

# *CONSTELLATIONS*

Pamela Jaye Smith

-- a KURULTAI story --

Best thing I've read in a long time! Highly recommended for those seeking a thought-provoking and enjoyable read.

Throughout *Constellations* Pamela Jaye Smith demonstrates she is nothing short of a true Renaissance woman, displaying intelligence and a vast array of talents throughout. Each page is beautifully written, offering both stimulation and entertainment.

Ell Leigh Clarke - Amazon best-selling sci-fi Author

Again, BRAVA on the work you have done - clarity and richness enhanced on a piece I lovelovelove!! Thank you for allowing me to review this latest iteration - I am so honored!!

Reece Michaelson - Author, Editorial Consultant, Co-author  
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Published by Pallas Press  
7231 Franklin Ave., Suite 5  
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Cover by Geffrey von Gerlach and Brian Dyer.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Georgia Lambert  
Esoteric Teacher Extraordinaire

And to

Bruce Logan, Monty Hayes McMillan,  
Rick Gilligan, and Geffrey von Gerlach

For Inspiration and Informative Discussions

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks to my very helpful readers Monty Hayes McMillan, Aurora J. Miller, Reece Michaelson, Laura Leigh Clarke, Robert Grant, Judith Claire, Jill Gurr, Mario Rongstad, Gail Jordan, and Steve Finly for their insightful suggestions and continuing encouragement.

Geffrey von Gerlach and Brian Dyer collaborated on the cover art: Geffrey with design and Brian with photography.

Tina Lewis made very helpful editorial suggestions. Aurora J. Miller works her magic as the Pallas Press Publications & Website Manager and is always much appreciated.

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## KURULTAI

History keeps repeating itself so that everyone  
has the opportunity to be and do everything.

Time and space recycle *ad infinitum*;  
the boundaries of experience and age are not fixed.

A group of souls called the Kurultai  
intertwine lives through time and place.

Their Mission is the enlightenment and evolution of humanity  
from Tribal to Individual to Group Consciousness.

Maintain the uniqueness of each;  
collaborate for the good of all.

Lovers now, Warriors another time,  
Scientists, Magicians, Clergy.

Sometimes siblings, parents, rivals, compatriots,  
sometimes total strangers.  
Who kills whom, who is loyal, whence cometh betrayal?

And always -- the battle between the Darkness and the Light.  
But how can you tell who's on which side when the players  
in the Kurultai keep changing between lifetimes?

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## PROLOGUE

You know how some people say there is no linear time and that everything is happening at once? That makes no sense whatsoever if you are conscious only of yourself as a single, individual being, because it is quite obvious that time flows in a linear fashion from yesterday to today to tomorrow. What is done cannot be undone. More's the pity. It is as the old Persian poet penned:

*The moving finger writes, and having writ,  
moves on. Nor all thy piety nor wit  
shall lure it back to cancel half a line.  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.*

Think before you speak, I always say. Though, I must admit, I have not always done so. As you shall see.

So, stuck in linear time within an incarnation we seem, to our great regret, to be.

However, if you consider yourself a unit in the whole of Humanity, which is itself part of a much, much larger unit, then everything is indeed happening at once.

There are babies being born, people falling in love, individuals being brave and valorous against overwhelming odds, people suffering, people causing others to suffer, people dying, people killing other people.

Frankly, it is a real beast of a chore to make sense of it from the perspective of a single, individual, isolated, unique, one-and-one-time-only life. It can actually make one quite bitter to see it from that perspective.

It looks damned unfair. You can see how religions that offer a reckoning, a judgment, and rewards and punishment in an afterlife look quite attractive against the general unfairness of the one-life-only, here-and-now life.

It is only when you look at the whole thing from the larger perspective of the Kurultai that it begins to have any semblance of logic whatsoever. And a sense of fairness begins to edge in only when you can look at the broad perspective and the long term point of view.

On a smaller scale, just think of it as, well, how it would appear to you if you were a single cell in the larger unit of your own body. Every day thousands of skin cells get sloughed off. Internal cells die and are flushed away or absorbed and replaced by new ones. Your stomach lining, for instance, is entirely new cells every seven days. So you, the entity in its entirety, are an encompassing unit within which there are smaller units such as the heart, the liver, the bones.

And within each one of those units there are the smaller units of the cells. And within those are the even smaller units of molecules, and then atoms, and then the protons and electrons, and then the tinier sub-atomic particles.

Well, if you consider, for the sake of analogy, that each individual human consciousness is as a sub-atomic particle in the body which is the race of Humanity, then you can perhaps begin to grasp the concept of how everything is happening at once and how there is no linear time because it is all a continuously ongoing process.

And then look up at night and see the billions of galaxies and stars that make up the cosmos. What is our planet, what are we, but tiny aspects of an unimaginably expansive whole.

But that is all fairly academic. What we all really want to know is how this all-time-no-time thing affects us personally, in the here and now.

How do the opposing forces within the cosmos affect us? Chaos, creation, inertia, entropy... At what scale do they work? Do our individual lives reflect the process of the life of the stars? What about the constellations? The patterns seen from earth are different from those seen from Vega or Sirius or Alpha Centauri. Is it all inter-linked? Is there any predictable, reliable rhythm to the forms we inhabit? The bodies? The emotions? The thoughts? The memories?

What do we know and how do we know it?

That to me is what science attempts to do for us. It gives us ways to measure reality, to substantiate our experiences as more than just fantasy.

It gives us repeatability. Perspective. And hopefully, with enough of both of those, Wisdom.

And at the same time, we must always be aware that some are out there using that same information with a different, destructive agenda.

As for the Kurultai, we are trained and if we do it well, we can affect things going both forwards and backwards in so-called linear time. For those not yet awakened in a particular lifetime (and more's the pity again, sometimes one is not, even though we might have three or four butterfly acknowledgements in other incarnations), one might sometimes receive the contact from another aspect of one's Self in as subtle a fashion as being sent a thought which may be interpreted as an inspiration, or a memory of something heard or read, or just a musing, a what-if?

Sometimes it might be a vision or a dream. Sometimes it might be a story or legend or myth that strikes us particularly poignantly. Sometimes the lyrics of a poem, or a melody.

Sometimes it is the affect of another person, be they a teacher, a friend, or best of all do most of us agree, a lover.

There is something in the nature of the merging of souls and the touching of stars in the act of love that tends to open the doors of perception and memory.

Unfortunately it also opens doors that those of the Dark Side can utilize towards their ends of blocking and setting back the advancement of Humanity.

The more awake and aware we are in a particular lifetime, the more accurate those impressions can be and the more affective our use of them can be.

To receive and to perceive them and not know what it is about can be maddening. And any number of the Kurultai have had lives where the input from other times and places did seem to drive them mad.

The better way is to have the remembrance and know what it is.

The best way is to be able to make use of that insight and information to affect a particular incarnation towards the goals of the Kurultai: the enlightenment and evolution of Humanity.

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## "CONSTELLATIONS"

England and Vienna  
1820s to 1900

*Vienna, Austria 1900*

The skater spun to a stop.

Stunned, terrified, she slumped to the ice and tore off her gloves and muffler with breathless gasps of pain and sheer terror.

Amazed that her bare skin looked perfectly normal and felt cool and smooth to the touch, Catherine Logan Sinclaire Chatsworth took in a deep breath of relief, disbelief, and trembling paranoia. What had just happened to her?!

Her skin still felt as if she had been ground to bloody shreds during her pirouette. And that vision - towering sandstone cliffs and what looked like a railway car in some outpost of the Empire smashing her against them, turning and crushing, smothering and grinding. Aaach!

The young Englishwoman leaned over and wretched on the cold cross-cut ice, her bare palms burning now from the frigid grit beneath them. Her mind's palms, dream's palms, ghost palms still screamed with the insult of the vision.

Catherine had always had what her Welsh grandmama on her father's side called Second-Sight. 'A wee giftee from the olde ones', she would say with an insinuating slant-eyed glance at her not-so-favourite grandchild. Lady Brentye Gruffudd Sinclaire Chatsworth always seemed to have had some sort of grudge against her only son's second child, everyone else's favourite, the lovely and graceful, shy and intelligent Catherine.

Lying here on the brittle surface of an icy pond in Vienna Austria, twenty-three year old Catherine cursed the Celtic gift and caught her breath. The odd unsettling wind-rush in her ears, like a thousand people whispering from around a corner, began to fade and the normal sounds around her crept back in like the sounds of the real world lapping onto the waking dreamer's shore.

"Catherine? Darling, what happened? Are you alright?" Frederick's voice sounded like it was traveling through wool.

She looked up at the man crouching down beside her and saw that he was speaking through his wool muffler. Frederick Durand's worried countenance was an anchor back from the blistering hot

metallic grinding greasy bloody shrieking living nightmare Catherine had just spun out of. The solid young man's skate blades tangled with hers and he tumbled clumsily down beside her. With no thought for his own discomfort, Frederick pulled her gently into his arms and cradled her against his large chest.

"What happened? Are you alright?" He held her away now and looked hard at her, inspecting her face, her grey eyes still wide with fear.

She turned her glance away from him, gulping in huge biting gasps of the cold, clean Alpine air. More and more of the local sounds wove reality back into place and Catherine was comforted by the merry waltz music coming from the gingerbread pavilion, the bells of the cocoa vendors, skating children's exhilarated calls of challenge and victory, the snick-slide snick-swoosh of metal blades on ice, almost like swords snicking out of scabbards - ?! - where had that come from?

"Another vision?" his voice married concern for her well-being with concern he might be overstepping the bounds of intimacy.

Catherine turned back to Frederick and gazed into his warm worried eyes, noting the furrowed brow above his still boyish face that nonetheless managed to look strong and intelligent. From his concerned and comforting look she anchored her attention and hopefully her consciousness in this time and place. Gripping his sturdy arms, she pulled herself to her knees. His question did not really require an answer but she wanted to dilute the gut-wrenching immediacy of what had just happened and she knew that the act of becoming the observer in addition to the perceiver would shift the emphasis of the experience. Though from America, Frederick was, like Catherine herself, a scientist. They would analyze this event, put it in its proper place, and move on.

"Help me up?" She smiled at her fiancé, 'putting a good face on it', as her father Lord Chatsworth would say.

Catherine and Frederick sat on a green wooden bench on the edge of the iced-over pond, blowing clouds of sweet-smelling steam off their hot cocoa. Catherine set the mug down; its radiant heat was too much like the scorching pain she had just felt.

"Where were you?" coached Frederick.

"Somewhere hot, dry, and hostile." Catherine's mind stood back and walked around her memory, hesitant to do anything but cautiously observe her recent experience. Unlike some of her second-sight visions, this one was not anything she wanted to ever do again.

"What happened?"

"Something painful, confusing, and deadly."

"Who were you?"

"I have no idea," she turned to him with a look that both asked for help and seemed resigned to its own solitary confinement in a mysterious world where visions and dreams invaded unbidden the otherwise orderly life she had managed to create for herself.

Frederick's theory about things like this, and really, any display of overactive imagination, was that the brain was like a library and the mind an unruly reader. Whatever sorts of 'books' you placed onto the library shelves in the form of experience, music, art, conversations, readings, ideas...could all be accessed, and would be accessed, willy-nilly by the mind. It took a conscious act of will to keep the library in order and it was both the virtue and the duty of the scientific method to bring some order into the world of thoughts and perceptions. There was plenty of evidence Frederick could point to that a disordered brain led to trouble. Order and science, logic and serenity, these alone brought both progress and tranquility to a man and to a nation. "What have you been reading lately?"

"The same things you have," Catherine snapped.

"I just thought, well, you know, with your brother's travels in the Sahara, and your cousin Ronnie off in India maybe you'd received a letter from one of them, or..." he trailed off under Catherine's scathing look. "Oh, heck. I'm sorry, my dear," he took her hands in his, but Catherine's flesh still cringed at any touch.

Though she knew he only saw her fine graceful fingers, she herself could see a veiled overlay of raw bleeding flesh shimmering around the edges of the here-and-now in Vienna.

"It does not matter," Catherine stood up, patted Frederick solicitously on the shoulder, and skated off with a little twirl and a challenging smile of forgiveness and 'forgive-me?'

Frederick leaned back on the worn wooden bench and slurped up the rest of the rich cocoa, contemplating his fiancée's departing form and growing problem. For the last few months her visions had been increasing in frequency and intensity and it was troubling both of them. Probably a great deal more than she would admit. Frederick tried to analyze them by analyzing what had gone into her brain, even down to keeping a diary of what she had eaten, how long she had slept, the temperature, what she had worn. Some people said if a woman's corsets were too tight it cut off blood supply to the brain. There were some rather risqué jokes going about the gentlemen's clubs these days concerning the exaggerated S-shape of a woman's molded form, which Frederick ignored in the way a true gentleman should. But there did not seem to be any consistent stimuli in Catherine's life to elicit these incidences. Not that Frederick could find anyway.

Catherine was a good scientist. She possibly even had as good a mind as him, he had to admit to himself. At least at making those leaps of imagination that led to discovery. His own scientific method was more like a plodding methodology. But he got results. Consistent, good, repeatable results. And he was getting more recognition in his field. Hence his invitation to the New Century Science Frontiers Conference here in Vienna. Frederick was presenting a paper on communicable diseases, their vectors and media.

Catherine had been asked to chair a panel on astronomy and the nature of reality. Frederick pandered to her slightly, if only in his mind. He rather thought it was her family name and title along with her charming enthusiasm for her work that had helped win her the seat. Plus, he rather thought her studies in gravity, orbits, and centrifugal and centripetal forces out in the far reaches of space were unprovable and impractical. After all, what did it matter to a fellow fighting some jungle fever how fast Saturn rotated around the sun or how many moons it had. Did Saturn have moons or was that Jupiter, or both? He could never remember.

But the Chatsworth name carried weight, and Catherine had published a couple of papers co-authored with her mentor and a visiting American professor. Her age and her beauty did not hurt either, Frederick had to admit, as he watched her moving in and out of the other skaters on the pond, a dancing fairy-form barely touching the surface of the earth beneath the swirl of her bell-shaped skirt.

His.

She was his.

Well, Frederick admitted as he set down the empty cocoa mug, as much as she would ever be anybody's. He had always had this gnawing suspicion at the bottom of his heart that her quick acceptance of his marriage proposal and her dispassionate acceptance of his constant company was more a way to shield herself from the rest of the world than it was for her to be with him.

He could still hear her grandmama Brentye's cackling laughter when they had announced their engagement, as though she knew something wicked waited just around the corner.

Catherine was still troubled by the vision when later that evening she stood behind the frost-rimed French doors of her balcony, gazing down on the Regency Hotel's skating pond. Vienna's ornate new electric streetlights cast cold orange glows on snow banks and white-draped shrubs, rather like campfires and field tents, she thought. Then shook her head to rearrange the overlaying images.

One of her grandmama Brentye's taunting phrases came to mind, "Whose life is this?"

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*Land's End, Cornwall England 1889*

Years ago Catherine's older brother Basil, ever the explorer and adventurer, had leapt into the uncomfortable gap left by Brentye's remark with, "Sounds like the Grail question to Parsifal, Grandmama. Are you playing King Amfortas today? Bit of a hitch in your git-along?"

Basil and Catherine were fourteen and twelve then, and their world-traveling grandmama was making one of her seasonal visits, haunting the Chatsworth family pile at Land's End.

"You," Brentye peered down her nose and through her pince-nez at Basil, "are significantly unimportant."

"Yes, I know, Grandmama, but you love me anyway." He bussed a quick kiss on her powdery smooth cheek, then bounded away, leaving Catherine alone with the older woman.

Brentye's smile gave her away. Yes, she did adore Basil, even though she did see him as relatively insignificant in the great scheme of things. Catherine... Now she was another story. And possibly a problem. It all depended on what she came to know.

What Catherine knew already was much, much more than what Brentye would have liked. Though the woman protested that it was unseemly for a girl to study mathematics and astronomy, though she tried to take her away with her on art tours of the continent, and though she tried any number of times to marry her off to eligible sons of local knights or even some older barons, Catherine had managed to escape the manipulative clutches of her grandmama's dislike.

Catherine's mother Camilla, a soft-spoken well-bred and supposedly compliant woman, had shown surprising strength at keeping her only daughter away from her strong-willed mother-in-law. Though Camilla would never openly speak ill of Brentye, Catherine suspected her mother was rather a bit frightened of her father's mother.

Catherine's father tended to pooh-pooh all the Welsh Second-Sight business, faerie stories, Celtic legends, and the like. He was not ashamed of it really, he just did not see any use for it. And he was quite aware of the fact that his mother did not have much use for any of her progeny except maybe young Basil, but only in the way one might have use for a lap dog or a *blanc*

*mange*, as an attractive but temporary entertainment easily replaced by another.

On Brentye's regular visits to the Chatsworth estate at Land's End she always spent some mysterious time away from the family. She would pack a small carpet bag, a phaeton with an unfamiliar insignia would call for her, and she would be gone for three or four days. That same summer they were twelve and fourteen, Basil had questioned her mercilessly about where she was going and what she would be doing but her enigmatic reply was, as always, that she was going to 'visit old friends'. Basil pleaded with her to take him along.

"Whatever for?" she had replied, seeming truly at a loss to find any valuable use for her lively grandson.

"Why for a brilliant adventure, of course," his eyes sparkled. "Mayhap a Grail Quest?"

Looking directly at Catherine, Grandmama Brentye pulled on her blue kid gloves, glared down her hawk-like nose and said, "You would surely find more of an adventure than you are up to, I fear. The Grail Quest has slain many an unworthy knight."

Catherine shivered and turned away from her grandmama's piercing stare. She felt the edges of her peripheral vision start to peel away and her brother Basil's voice took on that tinny wool-draped sound she knew preceded one of her waking dreams. The 12-year old girl stepped through the French doors onto the flagstones of the south veranda and walked slowly to the low stone wall separating it from the emerald slope of lawn that dissolved into the darker woods.

The vision solidified and she was walking down a staircase; most likely stone, given the echoes. And now her white linen summer frock was a heavy scratchy wool thing, a loose robe tied at the waist with a rope. Sounds of swords clashing and clanking against stone. As she had learned to do just that week, from Grandmama Brentye no less, Catherine willed herself to look at her hands.

The older woman had said that was how you began to wake up into your dreams. Basil had been reading their friend Sir Richard Francis Burton's latest travel accounts and had wondered aloud at dinner why there were so many hand-prints painted in the holy places, ancient caves, and campgrounds.

"But of course," Brentye continued, off the family's curious looks. "You see, it is like the Senoi dreamers in Malaya. The whole tribe dreams as a group and you know you are awake in the dream world if you can will yourself to look at your own hands."

"How do you know that, mother?" Lord Chatsworth sipped his claret skeptically.

"My dull little nugget, I certainly did more than attend the governor's tea parties when your father and I were out in Singapore and the Straits Settlements."

"Well." Chatsworth took a second, larger sip and gave his wife that look which disclaimed responsibility for either the rudeness or the peculiar erudition of his handsome mother.

Young Basil had spent the rest of the meal examining his own hands. Young Catherine spent the rest of the meal not looking at her grandmama though she could feel the sharp Welsh woman's blue-eyed hawk-nosed gaze on her. Everyone in the dining room knew that everyone else was going to try to look at their own hands in a dream that night, were they lucky enough to dream.

Or unlucky enough, depending on the type of dreams they might have.

The next afternoon, standing on the verge of the grassy slope, leaning slightly against the cool stone wall and fighting the heavy inertia of shifting awareness, young Catherine slowly willed her white hands up and her grey eyes down. Her quick gasp sounded in her own ears like a slow building wind rushing at her from far away, then coursing through her mouth, out her ears, down her throat... The hands she saw in place of her own pale dainty ones were a grown man's hands, long and vaguely obscene. A mottled white and red, looking more naked than a bare hand should.

Amid the sound of clashing swords, grunts, squishy thuds, a sour metallic smell, and a sharp stabbing in her belly that nearly doubled her over, Catherine managed to sit down on the low stone wall. The vision slid away down a precipitous slope in the right rear side of her brain and suddenly all was quiet inside her mind.

The young, aristocratic British girl gulped deep breaths of calm air tinged with roses, midsummer grass and old stones baking in the sun.

She would not give Brentye the satisfaction of knowing she had just had another vision. She could not stand the look of gloating knowledge, the sneer of a torturer. Good lord, the woman was her grandmama for heaven's sake! But young Catherine knew better than to betray any sign of the Second-Sight around the woman lest she use Catherine's now-vulnerable state to quiz her in great detail about what she had seen, heard, and felt.

The clop, rumble, and clank of the mysterious phaeton came from around the front of the house. Catherine had not turned around as Basil called out to her, "Come see Grandmama off, Cat."

Cat did not go.

Basil stood waving widely at his departing grandmama, his ears gnawing on the sound of carriage wheels on the gravel drive, the smell of fresh-washed and fresh-ironed lace at his neck and

cuffs, the lush promising green of an English summer all around him. "Life is spectacularly grand!" he shouted.

"What a bunch of ninnies," Brentye snorted as she leaned back into the plush upholstery of the shiny black coach drawn by shiny black horses driven by a coachman in rich black livery. Sunlight glinted off the gold embossed crest closely resembling but not exactly like the Order of the Golden Dawn as the phaeton disappeared down the white road and into the emerald forest.

Some long time later, when the shadows from the forest copse had stretched up the slope almost to the rose gardens, Catherine had dared to look down at her own hands. To her great relief she saw her own here-and-now pale hands, small and dainty.

In the family library where Catherine had then gone to look up what she could about hands and dreams, she found her brother Basil deep in the same research.

"See here, Cat, do let us see what else might we find out about this hands-in-dreams business. Surprise Grandmama when she returns."

"I rather doubt anything we do would surprise her, B."

"I wish we knew where she went and what she does when she goes away."

"Not me. I do not want to know anything more at all about her."

"Well, that is queer of you," Basil made her a slight frown then turned back to Sir Burton's new folios from his travels through northern and eastern Africa.

Unless she was in some far-flung outpost of the British Empire, every season on the quarter-year holidays of the solstices and equinoxes Lady Brentye Gruffudd Sinclaire Chatsworth traveled to her son's estate in Land's End to take part in a somewhat updated version of the ancient Druid rituals. Since she could first remember being alive in this lifetime she had always been aware of the potency of conscious actions as opposed to the habits, intuition, or predictable reactions most humans have when stimulated by some action outside themselves.

The newly formed Order of the Golden Dawn had caught her attention a few years ago when she was wandering about in the faerie field here at Land's End looking for a new place to hold her own private rituals, since her old place had been discovered by her son's new gamekeeper. Gamekeepers were usually not a problem and in fact often tended by the nature of what they did to be more attuned to the ways of natural energies, but this one was exceptionally churchy and that did put a knot in things. He had actually proposed ripping out the white hawthorne tree in the centre of the faerie field, said it stank of ancient superstition and a good Christian estate should have nothing to do with that



old folklore. Fortunately everyone in the family and all the servants raised such a hue and cry that the white-barked white-blossomed sacred tree was left upstanding in the fallow field bordering the copse.

Though she preferred to keep her powers to herself, there were times when what Brentye needed to do required a group effort. Besides, there were things afoot upon the earth that she needed to learn about from others. 'The times spoken of long ago are upon us', she had mused in the carriage leaving her son's estate that day when Catherine and Basil were young teens, tugging her blue kid gloves tightly up over her scarred wrist, 'and only a steady hand at the tiller will guide the course of mankind in the right, albeit the left-handed, direction.'

Something she hoped to accomplish during these midsummer rituals was an opening of her vision regarding her granddaughter. She had always known the girl was someone she should know from another life, but knowing who and why was always blocked. Damn the Kurultai that way!

A day or two after her granddaughter Catherine was born Brentye had laid a piece of embroidered butterfly fabric over the baby girl's basinet, just as she had done with this newborn's older brother Basil. Basil, the charming little twerp, had crumpled his chubby fist around it and hurled it cheerily away. Nothing there, obviously, but no surprise, considering his ninny of a mother.

Catherine however, had been born looking like a miniature grownup, a faerie child. No baby fat, no chubby cheeks, just a small, perfectly formed little person with silky dark auburn hair, big grey eyes, and a sharp little nose. She had clutched the butterfly blanket in her tiny hands and pulled it up to look at it, then looked around the room for something else she obviously expected to see. Brentye moved out of her line of sight.

Since that time, Catherine had always been inordinately curious, always looking for something she could not quite grasp, always expecting to find the answer to some unasked question.

It pleased her father, who was proud of his piquant and serious little girl. It amused her older brother, who was pleased to have such a clever little playmate. It troubled her mother, who never had sufficient answers for her daughter's esoteric queries. And it infuriated her grandmama, who chose not to admit that her own bloodline had spawned someone who might well be - probably was - a blood enemy from thousands of years back. And no doubt in many other lifetimes as well, though she could not place her.

Yet in a sense, Brentye reckoned, this was a good thing. If she could use this girl as bait to draw in and tie up the

Plan...well, that was better than killing her outright, because if she did that then the mission would just be given to someone else. Brentye had worked too hard and sacrificed too much to let this opportunity pass by. Oh, yes, this would be much, much better in the long run.

Dangerous.

But better.

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*Land's End, England 1826*

Brentye had always known she was different, but she had not always known how very different she was. The first inclination was when she found herself pinching her new baby brother, making the mewling little rat howl in breath-catching pain. Having enjoyed that, with the sense of a hard hotness in her belly that reached up to her throat, she was also astonished at the ease with which she played innocent when Nurse came bustling into the nursery.

"Poor little brother," the young Brentye had mused worriedly, "do you think he shall live?"

"Of course he will, poppet. Not to worry yourself. Now run along." Picking up the wrinkled little rat who threatened Brentye's hold on the household, Nurse settled into the rocking chair to comfort the heir to the family name and lands.

Brentye was aware enough of the way of grownups and was increasingly aware enough of having been one in other lives to sense a real pride in her father's voice when he saw the new baby. He had always been fond of her in a distant way, she had thought, but when she saw his attitude toward the new creature in the ribbon-wound basinet, she realized how very differently he felt about that thing as compared to her. It was her first introduction to competition, and the four-year old first child of the Baron Sinclaire would soon learn well how to deal with it.

The burning hatred she harbored in her small chest took her out further in the woods that day than she had been before. There were dangers out there, she was always warned, and wee ones were not to go beyond the hedgerows around the ancient estate near the farthest eastern point of England. But whether from spite or a sense of adventure, she often wondered in retrospect, Brentye cast herself into the outer darkness of the deep forest, far away from the big old house where she had reigned as favourite and only child for four glorious years.

Yet, in spite of her alienation there was something oddly familiar about this turmoil within her, the gnawing feeling that she did not yet know to call jealousy. It was strangely comfortable in an echoing way, as had been the voices of her grandparents and aunties once she had learned to speak. She knew the tones of their voices, the pitches and the inflections; but her memories of the sounds were without meaning or words, just the gibberish that grownups speak to children and the inability of the very young to understand the language into which their souls are born. But the sounds were familiar, like the sounds of storms blowing up over the craggy borders, the sounds of the animals around the back of the house and the barns, the sound of her own voice echoing down the long hallways and in the vast high-ceilinged rooms. In that same way, this intense feeling of jealousy was familiar to her. It had been an indistinct susurrations at the edges of her consciousness until the birth of her brother. Out here in the remote recesses of the forest thick with oak, ash, and hawthorn, surrounded by the wind-quivering sights and sounds of ancient nature she could suddenly hear in words concise and clear, "He is a threat to you. You must get rid of him."

The voice? Her own, she knew, but deeper, more like her father's voice. More like the voice of the woods, the stones, the sky, and the earth. It was the voice to which she would always henceforth listen, the voice she would always obey.

Over the next few days Brentye began to ask everyone if they heard voices. Being a Celtic country, of course the answers were mostly affirmative. Plus her being a child, most of the grownups knew that most children had invisible playmates, or faerie friends, or guardian angels. Oddly enough, no one asked her what the voices she heard were saying. Except for one of the young men who helped around the grounds.

He was a good-looking sharp-eyed boy with thick dark hair and a confident walk who spent a lot of time sneaking off into the woods and then being cursed at by the man who was in charge of the family's livestock. The boy's name was Bonner, and he always had three large hunting hounds with him.

Brentye was afraid of the dogs and he seemed to know that. As he talked politely to the Baron's curious little girl, he would order the hounds to stay behind. There they would sit some ten feet away, writhing whining bundles of muscle and wiry hair that both fascinated and repelled Brentye.

Bonner looked her directly in the piercing blue eyes and asked her who the voices were and what they were telling her. She sensed in him the first person who had actually given her the respect of being a person instead of an infant. He took her seriously. Something else inside her woke up and Brentye decided

to tell him. It was not trust, really. She was not sophisticated enough to yet understand the subtleties of trust. She knew her mother loved her, in a proper sort of way. She knew her father had, until the birth of his son, been quite attentive to her. And Nurse was always efficiently kind. But there was a huge gulf between the child Brentye and those grownups who treated her almost as a whelp, as some odd little puppy to be petted but certainly not taken seriously.

Before too long, that gulf would shift and become one not of benign indifference but of vague distrust and fear, as if she knew something they did not and could not know...and as if they all knew that. There would become a slight but very palpable distancing from her; a hush when she entered the room; what she would later come to know as a censoring of conversations when she was around. But now, on the verge of transitioning into a wider sphere of self-awareness, Brentye perceived in Bonner's look a grounding of her new-felt emotions.

"Who are yer voices?" Bonner asked with feigned casualness.

The sun struck his cheekbones and carved his face into planes that from her perspective made the young man look like one of the Greco-Roman statues that lined the house's main foyer.

"Mostly me," the little girl replied. "It is my voice, only it is old, grownup, like Father."

Bonner looked down at her with a smile Brentye would never forget. Even in her own old age she shuddered as she felt again the full power of the young man's gaze and his deep-throated chuckle. "Aye, then, the Kurultai is it?"

At his words the little girl reeled with the invisible impact of multiple images and impressions, overwhelmed by sights and sounds and smells totally alien to her existence here in the green hills of Land's End but viscerally familiar to some deeper and older part of herself.

Creaking ship timbers, crackling canvass, heady salt air...

Clashing metal and clashing voices echoing in cold stony chambers...

Tall summer grasses, blonde waves of pain in her chest...

Knowing laughter...

Brentye collapsed onto the flagstone terrace and found some solace in the solid cool stones beneath her legs and bottom. Bonner just laughed and walked away without a backward glance.

At the edge of the home grounds where the open lawns met the brooding forest Bonner turned and whistled for the dogs who still cringed in place, trapped beneath the weight of his orders. Released, they bounded across the grass with enthusiastic yelps, loping after their controller.

Brentye sat shivering on the terrace for another three hours, battling the images that assaulted her eyes, ears, mind,

and body. The short person who stood up and walked back into the big house late that afternoon was not the child who had sat down.

Over the ensuing months Brentye was easily able to slip away and into the forest as her parents and Nurse and the other servants hovered over and pampered her new baby brother.

Every time she ventured into the forest, Brentye made sure Bonner knew she was going there and sure enough, once she was a hundred yards or so into the thick dark greenness there he would be, with the dogs.

At first she had asked him questions about the visions she saw, the things she heard and smelled and tasted. Sometimes he had answers, sometimes he just shook his head.

