

Polly was a Pagan (with a capital P). This had got her into a lot of trouble at school and, worse, marked her out as “weird” according to most of the other pupils. So much so that she had no real friends and, it seemed that everyone was a bit scared of her, something that she quite liked - but also quite hated. She never knew how she was going to feel when she woke up in the mornings. Fierce and strong or lonely and vulnerable.

She sighed heavily as she got out of bed, knowing that today was going to be one of “those” days when everyone would jeer at her and call her names. “Witch” being the most frequent. And they didn’t mean it nicely.

In an attempt to explain to people what Paganism actually meant, she had asked Miss Browne, the R.E. teacher if she could do a talk on the subject one day. The teacher hadn’t met her eyes and had shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot while nervously fingering the little gold cross hanging around her scrawny neck.

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea Polly” she’d said, unable to explain why exactly.

“But Miss, that’s so unfair, we discuss all the other religions why not this one?”

“Well its not really a religion now is it?”

“Yes it is” retorted Polly wishing that she could coherently bring together all the facts she had at her disposal to that she could convince the woefully uninformed teacher. This was, to her mind, just another attack on diversity and that made her blood boil.

She knew about The Wheel of the Year, the Sabbats and the Esbats, the Equinoxes and the Solstices. She knew that Pagans respected and worshipped the natural world and the God and the Goddess. She knew about the elemental and nature spirits, and The Fey, as well as the gnomes of the earth element, the Sylphs of the air, the Undines of water and the Salamanders of fire. But she

was unable to put her knowledge (and it was considerable) into a convincing explanation. She so wanted to share the wonderful mystery of the natural world with people. She longed to tell people about the slow deep beat of the earth beneath her bare feet, the almost tangible energy she felt in a wood - as if the trees were just waiting for her to introduce herself to them. She wanted to talk about the great Pagan festivals - all of which had been adopted by Christianity, how the places of the Old Ones had been repurposed as sacred Christian places - the springs and the wells, but they couldn't adopt the barrows and the windswept hills with their white chalk horses, so they had remained resolutely pagan.

But it seemed that her classmates were more interested in Tik Tok, Instagram and Justin Bieber, or if they were boys, Ariana Grande.

Realising that she was not going to make any headway with Miss Browne, she signed deeply and made her way to the Library, her go-to place of refuge and inspiration. She spent most of her spare time there. For a school that didn't want to know about Paganism there were an awful lot of books that seemed to refer to it. Books on the Natural World, Mythology, Ancient History and most interestingly a book on Druids and Druidry. She'd even discovered a fascinating book on Stonehenge, Avebury and the great stone circles of Britain in the Humanities section.

Today however she was looking forward to RE because they were learning about Hinduism with its great pantheon of unusual and interesting Gods and Goddesses, its sacred cows and all of its bright and colourful festivals. She loved the way Indian women dressed, all the sparkle and richness of their saris the elegance of their dancing, she even liked their snake charmers. She was less enthusiastic about the "Holy Men" most of whom looked half mad and very hungry and smelly. There were several Hindu pupils at the school and they'd been asked to talk about their religion and

how it affected their lives. As had the Buddhist and Jewish children and even an Iranian boy who was Zoroastrian. Whatever that was!

Polly was upset that no-one was scared of these kids and no-one teased them about their beliefs. It was only her beliefs that made everyone uncomfortable.

Dressing quickly she stuffed her books into her school bag, found her coat and boots, grabbed a piece of toast as she passed through the kitchen, remembered to hug her parents good morning without sticking toast in their ears and headed out of the door in the direction of the “scenic route” to school.

This involved taking a shortcut across the farmer’s field (she always waved to him in his tractor) saying hello to the sheep who came running towards her baaing and bleating their greetings. She couldn’t stop today but promised them she’d come back with some carrots for them later.

She loved this route for it led over wide-open grassland then down into a small dell where she walked the ancient trackway, smelling the woody smells and looking at the plants. She could almost feel the fairies and other wonderful creatures peeping at her from behind leaves, from within bushes and even from high up in the trees. They, swayed at her passing below them and they liked to think that they were saying good morning to her. She knew, though she couldn’t remember how she knew, that trees didn’t like being approached from the North. This was because the sun never shone from that direction and so they were most sensitive on that part of their bodies, trunks, whatever.

