

SERENA LONGHI GELATI

**INSTRUCTIONS
IN THE CAULDRON**



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Аннотация

While the life of two English twins, Anne and Sarah, goes on peacefully, taking them from childhood to the end of adolescence, the novel plunges us into a background full of magic, traditions and real instructions. Nature will be not only the frame, but an active part in the story. Lunar and sun cycles will find their original meanings again; we are going to learn to work with herbs, to interpret Celtic Oghams, Tarots, we are going to understand the powers of stones, of colors and especially of our minds. A perfect mix of 21st century modernity and the wish to wake up and embrace the power, the symbols and the tools that the Universe puts at our disposal. While the life of two English twins, Anne and Sarah, goes on peacefully, taking them from childhood to the end of adolescence, the novel plunges us into a background full of magic, traditions and real instructions. Nature will be not only a frame, but an active part in the story. Lunar and sun cycles will find their original meanings again; we are going to learn to work with herbs, to interpret Celtic Oghams, Tarots, we are going to understand the powers of stones, of colors and especially of our minds. A perfect mix between 21st century modernity and the wish to wake

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Содержание

I. The Holly Bush Cottage	6
II. Passages towards other realities...	19
III. Days, colours and the wheel of the year	26
IV. Christmas with Major Arcana	42
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	54

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*To someone who isn't here anymore but is watching
from up above...*

I. The Holly Bush Cottage



It was Friday and like every Friday Sarah and I would go to our granny's.

The Holly Bush Cottage, as we called it in our family, was our second home, we had spent there every weekend and the summer holidays since we were babies.

A nice cottage in the English countryside, in Marlow precisely. Our great-grandparents had built it, our grandpa had inherited it later and it was inhabited by our granny Susan.

The house was composed of a living room, a kitchen and a dining room on the ground floor, three large bedrooms with two nice bathrooms on the first floor and a wooden attic with two large skylights opening on the surrounding countryside. I had spent so many evenings watching spellbound the clouds from up there!

Our pride was however the garden, where the big holly giving

the name to the building dominated, followed by the oak near the gate and by a hawthorn bush, standing next to the main door. Of course, roses weren't missing, and lavender bushes, orchids, pot marigold and a small place dedicated to officinal herbs like sage, rosemary and mint.

Our parents ran a cafeteria called *Café Room* in Newbury, a nice wooden place whose specialities were, besides coffee, apple pies and *scones*.

Mum and dad didn't have much time to devote to us at the time. I wondered who would have looked after us if our granny hadn't been there. In my eight-years-old child mind, however, this problem was solved in a short time: granny was there and she would never go away.

I wished I could spend more time with my parents, the only time to stay with them was a week in Palma de Maiorca in the summer. I hated the cafeteria.

"You shouldn't talk like this, Anne!" my mother scolded me, "that is our job and it enables us to live a comfortable life".

I didn't exactly understand what "comfortable" meant, I only understood that my parents devoted more time to work than to us.

"Sarah, have you forgotten your rucksack at school again?" I reproached her when we got into the car.

"Oh, no, don't tell mum" she begged me.

"Don't tell me what?" mum asked, driving in the Friday

afternoon traffic towards Marlow.

“I should have taken the M4 instead of going through Reading. Hell! It will take ages. I don’t understand why your granny doesn’t want to move closer and live in Newbury...it all would be easier”.

The same old story every Friday, but our granny would never move, she would never leave *The Holly Bush Cottage* for anything in the world.

“By the way, mum, Sarah has forgotten her rucksack at school again!”. I always felt a bit of fun in putting my sister under a bad light.

“Sarah! How will you be able to do your homework for Monday now?” our mum screamed, hooting at the same time to a big SUV which had cut her way. “People can’t drive...especially on Friday evening. So Sarah, how are you going to do without your books?”.

“I’ll use Anne’s books!” my sister answered innocently. She never got upset, even before the most resounding scolding, she just stared at you with her big eyes. Nothing could trouble her.

“Your sister won’t be always there in your life. You must learn to be more responsible and to take more care of your things!”. I didn’t understand whether my mum was nervous for Sarah’s fault, for the traffic or for the fact that the previous SUV was still before us and it was continually slowing down.

Even if it was almost dark, my granny was waiting for us in the garden, in her apron with pink flowers and a wonderful smell of apple pie associated with her.

“My two naughty little monkeys! Here are my girls!” she received us with a warm hug of the kind she was the only one who could give.

“Where’s Sarah’s rucksack? Forgotten again?”.

“Yes, granny...”.

“She would forget her head too if it wasn’t attached to her neck! She’s terrible, mum, terrible! Her teacher Richie is really worried, she looks as if she lived in a world on her own” my mother mumbled getting into the house with our bags in her hands.

“It’s probably just like that, Rebecca. Tell me Sarah, what were you thinking about at school this morning?”-

“I was fancying I was already here with you, granny, sitting on the armchair in front of the fireplace, caressing Kiki...”.

Kiki was my granny’s big cat, black and lazy, he lived just for eating, sleeping and being fondled by my sister.

“I’ve been thinking about that all the while, but I’ve also listened a bit to the lesson, I swear”.

“She has got a natural aptitude for visualization, my little witch!”.

“Mum, please, don’t tell her she’s a witch! If she started fancying about that too, it would be the limit” our mother said in her usual brisk voice.

“I wouldn’t consider it bad at all, Rebecca, really at all”.

“And what about you, miss Anne? Always serious and composed?”.

“One girl with her head in the clouds is enough, granny, isn’t she?” I pointed out seriously.

I was the responsible and cynical one, sometimes even a bit nasty, but that was a part of my role.

Being a twin is difficult: you want to preserve your own identity, to make the world understand you’re a single person and, to do it, you sometimes have to be completely different, not only in your clothes. I had asked my mother to stop dressing us up in the same way since I was five years old. I was tired that people always mistook us.

I would never want to change Sarah, I would be always there for her, but my task was to show her the rational side of life, I didn’t have to nourish her fancies. I was just the opposite she needed to be whole and she was the same for me.

“You must go now, Rebecca, or you’ll be late!”.

“If you lived closer, mum, it all would be really easier! There are some nice little houses near Newbury...”.

Mum was never going to stop insisting on making my granny move.

“Go, Rebecca, go... You know I’ll never move! It’s more likely you’re going to move closer in a few years’ time...”.

As soon as my granny received us at hers, it was as if we were thrown into a different reality: the sweet smell of the apple pie just taken out of the oven could be felt more intensely, the cat Kiki arrived, scraping against Sarah’s legs, the fireplace made the house still more comfortable and our granny’s love wrapped

us like a warm mantle.

We sat in the living room, on the old flowered sofa, we plunged among the cushions and enjoyed telling her how we had spent the week.