Usually they would walk further in to a large fern-rimmed clearing among the ancient oaks. Shafts of sunlight barely penetrated through the high canopy of age-gnarled trees and the dank green smell was thick and heady like the incense the priests used in the family chapel.

The dogs guarded the perimeter and hunted in the distance, their baying and yelps a wall of sound separating Brentye and Bonner from the quotidian world back on the estate.

"The great war, tell me about that again," she would say.

And Bonner would recount tales of the twenty-seven years of warfare between the Athenians and the Spartans two thousand three hundred years before.

"And were you and I friends back then?" she asked him once, more out of a logistical curiosity than a friendly gesture.

"Not really," he smiled wryly, "no."

Brentye looked around the oak grove and listened to her voices. Then she turned to Bonner, "Why are you helping me?"

"Am I helpin' ya?"

The little girl stared up at the young man, his face again carved into planes of light and darkness. She always tried to see something familiar in him, but had not yet done so.

"I need to kill him."

"Yeah, I know. How d'ya reckon to do it?"

Not 'why?' but 'how?'

"You tell me," she turned it back to him.

"Are ya cert'n?"

"Yes, I am certain," the little girl's voice replied.

Brentye got up from the fallen log and walked away from the grove. Whenever they were here she heard the whispering of lots of other voices. And Bonner had promised to bring her here at night when she was older. He said the others who used this grove to do their ancient magic would not understand her extreme youth or the things she was learning. But eventually, eventually she would be old enough to join the Group that met at the dark of the

moon to perform the rites that were many tens of thousands of years old.

The voices told her she could not allow any other child to inherit this estate. Therefore her little brother must be eliminated. Along with any others who followed him.

They were back near the stables before Bonner spoke again. "Well then. Whenever yer brother is in danger, ya muss try to help him," Bonner was twisting strands of hemp into a lead for one of the animals.

"But why?"

He did not look up at the little girl, who from a distance would seem to be simply curiously watching the young stable hand at work, a rather idyllic scene really: innocent child and noble savage in a pastoral setting, large brindled hounds prowling around stables, a few noisy geese, a pecking flock of colourful chickens. Beyond the stables loomed the dark bosce of the ancient oak forest.

"So ya will na be suspected, ya silly goose."

"...Oh..." Clattering images bounced around inside the little girl's memory-mind. One of the images was of looking up from a bloody body, seeing her hands dripping with blood and horrified angry faces bearing down on her. The vision ended in tearings of blood. "Oh, yes...I remember."

"So stay close to the infant, and try to help save 'im." He pulled the strands of hemp taut, snapping the new blond rope for emphasis. "Just dinna you try too hard..."

For weeks Brentye had stayed close to her baby brother. Her parents and Nurse thought it sweet; Brentye thought it boring and frustrating. She sneaked in pinches when she could, tormenting the little creature for whom she felt nothing but disdain and annoyance. Why had he even bothered being born into this family? She was certain she did not know him. Besides, was it not obvious that this was her territory? Could he not have seen that before he went to all the trouble to come here? Stupid baby.

Brentye supposed it would be the dogs.

Which troubled her a bit, because she herself was rather frightened of them. Her dreams were filled with troubling images of big dogs chasing her down, following her under her brother's basinet, and then speaking to her through their slavering jaws in perfectly good King's English. "It is time, Brentye," they would smile, baring their long wolfish teeth.

But when she lurched bolt upright in her own little bed across the room from the baby's there was no one in the nursery but the two of them. Nurse's snoring rattled gently at the door to her adjoining room. And so it went, night after night, some version of the intelligent, insistent, intimidating big dogs.

The night of her first nightmare, the first night after she had had her first conversation with Bonner in the oak grove, the light of the full moon had painted itself across the bank of bay windows in the third floor nursery. Silhouettes of the butterflies she had cut out of paper and pasted on the window panes quivered between worlds, casting their own shadows across the nursery floor and up onto the embroidered counterpane across her bed.

Brentye's new fascination with butterflies pleased her mother who saw it as a sign of her daughter's growing appreciation for beauty, and pleased Nurse who saw it as a way to keep the feisty, brooding little girl occupied so she could better care for the new baby. Brentye insisted on having butterflies embroidered on all her clothes and refused to take off the rusty locket with four interlocking butterflies she had found out in the faerie field. Brentye laughed inside that she was managing to hide her own secret in plain sight from everyone but Bonner.

This night there was no moon.

Something about the vacuous darkness struck a familiar chord in the child. She had wakened from the absence of the dream-dogs. Having grown used to their presence in her sleeping-mind, their absence was a signal that something had shifted.

Brentye's little fingers traced the embroidered butterfly patterns on her counterpane. Her eyes adjusted quickly to the near-dark in the nursery, using the paper butterflies on the uncurtained windows as spotting markers to orient herself. She could smell the milky, close, baby scent of her brother, even were she not able to hear his tiny regular breaths and occasional mews, and even were she not to visually discern the draped basinet where he slept. Rather like a catafalque in this light, she caught herself thinking. Rather morbidly, she admitted. But after all, her entire focus these last eternally long two weeks had been on how to rid herself of this febrile little parasite, this stupidly soft creature.

The idjit child had even smiled at her this morning. Imagine that. He did not even know she was the one who brought him pain with the furtive pinches and pokes. His tiny hand had wrapped around her strong little fingers on the way to tweaking him and he wagged his arm back and forth, gurgling happily up at her and smiling an innocent, cheerful, expectant, friendly smile which might well have melted any heart and inspired a cooing response, a caress, or an embrace.

It was totally lost on his sister.

Now, tonight, in the middle of a no-moon night, Brentye sat cross-legged on her bed counting her own breaths, matching hers

with two each of the baby's. In-breath...out-breath...in-breath...out-breath...

The room pulsed around her, seeming to breathe in rhythm with her own studied inhalations and exhalations. She knew there was something portentous happening all around her but she was afraid to move, afraid to investigate, afraid to go looking. Some greater Darkness behind the simple darkness of the absence-of-light was at work and its lumbering waves moved across time as though drawn to here-and-now Brentye and Bonner and the baby via some ancient chthonic call. She did not begin to comprehend the meaning of her feelings; all Brentye consciously knew was that she was safer to stay right where she was.

Bonner on the other hand thought he knew pretty much everything that was going on. The other cloaked figures here in the oak grove were performing rites they claimed were as ancient as the stars. Whether or not that was true, Bonner certainly remembered most of the motions from his trips twenty-two hundred years ago across the sun-dappled Mediterranean to wet dark caves in the cliffs below Carthage on the north coast of Africa. He knew the three nights of the dark of the moon were the right time of month and the moon cycles of autumn the right time of year to manipulate matter by potent acts of will.

A few of his fellow magicians seemed to know the power they were wielding here among the shadowy arches of the hovering oaks but most of them were simply here for the glamour of it all, to spice up their otherwise quotidian lives of country sameness, to have something exotic to talk about back in London, or as an excuse to lie with someone other than their spouses. That latter aspect typically served Bonner well, being a handsome and virile young man who knew how to hold and broadcast a promising frequency. And, Bonner smiled to himself, he wasn't half bad at fulfilling those promises.

Simple things thought they were sucking up his energies and smiled for weeks remembering the multitudes of times the estate's stable boy had brought them to heights of delight in the close embracing darkness.

Bonner let them think that.

Himself now, he thought he was the one who had gleaned their energies and was esoterically supercharged from these dark-of-the-moon events for weeks afterwards.

Actually, both camps were both right and wrong.

Across the fire and opposite Bonner in the circle of chanting magicians stood Stevenson Marlowe, the Assistant to their High Priest. Marlowe was a scholarly, retiring fellow who unbeknownst to them all, actually controlled all the energies among the entire Group. The slight man in his early 30's with the



pale yellow hair and slightly concave profile was an expert at demurring and disguise. Back in the City of London he was thought to be merely a mid-level manager at one of the large banks, a middle-class fellow with middling grades from a middling school who lived alone in a nice enough but non-descript house in a middling acceptable section of mid-town.

He had four discreet butterflies he wore on cufflinks, a tie pin, and as the fob of his gold pocket-watch. Unlike others who flaunted their various medals and talismans with bravado, Marlowe never did. He gave Bonner the occasional veiled compliment and the intimation that he envied the young man both his youth and his not-so-veiled mystical awareness. Bonner bragged, he did, and the Assistant to the High Priest listened, seemingly impressed.

He was most impressed with Bonner's story about the young lady of the big house. She was of the Kurultai, no doubt of that. But which side?

Seemingly the Dark side.

But perhaps it was a trap?

Marlowe had fallen for that one in another lifetime, lured in by the promise of understanding and assistance only to be compromised and slain by one of the White Lodge.

There was too much at stake these days for him to express anything but benign indifference to Bonner's enthusiastic offer of blood sacrifice via the supposedly vile-hearted little girl up in the manor house.

The Mahachohans, those Lords of Civilization who move and manipulate *en masse* the methods of hearts and minds around the planet were about to infuse a new rush of information into humanity. It was like that Greek version of the story of the hero Prometheus stealing fire from heaven, only this fire was coming from within the planet itself and could reach out to the very stars. It was as dangerous a time as that era back in Atlantis when the visitors from afar had brought new ways to see the world, new ways to ponder. Well, actually, what they had brought to this planet and to humankind was the ability to actually 'think real thoughts', as opposed to simply having opinions about their own emotions.

Oh, Marlowe the Assistant could use a blood sacrifice, that was not the problem. The problem was how to split the energies it would create so that the expectations of Bonner, the High Priest, and the other celebrants were met and at the same time the greater work of the Brotherhood was perpetuated. It was an odd conundrum of the Dark Side that it hid itself in plain sight within the inherent darkness of ordinary humans as well as those of the Kurultai.

People, stupid and blind as most of them were, tended to focus on what was in front of them and whinge and bemoan the

turmoils and tribulations to hand without pausing to think what may have been causing them. It was a concept that in another time and place Marlowe would explain as the difference between weather and climate: most people only experience weather, which is small-term, small-scale, and local; few know about or have the vision to experience climate, which moves in terms of aeons and affects entire hemispheres. It was so easy for the greater Darkness to use and hide behind the lesser darknesses that most people mistook for great Darkness. So sure were they of their own importance and place in the centre of the universe they would have thought what he did in these rituals was simply a parasitic act: a lesser magician riding the coattails of their own fine machinations.

Marlow was quite happy to let them think he was a parasite rather than have them know they were his tool. So few knew what was really at stake and though that made his work easier, Marlowe did rather regret the absence of a worthy opponent in this time and place.

This night the cold snap in the air spurred the near-naked dancers to leap a bit more quickly around the ritual space, to make the oak, ash, and hawthorn-fed fire burn a bit more brightly and the breath of the magic-makers to rise a bit more like mystical fires from within their dark insides. Marlowe shook off his morbid thoughts and gave the handsome young man across the fire a nod.

Bonner took his cue and knew that tomorrow night he would bring something to the secret ritual that would qualify him to move further into the inner circle of the Group – his first human sacrifice.

The next afternoon Nurse took the young Sinclaire heirs out to play on the lawn. It was a late Autumn day and the woods were streaked and spotted with arguments of colour vying for dominance among the oaks, beeches, larches, and fern bracken undergrowth. Lord and Lady Sinclaire were gone to London for a fortnight. Bonner was napping on a rough wooden bench on the far side of the stables, letting muscle memory of last night's revels seep through his drowsing consciousness, almost hearing the gasping laughter of last night's ladies interwoven with today's buzz of wasps, honks of geese, and the snuffling snore of his dogs.

A low growl roused him from his memories and, still moving in a languid caress of self against air and skin against clothes, he looked about to see what had piqued the hounds' attentions.

Bonner's smile curled up. The dogs began loping across the grass towards the flagstone verandah where Nurse, Brentye, and the baby sat soaking in the faint and slanted sunlight.

He whistled sharply and called the dogs back in a slightly off-key voice, "Homer! Vergil! Aeneas! - Heel!"

But the dogs pressed straight on towards the children.

Something Bonner had not expected now happened to him. Some ingrained protective part of himself was driven to try to save the children from the marauding hounds. Though his own mind and the whipped-up energies from last night's magic rituals had set this all up, his own human instincts warred with his own ambitions as he lunged towards the three terrified people frozen in a tableau of disbelief.

Like wolves from the wild, Bonner's three huge hounds were on the children before he could make it halfway across the lawn. Nurse was shrieking and jumping about in small circles, torn between survival and protectiveness, unable to strike at the dogs yet unable to turn and run.

In the same way that Bonner was responding to the cross-species threat to humans from animals, when Brentye felt the ground shudder beneath her as the heavy dogs bounded up the lawn she had grabbed up the bane of her young existence and was sheltering her baby brother from the dogs. Homer bit into her wrist, yanking her arm back and away. Vergil grabbed the shrieking baby by the leg, gave one hard shake and loosed him from Brentye's grip. Aeneas stood with all four legs quivering and apart, threatening Nurse with bared fangs and deep growls.

Brentye froze. She would never ever forget this long endless moment: pain in her right arm from where Homer's canine teeth punctured her soft young skin, horror in her heart from the sight of the baby's dimpled leg clenched in Vergil's teeth, the infant gasping and howling in panic and pain. All three dogs looked for what seemed like an eternity directly at Brentye with an intelligence and a bill for later payment, then loped off into the woods with the crying baby flopping loosely from Vergil's jaws.

Suspended in a crossroads between times with flashing visions of multiple people and places, Brentye slowly became aware of her own breath again in the here-and-now. She sensed a shifting of reality as though some great lumbering beast had become alert, glanced around, seen that all would be well, and adjusted itself for another descent into somnolence.

The rest of Brentye's childhood had been relatively easy. Perhaps, she often thought, that early act of defiance and allegiance had paved the way with the Dark Brotherhood for the rest of her life. She certainly hoped so, for there was not a moment of her waking life or an instant of a dream that did not have some reminder, however slight or seemingly insignificant, of that horrible day on the lawn.

Of course she had the physical scars on her right wrist where Homer's sharp teeth had torn her flesh; plus she had her parents' and the servants' sympathy and the presumably cleansing experience of having seen all three dogs put to the gun by Bonner's own hand.

He had tried to resign and leave the family but Lord and Lady Sinclaire were so thankful to him for saving their daughter that they refused to let him go and had given him a raise and a pension, much to the resentment of some of the other servants.

And much to Brentye's calculating interest; for once she understood what had happened it firmly set in her young mind that besides evil (like virtue) being its own reward, there were indeed more rewards to be had. According to what she could tell, the Dark Brotherhood rewards its disciples quite well and most humans not of the Kurultai are bumbling nimrods. Her opinions would not change much over the years.

Lord and Lady Sinclaire tried but were never able to have more children. They turned more unto themselves and imperceptibly at first and then seemingly without conscious thought began to drift away from their remaining child and the tragic site of the loss of their son and heir. Longer and longer trips away from England saw young Brentye effectively raising herself under the ineffectual guidance of a parade of governesses.

Her education did not go lacking. With an extensive library inside the big old house, Bonner as her guide out in the fields and among the beasts, her increasingly accessible and detailed remembrances of other lives, and her eventual admission to the secret Group that met in the woods, the young girl absorbed local lore, ancient esoteric knowledge, history both classical and contemporary, and most important, the way that power was consciously created and wielded.

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*Vienna, Austria 1900*

Catherine's suite in the Vienna Regency Hotel was vast, with its own small library and adjoining sitting room, a large four-poster canopied bed raised up on a stepped platform, and a roomy bathroom with modern conveniences and sybaritic luxury. Still standing at the French doors, Catherine shifted the throw of her vision from the skating pond below to the reflections of the interior lights on the door glass. She often sensed that the true nature of reality must be rather like this: a reflection of something behind you, seen before you on a screen that only

partially veils yet another reality out beyond; a variation of Plato's shadows on the cave walls. As she stood there and shifted focus, she could variously see the iced-over pond in the distance, the window glass itself, the suite's warm reflections on the frost-rimed glass. A quick glance upward and she saw the largest, most fascinating mystery of all - the chill but fiery stars.

Catherine turned away from the balcony. On the table were three newspapers from various countries in various languages. The local *Neue Freie Presse* led with a headline about the New Century Science Frontiers Conference in Vienna February 1-3, 1900. France's *L'Echo de Paris* teased, "Surprises rumored in store at Vienna Science Conference". Catherine's own scientific paper was one of the surprises and she was certainly looking forward to hearing the others in other fields. But that was all for tomorrow and the next day. For tonight...

She crossed the room towards a crowded library shelf. Though many were new, some of the books looked centuries old, and probably were. Where the hotel now stood there had once been a monastery, before that a castle, and according to the sly legend recounted in illustrated parchments hung on the hotel lobby walls, before that a pagan site of worship.

Moving her fingers over the titles Catherine was struck by an odd familiarity. It was as though she knew what books she would find there, more than simply because there were certain readings that were *de riguer* in any modern library. There were some obscure titles here along with a rather odd mixture of folios and what looked like might be diaries. Checking the time, Catherine saw that she had a few moments yet before she needed to proceed downstairs for the Conference's introductory party. As she tugged loose an unmarked book wedged between an old Saint Thomas Aquinas and a weathered copy of something with a Persian title, the rotting leather shredded in her fingers and centuries-old dust sifted out.

Catherine could almost hear her grandmama snipe, "Why are you always poking your nose into things that do not concern you? You should just leave well enough alone." Perhaps in sheer defiance of bitter Brentye, young Catherine had determined to explore and examine as much as she possibly could about anything she wanted to. Her theory was that if she was curious about something, there was a discovery to be made. If she had a question, there had to be, by the laws of logic, an answer. It was all just a matter of polarity: like a bar magnet with its two opposite poles, a question pre-supposes its own answer. In her inherent insistent demand for balance Catherine would press and dismantle and wrangle and wiggle at a problem until she solved it.

One thing she had never yet been able to solve however, were the meanings of her visions.

Catherine had learned not to talk about them very much, that was for sure. Early on she had seen how uncomfortable it made her mother, who was concerned that her girl-child might be feeble-minded. Her father's devil-may-care attitude gave them no truck. Her brother Basil always wanted to turn them into story-games and recast the characters so he had the most action and then play and replay them for hours. Her grandmama Brentye, the few times Catherine could remember her having been told about the visions, was slyly curious, with an unsettling unctuousness as though she expected the child to come out with some valuable information she had been waiting for for years.

The older woman's piercing blue eyes, high hawk-like nose, and hovering form had made the child Catherine breathless with trepidation and she quickly learned not to mention her visions. Yet somehow Brentye often seemed to know. Catherine would look up from a book she was reading to see Brentye standing in a doorway just watching her. Or returning to a room Catherine would find her grandmama pouring over her schoolbooks, her writings, checking the titles of her readings. What was she looking for? What did she think to find?

Catherine often dreamed of standing up to Brentye, of giving her a piece of her mind. Of course, it would have been a family scandal and it would have been hard to explain. On the surface Brentye's actions towards her granddaughter seemed harmless, just the common interest a grandparent has in how a grandchild is doing, what they are studying, *et cetera*. Her family was clueless. Brentye adored her grandson Basil so both of them were golden in each other's eyes. Brentye was proud enough of her son and tolerant of his beloved little wife. She was not around all that much, just a few weeks four times each year, but her implied presence had hung like a pall over Catherine's youth.

She often fancied that Brentye had left little ghost-spies here and there around the Land's End estate to watch Catherine and report back to the older woman. Perhaps she had. Catherine once read a book of spells on the use of faeries and the nature elementals to do a witch's bidding. But like other books about magic and other realms, it had seemed to Catherine highly unlikely and very unscientific. Almost laughable. Except for that slight shiver of prescient horror at the thought of the possibility of such things.

The book in her hands now, here in the hotel room in Vienna, appeared to be a diary. The pages were filled with handwritten quatrains of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Omar Khayyam. Written in French for the most part, the diary also had German, Greek,

and Arabic scribbled here and there, as well as another language she did not recognize.

Like most educated people of her time, Catherine could read and write a number of languages. Most books contained a *patois* of quotes and references in the original tongues and did not need explanatory translation footnotes. Set in and framed for emphasis with hard-drawn lines that had almost cut through the parchment was the quatrain Catherine recognized as:

*Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days  
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:  
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays.*

She read on in French the diarist's next entry:

*À travers la forêt éclaircie, nous avons vu le prochain  
joyau de la chaîne de la Vierge. J'ai senti qu'un grand  
moment du Destin nous attendait, mais je n'avais pas été mis  
au courant de cette vision.*

"Through the thinning forest we saw the next jewel in the Virgin's chain. I sensed some great moment of Destiny awaited us, but I had not been made privy to this vision."

Shivers rippled out from the back of Catherine's neck to her fingertips. This talk of visions, invisible hands, mating and slaying. What queer destiny brought her to this room in this city, to this shelf and this book, to a writing so similar to her own recent experience of such troubling visions? Like a sour note that curdles the inner ear Catherine could almost hear her grandmama Brentye chuckling.

She dropped the dusty old diary at the same time there came a knock on the door.

'Deep breath, Catherine. Deep breath,' she lectured herself. 'This is sheer coincidence. There is a scientific explanation for all of it. Or perhaps not, perhaps it is all sheer coincidence. There is nothing scientifically wrong with coincidence. Coincidence does not necessarily mean correlation and correlation does not necessarily mean causation.'

Another knock, a bit more hesitant. It was not Frederick for he would have used their signal knock. Had she ordered anything from room service?

Gathering up the spilled pages and tucking them all back into the old diary, Catherine crossed to the door and opened it to a huge basket of flowers.

"Lady Catherine Logan Sinclaire Chatsworth?" the basket asked in a resonant upper class English-speaking voice.

Catherine smiled, "Yes."

"These are for you." When she did not reply the voice continued, "Would you like them out here or inside?" The feet beneath the flowers shifted slightly.

"Oh, I do apologize. Please, do come in."

Working from the accent alone, Catherine's imagination conjured the bellboy as some unruly third son of an English earl banished from his country home and doing penance as a servant in a foreign hotel; or perhaps a fourth son free to follow his own desires and pursuing the life of near itinerant artist making his way across the continent. Catherine was surprised to see that the huge bouquet was carried by a handsome green-eyed gentleman in a military style uniform she did not recognize. Definitely not a servant. A hotel emissary perhaps? Someone from the Conference? The local Embassy?

And handsome indeed. Having placed the flowers on a low table beside the davenport the man turned to introduce himself.

"Major Albert Farley," he held out a gloved hand. Farley was above average height for Englishmen and had the fine-cut yet strong features that gave modern credence to the presence of the Roman Empire in old Briton. Belying the proper soldierly features were long full lashes and one dimple that hung onto a sense of humour even when Major Farley was not smiling. A flat, brown-rose mole on the left side of his chin drew attention to his rather attractive mouth where amusement, admiration, and proper protocol all vied for expression.

"Interesting uniform," Catherine acknowledged, attempting to hide her flickering interest. "What have I done? Am I under arrest?"

"Wha -- ?"

"'Major' Albert Farley?" she repeated his name back to him.

"Oh, yes," he ran a hand down the front of his uniform, which vaguely resembled the typical British Army officer's but with odd variances which she presumed must be from some exotic outpost of the Empire. What looked like a tiger's tail bandolier crossed his chest and a short fan of peacock feathers stuck out of his black Scottish-style beret. "This is our dress mess uniform. Corps of Engineers, India Highlands Division, Special Projects Group. A bit off-putting, yes?"

"Well...rather handsome actually," she said before she realized she had said it to a perfect stranger. "I just do not recognize it, and my grandfather was out East for a number of years, and..." Catherine had the good breeding to blush and good composure not to try to explain that away. What in the world was the presence of this man doing to her?

"Yes, I know about your grandparents. One of your relatives suggested I find you here and come by to say hello. So, hello."



By now Catherine and Albert were staring at each other with one of those looks that tend to get people into a lot of trouble. Both of them had the good sense to recognize that and tried to look away, but that did not work.

"I know this is probably going to sound really frightfully forward," Albert ventured, "but I feel as if I have met you before."

"Perhaps it is a family resemblance?"

"Yes, well, certainly, that would explain it."

"The flowers...?"

"Flowers...? Oh, yes, the flowers. Well, they were being carried up here by a rather slight bellboy who careened about the corridors looking for your rooms so I simply offered to help carry them and, well, here I am."

"So you did not come to see me especially?" Catherine finally managed to break eye contact and move away from the open doorway where the handsome Major stood almost at attention.

"Well, yes, actually, I did. You recall, your family..."

"Who?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Who sent you?" she asked.

"Oh. Fellow said he was your cousin. Something-or-other Logan...."

"Oh, right. Dear cousin something-or-other. Now see here, if your newspaper cannot manage to send a regular reporter for a regular interview or cannot afford the price of admission to the Science Frontiers Conference, far be it from me to criticize their efforts to get a story, but this is not the most efficacious way to scoop my presentation, 'Major' who-ever-you-really-are."

Catherine turned away dismissively, though she continued to watch his reflection in the French doors.

Something about that reflected image sent her hurtling back to this afternoon's vision at the ice rink when she had found herself hurtling through time and space, her life grinding out between the gritty realities of some other time and place. She almost caught an angle of his face in a reflection that almost reminded her of a quick vision from her vision that almost reminded her of the way a star field glimmered with deceptive distances and lifelines gauged in the shades of white and red and the dance around each other.

But no, this was simply a handsome spy from some less than reputable newspaper or magazine and she would not be turned by a handsome face.

"I am sorry," she said coolly, "you will just have to wait for the official reports."

"Heat without Light. The Ha'ab. The Triangle." Albert spoke then stood stock still to await Catherine's reaction.

She fell forward as though his words had struck her in a series of blows rising up from between the shoulder blades to the place where her spinal column entered the base of her brain. She rocked forward, teetering on a brink between worlds she was exploring and worlds she did not yet know. She instinctively started towards her notebooks and tomorrow's speech, determined to anchor her attention here, now.

"Hullo, who're you?" Frederick's deep protective voice reverberated across the old stone room, bounced off the star-sprinkled French doors and came back to Catherine in the shape of a comfortably familiar but admittedly slightly annoying barrier between her and the attractive Major who still stood as an apparition of revelation wavering in both her mind and her vision-memory like a grove of trees she once saw back at Land's End, blown about by fresh spring winds into a sussurating willy-nilly dance that still managed to seem as though some message were there, if only one knew what sense to use to perceive it.

"Hello, old bean. You must be Doctor Frederick Durand. Major Albert Farley. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"...Catherine...?" Frederick found himself slightly disappointed that this snappily albeit unusually attired man seemed perfectly at home in Frederick's fiancée's rooms. Courtesy demanded he return the hand for a shake.

"Friend of the family," Albert smiled as he gripped Frederick's large soft hand in his own two strong ones.

"...Catherine...?" Frederick repeated as he shook hands with Farley. "Introduce us?"

"I am unable to do that," Catherine whispered.

"What -- ?" Frederick shifted from foot to foot, unsure what to do. This Major did not seem to be threatening Catherine, but Frederick was always very protective of his fiancée, who most men found very attractive. And Catherine herself seemed odd, twisted in an odd way, as though wrapping herself around some invisible tree or staircase. He did not know whether to go to her side or stay between her and Major Farley.

"I am sorry, but please - both of you - may I have some privacy, please," she whispered.

"Catherine!" Then Frederick turned to Albert with a frown and demanded, "What's wrong with her? What did you do?"

"I could not say, old bean. Must be something in the atmosphere. Well, then, I shall see you both at the Conference tonight. We can catch up on the family news then, yes?" Major Albert Farley left the room with an almost annoying confidence.

No, damn it, Frederick was indeed annoyed; he did not like the man. Too cocky by far and he did not seem at all concerned

for what was obvious to Frederick was some problem with Catherine.

Catherine slumped onto a chair beside the French doors and stared out at the ice rink, where pools of light and colour swirled before her vision, transforming into Greek sunlight dappled on a heaving wine-dark sea. She barely felt Frederick take her hands. She barely felt the impact of his voice, again as though he were speaking through wool.

"Catherine...what's wrong, my dear?"

With an act of will Catherine brought herself back from the prow of a painted wooden ship somewhere in the ancient Aegean Sea to a suite of rooms in a stone castle turned luxury hotel somewhere in the middle of modern Austria.

"I am fine, Frederick. Truly. I just need to be alone for a while."

"But the Conference dinner starts - "

"Yes, my dear. And I am not yet dressed," Catherine smiled up at him as though she were simply a woman traveling without a personal maid, needing time to dress herself for dinner.

"Oh. Well. You're sure then? Everything else hunky-dory?"

"Yes, dear. Are you ready for tomorrow's presentation?"

"Actually, yes. I started going over my notes again and realized I know it better than I had thought. Too much rehearsing will make me, you know, too pedantic I think. So I'm just throwing caution to the winds and no more preparation."

"You really are good, Frederick. And besides, they are your ideas. You discovered it all. You do not need the notes for it is all in that brilliant mind of yours already."

Frederick bowed gallantly and kissed Catherine's hand. "And that's why I love you, my charming colleague, you are such a brilliant judge of character. I'll be back in thirty minutes to escort you to dinner, okay?"

Catherine nodded and followed Frederick to the door.

As soon as he had left she leaned against it and breathed deeply, as deeply as she possibly could, to bring new air to the bottom of her lungs. Then she began breathing in the special way Cousin Ronnie had taught her the last time she saw him -- through the invisible spot in the centre of her forehead -- bringing light into her body. With the seventh in-breath of light Catherine began to feel centered again.

'Heat without Light. The Ha'ab. The Triangle,' he had said. What did Major Albert Farley know about those things? How much did he know about what she knew? He spoke them like they were passwords to be followed by a secret handshake and then he and she would have begun a conversation resonant with some esoteric truths.

Well, she admitted to herself, certainly each of the phrases did resonate with esoteric truth. Yet each could also be just a simple phrase. She was determined to see him again this evening and pick his brain, examine his ideas.

Some deep part of herself shivered with the forbidden concept of examining other parts of him. Catherine blushed. She had never before felt this inner heat, this quivering sparkle rippling through her entire body.

Catherine loved Frederick. Of that she was sure. What troubled her only slightly now and then was that she was also sure that she did not love him as much as he loved her. She was not sure how love, true love, romantic love was actually supposed to feel. She was simply sure she was not feeling it with Frederick.

It was like her entire life, actually. She knew there was something missing, some slight adjustment to the mainstream of reality that she had simply never made. Other people saw and felt and knew things that had so far eluded Catherine.

But in the same vein, she saw and felt and knew things she could not express to others. How could these varied and disparate realities co-exist? And yet she saw it all the time, everywhere around her. Basil loathed cloudy days; their mother loved them. Their father loved dogs and hunting; it made Catherine sick to her stomach. Basil adored Grandmama; Catherine feared her. The events were the same, but the perceptions were different. This suite of rooms looked luxurious to many, including Frederick. Yet for Catherine they held the chill of betrayal and death. Why? She had never been here before.

One of the theories to explain her visions was that strong emotions left behind a trail, a sort of scent that the soul, like a bloodhound, could smell. Catherine's empirical evidence to support this theory consisted of reports of how people could walk into ruins and feel holy, then discover it had been a church. Or walk across a verdant field and sense conflict, then discover a great battle had been fought there. Perhaps we are all exuding emotions and leaving them behind like smells, like wisps of hair, like a pair of gloves lying limp on a velvet chair after a chamber music performance.