So when she spoke to them she always checked the direction. She was naturally attuned to the four quarters - the cardinal directions

of the main compass points and also the directions for Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Thus she arrived at school, chilled and happy and with muddy boots which she took off at the entrance and carrying them gingerly, stowed them somewhat messily in her locker.

The inside door was decorated with various colourful stickers, a decal of Yggdrasil the world tree of Norse mythology, a screen shot of the German dancing witches, a lovely poster of a dragon and a great shot of her made up as a witch for last Halloween. She mentally braced herself for jeers and jibes as other pupils rushed past her on their way to Assembly. It always happened and today it seemed it was the turn of the Goths to torment her. A group of about 6 of them, made up and dressed as close to their “look” as they could get in their school uniform without getting detention, swarmed around her.

“Ooh look it’s the witch” they sneered, jostling her and pulling at her posters. “Is that a pentagram?” They asked pointing at the five pointed star, which any Pagan knew represented the four elements plus the fifth, Spirit being the uppermost point. “Do you worship the Devil?”

“Don’t be stupid, of course I don’t. But you look like YOU do” Polly retorted, annoyed by their touching her things. “What do think vampires are? Demons, that’s what.” She said looking straight at them while realising that they were probably too stupid to realise that, that their Gothness was merely a fashion choice and a not a belief system. Privately, to herself, she admitted that, out of school, some of them looked stunning when in full Goth gear and properly made up. And more like witches than she did!

They scowled at her and hearing the bell, they swooped away towards the Assembly Hall, looking like a flock of bats. Was flock

the right noun for bats? Polly wasn't sure, but even in their school uniform they managed to look edgy and cool. The head Goth, Tanya, who preferred to be called Taz, was gorgeous with upswept dark red hair and long legs, she even did some modelling in her spare time. And apparently earned a lot of money doing it!

Sighing once more, she seemed to be doing a lot of it these days, Polly closed her locker and ran to Assembly, making it just in time before the doors shut and the prospect of detention for being late, loomed.

The day passed in its usual way, boringly, apart from the double art lesson which Polly adored. Her teacher Miss Cooper was young and hippy-looking and really encouraged Polly to use natural materials and natural themes in her work. Today's lesson was all about foraging for materials that they could use in a collage. It was for an end of term project and they could choose whatever subject they wanted, as long as the end result was from things that they had foraged or scavenged.

One of the Goths, Ellie, was working on a steampunk collage and Polly had to admit it was going to be pretty cool. She quite liked Ellie who seemed nicer and less angry than the rest of the group and she was amazingly talented. She had made all of her out of school clothes and they were amazing. She even made clothes for other people as a way of earning some money. Polly wondered if Ellie would make something for her, but she wasn't sure she'd say yes if she asked her.

Sitting at the bench she listened to Miss Cooper explaining what they could and couldn't use for the project. Since this is a double lesson she said that for the first period they needed to plan it, what it was going to be and what it was going to be made of. Polly had decided that she wanted to make a Tree of Life using leaves, buds,

bark and blossom from the trees and bushes in “her” dell. It was only a few minutes from the school gates so, during the second period, when they were all to go out and start sourcing their materials, she would go there and make a list of what she saw and what she felt she needed. She’d take her phone so she could take photos of what she wanted to use, that way she could plan the various different parts of her tree without having to come back with armfuls of soggy plants. For which, no doubt, she’d get told off.

These were her favourite times, she enjoyed school but simply didn’t see the point of some of the lessons. Why did she have to learn about Henry VIII and his six wives when she’d far rather learn the history of the ancient town in which she lived. Little did she know that, actually, Henry VIII had directly affected the history of her town, and that because of what he and other Kings had done, some of her adventures were possible, even hundreds of years later.

So she sat and planned, sketching a rough outline of the Tree and deciding what she would put where. Since they were in the late Spring she should be able to get some good stuff to decorate it but she hadn’t quite decided what the overall effect was going to be. She’d quite like to make it somehow “different” but how different?

Miss Cooper came over and looked at her sketch, marvelling at how easily and fluidly Polly could draw. Some of her other pupils had great imagination and vision but when it came to actually turning the ideas into reality they simply didn’t have the necessary technical skills. Polly had them both - in spades.