“There’s a new girl in our class, she comes from London!” Sarah commenced with enthusiasm.

“Wow, from the capital city...What a big change! What’s her name?”.

“Alison” I answered ready.

“She has just her mother and she’s a *hippie*!” Sarah went on. It was always like that with us: we spoke alternating, one turn for me and one for her.

Our granny burst out laughing: “How do you know she’s a *hippie*, Sarah?”.

“She told me herself. She is sitting at the desk next to mine. But I don’t know what *hippie* means...do you know, granny?”.

“Of course! Hippies are the children of the flowers”.

“Children of the flowers?”.

“They used to wear colorful clothes, they loved Nature and they sang “ Put flowers into your cannons! It’s better to love each other than wasting time and energy in useless wars”. To cut it short, they were just like that...What does Alison’s mum do to be a *hippie*? Have you ever seen her?”.

“She dresses up exactly as you are saying, she’s very beautiful, always smiling, with long blonde hair and she wears a pendant with a glittering white stone”.

"It's not glittering!" I interrupted her.

"Yes, it is. It looks like a white rainbow!"

"Rainbows aren't white" I pinpointed.

"It might be a white Labradorite". Granny got up from the armchair, she moved to the casket where she kept her stones and took one light stone out of it.

"Exactly, granny. That's it. Have you got it too?"

"I've got plenty...they keep me company and they help me", she said, keeping turning some of them between her fingers.

"How can they help you? They're just coloured stones!" I burst out defiantly.

"No, Anne, they aren't just coloured stones! They are much more and I'll let you know them, when you grow up a little more. If Alison's mum doesn't before me..."

"What are our plans for the weekend, granny?"

I already knew actually, it was March, the weather forecast said it would be sunny, so we were going to get the garden ready to receive spring.

Life at our *cottage* was marked by season changes: we carved pumpkins at Halloween, at Christmas it was a triumph of decorations, with evergreens, cakes and candles...it was absolutely our favourite time of the year! We usually spent most of the time at home around the fireplace in winter, towards March we got the garden ready, at Easter we decorated eggs and we spent the long summer days outside, barefooted; our granny picked up lavender, sage, rosemary and mint in order to dry them

and we went back to school in September, but just after we had prepared some jam!

“We’re going to the plant nursery, girls: we’re getting new mould, some nice little plants and some seeds; then we’re going back home and we’re putting the garden in order. Mrs Bray is coming too”.

“The lady who lives next door? Why?”

“You see, Anne, even if she lives just on the other side of the fence and she has got the same sunlight, the same shadow, the same rain and the same ground as I have, she can’t make even a daisy grow in her garden. She’s always hoping I will tell her my secrets!”.

“So why don’t you?”, my sister asked her naively.

“Because I haven’t got any. Flowers and plants are living beings, they stay with whoever they want to and they need to be fed, not only with water and manure... They need energy as well”.

“Electric energy?”

“No, silly girl. The power of our mind. We must think about what we are doing when we plant them, to instil our trust, thankfulness and also our desires into them”.

“Alison’s mum has put a fairy house in her garden. She says they are going to help her to make plants grow”.

“I wish I could know what kind of plants is Alison’s mum growing...”.

“I can ask her, if you wish”.

“No Sarah, it doesn’t matter, thanks”.

“Have you seen them, granny?”.

“What?”.

“Fairies!” my sister exclaimed, as if that was something obvious.

“No, darling, I’ve never seen them”.

“Because they don’t exist!” I claimed lofty.

“Anne, not all we can’t see doesn’t exist. I’ve never seen the Great Wall of China, but I know it exists”.

“Of course! They have taken photos of it, it’s real. Nobody has ever taken photos of fairies instead”, I replied, crossing my arms on my chest.

“Because they don’t want to and they show themselves only to the people they choose”, our granny explained.

“I don’t believe it”, I finished.

“So you’re never going to see them...”.

“I do believe in them instead, granny!”, my sister said.

“I had no doubts about it”, our granny burst out laughing.

“In fact I believe Mrs Bray should buy a nice house for them and put it in her garden, so they can help her grow plants and flowers”.

“No, Sarah. Mrs Bray is not the kind of person who believes in fairies”.

“So”, I suggested, “she should just talk to them. I heard in a documentary that plants react very well if we talk to them”.

“That’s true, my darling. It’s exactly like that”.

I really couldn’t believe plants could hear us, they didn’t have

any ears! But it was worth trying.

“Look how your little twins have grown up, Susan”, squealed Mrs Bray the day after. “You’re lucky you can see your little-daughters every week. My son never brings mine here. By the way, you’re their maternal grand-mother, you know, you are the favourite one...”.

Our paternal grand-parents lived actually on the Balearic islands, in Palma; they had got tired of the English weather, so they had moved down there when they had retired. We saw them once a year: they gave us plenty of presents, but they didn’t even know our teachers’ or our friends’ names and they sometimes still mistook our names.

“So, tell me, which of you is Sarah and which is Anne?”.

We stared at Mrs Bray with our big light brown eyes, my sister and I were completely different and in an absolutely voluntary way. Sarah had long blonde hair, she was thin and angular. On the contrary I had shorter dark hair, like my dad’s. Nobody ever mistook us.

At the plant nursery, Mrs Brady never left our granny even for a moment; she was her shadow, she kept asking stupid questions: “How much water should I give the roses?”, “Where is it better to place the chilli vase?”, “How long will rocket take to sprout?”, and so on, all the time.

Granny answered her kindly, giving her lots of advice.

“Oh, Susan dear, you really know everything! How can you?”.

Our great-grandmother Maggy had taught her everything, not only about gardening, but also about cooking and knitting. Her works were famous all over Marlow, her best things were scarfs, pullovers and pot holders, all of them strictly purple, violet or pink.

“Knitting helps me relax. The colour which makes the mind calm down the most is really violet”, she used to claim.

She completed her works with some drops of lavender essential oil, then she gave her creations to her friends as a present, or she took them to the *Charity shop* at the end of the street.

Lavender oil was never missing at home; it had helped me a lot when I was a small child and I couldn't get to sleep: I remember my granny used to put some drops on my temples and my chest, then she used to massage it, telling a nursery rhyme three times:

“With lavender oil and the moon in the sky, shall my little girl have a quiet sleep tonight”. So I could sleep all night long.

“Granny, do you believe Mrs Bray's garden will be as beautiful as yours this year?”, my sister asked, placing carefully some vases along the outside wall of the house.

“Oh Sarah, I hope it will, for her, since she spent a lot of money at the plant nursery. You know what I think: you should only take what you need. There's no use of having lots of kinds of flowers, if you can't deal with them or lots of different herbs if you don't use them and you don't know what to do with them.