All well and good. But everyone did not see, hear, smell, and feel things. Why her? Why her in particular?

It tied in somehow with her early and persistent sense that she should know something she did not. In part that gnawing sense of knowledge withheld had served Catherine Sinclair Logan Chatsworth quite well. It had made her an exceptional student, carried her innate childish curiosity about just about everything into the formal fields of science, and eventually gotten her here to this prestigious Conference in Vienna, where explorers of the

new frontiers in the sciences would compare notes, parade pride, and try to come to a consensus about the newly discovered reality of the world around them.

But Catherine knew, as did some of her other colleagues, that the reality of Reality was slipping further and further away from them all. They were on the brink of discovering something just as incredible as Marconi's and Harvey's and Champollion's awakenings with the radio, the blood, and the Rosetta Stone. A popular saying going around among them was Democritus's observation from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC: 'Nothing exists except atoms and empty space; everything else is opinion'. It was strikingly similar to the Oriental concept of *maya*, the illusion of reality created by the senses. And it resonated with the Ecclesiastical observation that 'all is vanity'. Catherine preferred Democritus's version because it was, like almost everything the ancient Greeks did, quite scientific.

Now was a time of new opinions and awarenesses all around. These last few decades had been connecting and opening up disparate parts of the world to each other. So much from the Orient was now becoming popular, almost faddish, in Europe and America. The work of adventurous and curious European Colonists in bringing back observations and objects from their travels abroad had and was contributing greatly to the store of knowledge. Certainly in Catherine's own family there was evidence of so much of value flowing back to England from the Empire besides the purely material cargoes which filled the home-bound ships. Then too, science was making leaps and bounds into realms beyond the purely visible as instruments became more refined and opened the doors to the inner worlds via the microscope and the outer worlds of the distant stars via the telescope. In the obverse of that, Dr. Freud's invention of psychiatry and psychoanalysis was exploring the inner reaches of the human mind and emotions.

Catherine could scarcely contain her curiosity about what everyone else would present at the Conference but her mind just kept oscillating between the future and her past. Her hand went to her neck and she fingered the small gold-and-enamel intaglio necklace her brother and cousin Ronnie had brought her some years ago from their first trip to Greece. Two butterflies outlined in gold touched wing-tips. One's wings were filled in with turquoise and the other with carmine red. To Catherine's mind, and she realized this was simply a childish fantasy she chose to hold onto, they symbolized those two predominant visions that visited her waking mind: one of the Peloponnesian Wars in ancient Greece and the other of hulking old stone buildings, some monkish Middle Ages French kind of thing which actually seemed fairly strong here in Vienna.

When she had begun to study other religions, spurred on by cousin Ronnie's own studies at Cambridge and abroad, she had found a reassurance in the Hindu and Buddhist concept of reincarnation. Not the part about coming back as a cow or a toad, but the part about climbing back onto the Wheel of Rebirth to complete some part of life one had muffed up royally or had simply not yet experienced. Catherine found the idea comforting and it gave her a label to attach to her very real-seeming visions.

After all, were not we all at one time or another driven half-mad going over and over in our minds how we should have done something differently, uttered something other than the words that had tumbled out of our mouths, wished to turn back the hands of time and still the storm, stop the runaway horse, wrap the woolen muffler more tightly about the neck of the sickly child. Or even, Catherine smiled to herself with the chagrin of self-knowledge, whip out the clever quip in a verbal *riposte* to some subtle sarcasm. The Germans had a term for it, she vaguely recalled, something like *Ich wollte ich hätte DAS gesagt...* or roughly translated, 'I wish I had said this instead of that'.

But the remorse was captured best by the Persian poet:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

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*Land's End, Cornwall, England 1890*

Esoterics were very popular that summer of the boys' Greek trip. It was a time when Oriental thought and philosophy was cresting like a rising tide across Europe and America. The extension of an Empire and its hegemony into its colonies is never just one way; through the pipelines of commerce and culture the esoteric philosophies and practical mysticism of India, the Far East, the Spice Islands, Egypt, and the Levant surged back to the British Isles and spilled over into their breakaway colony across the Atlantic.

New England had spawned Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendental movement, Phineas Quimby began the Metaphysical Movement, the theatrical Russian scholar Madame Helena P. Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society, Mary Baker Eddy laid out the Christian Science church, Charles Filmore started Unity, Divine Science and Religious Science joined the ranks. The prolific writer on

Tibetan philosophy Alice Bailey formalized those teachings in the Arcane School, Rudolph Steiner added the Anthroposophical Society, Paramahansa Yogananda founded the Self-Realization Fellowship. Percy Bysshe Shelley's drug-induced *Xanadu*, Walt Whitman's scandalously naked poetry, Edward Fitzgerald's eat-drink-be-merry interpretation of the Persian poet's *Rubaiyat*, William Butler Yeats' cyclic rhymes, and William Blake's visionary works all contributed to a swell of magical mysticism and idealism that flourished alongside the leaps and bounds of science and technology powered by the Industrial Revolution. Explorations of and machinations with the otherworldly, whether within or without, were a lot more fascinating and fun to the Chatsworth children than what they were being taught about evolution, interlocking gears, and mind-numbing assembly lines.

Once Ronnie and Basil were back in England from their trip to Greece, they and Catherine had knocked about with their young social set exploring the latest in music, dancing, books, theatre, soirees, and parties. Séances in particular were quite a fad and they had actually attended quite a few, but Catherine herself had never braved being the one in the *Siege Perilous*, the hot-seat, the one who asked for messages from visitors from beyond. She had once even kicked Basil under a fringe-draped table when he was on the verge of nattering on about his sister's voices and visions. The séances all seemed just a bit too contrived to Catherine; her scientific mind found all sorts of explanations for the hollow disconnected voices, the whistling winds, the dancing tables, the supposedly unknowable information.

People spoke with deceased pets and relatives and received guidance from disembodied helpers who took various forms as the fad of the day dictated, one of the most popular being handsome half-naked North American Indian chiefs. Basil would always make some crack about the virile Indian guides being ever so willing to speak to wealthy older women, while he himself could get nary a war-whoop out of the bloody redskins.

The boys' recounting of their trip to Delphi was fascinating however, with the Priestess seated on a high tripod stool over a crack in the earth up from which issued the pungent holy smoke that carried truth and visions. Perhaps in other situations that prophetic smoke was some internal vapor rising up the spinal column and the seat was simply the human mind perched up in the skull. Catherine certainly knew that some people seemed to see things others did not see. She had also grown up with the knowledge that such was expected from anyone with her heritage. After all, there was the second-sight said to be so common among the old Celts. Could she ascribe all her visions to that? Catherine thought not. Particularly since they seemed to centre on the era of the Peloponnesian Wars in ancient Greece and the

14<sup>th</sup> century in France. Hardly Celtic. Hardly Druidic. Hard to explain as family bloodline bleed-through.

Around the time Grandmama Brentye had come that year for her summer solstice visit the Triumvirate - as Catherine, Basil, and Ronnie jokingly called themselves - had managed to "discover" the popular movements and much more: spiritualism, Mesmerism, Queen Victoria's court magician John Dee, Freemasonry, the Eleusinian Mysteries, Mithraism, and all those supposedly secret philosophical schools and movements that were whipping up enthusiasm in parlors and pubs all around the Isles and the Continent.

Basil was quite taken with the idea of past lives and indulged himself shamelessly in costumes from other times and places. Ronnie, grown from gangly carrot-top into a tall big-bodied flame-haired Scot, joined Catherine in wagering what era or epoch they would meet across the breakfast table each morning at the Land's End estate.

The morning of Brentye's arrival Basil had descended the wide marble staircase dressed in the garb of a Celtic Druid complete with serpents painted in blue woad twining about his wrists, white-lime so thick in his hair that it stuck up and out in surprised exclamation points, animal skins around his loins, one of his mother's elaborate medallions hanging on his bare chest, and carrying a spear he had commandeered from one of the family suits of armor in the Great Hall.

Ronnie and Catherine giggled all through breakfast as Basil recounted a fractured "remembrance" of the old oak groves and his times as a chieftain of the ancient Celts.

Brentye's arrival shifted the tone. She had swept unannounced into the dining room and listened for a long moment, her thin mouth curling up on one side and down on the other.

"Oh!" Ronnie jumped up when he spotted her and quickly moved to offer her a chair at table.

"Welcome to my realm, honoured dame," 'Chief' Basil bowed with elaborate deference to his grandmama.

"Give it a rest, you witless booby. You were not there; and even if you had been, you would not have been the Chief, I assure you." But she kissed him fondly on blue-streaked cheek as she strode past him to take the chair offered by Ronnie. "So then, what is this superciliousness all about?"

Basil had insisted Catherine show their grandmama the butterfly necklace he and Ronnie had chosen for her.

Catherine could have sworn that Brentye blanched when she saw it. Her voice was tighter and almost metallic when she asked, "Where did you find that?"



"Oh, we bought it from some vendor in Athens, up near the Parthenon," Basil volunteered, throwing the moldy animal skin back over his shoulder and digging into his breakfast sausages.

"Yes," chimed in Ronnie, with a covert look at Catherine, "She said it was to protect one from the influences of the Dark Brotherhood."

"Don't be ridiculous. Why on earth would the Dark Brotherhood be interested in little ninnies like you?"

It was not lost on Catherine that her grandmama had not denied that there was a Dark Brotherhood.

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*Land's End, England 1832*

One Autumn day when she was ten years old Brentye had flung back the library's French doors and strode purposefully across the browning lawns to the stables, her skirts rustling with determination. She walked directly up to Bonner, who had just ridden in with some of the other hands from the fields and was curry-combing the sweat-wet horses. Moving in and out of a heightened-sense state, Brentye noted the clumps of grass and clay on the horses' hooves, the wet-dog smell of their wool saddle blankets, the sweet mixture of grass and molasses on their breath, and the musky sweat of the men, tempered by flat close-packed felt and sharp tangy metal. She moved to stand behind Bonner and spoke in a voice only he could hear.

"What do I owe you?"

"Wha' for?" he replied absently, watching the thick roan horsehair move in even waves under the curry-comb like ripples purring at the edge of a pond or the wind whisking through grass.

"For the Gift of Light and Darkness," she replied, using a term she had just read about in one of the old library books.

Bonner's hand stopped.

Bonner's breath stopped.

He stood still a long moment, then began to stroke the tall roan's rump, drawing rake-lines down the quivering sweat-streaked legs all the way to the fetlocks.

"'Tha Gift carries its own reward'," he spoke back the lines of the ancient ritual.

"Yes, but that binds me to you. I must give you something in order to free myself from indebtedness to you. What will it be?"

'Aw, gee,' he thought, 'girl's more clever than I thought. Cleverer than I am, I knew that, but how'd she suss this out?' "How did ya suss that out, Lady Sinclaire?"

"You know very well I am not Lady Sinclaire yet, Bonner, I am Miss Brentye. But I can read, you know. What were you planning to do with me?"

Something very cold and deadly in the tone of that last question caused the stableman's blood to freeze. He knew he was of the Kurultai, for he had a butterfly. Had had it since he was fourteen when he had awakened to a lifetime in ancient Greece as a sailor and a warrior during the great endless war between Athens and Sparta. Travelers had engraved the tattoo of a butterfly on him when an old woman saw that he saw another time and took it upon herself to see that he received his recognition, to those who could see it for what it was.

So, he got his first and so far only butterfly at age fourteen. This child got her first two butterflies at age four. He had helped, yes. But he had foolishly forgotten that she was lives ahead of him – who knew how many more she had contact with by now that she had not told him about – besides being miles above him in social status in this lifetime. Bonner experienced one of those dizzying sinking sensations when you know you have done something really stupid and it is likely to cause you great pain or immediate death.

In one of the cleverest moves this not-very-bright young man made, he decided to be perfectly honest. "I dunno, Miss. I was hopin' ta maybe bring you into tha Group in a coupl'a years an get me a higher rank, maybe. I was gonna use ya as a prize. Ya were gonna be my other gift."

"The baby having been the first one, I presume?"

"Yeh, miss."

"Dead or alive?"

"Oh, alive, of course. Ya would be a great value to tha Group." He turned away with what from a distance would have looked like shyness or the dictated deference of servants towards the lairds of the manor.

"Who runs it?"

"Pardon?"

"Who runs the Group?"

"I canna say – "

"Oh, yes, Bonner, you can."

Now the same images danced in both their imaginations: images of what would happen to Bonner were he to reveal any secrets of the Group.

"You think I have not followed you there? Have not been watching for years? You think I could not perfectly dance your dances right here..." Brentye began a widdershins peregrination

around an imaginary fire and the bright orange silk of her dress wavered like a dancing flame.

Bonner's guts loosened and fell another three notches seeing that indeed the young miss knew what had been going on every month in the Druidic oak groves on her family estate. "Donna do that!" he hissed.

"And who will make me stop?" she taunted, oblique autumn afternoon sunlight rippling and flickering across the cobalt blue butterflies embroidered onto her dress.

Bonner grabbed her by the shoulders and forced her to halt. "Do not do that!" he hissed at her again with much more force in his voice than he realized he had within him.

"Well," Brentye tossed a long black curl over her shoulder in begrudging acknowledgement. "All right then. Let us talk."

Leading the roan horse around the grounds to cool him off, Bonner was accompanied by the young lady of the estate. It looked to any observer like a trusted servant showing the young miss the way of horses in a courteous, perfectly respectable manner. In fact, Bonner was agreeing to bring Brentye in to the next meeting in the oak grove at the dark of the moon.

So began, after years of solitary yearning and curiosity, her formal induction into the Left-hand Path.

These woods had always been full of magic.

Of late the magic was created by modern magical groups, a growing revival of ancient pagan covens, plus neo-Druids fueled by the resurgent popularity of the Arthurian tales. Before then it was the more esoteric worshipers of the old ways who plied their rituals under cover of the Anglican and Catholic rites. Before the Church there had been the Roman influence with its pantheon of gods and goddesses. Before them the Tuatha da Dana, the King Stag, Ceridwin and her cauldron, Cu Chulainn, the faerie. And always humming just below the surface of those organized systems lay the chthonic pantheism and animism instinctual to emergent humanity.

Then, too, always alongside those instinctive prayers and supplications, worship and sacrifice, shimmered the even more ancient, terribly more sophisticated magic of the aeons. Its Wisdom was said to have been passed down from travelers from the distant stars; it was the knowledge not of religion or simple metaphysics but of the physics-of-metaphysics. This priceless information was supposedly spawned in distant star systems and developed by a sparse selected few to help guide humanity up in awareness from the instinctual to the intuitive, from there to the intellectual and eventually to the plane of insight and inspiration. These guardians, the elder ones, the watchers of mankind operated, so it was said, both in and out of physical bodies. Most cultures gave names to these great teachers and

mythologized them: Oannes in the Levant, Quetzalcoatl in Mezo-America, and closer to home and the local traditions, Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian Thoth, the ten Sibyls from Persia to Troy to Greece and round the Mediterranean and Near West, and in the western Islands the Merlin. Once one knew what to look for one could see their hand in all the works of man from pyramids to poetry, cathedrals to celestial navigation, music to the manipulations of nations.

Though the young Brentye had spied on this local Group that met in her family's groves for years, she also knew that an even older magic permeated the place. She could sense it, almost smell it. The times she came into the woods alone there was a palpable tent of awareness above and around everything. She could not name it specifically or tie it down to one tree, or this clearing, or that animal, but it was as if a large and powerful something lived here and used all the physical things of the forest as its eyes and ears. Years later Brentye would learn how to do that for herself, but nowhere near to the extent with which this ancient bosce vibrated with awareness more than animal and far far different from human. She could mark the boundaries of the entity, actually. It extended fifty paces or so past the edge of the oak trees and out towards the fields and buildings of the Sinclaire estate. Like a shift in temperature or light she could feel the shift as she approached or left the magic grove.

What Brentye had learned as a young girl was how to feed that spirit and how to feed off of it. She could never get close enough to the Group's monthly rituals to hear all of their words. Some of the Group were sensitive to invasion and she had once made the mistake of moving in too close. The handful of people who sensed her looked around uneasily at first and then one of them broke away from the forming circle and headed right towards her. Brentye let loose the quails she had carried in a sack for just this purpose and under cover of their whickers and flurrying she slunk quickly away. In an inspired act of desperation she scratched herself, hoping the gift of blood which had been so useful in other lifetimes and places would sway this forest spirit to hide her.

Apparently it had worked since the Assistant to the High Priest stopped at the edge of their magic circle and looked around, confused by the quail and, she was sure, by the wall of invisibility granted her by the ancient entity.

After that, quite pleased with herself that her skills in the dark arts were apparently transferable from incarnation to incarnation, Brentye made it a point to offer some blood or other sacrifice to the forest spirit every time she entered its influence. Currently a very young member of the Kurultai, Brentye

Gruffudd Sinclaire was very much aware of a life in what she was later able to identify as ancient Greece. Sparta, to be specific.

Second son in a privileged Spartan family, "she" - in that time a "he" - had gone with his parents to the religious festivals and accompanied his uncle, a city official, to the more arcane gatherings where the Mystery Schools instructed young people in the Lesser Mysteries. Every four years or so he and other selected children from the Peloponnese traveled to Egypt for months of esoteric training. Lysander, for that was Brentye's name in that time and place, was a clever youth and managed to use influence and coercion to learn things from the priestesses and priests that he was not supposed to know before having been trained and tested for years. But Lysander was impatient.

Brentye now, she knew the value of patience for she knew that patience annoyed other people. Rather than soothing them, it riled up mistrust and apprehension: 'What does so-and-so know that they can be so patient?' She found the demeanor of silence and a quiet stance ever so much more effective than an open display of boundless energy. On reflection in later years she surmised she had learned this from the forest spirit. After all, when an intelligence is tens of thousands of years old, what matter the brief little lives of the creatures who scurry about in its midst. That example coupled with the long view one has when a member of the Kurultai tended to imbue a patient attitude. Up to a point.

One of those points had been reached when ten-year old Brentye demanded of Bonner that he bring her into the magic circle. Standing far afield and watching behind the shielding yet transparent cloak of the forest's accommodating invisibility she was continually frustrated that though she knew the motions she did not know the words. Brentye certainly knew the power of words and wanted desperately to know the right words for the wielding of this particular power then, that particular power now. She knew she knew a lot but she also knew she needed formal training and this time, unlike back in Greece, she was not going to jump ahead and miss out on vital pieces of information and instruction.

On the dark of the moon that October Bonner took the young girl by the hand and led her towards the forest. Clumps of golden mistletoe punctuated the autumn-hued wall in the distance, echoing the far-flung stars in the moonless night. Bonner shivered when they crossed the invisible border of the forest spirit's reach. Brentye snickered at the grown man's obvious discomfort. For her, it had been like coming home.

Finally.

Again.

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*Land's End, Cornwall, England 1887*

One warm Autumn day not long after she had turned ten, Catherine was as usual going about the Land's End estate with her ever-present notebook taking down observations on various things that interested her. She had been studying stones of late and had drawn a series of charcoal sketches of the buildings on the estate as well as the smooth water-polished rocks in the creeks and the slippery moss-haired boulders in the dam that created the duck pond.

Moving into the old family chapel for a bit of shade and a sit-down, she found herself staring at the arrangement of dressed stone, keystone, arches, pillars, and walls. As she stood next to a pillar with her head craned up, she could smell the stone. Catherine experimented with smells, too, and she could tell blindfolded whether a stone had come from the brook, the pond, the outside of the house, the inside of a building....stone was like a sponge if you paid attention. It soaked up information about where it had been, what had passed by it, what had been done to it, and on it.

Lord Chatsworth peered into the chapel and saw his daughter standing like a stone saint, the flicker of votive candles playing over her knee-length cream-coloured linen dress and highlighting her long auburn ringlets.

His boots were caked with clay from a recent inspection tour of the farms so he did not want to come all the way in and muss up the clean stone floors. "Poppet? What are you doing?"

"Father," she asked without turning to look at him, "do you know where Grandmama goes when she comes here?"

"Well, no, actually, I do not. And actually, it is none of our business, now is it?"

Catherine shrugged. "How does this work?" she pointed up at the groined stone arch.

Chatsworth leaned into the chapel's dim coolness and frowned up at the complex handshake of precisely-cut stone, then down at his young daughter. "I really do not know. Something to do with weight and pressure, I suppose."

"Do the Secret Builders know?"

"Who?"

"You know, the Secret Builders who made all those marvelous things like the pyramids and the cathedrals and the menhirs and castles and - "

"Men build these things, Poppet."

"But not ordinary men?"

"Oh, I think so. Just otherwise ordinary men who have been taught how to use the laws of this earth. How to see, to hear, and to feel."

In the silence following his slightly arrogant reply about the nature of a class of men Lord Chatsworth instinctively felt were beneath him in class, even if they were more highly educated, Catherine applied her mind, and then stepped away from her thinking. Suddenly her already acute senses became even larger, more refined, as though the petals of a rosebud had suddenly opened and she could smell the languid autumn sun, see the ruffling breeze, taste the richness of colours in the stained glass windows, and beyond that even more shades and hues in a rainbow-like blending. Everything was incredibly more alive and real and in that moment of intensity, briefly, the girl was both herself and the observer of herself. The overpowering moment passed, but not before Catherine had engraved it for reference and determined to have that acutely rich experience again and again.

"Oh..." she smiled over at her father, "I see."

"By God, child, I rather think you do, though I have no earthly idea what I meant." Lord Chatsworth was both amused and slightly dis comforted by his erudite little girl. "Where do you come up with these things?"

"From the books," she shrugged.

"What books?" Lord Chatsworth shivered slightly, thinking for a moment he could hear a whispering from the aeons-old stones creating the chapel around them.

Catherine took her father's hand and led him through the arched doorway back out into the sunlight, "In the library. Ronnie and I just found them. I think Grandmama left some of them behind from when she visited last summer. Come, let me show you..."

Standing again in direct sunlight, Lord Chatsworth felt a loosening in his chest, which was surprising since he had not realized it had been tight while he was inside the chapel. "I have more to do on the farm, Poppet. You can show me later."

"Oh, look," she cried, racing to the stone sundial on the broad lawn. All around its periphery Catherine had placed markers to delineate the progress of the sun through the seasons. She had been keeping track for just over a year now and was delighted to actually see the shadow hit the same spot it had last year at this time.

"Brilliant! Just like the Mayans and the Egyptians. Father, look!"

Lord Chatsworth was a relatively well-educated man, as were most upper class Englishmen of that time, having been packed off to boarding school while still in short pants and then having made the career through the proper edifices of learning where friendships formed in youth became firm alliances in boardrooms and overseeing battlefields. He knew about the seasons from living close to the land and he knew about the equinoxes and the solstices from his mother, who never failed to arrive at Land's End for those four pagan holidays. He was not sure he was comfortable with his only daughter taking such an interest in the old ways. After all, this was 1887 and science was more valuable than superstition, even for young ladies.

"How are your piano lessons, Poppet?"

"Satisfactory," she shrugged. "I have been plotting the ratio of treble clef to bass clef notes in Chopin versus Beethoven. It is frightfully interesting how you can almost hear the music when you look at the numbers."

"That is very interesting, Catherine. But can you play the music?"

"Well enough," she smiled. "Basil, come here, look!" Catherine called out to her brother, anxious to show him the success of her sundial and sky calendar.

Lord Chatsworth gave an inner sigh and shrug. Both his children were curious. Like all small children, they were constantly spewing out the demanding whinge, "Why...?" But Catherine, from a very early age, had followed whatever explanation that ensued with "How?" She always wanted to know the mechanics of a thing or a process, the engineering of a machine or a system. There was no way he could keep up with his daughter. Nor might any man, and in fewer years than he wanted as a father to admit, this could be a definite problem. What gentleman, even a clever one, would be able to keep up with Catherine if she continued in this vein? Why could it not have been just the opposite, with Basil the scholarly one and Catherine the flighty and charming? Lord Chatsworth determined to speak with his wife about their daughter and her future.

That spring Catherine had expanded her study of heavenly bodies from the sun and moon out to the stars. Basil was a ready accomplice when she ventured up to the higher stories of the Land's End mansion, scrambled out the dormer windows and set up a little observatory on the flat part of the roof. They would lie up there almost every night, wrapped in blankets and holding hands, watching the stars graze across the dark blue sky like herds of mildly curious animals glancing down at them as they passed by.

Testing her own observational abilities Catherine would draw up star charts and then compare them to the ones in the



encyclopaedias and journals from the Royal Astronomical Society. In just a few weeks she knew the names of all the constellations and was working on learning the names of the major stars within each one.

Up on the roof one night Catherine was nuzzled close against Basil under a goose down quilt, their backs to each other with their bare feet touching. She stared over the stone edge of the parapets at the increasingly familiar night sky.

"That is Orion, you see. And look how bright Sirius is. I still have not discovered why they call it the Dog Star. It makes no sense. There is nothing like a dog anywhere around it. Why dogs in the sky? But then, why chariots and hunters and snakes and virgins for that matter. What do you think, Basil?"

"See here, Cathy," mused her brother, just as he was about to drift off to sleep. "I think we need a telescope. That way you can see for yourself and let me get some decent sleep."

After a flurry of letters to and from Cousin Ronnie in London, weeks and weeks of asking their parents for one, and pressuring their tutors to recommend it as an aid to the proper education for modern British youth, Catherine and Basil finally obtained a telescope. Ronnie brought it with him when he came out for his summer visit.

Once they had mounted it up on the roof Catherine hardly slept in her own bed at all. The summer nights were warm and clear and she filled notebook after notebook with observations, time lines, charts, and drawings. Ronnie would sit up there with her long after Basil had cheerily waved goodnight and scrambled back downstairs. Ronnie had been to Greece and north Africa over his long Christmas vacation and brought back fascinating tales about the Moorish scientists and the ancient Greeks. Catherine heard his voice, the deeper voice of a young man now, no longer the voice of a child, coming from over her shoulder as she pressed her eyes to the curved glass lens and leapt from the stone rooftop at Land's End into the stars of the Milky Way.

"See the Plough?", Ronnie pointed towards the north. "Ursa Major has seven stars, yes? Now look over there to the Pleiades."

"Seven stars, yes, I know."

"Do you know the story of how they are related?"

"Well...they are all stars. And there are seven in each constellation."

"There is supposedly more to it than that, but I have yet to be able to discover just what it is."

"It is probably just a myth, Ronnie. This," she patted the telescope, "is science. And that", she waved her arm out to the constellation-studded sky, "is reality".

"I am beginning to think there is more to myth than just fanciful stories, Catherine."

"Ronnie. You are the one who taught me that myths are the stories we humans tell ourselves to explain away the world around us."

"True...but maybe some of those seemingly fanciful stories are just interpretations of actual reality."

"Where ever do you get these fanciful ideas?"

Ronnie was silent for awhile. Catherine looked back into the eyepiece and gazed at another part of the heavens far separate from Ursa Major and the Pleiades. Then he spoke.

"They took us to Carthage. Read to us the accounts in Greek and Latin."

"Vergil's *Aeneid*?" Catherine asked, wishing she could turn the telescope southeast and see the cliffs of Carthage overlooking the Mediterranean.

"Vergil, Cato, Caesar. *Delende est Carthago*."

"'Carthage must be destroyed'?" Catherine also wished the telescope could look backwards in time. "What was that curse Dido said when Aeneas deserted her, just before she killed herself?"

"Threw herself on a blazing funeral pyre is what she did. And Aeneas was only doing his duty, had to move on, god's orders you know, 'Hip ho, up you go. Go found Rome!'. Poor Dido, tragic lovesick cow. Though she was rather beautiful it is said. Curse goes something like, '*Litora contraria litoribus, undas fluctibus, arma armis: que nepotes ipsi pugnent.*'"

Catherine turned from the stars to Ronnie, struck by the seriousness of his voice. "I know it means something like shore against shore and arms against arms, but what is that *nepotes* part?"

"'I pray that our shores may be opposed to their shores, our waters to their waters, our arms to their arms; and may our descendants themselves contend.'"

"Eternal warfare, then? Carthage against Rome, before there even was a Rome."

"And now there is no Carthage."

"So no more war."

"Actually, not quite true. Some battles never end, some wars go on forever."

"Well, who could possibly be fighting whom in a deserted city? You said there is hardly a stone left of the old place?"

"It is rather odd, Catherine, but I could swear there is something still there. Oh, you cannot actually see anything, really, but I just get a feeling."

"I hope you are not turning out like Grandmama Brentye."

Ronnie shivered, not just from the night air. "Gods forbid and thank the gods we are cousins through your mother so there is no blood tie with that...woman. No, more like our Sir Richard

Frances Burton, I should hope. He sees things and hears things other Englishmen can not."

"Or should not," Catherine giggled. "Mother says he is horrid and wicked but father says he is quite brilliant."

"I think they are probably both right."

"Tell me more about Carthage?" Catherine began shutting down the telescope for the night.

Ronnie got up to help her, his silhouette blocking out the starlight. Catherine looked at him and was puzzled by a sense of looking beyond the stars through a dark doorway shaped like her cousin. Something about that concept seemed vaguely familiar but the idea just played around the top of her brain and she could not find anywhere to put it or anything to put it with.

"Odd, really," Ronnie said, "there truly is hardly anything there yet you get this feeling... Of history, certainly, but something else, too. We snuck off, Beverley Shawcroft and that long-headed fellow Nils Fairlynn and I, and we found some caves. They were along the shore and I think they could have been there when Aeneas and the Trojans first landed. Maybe. Anyway, we went in as far as we could without torches and you could tell people used to use the caves. I want to go back sometime and explore them more. Bring you and Basil along."

"When?"

"What?"

"When are we going back to Carthage?"

Ronnie's sigh blended into the first pre-dawn breeze souging from the woods up past the outbuildings to the big house. There was something inclusive about her choice of words that seemed odd to him but it was late and he was tired. Ronnie was increasingly troubled by a sense that he had forgotten something very, very important and any time he had inklings or hidden information it tweaked his imagination and his interest. But so far he had not gotten any answers to any of his nascent questions.

Instead of replying to her 'when?' query he quoted from their new favourite book, Sir Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Persian poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*.

*"Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night*

*Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:*

*And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught*

*The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light."*

Snapping the telescope securely in its case and then placing it in the chest just inside the window they used to access the roof, Catherine teased him with a reply and a plea for urgency.

*"One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,*

*One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste-*

*The Stars are setting and the Caravan*

*Starts for the Dawn of Nothing – Oh, make haste!”*

One night after supper during Brentye's summer solstice visit the young people were in the library, pinpointing Carthage on the huge wall map where Basil proudly noted, "All the pink bits belong to us, you know. 'The sun never sets on the British Empire'".

Ronnie snorted, "The sun eventually sets on every empire, my dear boy. You should know, you have slogged across their dusty ruins."

"'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'" Basil struck a wide-legged stance as though to mimic those vast and trunkless legs of stone from Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*. Then he fell dramatically to his knees as Ronnie and Catherine together completed the poem.

"'Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.'"

"That will never happen to us," Basil rolled over to lie on his back, hands behind his head, staring up at the library ceiling where a mural of deities and constellations intertwined.

