

66.

PNEUMONIA

Helene got off the train to the sound of seagulls crying. *Ah, the seaside.* She imagined she could smell a salty sea breeze on the wind as she left the station for the short walk to Brighton Beach. She pulled her bright red coat around her as a cold autumn wind greeted her.

She had spent the night at Club Purr, a fetish and BDSM bar in London for women only. The night had been wild and raucous but somehow, despite the craziness and sexiness of the night, Helene had left quite early. She'd had a beautiful flogging from a mistress named Morphia but then Morphia had gone on to play with some other women. Helene was missing Luna, didn't know where Michael had got to and had had a small argument with Malus a few days earlier that hadn't yet been resolved, so she simply left the club. *I'll get in touch with the lovely Morphia again soon...*

As she left the station, Helene realised that being in a fetish club was not the most sensible place to have spent time when she was feeling sensitive. *I'm not as special as I think I am. I still feel emotions and pain, and try to run from them as much as anybody else. Why do I sometimes feel I should be above it all just because I practice Witchcraft? If anything, it makes my life harder!* There had been a few other witches at Club Purr and Helene was glad to have met them, even if she hadn't really enjoyed the night. These other witches were also magical activists, from the Dionysian Underground, so she probably had a lot in common with them and would meet them again soon no doubt.

Deciding to go somewhere random, Helene had jumped on the first morning train to Brighton with the plan to go and look at the sea. Watching the sea was like watching clouds or staring into a fire. There was something deeply hypnotic about it, something that allowed Helene to feel connected to nature which in turn allowed her to see her life from a fresh perspective. *I wonder if everybody has the same ability to heal themselves just by staring at the sea... If the element of water is associated with emotions then I guess the sea is the best place to explore the emotions I'm currently dealing with.*

She strolled slowly downhill along the street towards the beach and watched as seagulls and chip wrappers flew about in the wind above her head. There were plenty of people up early – milkmen, shop owners opening their stores, delivery

vehicle drivers as well as the dregs from the night before – party people making their way home.

Helene topped a crest where she could finally see the sea before her and picked up her pace in order to get there a bit faster. She passed a big clock tower which told her it was 7:20am. A group of young adults were dancing under the tower and throwing bits of kebab at each other and generally having a laugh.

Helene wondered briefly at what age people stopped considering themselves to be young and started talking condescendingly about 'the youth of today'. She was glad she didn't automatically judge the youths as menaces, as much as she was glad they hadn't thrown bits of kebab at her.

So many people are so judgmental, but isn't being judgmental the biggest problem we have in this world? The patriarchs and politicians all very cleverly making us judge each other and thereby we are divided and conquered. Well sod that...

Just before Helene reached the beach, she passed a newsagent and had a quick squiz at the headlines – some British soldier was being court-martialled for abusing Iraqi prisoners. *Well of course they are going to turn abusive if you send them away from their families and friends and tell them to invade and occupy a strange and foreign people. How can we be outraged if they are simply doing what they are instructed to do?* She had a closer look at the newspaper – the soldier's mother was decrying the prime minister as being a war criminal. *Well yeah, of course, doesn't that go without saying? Those poor boys thrown out there to kill or be killed so fatcats here can get oil wealth. They sign up to defend us because they love our country, and their love and goodwill is completely abused. Oh my god. It is so obviously a disgusting world we live in. Full love and power to the soldiers who refuse their orders. They are the true heroes. I wish I had time to help the refusers organise themselves. Now there's a cause I could really commit to.*

Helene finally reached the beach and looked out to the slightly misty sea. *Mmmm.* She took a deep breath and took the whole vision in. The sea went out forever and ever. Small waves rolled in over a slightly choppy sea. There were seagulls squabbling over scraps of food and a vast tapestry of stones covered the beach. Helene wondered briefly why they had stones instead of sand and wondered if this was a feature of the beach, or a problem. She walked down the ramp and onto the promenade. A number of well wrapped-up people were working with shovels, collecting the stones that had fallen off the beach and onto the path. *Great job! Wouldn't it be wonderful if I had a job that could be*

something useful in the community. Something like cleaning up or beautifying the place... something with an activist edge to it... Yeah, that'd be great...