That's why I only keep the necessary ones; lavender, sage, mint, roses, pot marigold, hawthorn, laurel and rosemary are never missing. I also like geraniums, orchids and of course I couldn't do without the oak and the holly, but for them that's a different question...they keep me company when you aren't here".

Granny never had rest when we weren't there. There were always her friends coming and going to see her.

"They are always telling me their troubles", she had explained to us, "sometimes talking with someone is enough to feel better, to break the dikes of the dam we built to protect our ego. While they keep talking, I make a good tea, I knit, I think about what they are telling me and in the end I give them the little work I made. In that way, as if by magic, sadness disappears".

"How can you do that?" I asked curiously.

"I've told you, I just have to let them give vent to their feelings and always think about what I'm doing. While I keep knitting and they keep talking, I imagine them at peace, light-hearted, so I can charge my work with a positive energy, instilling these nice thoughts into it. It's not difficult, but I need to concentrate a lot, so I use the violet so much, it helps me stay more focused".

I didn't understand much, neither did Sarah.

"Granny, I've heard someone saying that oaks should never be cut down. Is it true?" I changed the subject.

"Absolutely! Just like an hawthorn branch should never be torn, except for *May Day*".

"But how can you do, if the oak gets ill?".

“When an oak gets ill, that’s a bad sign...however a part of the trunk must be kept there. Roots are as important as the outer part”.

“The cut down trunk can be turned into a nice little table”.

“That’s true, Sarah, an oak should never be completely eliminated, especially when it’s inside a private garden! The family would crumble”.

Sunday evening always came too fast. When we heard the noise of our dad’s car on the gravel, we were caught by a mix of happiness in seeing our parents again and of melancholy. They usually took us to a nice *family pub* for dinner on our way home and it was nice to be with them, during those uncommon moments together, but we also knew that we were leaving behind us the magic of the cottage and of our granny.

Luckily our week went by very fast between school and the various volley ball and dance clubs, we came home tired in the evening, mum gave us dinner, she spent some time with us and then we went to bed.

II. Passages towards other realities...



The following weekend was mainly rainy and cold.

“That’s not bad”, our granny told us. She always saw the positive side in every situation.

“The new seeds need also rain and I have a lot of work to do. Old Mal invited me to take part in our *May Fayre* at Higginson Park, I’ll have my own stall! I’m going to sell mainly knitting and some herbal oils I produce by myself”.

Old Mal was a dear family friend.

“That’s great, granny! Can we help you sell?”, my sister exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Of course, Sarah”.

“Alison’s mother used to have a stall too, when they lived in London, in Camden Town”, she went on in her dreamy way.

“That’s really a very large market!”, our granny claimed, brushing poor Kiki.

“They sold stones, amulets, incense...you know, those little sticks which are sweet-smelling if you light them. But she said it has become too commercial now and she doesn’t like it anymore. What does commercial mean?”

“It means that most of the goods are alike, they aren’t original, they just follow trends. London is a tourist city, people goes to Camden expecting they can find some particular goods. There are various trends: *punk*, *rock*, *gothic* and *hippie*, but, as she said, they have turned into a commercial style, to avoid disappointing expectations and to be sure they’ll sell. Unfortunately, everywhere is like that...excepting *Chalice Well’s* gardens and the *Tor*, of course”.

Our granny’s family came from there, she always took a dreamy mood when she was talking about her village. We had never been there, mum said it was a den for crazy people and granny always scolded her because she didn’t understand the magic of that place.

“Is old Mal your fiancé?”, Sarah asked her impudently.

We had always suspected it, but we had never had the courage to ask her.

“Absolutely not! He’s just a dear friend, we keep company to each other. We’ve known each other for ages”.

Granny had told us again and again that she still missed our grandpa; he had died ten years before. A heart attack, he had passed away from morning to evening, without any notice. Our mum was just eighteen, she had never got over the shock.

We liked old Mal, as she called him. He was tall, with greying hair and a smile which always made you feel well, he could have been the perfect fiancé for granny. He was kind, smiling and he always took strawberry candies for us. He was fond of horses, he had two, *Smelly* e *Shelly*, and he was ready to saddle them and take us for a tour whenever we wanted to. I always insisted on not riding *Smelly*. He was famous in Marlow because he organized the yearly *May Fayre* with stalls, merry-go-rounds and gastronomic stands. If it wasn't for him, the fair might not be so nice; at least that was what granny kept saying.

“While you are knitting, can we watch *Harry Potter*?”, I asked as I turned on the TV.

“That's ok. I'm really curious, everyone is talking about that young wizard”.

“Great! Dad bought us the first boxed set, we could watch the first one today and the second one tomorrow...”, I suggested.

“We'll see...you know, I don't like letting you stay before the TV set for too long”.

We crouched down on the sofa for the whole length of the film, spellbound by the story. We knew it by heart, but there was some new detail to be discovered every time. It was absolutely our favourite movie. Granny never stopped knitting, she only got up to make tea. I couldn't understand if she was either following the story or thinking about something else.

“So, did you like it?”, I asked as soon as the film ended; I was curious to know her point of view.

“If I liked it? It’s great, girls! The author deserves all the success she is having. Absolutely gifted, a fancy worth of a great mind”. Granny was really enthusiastic.

“And you still haven’t watched the second one!”.

“I especially liked a detail”, she went on, “The idea of platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$: creating a passage to get into a different reality...neither the usual doors in tree trunks like in “Nightmare”, nor the holes in the ground like in “Alice in Wonderland”. Do you remember, little girls, when Alice is following the White Rabbit? She falls into a hole and, after a nice flight headlong, she finds herself before a door”.

We had watched that cartoon hundreds of times.

“Another clever idea is the transformation of Professor McGranit into a cat...really nice. I liked it. But children, that’s not magic, remember that. That’s fancy. Waving a magic wand and saying a formula quickly isn’t enough. Magic is something more: it starts from our work on ourselves to understand what we want to change and why. And above all, it doesn’t hurt anybody. Never! It sends away, but doesn’t hurt. Life, God, Mother Nature, Karma or what you call it will punish the ones who behave badly. Remember that: tit for tat.”

“You also taught us: don’t hurt, don’t be afraid”, I went on.

“Exactly.”

Someone rang the door at that moment. Who could it be? Tea time had passed and it was raining hard outside.

Granny ran to open it.

“Oh, Mal! Come in, what’s happening?”

“Pizza! Pizza for the most beautiful women in the county! Someone should feed you...”

“Old fox; come in, it’s a pleasure to have you here.” She immediately took his umbrella and laid the pizzas on the table.

“Where are the two little monkeys? Here they are, they are getting more and more beautiful! Miss Sarah, Miss Anne, how are you?”