Catherine spun the big globe, almost as wide across as the reach of her arms, finally stopping it so that Carthage was on top. Ronnie continued his search along a high bookcase, pushing and pulling the rolling ladder along the wall of ancient tomes without bothering to climb down and off of it first. He was on tiptoes stretching dangerously out across the cliff wall of books when, "Aha, methinks I spy my quarry".

"What lost treasure are you after now, Ronnie?" Basil asked.

"Your grandmama was talking about some interesting things at dinner this evening."

"All that stuff about the Hindu builder gods?"

"And the destroyer gods, the blood-dripping Asuras and the fire-swirling Agnichaitans. Hold on...here we go," Ronnie pulled out a slim volume and tossed it down to Basil, "Catch!" His eyes roamed further around that section of shelves. "And as if by magic, more treasure. Pukkah! Pukkah indeed."

For the remaining time of Ronnie's summer visit they spent hours in the library pouring over Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and some bound military reports from outposts of the British Raj up in northern India and Tibet, collected when Brentye and her late husband, the children's grandfather Lord Chatsworth, were out in the Far East.

Having grown up in the midst of their own Celtic lore of faerie land, the Tuatha de Danann, and the lost lands of Avalon and Lyonesse, and having delved into legends Icelandic, Arthurian, and the gloomy Teutonic with its world-ending

Ragnarok, it was no stretch at all for the children to dive right into and absorb the complex myriad of deities that made up the Hindu and Buddhist religious systems.

Of particular interest to Ronnie were the interlocking chains of rounds: the 432,000 and 4,320,000 and 43,200,000 and 432,000,000,000 year cycles of the ups and downs of civilizations, races, ages, planets, galaxies, and universes.

"The old fishermen say that on stormy nights you can see beneath the sea to the lights of those cities, even see the towers of their castles. Silly stories, really, but delicious when we were younger," Basil recalled.

"Mayhap not so silly," Ronnie offered.

"Here is another one," Catherine interrupted and read from a translation of the Hindu Vedic scriptures. "The world is now in the Kali Yuga, an iron age, the last of the ages."

"What were the others?" asked Basil.

"Ummm...Golden, Silver, and Bronze. Now Iron. A 432,000 year cycle of evil and decay."

"Just our luck to be born now, eh? Well, at least we still have all that gold, silver, and bronze close to hand. Remember that splendid exhibit at the Louvre?"

Catherine read on, "...and it will all end in fire." She slammed that book shut and moved along the library table, fingering the various tomes of different sizes, bindings, and languages.

"How do they know?" Ronnie wondered. "Who is keeping records? Particularly if everything is destroyed in between a *manvantara* of existence and a *pralaya* of nonexistence."

"They make it all up, laddie," Basil looked up from close investigation of a Tibetan tanka painting with blood-jowled demons dancing on decapitated bodies. "Just like in the merry old Church of England. The whole thing is just stories."

"Maybe..."

"Now here is something interesting," Catherine flipped the pages of what looked like a very old book. The boys went to stand behind her, peering down at the exhausted parchment etched with faded ink. The original writings looked to be in Sanskrit, but beside them in a fresher ink were English words, presumably the translations.

"The Great Game," Ronnie turned the book sideways to read the margin notes, "played among the Kurultai for the soul of the world. Invisible forces shall move most men, hidden links hold across form and time, until the Agnichaitans are loosed, the sound of swords are singing, and in the Battle of the Dark and the Light, the many hidden Halls of Power explode with - "

The next page had been ripped out of the book.

All three were silent for a long moment.

"I say, that does not sound like a very jolly time," Basil turned away.

Catherine and Ronnie stole a look at each other and both found themselves locked in a gaze that seemed to hurtle them backwards into dim halls of memory, swooping past half-open doors that allowed but mere glimpses past the thresholds. Catherine found it deeply unsettling and managed to break the look. Ronnie stood still a few moments longer, eyes glazed, then shook himself back to the present.

Basil, ever oblivious, was already back inspecting another of the vivid Oriental illustrations of multiple worlds peopled by melon-breasted beauties and long-toothed ogres. "I say, look at this creature. I should be frightfully loathe to meet him in a Battle of Dark and Light."

Climbing the stairs to their various bedrooms that night, Catherine took Ronnie's hand as Basil bounded on ahead. "What happened back there in the library?"

Ronnie shrugged. "Something similar happened when I was in Egypt, and then again in Carthage." Ronnie quoted from the Rubaiyat:

*"There was the Door to which I found no Key:  
There was the Veil past which I could not see:  
Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There was - and then no more of THEE and ME."*

Catherine was silent for five stair-steps. Then, "I saw past a few of those doors, Ronnie."

"What?!"

"Flat grassy lands, golden. And a deep blue canyon, vaster than anything I have ever seen or heard of."

Ronnie and Catherine had both stopped and stood balanced with their feet on different levels of the staircase.

"Imagination or vision?"

"Nothing I had seen before, but rather like my visions, in how it felt. And for the slightest instant I could almost taste, or smell, something. But..." she shrugged. "I saw so many things it was like the pictures in a zoetrope whirling past the slits of light, only each one was different. Or like looking at islands and realizing they do not float upon the sea, shallow and flat at their bottom like a ship's hull, but rather they are the peaks of vast mountains and the sea floats atop their sloping deeps. We are often deceived by position and unclear about foundation."

They both paused, letting their internal interpreters of reality shift back and forth.

"Shall we try it again?" Ronnie ventured, "If we use meditation techniques we might be able to recreate the experience, like when I was in those Egyptian temples and the ruins at Carthage. I should very much like to know what it was

all about and why it happened spontaneously and to both of us at the same time. Who knows what we could discover if we went exploring."

"No, thank you. Not me." Catherine shivered and climbed on up the stairs.

A few weeks later they were dreadfully disappointed to discover, when returning after a two day jaunt to Caerleon to visit the supposed ruins of Camelot, that Sir Richard Frances Burton had called to visit at the Sinclaire estate. The hero of all three children would have charmed them for hours with tales of his forbidden travels, if they had managed to get him away from Catherine and Basil's disapproving mother, who never wanted her children to hear anything racy or untoward. She never thought to forbid them the library, though, and Sir Richard had gifted them with a number of books, including yet another edition of Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*, this one with illustrations based on rather racy Persian miniatures recently uncovered on one of Burton's trips to Tehran.

Catherine and Ronnie, who had already memorized all the quatrains, would go for days at a time that summer carrying on all conversations with the words of the poet. It drove Basil mad.

One day at tea when he was huffing and puffing to his mother and grandmama how he wished they would make those two stop and speak good old King's English, Brentye commented that there was much hidden and much revealed in the poetry of the Persian; perhaps Basil should join in the treasure hunt for wisdom. A silence fell across the bone china and the watercress sandwiches, for seldom did Brentye make any complimentary statement about her granddaughter. Catherine and Ronnie specifically did not look across the linen at each other. Lady Camilla merely sipped her tea without comment, though one eyebrow was slightly raised.

Basil however slumped back in his chair and stuffed a cream-topped scone in his mouth, "I get all the drinking and eating bits, but there is no fighting, no adventure. And all that love stuff, eeewww, a bit too thick!"

"Mmm-hmmm," was all Brentye said.

Catherine had always been fascinated with vision, the way one saw, the mechanism of sight and interpretation of perception. One of her first memories – and a story the family told about her on those gatherings when 'weren't they cute when' tales went round the room – was as a toddler playing peek-a-boo becoming mesmerized by the change in perspective affected by covering up first one eye and then the other. The apparent shift in distance and position of objects, the flattening of perspective, the blurring finger held before the face, the hard throw of focus from close to far, the disappearance in the blind spot. She had

played with her eyes for days, wearing makeshift little eye patches from scarves or bandages until her mother dug out an old pirate's eye patch from the fancy dress costume trunk in the attic. Basil wanted to hear stories of his father being the dashing Sir Francis Drake and their mother the empire-building Queen Bess, but Catherine simply scampered away and continued her childish optics experiments.

Up on the roof that first summer she had a telescope, Catherine had been explaining the parallax shift method of determining distance to Ronnie.

"Very well," he said, well aware of the use of trigonometry for surveying and navigation, "what about the stars?"

Catherine slid him a smile. "Funny you should ask. See here," and she pointed the telescope towards the eastern edge of the evening sky, "look at the planet Mars, that red disk there."

"Got it," Ronnie peered at it.

"Now do the parallax markings."

"Done."

"Now, here, let me find it for you. Sirius, the star your Africans worship."

"Mmmm."

"Now do the parallax markings."

Ronnie took in a deep breath. "I say...."

"Yes," Catherine snapped shut her notebook. "Now if I could just reckon out a way to measure them. Probably somebody has. But maybe not."

"Why not just extrapolate out from what you see here."

Off her curious look, Ronnie turned the telescope away from the stars and down to the estate. He pointed to the white hawthorne tree standing alone in the faerie field, a supposed guardian to doorways to supposed other worlds. "Just take the distance to the tree and that to the copse, calculate the difference and use that ratio to determine the difference between, say, Mars and Sirius. You might not know the actual distance but you would know that Sirius was three times or ten times or whatever further away from us than is Mars."

Catherine looked at him a long time, running the maths concept in her head. "Right... That could work." She grinned at Ronnie and took her place at the telescope, swinging it round to the old grove.

As she peered through the ground glass a figure materialized out of the woods and stared straight up into the telescope lens. Catherine leaped away from the instrument as though her grandmama Brentye had been right there up on the roof with her and Ronnie.

"Now that is interesting." Catherine chose not to comment at all about her grandmama. "The closer something is to you the greater difference your perspective makes."



Ronnie peered across the parapet and saw his cousins' strange grandmama walking up from the woods. "Do not let her know you do anything but play with this, Cat."

They could not have been more different, this grandchild and her grandmama. Catherine was inherently a scientist, Brentye a natural magician. And yet there was something that bound them, besides their blood tie, that is. They were bound by the Kurultai, but only one of them knew it. And to that one, so far, went the advantage in an ongoing long-running battle where life and death were only part of the tactics. The ultimate stakes were much, much higher.

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*Vienna, Austria 1900*

Catherine fingered the two gold and enamel butterflies poised just above the watered-silk front of her creme-coloured ball gown and picked up her etched crystal wine goblet. Her black velvet shawl was strewn with gemstones, designed by Catherine herself to the patterns of the constellations. It was a pretty thing on its own, but all the astronomers who saw it spread across her elegant bare shoulders smiled in recognition and many quoted a line or two of poetry about the shining stars flung like gems across a deep velvet sky.

The opening night gala dinner of the New Century Science Frontiers Conference was in full swing. Frederick clapped enthusiastically beside her as the President of the Royal Society announced yet another prize-winner from among their colleagues.

The chamber orchestra in a balcony overlooking the ballroom unfurled music from various countries, alternating between Elgar, Sibelius, Sousa, Wagner, Rossini, Mozart, and traditional tunes from the Levant, the deserts, and beyond. They played an upbeat arrangement of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, awfully appropriate Catherine thought for such an eclectic gathering of disciplines and origins.

Supposedly to watch the musicians, Catherine craned her neck around. Actually, she was looking for Major Albert Farley, who she had not yet seen here.

"They say he's giving a ground-breaking speech tomorrow," Frederick whispered to Catherine about the gaunt sunburned Scotsman currently accepting a prize up at the front table.

"Really? What about?"

"'Ancient astronomy' the program says, but what that means is anyone's guess."

"Those old guys in the outback know more than we give them credit for is what it means," Major Farley interjected, bowing to Frederick and bowing lower to Catherine.

Though an American, Frederick was well-bred enough to half-stand and nod to Major Farley, though it was obvious to Catherine by the way he moved in front of her chair that he was not at all pleased to see the handsome officer.

Catherine was more pleased than she had intended to be. Major Farley still wore the unusual uniform, but he had added some ribbons and medals. One in particular struck her attention: it was a red ribbon suspended from which hung a cluster of four golden butterflies. He actually touched it as he bowed again and spoke to Catherine.

"I apologize for being so cryptic before. Your cousin Ronald Marion Bruce Logan strongly suggested I look you up. He assured me we would have a lot to talk about."

"You have to kill that tiger yourself, Major?" Frederick nodded at the tiger tail bandoleer across Farley's uniform.

"They rather expect you to, yes."

Frederick's nostrils flared. "With your bare hands, I suppose?"

"Goodness no, man, we are honour bound to be civilized to the weaker and less fortunate; we take them out with one shot straight to the heart."

Major Farley pulled round an empty chair and perched on it with his legs spread either side of the back. Leaning forward with crossed arms his casual air behind a real physical barrier seemed to give Frederick a slight reassurance and permission to relax.

Catherine caught her breath and her hand went to her own butterfly necklace. Visions, remembered dreams, and forbidden fantasies all clattered about between her head and her heart as she stared at Major Farley. She knew she knew him, very very well. She just did not know when and where and how. All of a sudden a thousand thoughts fell into a coherent pattern, quite like when she was first learning astronomy and would stare up at the star-dusted sky without being able to see the arbitrary patterns of the constellations. Then, looking down at the drawings to get the design and then back up at the star field, she was able to overlay the pattern of the picture of the Virgin, the Scorpion, the Snake, the Crab, the Warrior...all of them suddenly coalesced and snapped into place over the vast scatter of light. In that same way, looking at Major Albert Farley as he touched the golden butterflies medal on his chest, she was able to put all her uncertain hesitant perceptions into place.

Though she resisted the implications, Catherine was struck by a growing "knowing" that what cousin Ronnie had often said about multiple lives might well be true. She decided to let the concept spin out in her mind without marshalling it about with logic and critical analysis. What if...she put her scientific mind to the side...what if she *had* lived before and this Major had been a part of it? Perhaps she actually had ridden the prow of a painted Greek ship in Homer's wine-dark Aegean sea. It was like seeing the light from stars and knowing the light was millions, perhaps billions of years old. Yet it seemed so new, so now. These images, her memories, seemed like that: very real light from very distant times. Maybe she had indeed walked barefoot on cold stone steps in Middle Ages monasteries, the harsh scratch of the monk's habit against her skin. The large hands she saw in her visions, red and naked and knowledgeable to the point of embarrassment, maybe they were her hands. The hollow echoing of Gregorian chant, the breathy spume of breaking waves on wood, and of late those oddly tinny and smoky scenes in strange bedrooms...all felt so real because...because they had been (and perhaps still were?) quite real.

Catherine rocked back in her chair then turned away to the table and picked up her glass of claret. 'Like blood', she thought, 'like the blood I have shed, like the blood that has been shed by me, for me, on me, about me. What is our blood but our breath? What are our loves but our lives? I do not know who this man is yet I feel I know him almost better than I know myself.'

"Major Farley," she managed to say over the thin crystal edge of her wine glass, "where did you meet my cousin?"

"In the Himalayas," Farley's voice came from over her shoulder.

Just then the Master of Ceremonies called for silence. "We are greatly honoured," his voice took on an even more officious tone, "to have with us this evening and for the duration of the Conference, one of the most astonishing men I have ever had the privilege to meet. Please join me in welcoming Professor Max Planck."

The applause swelled up and ricocheted around the ballroom like the light fractured and glistening from the crystal chandeliers, sconces, and stemware. Farley leaned in to Frederick and placed his hand on the doctor's arm, "I say, old bean, who is this fellow?"

"You don't know?"

"I have been off in Hindya, you see."

"Oh. This 'fellow' as you call him has made quite a stir both sides of the pond with his quantum theory."

"Say again?"

"Help me out here, Catherine, it's more your arena than mine. I'm afraid there're no fever-bugs and infection vectors in his world of theoretical physics."

Catherine shook her head and brought her mind back to this time and place. "Wha -- ? Oh, yes, quantum theory. I do not believe he has officially published it yet, but from what I have read and heard it is rather simple yet terribly complex and it is shaking up the way we look at absolutely everything; but really it is about *how* we look at absolutely everything and about the position and perspective from which we look at absolutely everything. Plus something about the precious precision of a moment and that you can only know so much - but not everything - about something at one time."

Catherine's scientific enthusiasm had grasped her and brought a flush to her eyes and cheeks that Frederick was ever so thankful to see. She'd been way too pale since that awkward episode on the ice this afternoon.

"Eh?" Major Farley cocked his head at Frederick. Frederick was naive enough not to realize that Farley was paying attention to him to deflect Frederick's concern about Farley paying attention to Catherine.

"Explain further, won't you, darling?" Frederick used the term 'darling' just to remind the handsome major that the lovely woman in the creme silk gown was *his* fiancé, thank you very much.

"It is all about position and speed and jumping electron orbits, and - " Catherine began.

"Shhh!" someone the other side of them hissed. Max Planck had taken the podium. After the beginning of his speech about radiation from black bodies and the presumed but not yet scientifically proven optical problems concomitant with radiation of heat and his newly forming quantum theory, the room fell silent with the implications.

"So then the tiny particles travel in discreet packets rather than in a constant stream," Catherine whispered, rearranging the china and glassware to mimic star systems. "How is it decided which particle goes into which packet? I wonder how all that would apply on a cosmic scale, if at all. Is it only on the sub-atomic level? It sounds like they would look the same..."

"He is frightfully close," Farley muttered so only Catherine could hear. "Space itself is an entity that affects everything within it."

She turned sharply and stared at him. Their eyes locked. She was drawn into the green depths and quickly beyond before she realized what was happening. There was a sense of *deja vu*, as though she always knew from moment to moment what was about to happen, as though she was always just one moment ahead of herself. It was a very unsettling feeling and yet in a way

comforting because it gave her a thicker sense of beingness. She was simultaneously both the doer and the observer. As Catherine tore her gaze away from Albert's aeons-old eyes and her relationship with them the timelines snapped back together and she was in the here-and-now without that sense of split perception.

"There is a cave hidden in the high Himalayas," Major Farley whispered, "where the entire evolution of humanity is carved into the walls. Giant gas balloons, to quivering bulbous masses with nascent sensory organs, to more solid giants with - "

"Shhhhh!" came the insistent hiss.

"You know cousin Ronnie," Catherine rolled her eyes at Frederick, embracing him in the subterfuge of placing Major Farley in company with her romantically unthreatening red-haired relative. But she was shivering with expectation at what Albert would say next. She felt the burning insistence of the butterfly pendant on her breast.

"The Mysteries should be made known," Albert said, then got up off the chair and casually walked away.

"What'd he say?" fretted Frederick.

Professor Planck rustled his papers and cleared his throat. A sense of import rippled out from the podium and all eyes turned back towards the speaker. Waiters hushed their work, diners put down their forks, and the clicking of teacups on china saucers clattered through the huge dining room like little shells and pebbles tumbling in the receding tide. Even Albert paused at the double doors and turned back towards the dais.

"We stand on the brink of a new century, and soon a new millennium, with an arsenal of weapons against ignorance and a great light to drive away the darkness. And yet, we must not simply congratulate ourselves on the fantastic progress we have made." Planck looked out over the audience and beyond. "One of my colleagues," he nodded to a young man at the front table, "Albert Einstein, always tells me that 'Great ideas meet violent opposition from mediocre minds'.

"What we are talking about here, the machines and the ideas in the Exhibit Hall, what we are all doing here will change the world. There are many powerful forces that will not want the world to change. And there will be many more people who will want to change it to suit themselves and not for the good of all. I fear there will be much such opposition."

Like Catherine, a dozen or so of the attendees felt their hackles rise and glanced furtively about the room as though expecting to see the very face of opposition on their fellow diners.

The dancing had gone on for about an hour now in the Queen's Ballroom. Beneath the Art Nouveau convolutions of ceiling decor massive crystal chandeliers hovered like frozen suns above the swirl of dancers revolving like planets in generally stable but individually erratic orbits. Like quantum packets of particles small parties of dancers detached and cycled away, then back again. The champagne was flowing, the accolades mounting, the rivalries lining up. As protocol demanded Catherine had danced first with her fiancé. She had also done turns with her mentor, then with a middle-aged French doctor who praised Frederick's work, next an enthusiastic young Lieutenant just back from conducting a botany study at Ford Motor Company's rubber plantations in Brazil, and a slew of other scientific gentlemen. Frederick was torn between comparing notes with colleagues and being pawed off on their wives for a turn around the dance floor.

Though she tossed her auburn curls fetchingly and twirled about the richly decored ballroom gracefully, Catherine was all the while searching the perimeter for her Albert. After the Major's words had knocked her a solid blow to the solar plexus, Catherine wandered about in her memory exploring who she had been, who he was, what she knew, what she did not know, what she wanted very much to know.

All of a sudden her passion for knowledge about the stars in deep space was occluded by her passion for knowledge about this man and what he could tell her about herself and her other lives. It was a prickly almost painful awareness, rather like a limb that has been asleep waking up again: as the blood rushes in, the awareness leaps to the fore and the twinges and prickles are both painful in the actual sensation and pleasurable in their meaning.

What did it matter how far Aldeberan was from earth? Or what the rotational rate of Cetus was compared to that of Deneb 3?

'Space is an entity?' What did he mean?

It contradicted her Democritus quote about nothing existing except atoms and empty space upon which we superimpose our opinions to form reality.

It resonated with part of what Max Planck and others had talked about in their brief dinner commentaries, but Catherine sensed something more along the lines of what her cousin Ronnie used to talk about after his excursions to the West African Dogon and far Hindya.

Now there was a question, she smiled up at the rather stiff Colonel currently whirling her about the dance floor and giving her a brief engineering lesson about pontoon bridges patterned after Caesar's hinged floaters. She had not heard from Ronnie in months. How was it that this Major Farley appeared out of nowhere claiming to have been sent by Ronnie?

"Thank you, Lady Sinclair", the Colonel bowed away at the end of the dance.

The orchestra stopped to turn the pages of their musical scores for the next number.

"Just one more, m'lady?" the voice rippled through Catherine's blood.

She turned to face Albert and the room stood still.

Bright stiff canvass rippled behind him, that peculiar thick white Greek sunlight buttered against successive cut-out backgrounds of ship's sails and riggings, the whitewashed houses like sea foam left dripping on the near shore hills, and the fat clumpy clouds gathered to observe with remote interest yet another sea battle among the Peloponnesian Isles.

"Al..." she whispered.

The orchestra began 'The Gold and Silver Waltz' by Franz Lehar.

"Shhhh..." he took her in his arms and began to twirl her across the vast parqueted dance floor as though it were the bridge of a giant sailing ship.

As Catherine focused on his medallion with the four butterflies, Albert focused on her two-butterfly necklace. "I have something that belongs to you," he said.

"What, my past? My future? My hidden forbidden lives? Who are you? Why are you?"

Farley quoted from Khayyam and Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*:

*"There was the Door to which I found no Key:  
There was the Veil past which I could not see:  
Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There was - and then no more of THEE and ME."*

It was the quatrain Ronnie had quoted on the staircase the night he and a younger Catherine had that shared vision of the hallways with the many doors. Catherine quoted back to Albert the next quatrain:

*"Then to the rolling Heav'n itself I cried,  
Asking, 'What Lamp had Destiny to guide  
Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?'  
And - 'A blind Understanding!' Heav'n replied."*

Farley quoted back at her a well-known line of the ritual of many a Mystery School. It was even said to have been the German poet and philosopher Goethe's deathbed speech, "Light, light, more light."

Giddy with the impact of all this incredible new knowing, her forceful vision this afternoon on the ice, plus the in-rushing of all her seemingly random visions of the past, Catherine began to laugh aloud.

"How do I know Ronnie sent you?" she gasped out between breaths of almost hysterical laughter.

"The Dark Brotherhood."

Catherine ground to a halt. Several other couples almost collided into them. She took Albert by the hand and drew him away and out onto a glass-enclosed balcony overlooking the ice-embraced river where only a narrow ribbon of satiny black water hinted at the presence of the deep and powerful stream below the surface.

"Now see here, Major Farley. Either I am going starkers and will be carted away to the madhouse or you know more about me and everything else than you rightly should."

"Cat."

Again the frequency of his voice ripped through her body and pushed upwards from the back of her heart.

"You are in danger," he urged, "Dark danger. We have to get you out of here."

Now instead of the sails behind him Catherine envisioned the familiar cold stone walls. Only now she recognized them as the walls of this very hotel. The tapestries were different, though she thought she recognized the salamanders interwoven among the branches of the trees bearing strange fruit. The light was torchlight and candles then, but it was the same place where purposefully set fires had once almost destroyed a kingdom. "Who is 'we', Major Farley, and what is this 'Dark danger'?"

"Cat, we do not have time for this," Albert looped an arm around her waist and drew her closer to him.

Catherine was swept away from reason by the proximity of Albert. His warmth, his scent, the thick eyelashes. She stared at the small mole and then at his mouth, his lips, fascinated, as though she could actually see the words spilling out. She took a very deep breath, attempting to refocus on the here and now... whatever that was. No, that might actually be more dangerous. Another deep breath, but this one seemed to fill her with his presence. Stop breathing. Stop thinking. No, that will not do either.

"Do you really not realize what is happening here?" he insisted.

"Yes. I rather think I do," she sighed. "I am going starkers at a conference where I am supposed to lead a panel on the variances of orbital regularity in the planets and what that might mean for study of the stars beyond. My fiancé is going starkers because I seem to be willingly distracted by an astonishingly handsome stranger. And you are probably starkers for even coming here and talking like this without knowing how I would receive your comments."

"Right, that is much how I see it as well. But Ronnie - "

"Where is Ronnie now?" Catherine found she had leaned into Albert's embrace and made no move to pull away from him. In fact,



she found she was staring up at him and examining his profile from different angles, remembering more and more with every glance.

"Your red-haired cousin, born in 1872 to your mother Camilla's sister Marian, is waiting for us in Tibet."

Catherine shook her head and started to turn away, unable to hold at one time in any sense of order all her thoughts and feelings, remembrances, and imaginings. Albert mistook it for a dismissive move. He grabbed her by the shoulders and turned her to face him. Even through the pristine white of his gloves, the warmth of Albert's hands on her bare shoulders seared through Catherine as though she had been connected to some strong magnetic current that threatened to obliterate all sense of self, time, and locale into a small packet of energy that was just the two of them, swirling through yet totally containing the entire universe. All her senses flared into hyper-awareness and intermingled so that she tasted colour, felt sounds, could see his words. She desired every part of their bodies to be touching, bare. The societal and cultural constraints against even thinking like this, much less acting on her desires, only served to contain and inflame the energy as in a crucible where alchemical changes create great magic.

"Your life is in danger. I am to bring you away as soon as possible." There was no mistaking his seriousness.

"What...? Why...? Who...?"

"I do not exactly know, but Ronnie said to tell you the danger was 'from within' and had something to do with your Grandmama Brentye. He said tell you to remember the day you showed her this," Albert made so bold as to actually touch her butterfly necklace hovering just above the low watered-silk neckline of her gown. "He said you would know."

Catherine's mind went reeling back to the Land's End estate that midsummer day when Basil and Ronnie had presented her with the necklace: Brentye's comment about the Dark Brotherhood, her scathing look, all those years before and since when she held more than a disdain for her granddaughter and seemed almost sinister towards her.

That vague sense of something very important being missing in her life was being rapidly replaced with a strong sense of something very important being dangerously close. It made her a bit faint and as she looked down her eyesight dimmed so that her creme-coloured dress seemed dark. Tearing her eyes back to Albert's she heard him say, "Please, we have to get you out of here. I can explain more later."

"Catherine...?" Frederick interrupted them and Catherine found herself again on that pivot between the two men, both familiar in such different ways.

Perhaps more from hesitancy to accept Albert's outrageous claims and her own responses to them than from her feminine preference for Frederick, Catherine nonetheless pulled away from the Major and took the good doctor's arm.

"See here, Cat - "

"We'll see you tomorrow, Major, *if you're still here,*" Frederick guided Catherine back into the swirl of dancers and out of Albert's sight.

"Fiendishly clever of me to get them all here together, yes?" Lady Brentye Gruffud Sinclaire Chatsworth peered over the glistening bubbles in her Lalique champagne flute, across the glittering lights of terraces and lawn with the ice rink off to one side, and towards the deep rectangles of light from the canyon wall of windows on the opposite wing of the old stone hotel. Three figures had just left the glass-enclosed balcony of the Queen's ballroom, two men and a woman. Brentye recognized the true identities of all three of the people, one of whom was currently her granddaughter Catherine.

"Hmmp," the man behind her growled.

"How do you think I did that?" her smile went crooked as she sipped the exquisite house champagne, its bubbles so tiny they slipped into the crevasses at the roof of her mouth and hurled themselves at her bare brain and the bottom of her eyeballs.

"Years of practice, no doubt," he replied from years of habit, having heard most of the handsome older woman's opinions any number of times before.

"No," she set the crystal flute down sharply on a marble-top table and rose in a whirl and whisk of sapphire blue silk skirts. "Cleverness," she tapped her left temple. "Sheer simple cleverness; honed, I will grant you, by aeons of practice. But my dear Howard, if you keep doing the same things all the time, your enemies will be able to predict that and then you lose the advantage." Brentye paced across the hand-tied Turkish carpet in her suite of rooms at the Regency Hotel where the New Century Science Frontiers Conference was taking place. "It is a sad thing really, that you can not use twice what worked well once."

Off Howard's vague shrug of incomprehension she sighed and strode past him.

"So when are we going to kill them?" he asked.

"After lunch tomorrow? What do you think?"

"Well, they will be slower then, full of all this heavy German food."

"Pheh, you idjit. I was joking. At least your father had a sense of humour. You are more English than any Englishman I have ever known, Howard."

The stolid middle-aged man shrugged indifferently. Built like his father, the younger Bonner held his age well and still served his purpose in the magic rites. The Bonner men were quite well equipped to be a positive pole in the field of sexual duality: classically handsome but not too bright, Herculean actually, according to the versions of the story where the Greek demi-god was more brawn than brains.

When Bonner Senior had become too old to perform the ancient rituals with the required physical vigor and competitive enthusiasm, Brentye had simply exchanged Senior for Junior. Not out of sentiment, gratitude, or love had she spared the elder Bonner's life, but from the knowledge that his knowledge of and attention to what she and his son were doing together would further fuel their own activities and her own agenda. Stupid mortals thought sex was about status, familial duty, sentiment, what they mistakenly called 'love'. Had they but known...

Powerful ritual sex was not about the youth or juiciness or apparent sexual appeal of the physical body. It was about the level of energy of the consciousness housed in the body. In that sense, Brentye was the sexiest woman in the magical Group which met at those certain times of the year when the gates between worlds opened wide and welcomed any who dared cross the threshold. And in a sense, that misconception the uninitiated have about the values of sex served a marvelous masking purpose in that the Group could toss out bait and distractions hither and yon in the guise of sweet young things and no one would suspect that the real magic of the Group was being made by others. It was the perfect cover, just like that created by Marlowe, the unassuming Assistant to the High Priest who had initiated Brentye into the Group when she was ten. As Marlowe later pointed out to the young Brentye, there was the outer Group and then there was the Inner Circle, and the former need never – should never – know about the latter.

But who, really, would ever suspect a veddy propah uppah class English matron of participating in magic rituals involving any bodily functions other than a few signs of the Egyptian tau cross, whispered Hail Mary's, or waving of a willow wand? 'I can wave a wand for ye', Brentye chortled silently. 'Oh, ye of little faith, how little do ye know of the true faith. Or rather', she added, 'of truth.'

