

# Megan the White And the Order of Ancient Knowledge

Book One (Trilogy) – Synopsis – First three Chapters

Phil Daniels

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## Synopsis (full trilogy overview)

The trilogy 'Megan the White' centres upon a sixteen-year-old girl in the present day. Following a minor road accident she's plagued by visions and memories of ancient Britain. Drawn to particular standing stones an alternative-lifestyle family befriend her, strangely awaiting Megan's arrival and another two similarly affected teenagers.

A forgotten knowledge unravels, where pre-Roman tribes understood that nature reuses souls every 3000 years and memories are inherited during conception; deeply concealed in the mind. The three teenagers' souls last existed within priests from that time, adept at recalling ancestral memories from previous lives.

Megan is a modern girl, growing up in a seemingly 'perfect' suburban life. An outsider struggling through adolescence, now faced with this additional disturbing trauma and growing realisation. While coping with personal development, ever-increasing inherited memories question her own reality.

During Book One the other two teenagers are located, each evolving knowledge of three distinct disciplines from ancient times. Foresight, healing and nature's unity; powerful forces harnessing the natural world.

Drawn to historical locations their reused souls recall more semi-dormant knowledge. Apprehensive, questioning their true identities, ultimate destiny becomes uncertain when a distant plot for revenge is uncovered. Forced to open their minds freely, memories unearth the wisdom needed to face a fourth reused soul, intent on vengeance for her daughter's death by the ancestral priest of Megan.

Deep within the subconscious world, unconfined by restrictions of conscious reality, they battle alongside nature to overcome this timeless evil. Despite the struggles of adolescence, true existence and the restraints of time itself, they overcome a past that was never truly theirs to relive.

*"Megan the White is a timeless battle of good versus evil, love against hate, calling into question the reality of barriers between the physical world and subconscious mind. A beautifully crafted plot combines a thought-provoking concept linking past and present, questioning the fragility of time, existence, and who we truly are."*



## Chapter 1

“At least there’s no blood... I hate the sight of blood.”

A distorted shape mouthed at Megan from the towering crowd above. Their movement slowed, faint sounds distant and muffled, faces blurring into brightly coloured surreal wonderland characters with bizarre fish-eyes and ridiculously long arms.

Megan squinted, slowly lifting her head, as lightning pain seared through her brow. She yelped, wincing away when nausea dragged her down. The damp asphalt was cold, yet disturbingly refreshing in a most unnatural way.

“Just lay still darling” echoed the voice, fingers pressing hard against her arm.

Panicking, through a flood of distortion, Megan violently shoved at the hand, “Get off me...” Forcing herself up, frantically peering for features, she blinked, desperately straining to focus, but it was hopeless as both propping elbows buckled, collapsing her down again.

A figure suddenly loomed closer, shoving through the crowd, then dropped to kneel beside her. “Please keep still...” His voice swam through her mind, meaningless words that overpowered, the confusion flopping her head onto its side. Powerless to resist, his hand lifted hers, sweat merging with sweet wafting aftershave, then his chest cleared into view. A lapel badge jostled around, ‘Paul Mason – Paramedic’.

“What’s your name?” He smiled staring intently as her gaze slowly lifted.

“Elv... Meg... an” she stuttered, frowning with uncertainty.

“Just lie still now, it’s okay, the ambulance is here.” He seemed hesitant, features fraught and considered.

Her head spun sickeningly as clinging neck hairs prickled raised skin. The pain screamed across her brow burning down one jaw. Frightened, she pushed up, grabbing Paul roughly while attempting to stand. Then nothing.

The hospital room smelt, but not a nice ‘fresh-washing’ smell, all comforting and homely. This was disinfectant, rubber gloves and pristine trolley tops; never a good combination in Megan’s opinion. She pictured the dentist’s and that apprehensive fear of the incoming pain, despite what they always said. Quite numb and still woozy her head rested back at the sound of incoming voices.

Paul the paramedic leant against the door talking to a woman in white. Tall and elegant, she briefly glanced over while taking a folder he offered. Interrupted by the demands of Paul’s bleeper, its insistence stinging Megan’s temple, he hurriedly flicked it off while nodding her way then disappeared through the door.

“I’m Philippa... Philippa Guy. I’m a doctor here. Megan isn’t it? Well, by the sounds of it, you’re a lucky young lady. Can you tell me what you remember?” Her face lit up, the words spoken softly with a well-educated tone.

Megan’s lips opened, then hung undecidedly... before slowly and quietly closing.

The last thing she *could* remember was ambling along, iPhone cranked to the max as usual. Lost in the reflective world of Pink Floyd’s social statements while purposefully stepping on every paving crack in defiance of the game to avoid them. Just lately, no matter the rule, rebellious urges compelled confrontation; a behaviour quickly attracting negative responses from school. Thank God she only had one more month at that place, and *those* people, she scorned inwardly.

Regaining some concentration, she pictured the accident scene and turning at the curb, before stepping off towards number three, Oaktree Lane. The thought of home caused a sneer

of derision at the most boring place in the world. An ideal documentary location for TV's 'most stereotypical suburban street', she mused. The star cast competing for the 'most tedious household' trophy, while comparing knitting patterns or homemade animal-faced cushions. Without doubt her mother would win, revelling in the dubious adulation.

Panicking, jerking her mind back to the hospital... 'OH GOD!' Her mother; she'll go mental when she hears about this.

Megan stared blankly at the doctor, unable to remember a thing. What had happened when she'd stepped off that pavement? Philippa gently smiled, slipping her hand from Megan's shoulder while switching expressions to something more serious.

"You were hit by a van... possibly knocked out, momentarily. Although there's no breakages or bleeding you might have suffered concussion." Philippa studied the notes with a frown, then glanced at Megan's forehead. "There's certainly a bit of a bump. We're waiting for a scan before deciding if you can go home. I'm just going to check how long it will be... lay there and rest, I'll be back soon."

Megan watched her leave... the door eventually squeezing into its frame, encasing the room in loneliness. Oppressive silence overwhelmed as those smells came wafting back. With eyes closed, bouncing music through her thoughts, Floyd's 'The Wall' blocking the stark reality, as best it could. All that left, was to wait, but that felt the worst part of all.

Megan struggled with boredom. Ignoring Philippa's instructions, she slid from the bed to pad aimlessly round the room. As her feet reached the cold-tiled floor the room swayed, its walls tipping forwards, then swinging out again. An after-effect of pain relief, she reasoned, although her forehead burned while steadying against the metal framework. Pausing until the room settled and her pain intensity lowered, she finally eased out into the room.

After countless circuits, filled with 'over the top' sighing and arms swinging from frustrating tedium, her hand struck a sharp trolley edge. Yelping angrily she swore, blaming the inanimate object with a glare. Stinging, with her hand seeping blood, she shook it, but it pulsed even more.

Incarcerated in the clinical room, alone and irritated, her heated anger began rising. What on earth was taking so long, and how would a stupid scan help this thumping head anyway? Initially warmed by the doctor, but increasingly becoming annoyed... This was ridiculous, Megan decided to leave.

Flicking a glance at the doorway she grabbed her damp coat from the bed, then quickly slipped it on. Bending down to pull on her shoes, she stood quickly, ready to go... then staggered. Her head pounding with sickening pain, the room span in huge swirling vortexes of blurred colours. Reaching out wildly, clutching vainly into the room, she collapsed forwards into blackness.

In her mind the vision wasn't anything miraculously strange, just a memory of a grassy hillside all breezy and fresh, bright; feeling like a nice summer's morning. Knee-height grass wavered gently with no sign of life anywhere, whichever way she looked. The only distinguishable features were large rocks prominent on the opposite hillside.

Megan stumbled forwards heading for the stones. The strange thing was, although she could clearly remember being here, she sort of couldn't either. It *felt* like her first exploration, yet also a memory inside her mind... therefore she must have been here before, right?

Nervously approaching the stones; up close they towered above her. A flat one in the middle stood out, angled down one side, with red paint trickling down an edge. Leaning

against the rock, feeling its cold rough gritty surface... then a sudden noise interrupted the vision.

The hospital assessment door clunked open as the doctor strolled back in.

Philippa Guy had struggled in St Michael's A&E department for almost two years. It was never her intention to work at the front end like this, hating the hours, with an endless conveyor belt of ailments and conditions. Every patient was just evaluation, then transfers, never seeing the results of her work. Wasn't that why she chose this profession in the first place, to help people? There was no satisfaction without knowing what her help achieved. Like this girl Megan, she either stays in for monitoring or goes home. Either way it's not exactly the caring profession she'd imagined.

Startled by the door Megan snapped from the daydream while staring up at Philippa. Sprawled on the floor, a shoe halfway across the room, her hand felt wet, yet the dripping blood confusing. Supported by Philippa, rising groggily, she slumped back onto the bed. Their eyes met briefly, panged with guilt Megan turned away; the strange field and stones flashed to mind, then receded when Philippa softly spoke.

"I can see we'll need a ward bed this evening Megan... just for observation. Clearly you're a bit wobbly from the accident. Plus, it will give us a chance to get this scan done and make sure you're okay."

Megan just gaped, horrified. Stay in... in hospital? No way! Flustered with panic she glanced at the door with thoughts of rapid escape. Philippa took her arm reassuringly, while chuckling lightly with a grin. Megan frowned, was this care and concern, or had she sensed the impending dash for freedom?

The antiseptic stung and the smell seared as Philippa cleaned the scratch.

"There, how are you feeling now... a little better?"

Megan forced a smile, avoiding eye contact, silently hoping for release after all. Philippa crossed the room though, calling to arrange a bed and porter. "Don't look so worried. As I said, it's just for observation." Philippa smiled, crossing back to the bedside.

Megan scowled, while fighting the churning apprehension welling deep inside.

Flushed with embarrassment, Megan reluctantly accepted the wheelchair; squeaking along the shiny-tiled flooring. Amusing herself with the notion that a rodent was stuck in the wheels. Automatically reverting to her nonsense thoughts in awkward, often serious situations. Like Grandad's funeral; when Mother demanded she looked in the coffin, saying how 'peaceful' he looked. Although haunted by that memory for years, at the time it seemed a strange thing to say... as though he could have been anything more active in that situation.

The ward smelt worse than the assessment room. A fusty odour of clammy patients and sterile bedding, strangely mixed with fragrant flowers and dank standing water. Megan glanced at the rows of beds but couldn't see the occupants. The porter left as a nurse swirled the curtain round the bed bay, then studied Megan briefly.

"Let's get you out of there and in your bed then; it's dinner time soon... you wouldn't want to miss that, I'm sure. Megan, isn't it?"

Megan imagined dinner, while pushing down on the wheelchair to stand, but her legs collapsed; overwhelming nausea rushed in as another vision took over.

The field of long grass and standing stones surrounded her. Confused and desperate for understanding she scraped both hands along the rough rock faces, racing to each one in

turn. Clawing at them, embedding moss and grime in her nails, finding reality in this subconscious world.

Staring up the full height of one, it rose to the sky. Then loomed down, seeming to sway and stagger, threatening to topple and crush her beneath. Before the scream came... she turned away. Frightened, she glared from one to another, then the first to the last; why was she remembering this place? What was it?

They appeared arranged by someone, well, actually by huge machinery. Although some were smaller and further out, roughly resembling two circles... but why? Alone, trapped in this world of massive rocks and devoid of people, tears welled, and her throat burnt with anguish. Steadying against a stone... *This isn't real*... the thought diminishing her fears somewhat.

The sun rippled across the hillside, calming her mind further. Peering round, it occurred, the stones reminded her of Beefeaters at the Tower of London guarding something important. Mother took her there when she was young. So, she could remember *that* and also these stones... at the same time in this vision? Two comparable memories, merging as she saw fit? It made no sense!

Alerted by a sudden noise, she turned... some distant sound. Echoing over the grasses, bouncing round the stones. Rapidly growing intensity... mind searing... dragging her out from sub-consciousness, through vile tasting sickness and back to the hospital ward.

“Megan?”

“Megan...?” The nurse repeated impatiently.

Megan nodded, confused... an acrid smell of vomit rose, wafting through the ward as her clarity returned. Glancing at the ‘Megan White’ wristband, then a name-sheet over the bed, she stared coldly at the nurse with her obvious stupid questions.

That interruption had brought her mind back here, to this place. Despite how frightening it was, with all her concentration, she couldn't realistically picture the stones again. Just imagining felt forced, not the immersive visions at all, bringing yet greater annoyance.

Glaring across the ward beds her stare locked with a girl, roughly equal age. Skinny and pale with short blonde hair; above her head hung a row of cards, presumably from family and friends.

Megan's eyes dropped away from the girl and those thoughtful cards; wondering why her mother wasn't here. Proof, if ever she needed, her mother didn't care... she never had. The rising loneliness stopped abruptly as Philippa arrived, smiling warmly as usual. Megan automatically mirrored her, then glanced down, silly with embarrassment.

“Goodness me, what's this mess then?”

Philippa scowled at the nurse, raising a smirk from Megan.

As the nurse cleaned up, to Megan's delight, Philippa found a fresh gown then supported her into bed.

“I'm afraid we can't do this scan till 6.15, Megan.” Her continuous smiling bypassing Megan's expression.

“But it will give you a chance to rest... and for you to clean that dirt off your face and nails.” Philippa chuckled at Megan's gape. Turning away to leave, she quickly spun back round.

“Oh, and your mother's been ringing trying to find you. She's on her way up now. Must be sick with worry, I'd imagine.” With that, she turned and left.

Megan watched Philippa striding busily down the corridor, pausing briefly at each bay. When she finally disappeared, nature called, so Megan slid from the bed. Fumbling the

bathroom light cord, almost pulling the alarm, she considered summoning that nurse by ‘mistake’... but thought better of it.