After a long bow, he took two strawberry candies out of his sleeve. I can’t remember seeing him without them, even once. “The sweets after the pizzas, girls. Now wash your hands and lay the table.”

“You’re so demanding with them, Susan.”

“Rules, Mal. Rules.”

“Yes, Madam! I see that the production for the stall has taken off: there’s violet wool everywhere. Don’t overdo it, Susan.

Mal was looking around himself bewildered: when our granny did something, she always put her best care in it. “I don’t want to cut a poor figure, it’s a honour for me to join it. Who is going to get the proceeds this year?”, she asked him, handing him the glasses and the cutlery to lay the table.

“The proceeds will be partly used to build a town gym and partly for research on multiple sclerosis.”

“Excellent Mal, as usual.”

We spent a pleasant evening, between pizza with cheese and frankfurter, a Scrubble match and the old man’s jokes. He didn’t

go away late, however we were already exhausted.

“Granny...”

“Yes Anne, tell me.”

I was in my bed, but before she turned off the light, I had to tell her something: “When I come here, it seems to me I’m getting into another reality.”

“What do you mean, my child?”, she asked me, sitting down at the foot of the bed.

“Here at yours, I feel like Harry, when he goes through the wall at King’s Cross Station.”

It was something difficult to admit for me, my part involved not believing in those things.

“It might be like that...maybe it’s the old oak out there, next to the gate...”

My granny was smiling satisfied. Her big green eyes were shining and the light of the *abat-jour* made her red hair still brighter. She looked incredibly like Molly Weasley, Ron’s mum in “*Harry Potter*”.

“Why the oak?” I didn’t understand what the oak had to do with it.

“You should know that oak is *Duir* in Gaelic, which is where *door* comes from. And what’s a door? An opening between two worlds, a passage. The ancient oak can open a passage for you, towards something nice. I’m happy, Anne, that you’ve told me. You are two special kids and I have the duty of teaching and

passing all my knowledge to you, as time passes by.”

She leaned and kissed me on my forehead.

“Will you teach us to make the best chocolate cake in England?”

“Not just that Sarah, not just that. Now you just have to enjoy your age. Childhood is a special time, you must play and stir your fancy. Good night my little girls, shall the Goddess bless you now and forever.”.

Granny always talked like that before we fell asleep, I’ve sometimes heard my mum saying it too. I knew other children told Mary or Jesus their prayers, Alison and her mother lit a candle before Buddah’s statuette, Aysha’s family celebrated Ramadan instead...

Granny kept saying: “The important thing is to feel at ease with a deity, we can call and fancy it just as we wish to.” She called it Goddess Mother, or sometimes Brigid or Ecate...I had sometimes heard her name also a Pan, which was in my mind Peter Pan.

III. Days, colours and the wheel of the year



Three years went by. We were finishing primary school and we were already eleven years old.

Sarah had discovered pink nail polish, I, instead, hid myself into large black hoodies whenever I could. I had insisted upon having a school uniform one size larger than mine.

In these years we have witnessed Alison's mum's illness close, she fought hard against breast cancer; it seems she managed at last.

Sarah was shocked when she saw her without hair for the first time, she cried all night long. Mum explained to her that some treatments were really strong, but absolutely necessary.

"That's not fair, her hair were so beautiful!", she said between sobs.

"I know, darling, but they will grow again, don't worry", she

comforted her.

“We should pass our positive energy to her”, granny claimed when we told her what was happening. “Following the doctors’ instructions is right, but she needs something more.”

It was a cold Saturday afternoon at the end of October, the autumn colours in the garden were wonderful. The fireplace was lit and I could already breathe the typical *Halloween* atmosphere.

“I wish to explain something to you, girls”, our granny began while she was putting into the oven her traditional apple cake, “I’m going to talk to you about the power of colourful candles and of the days of the week. It’s really simple. We are going to lit some candles for Stella, she needs them.” That’s how Alison’s mother was called.

“She always keeps some stones next to herself...”, I added, thinking that was a fundamental detail in order to understand a person better.

“I’m going to explain that as well, one thing at a time, Anne! You called them colourful stones some years ago and I promised I would talk about their powers; you know I always keep my promises! All in due time.”

“I still believe they are just colourful stones! And it looks absurd to me that some candles lit on certain days could help someone ill. Days are all alike!”, I burst out as usual.

“That’s not true...let’s say that most of the energy, if not all of it, is strictly connected to moon cycles: waxing Moon and waning

Moon. During the waxing phase, we have a growth: our nails and hair grow faster, we have a tendency to put on weight or to swell, so we should work on a growth energy; on the contrary, the waning phase moves away. You know, Anne, in the past people lived in close touch with Nature, they respected it and learnt from it. Every time in a month or in a year has got a different energy, we should understand when we can take advantage of it. Colours send powerful spurs to our brain”, granny went on, “I’ve always told you that violet helps me relax and concentrate. Colour therapy is a serious science...” Not all the things she said appeared clear to me, she sometimes spoke about things I couldn’t understand, but I would keep everything she taught me as a treasure, as time passed by.

“In this particular situation”, she went on, “I want to help Stella to increase her physical strength and to detoxify from the remedies she had to take, poor woman. So I’ll have to work both on a growth energy and on a moving away one; I’ll try hard during the whole twenty-eight-days moon cycle. Have you understood, girls?”

“I have, granny”, Sarah nodded. She liked listening to those things, they had always charmed her.

“Go on...”, from my personal view, I felt attracted and reluctant at the same time. The influence of the Moon on human life was undisputed.

“Why are you doing it, granny? You don’t even know her”, my sister said while she was making Kiki play with a small ball.

“It doesn’t matter if I don’t know that woman, Sarah, I know she’s feeling bad and I want to help her with the tools I have at my disposal.”

“But she hasn’t asked you for help.”

“Good remark, Anne! By the way, don’t you think it’s evident that she wants to live, since she underwent an operation and such invading treatments, like chemotherapy? What’s more, you told me she’s keeping some stones next to herself, so she believes in the same energy as I do. She doesn’t need to ask for my help, I know in the bottom of my heart that’s the right thing to do.” My granny’s argument wasn’t wrong. “Let’s go back to ourselves, girls, make yourselves comfortable and take some paper and a pen, if you like.”

She sat down on an armchair and Kiki climbed on her legs, purring.

“Oh granny, I’ve been looking forward to this moment for so long. Look what a nice notebook I’ve kept just for this occasion. I’m going to write everything you’ll teach us”, my sister got excited.

I couldn’t believe it, my sister had just taken out a pink and glittered notebook.

“Sarah, you’re ridiculous. How old are you, five?”

“Anne, stop making fun of her, I think it’s wonderful.”

