to find markers near the trackways used by people. Yet without them it would be hard to remember the best places where I could shoot her unseen. I crawled along in the dirt and leaf mould, thinking all the time about where she would be and where I would be; her path here and mine there, her path here and mine there. It was difficult to move along at ground level when I was more than halfway through my pregnancy.

In the end I placed one marker, in a position that was particularly suitable, and I hid it as best I could at the edge of some bushes. There was a steep slope and bush cover on my side and a narrow, raised path on hers.

I reflected that it would be better to say it was a bird I was shooting at, for our skilled hunters and trackers could tell which kind of animal had passed by, and how long ago. A bird would be less likely to leave signs before flying away, unless some feathers fell down.

Ymarma liked to take solitary walks as well. She didn't belong to the archery group, because she wasn't interested in it and anyway her duties wouldn't have left her enough time. She would eventually be re-joining the women of the tribe and looking for a partner, and then a younger girl would become Ella's maidservant. Young women of childbearing age were too precious to keep as virgins for very long, for mothers and babies did not always survive to continue the tribe.

One day while she was walking along the track Ymarma spied me from a distance, scraping around near my hidden marker. She had no experience with markers and would not have suspected what I was doing. However, since the time when she had entered into my quest, we had a close mental bond- we could almost sense one another's thoughts, and what she saw filled her with foreboding. The story she told afterwards was that she was sure I was up to no good, and sure that somehow it involved Ella.

For many nights after that, she dreamed of me killing both herself and Ella. All she wanted was to live and be a mother, like I was. How could I deprive her of what I had, and send her into the spirit world while still in her early youth?

Finally, one morning she could bear it no longer, and went to warn Ella. But Ella wasn't lying on her sleeping fur. She had gone out earlier than usual for a walk. Ymarma ran out into the forest, and when she came to the narrow, raised path, there lay Ella with an arrow in her chest. She was surrounded by the tribespeople, and I was crying, saying I had been shooting at a kite bird.

After Hol had been made the king, Ymarma asked to speak to Stev and Hol. I was included in the meeting, sitting at the edge of the room, although Ymarma refused to look at me.

I held my head up defiantly but knowing how close our psychic bond was I dreaded what she was going to say. As I feared, she told them she believed I had shot Ella deliberately.

“Why would you say that about your friend?” Stev asked.

“I feel things. I feel, and I dream.”

The two brothers sat in thought for a moment. Then Hol said, “mothers are sacred. Wives are sacred, so much so that I must have one to be the king. I have noticed that when women are having their children, they become strange. Sometimes they cry all the time, sometimes they laugh all the time. I have never understood why. But it may be that because my wife is having her family, she is strange at this time. I decree that she will not be a queen like Ella was. She will not help me to rule. She will look after her children, and when other mothers are busy, she will look after theirs. Does this satisfy you, Stev, as there is a doubt about her?”

“Yes,” said Stev. “Mothers are sacred. She will look after children, as you said. And let us hope she did not shoot Ella on purpose.”

A few days later I was doing my regular meditation. In my mind I was up in a treetop, having impressions as elevated as the tree. Then I saw Ella coming towards me through the air, with her dark pink cloak wrapped around her and eyes blazing with fury.

“Traitor!” she exclaimed. “I will kill you. I will ram something into you: a stick, an animal horn, a spear- something long like your arrow.”

“Puma!” I called. “Help me. An enemy threatens me.” It wasn’t a quest, but he should still appear if I summoned him like that.

In the distance I saw the puma, but his form was misted. “The dark side of the moon,” he said. “Here you are a mouse.”

Instantly I tried another tactic. “Ella, you can’t kill me now. I am raising my family, and mothers are sacred.” Ella had no children, and the tribe had hoped she would have them later on, as it happens with some women.

“I will kill you later,” Ella said with dignity, turning her back on me. “But I WILL kill you.” She flew away.