“I love the idea of the Tree Polly. Are you going to base it on Yggdrasil?” Polly looked at her astonished. How did she know

about Yggdrasil? Wow, maybe she was also a Pagan? That was so cool.

“Yes Miss, but different somehow. I’m not sure how yet.”

“Well if anyone can do it , you can! I have enormous faith in you Polly” and she patted her on the shoulder and moved on to Ben who was sitting sucking the end of his pencil and looking mystified.

“Now Ben, what have you decided to do...”

Polly drifted off into her own world, blocking out sections of the tree into different areas to be filled with different types of material so when the bell rang for the second period, she rushed to her locker and pulling on her muddy boots and picking up a carrier bag she headed out of the entrance, across the road (checking carefully for traffic before crossing) and plunged down a narrow path towards the copse. She didn’t see Ellie following her.

She knew that the lesson was 40 minutes, taking 5 minutes each way to and from the dell, she knew that she was going to have to work fast in the 30 minutes remaining to her. Her head was so full of ideas that she didn’t know where to start, but once she arrived at the hawthorn bushes that marked its entrance, it was as if she was “taken over” by something and she knew exactly what to look for and where to look for it. She was astonished at the variety of things on offer and mentally resolved to learn about each and every one of them, for their powers for healing, physically, mentally and spiritually were a source of continuous fascination to her. She wished that they’d teach herbalism in science classes instead of how to make a Faraday cage. Much more useful.

She was so engrossed in her task of photographing various plants that she didn’t hear Ellie arrive. She was muttering to herself when a loud laugh rang out, making her jump almost out of her skin.

“Oh you scared me”

“What on earth are you doing?” Ellie sneered lighting up a cigarette, her black fingernails poking out of her fingerless gloves as she flicked the lighter, the flame illuminating her thin pale face. Polly gasped, horrified, not least because it seemed so disrespectful to the dell to smoke there. Maybe grass, occasionally, but certainly not Marlboro. And Ellie was 14, like her, so where had she got the cigarettes from?

“I’m photographing plants and leaves for the project so that I can remember what they look like...”

“Cool. Can I have a try?”

Polly wasn’t too happy about lending her phone to anyone but since she really wanted to get to know Ellie a bit better so she could ask her to make her a dress, she decided to let her. Wrong decision. Ellie immediately started flicking through her Apps, then laughing at some of her photos and commenting on them.

“Hey stop that.” said Polly reaching for her phone. Ellie jumped away laughing as Polly missed and almost slipped over. “Please give it back”.

“Why do you come here anyway?” asked Ellie ignoring her and still hanging onto her phone.

“Because I like it, it’s peaceful and beautiful” she reached out once more, without success.

“Its creepy. You’re creepy.”

“What are you talking about? I’m not the one who dresses like a vampire...” Ellie laughed again and threw the phone at Polly, who missed catching it and it dropped onto the muddy pathway, camera side down. “Now look what you’ve done” she wailed, picking it up gingerly from the mud. Luckily it had landed softly and the screen wasn’t broken but the camera was completely obscured by a thin viscous layer of loam and earth making it impossible to keep on photographing.

Ellie laughed again and chucking her cigarette butt onto the path, ground it into the mud with her heel and headed back the way she'd come, towards school and her horrid friends.

Polly burst into tears and sank onto a log sniffing miserably, wishing she had a hanky or a tissue, instead using the sleeve of her jacket she mopped up the tears and stream of snot that issued forth.

She examined the phone. It looked pretty muddy and she hoped that it hadn't got damp because if it stopped working her Dad would go mad. She'd ask him to help her clean it because he was good at that stuff.

Sitting for a while longer she wondered why everyone was so beastly to her. WAS she weird or different or scary? She didn't feel she was - instead she felt that everyone else was. They all seemed so blind to what was going on in the world and they all seemed so angry about everything all the time.

She found that, by being in nature, her soul felt calm and she felt connected to everything around her. It was as if her senses were somehow sharper and she definitely preferred the company of the natural world to the world of humanity. She felt that by doing her Tree of Life she could somehow connect to the unseen forces of nature and maybe They would take pity on her and take her away into Tir n'a nOg, the world of the fairies where she could live happily undisturbed by Goths, RE Teachers and other inconveniences. But she would miss her parents and her older brothers so maybe it was best not to wish to be spirited away as they would be really sad if she disappeared.