“Yes, it’s wonderful for a girl on her first year at primary school!”

“I’m going to keep here my notes about magic”, Sarah

exclaimed satisfied.

“We aren’t at the pink Witches’ congregation. You’re ridiculous...that’s enough, I’ll leave!”

I got up and I ran upstairs. They were both completely crazy: the one with her ideas about energy, stones and candles; the other who was playing the fairy. I could understand by now why my mum had left home when she was just twenty! I preferred staying alone and listening to music.

After a while, however, I was lurking on the stairs. I didn’t care about what they were saying, I just wanted to understand if granny would tell Sarah any important secret.

“I’m sorry for Anne, granny, she is always so nervous lately”, I heard her say.

“Don’t worry, my dear, it’s normal to feel like that at her age. I’ll make a good St. John’s Wort tea for her tonight and you’ll see she will calm down; your mother was just like her when she was eleven...she’s still like that in fact.”

Our grandmother never got upset, my sister had certainly taken after her.

“Granny...”

“Yes?”

“Can you tell about the candles just to me, or Anne needs to be here too?”

“Oh, of course my dear! If she doesn’t care at the moment, I can’t see a reason to prevent you from learning. Well, well... where am I going to star from?”

“From Monday?”

“That’s right, from **Monday**: the day of the Moon, associated with **white**; it’s the time to tidy the house, the garden and to make our intuition grow.” She was talking slowly, to give Sarah time to write.

“Then we have **Tuesday**: Mars’s day, the colour is **red**, it’s perfect to solve tangled situations and to overcome clashes. **Wednesday**: it’s Mercury’s day, associated with **yellow**; on this day you can work on communication, on writing, on reading, to get a deeper inspiration and better possibilities of success, it’s the perfect day to instil enthusiasm. Ah, **Thursday**, my favourite! It’s linked to Jupiter, the colours are **green** and **light blue**, it’s devoted to finances, fortune, plenty and wealth. **Friday** is Venus’s day, the colours are **pink** and **green**; on Friday you can try to improve the sentimental sphere, love, friendship, but also beauty and body care. Try to have a *manicure* on this day, and you’ll see how nice, healthy and strong your nails will get. **Saturday**: Saturn’s day, the colour is **black**, excellent to move away and exorcize negative forces or to increase our wisdom. And finally **Sunday**: the day of the Sun, the colour is **orange**, it’s the day of the family, of *BBQs* with friends, lightness and will get stronger. After that, according to the colours I have listed, we can light a colourful candle on corresponding days. If we don’t have colourful candles, we can use the white ones, they’re always good for that! Candles are the symbols of thought, idea, desire and hope. The four elements are contained into them: the Earth

is the wax; the Water is the melted wax; the Fire is the flame and the Air is the smoke. I've recently discovered floating candles: you put some water into a bowl, with some grains of kitchen salt to represent the Earth element, you put a candle on it and you light it. They are very beautiful and safe. It's always a good rule to oil the candle before you light it; you can use an essential oil from our production to do that, I'll show you how to make them, it's not difficult. Of course, you need to concentrate when you oil and light it, to instil our will to the candle. Now tell me: on which days can we help Sheila and which candles shall we use in your opinion?"

"To give her strength, a waxing Moon Tuesday, because you said that during this phase energy gets stronger, the colour of the candle will be red. To move away bad cells and the remains of remedies, a waning Moon Saturday instead, the colour will be black."

"Excellent Sarah, really excellent!", our granny clapped her hands satisfied.

"I'll add two very important colours: **magenta** and **purple red**. The first one works on our psyche fast, because it has the ability of awakening the magical power of our mind. The second one instead, is the symbol of Wisdom and it is used to move bad luck away. It's enough for today, Sarah, let's go and find your sister now."

I sprang up and went back into my bedroom without being noticed.

“Ok. Granny, do you really think we’ll be able to help Stella?”

“You see my child, I could never replace traditional medicine; treatments are important, but doctors and science have left behind some other sides in time. There’s always a reason behind an illness. The power of positive thoughts helps us to feel better; some people go to church, they say the rosary, they go on pilgrimage or something like that, they firmly believe in what they are doing. You can’t realize the power of our mind at all and the consequences of our words. You’ll see, your friend’s mum will get better, you mustn’t stop believing it.”

“Thanks granny. Let’s go to Anne now, if I know her well, she must be starving.

Old Mal came to the *cottage* the next morning.

“Here you are, the best pumpkins in all Marlow, directly from *Sainsbury’s*. Our girls are too grown up to play “treat or trick” along the road, but carving pumpkins is compulsory at all ages. We have to keep away the bad souls going around on that night... and don’t forget to leave some gifts for them! Talking about gifts, I almost forgot, I’ve got just two strawberry candies for you.”

He was always cheerful, he conveyed happiness just being close to him.

“Thanks Mal, you’re always spoiling us.”

“You are my favourite girls, it’s normal I want to spoil you. Susan, I don’t have any candies for you, but an invitation. You are going to be my “plus one” at Christmas dinner, to christen

the new town gym.”

“Oh, Mal...I’m left wordless! Thanks, I haven’t gone out for dinner for ages. I don’t even know if I have suitable clothes”, our granny admitted pretending to be shy.

“Mum will lend you something!”, I suggested.

Our granny out for dinner with Mal, that was really something new!

“Yes, Rebecca will lend you something. You are going to be very beautiful as usual. And then, the rebuilding of the gym was made thanks to you too, with all the violet potholders you sold at the last *May Fayre*. It took three years to raise the money we needed, but we managed at last, and what event could be better than Christmas to inaugurate it? The dinner will be on 21st December, isn’t that great?”

“For Yule, that’s wonderful! I hope there will be also a nice decorated log.”

My grandmother had taught us since we were very young the importance of seasons, equinoxes, solstices and of certain days such as *Halloween* or *May Day*.

Halloween was for her **Samhain**, the Celtic New Year’s Eve; it stood for the end of the period of light and the entrance into the darkness of winter. Nature seems to die, it withdraws into itself, animals go into hibernation and also men withdraw into the warmth of their houses. It’s a magic moment, when the curtain between the world of the living and the one of the dead gets thinner; for that reason it’s a good habit to honour our dear dead,

leaving gifts for them and lighting candles to help them find the light.

Our granny also explained to us that the pumpkins left outside are used to scare the damned souls who can't find their peace and want to annoy the living.

Wearing fancy dresses and going around asking for some sweets is just a parody of these dead souls, who ask for gifts and threaten to play bad tricks. I remember that, every time we emptied a pumpkin, she kept three seeds and put them into her purse.

“So money will never miss”, she said.

Mal and granny called Christmas **Yule** and they celebrated it on 21st December, the day of the winter solstice, the period when days are really short and the cold is biting. She told us that solstice meant literally “Still- Sun”.