Brentye squeezed the younger Bonner's hand where it curled across her lace-draped shoulder and stared with hostile intent out the window towards the other arm of the old castle turned hotel.

"Not tomorrow then?" Howard dared to ask again, already having passed beyond the chastisement.

"Your idea about weakening them is a good idea. Here, let me show you how we shall do that."

Across the terraces of the hotel Catherine sat alone before the French doors, staring up at the stars and trying to find a cohesive pattern in her recent experiences, Albert Farley's words, cousin Ronnie's endless speculations, and her own years of curiosity and wonder. She shivered with a sense of being watched, which reminded her of those times back at the Chatsworth castle when she would look up from her studies to find her Grandmama Brentye staring at her with what did not look at all like familial love.

Those times of the year when Brentye came to stay at the Land's End Lair, as the children had called their ancestral home, were the most harried of times for young Catherine. She swore the walls and halls and stairways came to life with peaked ears, following eyes, and susurrating reports to some malevolent force. Her brother Basil accused her of being perfectly batty but their cousin Ronnie, who had begun seriously studying the mystics around age twelve, countered that there was an actual science behind magic, but that it was so different from the rigid formalism set up by Newton and des Cartes (both mystics in their own right, he informed them) that it was hardly recognizable.

Basil rolled his eyes and called for another game of tennis but Catherine listened to Ronnie and quizzed him about what scientific principles he could possibly have found in the sacred scriptures of the Hindoos, the ancient Egyptians, the Sufi Musselmen, or the Israelites. His enthusiasm was contagious but his theories were so far just that...theories. He was determined to go to the source of the stories and investigate for himself, once he was old enough to escape the rigors of that upper class upbringing which currently held him thrall in its rigid system.

Meanwhile Catherine would skirt quickly past those areas of the Logan castle frequented by Brentye. Yet there was always this sense of being watched, as though there were invisible spy-eyes planted here and there throughout the house and grounds.

Catherine knew her grandmama was not fond of her. She was not sure how far that negative emotion went, and she did not really want to know. It was one thing as a member of the aristocracy, as landed gentry, to bear the resentment of the tenant farmers, the jealousies of other less privileged village children. But for one of her own family to so blatantly dislike her without, to Catherine's knowledge, any rhyme or reason, went beyond the logic of normalcy.

Catherine's parents had noticed it right away. Her father pooh-poohed it at first with the typical excuse he always made for his mother, "She is rather cold. It is in the blood on her

side of the family, you know." But Catherine's mother had an instinctual reaction to her mother-in-law's disdain for the girl-child. She knew that some how, some way, Brentye meant her child harm. As to why she could not fathom, but she knew it.

During Catherine's early years her mother had managed to plan trips to visit her own family during the times Brentye came to the Logan castle. But as time went on and her own family went on to other realms of existence, Lady Camilla Logan Chatsworth's excuses dwindled until finally she was without a valid reason to spirit herself and her children away from the premises during Brentye's quarterly visits.

Years and countries away, sitting here tonight in her suite of rooms in Vienna, Catherine the scientist decided to avoid thinking about Albert Farley, his words, and his affect on her. Instead she fell to something more familiar and comfortable — scientific inquiry. She analyzed the light falling from the modern electric lamps. Here it caressed a curved wooden surface, there it splintered in a crystal lamp facet, over against the far wall it slid along the sateen of the quilted bed comforter, and on the floor the light dug its fingers into the pile of the Turkish carpet, preening back in shades of gold, green, beige, and bronze. Catherine recalled with a shiver one evening in the family library when she had been similarly examining the quality of light and its reflection and refraction. Brentye suddenly stood in the doorway, backlit so that her silhouette seemed to hover in free space.

"What do you see, child?" she had asked.

Behind her question Catherine heard inherent threats.

"I do not know," she shrugged with feigned indifference, "What is there to see?"

"Why, only what is there," Brentye laughed slyly and moved out of the doorway, leaving a rectangle of blinding light.

Her own question had haunted Catherine's studies from that time forward. "What is there to see? What is there to see?"

Does light change the shape of an object, or only one's perception of the shape of the object? Is the chair the same at night in the dark as it is at dawn as it is at high noon or at night with the crystal chandelier casting fractured light across its gold-encrusted arms and sateen back and seat? If not, and if our *sight* of things is determined by light but the *truth* of things is not, then how can we make any judgments about what we see out there, all of which is based on light which is old. Minutes old if from our own star, millions of years old when we gaze upon Sirius.

What do we see?

Only what is there?

Perhaps not at all.

Staring at the silent stone walls of the converted castle Catherine searched for the eyes she still felt staring back at her, waiting to report her every move to her grandmama.

Staring up at the night sky she searched for a distant wisdom behind the placement of the stars and their motions.

Staring in a mirror she searched for the meaning behind her own existence in this time and place.

And oddly enough, considering her fear and loathing of her grandmama, Catherine still found Brentye's reply to be the best, most scientific answer: "Only what is there".

Everything else was fancy, fallacy, myth and legend, religion and philosophy, all subject to change and manipulation by interpretation. Old Democritus's observation that 'Nothing exists except atoms and empty space; everything else is opinion' seemed to brighten whatever was hiding behind the veil of vision that she could not yet quite see. As she had been told, the difference between philosophy and science is that the latter requires numbers. It became Catherine's mission to discover what was there to see and to be seen.

Now, some ten years after that incident in the library, Catherine Logan Sinclaire Chatsworth was giving a speech the day after tomorrow to a gathering of the finest minds in the world about just that very topic, "What is there to see?" Whether like herself and Albert Einstein, focused off-planet and out towards the stars, or like Frederick and Ronald Ross focused into the minutia of fever-bugs and the malaria bacillus beneath the ground glass of the microscope, it was still that same searching for 'what is there'.

She shivered again with the cat-quick crawl of ghost fingers up the spine that told her someone was watching her. Turning towards the windows Catherine looked out at the ice rink where only this afternoon she had the terrifying "experience" of being ground to death between hard iron and gritty rock. Not just another vision, that one.

And then that handsome major showing up, supposedly on a mission from her cousin off in the high Himalayas. Not bloody likely.

Or was it? He seemed to have cracked open the secret of her visions and even sent dear Frederick into a spin. Was it all real? A trick from Ronnie, who always counseled against being led around by one's sentiments? If there was a so-called Dark Brotherhood, might this all not be a trap? Catherine was, frankly, very confused. Her 'visions' included this Major Albert Farley, but in a different guise. She was so far just bombarded by images which she was so far unable to sort out, like a half-remembered dream one knows is important but which is exceptionally difficult to recapture and interpret.

Was Albert Farley simply infected by Oriental mysticism and a far-flung fatalism? Or might he be right? Might there actually be a battle between Dark and Light? Might the trials and travails of humanity be more than simply the-way-things-were? Though it certainly proposed more danger and called for more personal decision-making, Catherine found she actually relished the thought that humans might have a hand in the fate of humanity. It just seemed more, well, more democratic. More fair. She resolved to hold an open mind at the next few days' events and see how the lines of allegiance might be drawn among her colleagues.

But first, to sleep. Perchance, if she were lucky, not to dream.

On the other side of the hotel courtyard Brentye stared over Bonner's bare shoulder and across to the window where her granddaughter paced and fretted. Catherine was not just her granddaughter; she was the enemy.

Unlike so many humans who tried to turn sex into love and love into power, Brentye had instinctively known from a very young age that the equation ran quite differently: sex was a tool of power; love was a weakness. The more that ordinary people inferred a connection between love and sex the better. It weakened their power. When concentrated on two people, between two people, sex was as a thunderstorm contained in a thimble. Add that puerile, febrile, insipid construct called 'Romantic Love' to the equation and the effect was lessened even more. Oh, they wrote about it and painted it and wrote music in praise of it, but the mistake they all failed to realize was that the Love to which they directed their art had nothing whatsoever to do with the people they made their love to. It would be like praising the goblet for the quality of the wine, or the platter for the succulence of the pig.

But really, that sort of confusion served Brentye and her kind well. The less mortals knew about the power of the electricity of sex the better. And the less said about real cosmic Love, with a capital "L", the better. It was there right in front of them but so few ever realized it.

Such as Howard, actually, right here in front of Brentye. How much did he really know? He attended the rites and participated in the rituals; he knew all the moves, and quite well, thank you very much. But was he conscious of what he was doing?

His father had been. Almost enough to have been dangerous, there at the last.

This Bonner man though? Brentye drew in breath at the effectiveness of the middle-aged man's ministrations, gathered up the fiery energies swirling close about the two of them and

focused her intent through a certain place just outside her own body. As the tempo and temperature increased, she built the Wheel of Wild Wind, enclosing them in a separate world where only their two physical bodies existed, but which opened doors to other realms where hungry entities waited to feed off the light of the coming explosion.

Heavy blackness hummed just above Catherine's body like an approaching wind, pressing down on her paralyzed limbs. She could not move. She could barely breathe. Cold fingers closed around her neck and a dark vortex threatened to suck her head-first out of bed and right into the cold stone wall. Catherine tried to raise her hands and look at them, but her will would not move them. The sound of howling wind rose and her entire body began to tremble as the heavy coldness pressed down further.

'...no...no...No...NO...NOOO!!!' she screamed in her mind. Catherine jerked bolt upright in bed, shaking with terror.

After some long minutes, slightly less trembling, she determined to find comfort and solace where she usually did, in the night sky. Pulling on her full-length fur coat and wrapping a cashmere muffler around her head, the astronomer stepped through the French doors and out onto the stone balcony. Across the span of cold night air Catherine noticed other lights coming on in a few of the other rooms, as though those people too had been awakened by the same nightmare. The smattering of lights in windows across the hotel mimicked the constellation of Orion the Hunter. Ahead of it were the seven stars of the Pleiades. Catherine was reminded of that conversation with cousin Ronnie on the rooftop one star-studded night at Land's End. He had said something about the relationship of the Ursa Major constellation and the Pleiades constellation. All these years later, she was just now remembering it and made a note to herself to see what scientific connections might be found such as age, distance, brightness, size. But that was for later. For now...

Snow huddled thick like frosting atop the ornate balustrade and exuded crunchy squeaks beneath Catherine's slippered feet as she pulled a wheeled wrought-iron chaise lounge away from the wall and turned it around to face outward. She settled in and tucked her feet beneath her coat, slouched down to lean back and look up at the night sky over Austria.

There were so many new ideas at this Conference. How exciting to learn about all the new inventions, hear the ground-breaking theories, and watch as the patterns of knowledge rearranged technology and hence everything people did. In the same way that she could sense the future of a thing, Catherine sensed that great changes would come from this confluence of great minds. Secrets hid forever from humans were being uncovered



daily, and so many of the sciences were advancing and cross-pollinating each other that things merely sketched by Leonardo da Vinci or postulated by Plato were quickly coming to be. There was talk of news in all the sciences, but particularly in physics and medicine. The press was conspiring with science to popularize it so that more of the regular public knew more about the breakthroughs in understanding of how the world worked. With this period of relative prosperity and cooperation among the ruling countries, particularly her British Empire, who knew what great things might come forth for the betterment of all mankind.

A few meteors streaked across the sky and Catherine played one of her favourite mind games: she rearranged the constellations into new patterns. Sometimes she used everyday items and sometimes obscure mythological beasts or stories. Of course there was already the plow and the horse, but could you find a hayrick? The Virgin was there, but how about a cathedral? Sometimes she looked for letters of the alphabet, sometimes for numbers. Yet behind these imposed patterns there was always the ghost image of the ancient constellations named by the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the early Mesopotamian cultures.

The game was not working. She kept seeing hearts and triangles, as Major Farley had taunted with his obscure phrases, "Heat without Light. The Ha'ab. The Triangle". The Ha'ab was the dark spot in the centre of every man's heart, said to have been removed from the prophet Mohammed's heart by the accommodating Archangel Gabriel. The Triangle? An entirely inappropriate voice said 'love triangle' and positioned her at the apex of Frederick and Farley. And 'Heat without Light'? Catherine blushed to admit that that was what she was feeling all throughout her body, a fiery heat in the blood she absolutely knew was related to Albert Farley yet there was no light of the mind to understand the why's and the wherefore's.

She had to think, but she could not.

A few balconies down the curtains were drawn and behind them Major Albert Farley paced his rooms in the half-light of a few candles. He sensed something big, dark, and dangerous stirring about and did not want to draw attention to himself. Yet. First he had to find the enemy, then reckon out a way to deal with him.

Albert's problem was that though he was sharp-eyed, one of the best non-native hunters in the Hindu Kush, and though he was an excellent analyst, valued by the Intelligence services of the Raj, he had a bloody big blind spot when it came to his own other lives. He was aware of four other lives and was getting quite good at recognizing people he knew from other lives; but getting the layout of the relationships was a challenge to him.

Ronnie Logan he recognized immediately. They had both fetched up at the Officer's Mess in Srinigar. Albert was just in from a supposed hunting trip but actually from a reconnaissance mission up past the Khyber Pass and Ronnie was leading an exploration adventure with an unlikely mix of a couple of gemologists and a couple of professional hunters. They had been tramping about in the Zaskar Mountains for weeks and were there to replenish supplies and send home their various samples - animal, vegetable, mineral.

Over gin and tonics and out of earshot of the others Albert and Ronnie had renewed an old acquaintance from another time and place. Ronnie told him who he thought his cousin Catherine might be and Albert determined to take up Ronnie's suggestion that he look Catherine up and try to get her out of Europe before the coming conflagration so evidently brewing in both the seen and unseen worlds. Ronnie's time spent studying in remote Himalayan monasteries had not been in vain and Albert could hardly wait to return, hopefully with Catherine, and see what he could learn there as well.

According to the Tibetan monks, the so-called Archangel Michael, for whom they had a different name but who performed the same functions, had won a victory in the spiritual world in 1879. After a battle that raged on other than earthly planes for almost forty years Michael had cast the Asuras down into earth. That was a good thing on the higher planes but now the Dark Brotherhood was trying to gain control of the earth-bound Asuras, shadowy creatures with blood dripping down their long black capes.

"Sounds like the eternal battle between Light and Dark to me," shrugged Albert.

"Major Farley," Ronnie's voice dropped, "Have you really no idea? The Asuras always attempt to destroy the human ego, that individual sense of self without which humanity would cease to exist. This is new. If the Dark side makes it this time it could mean the very real destruction of our very being."

Albert looked skeptical. "It sounds like a lot of mythology malarkey to me."

"Old son, where do you think the myths come from in the first place?"

The next morning Albert was going up the grand staircase and Frederick coming down it when Frederick pulled the Major to the side and steadied himself on the balustrade.

"What is it, Doctor Durand?"

"Straight to the point, Major. Why are you hanging around Catherine? And don't give me any of that Cousin Ronnie crap."

"I am here to warn her. Why are you here?" Albert's calm smile infuriated Frederick.

"I'm here to protect her. Most likely from the likes of you."

"Fred, Fred," Albert patted him on the shoulder, "of course you are. But you never get it, do you, man? How many times have we all done this? Will you never wake up?"

"What are you talking about?"

Albert just shook his head, very tempted to punch the tall and stolid American in the jaw but knowing it probably would not have any affect at all.

"The Battles. The War between the Dark and the Light."

"Now listen here, Farley. I know you've been out in your Colonies of late, out where all the glory is. And you think I'm just a stuffy scientist who wouldn't know an adventure if he saw one. But it's men like me that make your being there possible, don't you see?"

"Yes, actually, Freddie, I do see. Malaria, typhus, the pox... Yes, I know, man," Albert clapped Frederick on the shoulder again, "And we are frightfully grateful for your support, really we are; but I am talking about Catherine now."

"Yes, so am I."

Albert sucked in breath, hoping that perhaps for the first time in all the times and ways he had known Frederick that the man was actually waking up.

Frederick continued, "Your type always thinks you can just swagger in from the outback and beyond with your tales of high adventure and kings and coomers and coups and what-nots and sweep everyone off their feet. Your sun-burned faces and your dust-covered tack reeking of stories from afar. What do men like me have to compare? Well, I tell you what we have. Stability. Surety. Devotion. Where will you be three years from now, huh? What about the children?"

"What on earth are you talking about...?!" Albert looked up and down the staircase, half expecting to see one of them.

"Catherine wants children. Three of them."

"Now?"

"No, you fool. Once she's married, once we're married. Once she's completed her work."

"Alright. But there is one thing she must do in order to have any children, or indeed any future at all."

"And that is?"

"Stay alive."

With that Albert turned and continued up the stairs. Doctor Durand decided it was a very good time to have a very stiff drink and he headed down to the lobby bar.

"How do you know she does not know anything?" Stevenson Marlowe grilled Brentye.

"Oh, she knows plenty, in her field. But she does not have the whole picture. Plus, she is not awake. Plus, she is still innocent."

"Hah," said the Assistant, who had known Brentye since she herself was a young girl. "Your granddaughter is a beautiful young woman, she has read at University, she has traveled abroad. Plus, she is engaged, and to an American at that." Marlowe's raised eyebrow spoke reams about his own experiences and observations.

"To Frederick? He is always her guardian, not her lover."

"Does he know that?"

"No," Brentye smiled. "And does that not make it just that much more interesting?"

"You are a wicked woman, Lady Chatsworth."

"I do my best, Mister Marlowe."

"I do not understand why you did not just kill her when she was a baby. Why let her grow up and gather all these others around her?" the questioning man paced Brentye's spacious hotel rooms.

Brentye rolled her eyes and glanced at Howard Bonner, signaling him to go ahead and say what she had just taught him.

"Well, see here," Howard puffed up, "the young Lady Chatsworth she's like a magnet. Draw all the others out, get them all here together, and then blooey!"

"Blooey?!" the same grey eyebrow now arched into a bow. The older man slowly swung his large head towards Brentye.

"Or something to that effect," she smiled.

"The point is, you have to know your enemy," Howard added smugly.

"I suppose you learned that out in the Colonies; Sun Tzu, yes?"

Howard's handsome face went blank.

"Yes, well," Brentye rose and also began pacing the carpeted floor, "but the old Chinese went on to say that not only do you have to know who the enemy is, it would also behoove you to know where he is, and what he can do, what are his capabilities, his intentions, who are his allies, other enemies who might ally with you? Sometimes taking one person out too early robs you of the chance to take out the entire system."

Stevenson Marlowe paced in tandem to Brentye, both of them passing in and out of rich oblongs of light cast in through the tall French windows. To Howard they resembled those little figures going in and out of the doors on the Swiss cuckoo clocks. A larger scale of time was ticking here, he knew, than simply a few inconvenient humans. He felt the crackle of energy in the room. He recognized the subtle clenching and loosening of Brentye's long-fingered hands. Some magick was afoot. But as

usual, Howard was not quite sure what it was. He was pretty sure what part he would play in it. The usual. But that was alright. He certainly enjoyed it. Always had.

The Dark Side had been working for millennia to halt the progress of the mind, to keep humanity trapped in its own emotions. If all the knowledge gathered here at this Science Conference were to be put into action there was no telling what humans could ultimately do. And just like those ridiculous movements of democracy, republicanism, individual rights and freedoms, or socialism and communism with their nascent group-consciousness, this too must be stopped. Or at least slowed down until Brentye and her kind could figure out how to turn the technology to their own advantage.

"You run the risk of ruining everything," Marlowe said.

"I know that," Brentye snapped back at him. "But if we do not do something soon the whole thing is going to get way out of hand. They already know too much."

"Timing. Is this the correct time?"

"I say yes."

"Is it for you to decide?" Marlowe's sarcasm was not lost on Brentye.

"It is now, would you not agree?"

"Crowley has got wind something is up. He has been pressuring me to find out what it is and who is doing it."

"The arrogant young charlatan wants in?"

"Something like that."

"Fool. Ridiculous ignorant fool. He has no idea - " Brentye swung round and glared hard at Marlowe. "Nor should he."

Marlowe waved his hands to ward off her venom. "He will not learn anything from me, trust me there. But the mere fact of him asking questions and now starting to spout off about a coming conflict, good and evil, that sort of thing he dotes on - "

"Yes, yes, I know. We shall have to give him something to shut him up, make him think he has reckoned it out himself."

"Well, we cannot ruin the whole Golden Dawn setup. At least give him credit for this, he is a perfect beard for the Dark Brotherhood; people think he is the dangerous evil and no one notices what we are really doing with - "

"Yes, yes. For god's sake, I know how it works, Marlowe. You have been through this enough before and you are closer to him than I ever want to be. You handle it. Just keep him busy and keep everyone's eyes on him."

"I can do that."

Brentye patted Marlowe on the side of his neck just where the carotid artery makes a V-shape. "I know you will." Marlowe shivered at the icy touch of threatening intimacy and batted her hand away.

Howard, oblivious and still riding his own slow train of thought, interrupted their glaring standoff. "I still don't understand why you have to stop them. Why not just let them all get together and invent whatever it is they are inventing and then our side can just control it." Both Marlowe and Brentye caught breath and turned to Howard, unbelieving.

"Have I taught you nothing, man?" Brentye hissed.

"But we could use all the stuff, too. Why not have better medicine and faster machines. Let them make it, let them build it. We all use it anyway, like the railroads and electricity. I just don't see why we cut off their noses to spite our faces..." Apparently perceiving that he was not only overstepping his class bounds but also making a dangerous mistake, Howard's speech trailed off.

"What, my dear boy, is the purpose of the Kurultai?"

Howard looked like a chastised schoolboy. "Um, er, to guide humanity."

"To what end?"

"Depends on which side yer on, don't it?"

"Exactly."

"But information is just information and stuff is just stuff. I reckon if we actually control what makes everybody's lives better, who cares?"

"Tired of performing the ancient rites in cold damp forests, are we?" Marlowe stared at the dim pampered man. "Would we like a bit of indoor heating perhaps? Maybe a magical transportation device to get us there and back more quickly?"

"Oh, give it up," Brentye snapped at them both. "This whole movement for equality and democracy is getting too strong. The communications technologies are about to leap forward and even the common folk will soon know more than any of us do today. Materials and propulsion. Medicine. Evolution. What they are coming to in physics could really turn it all around. The first Fire - Fire by Friction - has been around for aeons. Now the second Fire - Electricity - is out there and we are having a beastly time reigning that back in. That idiot Nikola Tesla wants to give it away to everyone, for free.

"Now if they discover the secrets of the third Fire, the Solar Fire, do you have any idea what that could mean? These things are not meant for the common folk. Why do you think we call them Mystery Schools, for god's sake? If they figure out how to propel the mineral kingdom up another level it could open cosmic doors in both directions on a number of planes...again. And we all remember what happened last time." She whipped around to stare at Howard in a look that strictly said, 'And if you do not know, do not ask'.

Then aloud she added to Marlowe, "After the whole Atlantis debacle, I know which way it should go for my tastes."

"Do not give the cattle weapons, do not teach the sheep to read.' All well and good." Marlowe filled his pipe and sat down on a dainty upholstered gilded stool beside the French doors, leaning in and out of the sunlight as he eyed Brentye and Howard. "You mention the common folk, but look at your targets. Catherine, Major Albert Farley, Doctor Frederick Durand... This smacks of simple revenge," Marlowe ventured, not quite daring to chastise Brentye outright.

"Revenge is never simple. Yes, they killed me. Any number of times. Yes, that makes me exceptionally angry at them. However, I have also slain them a few times, too. But who is keeping score?"

"You are, apparently."

"What is it ever about, Marlowe? All this," Brentye swept her arms around to include the luxurious suite, the stately old hotel, the sparkling city rippling up snow-dusted mountains.

"Life?" he shrugged. "Life is about power."

"Exactly."

"But to what end?" Marlowe leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and peered up at her. "Why do we keep up this infernal struggle?"

"Because you all enjoy it so much?" Howard Bonner was pouring himself an early morning drink. He was not facing the arguing pair but he knew once the words were out of his mouth he had once again overstepped his bounds. During the long ominous silence he downed the amber alcohol and poured himself another very large drink.

Laughter burst against his fear like a fist ripping through silk. Marlowe roared and rocked as Brentye glared at him, drawing herself up even taller and crossing her arms.

"He is right, you know," Marlowe sputtered, "We do enjoy it."

"I do not," she snapped.

"Of course you do; otherwise you would not do it."

"Now you sound like one of those bleeding idiot psychiatrists down there," she waved dismissively at the Exhibit Hall roof, its arched frosted glass barely visible from her windows.

"It is quite true; and if you were wise you would admit it." Marlowe joined Howard where the man still stood frozen in apprehension beside the bar. "Pour us one, too, old boy." He held his hand out to affirm the request and assure Howard he was not going to zap him into the outer darkness.

The younger Bonner man lined up two more glasses and filled them to the rims.

"They enjoy peace, we enjoy struggle. It is that simple really. Here, drink this, it will calm your eternally frayed nerves, my dear." Marlowe held the cut-crystal glass out to Brentye.

She smacked it from his hands straight across the room where it shattered against the flocked fleur-de-lis wallpaper in an explosion of crystal shards and dripping amber.

"See," Marlowe laughed pointedly, "wasn't that fun?"

Howard knew enough to stay silent and stay still.

Brentye knew enough to recognize the truth of Marlowe's words, and better still, to recognize the power of that truth. It was a comfort to sense someone more powerful than she, and someone who had more answers. "And where have you been all my life?" she said in a low sardonic voice.

"This life or the others?" Marlowe sipped again from his own glass then held it out to Brentye.

Brentye took the glass this time and sipped, her eyes never leaving Marlowe's.

"All right then, we have that settled. Let us get down to the business at hand." He gazed down at the Exhibit Hall. "Can you do this?"

"I can get at least a half dozen of them, possibly even a score or more if we time it right."

"And who gets blamed?"

"Why, it is an accident, of course. A tragic accident. Unfortunately my own granddaughter and her fiancé will be among the victims. Since by a fortunate coincidence I am visiting friends just across the border I shall hurry to the scene and weep over whatever might be left of them. And then I suppose I really should visit the other victims in hospital. What do you think?" she tugged the long lace sleeve down over her scarred right wrist.

"Why would you want to do that?," asked Howard.

Brentye and Marlowe exchanged a look, then he shrugged and nodded for her to go ahead.

"As you would know if you had been paying any kind of close attention, Howard, we Kurultai can be trained how to die without losing consciousness. That way we can quickly reincarnate after assimilating the wisdom gleaned in the lifetime just passed and take on a new assignment right away. Some of that practical information about how the conscious soul should best exit the body is being made more public with the translations and dissemination of the Sanskrit Vedas and the Egyptian and Tibetan *Books of the Dead*."

Marlowe broke in, "It was always out there. It lies hidden in plain sight in the Catholic Church's Last Rites and is even



alluded to in the works of Vergil, Dante and a bit in Milton if a person knows how to see it."

"Young Howard doesn't read the classics," Brentye said.

"Sounds like bad news for your plan," Howard looked at her, not having been offended at all by her comment on his reading habits, or the lack thereof.

"Yes... possibly. But the good news is that if a Kurultai is not 'awake' in a particular lifetime they will not have access to that knowledge from their own *ubergeist*. Their limited here-and-now mind will block their overshadowing spiritual soul - or what the new psychiatrists are calling 'higher consciousness' - and they will act and react as any ordinary sleeping dreamer."

"But if this really is a gathering of the Kurultai - " Howard began.

Brentye continued, "As for those who know who and what they are, the advantage to the Dark Side of a sudden or violent death is that regardless of training, the soul exits the body through the lower gates. If the training is not solid the consciousness could be lost wandering in *Kamaloka*, the 'place of desires', for ever so long. Out of incarnation, out of the way, their mental accomplishments are lost to this world. It is not failsafe, but the sudden violent deaths of many people at once in wars, plagues, or disasters... That has been working for millennia to tip the balance in favour of the Dark Side."

Marlowe stared at her through the circling smoke rising from his pipe, thinking how the violent deaths Brentye was planning could well serve to veil the knowledge that would be lost as all those brilliant minds were abandoned by their terrified souls. Even trained Kurultai often fell prey to panic and the pull of the physical form. "I think you are fiendishly clever and this time it just might work."

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*Land's End, England 1835*

Marlowe recalled one of his first conversations with the then-young Brentye. He had at first thought he was teaching her. "They either want sex or money, my child. We give them just enough of each, either in actuality or in illusion, for them to see us as the source. Then to keep receiving it, they fall in line with what we want."

"And all the while you are using them to get what you want, right?"

"Right you are, my little sorceress."

"Which is what?" Off his raised-eyebrow query she continued, "What do you get from them? What is it that you want?"

"Well, power, of course. What else is there?"

So that was it then, Brentye thought to herself. It is all about power, but if you can make others think it is about something else then you can control them. Simple enough, really. "I see," she nodded.

The Assistant gazed over at the girl-child and chuckled, "Why, I believe you do." He stripped more curling golden leaves off the branch he was playing with and laughed aloud. "Priests and priestesses have been doing this for thousands of years. Set yourself up as the doorway to God or Goddess, to the Light or the Darkness, to desirable things or tools of hate and vengeance, and you are set for life."

"Or lives?" the clever girl noted.

"Indeed. So, how many butterflies do you carry?" The man poked at the pile of dead leaves at his feet, thinking how they resembled a pile of dead butterflies. He already knew the answer from his discussions with Bonner but he was testing the child.

Brentye got up from the fallen log where they sat and strolled in a counter-clockwise ever-tightening spiral around the small clearing. She moved in and out of piercing shafts of slanted autumn sunlight. "How many of them matter to you?" she spoke over her shoulder then turned her head as she spun around so as to keep facing Marlowe.

"What do you know about the Wheel of Wild Wind?" he said.

The man's question brought her up short. It sounded familiar but Brentye did not recall it from another life; she knew she had not read it in any of the books in the family library and she did not think she had heard it mentioned by Bonner. And though it might well have been one of the rituals they did in the larger open grove she had not yet gotten close enough to hear the words distinctly. Yet she felt it was something she knew, or had once known; certainly it was something she very much wanted to know now.

"You will teach me?"

"Ahhhh," Marlowe's forehead wrinkled into a deep V of disappointment. "I was rather hoping you could teach me."

Brentye reached the centre of her little spiral and spun in tight fast circles. The child's game took over her ancient mind and she indulged that part of her that was still just a little girl. Marlowe glowered impatiently as her skirts, hair, and ribbands fluttered out in multi-coloured waves like a streamered Maypole in a freshet of late spring wind. Finally, she stopped and wavered off balance, giggled, and collapsed onto the dead leaves, breathless with childish laughter.

She caught her breath, rolled over in the rustling bed of colour and rested her chin in her hands, rather coquettishly for such a young girl. "Shall we find out together?"

"How?" he had been searching for this ritual for decades and here was this arrogant little snippet all set to just figure it out. Marlowe was both encouraged and dismayed. He felt like he supposed Mozart's *pere* or Da Vinci's first teachers must have felt: they were initially way-showers but they were very quickly way, way out of their depth.

Brentye cocked her head at the sound of scrambling in the crisp leaves. Her hand darted down and she grabbed something. Bringing it triumphantly up to show it to Marlowe, she grinned at the squirming salamander trying to escape from her grip.

"A fire lizard," breathed Marlowe with a respect the little girl had not seen before from this otherwise blasé and insouciant magician. "How did you do that?"