Peering at the phone to try and see the time she thought that she'd better get back to school and so, it was with a heavy heart that she

left the sanctuary of the dell, making sure she had picked up Ellie's cigarette butt and wondering why she had followed her.

The rest of the day passed as usual, no-one spoke to her, she spent the lunch break in the library with a packet of crisps and some orange juice. She hated lunchtimes because she sat alone while the Goths and, it seemed, everyone else, sniggered at her. What she hadn't realised was that there were other children also being ostracised and sitting alone, the odd ones out, the "misfits", the ones who had come from abroad and who were also different. But her own misery made her blind to the misery of others.

When the final school bell rang she was glad that she didn't have extra anything that day, she wanted to go back home, ask Dad to help clean her phone and think a bit more about her project. So she didn't take the same route, instead she skirted the edge of town, mingling with other pupils as they all headed for home, some to go and sit in the town centre and people watch, some to go to extra classes and some to smoke in secret behind the cricket pavilion. As she crossed the little stone bridge over the fast flowing stream, too small to be called a river, she looked down and gasped. She was sure she'd seen a face in the water smiling up at her. She looked again and at the very edge of her vision, thought she saw a flash of something rushing through the water joyfully. It gave her goosebumps, had she seen a river sprite? She would give anything to actually "see" what she felt. A huge lump rose up in her heart and she wanted to cry again. But this time with joy and not from sadness. Maybe she HAD seen something, maybe it was a sign. She knew that Midsummer, the Summer Solstice was the following week and this was, she thought, a good time to spend in her dell. She had already checked out the compass orientation and, to her delight, the path through it was on a direct east/west alignment. Surely that can't have been coincidence?

She'd ask her parents if she could go and see the Solstice sunrise - it if wasn't raining. Maybe they'd let her camp overnight on the pathway, the thought gave her a bit of a shiver as she realised that she'd be completely alone in the darkness with... with what? She didn't feel that the nature folk were bad or scary, but there was an indefinable sort of power in that place and it felt very ancient and she wasn't sure she wanted to meet the source of that power. And, that night, it was going to be a full moon too...

Arriving home, her Dad, who often worked from home, said he'd be happy to help her clean the phone. While he was doing it he gently questioned her as to how it had got so muddy, She had already decided to hide the truth from him so just said that she'd slipped and dropped it while photographing the plants. He seemed happy with the explanation and soon the phone was as good as new. She thanked him with a huge hug and went upstairs to have a look at what she'd managed to photograph before Ellie had ruined things.

She'd actually got some pretty good shots and she meticulously copied each one down in her sketchbook. Remembering that she'd heard of an App that identified plants, decided to buy it. She'd got an iTunes voucher from her last birthday so used that and waited impatiently as it downloaded. Soon she was engrossed in identifying each plant, cross referencing her findings with a book on British plants and trees, another one on fungi and mushrooms and another one on herbal medicine and natural cures. She usually found these little books in the local charity shop and the lady who ran it sometimes put books aside for her until she had saved enough of her pocket money to buy them. She already had a collection of over 20 books and she looked after them with love and pride. Using them was so much nicer than googling everything.

As she started cataloguing them she stopped and stared at one particular photograph that she didn't remember taking. It was of Ellie, standing scowling in her blackness and behind her, almost sitting on her shoulder, was something odd. Polly looked more closely. Yes, there was definitely something there. A sort of face peering through the leaves of the bush behind Ellie. The closer Polly looked the more convinced she saw something there. Out of curiosity she loaded the photo into the App, zoomed in, pressed the capture icon and lo and behold the result appeared. It seemed that the bush was a Hawthorn bush. Polly knew from one of her magical medicinal plants books that the Hawthorn was a powerful and sacred plant. In western herbalism the plant is used for healing the heart - both physically and emotionally. It also marks the boundaries of a gateway into the land of the Fay, the land of Faery. Polly was astounded that, somehow this powerful magical bush had appeared in her phone when she definitely hadn't photographed it and, what was more extraordinary was that someone or some-thing seemed to be peering out of it. This had to be a sign of some sort!