Staring in the mirror, surprisingly, nothing seemed particularly awry. Dirt smudged her cheek, and the matted hair wouldn’t win any awards, but generally she looked pretty normal. Although, a nasty-looking lump stood proud on her forehead. Reaching to touch it gently, piercing pain stabbed into her skull, inflamed skin screaming through her senses. Doubling up, her eyes crammed shut as she collapsed at the sink.

A sharp rock pressed tight against her knee... it felt like she was bleeding.

The grass fields had lost their sunshine glow, with the tall stones no longer resembling protecting Beefeaters. Now they seemed to threaten, menacing, with her frail body below. Scared, desperately pleading for help, swinging round for signs of life, but feeling lost in endless darkness. There was no escape from this vision, the memory; yet she knew the warm comforting hospital was there too, just out of grasp.

She felt herself reach down... yet somehow it wasn’t her... lifting something from the flat rock, then raising it above head-height. A long glistening curved blade, shimmering in the dim light from the moon. Suddenly she sliced it violently downwards.

Megan could *see* and *feel* herself doing it, without control over it happening. This wasn’t something she was doing now... she had already done it. The vision was a memory, simply replaying... but strangely devoid of any recollection.

Trembling to her toes, an unrestrained mind running riot, without escape from its conjuring and forcing her to face it alone. The stones blurred around her, fading into the cold black wall of night; then a figure appeared. A dim image, shrouded facial lines, slowly emerging from the depths. A woman, head held low, her features obscured... until the face gradually lifted.

The petrifying shudder rocked through Megan’s bones. Horrific scarred lines ripped across the woman, deep gnarled crevices shattering through split lips and into her eyes... and those eyes; black as the night that surrounded, deep endless pits of nothing but rage and hate. They locked onto Megan, intense with widening pain... she reeled back, fear pouring cold sweat down her spine. The woman’s creased lips opened, vile green teeth bared briefly as she spat out... “Aed...”

Megan’s scream echoed through the bathroom, a deafening wail of pitiful sobs. Its volume amplified within the hollow space, a rebounding force, shaking her consciousness back into the room.

A warm glow of light burst from the opening doorway. The nurse helped Megan up, supporting, as they crossed the corridor to the safety of her bed.

“My, we are a bit tiddly aren’t we” she joked warmly, trying to comfort.

Megan wasn’t laughing though. She was absolutely terrified.

“Oh Megan, my precious darling, thank goodness you’re alright, I’ve been worried sick!” The shrill theatrical voice rang out as Megan’s mother arrived.

Flouncing towards the bedside, casting a derisive glance at the nurse, she bustled towards Megan. Still in shock, eyes fearfully wide, Megan stared blankly at her mother as though from a distance. The vision still screaming in her head; that face, the horror. She felt *so* alone, despite rows of patients, hospital staff... and of course her mother.

“Well... I must say, you don’t seem very pleased to see me!” Her mother pouted. “Honestly Megan, I rushed from work the very moment those police people called... you could at least make an effort. What have the doctors said? Will you need to stay in? Only I told Denise I would call round later; she’s having *problems* with Peter again. I don’t know,

those two... they drive me to distraction. But a promise is a promise and I wouldn't want to let her down."

Megan glared in disbelief. Did she *actually* hate this woman? Or just a lifetime of dislike, reinforced every time she came near? It was easy to pretend, when she wanted something... but fully aware her mother would be happier if she wasn't here at all.

That realisation flared deeply upsetting anger, purely at her presence. Now here she stood... more concerned about her stupid friend than her own daughter. Turning away, she pushed her burning face deep into the soft cotton pillow.

She fought desperately to glimpse the stones again. Even though the latest vision was so terrifying... that fear was preferential to this pain her mother caused. Digging nails into the pillow, cramming her eyes tightly shut, but nothing lifted her mind away. To cry out, to sob until this stopped, but her mother droned on again, demanding, controlling...

"Oh, excuse me mada ...." Her mother began, but Philippa's return cut her short.

"I understand you've had another wobbly moment, Megan?" Philippa frowned, briefly glancing at Megan's mother. "I've managed to move this scan forward so we can sort you out. You must be Mrs White?" Philippa nodded quite formally, pulling a wheelchair into the bay. Helping Megan sit, then manoeuvring a three-point turn... the twisting chair's squeaks and squeals made Megan snigger while peering at her mother.

Bridget White had never understood her daughter's behaviour. Watching her now, being wheeled down the ward, she reflected on the past.

Megan had always been a difficult child, but the last few years were intolerable. It was hard to admit, but there were times... well, abortion had been a consideration. Guilt-riddling thoughts, but she had them nonetheless.

Nobody knew the hardships raising Megan alone without a father figure. Blocking out the earlier years suited her best. His lies and deceit. Yes, repressing thoughts until they faded dealt with them well. Even when Megan asked about her father that time, she'd cleverly evaded. What's the point of dragging up such things? *She* was the one who'd sacrificed her life to raise a child, not him.

Where was the gratitude, enduring all those years... just for her? Their nice home, in a sought-after area of town, plus her respected position in the neighbourhood. Why didn't she appreciate that more? She was a very lucky girl... and should be thankful.

Despite those adversities, the passing years had been physically kind, she was still an attractive woman after all. Smiling, picturing her bedside mirror and the layering makeup that gently smoothed her skin. As her good Mother always said 'Keep up appearances, but keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself'... After all, that's how you earned others respect and admiration. Yes, Megan was a very lucky young lady.

Bridget called out, attracting Philippa's attention. "Excuse me, how long will this take, only I have a very important meeting shortly and cannot be late?"

Megan scoffed loudly; Philippa tried to restrain her intolerant tone, but failed miserably. "It's difficult to put an exact time on vital treatment and care, it might be best if you go to your *meeting*... Megan will need rest afterwards anyway." With that, Philippa swung the wheelchair through a cacophony of squeals; comparable to her mother, Megan smirked.

Philippa was fully aware that transporting patients was specifically a porter role, but this woman's attitude riled her. This accident clearly traumatised Megan and parenting skills



like that wouldn't help. Pushing along the corridor her anger slowly receded, morphing to niggling guilt as they wheeled into the lift.

The stark treatment corridors had felt cold and eerie; a much older, tatty and original part of the hospital, Megan reasoned. She'd spotted a spider on the scan room wall... watching it intently in case it moved, or worse, disappeared altogether. The results revealed nothing sinister and Megan had been pleased when returning to the ward.

Now, laying back in bed, tiredness slowly crept in. Painkillers numbing the throbbing head also brought on drowsiness, her eyelids gently flickering. Eventually her mind drifted away from the hospital confines... to a place deep within her subconscious.

Megan could see for miles from the massive hill summit.

This memory a stark contrast to the recent bathroom episode, with wild flower scents wafting on the gentle breeze, creating calm and easing her fears.

Centrally, on the flat-topped hill, stood a huge construction of wooden crossbeams full of sticks and dried grass. A platform perched above, a motionless arm poking out from one side. Three men stood by... suddenly thrusting a flaming torch into the pyre. Instantly flames crackling high, followed by a thick fatty smell as the body caught alight.

Stepping back quickly from intense heat, she heard them talking. Strange sounding, with thick rough accents, like Mr Soames her maths teacher. He must have told the class at least a million times he came from Wales... as though expecting a trophy for his achievement.

The men's happy tone conflicted with the ceremony's nature, missing the grim mood Megan would expect. Walking down the steep incline she noticed their rough-woven clothes, similar to her school's rural-farm visit last year. Could this memory be that school day... perhaps she'd forgotten these details? Then realised how nonsensical that was, positive they didn't burn people at education centres. Although that might have made it more interesting than it was.

They finally reached the slope's bottom. Staring back up it seemed too perfectly constructed to be natural, but surely impossible without diggers and machinery? Several buildings stood around the base made from poles with reed roofs. Bouts of laughter made Megan turn, a group of women approached shouldering huge pots, which she reasoned to be water from a nearby river.

The men gathered outside the largest roundhouse, their muffled voices floating inside Megan's head, as though distant whispers... but they stood right in front, just a few paces away. Suddenly the wind picked up, forcing smoke down in swirling gusts. One man coughed, hacking nastily from ash-filled fumes. Its sound reverberated, echoing through her skull... shaking the memory into fragments.

Sudden fierce coughing in the hospital ward woke Megan with a start.

Quickly cupping her mouth, the girl opposite muffled into a pillow at Megan's glare, then turned away sheepishly. It wasn't a purposeful act, Megan assumed, but still annoying nonetheless. A rude interruption from the subconscious vision.

No matter how she tried finding sleep again was impossible. What were these visions? They seemed so real, so strong, like dreams... but then more like actual memories. So vivid and detailed but also blurry and distant, as though she could reach out and grab them... only to clutch thin air.

Trying to push them aside, wiping the TV earpiece on the bed cover, she squeezed it into her ear. Momentarily peeking at the girl opposite, she shrugged; if the screen's brightness was annoying it served her right.

Flicking through channels, there was nothing remotely interesting - no surprise at this hour. Her button pressing increased with rising agitation, while the TV struggled to obey. Then something caught her eye, frantically flicking channels back, there it was... she stared, open-mouthed.

One of those tedious archaeology programmes, hosted by bushy-bearded academics, droning on about historical Britain... but there were the stones from her memories, or at least some very similar. Expert presenters strode around discussing soil and stone weights. Even how ancient people might have positioned them.... but no name or location. Utterly frustrated she watched until the final credits rolled.

Beary eyed, Megan left the TV on, but her concentration waned. Celebrity cooking shows, sales pitches for innovative vacuum cleaners... all blurring through the hours. Eventually, sliding down the bed, she fell asleep, earpiece dangling with TV light flickering round the bay. Thoughts of stone circles drifted to mind and gently subsided away.

Morning arrived sooner than Megan knew existed, clearly delighting the smirking nurse. Quite why they woke patients at this hour wasn't apparent, despite Megan's moaning.

"... You should be happy, your notes say you're leaving us, all being well." The nurse grinned, leaving Megan pondering... perhaps she was equally pleased.

Dragging her clothes from the cupboard, Megan dressed, then waited endlessly.

"Oh Megan darling, we had such fun last night! Do you know, Denise... well, and Peter of course... they're getting a puppy! Yes, I know... exciting, isn't it? Anyway, come along, hurry yourself. I don't know... I thought you would be ready. Is that your bag?"

Megan just stared, purposely dragging time, pulling her dirty coat on and then hoisting up her bag. "Yes, I'm fine... thanks. Thanks for asking."

Passing the ward station, Philippa glanced up from a heap of patient's notes... smiling warmly, "Well, you're off then Megan. Remember... bed rest and quiet, for a few days at least. Here, it's your discharge notice. If you need anything, well..." Her eyes flickered intently, confusing Megan, but Philippa returned to the pile of notes.

Philippa said bed rest and quiet... *Yeah right*... Megan churned, suffering her mother's petty self-revolving world all the way home. As they turned into Oaktree Lane, pulling up at number three, Megan gazed through the murky window at their perfect little house, in the perfect little street... and felt perfectly sick.

Clutching the discharge notice; it listed Megan's details and other boring stuff. Although scrawled along the top was 'Philippa Guy'. She'd said, with a secret sort of smile, "...if you need anything." How strange, Megan thought; while studying a blackbird tug its breakfast from the lawn. She was a nice doctor... seeming to care, but it felt like something more.

"Hurry along then, I shall be late for the parish council meeting at this rate." Her mother insisted, fingers drumming the steering wheel. "It's our street's tree-pruning frequency debate this morning. I hate to think what branches might be overlooked if I'm..."

Megan slammed the car door, cutting her mother short, then headed for the house. Speedy car reversing raised shrieks of blackbird alarms, as Megan slumped indoors. Her relief was palpable, sighing as the door closed. Shutting the world, and her mother, outside.

Throwing her bag down she made straight for the computer, with no idea what to look for... but she had to try. Searching for 'tall stones' and 'historical sites of Britain', offered an endless list of options. One in particular looked promising, clicking the link in excitement.

The smaller stones were missing, possibly due to image cropping, but those large ones sent trembles through her fingers to the mouse.

Staring at the screen her scalp prickled, remembering the stones touch, that rough gnarled surface. Visualising them towering above, powerful and timeless, protecting but at times also threatening. Then her spine shivered, that woman's face flooding her mind, hearing that scream ... "Aed..." Megan's fingers jerked away from the keyboard, jolting her body upwards to stand, but they pulled her back again, the images... those stones.

Breathing heavily, trying to block out those thoughts, she found calmness reading the website description with location instructions. Train route details made it seemingly easy to visit... but this was madness. What was she thinking... actually planning to go? Some place bearing similarities with visions from a bump to her head. No, this was crazy.

Rising slowly, grabbing her bag, she paused on the stairs and glanced back at the screen. Nervously tingling with agitation, she'd never done anything like this, aside from angry irrational threats designed to spite her mother. So the notion of actually stepping outside their town, alone, was frightening... but exciting too.

Megan lay in bed that night in turmoil, constantly changing sides, but it wasn't placating her relentless throbbing head. Although she knew deep down the worrying state of her mind brought the main unrest. Perhaps she should have mentioned these visions in hospital? It could be serious, like one of those brain diseases people got. They would probably have laughed though, or kept her in that awful ward for longer.

Despite the pulsating pain, tiredness began dulling her senses... but she must stay awake to understand these visions and their constant plaguing. Fighting for concentration, she imagined counting sheep hopping backwards over a fence. The logic was clear to Megan, if forwards helped you sleep, then backwards kept you awake. Despite this scientific approach, it seemed flawed. As consciousness waned, a vision slowly formed, drifting deeply into the subconscious mind.

