

## **The Call of Isis**

By: Olivia Robertson

### **CHAPTER 1** **THROUGH THE VEIL**

Children were playing on a grassy slope. On the one side they were bounded by a privet hedge newly clipped; on the other three sides by the potting-shed wall, the yard wall, and the house. The garden had run to seed with long grass and wild flowers. One of the children had separated herself from the others, and had wandered off on her own - she did not know why. Her companions' calls grew fainter.

Suddenly her attention was attracted by a flower growing by itself. It was a flower she had not noticed before. It was brilliant scarlet, with a grey furry stalk. She knelt down and examined it more closely. It had a thick heady smell. Within it were black velvet spikes, set tidily in a circle. She held the long rough grey stalk and gazed deep into the flower. The black centre with its radiating spokes began to revolve, at first slowly, then more quickly. As it did this, the sounds of the other children playing stopped; and so did the song of the blackbird in the neighbour's apple tree. Instead she heard a low humming sound like the buzz of a bee. The flower grew bigger and bigger, and the centre grew into a black tunnel and she felt herself falling into it . . .

When they found the girl's body the children were afraid, for she lay face downwards, stiff and cold. One of the younger ones screamed, and the eldest child called for her mother. And the mother had the girl carried indoors out of the sun. She was laid on her bed upstairs in the tiny bedroom she shared with her older sister.

The father rang for the Doctor. He said she was in a coma, and had she done this before? And the mother looked embarrassed, and said that the little girl was a day-dreamer: and that her aunt was a medium and used to go into trances. Not on her side of the family, she added quickly, but it was there on the father's side.

Meanwhile the girl, as she fell down the tunnel, remembered Alice in Wonderland who had, she remembered, done much the same thing, so she did not mind. There must be an end to this falling. And so there was. She landed still in darkness, on earth, and looked about for the White Rabbit. She could not see any such person, but before her was a long dark passage with a light at the far end. She picked herself up, and wondered what size she was now, because, she thought, I must be very small if I can fall through a flower. Or perhaps I'm the same size as usual and the flower suddenly got bigger, like in science fiction stories.

When she reached the end of the tunnel, she came out into a beautiful garden, full of trees and flowers. What was strange about it was that all the flowers and trees seemed more alive than at home, as if they could talk. But as this girl had followed Alice's adventures through the Looking Glass she accepted this calmly. She just thought how sensible of her parents to give her a book so helpful in such circumstances.

Then she saw the boy. He was standing, legs apart, hand in pockets, gazing at her.

"Hello!" he said. "Have you just come?"

"Yes" she said.

"How?"

"Oh, I fell through a strange flower in our garden."

"I was just crossing the road. You can say I came by bus." And he laughed. "That was a joke".

"I can't see anything funny about that," said the girl. And because she liked to understand everything very clearly, she began to feel afraid. She wondered how she could get home to tea. As she thought that, suddenly the lady came. She felt she had seen her before. The lady said; "It is time to come home," very clearly. But the girl wanted to play with the boy. But he just waved and ran across a small stream by a wooden bridge. The girl tried to run after him, but the lady took her by the hand. Then came the curious feeling of falling into the tunnel she had experienced before. But this time she did not like it. It felt stifling. And at the end, instead of the lovely garden, she found herself in total darkness, unable to move. Her eyelids felt glued together. She tried to shout, and could not. Her arms and legs felt like wood. But she did hear a voice or rather two voices.

"She is coming round," said her mother's voice.

"She is coming back," said a lady's voice.

At last she stopped struggling, and then she could open her eyes. And it was daylight and she was in bed. Her mother sat by her, and, seated next to the looking-glass, was her aunt. The girl felt she had seen her recently, but could not remember where. But she did remember the garden and the boy. And she wept bitterly. For she had heard the call of Isis, the Veiled One. Never again would she be content with children's play.

This is the story of Persephone, and of every human soul that reaches beyond the mundane.