She shrugged, intuitively knowing it would madden him. "When the magic is working the tools appear, yes?"

"No," growled Marlow. "Not always. More's the pity." He took a deep breath and looked away from the young girl. This was more than he had reckoned on dealing with. Marlowe resisted what he knew: that he was dealing with a Kurultai soul much stronger and more aware than he was, albeit in the body of a small English girl. Throughout his many remembered lifetimes, Stevenson Marlowe knew enough to know when he was bested and in the presence of his (if only in this lifetime) betters.

"Alright then," he said, staring at the now-stilled salamander. "How do we discover how to do the Wheel of Wild Wind?"

"Logically, of course," she replied with a youthful confidence he both admired and dreaded.

Piecing together bits and bobs of information, hints, misinformation and outright obfuscations in books of alchemy, hermeticism, magick, Masonic lore, Druidism, Mithraism, and oblique conversations with other witches and sorcerers Brentye and Marlowe the Assistant thought they finally had deciphered it.

Yes, it involved sex, and breath. What did not, Brentye wondered with a sardonic smile. But no human sacrifice, no human death. At least not for those who worked the magic. It was, like most everything in the universe and certainly everything in magic, a two-edged sword. It could be used as a protective device or it could bring death to selected targets by a redirection of strong but invisible forces. Basic magic, really, but with some slight twists and shifts that differentiated it from everyday spells.

The reason it was named the Wheel of Wild Wind was that it affected the natural vortices of the physical body, those little

whirlwinds that mystics see playing all over a person's etheric framework just outside their physical form. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, such a vortex was called a *chakra*, meaning wheel. Apparently, though neither Brentye nor Marlowe claimed such vision, the vortices sometimes resembled spinning wheels, as well as tiny whirlwinds, depending on the point of view and the amount of energy in play.

Most of their information about the specific physical details or the actual process had been pieced together from Oriental treatises, Tibetan medical scrolls, and traveler's accounts, including a fairly salacious diary kept by a Catholic missionary out in Burma and Assam. The Wheel of Wild Wind was a Tantric procedure which when done correctly vitalized the two participants' vortices by drawing energy from the vortices of the target, who was as a result then greatly weakened. The other way it worked was in reverse, where the two sexual partners directed the climactic energy at the target, thereby disrupting that energy field, which lead to debilitation and sometimes even shattering it, which lead to death.

Supposedly the ritual could be worked from any distance but was much more powerful if the targets were within half a day's walk. Given what she had learned about the ruffled geography of the Himalayan foothills where this practice had been developed, Brentye realized that a half a kilometer as the crow flies might take half a day to walk. She adjusted accordingly, they transcribed all their notes, and finally, in solemn ceremony at the full of the moon using a quill pen made from the feather of a peregrine falcon and writing with still-warm dove's blood on the oldest sheepskin they could locate, Brentye and Marlowe wrote out in Sanskrit what seemed to be a most powerful ritual. All that was left was to try it out without giving it away.

Though she begged him relentlessly Marlowe refused to have sex with the young Sinclair girl. She had wormed out of Bonner his belief in the Doors of Remembrance: when two of the Kurultai have sex, it can open up lives for and/or with each other. With the presence of mind to want a teacher and not to be one, Brentye had certainly preferred a linkage with the much more knowledgeable Marlowe over the outskirter Bonner. She still did not know how many butterflies Stevenson Marlowe had, but though his official position was as Assistant, he was obviously to her the real power behind the Group that met monthly in the oak grove at the dark of the moon.

When pressed to explain why he would not have sex with her in the ritual, the answer Marlowe gave was always something obscure about the dangers of awakening the Agnichaitans, the powerful spirits of the greater earthly Fires and even more powerful Fires beyond that. But he would explain no further.

Now Bonner had always harboured a secret desire that was also a secret fear. He had often wondered if because he had brought Brentye into the Group he would be selected to make her first sacrifice of virgin blood. Generally speaking, Bonner did not physically desire younger women. His own first sexual experience at age eleven had been with an older married woman from the nearby village whose craftsman husband was much away. He certainly could appreciate the freshness and beauty of youth but he found innocence entirely unattractive and a deuce of a lot more trouble than it was usually worth. Yes, he found virginity highly over-rated unless one was presenting a sacrifice, and since he himself did not rank high enough in the Group and was never called upon to physically do that, he had only the observation and not the experience to hand.

His natural proclivity towards older women was probably what led the governesses and Brentye's parents to trust him with their girl-child. He truly seemed protective of her and showed no prurient interest. Truth be known, Bonner knew how much stronger she was than him and had appointed himself her guardian out of self-interest as much as anything else: he wanted to learn from her and he certainly did not want her as an enemy.

So, this desire of Bonner's. It was not a desire to possess a fresh young body. And Brentye, though a handsome child, was not particularly pretty in the soft rounded way which was then in style. Bonner's desire to possess her in a midnight ceremony in the old oak grove sprang from his supposition that, as he had told Brentye, when two of the Kurultai come together in that way it often serves to open even more Doors of Remembrance for them both. Though both he and Brentye had butterflies he had only one and it did not correspond in time and place with either of hers. The plain soft-spoken Stevenson Marlowe, Assistant to the High Priest, was of the Kurultai but so bland and non-communicative in addition to being so far above Bonner in class as to preclude any contact save the monthly rituals. The man was tolerant but dismissive of Bonner. So far Bonner had not met anyone in this time and place that he knew from his one other time and place. He fully trusted the veracity of his knowing but he was rather like a traveler in a strange land longing for some news from home, hungering to speak his native tongue again and taste familiar foods.

If sex with young Brentye could open another door, perhaps even one where he and she shared a living, that might well be worth the inherent danger he always sensed from her.

Bonner was fortunately also clever enough to know how intelligent he was not. He was neither arrogant nor dim, but simply a simple man who had some special insights and abilities, as signified by the butterfly tattoo he had gotten from Travelers

under the sacred white hawthorne tree standing alone out in the faerie field. The magic Group taught that the hawthorne blossom with its five lobes was symbolic of the five extensions of the human form: head, two arms, and two legs. It also symbolized the five senses and most significant and mystical of all, it reminded the Initiates of the five-pointed star of the ArchePaths: Warrior, Clergy, Scientist, Magician, and Lover. Gather a butterfly connected to a life emphasizing each of those Paths and one moved on up to the next level.

One of the old Romany women had used a hawthorne thorn to prick tiny holes in his skin and smear in the tattoo pigment as another younger, much prettier woman with a wreath of white five-lobed blossoms had fed him the berries of the magical tree and then introduced him to magical ways to use the human form.

Bonner knew his place in the pecking order of the Group and though his introducing Brentye and before that offering up her infant brother for sacrifice had advanced his standing, there were certain levels beyond which he could never rise. Unless he expanded his awareness with another butterfly.

For the two years now that Brentye had been attending the monthly rituals Bonner's insides warred for the seven days before the events, never knowing if this would be the time. Or not.

He almost always served the Group with his manhood. That was expected and Bonner was rather good at it, thanks in part to his first lover and what she had taught him. In fact, many of the members of the Group met privately with Bonner outside the grove at other non-magical times of the month.

Finally the time came when the supposed Master of the Group deemed all the energies correctly aligned for young Brentye to be initiated into the deeper secrets. It was the dark of the moon before Beltane, the spring cross-quarter holiday of new life and the setting of intentions. Fertility festivals would take place throughout the countryside on Beltane Eve, with ritual fires, people coupling in the fields to show Nature how it's done, and dancing round the phallic Maypole on the first day of May.

Though everyone in the Group would take part in various ways in those very public Beltane events, this ritual a few weeks before that was just for them and their secret intentions. In the family chapel early on the Sunday evening of the event Brentye feigned illness and her mother nodded as the trust-worthy Bonner offered to see her home since he had to tend to some sick animal and would be up all night anyway.

Peering through white lace curtains embroidered with butterflies, Brentye looked down three stories and out to the far end of the lawn where the *bosce* began. Bonner would be coming for her soon and tonight, finally, she would take a huge step forward into her inherent power and vision. She had so far kept it from

everyone that she was as advanced as she was. Marlowe suspected it, she thought, but had said nothing specific. Bonner was, as usual, clueless.

The Group would dress her in a loose white gown once she was out in the grove, but to get there she would wear a dark hooded cloak over a plain dress and boots. Before pulling on the garments Brentye retrieved a thick glass vial from behind some childhood toys and stood naked in front of her full-length mirror. She unstopped the bottle and poured some of the viscous liquid into the palms of her hands. It was a combination of hawthorne, crystal dust, her own blood, rainwater gathered at the dark of the moon, a few other ingredients, and the dregs of Communion wine from a carelessly-cleaned chalice. The young girl analyzed her ripening body and saw it as a tool for her ambitions. She smiled knowingly and then moistening the tips of her fingers began at the point between her legs and using both hands smeared the liquid up her body like twining serpents, drawing the medical caduceus from her root chakra up, criss-crossing at each chakra. The spiraling trails of the elixir were an outpicturing of the male and female channels of the kundalini energy used in sex magic as a force multiplier to quicken the awareness and intensify the upward energy flows.

It was not something she had ever seen done in the grove. Brentye had discovered an oblique reference to something like it in some of her research. The rest of the details she had gleaned from her own solitary experiments with sexual excitement until she had what seemed like a working formula. On her own and with half-remembered experience from some other lives, she learned how to stimulate and control her own responses and was now more than ready to take the next step by actually connecting the polarities of male and female magnetic etheric fields. If it worked she would have much greater access to her other lives.

The faint traces of the elixir would be dried by the time the ritual with Bonner began, plus she would be wearing the pure white garb of the virgin sacrifice so it was highly unlikely anyone would have any idea that she was trying to open doors to powerful and potentially very dangerous realms. The grimoires were always gruesomely explicit about what might happen to those who misread the signs or did not complete the rituals with exactness. It ranged from slight discomfort to total destruction.

All of Brentye's senses were heightened. Interwoven amongst the sounds and smells of the dark, here-and-now forest were vivid impressions of other-times-and-places. The soft feathering of birds fluttering to night roosts in the forest was interwoven with whispering flames racing up curtains and around silk skirts. The skritch of ground-hugging creatures seeking warmth in their burrows was interlaced with the rhythmic strike-slide,

strike-slide of metal tools on stone. She heard her heartbeat and the blood pulsing in her neck and up behind her ears. Though it was a dark moonless night she was able to see shadows and the distinctions between different layers of trees. Also interwoven in those stationary sentinels of the present were individuals, armies, stampedes from the past and the future. The lanolin residue in her woolen cloak almost masked the scent of the elixir still drying on her flesh intermingled with the sweet smell of decay and roasting flesh. Shaking off the sense of many hands touching her, some in hatred and some in tenderness, her skin tingled and she thought she could see sparks of light leaking out of her fingertips. She looked behind her to see a faint luminescent trail where she had walked.

As they entered the forest Brentye felt the ancient being turn its attention to her. The sensory input all focused down into a point in the center of her forehead and quickly quieted. She was handed the white robe, her hair was loosened, and she was led barefoot into the magic circle at the center of the *bosce* where seven low fires glowed in a circle of the clearing, giving enough light to see by but not enough to draw the attention of anyone wandering through the forest.

Though she had been a member of the Group for almost two years she was only allowed to attend some small number of the meetings. Since a new Probationer was supposed to be in awe of the goings-on at their own initiation, Brentye managed a wide-eyed look and a few gasps of ersatz surprise. However, since she had been watching this for years there was not much she did not know, from an observer position. Now however, she would actually experience it.

The young girl did manage to feign an innocence, a blankness, and a quivering obedience to the ritual that fooled everyone but the Assistant and Bonner. Both those men knew that the slight, stiff, dark-haired figure in the requisite loose white gown carried more power than either of them, though neither one knew the other knew it too.

Marlowe had maneuvered the Master's thinking such that he easily selected trusty-lusty Bonner for the initiator of the young teen. On the verge of fourteen Brentye was beginning one of those seven-year cycles that signaled the shift from one mode of personal development into another. Typically this third seven-year period was devoted to the development of the mental body, presuming that the first seven years had been the incarnate soul learning all about the physical body and the second seven years about becoming familiar with and learning to control somewhat the emotional body.

Brentye was helped up onto the stone altar where she stood with arms out, palms up, and head tilted down with hair parted so



that the nape of her neck was exposed to the dark skies above. Marlowe and the Master stood at either end of the altar. The others made a circle and gathered in close enough to join hands. At a signal from the Master they began chanting and side-stepping widdershins around the altar. Brentye snuck peeks from beneath her down-cast eyes as the Group made thirty-three revolutions around her, one for each of the vertebrae in the human spinal column. The circling bodies alternately blocked the light from the low fires then revealed it. The effects were mesmerizing, but she had enough other-life awareness to have a very detached observer-mind and though her whole body was quivering, it was not with respectful trepidation and virginal fear but with anticipation of blowing open more doors of remembrance. Since it typically took an intense experience to open a door to another lifetime - the coming experience would serve to connect Brentye with more than just the virginally vague and unfinished memories she had had so far about sex in other times and places, in both genders and with different proclivities.

The chanting peaked, the celebrants stopped circling and formed into thirteen sexual groupings, some couples, some in threes or fours. Bonner climbed up onto the altar and guided Brentye down into a kneeling position. The thirteen units began to join in various sexual positions.

Brentye held the mental observer position, imaging a small golden sun in front of her forehead. She calculated when to put a hand where, how to breath, what angle to turn her body... Others whispered that the young woman was a natural, but actually she had been observing so long that she knew the required positions and that they were about aligning chakras one to another. The energy lines of the etheric body were like electric wires carrying white hot light. Connect them in the right way on one's own body and/or on another's and the result could be light and/or fire.

The naked members of the Group continued their own positioning. Brentye and Bonner sat atop the stone altar, her legs over his and pulling herself closer to actual sexual congress. The dancers' chanting had a three-beat rhythm that stressed the first syllable like an insistent waltz tune. The light of the surrounding torches flickered in the same rhythm, creating *chiaroscuro* alterations in the planes of their faces and positions of their bodies as they recreated the varied poses from the Khajuraho temple in India.

Because Brentye was still a virgin Bonner's initial moves were slow and sure. As Bonner placed his left palm against the bottom of her spine she knew it was about connecting the small heart-centre chakra in the palm of his hand with her major root chakra, the *Mulhadara*. It was meant to gently awaken the

supposedly sleeping *kundalini* energy so that the aspirant could begin raising their consciousness up through the chakras along the spinal column.

As he did that, young Brentye felt the swell and sensed the sparkle of increasing electricity as Bonner was infused with the energies of the circuit he had just completed by placing his hand on her bottom and maintaining their moist kiss. The moment held, time stopped, energies contracted into a closed circuit between the two of them and then - the others in the Group all released their sexual tensions and declaimed the special words that were meant to help awaken the Initiate.

Bonner did his job well and clasped the girl close as she continued rocking on him. Where she pressed against his chest she felt the faster beating of his heart. She placed her hands on either side of his neck, pressing the palms against the pulse of his carotid arteries as waves of contractions rippled from her sex throughout her entire body. Bonner released then, and was lost for long moments in the involution of energies gathered in one spot. He waited for the usual powerful explosion of energies outward but it did not come. The fire seemed to only flow from him into the girl, rather than back to him and out to the Group. It felt as though he was standing at the edge of a cliff and had just hurled all his energy and most of his self into an enveloping darkness.

As she shuddered and pulled away, Bonner felt a deep emotional disappointment because all the while he had been in physical congress with Brentye, a Kurultai who held two butterflies already this lifetime, no doorways to other lives had opened for him, only quick flashes of images he could not clearly discern.

For her part, though she had been watching the sexual activities in the grove for many years and thought she knew what was going on, Brentye had been stunned by the intensity and the focus created by the Fire of Friction and the Electrical Fire. Her imagination reeled with the implications of being able to wield this power for her own purposes.

As the Assistant helped her down from the stone altar, Brentye noted others in the circle shrugging their shoulders as though to remove a bothersome cloak, rubbing their arms and shaking their heads as though to dislodge some unwanted thought.

Marlowe led her to the periphery of the circle and chuckled, "Kept all the energy to ourself, did we?"

Brentye did not look up, but smiled into the dark forest where the ancient spirit seemed to nod back at her with approval. "Do you think they will notice?"

"Oh, they have noticed alright. But most of them are burdened by a surfeit of expectation and a dearth of explanation.

Although they are now sexually spent, they are nonetheless frustrated and do not know why."

"How unfortunate for them," Brentye said.

"Indeed," Marlowe replied.

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*Land's End, England 1843*

Brentye and Bonner had not created the Wheel of Wild Wind that first night together in the dark grove, surrounded by the rhythmic chanting of the circling acolytes, initiates, disciples, and masters of the Group. In fact, they never did.

But Marlowe and Brentye, once she reached twenty-one, did. Their studies had revealed that for it to be effective at least one of the participants needed to have a functioning Ajna Centre through which to focus the collected energies. Though Brentye carried the information from former lifetimes, that chakra on the forehead just naturally became more effective in the fourth seven-year cycle, so they had decided to wait until then.

Meanwhile, she and Bonner had plied the waters and trod the grounds of sexual power and prowess, using the instructions of the Group, what Brentye found in books in the manor house library, and what Bonner picked up from the annually passing and camping Travelers, as well as basic tricks gleaned from lifting pints with the lads in the local pubs.

Brentye appreciated Bonner for his mechanical skills. He appreciated her for her magical ones. Neither of them presumed to be in love with the other, or even to like one other very much. Theirs was a relationship of mutual respect and the admiration of a definitely useful ally along with wariness of a potentially formidable enemy. The body is the instrument of the soul and their performances for the Group were similar to those of dancers or musicians who each knew their part and played it to perfection, regardless of personal emotion about the other.

Bonner always wished it could be different, for he longed to have a compatriot on his journey as a Kurultai. The Doors of Remembrance had not swung wide for him and though his first sexual engagement with Brentye had seemed a zoetrope experience of multiple realities from diverse and distant times and places, he had not been able to fully grasp any of the images or impressions and claim them as his own. He tucked his disappointment into a pocket of hope and continued to engage with the young Lady of the manor, always yearning that each time the

frenzied blood of physical arousal would waft into the elevated beat of a high passion and throw open those Doors of Remembrance. It was Bonner's burden that they did not.

It was Brentye's intent that that was so. She did not know which of his own Kurultai lives might be awakened and in which of them he might be her sworn enemy. Young Brentye knew herself fortunate to have landed in an existence with Bonner, who had facilitated her own growth in power from the very first. She had no intention of endangering the balance of that system by gifting him with the consciousness of other lifetimes.

The first time Brentye and Marlowe had tried the Wheel of Wild Wind they tested it by directing the whipped-up energies onto animals and were pleased to find a ewe and her twin lambs dead in the paddock, all seemingly struck by random summer lightning. It was so easily explained away by a dismayed shepherd and Brentye's father they did not have to concoct a cover story. They made a point thereafter however to be sure that there was a valid reason why some overweight farmer or already sickly peasant or nearby grove of dead, dry trees might collapse with a shattered heart, or burn feverish for five days, or burst into hungry flames.

The closest they came to being found out was when Bonner returned pale and shaking from the fallow field near the old white hawthorne tree to report that the entire troupe of passing Travelers had been consumed by an errant campfire that oddly enough had burned an almost perfect circle around what was left of their brightly painted high-wheeled wagons. Not even their horses or dogs had escaped the conflagration. Though it was noted there was an unusually large number of salamanders scurrying through the carnage.

Brentye was clever enough to take Bonner's arm and lead him to sit beside the burbling fountain in the front lawns and sympathize with how dreadful he must feel, never once mentioning anything about the gypsies or what had happened to them, always keeping the focus on Bonner's emotions. He appreciated the sympathy and never once suspected Brentye, much less the Assistant Marlowe of playing with very dark, very dangerous black magic.

After that impressively noticeable display of power on the Travelers, Brentye and Marlowe had limited their use of the Wheel of Wild Wind to the rare assassination of those few individuals who were bright enough to see them for who they really were.

Eventually Marlowe grew reluctant to engage so intimately with Brentye.

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*Vienna, Austria 1900*

The great rear courtyard of the old stone castle had been covered over with frosted glass and became the Regency Hotel's grand ballroom, currently serving as an Exhibit Hall. Under pale creamy sunlight a cloud of chandeliers sparkled like constellations above the streams of scientists, writers, newspaper reporters, royal patrons, government officials, colleagues, family, and friends milling about the displays and demonstrations. Incredible things were happening these days in the various scientific fields and the New Century Science Frontiers Conference was a fascinating draw.

Colourful dirigible-shaped balloons filled with William Ramsey's discovery of the lighter-than-air gas helium tugged at their ribbands and yearned towards the arched glass ceiling. A shiny 1:18 scale mockup of the first all-steel building in West Hartlepool stood proudly beneath an overhead spotlight. Wire-and-ball models of molecules bobbed on display tables near planetary orreries showing the heavenly bodies and their moons in an "as above, so below" demonstration. Monsieur and Madame Curie had an enclosed booth where one could view the eerie glow of radium painted on various objects. Posters advertising the Paris Metro trod the border between garish and elegant with plenty of frilly lace and flirty poses. Competing systems of sound reproduction played back stilted voice recordings or musical performances, and in a different yet similar display of preservation an exhibit from Arthur Evans's excavations at Crete drew the curious.

Staking its claim as a new science, a few psychoanalysts had put aside their epistemological differences and put up a group display featuring their books, patient testimonials, and themselves ready to explain the convolutions of their craft and its value to modern, hence troubled, man.

The Nobel Prize section showcased its first four years' winners in physics, physiology, medicine, chemistry, literature, and peace. Dr. Frederick Durand from Chicago hoped to win an award for his work in communicable tropical diseases and had held his fiancée Catherine captive for over an hour hob-nobbing with the fellows at the Nobel booth explaining his system, his theories, and his successes.

Catherine was pleasantly surprised to see literature represented at this Conference. H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* were both considered important popularizations of theoretical physics. She herself had been drawn to both books and appreciated their varied

imaginative approaches to alternate realities. What, after all, was reality and who got to decide, queried the young woman who had always seen visions of other times and places. Though she had not yet found an answer in religion, philosophy, or physics Catherine found Alice's experiences on the other side of that looking glass comfortingly familiar in a vague way.

She was also naturally drawn to the astronomy section, where the recently opened Flagstaff Observatory in the American state of Arizona displayed photographs of the night sky. It was absolutely amazing to see the shiny black-and-white photographs of the stars, as opposed to the hand-drawn or printing press star-charts Catherine was used to working with. Just as the difference between painted portraits and photographs was a sense of captured time, so too did these photographs of the star field seem more real. In the way her mind worked, Catherine saw the stars progressing backwards and forwards in time creating and re-creating the constellations. It was a slightly different view from across the globe than she was used to at home in England, but her studies had included star charts from Mesopotamia, Cambodia, ancient Khitai, and Mezo-America so she could readily distinguish the groupings in spite of the slight shift in perspective.

As always, Catherine sensed some hidden language behind this throw of diamonds against black velvet, like the beautiful shawl she had designed and now wore. She knew this in the same way she knew there was a language of the wind that played out in the bend and sweep of willows along the creek down the sloping lawn from the Land's End estate, in the multi-coloured shuddering symphony of autumn leaves, and in the wet deep-throated crashing of waves on the stony coasts. It was like any other foreign language, you knew there was meaning there, you simply had to learn the grammar and the vocabulary to begin to grasp it. Certainly, like an opera in a foreign language, one could appreciate the beauty of what was happening and get an intuitive sense of what was going on. But to fully comprehend the particulars one needed an intellectual, not just an emotional, understanding.

This is what Catherine had always sought in the stars. She knew it was there and she bristled and argued with Basil and Ronnie when they chided her that her knowing of this self-proclaimed fact was as ephemeral as the knowings she criticized among the psychic dabblers at the séances. Though the source and goal is different, they pointed out, the methodology is quite the same. And hence, according to Catherine's scientific regimen, illogical and therefore untenable. Nonetheless, Catherine kept gazing at the stars looking for some kind of answer to a question she had not yet formed.

"Come along, my dear," said Frederick, taking her arm, "it's almost time for the panel to begin."

Catherine glanced around the room, looking for Albert Farley.

"Probably out scouting the perimeter and strengthening the guard patrols," muttered Frederick.

"What?"

"Your Major Farley. He seems to think some evil force is going to sweep you away from us."

Catherine did her best to shrug dismissively but inside, her turmoil swirled around the conviction that not only did she agree with Frederick but she increasingly agreed with Major Farley's assessment of a very real danger.

She steadied herself on her fiancé's arm as they made their way through the milling scientists and journalists crowding into the lecture hall.

President of the American Physics and Phenomena Society, the vanguard thinker, British transplant, and idea-explorer Nils Fairlynn headed the panel just before Catherine's. A few years before, Fairlynn had been a prominent member of the American Society for Psychical Research. Along with Basil and Ronnie, who knew him from their younger days of exploring Carthage, Catherine had read some of their papers and attempted some of the experiments they reported on extra-sensory perception, mental telepathy, and telekinesis. She longed to question Fairlynn about psychic powers but when she broached the subject he politely declined, stating that he had never really found any hard scientific evidence to support the claims of any psychic phenomenon.

In a way, Catherine was glad to hear this. She too had found it difficult to validate the sometimes preposterous claims put forth by the devotees in that Summer of the Séances, as she, Basil, and Ronnie had dubbed their season of exploration. Catherine had hints that her grandmama Brentye believed in some of it, or at least knew that it had a powerful hold on others. Whether the older woman believed it herself or, as Ronnie had once sarcastically observed, she simply used it as a priest uses the fear of hell and the promise of heaven to control the common folk, she did not know. Catherine actually trusted only what she could perceive with her actual senses and prove with her actual instruments. Anything else required a leap of faith and Catherine had seen enough of the chasm over which the faithful seemingly leapt to know she did not wish to plunge into it. Madness was a severe reaction, yes, but the one she dreaded most was the simple-minded nattering of the faithful. No, she would side with Nils Fairlynn in his statements that psychical research was a

scientific dead end. Entertaining, yes. Comforting, perhaps. Real, never.

"You are that English girl with the crazy idea about planets orbiting other stars, *oui*?"

Catherine's initial defensive response at the words was deflected by the accepting tone of voice beside her. The stranger was a lovely Frenchwoman with an almost stereotypically French nose, large and curving upwards from her face as though it wished to take flight at any moment in superiority or conquest. But to counter that unfeminine feature Marie Desraimes had the most gorgeous hair Catherine had ever seen. Full, thick and deep brown, a colour that you could almost taste fell in loose heavy waves, contrary to the swept-up style of the times. Catherine found herself wanting to dive into Madame Desraimes' mane and in one of those rare flashes of non-competitive female insights, was simply impressed and awed by its beauty. She found herself liking this woman as if by instinct.

"Physics is physics, whether in Vienna or on Vega."

"Vega is a star, *n'est cest pas*?" Mme. Desraimes looped her arm in Catherine's and strolled her around the vast exhibit hall full of displays of intriguingly strange or deceptively simple inventions and technologies. "*Ici en France* – oh, pardon, I speak to you as if we already know each other. I am Madame Marie Desraimes, and you are Lady Catherine Logan Sinclaire Chatsworth."

"*Oui, c'est vrai*. And what brings you here, Madame Desraimes?"

Of course Catherine spoke French, as did all educated Englishmen, but she was impressed that Madame Desraimes had such a fluent grasp of English, which not all educated Europeans cared to learn.

The older woman continued as they strolled past demonstrations of electric lights, Tesla coils, and substances bubbling in retorts. "In France, you see, we pride ourselves on being advanced of everyone else. We are leaders of nations in art, exploration, literature, philosophy, cuisine, architecture, fashion...shall I continue?"

Off Catherine's dubious look, Madame Desraimes laughed a curiously girlish lilt for a grown woman. It made her that much more enchanting. "*Oui*, you English would argue with me on this, this I do know. And there was that unfortunate incident of our *liberte, equalite, fraternite* turning into The Terror." She frowned and was silent for a moment. "But there are many things we are doing now, that others do not find...appropriate. My work is in architecture, you see, and I study your Inigo Jones as well as the old ways of the pagan peoples."



"What an odd combination," Catherine examined the scale model of a steel building.

"Not at all. Magic and building share a common source, common methods, and oddly common results."

Catherine shivered slightly at the thought that this woman would be doing anything slightly akin to what she believed her Grandmama Brentye did. She turned to stare at the handsome Frenchwoman, not so subtly searching for any signs that she too was playing this so-called Great Game of the Kurulatai that Albert Farley seemed determined to make Catherine play. But the woman's gaze was clear and very grounded.

"*Ici*, look at this," she walked over to scale models of an Egyptian temple, the Alhambra, and a Persian palace. Behind the facades were the exposed structural elements of each. Columns, arches, lintels, and selected drawing comparing and contrasting the three.

Peering at the models then at drawings, Catherine drew back and turned to Madame with an ever-growing admiration, "These are yours. Amazing."

"*Merci*. It is about polarities, *ma cherie*. In the stars as on the earth. Plus understanding of dimensions. And stress. Weight. Gravity. The Golden Mean and the Fibonacci series. Once you know the mechanics of a system you can then construct any thing you wish."

An echo of a conversation she had as a child back at Land's End reverberated in Catherine's mind like Gregorian chant in the stone cavern of their family chapel. "The Secret Builders," she whispered, recalling how her father had seemed uncomfortable even skirting around the idea of same. Then she noticed that Madame wore a jewel-encrusted brooch with the square and compass of Freemasonry. She wondered if it were a gift from Monsieur Desraimes or if it belonged to the lady herself. After all, in France the Masonic Obediences did include women as actual Masons, not just auxiliaries. She would perhaps ask her later if it seemed appropriate.

"Have you been to Chartres Cathedral yet?" Madame peered closely at Catherine. "No, I see you have not. Well, you must go soon, I think. Very soon. And be sure to go up into the bell tower. The view from there is enough to open your eyes."

Seeming not to notice Catherine's puzzled expression, Madame Desraimes carried on. "Oh, have you seen this?" She pushed her thick hair back from her face and peered down at what looked like a model of a very large dragonfly. Renaissance-style line drawings explained the exhibit and showed the exploded-out inner workings of the piece.

Catherine stared at the "Ornithopter" and recognized the concept from some drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci's she had studied back when she was about fifteen.

"See, it is coming out now," said Madame Desraimes, glancing around the exhibit hall. "How many other items here are the actual incarnation of concepts that have been swirling about in the mental body of humanity for centuries, millennia perhaps?"

Catherine was not quite sure what the Frenchwoman meant by that, but the more she learned about the people at this event and the more she saw of what they had all accomplished the more she was proud to be among them. Her own science was very far afield from practical applications such as the telephonics machines. Yet Catherine had never thought her studies were frivolous. Rather, they were the sort of discoveries and theories that led by reduction and distillation into applications and inventions that could benefit all mankind. Not, Catherine had always had the honesty to admit, that she was all that driven by a desire to help mankind, not like the compassionate Florence Nightingale or the abolitionist William Wilberforce. No, it was rather that her curiosity and her hunger for order found its purest form in the night skies. If it ultimately helped precipitate down some knowledge that everyone else could use, all the better. But even if it did not, she would still pursue her studies of the heavens.