Crowds were milling to the stones, hundreds of people... huddled movements across the land as though herded by giant sheep dogs. The stench was over-powering. A rank mixture of sweat, dirt, animal fur and blood. Glancing behind, men dragged several slung beds across the field carrying dead bodies. Wobbling on wood frames as they bumped across rough ground... they seemed alive as arms and legs jerked randomly.

Drawing to a standstill the crowd gathered, then slowly spread around. Megan stepped forwards, centrally in the circle. She spun round, confused, but nobody took notice. As though expecting her presence, somehow belonging in this world, but one her mind had conjured. Agitated, Megan felt increasing awareness she knew how events would unfold, but in another sense... had no idea at all.

A man stood on her right, tall and thin. To her left a shorter woman, much bulkier, with electric piercing blue eyes. Steadily people passed in front, one by one, their faces hidden with heads held low. Eventually just one small boy remained, attempting to peek from under his brow... eyes averting when she spotted him.

The body-laden beds lay neatly rowed, a sense of order to their condition. Gesturing to follow the tall man moved closer, strangely leaning at each one to peer intently.

Strained corpses, painful suffering; Megan imagined death was prolonged. Her stomach churned, this first-hand exposure to bodies was shocking. Apart from Grandad, and films... but they didn't count... this was her first real 'death' experience. Although, how this vision was *her* experience defeated any logic.

As sunset arrived the hillside fell silent, except for the blue-eyed woman's mumblings while lowering bodies into graves. Megan watched as shadows, emitting from large stones,

slowly extended across the land. They stretched to the horizon, then suddenly disappeared, just as life had, from each poor soul in the ground. It was *truly* the end of the day.

Megan woke as sunlight pierced through a tiny curtain gap.

In between moans, eye rubbing, and heaving the duvet into a miniature tent, she tossed left then right, until finally giving in and propped herself up. The front door closed. The air pressure pushing her own door, then the latch clicked downstairs as her mother left.

Megan's head drummed painfully, a dull thumping that wouldn't stop, causing ripples of random queasiness. Swinging her legs down, surprised by the aches and pangs, she stood quickly then reached for her slippers. Intense nausea washed through her instantly, collapsing to the floor in a heap.

Sparks of light dashed across the sky, encouraged and flicked upwards by the fires deafening roar. Panic-stricken she turned, facing the tall thin man from her last vision.

Now night had set in. Flames raged, sending streams of rising smoke all around. Frantically beckoning her to follow they ran between rough buildings towards the hill beyond. These fires weren't cosy warm cooking fires, but raging infernos of burning houses.

Screams rang out... racing past people, the pitch intensity changing as they careered along. Groups of men fighting, some dressed in sack clothing, their opponents in finer outfits with glinting metal and bright tunics. Struggles and battles in plain sight momentarily, then blurred by shadows and billowing smoke.

The smells were ever-changing too, from burning grasses to sweat then blood... and now... to flowers, delicate fragrances as they cleared the settlement and sank into darkness. Petrified and confused, Megan stumbled, glancing back, her mind engulfed with desperation.

Heaving breathlessly, panting... slowed and silenced, but they still ran, heading for the towering hillside stones. The man fell to his knees beside the central flat stone, muttering frantically and shaking powder onto the rock from a leather waist-bag.

Blurred movement in the darkness behind made Megan cry out, then hushed as the blue-eyed woman appeared. Frowning heavily, she glared at Megan, gesturing for quiet. Peering through the stones, into the night... listening intently. Suddenly she turned, clutching Megan's hand in panic, dragging them to the central stone.

Megan's knuckles scraped across the rough rock, forced into the powder. Terrified, she shook, her scream breaking free. White powder clouds billowed, hands covered and stained with blood. The woman's blue eyes opened wide, glaring wildly, spluttering strange words... and then... nothing.

The air hung, filled with salt and seaside damp. Shivering, the chill biting her skin. This was strange, as though she'd fallen asleep, then woken somewhere else entirely. Reality stung, like this wind. She *was* somewhere else entirely.

Slowly the vision lifted, the memory floating away from her subconscious. Sprawled across the bedroom floor, Megan lay awake, stunned and completely motionless.

The last thing she needed was another lump on the head.

Sitting up, stroking the carpet gently, thankful it wasn't the bonnet of someone's van. Then tears came, silently rolling, trickling over reddened cheeks.

"I can't go on like this... Christ, what the hell is wrong with me?" Megan spluttered and sobbed into the empty bedroom void.

Eventually she calmed, rubbing damp hands across sore and sticky skin. Wiggling her feet into pink fluffy slippers, a detested birthday present from Mother. She headed downstairs.

Pouring juice in the kitchen, she glazed over, staring through the window. The neighbour's Jack Russell 'Alfie' dug frantically, flinging vegetables from his hole. Partly buried carrots the fallout from his efforts, surrounding darkened depths of the excavation.

Focusing on the earth cavity, Megan mumbled 'curiouser and curiouser', a favourite childhood line. Had she, like Alice, tumbled down an abyss? Into a world full of strange events and inexplicable oddities with visions that came and went, as they saw fit, from a time without connections.

Breaking free from the daydream, she glanced towards the computer. The only certainty was that these stones actually existed, and within travelling distance too. There was no choice, she had to go.

The train map showed it wasn't far, about an hour or so. Gulping her juice hurriedly she spotted a note pinned to the 'In case we forget' board, reminding her of Mother's delightful squeals when she'd brought that home. With no comprehension this tat didn't lift her neighbourhood profile quite as she perceived.

'Gone to visit Nan, the least I could do. Got your juice... don't make a mess, expecting the Smithson's round later'.

Screwing the note more tightly than was needed, Megan tossed it to the floor.



## Chapter 2

It wasn't as terrifying as Megan imagined.

Call at the station counter, get your ticket, climb on the train and sit there. The only worry was knowing where to get off, what if she ended up in Scotland?

Megan stared through the smeary glass, trying to repress her unease. This was an alien adult world she was stepping into for the first time, alone. The seats rank smell wasn't helping either, a million commuters' grime ground into the fibres turned her stomach.

"Tickets please," the guard's sudden appearance startling. He gestured as though addressing a congregation while he stared right at her, the only person in the carriage.

She'd carefully chosen this seat wary of recognition, like the target in a TV crime programme... 'Have you seen this girl?'... despite leaving home just one hour ago.

Fighting the urge to reply *who, me?* She smiled sweetly, handing over the ticket and questioning nonchalantly, "I can never remember my stop, I nearly always miss it, how many are there before mine?"

His sigh was slight but noticeable, notching the ticket he turned to the aisle "Yours is the sixth".

More content now, Megan watched hedgerows flashing by, while mentally counting stops. Drumming fingers in tune with the train... this wasn't so difficult after all.

Successful with the counting and filled with relief, she stepped onto the platform. Glancing back at the train she smiled; it felt like leaving a whole world behind.

Buses picked up outside and twenty minutes later she hopped off near the historical site. Engulfing diesel smoke plumed from the exiting bus. Hoisting her bag up quickly she jumped back, then turned, finally... there they were. The stones that haunted her visions. Standing silently as they had for millennia with long grass sloping behind them just like she remembered.

Something felt wrong though, a weird sense of not belonging. It wasn't the stones as such, and it certainly didn't feel like her, the *time* just seemed so out of place. The road was confusing, fences, and a car park for God's sake! Everything felt defiled and cheapened, raising anger and frustration, but they just stood there, old rocks clumped behind a fence. Glancing at the Visitors Centre riled her even further with geriatrics slumped in folding chairs chewing sandwiches beside their cars.

Her own stupidity annoyed the most, why had she come here? Believing this place would cure these visions? That thought process seemed laughable... now. Dejected, she trudged towards the entrance, with little option now that the bus had gone.

The small shop was full of tat her mother would love, Chinese-made ornaments with sentiments declaring proof of the visit. Megan wondered if they even recognised the letters, let alone what they said.

Pressing the counter's buzzer, she waited, impatiently. Nothing. Maybe she should hold it down? Irritated, her finger hung momentarily, then a man appeared from the back room.

"Can I help?" He queried.

She stuttered, suddenly unprepared, feeling cornered and trapped. Far from home, confused... why had she come here? This was so stupid, embarrassment flared up and words wouldn't come, but tears did. Clammy palms, her forehead beading with perspiration, she grabbed the counter tightly. Powerless... without control... the room spiralled, blurring colours... then nothing.

Early morning light built increasing warmth and distant land hazed beyond the water. A bird dipped into view bobbing on the wall, slowly focusing as the memory formed.

Gradually smells and sounds filtered through, completing the ancient scene. A building stood before her, resembling a church in many ways, weathered with rounded stones... honed by the salty sea air, Megan reasoned. People were working busily in the gardens, but no swathes of pretty flowers and colourful displays though, this was like a miniature farm.

Arrays of small bushes, plants hanging from wooden frames, endless rows with every shade of green. The surrounding wall had inset stone faces facing outwards, guarding against attackers. This was a strange place of refuge, with an air of frantic preparation.

A woman approached; Megan recognised her piercing blue eyes immediately as the gardeners purposefully turned away. Beckoning Megan to kneel, she delicately sliced sections of leaf with a razor-edged stone.

A group of men joined them, led by the tall, thin man. He smiled, proffering a long ornate staff. Wrapping a hand round its shaft Megan felt the rising twist, like a snake embedded in the wood. Its surface carved with symbols, but nothing she recognised.

Grinning, he passed Megan a handful of leaves. He was chewing slowly, gesturing she did the same. Hesitant, Megan forced a smile... then slipped them between her lips. They tingled, tasting surprisingly pleasant. Tiny hairs brushed her tongue, saliva encouraging flavours and a sense of wellbeing.

Feeling warm and safe, somehow taller, stronger, and more confident. This was good. Chewing heavily a few times, she swallowed the lot. The euphoria was brief, then suddenly overwhelming, as cold sweat prickled her temples. Clinging tightly on the staff, her head swam, swaying forwards briefly... then she was gone.

The smell brought her round, conscious awareness slowly forming.

Jerking backwards, sudden realisation struck... he smiled awkwardly, pulling the dishcloth away. Megan blinked, still woozy, levering herself upright against the counter. Grimacing at his cloth, the nearest thing he had to smelling salts, she figured. It wasn't far off either.

"Sorry..." Megan muttered, unsure why, but he looked worried. "... I must have, I must have fainted."

"I noticed that nasty bump when you came in..." He frowned, nodding at her forehead, "... then you just collapsed. Can I get you anything? Some water perhaps..." Tossing the dishcloth across the worktop, then adding hopefully "... or should I call someone?"

His features were long, narrowed and slightly elven. Hopeless with ages, she guessed about 40, although anyone over 30 looked old in her eyes.

"No really... I'm fine" she insisted forcibly, using the counter to stand. Struck by the horrifying thought of her mother's reaction to any potential phone call.

"I got knocked down by a speeding van yesterday, hitting my head when I was hurled in the air and landed on the bonnet." Self-conscious of her reddened cheeks and confused why she'd embellished the accident events to a complete stranger. "I've had a couple of dizzy spells, but I'm fine... really."

He frowned heavily, his tone overtly serious "That sounds awful, shouldn't you be in hospital?"

She shrugged nervously then turned away to the shelves, he sounded more concerned why she was here than any health requirements.

“So... what brings you here then? I’m Céad by the way.” His smile returned, an effort to clear the air, she felt. Pleased at the subject change she visualised the letters, one by one, but his name still made no sense.

Spotting her confusion with a broadening grin, he explained, “It’s pronounced ‘seed’ but spelt C É A D, with one of those things over the ‘e’... it’s Gaelic.”

“I came to see the stones, but it’s all fenced off... and it’s Megan, with no *thing* over the E. It’s Welsh, so my mother proudly tells me.” Megan tried to find a smile.

The tension subsided, her arm resting on the counter as he nodded appreciatively.

“So this kind of history interests you then, does it?” Céad wiped the worktop with his dishcloth, nonchalantly flinging it underneath. “It’s a very old place, evoking lots of theories. This new Information Centre doesn’t really present the same feel”. He eyed the modern walls with a scoff.

Megan wandered around the aisles until attracted by a book, the stones back-dropped with a beautiful sunset cover. Thumbing through photos and stories, pausing to read odd lines, then giggling out loud at an image footnote suggesting extra-terrestrial links.

“What’s so funny?” Céad sounded jovial, his earlier concerns gone.

“Oh... this rubbish about UFOs and aliens. How can people print this stuff as fact, especially when it’s probably just an old graveyard or something?” She snorted in derision, glancing up with a smirk.

Céad turned away, busily tidying counter displays. Instantly Megan felt the awkwardness return, agitated and confused by another impending ‘sorry’. Swiftly she engrossed herself back in the book, despite its contents blurring from focus.

Céad’s passion and history studies stretched back to his earliest memories. In fact, his whole upbringing and family life centred on past events. Years at university culminated in this job, through a deep love for ancient historical sites.

Therefore, this girl’s derisory opinion, flaunting complete lack of knowledge, annoyed him intensely. Ramming leaflets into the wire rack, forcing more than it could hold, he fought to restrain his sarcasm.

“Well, there’s more to what our ancestors created thousands of years ago... than just a simple graveyard. Although I doubt that included a landing strip for aliens it’s true.”

Megan didn’t look up, his tone stung, prickling her skin.

She felt lost, the whole trip seemed pointless and demoralising. Tired, mentally battered by her pulsating forehead, she wanted to go home, but the next bus wasn’t due yet.

Sneaking a quick glance, Céad was busy restocking leaflet racks. Sliding the book back, she ambled towards the door. Nodding at him with a grimacing smile, she quickly ducked outside.

The old couple’s sandwich lunch was over, now packing their hamper away. A gusting wind swirled dust as she squinted at the stones. Were they even the same as her visions? It depended on the angle... and something was missing.