At dinner, she was excited and enthusiastic, a different girl from the sad one that had come home with a muddy phone. Her parents commented on it and she explained that she'd got some amazing photos for her project and wondered if they'd let her spend more time in the dell and told them about her hopes for Midsummer Eve. They knew the friendly farmer on whose land it was, so said that they would ask him if he would mind her staying in a small tent for one night. But they insisted that she be accompanied and not go alone. Her heart sank. How could she do her magical stuff and meet whatever it was peering from the bush if there was someone else there? She argued that she'd be fine, she could take Jess their dog with her maybe?

Her parents looked at each other questioningly. “OK lets compromise. You can take Jess but only if you absolutely promise to stay in the dell, to behave responsibly and not go wandering off anywhere.” She promised, then realised that it might be a little bit scary and if Jess got scared and started barking that would frighten the sheep and the farmer might never let her go into the dell again. So with a deep breath she suggested that maybe, Tom her closest brother, could come too, looking at him fixedly as he shuffled and muttered about having other plans. Tom was 16 and, for a boy, was actually pretty cool and not an idiot like most of the 16 year old boys she’d met. Better still, he loved the outdoors and often helped the farmer with the harvest when asked. He and Polly were close and he’d even taught her some basic karate moves in case she ever needed to defend herself and he was never patronising to her.

He looked at her face and knew that this meant a lot to her and, being one of the good guys, said he’d go with her and it’d be fun watching the Midsummer sun come up and what a pity they couldn’t go to Stonehenge together instead. “ Next year, when you can drive...” Polly promised and their parents smiled, thankful that their kids all liked each other.

Polly and Tom made plans once Dad has talked to the farmer and the ground rules had been agreed. Jess even knew that something fun was happening and when they got the tent out from the shed and had hosed it down she’d rushed around and around in circles barking excitedly and getting in everyone’s way.

Polly had been back to the dell several times but as hard as she looked she simply couldn’t see anything in the hawthorn bushes on either side of the entrance. She felt that this gateway was a portal of sorts. She knew all about portals having watched all the Stargate series with her brothers and loved the idea of an

intergalactic portal and thought that it was the coolest thing ever, when all the symbols aligned and the centre bloomed outwards like a bluish silver jelly and the Stargate team walked through it down into a wormhole and into other worlds. She wondered if a hawthorn portal would bloom similarly...

She'd not seen Ellie again, other than at a distance with the other Goths, and wondered why she had followed her into the dell that day. But she was so busy making plans for Midsummer (which thankfully wasn't on a school night) that she didn't really care what Ellie was up to with her gloomy friends.

The days before the Solstice were perfect, hot but not too hot, with a cooling breeze and not a drop of rain (which the farmer had told her was good for his crops) and so, the evening before Polly, Tom, Jess and their Dad did a recce to choose the best spot to pitch the tent and not cause any damage. They'd agreed that it would be wrong to have a fire so they had found some of those candles that burn in glass jars and don't set fire to things if they fall over, they also had torches, loads of provisions, chocolate and Mum had made loads of sandwiches. Tom was allowed a can of cider and Polly was perfectly happy with spring water which she carried in a flask, hating plastic bottles and what they did to the environment. They had sleeping bags and Polly had packed her old fashioned wind up alarm clock, preferring something mechanical rather than electronic with which to tell the time. Tom teased her about it, but she loved the sound of the bells when the alarm went off - so much nicer than a phone beeping.

She had also packed some offerings. Organic set honey, a small glass flask of organic full cream milk and some dried rose petals that she'd nicked from Mum's pot pourri. Offerings to whom or what she wasn't sure but she felt it would be appropriate - especially at this great solstice. Tom didn't raise an eyebrow and

she silently thanked him for that. So many people had older brothers who dissed them and their beliefs and she realised how lucky she was to have such a great family.

The Midsummer sun was set to rise at 04.54 am - Tom had checked their longitude and latitude and an App on his phone had calculated the exact time of the solstice in their location. The full moon was due to be at its fullest at 2.00 am - a time that would be nice and dark - so it was to be a double celebration. Polly had read about Full Moon ceremonies and wished that she could do one with someone, but she was still too young and besides she didn't know anyone who did them. At least she didn't THINK she did.