I opened my eyes and felt mortified. I was a failure. I had not found my special place where I was strong; instead, I had let myself be consumed by the desire to steal

Ella's power. Now I would never be a queen, only a childminder- Ymarma would soon be giving up the pink garment and I would not be putting on one of my own. And one day, Ella would kill me.

## Chapter 6. Sub-alpha

There is something erotic about a girl playing the cello. The way she sits with the instrument clasped in between her legs and rubs the bow to and fro across the fretboard. Even more so when the cello player is as pretty as Bonita. I was at a rehearsal with the Rose Bowl's orchestra, and I couldn't take my eyes off our new cello player.

This was so inappropriate when I was supposed to be making sure of spending the rest of my life with Moona. I was putting all this effort into the concerts especially for her. I was working hard at every aspect of our relationship. It may be only a few years till Summer 2019, but I was determined to persuade Moona to be with me for the whole of that time.

Surely that couldn't be Bonita giving me an encouraging look? Quickly I switched my attention to some framed pictures on the back wall of the hall and pretended to study them. But I had seen that look enough times before.

After the practice I gathered my stuff together quickly: my handbag, the piccolo in its case, an angora cardigan that trailed round the back of the seat. I tried to slip away discreetly, but suddenly there was Bonita beside me, smiling and handing me a piece of notepaper. "I thought you wanted to meet. On a date... soon. There's my phone number."

I almost felt irritated with her for the comment that read two ways. She was so smooth, and I wasn't really available. Yet I found myself taking the note with a slightly unsteady hand.

"Thank you," I said, and smiled in the same way as her, like we had been making friends.

At first, I told myself that I wouldn't phone Bonita. But of course, I did, and after a couple of months it was clear to me that I would have to have a talk with Moona.

We were sitting on my porch when I told her, and it made me sad that I still had my own home, and we had never moved in together.

Moona became very still, gazing into mid-air at nothing, like she did in her trances. Then she said, "I always knew anyway that we would go our separate ways. If we don't, you'll die. Remember?"

*Of course I do. I've been there before; I've travelled back in time.*

I remembered every detail of our parting last time, in 2016, and this time it was going to be different because I was going to correct the timeline. This time we would

go to a lot of parties together and have a civil partnership, and then we would share a house. But the same thing had happened even sooner this time, and in a different way, and I couldn't escape my fate.

So was I going to be selfish, and still try to find a way of dying in summer 2019, even though I might be leaving behind a bereaved partner? When I faced that tsunami originally, I was alone. Moona had left and no-one else permanent had taken her place. If my relationship with Bonita stayed as strong as it was, we might still be together, which would mean I was leaving her deliberately.

How could I have let this happen anyway? Moona was Ymarma, my dearest friend from that long ago past life. She was special- we were meant to be together, and I should have moved mountains to correct that timeline. But even if I had done, we would only have been together for four more years.

Over the next few weeks, I tried many times to make the witch's cottage appear. It wasn't a foregone conclusion what would happen; I would be able to choose between going into the kitchen, which led to the tsunami, or staying in the garden which led to the rail accident. But at least I would have the choice.

However, the cottage refused to materialise, and however many times I put up my hand and felt for the time current, I never found it. Maybe it was too late, and I had used up all the occasions when time could be altered.

There were still plenty of chances to find the current before 2019. Even so, I began trying to think of some other way of dealing with the problem. An unusual idea occurred to me- what about trying the meditation technique that I used to do in the Taiga?

My past life memories were still hazy and incomplete. I knew there had been other lifetimes later than the one in the Taiga, and in one of them I had done a far more spiritually refined type of meditation. But the Taiga one appeared the most relevant simply because Ella's grievance was intimately linked with what was happening. The Taiga meditation was broadly similar to other kinds that I have done during my present life, with one or two distinguishing features that I was confident I could duplicate.