Checking her watch she sighed, then meandered towards the stones. The grassy bank was slippery, especially in flat slip-on shoes. Clutching a handful of coarse strands, she slithered and clawed to the top, continually fixated on the stones. Despite their distance and the fence blocking further progress, they began to tower as vision comparisons formed.

There was something timeless, silence echoing from a long-forgotten past, the wind dropping in unison. Megan could feel it, pulling her, crying out from deep inside. Goose bumps danced down her arms. Calmness came, serenity and peace flowing through her mind.



Some strange connection, the stones to her, was raising a gentle smile. Tensions rippled away, unaware, her relaxing grip loosened from the grass tuft... suddenly skidding and thumping down the steep bank, she lost consciousness halfway down.

They stood three abreast, the tall man left, the blue-eyed woman on Megan's right.

Each held a long staff, but she noticed his split with a 'V' shape holding a strange symbol. Dull brown, the symbol formed a curly three-sectioned spiral, the same shape inked onto his gripping hand. The woman linked Megan's arm and began crossing towards the complex's walling, passing rows of bushes and crop-carrying wooden carts.

Over the wall was a beautiful shimmering bay, opening out to the sea. To her left the distant land, only broken by a river snaking to the horizon. The view was breath taking, but the atmosphere clouded in tension. The woman gestured to bumps of land past the water, her eyes glazing over, calmly whispering, "The next tide is our time."

Then her voice muffled, as the vision faded away.

Megan lay heaped at the bottom of the bank. Dazed, she stared at the strip of flattened sloping grass. Nothing was broken, green knee-stains the only visible sign... but she burst into tears all the same.

Sobbing through congealing spittle and heaving chest beats she pleaded desperately, "Why are you tormenting me like this... please..."

Each successive vision was clearer, sometimes longer and more immersive. They captivated a world like no other; her world - that no one else knew - but she didn't *want* them anymore. Just her normal boring life back, at number three, Oaktree Lane. Dull and annoyingly perfect, but infinitely better than this continual stream of nightmares controlling her mind.

Hauling herself up, half-heartedly wiping her jeans, odd glances flicked across at the stones. The tears had gone but bubbled under the surface, ready to flood through at the slightest provocation. Why had she come to this wretched place?

The whole journey home was tear-stained, staring blankly through smeary-grey windows of public transport. At one point she positioned her forehead's good side on the narrow metal window frame, pressing hard, just to feel the pain. Through gritted teeth she pressed, deeper, enjoying the anger that came. Desperate to escape the stinking carriage, with its pathetic people and annoying mobile phones.

Eventually home, huddled on her bed drinking juice, she expected relief but felt total dejection. Apparently Nan was fine, which Megan had disseminated from her mother's tedious spiel on her return... seeming unaware of Megan's absence. The Smithson's imminent arrival was such a wondrous event that anything, and everyone, came a distinct second. Blaming a hot bath for her reddened tear-stained face suited perfectly, since Mother didn't need a problem 'today of all days'.

Lying back, tired and slightly calmer, Megan mulled over the last few days. Remembering her thoughts felt strange, initially when recounting the accident to C  ad. Recent memories seemed distant, the specific details blurred, as though side-lined somehow. Yes, she definitely felt weird... since that van.

Increasingly anxious, grinding her hands tightly together. Could it be that disease old people get, when they forget who they are? Sleepily, her eyes flickered shut, mumbling through a semi-conscious state, "Megan White. I am Megan White, I am Meg ..."

The water in the bay had dissipated, the sea sucking it back like a devouring monster. The memory slowly formed, its detail trickling in from Megan's mind.

Such a radical landscape change from the previous vision felt confusing. The tidal exit miraculously raising an island from its depths, or so it appeared. Tiny figures were moving on the distant dry land, like ants clothed in bright reds and silvery grey. Gradually more appeared, until the far-shore became a writhing mass of tunics.

Beside her stood the man and blue-eyed woman, with a throng of others spread along the wall. Each one deathly still, eyes fixed across the mud flats. The air clung, heavy with salt, clammy and eerily silent.

This vision's clarity was clearer... closer. Like a spool of old film enhanced to glorious high definition. It struck her then... it felt important. Vital that she experienced it perfectly, remembering every detail.

"Summon the Cran to the walls, Fendalla," the man instructed the blue-eyed woman.

Fendalla swung her staff sideways, those piercing eyes glinting the rising sunlight, while screaming orders to black-robed figures amongst the gathered crowd.

As the Cran approached, their smell wafted before them... a rank odour of rotting seaweed. Torn and tattered black robes hung from skeletal frames like rags. Their movement flowed, footfalls hidden by dank mist swelling round their feet. The stench became overpowering as they formed into a huddle, and then poured down past the walling onto grassed ridges below.

Positioning behind small trees, presumably to conceal their presence, the Cran snapped leafless sticks and jagged thorns. Leaving them hanging, split angled offshoots in a peculiar kind of ritual.

The memory jolted, beginning to fade, as Fendalla's eyebrows raised to the man, reminding him softly "The knowledge is safe, this land holds nothing more to The Oak. Cudert... keep beside me when we pass."

Megan woke with a start, heart pounding in panic and confusion. That middle land between sleep-induced memories and the realities of her room.

Bitterly cold, eyes wide, she fought for breath. Severely rocked, the vision's clarity overflowing her mind. Grinding fingers into a pillow, clenching every fibre, she grabbed for fist loads of security. Minutes passed, she just laid, petrified of... herself. Gradually the bedroom fully returned, images faded away and tensions subsided.

Faint muffled conversations from her mother and those beloved Smithson's pulsed through the floor below. Like a thumping speaker from a neighbour's party, an inaudible tune, but its constant beat annoyingly present.

Propped against the headboard, her breathing gently easing, she thought about the vision. What the hell was her mind doing now? Fendalla was the blue-eyed woman, Cudert was the man, but what was The Oak? Concentrating hard, replaying every second before the details faded away, fully aware of morning's sapping power over dreams. The names were clear, even those Cran women... with that awful smell.

While changing her jeans, the droning downstairs reached a peak. Her mother's distinctive laugh, a forced whinny clearly aimed to impress, over some wonderfully funny anecdote, Megan was sure.

Easing ajar her bedroom door their conversation instantly burst to life, "Oh yes Margery, of course my Megan will take herself off to one of the top universities in

September... probably a doctor or something befitting, I'm sure." Megan pictured her mother, flamboyantly waving a napkin in gay abandon.

Gently closing the door their voices immediately muted... edging it open again, they returned. She played this little audio game repeatedly, giggling when the meanings changed with careful door positioning. Eventually succeeding to manipulate her mother declaring "She simply... loved being... run over". Scowling in realisation, Mother was discussing *her* accident with the Smithson's, angering her intensely. As if it wasn't embarrassing enough! Stomping down stairs, determined to interrupt their conversation; what right did her mother have in publicly discussing her business?

"Ah, Megan, how are you?" Mrs Smithson barely looked up, with little interest in Megan's answer, her attention centred on the last slice of Battenberg. Megan noticed it, looking forlorn on the hideous imitation silver, two-tier 'for important guests' plate her mother treasured. 'Genuine Silver' she'd pointed at the scratching underneath the day she brought it home, not an actual hallmark of course, but that didn't matter.

"I'm okay... thanks" Megan curled a lip, slipping past her inquisitors and heading for the kitchen.

"Would you like a piece of cake Megan darling?" Her mother called.

Pausing in the doorway Megan eyed Mrs Smithson, then smiled politely, "Yes... thank you, that would be nice." The sickly cake flopped repulsively, but her satisfaction tasted sweet, crushing the end into her mouth. Then heading for the back door, she tossed its remains in the bin.

Megan didn't do 'shopping around town' like other girls at school, she didn't fit in with that type. Sometimes she wished things were different, but they just annoyed her and clearly the feeling was mutual. Never exactly bullying... although they certainly didn't make school life a pleasant experience. So deciding to nip into town today was unusually out of character, but she had a reason.

Crossing the main high street, overly wary of vehicles, she headed for the library. An ominous Dickensian looking structure with a huge arched entrance and conflictingly modern glass doors recessed in the stone. Apprehensive at the entrance, fully expecting smelly mothballs and decrepit book odours, she squeezed through the door. Surprisingly, not only did it smell fairly neutral, there were actually young people too.

Signs leading to the history section did uncover a fustier collection. Binders split and worn, page edges poking through cracked leather. Although others were clearly modern, glossy bright covers with colourful photographs and 'sales pitch' wording. Thumbing along the shelves, with no preconceived idea, just hopeful for information on these visions.

Most covered people or periods... *The Napoleonic Wars* stood alongside *Churchill – Our Greatest Leader*. Nothing particularly helpful, unless you liked dull and boring, she sighed. Then one book caught her eye *The Mystique of Britain's Ancient Stones*, but tucked tight upon the highest shelf and impossible to reach. Glancing round for help, she spotted a step-stool in the main aisle.

'Staff Use Only', the sign read, but without a soul in sight. Furtively scanning the lane, then poking her foot at the stool, she shrugged, wheeling it back to the shelves. Stepping up and reaching on tiptoe her fingertips eased at the book. Tipping outwards, a symbol appeared on the front... her heart raced in excitement. The same swirling pattern on Cudert's staff and hand from the visions.

Yanking the book frantically her stool wobbled and shook. Its wheels twisted suddenly, spinning away, then scooting down the aisle. Clawing for handholds, the book flipping away, she slid down the historical shelving into an unconscious heap.

Fendalla turned to directly face her then gently smiled. Full of calm and peace yet echoing something deeper; Megan wasn't certain, but it felt like acceptance.

As the vision clarified Cudert came into view... then the Cran, followed by all the farm folk. Continuing exactly from the memory in her room.

Moving forwards they stood behind the Cran. Their wafting stench overpowering while screaming and cursing like banshees, raking the sky with staffs. Long, screeching, petrifying wails that could be meaningful words, but nothing Megan understood.

Horried, trapped in this memory terrorising her mind, she trembled at the Cran women. They held her though, captivating attention, like horror films viewed between spread fingers... frightening to watch, but desperate to know, despite yourself.

Tiny beads of light began flickering across the bay, glinting reflections highlighted by the sun. The previous miniature red and grey marks buried in the opposite shore were now closer and clearly shiny silver, casting bright flecks across the shimmering mud flats before them.

Soldiers partly clad in metal, shields, spears... strong and menacing. Thousands of them, a continuous line, marching like some huge chess set, ready to play. Megan felt the sweat droplets snaking down her spine, chilling each vertebra they bumped. This army's purpose was apparent, to kill these simple people in their cloth rags, only equipped with sticks and farm implements. What on earth had they done to deserve this?

She glanced across at the farmers, just gatherers and plant pickers, but now defenders to the end it seemed. In the distance, over the wall, faint sounds began to flow. Metallic clanking, muffled voices; her eyes filled with the oncoming terror these people faced.

The Cran continued breaking thin branches on sapling trees around them, slight snaps and cracks; a sharpness in the air. Then silence. The breeze failed in an instant, as though nature herself held a breath... the salty taste on Megan's lips dried to crumbling crystals.

A drubbing shook the ground, a thumping rhythmic march. Soldiers pounding, climbing the incline to firmer ground. Their huge shields a regiment of colour, javelins glinting in the sun. With each step the crescendo rose, dust jerking around her feet from a thousand thundering footfalls... Megan tried to break away.

Fendalla clutched her arm, smiling that smile, a deep serene calm that held her firm. An unspoken message that Megan barely understood, but it flowed through her, from a time so distant she could hardly sense its place... but sense it she did.

Then suddenly they stopped.

No more birds flitted by, no gentle coastal wisps of sound. Megan half expected a sinister voice, drawling out 'Check mate'.

The Cran, in unison, turned for instruction. Cudert raised his staff, turning its shaft slowly, the swirled metal end glowing high above their heads. The Cran's snapped twigs erupted into flames, firing a huge inferno forward. The intense heat seared grasses black, wafting plumes of acrid-smelling smoke, partly from scorching ground but mostly the burning flesh of soldiers roasting alive in their shiny metal crucibles. Megan shuddered, horrified, but fixated by the scene. A few stumbled for the water's edge but collapsed to their knees before making any distance.

Frantically shaking staffs the Cran shrieked incantations at the shielded army, but the men didn't move. Just a few rows had fallen, still burning, licks of flame dancing from armour holes. One blackened torso jerkily crawled aimlessly, screaming for help. These pawns held little value though, and no help came.

Cudert slashed the air, jolting Megan sideways, as the earth split apart and tree roots burst forth. Twisting towards the army like slithering snakes, tangling amongst the dead and dying, snarling over bodies. Finding the front ranks, they rose up, pausing like cobras, then struck. Kicking and writhing soldiers shrieked in agony as the roots tore them apart like rag dolls. Maybe another thirty, or perhaps forty, were dead or dying, but still the hundreds stood, unmoved.

Seemingly spent the Cran moved behind, hurling incantations as they went but with no further effect. A shout from the opposite ranks heralded the opponent's turn in this real-life game of chess. Shuffling forwards, shields protecting, their long javelins protruding from either side. Megan's arm tugged, making her jump. A young woman smiled apologetically, beckoning she move back. How farmers armed with sticks and gardening implements offered any protection wasn't apparent, but she hurriedly followed.

A cold realisation dawned on Megan, suddenly aware she saw these events from her own perspective... as if she was actually there. Not some weird distant dream, conjured up randomly, but more like a memory... *her* memory. She hadn't experienced this before though, damn certain she would remember! Yet... it was in her mind.

Mentally blurred from the scene; the first farmers fell, their screams faint echoes from the edge of her thoughts. A deep panic and disturbing confusion overtook her. She wanted out... now. Desperately trying to wake, to close this self-inflicted torture, but she didn't know how, as deafening screams held her mind within the vision.