Helene looked out to the pier and watched as small waves crashed against it. She thought back to the newspaper headline she had just read. *Community work would be so much better than being in the armed forces. Fuck that. I think I will get involved in one of those community groups supporting refusing soldiers. It's the least I can do to make the world better... the least I can do short of organising a revolution... Ha!*

As Helene walked along the path by the beach, a door under the ramp opened and a group of about ten people walked out, laughing and cheering. They all wore swim caps, bathers and what appeared to be wetsuit shoes. *Oh my god, they're going for a swim? It must be minus ten degrees in there!* A few more people came out of the door similarly attired. One was carrying a pair of flippers. *What a bunch of mentalists! They'll get pneumonia!* They all seemed quite excited about their morning swim. Helene pulled her coat around herself much closer as the thought of going anywhere near the icy-looking water instantly made her feel much colder.

As they all walked past her, one man in the group stopped for a moment and made eye contact with her. *A witch!* Helene and this man looked at each other for a few moments as they recognised each other as part of something bigger. She instantly knew that this was a man who practised magic and that he could see the same in her. Smiles spread across both their faces in recognition. It was a timeless and powerful moment before the man turned and joined his colleagues walking towards the sea.

Wow, they say some people are born witches but I've always known I wasn't born anything. But all this practising of magic has suddenly made me able to connect with another! This is going to be a whole new world for me! That's brilliant!

Helene looked out to sea as the group hesitated – for only a few seconds – and then variously dived and jumped into the sea. Some let out squeals and shouts. Yes, it was definitely cold.

Well if those mentalists are brave enough to dive into ice, there's no reason I can't be brave enough to do what I really want – to encourage evolution and revolution and psychedelic consciousness. She watched the group in the water split apart and swim in different directions. *But revolution is so bullshit. We are so scattered and without any means of organising ourselves. With our rights and community having been stripped from us piece by piece over the last*

several hundred years, it's impossible to start living as we want immediately. What we need is a date in the future when we can - all of us - all six or seven billion of us - agree to start living our True Wills. Ha! And there's a flying pig. Helene used her imagination to visualise a pig flying across the cloudy sky. She mentally slowed it down and brought it towards her. When it was close (and she was sure no-one was in ear-shot) she asked it, “little piggy, you fly so well but only in my imagination. Is the saving of our world only ever going to be in my imagination also?”

The pig hovered facing Helene and answered, “if that is where you leave it, yes... Or if you weren't afraid of looking like a Fool, then perhaps you could set it free. Oink! Oink!” And with that the pig flew off and vanished under the pier. Helene saw that some of the group of swimmers were swimming around the pier, which was actually quite a long way.

What we need is a date. Another Guy Fawkes day like in V For Vendetta? That could work, but what year? Helene stepped onto the stony beach and started walking towards the water. She watched as a few small waves rolled in. *It will be winter solstice in two months. That would be a great day to rise up! But there is no time to organise it. How about next year? The problem is there is nothing special about that date. Meanwhile our freedoms continue to erode. Fuck it.*

She bent to pick up a shiny stone and walked further along the beach. *The year after? The year after that?* She counted the swimmers in the water. There were 12 of them. *Winter solstice 2012, that could work.* The date rang some kind of bell in her head. *2012... 2012... Oh fuck yeah, that is the day the Mayan calendar comes to an end. Loads of people already believe that date is somehow special. Maybe we could latch onto it and share it? That's the way of Fool Sorcery after all. To go with whatever is there and to embrace other people's myths that are useful or beautiful or both.* Helene watched as another small wave rolled in and the first of the swimmers started getting out of the water. *Yes, I'll talk to some friends and see if they are up for organising something... anything... a ritual or a protest or anything that can be used to promote this.*

She saw a shiny black rock that caught her eye, picked it up and absent-mindedly discarded the first stone she had. *I wish V For Vendetta was real. That was brilliant. But I'm no superhero, just an ordinary lass from North London.* Another group of swimmers got out of the water. *Well, no harm in trying. It'll be a fun project even if I do make a twat of myself. Ha!*

Helene wondered briefly if the swimming witch would be into the idea. Too shy to approach and ask, she turned away from the swimmers and started walking along the beach in the other direction. *Yes, winter solstice 2012 sounds like a*

good project but as long as I keep in the here-and-now as well. I mustn't lose sight of making the most of each moment.

As she walked along the beach she noticed a group of very brightly clad people, rugged up quite warmly and standing on the shore. From the distance she was at and from behind, one of them looked surprisingly like Luna. She took a closer look and saw that the group was half-solemn and half laughing out loud. They were passing around a bottle and pouring shots out of it for each other. Helene stopped to watch and saw that each of them said a few words. *It is obviously a beach-front wake of some kind. That's kinda nice.* That it was a wake was confirmed to her when the woman who looked like Luna pulled out a ceramic jar and opened it, allowing an ash genie to scatter into the wind.