“Do you remember, girls, when you get on the panoramic wheel and it stops at the highest point, and then at the lowest? Well, the Sun does the same thing. In winter the Sun is in the lower part of the wheel, it's more hidden, but it's there. During the solstice it stops for a while and then it starts to rise again. Christmas stands for the rebirth of the Child Sun, exactly like Jesus who was born in the darkness of a cave.”

From that moment, days get longer again slowly; every year the same magic takes place with exactness. We decorated the house together with our granny with evergreens, which represented life going on, we lit candles, we put some mistletoe

here and there, and it was compulsory to kiss each other under it.

The wooden log taken from our oak couldn't be missing in our fireplace, it was kept lighted during the whole period of the Christmas holidays, then granny gathered the ashes and spread them around the house, keeping telling: "May negative powers keep away from here!"

I couldn't understand very well what she meant by negative powers, I thought she was referring to unpleasant people.

When February started, the snow fell heavily and the wind blew freezing from the north, Mal punctually arrived at the cottage, with a new broom.

"A present for the wisest woman in the whole county", he claimed smiling and granny thanked him with a strange word. "Happy **Imbolc** to you!"

Granny told us that Nature was slowly waking up in that period, so we had to clean and purify the house. It was quite impossible for me to think already about spring, but I always started to notice some changes after a heavy snowfall or a winter illness: days were beginning to get clearly longer and some shy snowdrop was peeping out in the fields.

"Children, you must always remember that it's sometimes good to have fever, fire burns and purify. Shall Goddess Brigid protect and bless you."

We knew how much our granny was devoted to Brigid, she often tried to justify herself by laughing and saying: "Maybe that's because she has got red hair like mine!"

Everyone took her for an Irish woman. I think she had never been to Ireland; but to make up for it she always went to the Irish *pub* with Mal on St. Patrick's day. She didn't like particularly Saint Patrick, I was sure about that, she used to say that every year, but she could never refuse a beer in good company.

Soon after, **Ostara** finally arrived, on 21st March, the spring equinox: it was a period of perfect balance, with the same hours of light and of darkness. Nature had awakened at last! We used to spend those days painting eggs, which were a symbol of rebirth, and we got the garden ready going to the plant nursery.

Our new family tradition was taking with us our neighbour, who had shown signs of great improvements in the care of her plants in the previous three years.

"That's surely thanks to the gardener she has hired", our granny had claimed naughtily.

May was my favourite month: there was our birthday, Marlow's fair and Nature was at its best, with all those flowers blossoming, a delicious smell of jasmine in the air and the Sun warming us at last. Celebrations started with **May Day**, the first day of the month, which was also called **Beltane**. For that celebration granny used to give us some delicious flower wreaths she made herself and we hang coloured ribbons to our oak.

The 1st May was the only day when we could pick flowers from the hawthorn and we later left some presents for the fairies, like little crumbs or a bit of milk, because people said that those tiny beings were the guardians of the tree and so it was right to

thank them somehow.

Granny asked Mal to add a big bonfire to the village fair, just like people used to do in the past at Beltane.

“That’s quite dangerous, Susan, but we’ll see what we can do...”

As foreseen, authorities never let them light a bonfire, but they replaced it with wonderful fireworks and with a tall pole around which people could dance braiding ribbons; they told us that was a very old tradition as well.

“It’s not exactly the same”, granny had said, “but it’ll be alright too. What’s more, children love that!”

Towards the end of school, when we were tired at last and it was hot in England too, it was **Litha’s** time, the summer solstice, the longest day of the year! The Sun never set.

“You see, the Sun is high on the panoramic wheel, but it’s going to start its descend slowly by now. Isn’t that incredible, girls? That’s all so perfect.”

We put granny’s stones outside at night and we spread a cloth on the grass; we took it back the next morning, before the Sun rose completely, soaking with dew.

“That’s my beauty secret!”, granny told us laughing and putting some drops on her face. “The summer solstice dew. You can’t imagine what is this night’s power!”

It was simply dew for me, but I must admit that I was particularly happy in those days when summer began and that was a real magic for someone grumpy like me.

As soon as we finished school, at the end of July, we left for Palma de Maiorca. The Balears' heat and sun was really something strange for us. We spent whole days into at the swimming pool during that period.

"Rebecca, bring the girls to the seaside on 31st July at least, it's **Lughnasadh!** I'm not asking you to make bread with them at dawn as I do, but let them stay in the sun as long as possible at least. That's good. With a cap and sun cream, of course. Remember that, I'll warn you! I can't understand why you're always at the swimming pool, isn't the sea beautiful there?"

"Oh, yes mum, the sea is wonderful, but the swimming pool is more comfortable. With no sand, a café nearby and sun beds to relax...", our mum answered in a persuading voice.

"I don't understand...what's the use of spending the days on the edge of a swimming pool?"

"We go there to have rest, mum, we really need that!", she put an end to the conversation that way.

And then autumn came, Nature changed its colours, the garden at the cottage lost its leaves day by day, days get shorter and cold came back. **Mabon**, that's how granny called the autumn equinox. She decorated the table with ivy and she put into some pots the herbs she had been drying in the hot months.

"What do you need all these herbs for, granny?", Sarah asked her once, passing her hand through the well tied lavender, hanging by its long stalks.

"I can do lots of things with them: my oils, my tinctures, good

luck little bags, and I keep them for my herbal teas. You shouldn't throw away anything, remember that!"

"How is that possible? You taught us that, before spring comes, it's important to clean the house: to throw away what is useless for us and give our old clothes to the poor!", I underlined obstinately.

"That's right, Anne. We mustn't accumulate, otherwise our house will not breathe and energy gets too heavy that way. Throwing away the unnecessary, that's right, it's foolish to keep too many things. I'm telling you not to waste: if I picked up so many lavender flowers, for instance, never too many or more than necessary, I'll use them all, I'm not going to throw anything away."

"When are you going to teach us to make oils and tinctures, granny?"

"Give things time, Sarah..."

"Why can't mum do anything you do? Why didn't you pass on your knowledge to her?", I asked her.

"You see, your mother is a woman who can be called hasty; she wants everything and at once. She was born in fifteen minutes, she got married and she was pregnant with you when she was twenty! Whenever she needs an essential oil, she goes to *Holland & Barrett* and she buys it, if she needs basil she goes to *Tesco* and gets it. She can't wait for the plant to grow, to pick it up, dry it and then wait as long as it is needed to macerate and give an herbal oil. I'm her mother, I know my Rebecca! I would

have wasted my time showing all these things to her. But I really think she can do that all, since she saw me do it.”

I wasn't as sure as her about that.