People crumpled at her feet, horrifying faces of torment and pain. The young woman who moved her to safety shuddered beside her, then slumped to the ground, blood gushing down her clothes and feet. Scared witless, Megan screamed, pleading for an end. To close this window and never suffer these people again, but she was powerless against her own mind and the relentless goal to force its contents upon her.

The soldiers stomped forward, a rhythmic pulse, never changing momentum. A spear launched between a mass of shields, passing by some farmers. They saw it coming, but those behind were not so fortunate. The point as long as her arm, its metal sides gleaming, slipped into a man's chest. Like a slow-motion replay, without noise or knock back. It just glided into him, like a knife through butter.

She stared open-mouthed and aghast as the spear exited his back lifting him high into the air. He shook violently, dangling on the spear, frantically grabbing the shaft with both hands attempting to pull it out, as though he would be fine. Then he twitched, slumping forwards... still.

The farmers smashed their sticks, scythes and tools down on the brightly coloured shields; vast numbers fell in moments. No match for well-armed and highly trained fighting troops. Cudert and Fendalla were powerless to stop the slaughter until finally they stood alone, amongst a mass of dead or dying.

Fendalla pulled Megan close beside Cudert, she seemed strangely relieved. Her blue eyes scanned both of them, then whispered directly to her.

"Our knowledge is safe, we can leave to return as Farsight has seen, but you Elva must flee. Your knowledge has not yet passed on. Take the children and go to the grove".

With that, Fendalla grabbed Cudert's arm, as bright light blinded Megan completely.

Stumbling around, sounds of metal on bone rang out and bodies thumped to the ground. Screaming in fright a hand grasped her wrist. Pulling and dragging, tripping over legs and discarded weapons. Pushing a shield away from her ankle the blindness began to fade, a small elven-faced man reached for her, anxious they should hurry.

Dazed, she clambered to her feet, glancing back. There, amongst the fallen bodies, stood a strange woman. Staff in one hand, frenziedly turning the dead, searching for someone. Then Megan glimpsed her face, a chilling rush shot through her soul. Those horrific decrepit features, from the petrifying vision in hospital... it was *her*. Glaring eyes of endless black, clumps of matted rope-like hair, flailing around as she rifled through dead faces.

Spun around by the man yanking her sleeve, they headed towards a clump of trees and watery bog. Two children were running with them, a girl and thin gangly boy. Probably this man's, Megan reasoned. They looked similar ages, despite the height difference. Rushing through the trees, Megan caught a flash of the girl's eyes; piercing bright blue in the sunlight.

Finally reaching the black murky bog edge, ignoring its heavy dank smell, they quickly waded out. Bursting through the opposite tree line, without pausing, they reached dense forest. The sudden darkness with its damp natural smell slowly calmed the intensity from those horrific scenes.

Slumped against a tree, squatting on the mossy floor, her breathing recovered. Tiny flecks of light speckled the ground as she stared up to the canopy. It seemed to envelope with safety... the pattern of leaves blurred, lights spiralling, as the vision gradually lifted away.

"Megan... Megan can you hear me? Megan?"

The voice boomed, echoing through Megan's skull, still barely conscious. Her eyes peeled open, filled with blurry features only inches away. Overwrought by the vision, frightened and confused, she lashed out in panic. Clawing the shapes, screaming with fear... that gnarled face, searching those bodies.

"Hey... hey now, Megan... calm down. It's me." Philippa held her, grappling past the flailing arms to soothe and comfort.

Megan gasped, fighting for breath, wide eyed and heaving every lung-full. Slowly realising... the panting calming; Philippa eased her restraining pressure with a smile. Megan glanced round; But...the hospital... how was she here? Then relief came, she'd escaped and they'd gone. That petrifying horror, those people, the dead. Bursting into tears, throwing herself at Philippa, she clung on. Sobbing uncontrollably wrapped within her arms.

"Hey it's okay... no need for tears Megan. It's me, Philippa, the doctor... remember?" Philippa pulled free, holding Megan's arms, with their faces almost touching. Megan could see right inside Philippa, feeling her there. The worry, concern shining back from her eyes, empathetically drawn to soothe and allay the anxieties within. Although overriding confusion still filled Megan's mind.

"Why... why am I back here?" She mumbled, forlorn and lost.

"You fell again Megan, in the library... don't you remember?" Philippa scanned Megan's pupils searching for any response.

Desperately concentrating, Megan tried to visualise a library; the Cran smell, burning her nostrils. Screams of agony, the young farmer woman pouring blood. Heaped bodies, writhing in death. Then that woman... her face. Staring back into Philippa's eyes, she slowly shook her head. Then the sobbing came again, deep gulping howls of utter anguish.

Philippa held her tightly, while gesturing to a nurse.

Frustrated by inadequacies and sickened with worry, Philippa instinctively reacted through clinical training... but it didn't feel enough. According to the library staff, who'd called the ambulance, Megan had a minor fall. So why was she this distressed? With all those years of study, covering technical treatments for painful conditions, but not how to comfort a distraught young girl bawling her heart out.

Professionally aware that Megan's mental state was wrong, something deep inside inexplicably took control. Patting Megan's hand, then lifting her tear-soaked chin "I may be a doctor Megan, wearing this white coat, but I can listen... and be a friend".

As the words left her mouth, she realised their unprofessionalism. The disapproving nurse's glare, returning with the sedatives, made that clear; but Philippa was beyond caring. Yet, in some strange way, she'd finally found something worth caring about. Staring quizzically at Megan, past the tear-stained patches of innocence, the girl certainly had a mysterious hold on her.

Megan was shattered.

Forcing tablets past her flaming throat the cold water soothing the soreness, with sticky tear-stained facial trails like a snail had run rampant. Relaxing slowly, the tablets taking hold, she glanced down at her numbing fingers... the ones Philippa still held.

"I've been seeing things," Megan blurted, her voice breaking slightly. It sounded stupid when spoken loud, with no idea why she said it.

"What kind of things?" Philippa tensed, sliding her hand back and stiffening upright.

With surprising growing relief, Megan explained all the visions in great detail. How they started so gently, almost serene, just simple insights into life long ago. She included names; Fendalla, Cudert, and The Oak. Even how, in the last one, they'd called her Elva. Remembering that detail, with Fendalla's words rippling through her mind, brought a warming smile.

Philippa listened without interrupting, attentive to every word. Until Megan mentioned that name, "So in these visions you're not Megan then? You're someone else called Elva?"

Megan was struggling, her eyes drooping low, but single-mindedly driven to finish. Barely registering Philippa or her questions, only desperate to free her mind. Reflecting how each vision caused blackouts, externally shutting down, despite full awareness at times of the world outside her thoughts. Finally recalling the horror; deaths, the bloody screams and that woman searching through bodies. Her eyes glistened, the fear returning and abruptly ending her verbal release.

Philippa squeezed her hand tightly with a smile, then quickly turned away.

Staring through the ward window at rain lashing down, Philippa's stomach churned. Due for a break hours ago, her body finally took notice... but that wasn't the reason really. Countless medical grounds dictated Megan's hospitalisation. These visions could well indicate a serious condition resulting from the accident. Glancing back at her, laying on the bed, she struggled over niggling emotions. Such a frightened girl, suffering terrible ordeals... but she had a duty to do. Overriding her heart, in Megan's best interest, she must remain professional.

"We'll need to keep you here for a day or two, just for tests... you understand?" Then guilt reared up, a sense of letting Megan down. Not helped by a tear slowly forming in Megan's left eye, stalling on the edge of her lashes, preparing for its perilous leap.

Staring in pity, their gaze linked... a strange feeling overcame Philippa. Exposed, vulnerable, as though Megan could see right inside her. Searching and probing, almost controlling, her mind pushing deep within. An unnerving intimate sensation, tingling the hairs on her neck. Twisting away suddenly Philippa glanced down, breaking the pressurised feeling instantly.

“Tell you what... how about we visit these stones, once the tests are done. You can show me then, I’m sure that will put it into perspective.” Philippa swung round anxiously, checking the nurse’s location.

Flustered with worry, why did she say that... to a girl she barely knew? A patient as well! Professionally *so* out of order, this could get her struck off... but bizarrely she didn’t care, not anymore. Megan needed someone, clearly with few other options.

Philippa smiled at Megan’s surprised expression. She was so young... there was a time, many years ago, when she needed someone too. A few years older than Megan, one of the many drunken parties resulted in her pregnancy.

Glazing over, watching hazy streams of rain trickling down the glass, she remembered him. His smell, in that disabled toilet, mixed with clinical disinfectants. One stupid moment that still haunted now. A colleague arranged the abortion, no one found out... not even her mother. If only they had. Alone with constant breakdowns, bursting into tears, apparently irrational. They all thought it was stress and pressuring studies. Never understanding that loss or grief she’d suffered.

Glancing back at Megan, she sighed... perhaps they both needed someone.

The two days of hospital tests were rank. Megan was sick of being poked, prodded, scanned and monitored; but now finally allowed to go home. The results concluded the need for rest and recuperation although nothing was physically wrong.

Megan sighed, angrily stuffing clothes in her bag. Apparently her mother was busy, something important had cropped up, and ‘did she mind hopping on a bus?’

Pausing, her mood lifting, Megan remembered Philippa’s offer... she was off on Tuesdays and *definitely* don’t take a bus. She’d visited regularly, showing genuine care, which felt nice to Megan but very unfamiliar. Grabbing her bag she left, they’d agreed to meet outside, confusingly to Megan.

At Megan’s house Philippa felt obliged to slip off her shoes, its perfect neat and tidiness issued out that rule. It mirrored the street with everything in rows, in its rightful place, precisely kept and spotless. Picturing her own rented flat with embarrassment; the ‘burgled’ look was all the rage now, she smirked.

Their silent journey from the hospital had felt awkward, making Megan’s coffee invitation somewhat surprising, but perhaps she wanted to talk after all? These visions were definitely odd, so explicit and detailed, no wonder they upset and confused her. Neurology was a complex area she barely understood, but this was most likely a short-term issue anyway, she reasoned.

“Do... do you think I’m mad?” Megan stuttered, passing Philippa’s coffee. A dainty little cup and saucer with kittens prancing round the handle. Philippa looked up whimsically as Megan shrugged with embarrassment, then plonked down on the sofa.

“No, of course not...” Philippa paused thoughtfully, “...medically the word ‘mad’ doesn’t exist. There are all sorts of mind-related illnesses, but I don’t think you have one of those. The accident bump has probably shaken your head up. It will all settle down in a few



days, I'm sure. Have you had any visions since the library?" Megan shook her head, realising she hadn't, but had hardly moved during two days of sedation.

"Anyway..." Philippa added, swiftly changing the topic with a smile, "... we need to visit these stones of yours don't we? That might resolve it all. How about tomorrow morning? I have some holiday due and... well, I could do with a break from work."

Shrugging again, Megan forced a smile. Mentioning the stones, and returning there, turned her skin cold. Facing any fear directly was nerve-racking, like holding tarantulas to become accustomed. Shivering at that notion, actually the stones seemed preferential.

"Right, well I'd better be off then, see you in the morning, okay?" Philippa slid her cup onto the table, grinning. "Oh, and rest please" comically frowning from the doorway. Megan nodded, sighing theatrically in return.

Megan had slept well, the hospital prescription certainly helpful.

A bright and cheerful morning, reflecting her mood, unlike yesterday's endless rain. Even her head felt better, probably tablet-numbed, although returning to those stones was troubling. This time with a friend though, which felt reassuring. Dragging a brush through her hair, she paused, laughing at the mirror. *A Friend?* Philippa was a doctor from hospital, not a friend... whatever *they* felt like, she pondered.

Just having something nice to look forward to, that was exciting for a change. Buttoning her blouse, Megan reflected that Philippa was probably right. This would all feel stupid once they got there, granting freedom from these haunting visions. A car horn blasted, sending Megan rushing downstairs to the door.

Céad was unlocking the Visitor Centre entrance when their car rolled onto the gravel.

As they climbed out, he instantly recognised Megan; not many girls collapsed in his shop then belittled historical sites. His family carried deep-rooted traditions, some clearly farfetched fantasy in Céad's view, like beliefs in ancient nature worshipping. Even so, he didn't like them disrespected. He smiled; they hated it when he said 'nature worshipping'. Flipping the door sign to 'Open', he turned to greet the arrivals.

"You're back then I see, how are you now?" Céad smiled, but his politeness seemed overly considered.

Megan nodded, equally politely "Fine thank you." If 'fine' meant gut-wrenchingly petrified about seeing some rocks in a field. Following him inside brought previous awkwardness back too, and something about Céad didn't really help.

Sensing Megan's discomfort Philippa cut in, "You must be Céad, nice to meet you. Megan told me about her visit, when she felt unwell." Philippa proffered her hand but Céad was busy lowering the worktop, partitioning them further and increasing the barrier of pleasantries. Undeterred Philippa added, "I brought her this time so the journey wasn't as gruelling. I don't know if she explained but she'd really like to see the stones closer... if that's possible?"

Céad looked up sharply, scanning them both. Rules stated the public were 'prohibited beyond the fence', apart from certain occasions. He didn't need another fainting episode though, glancing at Megan's head. This other woman seemed nice enough... actually quite attractive. Catching her stare, he smiled, unwittingly exploring her features.

"Sorry... I missed the name" Céad beamed, his tone now light and airy.

"Philippa. I'm Megan's... friend", narrowly avoiding the truth.

"It's early, no one's about, but please... don't touch anything. I'll take you to see them." Céad smiled with a new warmth for Philippa.

Approaching the stones Megan hung back apprehensively, picking her way through grass tufts, eventually reaching the tallest pillar then staring up its full height. Nervously expecting visions flooding through her mind, but they didn't, leaving her strangely disappointed and embarrassed. She walked alongside Philippa, who must be expectant, having driven all this way. Was this all in her mind, these nightmarish dreams, implanted by a van's bumper?