The family had a lovely pre-solstice supper outside in the garden, Mum had made some delicious vegan treats and had picked nasturtium leaves to garnish the salad which looked really pretty. They all had homemade elderflower cordial with sparkling water and Dad toasted Polly, Tom, Jess and their upcoming adventure. "Cheers!" They had all clinked glasses and Rob, the eldest brother had told Tom to look after their little sister or else...! Pudding was Mum's Eton mess made with raspberries AND strawberries and as Polly spooned the delicious fruity, creamy, meringues into her mouth she felt that she couldn't possibly be happier.

Together they had loaded the car and driven to the entrance to the dell - the "other" entrance, between two Ash trees - the "portal" being at the opposite end of the path, overlooking the fields which were already bathed in the beginnings of a glorious rose pink sunset.

It didn't take them long to pitch the tent on the pre-agreed spot and they were touched to see that the farmer had left them a small groundsheet which would keep the dew out. Despite the heat of the day it was turning into a chilly night and Polly shivered, glad

that she had remembered to bring her fleece and her beanie. Tom hadn't, so Dad took him home to get them while Jess stayed with Polly. They had also packed biscuits for Jess and taken along her bowls so she could have some water with her biscuits which looked a bit dry and boring, though she seemed to love them. She rushed around happily, her plume of a tail waving madly as she investigated all sorts of interesting smells. Even she was affected by the energy and atmosphere of the place because when she wanted to poo she had chosen a very secluded spot with a sort of dip which made the perfect outside loo. "Clever girl Jess" said Polly, mentally marking the place and making a note to tell Tom that this was where they'd all go if they had to.

He returned shortly afterwards and they settled down for a long watch. It was 10pm and they had four hours before the full moon and then another two before the Solsticial rising. Briefly Polly wondered what on earth they were going to do for the hours in front of them but Tom turned to her and asked "Poll, where did your interest in paganism come from? What is it that you find so appealing about it?" So she told him, she told him about feeling the beat of the land, the pulse of the earth, the tangible change of each season, the knowledge that, seemingly just out of sight, was a whole wonderful magical world filled with incredible beings who were a part of the whole. She told him how she felt that humanity was treating the earth and nature with such disrespect that she felt something bad would happen if they didn't change their tune and their behaviour fast.

Tom listened, really listened. Then it was his turn to speak. He told her how he too felt a connection with the land and with the stars - heaven and earth were one as far as he was concerned. "As above so below" he told her, explaining that what went on on earth was mirrored in the heavens.

Polly wasn't sure how that worked but respected him for his beliefs - and his honesty - while being secretly amazed at the depth of character her brother had revealed. But also how well he'd kept it hidden, for he was at the same school - in his GCSE year - and he seemed just another one of the pupils. He wasn't singled out or bullied or sneered at for his beliefs. Here he looked shamefaced. "I'm not as brave as you Poll. You're not afraid to stand up for what you believe in. I'm not - or I wasn't. But I'm changing. Part of the reason I learnt karate and kung fu was so that I could defend myself if I had to."

"Defend yourself? Against who?"

"Oh you know, the other kids at school. You know how they can be with anyone who is 'different'".

"I sure do" she replied astonished that he had the same problems as her - he just hid them better.

Thus the hours passed, with them sharing their innermost secrets with each other and growing closer and more united with the passing of time.

"It's almost the time of the Full Moon. Shall we go and stand by the western entrance, I think it rises in that direction. I wish I knew how to do a Ritual..."

"I do" he said quietly

Polly went very still, she wasn't sure she'd heard him correctly. She could hear her heart beating in her chest and she wanted to cry with the sheer happiness of knowing that there was someone, someone close to her, who knew these things and who could teach her and do it with her. She moved towards him and hugged him fiercely.

"Will you show me?"

"Of course. Hang on I've got some bits and pieces I need to bring." He rummaged in his rucksack and brought out a small glass flask of water with one of those metal and rubber stoppers, a

bowl that gleamed like silver and a small round mirror. “ok ready, come on Jess!”.