I wished I could know what she thought about me, if she really believed I would be able to work with herbs and stones. Maybe in the bottom of her heart she had already understood she could hand on her knowledge just to Sarah. I preferred on my part to avoid certain subjects, fearing I wouldn't match up, I preferred hiding myself and not believing in those things.

IV. Christmas with Major Arcana



It was a cold Wednesday at the end of November, we were going to the volley club after school, as usual. We didn't expect to meet our parents when we went out.

"What are you doing here?", we asked them at the same time.

"Has anything happened?"

"No volleyball tonight girls, we are going home, dad and I have to talk to you."

That was something absolutely new. It could just mean something bad, but they looked relaxed and smiling instead.

"Are our grandparents well?"

"Of course, Sarah. Who's better than them?!", our dad stated. "All day long in the sun and on the edge of the swimming pool.

There are still twenty degrees down there in November, can you fancy that? That's wonderful."

"And what about granny?", I asked agitated.

“She is ok as well, my dear, don’t worry. Nothing serious has happened.”

“So why did you come and see us to talk?”

“Let’s go home now, Anne, we’ll have a good tea all together and then we’ll tell you the news.”

“Are you pregnant?”

“No, Sarah, I’m not pregnant. You two are enough for me!”

Mum might have been pregnant actually, there would have been nothing wrong, but she had always been emphatic about the fact that her supply of energy and patience had come to an end after two twins.

When we got home and we were sitting all together around the table, as we had hardly ever done, we discovered what the news was: we were going to move to Sonning Common.

“Where the hell is Sonning Common? And above all, why are we moving there? We’re at our last year at school. How can you think of taking us away?”, I burst out. I flew into a rage, I didn’t want to go anywhere. I liked Newbury, we were born there and we had all our school mates there. Moving away was something absurd!

“Sonning Common is north of Reading, near Henley-on-Thames, we’ll be just thirty minutes far from your granny’s house!”

“Yes, but why? We’re so well here in Newbury”, I went on astounded.

“Your mother and I are going to open a *bio-veg* café. It’s a

great opportunity. Don't worry about school, you are ending the year here and you're starting college there."

"So everything is already fixed..."

"Yes, Anne, everything is fixed. Mum has got two more good news to give you."

"Ok, fire away...it can't be worse than that!"

"The good news is I spoke with Stella about our move, you see, I didn't know how to face up to the question with you, so I asked her for advice too...Well, you see, she decided they are coming too! Isn't that wonderful? She is still under medical supervision and she needs to be looked after at a good hospital, the one in Reading is surely one of the best in the whole Berkshire. What's more, it's just twenty minutes far from London by train and her parents live there...So, we're going there all together. Are you excited, girls?"

The fact that Alison was coming too, was surely the best side of the situation. The three of us had been always very close; she was able to counterbalance my relationship with Sarah: she was balanced, methodical but at the same time sweet and sensitive.

Even if she had grown up according to *hippie/new age* ideals, she looked absolutely ordinary.

However, I wasn't quite persuaded about moving house.

"And what is the other news, mum?"

"They're coming to spend Christmas Eve with us at granny's! Stella wants to meet her. Don't you think that's a great idea?"

"Luckily old Mal will be there, otherwise I would be the only

man among wonderful, but absolutely crazy, women”, our dad claimed.

He wasn't wrong at all, actually.

That was certainly one of the funniest Christmas in our life.

In the afternoon we helped Granny to make *Christmas pudding*, stirring and making wishes, according to our family's tradition, while she told me how much fun she had had with Mal at the gym opening. She had even danced latin-american music and played bingo till midnight. Mum had laid the table with traditional red and golden colours, putting creakers on every dish. Dad and Mal were instead trying to make the fire brighter in the fireplace, using Yule's log.

At exactly 6 pm Alison and Stella arrived with a Christmas poinsettia and a bottle of *rosé*.

“I'm very pleased to meet you, Susan. I've heard so much about you”, Stella told her with a hug.

“The pleasure is mine, dear.”

“Sarah has told Alison about the candles...I was really moved, thanks a lot! You're a *wiccan*, aren't you?”

She had the bad habit of making people lots of questions. Alison said her mother had no philtre between her mouth and her brain. She was pleasant, always smiling and what's more she could listen to people, just like granny.

“No, darling, I'm not. I know the *Wicca* religion very well, I've spent my first years in Glastonbury...”

“That’s where your strange accent comes from! That’s great. But can I ask you, why do you live here now?”

“My husband inherited this *cottage* and I agreed to leave the “Apples island”, I haven’t been there for so many years...”

“This house has got a certain energy in fact, it looks as if we are in a different reality...” Stella was looking around herself, like little girls before dolls houses.

“That’s strange, Anne said the same things some years ago!”

“I’ve been to Glastonbury too, soon after they had diagnosed my breast cancer...I needed to rediscover myself. A spent a whole afternoon sitting at *Chalice Well*, I stared at the well, the *Tor*, the water flowing: I was shuttered. I would never have expected such a difficult trial in my life. I do yoga, I’m master *Reiki* and crystal- therapist, I followed meditation courses in India when I was younger...I blame London air, it’s so polluted. I don’t know...Oh, I’m sorry, I’m talking freely about my problems...That’s because you make me feel really at ease, Susan.”

“I’m really pleased about that and you don’t have to apologize at all”, my granny comforted her. “You must be happy you’re here now. Everything has come to an end; enjoy every moment of your life with your wonderful daughter and with your friends’ fondness. Don’t blame London air, that’s true, it’s polluted, but unfortunately some illnesses happen also if you live on top of a mountain! One of my cousins was vegetarian, she didn’t smoke, she walked a lot and she lived in the South, near the sea; she fell

ill all the same.”

“I’ve learnt a lot from this experience”, Stella went on. “It made me understand how frail we are. My stay in hospital was terrible! I hate places like that, the heavy energy, the deep pain, you lose your sense of time. At the start I didn’t want to undergo chemotherapy, I didn’t want to poison my body. I did all that for Alison. Keeping my mind focused on my target was so difficult.”

“But you managed at last. Your holistic training has surely helped you a lot!”, granny had always had this power, she could encourage people and help them see the positive side in everything.

“Yes, I’m sure of that. I devoted my time to the study of Tarots in hospital and during my period of convalescence, when I could read. One night I dreamt I was holding in my hands a small tin box with cards inside: they were “Maria Celia’s” tarots, those cards really exist!”. She took out of her huge bag a small tin box with cards inside. “I bought them online together with a book and I started this new course. I think you can read them...”