The stones were certainly odd, a weird and pointless construction it seemed to Megan. Huge similar rocks, but each one uniquely shaped, some tall and pointed, others shorter and squat. Reasoning that whoever built the circle just used what was lying around.

Wandering to the centre, without thinking, she innocently turned to Céad, "Where's the big one in the middle gone?"

Céad spun round quickly, his colour drained, wide eyed, "Sorry... what did you say?" Obviously knowing what she'd said, just shocked by the comment.

Megan fidgeted nervously, her neckline damp with sweat. "I... err, well... I just wondered where the big flat one had gone from the middle... is something wrong?"

Céad strode across the circle to the largest most domineering stone, running his fingers down its surface thoughtfully. "Where exactly did you learn about this middle one?" His tone strangely threatening, laced with accusation.

Philippa interjected sensing the atmosphere, and instinctively protecting Megan. "Oh I was telling her about this place during our drive over actually..." sounding weak and fabricated, "... my parents bought me here as a girl. Of course it was years ago now..." she giggled loudly, "... but I can just remember it. Did they take it away for some reason?"

Céad turned abruptly towards the information centre, announcing over his shoulder "There are visitors arriving now, you need to leave please."

An elderly couple entered the shop as Megan followed Philippa to the exit. Céad held the door wide open, like a farmer driving trespassers from his land. "There hasn't been a central stone of sacrifice for nearly 3000 years... so I doubt very much you saw one as a child." His tone icy cold and perfectly clear, letting the door slam behind them.

Philippa hurriedly started the car, causing streams of dancing gravel as they sped away.

"Well..." she exclaimed, crunching into second gear, "... what a rude man. How was I to know about that stupid stone, there was no need to speak to us like tha..." Megan interrupted, blurting out "PLEASE!" Tears streaming down her face while visibly shaking.

"Megan, what on earth is the matter?" Philippa slammed on the brakes, jerking to the roadside.

"Don't you see?" Megan screamed, smacking both hands on her thighs. "The visions I've had, those people... all of the places. They *are* from 3000 years ago... they actually took place for God's sake!" Deeper sobs came, wiping dribble from her chin "For me to question that one stone was missing... I actually *do* know... not dreams or imagination."

Megan turned away, staring through the window, nail chewing and twitching with torment. She didn't speak, the tears just trickling silently down.

Philippa realised, replaying Megan's outburst, if that stone hadn't existed for 3000 years... how could Megan possibly know that? Fixated on Megan she fought for words, but nothing seemed to come. A van approached in the rear-view mirror, slipping the car into gear she slowly pulled away.

They barely spoke for the rest of the journey; Megan trapped in confusion while Philippa mentally stumbled for any logic. As they pulled up outside Megan's house the atmosphere felt strained. Philippa was worried, unsure what to do, but couldn't leave things like this. The original plan, enabling Megan to put this behind her, had failed miserably. In fact, things were decidedly worse. Kicking off her shoes Philippa trudged indoors, deep in contemplation.

"Look... I'm sure it's something obvious. You probably saw a photo, in a book... or perhaps a film or something." Philippa rationalised cheerily, as Megan disappeared into the kitchen for coffees. "So, when's your mother due back then?" Philippa called out, anxious to avoid her return. "Megan?"

Megan didn't reply though. Physically she laid in the next room... but mentally existed in a different place altogether.

The path was long, a winding climb up the sloping grassy hill.

To the side lay a straight line of stones and a weaving track led behind. She turned, watching men digging and loading soil onto carts. In the distance stood a huge flat-topped hill with a constant procession of workers adding to its build.

This vision felt earlier, a light airy memory, unlike the frightening recent events.

Fendalla called out, with Cudert approaching behind. "Elva... come on, they're nearly finished, we'll miss it." Beckoning excitedly Fendalla laughed, gesturing she should run.

The three of them ran, occasionally stumbling over soil cart spoils, until reaching a deep trough. A huge gully, its side's three men in height, like an empty moat arcing round a vast circle. "It's almost complete... all those summers, and now it's done" Fendalla beamed with pride.

They followed the edge, walking round the complete circumference. Halfway around, Cudert feigned to push Fendalla in, leaving her teetering on the lip. "Cudert! That's not funny..." Although Cudert found it very amusing, until her slap stopped his giggling. The sun beat down, a light breeze wafting contentment as they continued ambling along.

Megan's breath faltered, noticing Fendalla's stomach and the pronounced bump through her tunic. Glancing up, her eyes... vibrant electric blue, flagged the memory of the children before. A tinge of sorrow welled up, knowing their fate and the future they faced; pushing that thought away she concentrated back on this vision.

Eventually reaching an undug section, forming a pathway inside, they entered a vast array of stones. The enclosure so big its far side distantly blurred, with rocks the size of roundhouses. "Incredible isn't it?" Fendalla grinned, turning to Elva, then spinning round to Cudert. "Yes... yes it is. Let's see how things are going" Cudert gestured further ahead.

A crowd of men heaved on vine-ropes strung over tree trunk frames. Dozens of stripped poles lay in lines, rolling pins for positioning stones. Under the frame hung a new stone, small in comparative terms. Unusually coloured, appearing unnatural with its two-toned black and white faces.

Cudert stepped closer, noticing her amazement at the work. "Elva, this is a stone of the Ecen, the newest tribe to join the Order... they come from the east. Each stone here represents a tribal group, honouring nature and allowing the Order to grow. Their leaders' souls can rest within the circle now; this evening we host a sacrificial blessing feast at the sacred hill."

Megan felt warmed, they called her 'Elva' again. Clearly, in this subconscious world, she *was* Elva and that was fine... actually more than fine, it felt right.

As the beautifully coloured stone toppled into place the Ecen people cheered with delight, finally joining the Order. Cudert addressed them authoritatively as they calmed.

"Welcome to the Order of Ancient Knowledge, people of the Ecen." His hands extended the pleasure plain to see. "This stone represents your place with all the tribes, sharing beliefs and securing trade routes throughout the southern lands. As your leaders pass, their souls will rest with nature here... until recalled again. Today is a time of celebration at the great hill, a feast for all!"

Megan realised some level of understanding.

These ancient people created this circle from stones across its regions. Each one represented a tribe, a burial point for leaders and entitlement to shared trade routes. Cudert, Fendalla... and even Elva, held respect within this Order. Leaders of sorts, apparently some kind of priests.

How she was part of this and witnessing these events was unclear. Although increasingly aware, her conscious mind was piecing together these subconscious visions, making sense of the absurdity within her.

Altering focus with her mental processing, distracting from the vision, almost closed it entirely. A semiconscious state, like clinging to a dream as it slipped away, causing this vision to jump and falter to later in the day.

Crowds of people milled around in the failing light of evening.

Strange stringed instruments pinging tunes around the fire, dancers prancing through smoke with flames licking the sky. Crackling timbers relenting to the heat, backing notes to laughter and singing through the warmth of celebration.

A ritually slaughtered young ram, it's bleating sickening amongst the cheers. Ravenously eating with pungent drink flowing, the festivities were harsh in their realities. Fendalla and Cudert smiled though, clearly pleased another tribe was joining the Order.

Elva sat beside them. Initially Megan's insight felt odd, a distant outside viewer, but an equal participant too. From Elva's perspective, she *was* a part of their world, a respected priest of this Order... alongside Cudert and Fendalla. Actually holding a position with real value to others felt good and purposeful. That thought process shook Megan momentarily... this felt real.

Fendalla gripped Elva's hand, eyes glinting from the fire light, "The more we grow, the safer our knowledge becomes Elva." She beamed, turning to laugh at children swirling flaming sticks in the air. The rapidly twisting stick embers spiralled in the sky, blurring into stars. Darkness formed across them, lifting Megan's mind... as the vision wisped away.

Megan's trousers were soaked, lying in the coffee pool. Her sleeve ripped too, somehow caught against a kitchen unit. Philippa helped her stand.

"Megan we have to sort this out, you could get seriously hurt. What is happening to you?" Straining to pull her up.

Megan grinned, despite confusion and embarrassment, "I saw them again... only this time much earlier. They're happy and really content..." Her excitement overflowing while rapidly recalling the whole vision as Philippa cleaned the floor. She kept babbling enthusiastically watching Philippa brewing fresh coffee, covering every detail and reliving every moment.

Philippa zoned out as Megan droned on, unable to override her deep concerns. Megan was a lovely girl, clearly troubled and not exactly from a close family unit. Despite that, she was... well, what Philippa had been many years ago. Perhaps that connection caused this bond she felt, although uncertainty muddled her thoughts.

These visions though were clearly abnormal - especially losing conscious control while experiencing them. Putting the actual vision content aside, there should still remain awareness, all the medical training told her that. Glancing at Megan enthusing about these people, it occurred to Philippa... these sounded like memories. Deep, dark snippets extracted from a long distant past... but how was that possible? No, this couldn't go on, she had to do something. Then an idea occurred.

"Megan, I want to ask a friend of mine to help you... would you mind? Only, she is qualified in this area and I don't have the knowledge." Philippa frowned in puzzlement as Megan glazed over.

"The knowledge is safe..." Megan whispered, hushed and barely audible.

Philippa began frantically searching through her mobile phone.

"She said we can go right over." Philippa snatched her handbag, grabbing Megan's arm with perspiring damp hands from heated intense worry.

Megan, confused by the hurried reactions, didn't understand. The knowledge was safe now. She knew it. She had seen it.



## Chapter 3

Jennifer Trilling was exactly as the name suggested, her shrill voice and over exuberance annoyed Megan immensely.

“Oh Pippy Pip, my darling... how long has it been? You look so well, goodness me... so how's life at the medical profession front end? You simply must tell me everything! Now where are my manners, this must be your... Megan... isn't it? Do come inside, both of you, let's rustle up some tea and cake. I bet you like cake don't you Megan?”

Megan reluctantly followed Philippa as Jennifer disappeared through to the kitchen. A mustiness tickled her nose, a mix of joss sticks and... Two slinky shapes rubbed her legs in unison, kneeling to coax the cats caused purring with delight.

Tea and the obligatory cake soon arrived; Megan feeling like an inductee at the local Women's Institute. Philippa and Jennifer demolished the cake while excitedly discussing their passing years, clearly fun events... throwing them into giggling fits. Bored and fidgety Megan's sighs passed by unnoticed, so she played with the cats while 'admiring' the 1970's décor. Then the atmosphere changed, their constant chatter stalling as Jennifer turned to Megan.

“So, Megan, how do you feel being here?”

The question was very direct and cold. Twisting uneasily on the sofa, Megan sought a response. Jennifer clearly expecting a deep meaningful answer of great magnitude with clever reflection on her situation.

“Fine” Megan mumbled, bent to the floor, tickling a cat wrapped around her ankles. Fully realising this reply didn't cut it as deep insightful answers go, she suspected it wouldn't end there.

Jennifer Trilling had known Philippa for... well, countless years. Best school friends, followed by college, then jointly into medical training. Reminiscing those years brought a smile, and here they were again, together. 'Pip', as she fondly called her, shared a timeless and mutually understood bond. So when she'd called, requesting help with this young girl, there was no hesitation.

The all-too-familiar teenage attitude was apparent the second Megan walked in the door. She'd seen it a thousand times before. An amusing challenge, another one ready for moulding. The only slight concern was this recent accident trauma, the issues might be physical, something she had to explore first.

“Philippa said you had a nasty accident Megan, receiving that bump in the process, what can you tell me about it?” Pausing between mouthfuls of carrot cake, while glancing at Megan's forehead, Jennifer directed her question.

“I don't really remember much about it... but since then I've had these weird vision memories” Megan was sick of talking about the accident... again. Surely she was here about the visions?

“Yes, Philippa mentioned those, but for the moment I want to understand if the vehicle caused serious harm.” Twisting things back, determined to get answers.

“I had loads of tests and scans... and no, nothing was broken. Well... not bones anyway.” How this was helping, defeated Megan. Glancing at Philippa only returned a weakened smile.

“Not bones, *anyway*? What else could have been broken, Megan? You mean skin, flesh, or something else... something deeper... Hmm?” Jennifer's eyebrows raised.

Jennifer's knowing smirk wasn't lost on Megan. She had leaned in, apparently targeting some indiscernible mistake, ready for the kill. Reaching down, Megan rubbed a cat's back as it arched into her hand.

"Yes...you're right..." Pausing to stroke the other cat momentarily, "... my iPhone was smashed to bits." She looked up, staring rigidly at Jennifer.

Philippa looked embarrassed as Jennifer glanced her way, but neither spoke, a continuous purring drone the only sound. Shuffling on her chair Jennifer eyed Megan carefully, before broaching the topic again.

"Let me start afresh, Megan. You're clearly, a very clever... intelligent... young lady." Each word considered and precise.

"I'm not trying to trick or belittle you in any way. I'm purely trying to, a) help you with something I believe you would like help with and, b) stand by an old friend..." Gesturing towards Philippa, she smiled briefly. "... and do everything I can with someone she cares about." Jennifer's tone instantly changing with Megan's expression at the word 'care'.

"That someone is you, Megan..." Jennifer watched Megan carefully, her body movements... every slight reaction guiding the words. "We both *care* about you, and want to help... but do you want that help?" Driving the 'care' word in again, teasing out physical responses, self-gratifying, as Megan reeled again with the notion that somebody cared.

Megan considered walking out now. Her throbbing lump, with sweat creeping from the base of her spine, turned this place extremely uncomfortable. The stupid needy cats kept pestering too, and this woman's interrogation was stifling. Like a prison warder, throttling against cell bars, choking her confession for some heinous undisclosed crime.

Glancing nervously at Philippa, Megan felt the obligation, and deep inside she needed help, she knew that. How this Jennifer woman claimed to care... all lies and nonsense, words were easy, her mother proved that. Although... With all the mixed feelings, Megan cried out within.