I sat down on a quiet Saturday afternoon on my porch, in the same place where I'd had that break-up conversation with Moona the previous week. I was doing weekdays only at the music shop, so I had the whole day free. There was ylang-ylang and lavender oil burning in a diffuser on the coffee table.

As I went through the specific breathing and visualisation for the meditation of my Taiga life, I began to see in my mind an evergreen forest. It looked like a modern one,

here in the UK or possibly another part of Europe. Then came other sensory impressions: birdsong, the sighing of wind through the branches, the scent of pine and larch leaves.

There was movement in the bushes and the puma came loping towards me, but then he changed into a man. He looked like a mountain rambler, sturdy and muscular with a dark brown beard.

“I am a man now,” he said simply.

“Is it really you, my guide from all that time ago?”

“I know what you want. That time current you found. You must go to a library attached to a research centre, where you will meet a man. Not me- it will be someone else. The library is at number 50, Chain Street in Southampton. Write to them and ask to join, to borrow some specialist books. Then take a trip there and you will meet him.”

I was amazed. This was more like something that would happen to Moona; a psychic message with an exact address in it.

“Thank you,” I said. “But...where do you live now? And where are Stev and Ella? I’m sorry now, for what I did. I would like to apologise to them.”

“Ella and Stev are a goddess and god,” he replied. “They always were, but you didn’t know, for human beings walked beside the gods at that time. She will not give up her grudge against you because of who she is, but it doesn’t matter. Human beings are discovering what she knows: information science, quantum time, and they can interact with her more confidently. Good luck with your quest.”

He waved, and the impressions started to fade, till I was once more aware only of the porch and the smell of perfumed herbs.

I’ve never been the scientific type- I’m a creative, a musician, and the knowledge I had stumbled upon was a puzzle to me. My hope was that this mysterious man at the research library would understand it and be able to explain everything to me, and I at once set out to contact him.

It was a few weeks before I was ready to travel to Southampton. Irrationally, I was nervous about going by train, and I squeezed myself tightly into a corner of a middle carriage and read compulsively, a light romance paperback. It was mainstream and conventional, which somehow reassured me as I let it absorb my attention.

The research centre was a square building at the end of a shaded narrow street. The thick double doors were locked firmly. I rang the doorbell, clutching my invitation letter.



The lady who opened it looked like an old-fashioned secretary: black-rimmed glasses and a dress suit. "Are you the physics student?"

"Yes, I'm Lydia."

I had told them I was writing a thesis on the relativity of time as it relates to music performance. You could say that was the turn my life had taken.

The library was so quaint. I loved the dark brown wooden furniture and the dimly lit corners at the ends of the bookshelves, with vintage lights hanging down. It looked like the 1950's, and there was a secluded atmosphere as if I were miles away from the modern world.

I couldn't very well start searching for the contact that had been predicted in my vision. What would I say to him? I would have to let him approach me. So I located the music section and begun flicking through the volumes.

As I was running my finger down a page with illustrations of violins and violas, I became aware of someone standing behind me. I turned to see a short middle-aged man with glasses sliding down his nose, wearing a jacket that flapped.

"Ha! Are you the lady who's been watching *Donnie Darko*?"

"I've seen it," I replied cautiously. "But the reality is ...different."

"Oh-ho- so you know the reality? I thought as much when I saw your letter."

I glanced around to see if anyone was witnessing this unusual conversation, but the lady who had let me in was gone and we were alone.

"There's a current which flows down from the sky and touches my hand. It feels prickly. But I can't get it anymore, it won't appear. I'm afraid I might have lost my chance to time travel again."

"Well, my dear, what you're talking about is called the sub-alpha current. I've been studying it for a while, myself and some others, and it defies control. Does what it likes. Because it IS intelligent, so it appears. But there is one way that you will catch it. On a Solstice, either winter or summer, when the sun sets. If you feel for it then, I assure you that you will get it."

"Thank you so much," I said. "It means a lot to me, to try again. You wouldn't believe, a spirit guide from the past told me I would find you here."