“I’m sorry to deceive you once more, but no, I don’t know any kind of divination. I’m just used to consulting an oracle when the seasons change. If you wish, you could explain us the meaning of Arcana after dinner. I haven’t heard about them for ages. My aunt Ruby, my mother’s sister, could read them; she made a lot of money with them, she was famous in Glastonbury. Unfortunately, I haven’t inherited her gift.”

“Oh, I don’t want to bore you.”

“Just relax, the ones who don’t want to listen to are free to leave the room. Let’s have dinner now. Children, wash your hands! It’s ready.”

The dinner was delicious, granny was a perfect cook. She made traditional dishes: turkey filled with blueberries sauce and *pigs in blankets* (which were absolutely my favourite). Of course, vegetarian dishes for Stella weren’t missing. Besides our *pudding* as a dessert, Mal brought a wonderful *Yule log*.

According to tradition, when dinner ended we exchanged presents. Sarah got a “Griffindor” hoodie and I got a “Ravencrow” one. After we had cleared the table, mum, dad and Mal started playing Scrabble, Alison and I sat on the sofa watching TV, with lazy Kiki next to us, while Sarah and granny were listening to Stella explaining Tarots.

She mixed the cards making her bracelets tinkle, she had a mysterious look, she moved them with skill and precision, as if they were an extension of her fingers.

“These cards can help us to understand the Divine project”, I heard her say. “They don’t foretell the future with certainty, but they tell us what could happen. It’s up to us to understand them and to live what life gives us as a continuous teaching somehow. Cards are a means of divination, they keep us in touch with the real source of All and they must be handled respectfully. Let’s start from Major Arcana, they are twenty-two. The first card is **The Madman-0**: it represents the start of a new journey. We sometimes throw ourselves into an adventure without thinking

about it before, led by too much enthusiasm. Being able to take a risk using our hidden gifts is very important.”

She turned to Sarah and my granny that small card representing a young man on journey with a stick, held back by a little dog.

“Then we have **The Magician-I**: the wizard, the one who focuses on something and turns it into reality. He knows he is the means the Divine Spirit appears through. We are the makers of our fortunes, just like the man in the card who works with his tools to get what he wants and to evolve.

We then find **The High Priestess-II**: she is the symbol of intuition and wisdom. We must be able to keep detached from the material world and listen to the voice of our guide spirits; only by knowing ourselves we will be able to understand the world surrounding us. Can you see the eyes of the woman in the drawing, lost in her thoughts and far away? It looks as if she could see beyond everything. I think she reminds me of an oak, strong and still.

The Empress- III: this card brings romanticism, love and sensuality. It's the symbol of a happy moment, full of creativity and emotional fertility. She could be compared to spring, to rebirth. Soon after there is **The Emperor- IV**: it represents stability, respect of the rules and the ability to listen to our fellow men. It reminds us of a family father and tells us never to use other people. After the Emperor we have **The Pope- V**: it's a

sign connecting the material to the spiritual word, a Pontifex, that's it. This card warns us to follow our heart and never to give up to temptation. That's why it's in opposition with the Arcane number XV, *The Devil*. But let's follow the order; after The Pope there are **The Lovers- VI**: we are all made of two opposite sides, male and female, positive and negative. We must accept also our shadowy sides and confide in other people, it's the symbol of new relationships coming.

Moving further there's **The Cart-VII**: it obviously refers to travelling. You see, the image is that of a coach drawn by two horses. The journey represented could be our soul's journey on the Earth, so the Cart will represent our body, the means which we need to live. The card can also foretell the choices we are going to take in a short time, we might afford some extremely uncertain moments. It's no accident that two horses are represented, the number "two" reminds us that we always have different choices. The next Major Arcana is **Justice-VIII**: this one always urges us to uphold our ideas and to act having a full faith in ourselves. We have to find peace and harmony. If we go on we find **The Hermit-IX**: it underlines how we sometimes need to be alone to find a light, which means wisdom. The card is usually represented by an elderly person holding a lantern in his hand, the symbol of intuition and knowledge, and in the other a stick, the means to overcome the troubles of life. It could be considered as the young man in the first card, **The Crazy**, having grown up and with a wider knowledge. If we move further we get

to the **Wheel of fortune-X**: it's the symbol of fate, of the wheel of our life turning in spite of our will. The condition of mankind is not unalterable, it's continually changing. Our true lightness is often to have the ability to let ourselves be dragged by events. We find soon after **The Force-XI**: our adult side, the one which has to guide us. We must never hide our emotions, but follow them instead. We don't have to tame the lion by cruelty, but by our will and wisdom; the lion represents our instincts. We can often find Force and Justice in the opposite order, that's Force at number VIII and Justice at number XI. In the following position there's **The Hangman-XII**: someone who looks at the world from a different point of view. It could be considered as the moment of "reflection break" leading us to Illumination. Its roots, the feet, point upwards, to the sky, reminding us that we come from the Divine, from something above us. Going on we run into the card we fear the most, **Death-XIII**: it means the end of a period and the beginning of a new one. That's part of our life, it's not always something negative. We must be able to throw away what has become useless in our spiritual growth. In the next place there is **Temperance-XIV**: it foretells a period of quietness, full of harmony. Moderation leads to peace of mind. This means that the phases of peace and rest are necessary to recharge ourselves.

We then find **The Devil-XV**: this card reminds us that the souls descended into the material world and that we are always being tempted. In certain phases in our life, the force of our selfishness brings to light the hidden sides of our Ego, those sides

we try to hide from everybody, including ourselves. What the Devil represents is just that: the tempting Ego, our material side which makes us heavier and prevents us from being uplifted. We have to know and to face evil if we want to gain awareness and become better. Taking the decision of becoming incarnate on the Earth is not easy. Let's go on to **The Tower-XVI**: the sudden collapse of a situation. Destruction was necessary to open doors to something different and new; this card will make us understand that unfortunately nothing is eternal.

The next Arcane are **The Stars-XVII**: a new phase of life starts with them, characterized by inspiration and creativity. Starlight makes our wishes brighter.

After the Stars, there's **The Moon-XVIII**: the interpretation of this card is that something mysterious and unknown can interfere with our intuition and deceive us. Nourishing our wishes in the shadow and acting shrewdly is better, to avoid becoming the target of envy. After the Moon and the Stars, here's **The Sun-XIX**: this card wants to tell us that obstacles have been overcome.

The Sun represents a moment in life characterized by a strong positive energy and by success. It is usually drawn as a child because, after a long journey to discover ourselves again, we have reached Knowledge and we feel like light-hearted children. We're almost coming to the end. The next card is **Judgment-XX**: our soul has woken up, we're wearing new clothes. We've learnt to look into ourselves to find the truth again and to get free from prejudices. Let's finish with **The world-XXI** at last:

a cycle is coming to an end, we're going to be rewarded for our hard work. New opportunities are looming up on the horizon.

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