"Yes. I need help with these visions. Some are horrible, like nightmares. I don't know why they suddenly started." Megan's voice broke, coughing, then staring at the floor she struggled onwards.

"The truth is... well, I'm scared. The things I see, the places and people... they're real. Not some fantasy, and not just in my mind. I don't make them up you know." Staring pleadingly from Jennifer to Philippa, then back again. Blinking away her filling eyes, then focusing on the heavily engraved silver cake stand.

"They're actually alive... well they *were* alive. That's the thing... they existed 3000 years ago. With each new vision, they're becoming clearer and more detailed, as though my memory is improving. I'm a part of them not just a third-party viewer. Does that make any sense?" Megan bit back the tears. Actually expressing this, for the first time, was enlightening, but frightening too.

Jennifer glanced at Philippa, only slight, but saying so much.

It was easy to make assumptions about this girl's mental condition, perhaps so clear, no further discussion needed. Yet something troubled her. Mentally delving though years of training, knowledge from countless seminars, but no answers came. Philippa was staring now. Jennifer could feel it on her side - imploring for help. How could she refuse?

“Megan, I would like to understand these *visions*, by you walking me through one. Would you be happy to do that?” Jennifer smiled; her tone decidedly softer.

Megan didn't answer, she wasn't sure what Jennifer meant really. Fidgeting nervously, half grimacing at Philippa for moral support, she just nodded.

The clear option to Jennifer was hypnosis, particularly regression therapy. If Megan called up one of these imaginary 'past life' visions, she insisted were real, then it might help in some way. Although these things were utter nonsense of course - some form of mental escapism, rather than facing reality. It would humour the girl, and at least show willing to Philippa.

The tiredness surprised Megan, laying on the lime green sofa; Jennifer's idea to encourage relaxation. The lower half threadbare, torn into strips by the cats no doubt, but the arm was comfortable, helping Megan's eyes close. Jennifer droned monotonously, her words blurry and continuous, then asking to clear her mind. Megan felt calm and untroubled, then gradually she sank deeper and deeper.

The massive oak tree towered, craning her neck upwards, its highest tiny twigs just distant blurs. A plant twisted round its lower branches, with bunches of milky berries bursting out between deep green leaves.

Carefully cutting one large bunch down with a beautiful bronze curved sickle, she laid the soft berries onto a cloth. Gathering more, creating a bundle, as much as she could carry. Clutching it under an arm she headed for the settlement, until Fendalla stepped from a nearby hut.

“Elva! Oh I forgot you were out gathering for remedies.” Fendalla's eyes glinted with laughter, blue flashes in the sun, while grabbing handfuls of grass heads and tossing them into the breeze where they floated like butterflies searching for food.

“Your healing grows stronger with each day Elva, my understanding of future possibilities also develops... but I worry for Cudert. His mind battles with the complexity of stars and the world around us. He's the link between the sky above and the world below. Like branches are to roots within the great oak you gathered from, but his mind will not release control I'm afraid.”

Elva could sense Fendalla's concern but was hesitant to reply. She was right, Cudert was struggling, but had to find his own path, no matter the timeframe. They sat for a moment, resting the heavy bundle, then Fendalla stared thoughtfully.

“It's strange, each passing day you're growing inside. Becoming closer to who you can ultimately be... I sense your mind is opening Elva... even now.” Fendalla locked onto Elva, her eyes and mind searching deep within.

Megan reeled from the sensation. Fendalla's stare bore inside, even within the vision she felt her there. Probing, touching thoughts and feelings with wisps of pure self. Shuddering on the sofa, with groans of conscious turmoil, grappling against her subconscious state. Then Fendalla turned away from Elva, releasing Megan's emotions.

“Come Elva, let's help these people we're meant to protect.” Fendalla grinned, jumping from the warm flattened grass patch and striding towards the huts. Elva heaved the bundle up, hurrying behind.

Her eyes adjusted slowly from bright sunlit meadowland into a dark smoke-filled building. Someone coughed, a girl... plainly gaunt despite the covering cloth. Elva uncovered the berries, breaking a handful free from the sinuous stems into a bowl. Grinding to a thick



paste, then carefully adding drops of light blue liquid from a wooden vial around her waist. Between gentle sips the girl mumbled gratitude for the help.

Stepping outside, Fendalla smiled “Yes... I feel you are truly becoming who you really are Elva. The knowledge has passed to you, we need to find a suitable husband before the season ends.” Laughing loudly, she turned, greeting Cudert’s approach.

“It’s no good, I’ve spent the whole night studying patterns in the sky, but I don’t feel any connection. It’s been *so* many years and I’m no closer.... perhaps I cannot stand beside you when the time comes.” Cudert’s dejection and frustrations clearly apparent.

Elva gestured to answer, but a slight interrupting cough made them turn. The girl stood in the doorway, frail but faintly grinning.

Fendalla connected with Elva as their eyes met. An icy cold wave of emotion poured from Fendalla, burning deeply into Elva’s soul. A distressing sensation filled with angst and loss, as Fendalla’s head slowly shook. Elva turned, returning the girl’s smile as best she could.

A dull drone repeatedly pulled Megan’s mind, shaking her concentration. Repeating again, a voice, distant but rapidly coming closer. Then the image shattered, suddenly closing completely.

“What is your name in this time?” Jennifer’s tone demanded.

Megan was conscious of suddenly switching awareness. The vision still filling her thoughts, faces, the emotions, even its warm summer sun and sweet-smelling wild flowers. Now her concentration fixed on Jennifer’s words, firmly back on the lime green sofa.

“Megan of course...” she blurted out derisively.

She knew what Jennifer meant, though. Discussing Elva would be so easy... how carefree she felt, a world where friends existed, a purpose to life and most of all, feeling valued. This vision providing a deeper understanding with some level of control over her mind.

When remembering Elva’s life, she *was* Elva, but in the present day, she was of course, Megan. Although it didn’t feel quite that segregated, or as divided like two separate people... something she couldn’t quite pinpoint. Then it dawned on her... what Fendalla was saying; she *was* ‘becoming who she could be’. As if Fendalla knew she was experiencing this.

How was that remotely possible?

“That was a very detailed story, Megan... so where did you get it from?” Jennifer leaned forward; eyebrows raised.

Megan shuffled nervously up the sofa, realising she’d unwittingly narrated the whole vision during Jennifer’s hypnosis, who clearly expected an explanation. Even the cats were staring intently, positioned beside Jennifer’s feet, apparently awaiting feline enlightenment.

“I just remember it,” Megan stammered, quite honestly. “Can I get a drink of water please Philippa?” A random confusing request, considering she hated water.

Philippa avoided eye contact heading for the kitchen, with a simple returning nod at Megan’s thanks. The delaying tactics barely bought any time for events to sink in, they all sat watching, expecting. Lingering between sips, desperately seeking a suitable answer only increased the pressure.

“I don’t understand, what do you want me to say? It’s my memory... I *can* remember it!” She burst angrily, imploring them to stop.

Jennifer shrugged at Philippa, her obligations complete. They didn’t speak, there was no need... Megan knew their thoughts. The cats turned in unison, tails held high, rear-ends swaying dismissively. Jennifer sighed, then faced her, smiling sweetly.

“Megan, I’m sure you *think* it’s your memory, but logically my dear, how can it be? When you live now and that story happened, well... then? Anyway, you must be tired... let’s continue another time.” Jennifer finished quite decidedly, ending further discussion.

Megan rose slowly, slightly confused, but relieved. Mumbling ‘thanks’, then waiting for Philippa outside, knowing deep down there wouldn’t be ‘another time’.

The atmosphere was thick returning to Megan’s home, Philippa glanced across now and then, but found nothing to say. She wanted to help, provide solutions and alleviate fears, but simply couldn’t. If Jennifer struggled, with her knowledge, then she had no hope.

Once the car door closed, Philippa watched Megan ambling to her house. Holding the stare even after Megan went inside, pondering for a while. Would she ever see the troubled teenager again? It certainly didn’t feel like an ending. With a sigh, sliding the gear lever, she headed for home.

Megan lay in bed that night repeatedly replaying the day’s events.

Since the vision at Jennifer’s she felt warm inside, gaining insight and awareness... mostly from Fendalla, weirdly. Even admitting the cold facts, when under pressure, these were memories, her memories. She’d known that anyway, in truth, deep down. Today just pushed her over the brink.

They didn’t believe of course, how could they? Fendalla knew though. Realising that brought excitement, laced with trepidation. Who the hell was she... really?

Megan felt she’d moved forwards. Alongside that, a sense of loss, well no - something let go, cast adrift... not a loss as such, not exactly. Processing these thoughts, within a tired state, confused them even more.

Smiling, she turned over, pulling the duvet under her chin. Feeling the happiest she ever had with the person she was becoming... despite uncertainty with who that really was. Eventually sleep gently covered her mind, with rising thoughts from deep inside the subconscious.

“No... no Cudert. You must see the world as one complete living being, remember the ancestor’s words, ‘everything is one thing and one thing is everything.’” The old man’s frustrations apparent while correcting Cudert again.

Fendalla leaned towards Elva cupping a hand to whisper.

“Cudert asked a Glacadair elder for advice, they’re priest advisors, helpers and guides. They don’t have our knowledge but they help us learn, ensuring it’s passed on. They know about the three forms of knowledge we believe in. Your healing and my far sight is going well, but Cudert won’t let go. The stubborn control he holds on himself doesn’t let nature in... no-one learns until they’re prepared to.”

Their journey with the Glacadair to the western coastline had been arduous.

A unique settlement of people lived there, plotting and calculating lunar movements, sun alignments and earth rotations. Utilising stone arrangements with standing points for

reference, and the 'Priest of Unity' pillar. This reads passages of time, predicting when the sun, moon and earth joined as one. This caused the whole world to darken, with nature repeating its life cycle.

Despite this gruelling journey, Cudert had to learn, so the elders were explaining symbols and concentric shapes that read the phases.

"That's it!" The Glacadair elder shouted as Cudert used the long curve to align with the central pointer stone.

As the sun passed along the distant hills he positioned against the stones. A dull glow emanated from the granite surface when Cudert placed his hand. Gradually a swirling image appeared glowing under the rock, then formed on Cudert's hand. Not burning, but seemingly inked by an invisible artist, right in front of their eyes.

Cudert spun round with a beaming grin. "Fendalla did you see... did you see?" His excitement clear.

Fendalla smiled, whispering to Elva "Cudert has finally connected the sun and moon above, to the earth below. Now his senses can grow and become part of nature, like plants are part of life in the ground. Our time of learning will soon be complete, nearly twenty summers have passed since..."

"Priestess's Fendalla... Elva." The approaching Glacadair elder interrupted.

Nodding in turn, he gently smiled. His face bore signs of tiredness, highlighting his years, with thin elven features and gaunt hollowed cheeks.

"Priest Cudert has finally succeeded and bears the Natures Unity sign, although he still has much to learn. The Order of Ancient Knowledge will be safe once the wisdom passes when you have children. Today is a good day, we must celebrate!" Slapping Cudert's back the elder grinned, then realising his transgression, quickly pulled away.

Fendalla grabbed Elva's arm, laughing and dragging her towards Cudert.

"Does it hurt?" Fendalla frowned, apprehensively touching Cudert's hand.

"No, not at all... in fact it feels slightly warm." He smiled, fingertips stroking the design, clearly proud of his achievement.

At that moment a thin mist flowed from the boggy marsh nearby, swirling round Cudert's feet like a protective cloak. The two priestesses struggled to see Cudert through the thickening veil. Within seconds he was virtually invisible.

"Argh... what is this?" Jumping from the mist, Cudert screamed. As quickly as it had formed it faded away, then disappeared altogether.

"As I said... you still have much to learn", bellowed the Glacadair elder, laughing at Cudert's antics.

Elva and Fendalla's giggles were hard to restrain, especially as Cudert stood dumbfounded, staring at his hand then into the watery undergrowth. The Glacadair elder shook his head, returning to preparations, loudly rattling bowls together ready for their celebration feast.

The scene wafted momentarily, hanging in the air, and then drifted away like the watery bog mist as the memory suddenly ended.

"Megan... MEGAN, for the last time, can you get up now... PLEASE!" Her mother pleaded, pounding on the bedroom door for the umpteenth time.

"Alright... for God's sake." Megan's muffled moans struggled from the covers.

Eventually peering out, morning apparently here. Sighing with resignation, clearly Mother didn't want her to miss anything, despite what *she* wanted.

Slowly slipping clothes on just to spite her mother, Megan recalled the memory. It felt so warm and tender. Fun, loving and... well... real. She couldn't wait to go back, but smiled; it wasn't a place, as such. You couldn't catch a train to visit at will. In fact, there wasn't a physical location at all, purely memories existing in her mind... it was her.

Downstairs she perched on the kitchen worktop chewing toast. A pretty uncomfortable spot, but her perfect thinking place. Sneering at her mother's note... why all the panic to wake her when she'd gone out anyway? Very little her mother did made sense.

Cramming a third mouthful of toast in, the decision was made, she had to go back... tossing a crust in the bin just finalised it. Something about him felt strange, but Céad was her only hope; he knew all about this history stuff. She'd tell him everything, all the visions, and confusing feelings. What's the worst he can do... laugh in her face?

A train was the only option. She couldn't imagine seeing Philippa again, not after yesterday. Grabbing a bag then slamming the door behind her, she paused briefly on the step. Perhaps leave a note? But the guilt pang passed instantly... besides, there was nothing to say.

Megan hopped off the bus, began passing the stones, and then cursed. Her mother's dawn awakening meant she was early; the Information Centre was still closed.