Together they walked the short path to the western end and stood hesitantly between the two ash trees. Tom took a deep breath and, raising his arms skyward, pirouetted towards the east intoning grave words, then the south, the west and finally the north. He then stretched out his arms and circling slowly “drew” in the air a circle around them, Jess sitting quietly and patiently in the middle. Polly had never felt so safe. It was as if he’d conjured an invisible snow dome around them. He took the glass bottle, filled the silver-coloured bowl with the water and held the mirror over it. As Polly looked up the moon appeared rising huge and silent above them, a gorgeous golden silver colour. Angling the mirror Tom “caught” the moon’s light in it and reflected it down into the water in the bowl. Gesturing to Polly to scoop some up he whispered “bathe your face in it, breathe in the strength of the full moon”. She did as he told her and then held the bowl for him as he did the same.

She felt fuelled with strength and purpose and could feel a sort of throbbing coming up from the ground to meet the shafts of light coming down from the heavens. “As above so below” she whispered awestruck, then screamed. For standing in front of them was a group of demonic figures with bone white faces shining in the moonlight. They looked like the vampire Wraiths from Stargate and they were absolutely terrifying.

“Run” yelled Tom and without hesitating she did as she was told, with him racing along beside her. Jess was barking wildly at the figures yet not wanting to go towards them for it was her job to protect her humans. They ran headlong back up the pathway through the moonlit dell with the group of wraiths in pursuit. Polly screamed again, for she had fallen over on a rut in the pathway and the creatures were descending on her screeching horribly. Tom

was ahead of her and as he turned to return to her, something odd happened. It was as if someone or something had stretched an invisible membrane across the pathway for though she could see him, he was on the other side of something that shimmered and oscillated in front of her. A circle. In mid air. Like a portal.

As she looked at it, it opened and out came... beings like nothing she'd ever seen. Tall thin silver beings, but more like elves than aliens. Though none of the Elves she'd seen in books or films looked like these. They were beautiful but petrifying in equal measure. She remembered that petrifying literally meant 'turned to stone' and that is how she felt, for she couldn't move. She watched horrified as they whooshed past her towards the screeching horde that had been pursuing them. Tom from the other side of the portal or whatever it was, was gesticulating wildly and Jess was seemingly maddened with fear and outrage at being unable to reach Polly and protect her. Yet strangely Polly felt safe and watched as the 'wraiths' were gathered up by the silver beings and herded towards the portal and her.

She tried to move out of the way but was still immobilised while a deep voice beside her said "no, you are coming too" and suddenly they were all caught up in a sort of whirling vortex of silvery light and coolness and she heard a lot of screaming from far away... before she lost consciousness.

Polly awoke to find herself in a sort of leafy hall. Something that looked like a set from The Lord of the Rings but very different for it was all light, nothing of substance, like holograms but seemingly solid enough. She was lying on a pile of leaves, long pointed silvery ones that had sharp ends and which poked her if she moved too much. In a corner was the group of wraiths, looking less like wraiths and more like... "hang on a minute," she thought, "that's the Goths from school." Sure enough there was

Taz looking very scared and not at all like Chief Goth, Ellie was crying, her mascara creating great black streaks down her unnaturally white cheeks. As Polly looked at them she realised that they were all made up with pale white faces, unnaturally black eyes and black lips, though most of the makeup was running making them look more like clowns than goths. Standing guard over them were four incredibly tall, incredibly beautiful and incredibly threatening beings.

She gasped and, upon hearing her, they turned as one and fixed her with their deep green eyes. She felt the power of their gaze, as if she was being x-rayed and all her innermost thoughts and dreams were being exposed.

She struggled to get up and a long thin elegant hand appeared at her side, taking her gently by the elbow and helping her to her feet. She staggered slightly and the Being beside her steadied her gently. She felt a rush of warmth and a feeling of strength and courage washed over her, all the terror and fright gone. She wondered what had happened to Tom and Jess and was worried that they would be searching for her. "They have been put into a sleep for the moment, they are quite safe" said a voice beside her, the same voice that had spoken to her earlier. "You can hear my thoughts?" said Polly.

"Of course" laughed the Being. A deep fruity laugh, completely at odds with the elegance of its body and posture. "now watch"...