In childhood we may enter the psychic realm with ease. A friend of mine, Angela, told me that when she was a little girl she found a doorway between two trees. It was a steamy sunny August day. She found two trees and stood between them. She said that between the trees in front of her appeared to be a mist or veil. When she crossed between the trees, she entered into a different world. The inhabitants, she said, were either very ugly or very beautiful. They were kind to her and liked to play. Possibly, she said, they understood that she was very unhappy at home. But, after some time - and time seemed to go very quickly there - they brought her back through the trees. And after that she visited the other world, until the age of ten.

Although these experiences were clearly of a psychic nature, on one occasion there was an inexplicable juxtaposition of two spheres that upset our neat classifications. For this time, when she came back to the earth plane, she did not go through the tree doorway, but instead found herself inside the pig-sty! This was a disused pig-sty, and her father kept it padlocked from the outside. She had to wait for a long time before she was discovered - and her father could not understand how she got there. And, wisely, she did not try to explain.

Some places have a strange atmosphere that seems to belong to both spheres at once. The veil between this world and the sphere of the soul seems to be thinner there. When I was eight, I was brought to such a place in Ireland. The transition from Reigate in Surrey to a South Ireland valley was in itself fantastic.

In Reigate I had lived my mundane and orderly life along with my sister and two brothers. I was receiving an intellectual education, and had faith in common sense. Naturally I did not believe in fairies. Scientific truths used to be explained to me by my father at the breakfast table with the aid of mustard-pots and salt-cellars. I could play chess of a sort when I was five! Admittedly my sister and I were interested in the nature of time and where the past disappeared to - and how to capture 'now', but scepticism had set in very early as regards the miraculous. The atmosphere of our sensible home "Hatherlow" precluded the weird and the supernatural. Cosiness filled that existence. There was the walk to a nice school, a penny bus ride

back to the Yew-Tree Inn stop. Everything was understandable. The warmth and shelter of Anglo-Saxon England was about me. It was safe.

Safe, that is, save for my sister's wild imagination. She was in love with Heatheliffe from the alien world of Wuthering Heights, and she tried to enrich her imagination-starved world with dreams. Too much so, for parents at the nice school sent a protest to the Headmistress, saying that my sister was giving the other children nightmares. Our parents were duly admonished. I do remember some of Barbara's tales. One concerned a headless nun haunting lone passages. Oddly enough, though, it was the dreadful Boiled Owl and the Guinea-pig that used regularly to send me into nighttime screams. I don't know why, but even now the words have an uncanny sound. Barbara and I shared a room, and our nurse had pricked holes in the weather-streaked green blind for ventilation. These pin-pricks glittered when the light was turned off. And these, Barbara would inform me, were the horrific eyes of the Boiled Owl and the Guinea-pig watching me . . .

However, if Barbara introduced me to the macabre, I am ever grateful to her for making my first doorway into the psychic sphere. These imaginative doorways are best created by someone with a strong imagery - but more easily entered into by a passive character. And I was a day-dreamer. So Barbara told me that the green blind that I knew in daytime covered a window overlooking a road - at night was a mysterious wood. This wood, she said, was a border country through which one passed in order to reach the domain of 'Queen' Jupiter. The twinkling lights through the blind were now the lights of fairyland - if only one could get through the dark wood. How glorious and happy it was in Fairyland! It was the land of Heart's Desire - and to us infinitely preferable to living in Reigate! But always there was the wood that made a barrier both to getting there, and to getting safely back. But when we all of us arrived at the Castle in Ireland, we seemed to be half-way to the mysterious wood already. It was as if we were in the outskirts of the wood, and through the trees could see the golden and green fields and the blue hills of another sphere. The isolation of the valley added to this impression. As the Castle had been built for protection, it was situated between two rivers. It was built with six-foot thick walls over a fifteen-foot well. To us it was as if we had the Celtic 'Well at the World's End' in our very house. We were surrounded by hills, and overlooked by our blue mountain, Mount Leinster and her foothills.

Above all, there were the trees. The sombre yew walk girded us about on three sides, and on the other side were the ruins of 'The Abbey'.