"I DO believe that."

"Shall we keep in touch? My address is on the letter."

"My name's Pete Dixon- I work here at this centre. Let me know if you get any interesting results. But you might not be able to - you might not be here, in the same time frame as me."

“I think I will be. Though I’m not sure, of course. It all seems to hinge on what I do now, in 2015.”

“That’s the way it looks, because here we are in 2015. But wait and see. Best of luck.”

He started to walk away, and I didn’t call him back.

I felt inspired by our conversation, yet also perplexed. Why hadn’t my guide simply given me the same information that Pete gave me? What was the reason that I had to come here to receive it? All I could think of was that I must be meant to contribute in some way to Pete’s research. My guide and Pete had both wished me luck, and yet for me the question of how far luck existed was still unanswered, and indeed how far fate existed. I wondered whether my present actions would succeed in transcending both luck and fate, or whether they would ultimately catch me out.

The next Solstice to come was only a couple of weeks away, winter 2015, and I knew that there was going to be a Winter Solstice celebration at the headquarters of Zodiac Spiral. Moona had taken me to a few of their meetings in 2014, and I was fascinated, although I was unable to discuss astrology with them on the same level as Moona. She had stopped attending since then, so she wouldn’t be there. It would be too awkward if she was there. I didn’t want Bonita to go either- just me, and I sent up for a single ticket.

They would be marking the exact moments of sunset and sunrise. Of course, I could look up the times myself, but it would mean more to me if other people were there. A group ceremony signalling the time would be the ideal setting for my time travel, which would be the jewel in its ring.

The days leading up to the Solstice soon passed, amid preparations for Christmas. I wondered whether I would still be here for the Christmas festivities, or if I would be transiting through the time waves in search of a suitable entry point back into its stream that would deal the necessary tweak to my love life.

I enjoyed the Solstice ceremony. It was held indoors in a grand lecture hall, with astrological talks, poetry readings and communal singing. There were breaks in a side room with party food and drinks on sale. After the sunset ritual it was optional to stay on all night and mark the sunrise as well, and some core members of the group were planning to stay. I hoped I would be gone by then, literally- disappeared from the room at sunset.

It wasn’t strictly a religious ritual; however, Greek and Celtic gods and goddesses were mentioned in the lyrical address, and perfumed candles were burning. As a chime

announced sunset, I put my hand out and felt for the sub-alpha current while thinking intently about the seasonal change that was occurring, and its familiar prickling was a thrill even though I had encountered it so often before.

There was the witch's cottage, before me at last! As it solidified, the room I had been in at the ceremony vanished, and I was once again in the other timeline.

But was I really sure what I wanted to do? I could try again to steer events so that I stayed with Moona. Alternatively, I could go into the kitchen and manipulate events so that I toured Europe with the Rose Bowl orchestra in company with Bonita; her on cello, me on piccolo, and the orchestra on a roll to profit and success. I could enter into that civil partnership with Bonita instead of Moona, and live with her until the tsunami shattered our world in 2026.

But what if my plans were to go wrong again? Bonita was a person with free will, and she might decide to leave me as Moona had done- or I might leave her. After all, we had only been together for a few short months. Then there was Ella. If I escaped the rail accident would she try again to kill me, or would it be (as Moona had implied) enough of a punishment that Moona had left me? They were all unknown factors, which could turn out differently at every attempt I made to change my fate.

As I drew near to the cottage, I saw a figure hovering on the winding path over to my right. It was Pete Dixon. "I knew I would find you here," he said. "And I have a suggestion. Instead of trying again to change the timeline, have you thought of going over there?"

He pointed above the roof of the cottage to something beyond. I had always thought the cottage was like a piece of stage scenery, with nothing behind it, but now as I peered around the back, I could see a grassy knoll rising up, with steps cut into it.