Time out of time, stars whirling above, comets shooting, leaves rustling, water running, wind howling, lightning flashing, thunder crashing - all of the elements, all of the heavens, all of the earth seemingly speaking, if that was the right word, at once. Polly was thrilled and scared in equal measure at the sheer primal power of the natural world. The Goths were less thrilled and more scared.

What seemed like hours but may have been a few minutes or a few millennia passed. Polly watched as each Goth was subjected to some sort of hands-on healing process. Their melted make up ran in rivulets down their faces, the chalk white staining their clothes, leaving a group of beautiful fresh-faced teens cowering in front of the Beings. Not a word had been spoken but Polly could see the changes occurring in each of the girls and some boys. She hadn't realised that there were boy Goths too, but then she'd never looked that closely.

Their crow black costumes looked so out of place in this silvery holographic palace and they started to glow slightly. Polly was worried that they were going to burst into flames. Once again the deep rich laugh beside her rang out. "We are not setting them alight, rather we are raising their vibrations for there is much work for them to do in your world and you and your brother need all the help you can get".

"Tom? What's his part in all of this?"

"He and you and many others have been watched since birth. All will be revealed shortly. Come with me."

Finally able to turn her head, Polly looked at her escort. He, she or it was tall, slim and androgyne. That is neither male nor female, but something with the best of both in complete harmony. She could feel the compassion and the love and the goodness radiating from it.

"Please may I know your name?"

"Tirness"

"Who are you? All of you?"

"We are known by many names, but here in this place, your place, we are known as the High Fay. We are an ancient race, living upon the earth before humankind came along."

"So why do you live hidden from us?"

“Why do you think?”

Polly understood instantly and felt guilty and sad for being human, for was it not the humans that were destroying the Earth, their beautiful blue planet? She gulped and turned to follow Tirness.

The group of Goths was also being shepherded to a point at the end of the holographic hall. Polly joined them, smiling wanly at Ellie who looked less terrified now. Ellie smiled back and Polly decided she actually quite liked her. They stood in a group and another type of portal, a shimmering screen materialised in front of them. Through it they could see their town, but it was different, it was full of elemental beings of all shapes and sizes, going about their daily business and there was not a human in sight. They were repairing, making, sowing seeds, planting, clearing, cleaning and generally looking after the land, the land that the humans were hell bent on destroying.

It was shocking looking at the place through a different lens and, as a cigarette butt came into view, Ellie winced.

The screen changed and an endless stream of black beings moved slowly across it, their pinched faces tired and haggard and very very white. Polly looked questioningly at Tirness.

“These are the souls of those who cannot ‘see’, those whose selfishness and lack of respect for nature are making our home, your home, the home of all creatures, into something dark and without hope.”

Several of the Goths started whispering that they looked like them. “Yes” said Tirness, “which is why we have cleaned you inside and out. For while you are still young there is hope for you, for the earth and for nature. Today is an important day, it is the Summer Solstice of a preordained year, a year in which everything hangs in the balance. We have broken ancient laws by bringing you to this

place but it is the only way we can get through to enough of you. It is happening all over the world, for there are many places like this. If we do not do this thing at this time it will be too late then everything that we - you and us - know will be doomed and there will be no going back.”

"By reading the soul map of every human we know who to work with and, we are thankful that there are more of you who want change, than those who don't." A second Being appeared from within the portal. Again it was difficult to tell whether it was male or female and, oddly, it didn't matter for all souls are created equal, at least that's what Polly felt.

“Come, now, it is time to return you to the Above, the Here and Now, just in time for you to receive the light of the solstice sunrise. Know that you have been changed - for the better - and that this experience will be relived in your dreams for the rest of your lives to remind you of your role.”

The membrane of the portal shimmered once more and, in true Stargate fashion, surged forth, enveloping the group in its silvery light. A quick whoosh and the silver which was cool, turned to gold and warmth and they found themselves back in the dell with Tom and Jess awaiting them as if nothing had happened. Except a LOT had happened.

Polly turned to say something to Ellie and, looking at her, at all of them, burst out laughing. For their black clothing had, as if by magic, turned into clothing of all colours, flashing like rainbows, they looked like something from a Gay Pride event and the look of fun and happiness on their faces was good to see as the Solstice sun rose between the two hawthorn trees heralding the dawn of a magnificent new day and a magical new age.