People said ghostly monks walked up and down the yew walk, hoods up, hands clasped, using it as a cloister. For cloistered we were. And the Bullawn stone, a huge granite boulder near the lime avenue, contained a hollow that, when filled with rain-water, brought a cure for warts!

However, the house itself provided its own psychic doorways. It was only when I was grown-up that I found my elder brother also used to have a succession of dreams about 'extensions.' For instance, the old 1625 fireplace in the hall was a doorway. During the day it was just a fireplace. But not so at night. Then, heart in mouth, one found oneself in a dream going through to an extension. The extension usually was like another wing of the house, with different furnishings and inhabitants. Years later, new children in the Castle visited these extensions in dreams. Encouraged to investigate further, they would report on period, costume and architecture.

One of the most significant of these real dream experiences came to me as a girl, when I went through the hall into an extension that was formed by a long tapestry-covered passage. I was afraid of what lurked behind the tapestries, and was careful to keep well to the middle of the passage, arms tightly to my side. But on this occasion at the end of the passage I came, not to strange rooms, but to another world altogether. It was brilliant with sunshine. I found myself watching a young man with brown rough hair busy doing magic. I knew it was magic. He was strongly muscled and naked to the waist, and was wearing what looked like a cloth tied round his waist. He was doing magic with his arms spread out, using a dancelike walk. I watched with interest.

Then I noticed a mosaic-paved fountain and people sitting round it watching me. One was an elderly man with a thin white beard and blue gown. I became aware I was trapped. However, I talked my way out of

the difficulty, and the people became friendly. They played me some very curious music. Then I went back home. This experience made such an impression on me that I told my father about it at breakfast.

Nonetheless, these occasional 'magic' dreams were sporadic and beyond my control. With most children, the power to cross the threshold of the magic door disappears at about twelve years old, when the hold of earth life becomes stronger. And with many children, this should be so. The powerful evocation of the fairy-tale, the George MacDonald world of the Enchantress, give place to stories of 'real' life, of career and marriage.

Is it that the lunatic, the romantic lover and the poet alone retain their hold on the world of the unseen? Are they too old and yet too young for their fellows? For when their comrades go forth into the sunlight, they stay behind in a darkened room and look through the reflected world of the mirror into a shadow world of the imagination. For no real woman can be as perfect as the Ideal dimly seen in a glass; no actual hitchhiking journey can equal the wonderful, sometimes terrifying adventures through dark corridors beyond the senses, as the soul makes her nocturnal flights.

When the questing traveller chooses to walk the psychic path the way is chosen that leads to the sphere of the Moon. The intention, if good, will bring forth the fantastic beauty of the sphere of the psyche. If the intention be foolish or unhealthy, such journeying may lead to madness or even death. But the lure is the same. It is the call of that which is concealed by the veil of sleep and death.

In order to enter the lunar sphere it is necessary to be passive. The troubled mind, the seething emotions, can never allow the soul to pass beyond the domain of the physical. Hence the guiding vision of these spheres is of the Master levitating over a stormy sea and, because untroubled, causes the angry waves to subside. For this realm of reflections must only be approached by the pure. Purity is a negative virtue, and as such controls a negative sphere. To say 'no' to troubled thoughts, to inhibit unruly emotions, is to discriminate, to draw a circle about oneself, and within that circle to be still. So that in order to protect one's inaction, one must actively push out the irrelevant.

And this inhibiting circle, this protective veil, is the chalice, the mirror and the pool. Otherwise the soul is lost in a tumult of psychic impressions and sensations. Therefore, in order safely to enter the world beyond the looking-glass, one needs to command the power of choice. One chooses to enter this psychic sphere only at a stipulated time, and for a certain length. One chooses to return. So indiscriminate daydreaming is ruled out. When one is functioning in every-day life, one draws one's whole consciousness upon the task in hand. So when one enters the psychic realm one also should have this concentration. The circle is created, the focussing material is at hand; crystal, glass or bowl of water. One is ready to begin one's chosen art.