"Fascinating," Catherine whispered, noting how just a slight variation in the gearing system from Da Vinci's drawing to this prototype made a vast difference in the available work output of the mechanism. "Whose is it?" Catherine leaned over to read the ornately lettered card explaining the device and giving a brief introduction to the inventor.

"Shatzi Plummer," Madame Desraimes proudly noted. "My dear friend, Frau Scheherazade Plummer."

"Frau Scheherazade Plummer?"

"Her father was a famous German linguist; he translated foreign texts alongside your Sir Richard Francis Burton."

Catherine smiled to think other families were even more far-flung and eccentric than hers.

"On the mental plane, *ma cheri*, we are sexless."

Now that struck Catherine a blow to the belly. Of course! That explained how she could take refuge in thinking and thoughts and be clear of emotions. Ronnie had tried to explain it all to her once, about the various planes and their polarities, but she had sloughed it off as so much metaphysical meandering.

The most obvious example of late was how Albert affected her. She actually felt her own awareness bouncing back and forth from highly abstract contemplative thoughts to swooning emotions to fire racing along beneath her skin and swooping into the centre of her body only to billow back out again in pulsing waves

of electric heat. If only Cousin Ronnie were here to help guide her. But then, perhaps he was, in the guise of Albert. Perhaps Ronnie knew what affect Albert would have on her. But how could he know that? Catherine caught herself up short, realizing she was doing it again, having as Ronnie would admonish, 'Not thoughts, but rather opinions about your emotions'.

"Yes, so I have been told," Catherine nodded at Marie.

Madame leaned in to kiss Catherine on both cheeks, "You will do quite well. Keep your eyes on the stars, *ma cheri*, and keep an eye open for those who would stop your progress," and quickly as if to make light of her warning she patted Catherine on the arm. Though both women wore elbow length gloves, some spark of deeper recognition seemed to flow between them where their physical bodies touched. "Some people are so jealous -- ", her voice trailed off as her eye caught something. Marie stared at the wall behind the ornithopter display.

Catherine looked and saw nothing there but heavily flocked wallpaper in carmine red, Prussian blue, and burnished gold. Marie's eyes widened as she turned a curious glance to either side of the display and took in a deep breath. Higher than a tall man's head and evenly spaced around the perimeter of the vast exhibit hall were ornate wall sconces beaming out bright electric light. Catherine followed her line of vision. If she squinted slightly she could make the entire large ballroom seem like a magical fairy ring with fireflies dancing above the exhibits, many of which seemed to have come from far off lands and legends. Twinkling above were the grand chandeliers, resembling constellations seen through a telescope. Catherine thought it was beautiful. Marie seemed concerned.

"What is it?" Catherine asked.

"The sconces..." Marie's voice wavered between what sounded like doubt about her perceptions and a struggle for control.

"Yes? Isn't it wonderful the Hotel has electrified the entire building."

Marie gave a small snort. With a tilt of her Gallic nose she indicated the nearest sconce. "What do you see there?"

Catherine looked closer and as she did, the ornate swirls took on shape - crooked legs, splayed fingers, spatulated toes, and a long head whose gaping mouth held the light bulb. "It's...a lizard?"

Marie turned and swept the room with a glance she tried to make look casual, but which failed miserably to do the job. "They are salamanders."

Catherine shrugged. "And so?"

Reclaiming her confident smile and manner, Marie shook her head and her hair swirled like layers of fishermen's nets thrown out to catch...something. "Probably nothing. But do be watchful,

*oui, ma cheri?*"

"Of what?"

Marie shrugged dismissively, "Scientists, we are as competitive as anyone else. The lure of the fame and fortune, it has proved too much of a temptation for some. We are here to share our inventions with the world; but not too much, lest an unappreciative or greedy world take those works and turn them to darker purposes."

"Now you sound like my cousin Ronnie," Catherine smiled fondly. "He says he sees the shadows of things that no one can see."

"Your cousin sounds like a wise man. See you at the dinner this evening. *Au revoir.*"

"Who was that?" Frederick queried, coming up beside Catherine and then quickly distracted by the ornithopter.

"Just someone I know from somewhere else," Catherine heard herself say.

"Looks like an anopheles mosquito." Frederick crouched down to get a side-on view of the flying apparatus. "What sort of disease could this carry? And what sort of inoculation could you invent against it?"

Marie's words of caution stirred about in Catherine's consciousness. The way Catherine saw things was without any wall between the states of energy, potential and kinetic. She could, in a way, be said to be able to see a future. Not *the* future, she smiled with chagrin, but a future. It was not just static patterns that she saw but also past patterns and potential patterns. When she walked beneath a precariously listing oak tree she sensed decades of shoving winds and felt the crushing thud of its eventual decline and fall. A particularly feisty horse was not only that but was also the just-broken colt from three years ago and a careless rider months from now lying broken from the fall. A constellation was not just in the skies of this night but it also traveled around the rim of vision in oscillating positions over the centuries and millennia.

Catherine briefly wondered what to do with the mention of the salamander sconces and its possible link to Marie's warning. As she would do with a precariously listing tree or a rambunctious pony her pattern-seeking mind drew a quick timeline scan about manmade lights. She imagined shadows cast on a neolithic cave wall to illuminate primitive though elegant art, this brightly lit ballroom filled with incredible inventions and innovations that were already changing the world, and into the future with flashes of intensely focused light moving up into the sky like reverse lightning to join the clouds of stars. She gave no further thought to salamanders.

Catherine saw multiple realities in things; once she began studying mathematics she thought she had found the answer as to why. Her facility with calculus and algorithms, where predicting and seeing patterns in both directions is both the goal and the means, was a perfectly logical explanation for her tendency to merge potential and kinetic energy and apply it instinctively to the inert and instinctual world.

Catherine could look at her own hands, as her grandmama Brentye had taught her to do during the visions and dreams, and she could see them in ever-varying forms. Sometimes old hands, sometimes young, sometimes a man's, sometimes a girl's. Oddly enough, although Catherine was quite comfortable projecting into the past or the future when it came to other things, she had never actually considered the possibility that the hands she saw in the visions might actually be her own rather than her hyper-active imagination. She had tried as a young girl to apply mathematics and physics to people and found it simply did not work. Even with the given that her brother Basil was an unpredictable ninny, his assuredly silly acts had a randomness onto which Catherine could not place a pattern. Cousin Ronnie had returned from his sojourn to Malaya, Burma, and India with some intriguing ideas about larger patterns in individuals, families, groups, nations, and races but it all sounded a bit far-fetched to her.

As a good Anglican Catherine attended Mass every Sunday in the chapel at Land's End and had always enjoyed the colourful and complex ceremonies of High Church. But beyond the basic ethical admonitions and the regular teachings of the liturgy neither she nor her brother Basil had been subjected to religious indoctrination.

During the Summer of the Séances they had begun their exploration of other cultures' religions and philosophies. From long discussions with cousin Ronnie and lectures at the various Societies, Catherine soon had some familiarity with the basic tenets of reincarnation, the transmigration of souls, and the wheel of rebirth. But unlike Ronnie who seemed to find the belief systems both laudable and plausible, Catherine was already exhibiting her scientific bent and saw them as simply more elaborate variations on the Catholic, Protestant, or Anglican systems, all of which were, in her mind, products of people's fear of death and their desire to live forever, one way or another.

Illustrations of elaborate tombs from Napoleon's excursions to Egypt, traveling museum shows of actual mummies, the Elgin marbles at the British Museum in London, and the art and artifacts gleaned from the far corners of the Empire simply solidified that idea in her mind. Humans will go to any lengths

to put their fears to rest about the relentless blind impersonal progress of Nature, which by its very nature demands death of all creatures and the eventual demise of all things.

Catherine did not fear death *per se* but she had early on realized that there was a vast difference between accepting Nature's way and coming to terms with pain, fear, and loss. Basil, like older brothers the world over since time immemorial, was wont to tease her mercilessly. He usually did not actually hurt her, but a few times Catherine had been shoved out of a tree or had a gate slammed on her fingers as the children played around the estate. The usual childhood injuries and illnesses had never laid Catherine low for long and so she had little sense of the actual vulnerability of her own body. Though she accepted it as a mental concept, she had never yet come face-to-face with her own mortality.

Having been born into status and comfort she also had little real sense of how other people lived, though of course the other classes and their problems were all about her, what with the servants and villagers around the Chatsworth estate and in London that whole rich panoply of the rigid class structure underlying the bustling international city. Both Ronnie and her grandmama Brentye often talked about the similarities between the British class system and the Hindu caste system. Catherine certainly appreciated what she had and she did her part to help others with giving away her outgrown clothes and toys and later a tenth of her trust fund income each year, as the Church and upper class *noblesse oblige* dictated: 'To whom much is given, much is required'.

But between Ronnie's accounts of other cultures and her own basic history studies it was obvious to Catherine that just as there was a pecking order in Nature, so too did human nature seem to dictate a layering. Even America, a supposedly democratic and egalitarian country was not that in practice, not really. Like a lot of things American, their pretension to equality was sheer hypocrisy. On this she and her American fiancé Frederick argued, for he contended that yes, though one could find obvious layering in American society it was permeable, unlike the rigidly layered British society. Frankly, it looked more Darwinian to Catherine, and democracy was just another way for the ruling classes to fool the working classes into thinking they were free. For when all was said and done, the same situation applied, no matter what you called it.

The things that did trouble Catherine were most of them smaller than these broad sociological concepts. She was actually rather affected by personal tensions between individual people. She seemed to be inordinately sensitive to other individual's feelings. Very early on she realized that she knew if Cook had

had an argument with her husband, though the woman certainly would not say a word about it outside of the kitchen and certainly not to the master's children. But discrete questioning would glean Catherine an explanation of the odd disquiet she felt in her own belly when Cook was in the dining room. She could sense her mother's fear and dislike of her mother-in-law Brentye. It gave Catherine a headache. She could sense Basil's rambunctious puppy energy, like a whirlwind in a willow grove. She could also sense shifts in cousin Ronnie's attitude towards her as they grew older and he spent more time traveling abroad with his Foreign Service parents.

Though she herself did not feel it on her own, Catherine perceived the sheer elation of some of the different priests who over the years had officiated mass at their family chapel. It was actually similar in quality to the exhilaration she could sense from Basil after a good run on his horse or from her parents sometimes as they came down to breakfast hand in hand and whispering to each other with secret smiles.

The strongest feeling Catherine picked up from another person was sheer hatred from her grandmama Brentye. And yet the hatred was held in check. It was like looking up at the straining wall of a vast high dam about to break and let loose a torrent of total destruction.

Catherine's defense against the uncomfortable and sometimes fearsome bombardment of other's emotions had been to turn to science and the stars. The solid logic of mathematics, geometry and calculus left her insides quiet and untouched while her mind reeled in the limitless exploration. Star charts had an orderliness beyond that of humans, larger than Nature, longer than time, and devoid of any feelings save awe and appreciation.

Building her reputation early on as the scholar in the Chatsworth clan had given Catherine much that she desired: an outlet for her rampant curiosity and an excuse to be rather solitary. Over the years she had also discovered that if she kept her mind working while interacting with others and made all best attempts to keep their minds working as well, she was not aware of the emotions of others. She had first heard someone say it at one of the Theosophical Society lectures she, Ronnie, and Basil had attended: "Most people do not have thoughts at all; what they do have are opinions about their emotions." With that in mind, Catherine had become very good at asking questions that made people think and kept them away from expressing opinions about their feelings.

Cousin Ronnie adored the whole subtle manipulation process and loved playing it with Catherine, but he often teased her that she should go into law rather than science. Or better yet, he

would grin, journalism, which made Catherine shriek in mock horror.

Looking back today from this pinnacle of professional success rare in someone so young, and almost non-existent for a young woman, Catherine allowed much of the credit to her ability to think and not to be swayed by feelings, be they her own or other people's.

Save for the visions.

And now there were these overwhelming, throbbing, loud, very emotional as well as physical sensations triggered by this Major Albert Farley. Catherine had been so many years successfully repressing her feelings she now was not sure if it was his emotions or her own she was sensing. It actually felt like more than one or two people, although the weird thing about Catherine's little ability was that it did not work as strongly in crowds. There was simply too much going on to pick out any individual, so large groups were mostly "quiet" to her, like a distant murmuring of a far off seashore. But in the same way her grandmama Brentye's fear and loathing loomed powerfully near her so too did this huge wave of *something* that had been called to her attention by Major Albert Farley.

Perhaps the strange nightmare that had hurtled her out of a troubled sleep last night with what seemed like a blast of dark emotions was a crowd effect. Catherine wondered what had happened: perhaps a large group of people suffering sudden death in a shipwreck, or something terrifying that affected a great number at once? Where were there wars just now? The Boer War in South Africa, the Boxer Rebellion in China? Catherine had never had such a bombast of feeling and she just hoped it was a one-time event because she doubted she could handle it again.

That afternoon Catherine answered the knock on the door of her hotel suite to once again find Albert standing there. Her heart skipped a beat and she quelled her excitement to see him again, at least to outward appearances.

"We have a little while before the dinner, and we have much to do," he walked past her into the rooms.

"Well...do come in, Major Farley," she said with more than a touch of sarcasm at his presumption to enter a single lady's chambers.

"Let us see what you have to say about the Dark Brotherhood." Albert walked away from Catherine and over to the library shelves of her suite and began perusing the titles. She admitted to herself her disappointment that he turned to the bookcases and not to her.

"What...?"



"Well," he said, not turning to look at her, "if this butterfly business is true, then you should be able to find some clues from your former self here in this collection of writings, yes?"

Catherine automatically laid her hand over the old leather-bound diary she had intuitively pulled from the shelves after her incident on the ice. "Why do you say that?"

"Well," Albert turned with a boyish, mischievous smile, "we are not stupid, you know, we of the Kurultai. If you know you are living multiple lives, would it not be terribly sensible to send yourself messages forward and backward across time that could hopefully alleviate or totally avoid some of the more stupid or dangerous moments of those other lives?"

Well, yes, Catherine thought to herself, that did make good sense. Which would go a long way to explaining her lifelong visions: they could be her other-time selves trying to get in touch with her now-self.

A knock on the door portended someone else trying to get in touch with her. "Catherine...? Darling...?" Frederick's voice penetrated the wooden barrier.

Albert's look was calm and not at all the look of a man intent on stealing away another man's fiancée. Rather, it was the look of a man intending secrecy and hoping the other person would concur.

Catherine glided across the stone floor stylishly strewn with Oriental silk rugs like islands of awareness floating upon uncharted seas, finding herself acutely aware of other aspects of her consciousness that were aware of other realities going on in this self-same room. Opening the door to Frederick she intuitively clutched the butterfly necklace, "Oh, hello, Frederick. Do come in."

"'Oh, hello, Frederick...?' What's he doing here?" Frederick demanded.

"It is about my visions," Catherine motioned Frederick in and locked the door behind him.

"You've told him?!" Frederick sounded as aghast as if she'd said she danced the cancan for the Major.

"I already knew, old bean," Albert sat on one of the ornately carved campaign-style chairs and rested elbows on knees in a pose of comfortable belonging that only steamed Frederick more.

"It seems he has spent time in the field with my cousin Ronnie, Frederick," Catherine explained and then justified, "He has them, too...." She glanced quickly at Albert as though she might have told too much.

"Yes, well, sort of," Albert demurred.

"Are all you Brits completely bonkers?!"

"Just the Kurultai." Albert waited for the word to signify with Frederick.

"Really, Cat, I keep telling you how unsettling it is to be shut out of your little family secrets. After all, once we're married - "

"It is not a family secret, old bean - ."

"I am not an 'old bean', Major Farley, if you would be so kind as to leave me to speak with my fiancée," Frederick did his best to bristle at the neatly uniformed major.

"Certainly." Albert bowed to Catherine, to Frederick, and then went to sit in a chair nearer the door.

"In private," Frederick practically growled at him.

"Frightfully sorry, but I am unable to comply with that request."

"Catherine...?!" Frederick turned to her with exasperation.

She looked from one man to the other, seeing their faces with the overlay of other times and places. Both were precious to her, she knew, but in different ways. And she recognized the same sense of being pulled between the two of them in those other times.

Again?

Yet again?

Was it ever and always the same?

Familiarity should breed facility. Should this not all get easier? Both Albert and Frederick were trying to protect her from danger, yet she had the very real sense that at times - perhaps not yet this time, but surely in other times - she was a very real danger to them both.

"Frederick, he has explanations for the visions. It is important. Listen to him."

Frederick's mouth opened and shut a couple of times. Then he simply sat down and exhaled, as though a thousand years of futile protestations were flowing past his lips.

Catherine went to stand beside him and placed her cool hand on the back of his bent neck. "Tell him," she commanded Albert.

"Well...you are certain about this...?" Albert did not think Dr. Durand looked like he could handle much information at all, much less information about multiple, simultaneous lifetimes.

"Do it," Catherine repeated.

"Alright." Albert bent down and picked at a thread in the Oriental rug. He plucked one up and tugged at it. "See how this thread is interwoven with the others into a pattern?" He did not look up to see if Catherine or Frederick were watching. One sensed he had done this lecture before and it was elementary to him.

"Reality is a tapestry, woven by each of us, blindly following a pattern we sometimes glimpse *in toto* but often just

intuit. Once you get a high enough perspective, say a metre or so above the carpet, you can see how you fit into the whole. You can see a turn coming, know where you have been intertwined with other threads and see that you shall meet them again in another foot or so. It is rather like those three Fates of Greek mythology, you see: Clothos, Lachesis, and Atropos."

"And what the heck's that got to do with Catherine and her visions?" Frederick growled.

"She sees the patterns. She just did not know what she was seeing. But her necklace, you see, the butterflies - it is the sign of the Kurultai."

"The what?" asked the doctor.

Catherine cocked her head at Albert as her hand fluttered up to cover the intaglio necklace Ronnie and Basil had brought her from Greece the Summer of the Séances.

"The Kurultai. It is an ancient word that old conqueror and military genius Genghis Khan adopted. It means a 'gathering of chieftains'. It is what is happening here and now in Vienna with this Conference."

Frederick snorted. "This is more of your dim-witted Theosophist metaphysics? My father warned me about the Church of England and its pseudo-Papism, but I had no idea you were all so superstitious and - "

"Freddie!" Catherine hissed at him. "Let him talk."

Frederick's eyes grew large and he pulled away and back into himself. Catherine had been short with him before, but this was different. Her troubled uncertainty which had always called out the protector in him was quickly fading away. He sensed his importance to her fading with it. Frederick was Catherine's protector. That was his job. If she no longer needed protecting, then what good was he to her? The stark reality of that dynamic struck him a blow to the back side of his heart. It not only undermined the way he had enjoyed thinking about why she was affianced to him, but it undermined the way he really felt about her. Some odd and unsettling but very direct sense of duty was climbing up from the dark parts of his memory and shouldering the tender aspects of romantic love aside. It was like watching an oil painting melt and reform before his eyes from a sweet domestic tableau to a fierce yet noble battlefield scene.

Frederick knew he didn't see things like Catherine did; they were after all on opposite ends of the scientific spectrum. He looked in through a microscope to discover the tiny creatures that affected human health and she looked out through a telescope to the vast cosmic bodies that might not have any affect at all on humans. But here for the first time since he had first seen and fallen in love with her at a science conference in Chicago

two years ago, Frederick had a sense of what she might have been experiencing all her life.

For the first time in his own heretofore very logical life he sensed another reality just outside the realm of his conscious comprehension. He did not hear any voices and he did not see any visions, but he had the sensation of things shifting all around him. Nonsensical thoughts flitted across his mind, thoughts as crazy as, say, 'How can we fit these three elephants onto the petri dish?' He had the sense of chasing a thought around in his own brain, trying to tie it down and analyze it. He knew that the pulsing of his blood had something to say to him if he could only remember the language that it spoke. He suddenly knew things that would never be 'real' in this 20<sup>th</sup> century reality, yet were very real in a reality just beyond the veil.

Frederick Durand shook his head in one of his first attempts to actually 'wake up'. He sensed a huge wall just behind him to the upper right, a dam of realization waiting to be breached. It terrified the bejeezus out of him.

Albert saw it and crossed the room towards him. "Steady on, old bean."

Frederick saw a fair-haired handsome man in ancient Greek navy garb striding across the rolling deck of a wooden ship towards him, hands outstretched as if towards a lifelong comrade. Dr. Frederick Durand blanched, doubled over, and wretched on the floor.

Catherine grabbed an embroidered towel from the dressing table and soaking it in rosewater from the ewer, daubed Frederick's face. "Deep breath, Frederick. Deep breath."

"What is happening to me?! What -- ?"

"Steady on. You will be quite all right." Albert clapped a firm hand on his shoulder. "It is a bit rough until you know what is actually happening and then... Well, bloody hell, man, I am afraid it is always a bit rough."

The three of them formed an odd tableau in the stone-walled suite. Trembling Frederick with bowed head, Catherine kneeling before him with the dripping towel, Farley standing beside them with an arm across Frederick's shoulder and the other hand on Catherine's wrist.

All felt the electric current flowing round and round through the three of them but each felt it differently and none thought it might just be limited to their actual physical interconnection.

Taking the linen towel from Catherine, Frederick held it open and gazed at the embroidered white-on-white butterfly. "Oh, my God...I remember..."

Now Frederick's mind went into a time/space spin. He saw carved marble columns and moonlit porticoes, heard suppressed

drunken giggles and slapping leather sandals, half-saw-half-was himself in futile pursuit of out-of-control comrades the night of the pre-battle raid on the Athenian Herms, twenty-four hundred years ago. 'No!' he heard himself call out in a younger frailer voice. 'Do not! That is not what he meant!' Shattering marble and irreverent laughter ripped through his gut.

"I could not stop them," he looked up at Albert and then at Catherine. "They misunderstood. They would not listen. I tried to stop them..."

"The Herms," Albert reminded Catherine.

"The what?" she asked.

"The desecration of the Herms in Athens," Albert continued. "Before the battle of Syracuse. They blamed it on me, you know, but..." he nodded at Frederick.

"It was not your fault, Alcibiades. They misunderstood us both. I am so sorry..., oh, gods..." Frederick looked white and stricken.

"See here," Catherine interrupted. "I do not know what you have been doing to us, Major Farley, but I really think this has gone too far. What mesmerism is this? Have you used some Oriental drug to make us go off like this?"

Albert frowned at her, puzzled. "Cat?"

"I do not see what all this has to do with the Science Conference, and it is upsetting Frederick terribly. And I am not all that keen on this, either. So maybe you had best leave."

Frederick still sat staring at the embroidered butterfly on the towel in his hands.

"All right. Listen up. This is what we are going to do." Albert's voice now carried an even more commanding tone than Catherine's had to Frederick. "We have no time to lose and no time to play about with your silly parlour spiritualism. This is one of those cruxes of time where we of the Kurultai have a chance to tip the scales of the Great Game one way or the other. The people gathered here are the greatest minds of our time. What you people are thinking and doing can change the world, one way or another. Do you come down on the side of liberty, equality, fraternity? Or do you shiver and faint at the challenge of the Dark Ones and let control of these new powers go by default into the hands of the few elites, as usual?"

By now Catherine had Frederick sipping chilled champagne and was pouring a crystal flute for Albert. "Go on," she nodded, though her voice carried solid skepticism and a not-so-hidden note of disappointment that Albert was not interested in her as a woman but rather as some sort of messenger or warrior of the Light, "We are listening."

"Are we?" Albert tilted his head and looked down at Frederick.

The American nodded, still dazed, but deferential.

"What we have here – right here, right now – is another chance to shift the way humans operate in the world. How we use physical reality and the other layers. Solids, liquids, gases, the aethers. The forces of Nature. How we use each other. You people, you two, your colleagues, you hold the future of the race, the future of the planet in your hands. Yet most of you do not know it."

"What is he talking about?" Frederick asked Catherine.

"Who do you think 'misunderstood' you, Frederick, back then in Athens in 417 BC? What about the Templars and the Cathars? You might not remember the futile coup of Charles the Pretender, whose fatal suite this was, by the way. What about our meeting in Warsaw in 1650 when we wanted to touch-down the democratic movement? And what about your own American Civil War? The French Revolution? Masonry flourished here in Austria for a hundred and fifty years and then suddenly all Freemasons were *persona non grata* and most left the country or were forced underground. How did these good things all go so wrong? Who do you think misled the people? Then? And now? Have you any idea what you all can do together, if you come together with one mind? Well, trust me, they know. Those of the Dark Side know very well what it can mean. And therein lies the danger."

In the quiet moment of reflection all three of them seemed to feel the walls of the old stone castle breathe in and out, billowing in with the pressure of Darkness attempting to crush them, then out with the expansion of Light attempting to use them to illuminate the darkness.

Early that evening as he prepared to mount the dais and take his place on the panel on epidemiology, Doctor Frederick Durand felt rivulets of sweat coursing down his body. The room was chill. It was after all, the first of February in Austria and banks of freshly shoveled new snow frosted the edges of cobbled walkways fringing the wall of French windows lining the Exhibit Hall.

Like most of the men there, Frederick wore a dark wool three-piece suit. As an American he was expected to be slightly more daring in his choice of couture and Frederick did not disappoint. His waistcoat, with a quite fashionable shawl collar, was a subtle blend of dove and pearl grey to compliment the charcoal grey suit. It was not lost on him that the pattern in the vest fabric was interlocking Greek keys. He had been drawn to the article of clothing when he was shopping for the trip to Europe six months ago and was rather proud of himself for having found something rather extraordinary yet dignified. He had not

been conscious of the design as ancient Greek. Now it was like a magnet for his eyes and his imagination.

He kept looking down to see himself, in his mind's eye, attired in a formal toga trimmed with the very self-same Greek key design. Frederick had a quickly growing appreciation for the disturbing quality of Catherine's visions. He had made that one-way trip through the swinging doors from sympathy to empathy and it was terribly unsettling.

Frederick's muscles ached and he "felt" a gritty dust in some of the bends of his flesh, feelings that were not washed away by the profuse perspiration that soaked past his garters into his grey silk socks and pooled in his highly polished black sealskin shoes. 'Dammit', he thought, in an almost humourous fit of pique. 'It's hard enough to be one of me, how in hell can I possibly handle being two of me? Not that I believe this Major Farley character for one instant,' he reminded himself. And then chastised himself for talking to himself as if he were two different people. Frederick determined to make time to visit some of the psychoanalysts after tomorrow's presentations in their discipline. He was obviously undergoing some sort of mental schism, most likely brought on by the pressure of this Conference and his identification with Catherine's own troubling visions.

Yes, that was it. He would go see one of the psychiatry specialists and learn the name and prognosis for his mental ailment. And hopefully also, a cure. Frederick wondered if mental illnesses were caused by mental viruses and emotional bacteria? And were there inoculations against delusions? The tonic effects of a seriously strong quinine and gin came to mind and Frederick wondered if he could get away with having his water glass at the podium filled with a stiff gin and tonic?

As more of his colleagues and the press and public filtered into the Exhibit Hall and began to gather at the end with the dais, Frederick found himself darting furtive looks at anyone who might possibly look the slightest bit familiar from another life. Wavering between outrage at the preposterousness of Major Farley's suggestion that he, Catherine, and Farley had all - were all - living other lives together in various times and places around the globe and the conviction that he had consumed some hallucinogenic contaminant and was thoroughly out of his mind, stark raving bonkers in fact, Frederick was pummeled by a cold fear that ricocheted around inside his mind and body. No matter which one were true, the Kurultai and the Great Game, or his own insanity, he was lost.

And if the former were true then he was among enemies as well as friends. Each seemingly innocent face here at the Conference might be simply a mask for those who would again try

to slay him, and Catherine. He gazed then at the people as if trying to read a history in their physiognomy.

"Dr. Durand?" someone touched his elbow.

Frederick jumped and sputtered.

"Sorry, Doctor, didn't mean to startle you." It was one of the secretaries of his Society, a young man who'd been most helpful in assisting Frederick to set up his display of enlarged photographs of microbial bugs and the accompanying plaster-of-paris and paper-mache models. "Can I get you something?"

"Where do I know you from?" Frederick croaked at the eager-faced young American student.

"Why, from University, sir. Sir...are you alright?"

Frederick shook his head, trying to clear away the sense of double and occasionally triple vision his imagination was overlaying on everything. "Yes, yes."

"Sir, you're sweating, er, perspiring." The young man reached out to touch Frederick, who saw the hand approaching in slow motion and made to knock it aside with a swiftness way beyond his normally quite normal reflexes. The youth jumped back, startled.

"Doctor Durand!"

Frederick leaned onto a table and caught his breath. He tried to remember what he always told Catherine when she was having a vision. Breathe deeply. Focus on something close to hand. Focus on your hands! Isn't that what she always said she did?

Frederick looked down at his hands, one still grasping the wrist of the young secretary and the other clutching the edge of the table. Over the physical sight of his shirted and coated arms and pale manicured hands Frederick saw suntanned bare arms and hands, scarred with recent cuts and actually bleeding in a few places.

"Doctor Durand, sir, how can I help you?"

"Water."

The young man pulled the American doctor's clenching hand off his arm and reached for a glass of water. Obviously the Doctor of Tropical Diseases had succumbed to one of his own experiments and was suffering from some ailment. Perhaps malaria, given the sweating and shaking. "Here, sir."

Frederick took the water and sipped, tasting the tang of metal and marble that was not in this water.

Steadying himself, Frederick began his first alignment of vision with current reality and relegated that piercing knowledge of a fatal mistake twenty-four hundred years ago in ancient Greece to a position behind his obligations in the here-and-now in nascent 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. Hints of another time and place in a shoulder-high field of corn where the rattling of ripe amber



ears and the rustle of silk was punctured by gunfire would just have to take third place in the doctor's imposed ranking of what-I-need-to-do-next.

If Major Albert Farley, or Alciabiades as Frederick knew him in Greece, was correct then there was a lot riding on what happened these next few days here in Vienna. Frederick had always been Mister Steady-On for Catherine and he was not about to give up now, just because he himself was having a few sweaty heart-pounding qualms about his own identity.

If there were enemies of the Kurultai out there, so be it.

"Sorry, son, just a touch of the old fever I picked up in Cuba. Can you get me a gin and tonic, please?"

"Isn't it a bit early, sir?" the boy began to query, then a light bulb went off in his head and he recalled some lectures at University. "Oh, of course, the quinine for malaria! Right away, Doctor."

Later, looking out over the crowd from his position at the podium, Doctor Frederick Durand scanned again for familiar faces from the past - or the future - or for threatening faces whose scowls might portend more than incomprehension of his topic or disagreement with his theses. Unfortunately this was all new to Frederick so he didn't really know what to look for or how to "see". If he had he would have seen Stevenson Marlowe leaning against a pillar with a smooth insouciance and only a faint twitch of the eye to indicate he himself thought he might actually be seeing another member of the Kurultai in Frederick.

What Frederick did see was Catherine on one side of the audience and Albert on the other. It was not lost on Doctor Durand that his fiancée and the handsome major managed to look at each other as well as scan the audience for more of either friend or foe. Whatever else this multiple lives knowledge might bring one, it apparently did little to quell normal one-life-only feelings of romantic danger and desperate jealousy.