Pressing her nose against the damp glass she mentally thumbed through books on display. Sliding along the window from boredom, smudging a trail, she stopped suddenly. On a front cover were the same berries and curved blade from her memory, when Elva created a potion from ground paste and blue liquid.

"You can try to break in... but the door is easier." Megan jerked back from the glass, spinning around. Céad held the key up, his thin grimace restraining a smile.

Feeling awkward, Megan frowned, their last encounter ended abruptly with Philippa's childhood lies. "I've come to ask for your help," she mumbled nervously, while trying to seem carefree and friendly.

"Help... help with what? As I recall you know everything about this place?" Dismissively turning the key and spinning the sign to 'Open', Céad's tone hardened.

Megan felt her cheeks burn "Yes, err... sorry about that. I didn't mean to annoy you, it's just that... well... I didn't know it was such a big thing." Her words stumbling out in stuttering bursts. Mentally kicking herself, if only she'd rehearsed a suitable answer. There was plenty of time on the train and he was bound to raise it; how many visitors ask about a stone that's been missing for 3000 years?

"It wasn't people you know" Céad paused, sounding apologetic.

Megan stared in confusion while shuffling her feet, but Céad continued.

"The sacrifice stone... it wasn't people they sacrificed. We believe it was used for animals, for their ceremonies and feasts. Of course, it's difficult to say, but that's what we believe. The stone must have been moved, or probably destroyed by the Victorians. I'm afraid they *changed* quite a few things in their time." His head shaking as they walked inside.

"When you say 'we believe'... do you mean historians?" Megan consciously holding the friendlier tone.

"Well, actually I mean my family... but yes, sort of historians I suppose. I come from a family who believe in certain 'cultural values' our ancient ancestors did. You know the type of thing... natural earth type stuff." Laughing loudly, Céad glanced away in embarrassment. "Some people call us hippie nutters," he added, still laughing, but clearly affected.

“Well they sound really interesting to me” Megan said immediately, empathising with outsiders while also hopeful for information.

“Oh not really” Céad reflected, “It’s mostly-mumbo jumbo. Anyway, what is it you think I can help with?” Smiling warmly, the past seemingly forgotten.

Taking a huge breath and at the point of no return, Megan felt quite sick. Clearing her throat, staring him hard in the face, she readied for the ‘leap of faith’.

“Well... you know I said about my dizzy spells since the accident?” Subconsciously gesturing to her forehead. “They’ve been more like visions. Well not visions really... they feel like memories, my memories. Only... memories from many, many years ago. Look, I know it sounds stupid... but it’s the truth.” She stopped, expecting derisive laughter or anger, but he just turned his back busying himself realigning books.

Megan spun round to face the window, flushed with anger. If he’d laughed it would have been kinder, but this contemptuous ridicule...

“Go on...” Céad spoke clearly and concisely while still facing away.

Frowning with confusion her head half turned, then reverted to the window. It felt odd, standing back-to-back, having an adult conversation. Although... they were years apart, in so many ways.

“I’ve seen a lot things in the last few days, some horrible, but also wonderful people with lives totally different to ours.” Megan glazed over, picturing Elva running through wispy meadow grasses, remembering simple smells and carefree summer days.

Céad broke her daydreams, seeking clarification. “So you’re telling me you remember a previous life, around the time of these stones... and you think I can help in some way?”

“I did say it sounded stupid, and how you say it... it does.” Fixating on books under the window, her nape damp and clammy, Megan felt awkward and embarrassed. The silence building, raising atmosphere and tension, as her eyes began welling up. What the hell had possessed her to tell him all this? Travelling here again just to look a total idiot.

“Tell me more about these *memories* and what you see...” Céad questioned, fiddling unnecessarily with the shelves. “... Sorry, what was your name again? I’m useless with names.”

“Megan. Megan White, I’m 16.” Biting her lip hard, why did she say her age? It just felt the right thing to do. He seems so... well, teacher-ish. Spluttering slightly, wishing it was a proper word, but then her expression changed.

“I’ve had lots of them, at first very short, then some longer. They used to make me black out, like I did here when you helped me. But now it’s like they’re part of me or something, I don’t fight them anymore. In the beginning it felt like being taken over... or as if I wasn’t in control of my own mind. But now... well now, they are me. As much as me... is me.” Stumbling on her voice broke, then rose dramatically in pitch, fighting back the tears.

“I’ve seen soldiers killing people with spears, dead people being buried... others burnt. Magical sorts of things, crazy stuff!” Sucking air in hard, her voice lowered, then slowly and precisely, “Lately... I’ve witnessed the memories as though I’m someone else, someone alive then.” Explaining aloud highlighted the changes, choking briefly, she drove on through a pounding chest and tearing throat.

“I err... I’ve heard them call me Elva.” Sniffing loudly, staring up at the ceiling, trying to hold on, “I have memories of healing people with berries I crushed in a pot for God’s sake!” Then it all came at once, pitiful uncontrollable sobbing. It sounded so stupid... yet she knew it was true. God, what was wrong with her? Clasping a hand to her mouth, trying to stop the pain pouring out... but it just kept coming.

Céad turned, watching her back heaving and shuddering. “Can I talk to Elva... or only to Megan?” He asked calmly.

Megan spun around spitting with rage, how dare he, “She doesn’t control me, I am me. This isn’t some weird possession thing!” As the words left her mouth she realised, he wasn’t mocking at all. His expression considered, composed and relaxed... he believed her. Open mouthed, expecting some comment, she gaped... but he just stared right back.

Rain began pattering outside, pleading drops gently tapping to come in, but Megan hardly registered. She just stood in the shop, not moving or speaking, with nothing left to say. Her face felt sticky despite repetitive sleeve dragging.

Then Céad suddenly strode towards the counter, picking up the phone.

Carrying it through the back, with inaudible distant mumbles, Megan decided she may as well leave. With no idea on bus times and rain pouring down, she hesitated in the doorway.

“Megan... Megan, please wait. There’s someone coming to see you, he won’t be long.” Céad called out, waving his phone from the counter.

Easing the door shut her hand slid slowly down the handle, confused and unsure what to do. Who was coming? Why? What could Céad have told someone for them to rush down here now? Perhaps an ambulance... the ‘men in white coats’ her mother often threatened... finally collecting on all that bad behaviour.

Eventually a figure appeared down the road as Megan stared out of the window. A shimmery shape, raindrop colourful blurs through the glass. Wobbling onto the car park, riding a very peculiar bike... flattened tyres, an almost vertical seat with wheel spokes poking at all angles. He was drenched, wearing thin trousers and cloth checked shirt, grasping chest folds he shook while entering the shop.

“You must be Megan? Céad told me about you on the phone.” He grinned warmly reaching out a hand, Megan gingerly sliding out hers.

Shaking hands felt so strange, teachers and old people did that. He seemed sincere and friendly though, putting her at ease.

“Forgive me... I’m David, but everyone calls me Beagan, I’m Céad’s father.” His grin broadening into a smile.

Considering his size, the smile was massive. 70 or 80 years old, all wrinkles and sinew, within such a tiny frame. The likeness to Céad was striking, thin face, prominent bones and elfin features.

“So... I understand you *say* you’ve had dreams or visions and feel this place might have some answers?” Beagan shook each leg in turn.

His tone felt odd, stinging her feelings, but unsure why. Was he trying to catch her out... force an angry flare up or silly childish comment? He just looked though, smiling and expectant.

“Yes, something like that. So why are you here?” Folding her arms subconsciously, adopting a hip dropped stance.

Chuckling, Beagan pushed a book pile across the shelf, creating a space to sit.

Was he buying time... preparing the perfect answer? Flicking a glance at the door, fully prepared, Megan’s hands dropped to her sides. Although he didn’t appear the stereotypical white-coated child catcher from Mother’s threats.

Shuffling into the shelf recess, perched like a garden gnome, he finally looked towards her with his huge smile.

“I am here Megan... because I’ve been waiting for you to come.” His smile widening even further at the confusion and shock on her face.

Wobbling against the shelves, Megan felt faint, bumping down onto a stack of books beside her. “I’m s... sorry, what did you say?”

Beagan didn’t reply, they all knew what he’d said. She looked across at Céad, searching for understanding, slowly returning to Beagan.

“Megan, what does this mean to you?” Suddenly sounding demanding, and cutting to the chase. Raising his hand, then slowly turning it so the back faced towards her.

Megan was speechless, her mouth hanging open as neck hairs prickled erect. There on Beagan’s hand, in amongst creases and raised veins, was the swirly pattern that Cudert bore from memories 3000 years ago.

“I... How the...?” The words wouldn’t come. Megan’s question simply didn’t seem to exist. Twisting to Céad at the counter, then slowly across to Beagan propped on his shelf... but they seemed miles away, within a fuzzy haze of confusion.

Céad looked stunned. Beagan finally lost his smile. No one spoke nor moved. The enormity of a thousand impossible questions, without a single spoken word... and nobody had the answers.

Eventually Beagan mumbled, “I think we have some talking to do.”

Sliding from the shelf he left for the back room, calling Céad to help with the kettle. Excited whispers occasionally floated through until they reappeared with tea and biscuits.

Sitting amongst the books and shelves in their makeshift conference room seemed a most peculiar meeting, but Megan didn’t care. Sipping tea was calming the nerves, although her head spun with confusion, then Beagan began to speak.

“Megan, our family live a simple existence close to nature. Some folk call us hippies, tree-huggers, layabouts or worse. We have beliefs that come from ancient times, before the birth of Christianity and followed for centuries by our forefathers.” Beagan gulped his tea, smiling at Megan, then frowned with concern.

“It’s not a weird cult or anything like that. Just simple nature-based beliefs... to do with animals, plants, the stars and earth itself. Passed down over thousands of years when the world was tribal based, set regions and the early days of farming. Our particular family comes from a special group, they were helpers of high priests that ruled then.”

Megan began to raise her hand, a schoolroom reaction, but Beagan didn’t notice.

“These priests held great knowledge and this was the *only* thing that mattered, everything else was unimportant. Although my family wasn’t chosen to actually *have* the knowledge, we were vital to ensure its safety, guiding and helping it to continue.”

Beagan fell silent, sipping tea with his gaze locked to the floor in reflection. Describing his own existence, detailing deep-rooted beliefs, must be very difficult, Megan thought.

Céad took over, although his tone more matter of fact. “Father believes in these past cultural beliefs, Megan. I’m not convinced a lot of it even happened or existed. Sure, I don’t doubt many years ago people worshipped everything from trees to the stars, but that has no place anymore... it was just ignorance to be honest.”

Beagan glanced up quickly. “Céad, there’s no need to publicly mock my beliefs or your family and forefathers.” Céad shook his head, turning away, while Beagan’s pain was clear. An awkward silence hung momentarily until Megan finally spoke.

“Are you the Glacadair?” Megan asked quietly, staring directly at Beagan.

Megan jumped, the crash jarring already unsettled nerves. Céad's makeshift seat of books had collapsed and desperately trying to gain footing his legs slid across the open pages. Leaping up, Megan knelt beside him, gathering sleeves and folding them back in place. They suddenly stopped though, both turning to look at Beagan. Tears were trickling down his face, accompanied by tiny gulping noises... but still smiling widely. More widely than ever, if that was even possible.

"I'm so sorry." Megan panicked, scared she'd caused offence to Céad and his family again.

"No. No... please. Don't be sorry." Beagan's splutters burst through tears with laughter. "Sit Megan. Please tell me everything you know... and I do mean *everything*."

Megan began to relay the visions, from the first, with its confusing events in the grasslands and standing stones, through to the massacre of the two priests and their followers.

Beagan and Céad hung on every word, never interrupting or asking questions. They just stared, soaking in the details. Megan found the tension unnerving but knew how significant this was, especially to Beagan. Finally, there was nothing to add, apart from her feelings and how they'd developed.

"Although some of the visions were frightening and deeply upsetting at times, now I'm okay with them. Actually, better than okay... I can't wait to be back there again." She laughed, and Céad nodded appreciatively.

"It sounds to me like you've found peace with them now, rather than fighting, you allow yourself to be immersed into that world." Céad pondered thoughtfully.

Megan smiled; yes, that was exactly how she felt. Perhaps she'd been wrong about him, he had understanding and that meant so much.

The conversation paused as Megan's recollections sunk in. Replaying every memory through her mind, searching for missing details, until content she'd recounted them all. Occasionally discussing various parts in heavy whispers the men's excitement flowed, until Beagan clapped his hands decisively.

"Megan, you've seen events from a time long ago... I can help fill in some missing parts and answer questions you must have. You need to understand though, before I tell you what I know, how important this is... Megan, your life will *never* be the same again."

Wobbling nervously on the ledge Megan felt strange, an odd mix of excitement and fear but desperate to ask *how*. Before she had a chance Beagan leapt up grinning.

"How about you come meet the family? We can discuss this in comfort then."

The rain had temporarily increased during their discussion, pounding on the flat roof and pouring from the edges, forming mini-lakes in the gravelled car park. Despite reducing to a drizzle now, any visitors to the centre were unlikely. Céad flipped the sign to 'Closed' and they stepped outside.

"I'll give you a lift if you like?" Céad nodded at the bike leaning against the wall. Megan shook her head, the mere thought of it made her uncomfortable. The close proximity to a man, but also the bike itself. She laughed as the men set off, weaving up the road.

Following on foot her mind was on overtime. What on earth was this all about and how could Beagan possibly have Cudert's mark on his hand? They seemed shocked when she mentioned the Glacadair, so much that Céad fell off his seat. The excitement was overpowering but heavily tainted with worry. Where was this leading and why was she part of it?



Fine V-shape sprays spurted from the wobbling bikes ahead as Beagan and Céad struggled to steer while talking animatedly. Megan giggled, men attempting to do two things at once could only end one way... sure enough, she laughed out loud when they clattered together disappearing into the roadside ditch.

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