"If you walk straight up there, you will go into the far future. It would be a chance to find out our ultimate destiny- what becomes of mankind and the Earth."

I shook my head. "No, I can't. I can't leave everyone I know behind. There are people I love- two people. I can't have them both, but I might be able to swing it for one of them."

Inwardly I was annoyed with myself for having said 'two people' when I should have said 'two girls.' But I couldn't stop that familiar habit of hiding it, making it sound neutral.

"Ah- love. It always wrecks the time travel. In every story, and in real life too."

I glared at him. "Don't you want to go there yourself, Pete?" I asked. "For your research, if nothing else."

“I probably will, some day. But for now, I want a test subject. To report back- if you can.”

“If you’re going someday you would be there now, wouldn’t you? So you can do your own study of the future.”

His eyes widened, and he chuckled. “That is potentially ingenious! But it must be wrong, as I am here. Well, never mind, you must make your own choices.” He put his hand up casually and vanished.

*Can you feel for the current while you are inside it?* Maybe he had learned to surf it and target where he was going. But I was far less experienced than he was. If I tried to do the same, that could take me away from the cottage, and I would lose my chance again.

Now I understood why I had to meet Pete and hear the instructions about the Solstice from him. It was important that I should be aware of that third choice of where I could go, even if I didn’t intend to take it.

My decision would be part of a whole web of choices made by myself, Pete and all those who had found the sub-alpha current; choices which would reverberate through time remoulding past, present and future for all of us. We were in a unique position almost like the Time Lords of TV mythology, dipping in and out of this current until a larger number of human beings should discover it, and unable to work out with our limited human consciousness how that would affect us.

There was no need to rush- after all, it was the longest night of the year. Yet I still felt I wanted to make my decision quickly and get it over with. I almost don’t want to tell you what I did, and leave you wondering about it forever. But I won’t do that.

I went into the garden of the cottage and sat on the white trellis seat, like on that day behind Alfred Road.

# Other Books by Candy Ray

I write metaphysical and visionary fiction, influenced by the occult, magic, paganism and shamanism.

These books are all available as free eBooks (except Platara Mountain, which was published as a paperback only by an independent publisher.)

## Novellas

### The Wizard From Vahan

A science fiction/fantasy story about a young chaos magician from the year 2091 who becomes stranded on another planet. The first book I wrote- this one is a bit influenced by feature films!

### Copying A Master

A French painter with an interest in sigil magic is dragged into an art fraud against his will. Set in the 1950's. This story was entirely channelled from my muse Ino (who is a nymph/demon).

### The Rescue Circle

A magician undertakes a dangerous quest to become a psychopomp, a guide of the dead. This is my most popular novella. Most of the action takes place on the astral plane (the Spirit world.)

## Novellas under the pen name Lena Chere: The Eoss Trilogy

### Platara Mountain

A teenage girl becomes involved with the Horse Goddess Eoss who was created on the internet by modern magicians, and with a parallel world where human beings are still in the Stone Age.

## Mount Clexa

The story is told in the first person by Clexa, the daughter of Eoss. She is bound in service to a magician who wants her to help him with a curse, and with exploring the aethyrs of the Enochian magic system. She has her own ideas about what she wants to do.

## Silver Manes.

Arran has an accident which puts him in a coma. It comes at a critical moment in his love life, and it deepens his emerging connection with a region of Hell. He dwells there during his coma, learning lessons and meeting Wishing Horses.

## Short Story Collections

Chaos Dreams Part 1.

Chaos Dreams part 2: Astral Tales

Chaos Dreams part 3: Fruition

Chaos Dreams 4

Chaotic Dreams

Chaos Dreams part 1 is entirely channelled from my muse Ino. Half of the stories in parts 3 and 4 and in Chaotic Dreams were also channelled from her.

## Non-Fiction

### Alchemical Journey

An account of six past lives that I remember. This was previously available as a PDF and is now an eBook. The PDF was popular and widely read on occult forums.