China clattered, butter scraped across toast, and tub-sized serving trays hissed steam around a true continental spread, in that it had foods from most of the countries represented at the Conference. The Conference planners had decided to continue breaking old traditions and for the late supper had put out breakfast foods in the dining rooms across from the Exhibit Hall. It was steak and eggs from the Americans, cafe latte and croissants from the French, powdered-sugar-dusted abelskivers from the Swedish, baklava from the Levant, congee from the Far East for those who had been out in the Colonies, and much more. The smells were a symphony of geography.

"Oh, bloody hell, what are you doing here now?" said Albert.

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Elia...er, what is your name?"

"Who wants to know?"

"I know you, man, what is your name?"

Howard Bonner puffed up a bit in expectation of vexing this officious King's officer, only vaguely realizing he was meeting someone who actually did *know* him in the way the Kurultai knew each other. He turned to the sideboard and continued heaping his plate with this evening treat of varied breakfast fare. Howard felt rather like a child being spoiled at the Holidays by getting to choose his own food. Albert followed him, hands behind his back in his best imitation of hail-fellow-well-met.

"Who are you here with?"

"I work for Lady Sinclaire Chatsworth," Howard reared back a bit in pride as though the name should carry weight no matter the country. He had not, however, expected to see the Major blanche and step back a pace.

"Catherine...?!" Albert, totally confused now.

"Certainly not," Howard sniffed dismissively. "Her grandmama, Lady Brentye Gruffud Sinclaire Chatsworth."

At the same moment that Albert Farley realized danger was indeed closer than he had supposed, Howard Bonner realized he had revealed something he should not have.

"Oh, sorry old bean. My mistake. You look just like a fellow in my first regiment, obviously quite some time ago. Catherine is that lady astronomer, yes? Met her at the dance last night, lovely girl, if a bit vague. So her proud family is here to watch her receive honours, eh? Good show."

"Her grandmama is here to surprise her. She would be quite cut up if her secret got out. Best if you not mention you saw me. Save the surprise, eh?"

The desperation in Howard's handsome face and form did not escape Major Farley, who was not only trained as a warrior to recognize both weakness and danger in an opponent but had through his years of experience as an awake mind in the Kurultai, learned to quickly assess who else was how awake or not. This fellow had maybe one butterfly, if that. He was probably one of what they called "Gardeners", those continual hangers-on who never quite got it but who were inexorably drawn to those who did. Because of their inherent but unconscious attitude of curiosity and desire to be involved they became the tenders of the flowers, the cocoons, and the butterflies, a support system for the more awakened.

Unlike the vast majority of human "grubs" who had no inkling of anything, not even their own here-and-now personal existence, if they were lucky the Gardeners would receive some jolt or dream or vision that would further awaken them and then they too would move on up in perspective. It was rather what Bonner the elder

had done for young Brentye in helping wake her up. It was what Brentye had assiduously avoided doing for young Catherine.

Albert certainly did not want his sword point of recognition to prick any sense of growing awareness in Elia from the Peloponnesian Wars, aka Howard Bonner here in *fin de siecle* Vienna. Catherine's cousin Ronnie Logan had briefed Albert on the family tree with particular warnings about the grandmama Brentye, who he seriously suspected might be their old enemy Lysander. Ronnie had always sensed Brentye's hostility towards Catherine and her growing antagonism towards him, but then she had very little patience for any children except Catherine's older brother Basil. Like Catherine, Ronnie too had often felt spied upon at the Land's End estate. Now he knew why, he had told Major Farley.

Having awakened to three other lives in rapid succession among the West African Dogons, in an ancient little ceremony in the ruins of Babylon, and most recently in the Indian city of Harupa under instructions from a wandering Tibetan Bon Po magician-monk, Ronnie had no desire whatsoever to encounter his great aunt Brentye. Thus his having sent Albert to extract Catherine from her grandmama's clutches and get her to finally wake up and hold steady the course of the White Brotherhood of the Kurultai.

It was not at all difficult to convince Albert to travel across three continents to do this once Ronnie had assured him that his cousin Catherine Logan Sinclaire Chatsworth was also Chareas from the Peloponnese and Kat from the Gnantan Ridge wars and was on the verge of remembering both. The Alcibiades who was now Major Albert Farley longed to be with his adoring cousin Chareas and with his beloved mysterious Trooper Kat. He shivered with both delight and despair, knowing the fateful ways of the Kurultai might actually bring him neither. And he still had that blood-spattered veil at the far end of his Alcibiades time that he knew involved Chareas (now Catherine) but he still did not know how or why. Regardless, he had determined to set out for Vienna. After all, the New Century Science Frontiers convention, years now in the planning, would also reap connections with others of the Kurultai.

Though Albert sensed some huge darkness hulking just beyond the borders of awareness, he knew that Ronnie was downright spooked by what he had been learning from the Hindoos and the Bon Po. It mattered not whose calendar you consulted - Egyptian, Vedic, Mayan, Teutonic - the signs were everywhere that a major crux was upon them all. The long-contained conflicts were taking the battlefield again and it promised to resonate with the severity and world-wide consequence of those ancient battles between the Sons of Darkness and the Sons of Light and even earlier, the Wars in Heaven.

"Rest assured, old bean, I shall do the right thing," Albert clapped Howard on the shoulder and loped away across the dining room, managing to stumble into first a table and then a waiter as he went, so as to reassure the watching Howard of his ineffectualness.

Howard smiled to himself, pleased with his own cleverness in keeping Brentye's presence here a secret from the doomed Catherine.

Standing on the threshold of one of the sets of double-doors into the dining hall, Marlowe grabbed Lady Chatsworth by the arm and drew her back and forcefully down onto one of the gilded brocade benches that lined the stone corridors of the grand hotel. "Alcibiades is here!" Marlowe hissed furiously.

The rush of air resonated faintly with echoes of Gregorian chant and the clash of swords. In spite of the pain where Marlowe's fingers tried to mesh with her own flesh, Brentye smiled, knowing that this thinning of the veils meant a going-over time was fast approaching.

"How could you have let that happen?"

"I told you," she replied, "it works to our advantage. She was the bait, he is the catch. Get them all together and get rid of them all together."

"Fine in theory. But Alcibiades and Chareas together again?! Perhaps these have gone quiet on you, Lady Chatsworth." Marlowe stared at the diamond-encrusted butterflies on Brentye's pendant.

"Not at all. Have you any idea how many others are here? Sleepers as well as awake Kurultai? And the Gardeners? My god, man."

Marlowe glanced down the corridor, his mind following the Persian carpet trail towards the staircase spilling down into the main lobby where crowds swirled in a animated pointillist painting. With his ability to 'see' Kurultai heightening because of the conflux of the others and the approach of a climax, Marlowe noted those sometimes-conscious, sometimes-not souls among the Convention crowds just as a French horn player in a symphony hall audience could identify and isolate the sound of his instrument from the blended sounds of the on-stage orchestra.

Again came Brentye's self-satisfied smile. "Tell me, Mister Marlowe, how many are we getting this time?"

Marlowe jumped up and paced away from Brentye, then back, then away. "What magic do you intend to use this time, pray tell?"

As if giving him the most precious gift a person could bestow she glanced away and said lightly, "The Agnichaitans."

In the horrified silence between them both recalled what they knew about the magnificent but dreaded, difficult to control

Agnichaitans, those destructive Devas of the so-called Larger Fires.

"You must be exceedingly careful how you begin this, Brentye, or whoever you are right now."

She just laughed at him. "Like you, like all of us, I am everyone I was or shall be. I just happen to be more aware of it than most of them...most of you." She sniffed the air as though searching for a particular scent. Out of the corner of her eye she thought she saw one of the salamander wall sconces move. "Besides, I have already begun it."

"What?! How dare you!" Marlowe struggled to control his heightened awareness and fight-or-flight reaction.

"I dare say I can dare whatever I want, Marlowe. As you well know, that's the whole point of having these," she picked up the butterfly pendant and waved it at him.

"That is not the whole point and you know it. There is The Plan. Our version of The Plan. You have put us all in danger if you - "

"Calm yourself. At this point there is little you can do. Either stay here and sweep up as much of their thought-forms and astral desires as you can, or get the bloody hell out of my way." Brentye gathered up her skirts, stood up, and swept past the angry, frightened, frustrated magician.

"There is my grandmama!" Catherine wavered between disbelief and relief at the thought that her grandmama Brentye was here in Vienna; that could explain her unsettling sensations of being watched.

Frederick and Albert both turned to see sapphire blue silk skirts vanishing around a fluted porphyry column and out the doors.

"Are you sure?" asked Frederick.

"Did she see me?" asked Albert.

Frederick scowled at Albert with a look that condemned his supposed selfishness.

"If she did," Albert explained, "we could all be in a great deal more trouble than I had feared."

Something caught Frederick's attention. He glanced up and had the sinking feeling that he was about to be overtaken with another bout of malarial fever. Parts of the ornate chandelier were beginning to move, as though the metal and crystal were coming to life. He wished he could have another gin and tonic, right away, to bring things back to normal. But given everything that had been happening of late, the good doctor seriously doubted he would ever see anything near 'normal' again in this lifetime.

Then he shivered to realize he had even thought of such a thing as a particular lifetime among other lifetimes. This Major

Farley was like an insidious tropical disease that he feared was going to keep reappearing rather like malaria, and particularly when he could not afford to be laid low. If Catherine was indeed in danger, from her strange grandmama or the Major's imaginings or God forbid it was all true, the Dark Side of the Kurultai, then he needed to marshal his full strength of mind and body to protect her.

As he stared harder at the suspended constellation of electric lights he saw that the fixtures holding the bulbs were shaped like lizards and were indeed wriggling. Then small tongues of flame began to rise from the lizards' upturned mouths. Frederick was transfixed by the sight, unable to break away, to make his body run as it was so desperately urging him to do.

Catherine's eyes registered the increasing flickering of lights from the chandeliers and sconces. She turned to look at Albert and her vision did one of those rotoscope flashings between different times and places. First Vienna today, then the old castle hundreds of years ago, then shipboard in the Aegean...by the time she had moved to look face-on at Albert he was a brown-skinned bare-chested blonde man with a very large bloody sword in his hands. He was shouting something at Catherine that her here-and-now ears could not hear. Catherine stumbled back into Frederick's protective embrace.

That broke Frederick's trance. "Now look here, Major - ."

"Stuff it, Frederick. We must all get out of here. Now! Fast!"

A round of applause for Nils Fairlynn's speech rolled towards them with a sound reminiscent of invading wooden triremes plowing up onto pebbly Adriatic beaches.

Frederick stood in place holding onto Catherine's arm, his eyes continually drawn to the ballroom chandeliers, all of which were now writhing with flaming salamander lizards. He motioned up to them and Catherine and Albert both followed his gaze.

"Bloody hell!" Albert scanned the vast Exhibit Hall for the nearest exit.

Catherine shifted uncomfortably with the impact of her increasing visions and the onslaught of emotion coming from both men. Dread, fear, confusion, determination. Her own insides clutched, melted, then froze as she suddenly knew she was standing in a pivot point and that whatever happened in the next short span of time was going to have a very great effect on a very long span of time in both directions.

As if they had heard the same trumpet call and by that recognition now knew each other, a number of other people in the room began looking at each other with sudden recognition and urgency. Under impending energetic pressure the Kurultai was waking up and coming together. As though the entire scene were

now a moving picture, the clothing on a number of people was doing the black-to-white-to-black colour shift that signaled someone of the Kurultai about to go over.

A wailing shriek rent the air and stilled the applause, "Fire! Oh great God, fire!"

There was a seemingly very long time of silence which probably lasted only a second. Then over the growing crackle of salamander-shaped flames climbing up the drapes and table coverings two types of voices called out: one was from the panic-stricken and the other from those who kept cool heads and were taking charge with strong-voiced commands of, "Here - come this way. Stay calm."

The fire seemed alive, as though many fiery creatures were intent on devouring the things and the people in the room. Flames leapt from the walls to the tables, then scurried across the flat surfaces bursting crystal and turning the liquids instantly to steam. Yellow and blue flickerings poured down from the tables like waterfalls tumbling over mesas. Foot-high flames skittered along the floors, seeming to bite and claw at anyone they found. The smell of charred food and fabric and increasingly, of flesh heightened the fear of all those people so recently basking in the warmth of accomplishment and recognition.

Madame Desraimes clutched together some of the scientists and herded them towards a distant wall near the buffet tables where an open dumb-waiter offered an escape down to the vast underground kitchens. Something high above caught her attention.

She looked up to see the gala chandeliers shimmering with flames that grew from salamanders to dragons, some arching up towards the glass ceiling and others arcing over shooting flames at clusters of the panicked crowd. The way the fire was raging there was no possibility of going back for another batch of people; that was unfortunate but Madame had done what she could to save at least a few of those whose visions and work would change the world. After the others had scrambled in, she hiked up her skirts and swung her legs onto the platform of the dumb-waiter, gagging at the smell of spilled food and urgent urine. She glanced out through the smoke and flames, looking for Catherine. Seeing her close to Albert and Frederick as all three of them swept further apart like a well-trained military team helping others escape the flames, Madame gave a half-smile of "Good enough for now" and slammed down the wall partition, plunging her and her precious corporeal cargo into a cool dark descent to safety, punctuated by shivering sobs and desperate coughing.

"Quick!," Albert motioned Frederick towards Nils Fairlynn, frozen in fear on the dais, "bring him with us".

Frederick looked at Catherine, torn between staying by her side and rescuing the brilliant young man and family friend of Catherine, Basil, and Ronnie. Catherine grasped Frederick's arm, laid a hand on his cheek and looked deeply into his eyes, "I'll be fine, Freddie. Go save Nils for us. We need him."

Frederick pulled Catherine close and kissed her on the mouth. "We'll come back for you." Then with a look at Albert that was a mixture of respect, dismay, loyalty, jealousy, and resignation, he wrapped his jacket around his head and plowed through the hot churning panic towards Nils.

"Grab her, you fool!" Brentye hissed at Howard. "Bring her to me so I can kill her myself."

In the chaos of the Exhibit Hall Brentye had lost sight of her granddaughter. There were plenty of others she needed to get rid of, but she wanted most of all to end her intolerable relationship with someone she now knew for certain was her sworn enemy in lifetime after lifetime. Thank the stars the little twit had not twigged to it all yet. It was so much easier to eliminate those of the Kurultai when they did not know they were of the Kurultai.

Howard tightened his grip on Brentye's wrist, his fingers digging into the old butterfly-shaped scar. "Leave me and find her!" Brentye twisted her arm away and shoved her accomplice back into the growing flames.

She stalked the perimeter of the room, whose flaming walls appeared as giant lizards trying to scramble to the ceiling. She half-smiled with satisfaction to see the dragons scything their scorching breath across the ballroom. The smell of charring flesh and burnt electrical wiring filled Brentye with a growing sense of power and victory. Stopping to grab a knife from a buffet table she cut away her full blue silk skirts until she was wearing only tight-fitting pantaloons. She used pitchers of water to soak herself and moved back into the fray, steam rising from her wet body, as she searched with her inner sight for the light that was Catherine.

All around her were people succumbing to smoke or panic. Finely-crafted exhibits melted in the heat, were flaming skeletal tracteries of themselves, or exploded like the fragile formulae that had created them. The dirigible balloons burst, showering their flaming remnants down into the hall. High above the rising smoke and flames, the glass ceiling showed a clear star-dusted sky. As any scientist there would know, heat rises, and against that winter-cold glass a series of panes crackled, cracked, and plunged into the desperate turbulence below, spilling blood and in one case slicing a poor panicked soul straight out of its overheated mortal coil.



'My, what a delicious meal the Agnichaitans will be having tonight', Brentye grinned to herself between coughs and gasps for air. Like the sexual climax, each sudden or fearful death would cause an explosion of Light on the Astral Plane that would feed those entities Brentye owed for their assistance in helping out the Dark Brotherhood of the Kurultai. The Agnichaitans were dangerous because they were so strong and worked on so many planes. They were also always very hungry and rather indiscriminate in their choice of cuisine.

Through the din of fear and despair came heroic voices of calm, some of which she recognized. They were trying to lead people to the exits but Howard had done his job well and in disguise as a hotel repairman had fixed most of the doors so they would not open. The one exit near the back was now a maelstrom of the panic-stricken and the faint, whose bodies would soon log-jam the doorway and provide the cauldron of destruction Brentye had so carefully planned. She and Howard would meet at the huge windows and break their way free, as soon as she was sure Catherine was dead. Catherine and that other young scientist who had made that provocative speech about the hidden matter and the Dark Mother: Nils Fairlynn, was it?

Brentye spotted him leaving Frederick to help an older gentleman limp towards the exit, both of them bent over to breathe beneath the increasing layers of smoke. Satisfied Nils was back in action, Frederick sought out Catherine, calling her name and stepping up on a yet unscorched chair in hopes of spotting her across the crowd that was spilling towards the doors like water in a pond where a large stone had fallen. He could not see her and he felt as though he were falling into a dark bottomless chasm. "Catherine!!!" he shouted in despair.

Brentye calmly shoved her way past others, kicking a hand desperately clasping for help away from her ankle. She stepped up to Nils Fairlynn and stabbed the young man in the heart with the purloined carving knife.

Shocked and stunned, he dropped the old man and jerked upright and then over, clutching at the wet slash in his chest. The dark wool of his Bond Street bespoke suit shifted to white, then back to black, then to white - the sign of a Kurultai going over. Brentye grabbed him tight around the throat and pressed the blade against his carotid bodies. She stared into his unbelieving eyes. "And that is the end of you and your ideas, my young genius."

"...You...? Why...?" he managed to gasp as he fell to his knees before the handsome older woman straddling him in dripping wet bodice and pantaloons.

"You were getting too bloody close is why. You almost had it. Congratulations. And goodbye for now." Brentye slashed his

carotid arteries, muttered a few ceremonial words, and dropped the bloody knife beside him. Nothing would be left of the body but bones, but just in case, it could look as though the man had taken his own life rather than face the flames.

Brentye could not hear the words and formulae the young man sent back up into the Plane of Inspiration from his dying mind. He desperately hoped he would have time to get all his thoughts out before he lost consciousness. If so, then perhaps another would be able to draw them down in another lifetime and pick up where he was now forced to leave off his work about the transfer of form using different types of matter... 'the potter's hand moves over any type of clay and can make the same pot here as there. It is the potter's hand and not the clay itself that transfers in space'. Fighting off the falling veil of mercy, Nils projected up a quatrain of the Rubaiyat and the sing-song chant of the Dogon fifty-four year festival.

Mistakenly thinking she had stifled his discovery because she could not hear it, Brentye looked with her inner eyes and found another two of the hateful Kurultai crawling below the smoke. She strode across the chaos towards the scientists, relishing remembrances of other killing fields, salt-spray on smoke-roiled decks, mason-dressed stones crackling and splitting from the heat.

"Lysander!" Her attention was drawn to the left and suddenly a large dark hook of hatred reached up from her gut and clawed at the back of her heart, sending heat and a foul metallic breath out her throat. Catherine and Albert - who were her old fellow students, pretend allies but always enemies Chareas and Alcibiades in the Peloponnesian Wars - were almost upon her. Brentye/Lysander saw in her peripheral vision her own smoke-streaked wet undergarments shift from ivory to black and back again. "Nooooooooo!," she howled at them.

Albert's ceremonial saber slashed into the side of her throat, opening up the carotid artery. Brentye felt a thousand golden pearls spill like caviar from the place where she did her magic. The carotid bodies shrieked and spewed and her mind's eye reeled to stand outside her present form and glower at Al and Chareas with unbridled hatred. Then she was snapped back into her body and grabbed her throat to stem the bleeding as she fought for a few more moments of this particular life in order to accomplish her goals.

"Howard!" she called into the din of panicked, coughing, wailing people. But he was gone. Her inner eye searched for some glimmer of him but he was totally gone. Dead? She could not tell. But gone. Brentye fell to her knees, lifeblood streaming through her fingers. She was alone here then. Where was Marlowe? Arrogant fool that she was she had refused his offer of assistance and

sent him away to commandeer the gathering remnants after the fiery gleaning.

In an odd coincidence, Brentye knelt next to the table where she had cut off her skirts. Albert shoved his sword point to her chest and motioned to the pile of sapphire blue silk. "Cat, wrap that fabric around her head. Quickly!"

"I am your grandmama, Catherine..." Brentye rasped, all the while glaring hatred at her mortal enemy Alcibiades.

"No, I do not think so," Catherine's steely voice was accompanied by the swish of blue fabric billowing down over Brentye's head, covering the viciousness in her cold blue eyes.

Brentye/Lysander was reminded of painted sails luffing in a smoke-filled battle, of looking up to see the heavy fabric billowing in slow motion down onto the ship's deck, smothering him beneath the Athenian naval crest of his sworn enemy, the charming dangerous traitor Alcibiades.

Albert tightened the silk around the older woman's neck, holding her down with a knee to her chest. Catherine looked about fearfully, dreading being discovered actually murdering her own grandmama in the midst of the fire panic when everyone else was trying to save themselves and others.

"Tie her hands and feet," Albert commanded.

"Wha -- ?" Though Catherine had always felt that huge ominous wall of loathing from her grandmama, she had enough sensibilities for humanity in general that she shrank from consciously causing another person harm. Besides, though she may well have been a warrior in some of her other times and places, in the here-and-now she was a genteel, well-bred young English woman and hardly given to displays of aggression or violence.

"Right you are," Albert said. He pushed the tip of his ceremonial saber into Lady Brentye Gruffud Sinclaire Chatsworth's sternum, then shoved it up into her heart.

"It is not over..." Brentye managed to sputter before her silk-masked head fell to the side.

"It never is," Albert rose up and wiped her blood off his sword. "Take off your clothes, quickly," he ordered Catherine, peeling off his own uniform and starting to strip one of the bodies already dead from panic or smoke.

"Are you totally bloody mad!?"

"We must seem to die here. It is a perfect escape. If the Dark Brotherhood thinks we died in this fire, they will not be looking for us any more."

"Catherine -- !" Frederick's voice from the far side of the room cut through the chaos which was becoming louder in hissing flames and crashing exhibits and quieter in human voices. The shouts and pounding on the various doors continued, accompanied now by cracking skylights and clanging fire alarm bells.

"Freddie, too?"

"Not this time. He is our decoy."

"That is not right!"

"Not to worry, he lives."

"How do you know?" Catherine hissed, horrified, but already undressing and watching as Albert placed her garments on her grandmama's bloody body, including the jewel-strewn black velvet shawl about which so many people had complimented Catherine.

"Trust me, I know. Now hurry!" Albert grabbed the edges of a flaming tablecloth and flung it over Brentye's body. "Come on!"

A cold orangey pink light spread across the frozen surface of the skating pond between bony-fingered shadows of the trees along its edge. The slight warmth of approaching day groaned and cracked in the ice. Across the pond an occasional beam creaked, crumbled and fell into the ruins of the Regency Hotel's fire-gutted Exhibit Hall.

Catherine and Albert stood on the far side of the skating pond, now disguised as local working people in clothes that kind hotel servants had given them. Hiding in plain sight they gazed into the smoky ruins of last night's devastating fire. Along with tsk-tsk-ing city officials, hand-wringing hoteliers, fate-saved colleagues, and the morbidly curious they saw Dr. Frederick Durand wandering dazed among the piles of rubble and human remains, occasionally kicking at this, bending down to push at that. In the cold air, people's breath trailed up in unaware life, mocking the rising trails of smoldering death amongst which they walked.

"I hate doing this to him," Catherine muttered.

"He is used to it," Albert said, pulling her close against his chest.

"That is hardly reason enough," she snapped back.

"It is his mission, Catherine. Self-selected. He always chooses to protect us. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not."

"And what does he ever get out of it all?" Catherine's heart wrenched with both love and pity for Frederick, who it turned out to her great surprise, she realized she actually did love. Oh, not in the way she loved Alcibi - Major Albert Farley. But casting her mind's eye on a tangent to a future she might have had as Frederick's wife in this time and place she saw that indeed they might have been quite content together. As long as she never knew anything about Albert that is, nor ever experienced anything like what she felt with him. As long as she had stayed mostly asleep, she could have been content.

But how long, really, would that have been, given her innate tendencies and her bloodline? And too, how long before her

grandmama would have tried to kill her? It was all too disappointing and sad. For now, Catherine saw not only the wisdom but also the urgency in going along with Albert's and cousin Ronnie's plan to get her and the others out of Europe and into hiding.

"Frederick lives to serve. It gives his life meaning, Catherine. Do not deny him that this time."

Albert quoted from Khayyam:

*Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days*

*Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:*

*Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,*

*And one by one back in the Closet lays.*

"With souls like Frederick, ever vigilant even when they are not certain why, we may eventually be able to take back the field, defeat Destiny, and play our own Great Game of the Kurultai." Albert stood a little straighter and touched his cap in a salute to Frederick. "He is a very good man."

Catherine was overpowered by a gratitude far greater than was warranted for the few years she had known Frederick. Looking down the hallways of her increasing awareness of other times and places, his self-sacrifice and loyalty blazed hot and bright. She swore to herself that this lifetime she would somehow make it worth his while.

"And what about my poor family? This will break their hearts...."

Albert sighed, "It is never easy, no matter if you are the one who leaves or the one who is left. For now it is better that none of them know."

Tears began to flow as Catherine gathered in memories of her parents and Basil, her childhood, their support and love. She turned into Albert's comforting embrace.

"Think of it as being a soldier," he said. "You are on a mission that is more important than your personal feelings. From what your Cousin Ronnie tells me about them, if they truly knew what the Kurultai is about and how important this is, they would be pleased for you and proud of you."

"But they do not know...."

"Not this time. Not yet."

Catherine sighed and an early-morning breeze rattled frosted glass in the ornate streetlamps and scattered snow from slender splayed fingers of long-needle pines at the pond's edge where Catherine and Albert stood. On the wind from the Hotel grounds Catherine could smell fear, hatred, surprise, and triumph interwoven with the thick nauseous bite of charred wood, melted electrical wiring, and burnt flesh. She gathered strength from parts of herself she had not known, and focused her attentions.

"You really think I can re-create some of what was lost here last night?" Catherine's hand patted her pocket to feel the reassuring crinkle of paper on which she had drawn and written her impressions of the thought-forms hurled upward from the minds dying in the Agnichaitan vortex, as Albert had urged her throughout the night.

"Theoretically, yes, it is possible. Where we are going there are teachers who say they can train you to do it. Do I believe it? Actually, I am not sure. Yet I know we must try."

"Right..." She leaned back into Albert, molding her body against his as she recalled they had done as Greek children and later as fellow sailors on the prow of their Athenian triremes. "What next, my old love?"

"Now see here, Cat, I am not that old. But I should like us to actually grow old this time. Preferably together." He leaned in and kissed the side of her throat, sending electric chills coursing through her entire body and seemingly even out from it, sensitive to everything within a few feet of where they stood. She turned and gazed in wonder at his lips, wondering how something so very human could cause such very divine feelings. She thought another kiss might be in order. When, long moments later, they finally turned for a last look at the smoldering remains of the New Science Frontiers Exhibit, Albert took her hand and gazed towards the East.

"Come along then, we are off to join Ronnie in Tibet. He said to tell you he had another clue about Ursa Major and the Pleiades. And after that, Mezo-America, I think. Or is it Egypt again?"

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## THE STORIES

*"The walls of the Halls of Memory are inscribed with mutable images and words that often shift even as you're watching."*

### AMBER WAVES OF GREED

Katy is a glamorous gangster moll in 1950s America, helping her mob boss boyfriend by using strategy and tactics from her remembered lifetime as a warrior-poet back during the Peloponnesian Wars in ancient Greece.

A gun-runner comes to town to make a deal, pitting the two mobs against each other.

Now if she could only retrieve her memory of who his rival boss really is from back then, before the tensions boil over again in deadly far-reaching violence.

*"We are all just dreamers, looking for  
the right place to wake up."*

### THE CANYON OF FORGETFULNESS

Trooper Kat crawls up out of a canyon in the Australian outback in 2163 with no memory of who she is or how she got there. The old Sergeant who runs the isolated supply station takes her in against the objections of his embittered wife.

When a troop train arrives on its way to a doomed battle, the handsome, idolized Commander reclaims Kat, one of his spies who he remembers from another life together. As her memory starts to return, Kat knows she must escape, or die.

*"Whose life is this anyway?"*

### CONSTELLATIONS

Catherine is a brilliant young Englishwoman making an international reputation as a scientist. But she has troubling visions of other times and places. Her grandmother practices dark magic and is overly interested in what Catherine knows or may find out about the Kurultai.

At the New Science Frontiers Conference in Vienna in 1900, Catherine meets a British officer who claims to know her from other lives and whose compelling presence increases her visions. She begins to believe him, against the disapproval of her American fiancé. Meanwhile, the grandmother plots to destroy all the scientists whose work could advance humanity. If she is also

rid of her potentially very dangerous granddaughter, all the better.

*"Humans are at the crossroads of evolution and idiocy."*

#### HEIR APPARENT

Brother Charles is a monk in 14<sup>th</sup> century France who knows he's really special. His English lady-in-waiting mother always tells him that as she secretly trains him in the ways of the Kurultai. As the first-born, illegitimate, unacknowledged son of Charles the VI, King of France, Brother Charles has become a pawn in the Great Game, though he considers himself a major player.

He makes his way, along with another young monk he both favors and tries to protect, to a royal gathering where the fate of France is to be decided by those pulling strings behind the scenes. Along the way the monks trace the pilgrimage path of Cathedrals, encounter secret Masons, learn about the Black Virgin, and find themselves at the center of power-plays both bigger and more immediate than they imagined. Will Brother Charles see the truth before it's too late?

*"Perhaps we ourselves are the answer  
the cosmos seeks to find."*

#### THE BLOOD-DARK SEA

Famous Athenian general Alcibiades is charming and brilliant with a talent for being on the winning side in the Peloponnesian Wars, even if that means switching sides... a lot. He's also a member of the Kurultai, trained in ancient mystery schools in Greece, Egypt, and Carthage.

His cousin and adoring lover Chareas is a soldier and poet-historian, concerned Alcibiades is going over to the Dark side. Chareas fears he may have to kill his beloved Alcibiades in order to save the progress of humanity.

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Subsequent stories are set in Tibet in the early 1900s, Egypt in 2012, Mezo-America in 500 C.E., the Gobi Desert, and more.

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**PAMELA JAYE SMITH** is an Applied Mythologist, international consultant-speaker, award-winning writer-producer-director, and author of six books for media-makers, a collection of short stories, two of which placed in the ScreenCraft Short Story Contest, and co-author of two children's books. Her co-authored script *The Cuban Circuit* was a Winner at the Bahamas Intl. Film Festival and she has hundreds of articles published in Film Industry print and e-zines as well as many podcasts.

She has eight years formal study in Comparative Mysticism and is a certified teacher of the Mystery Schools.

Pamela is an on-camera mythology expert on the History Channel's *Ancient Aliens* series, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's *ICE AGE: Continental Drift* movie, the *American Jedi* documentary, Microsoft's *Age of Mythology* game, the *Forbidden Secrets* TV series, and other projects.

Also a history buff, she's a world traveler and has consulted for the U.S. Army, the Aerospace industry, corporate, and non-profit organizations.

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