

# Water Seers

By Sita Brahmachari

*Illustrated by Grace Emily Manning*

The walk from Tideling Station is long  
I wipe the sweat off my forehead

Mum hitches up her rucksack

'Mum? What DO you remember about your aunt Ambu?'  
'Not much! We had to carry water from town  
Taught me to swim in the sea, she told good stories  
Made weird fishy-birdy jewellery!'

Seaweed paniers weigh me down  
Can't believe she didn't have a water source  
Walking on, Mum's memories flow  
Of her last ever visit on a full moon  
A gathering  
Kids wandering around with sticks  
Looking for a spring  
Water Divining!

'Ambu was a weird old bird,' Mum explains  
'I stopped coming at eight when the Chanellers polluted the waterways  
And Mum and aunt Ambu fell out about all her speaking out.'  
None of it sheds much light  
On why Mum's long-lost Marsh dwelling aunt  
Would leave a 'water legacy' for ME  
With strict orders only to claim it on the night of the full moon

We follow the faded signs to *Sandlings*  
Black boarded cottages open to fields  
Scent of salt sea in the air  
Waves whisper  
Mum's feeling her way  
Retracing her steps to back in the day  
Treading on walkway paths  
That bow and dip  
'She called this 'The Eel walk' Mum says, all creeped out  
'Eels are awesome... saw them on a documentary. The glassy ones 'Elves'...  
No, 'Elvers' migrate thousands of miles across the sea  
'Ugh! Chand, they're way too slithery for me!'  
Shuddery, Mum plugs herself in to her podcast on Midwifery

Wild reed beds sway above our heads  
 I surf the waves  
 Serenaded by secretive songbirds  
*Goldcrests? Sand Martins?*  
 A *Dragonfly* darts in and out of bullrushes  
 Dazzling – emerald - lace wings  
 Inheriting a jewel like this would be something  
 Compound eye swivelling 360 degrees  
 Kaleidoscoping colours beyond my imagining  
*Dragonfly!*  
 If only I could see the world through your eyes

Crossing a narrow bridge  
 I run my hands over the driftwood rail  
 Tracing the words carved in

*Welcome to 'Midwife Waterweb'*  
*Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.'*

*Amba Vita & W.B Yeats!*

Mum pulls a weirded-out face  
 'Maybe SHE's the one who planted the midwife seed in me!  
 'Watch out!' I grab Mum's arm and steer her around a trail of sandy mounds  
*Ground Bees*

S w a n s g h o s t - g l i d e o v e r s t i l l i n l a n d w a t e r s

Mum points to a 'bird of prey'  
*Marsh Harrier*  
 I watch it ride the currents of air  
 Breathing in a salt-air wish

To fly

Mum sighs, 'Can't be too far now.'

Waterways widen  
 Patchwork of crystal and mossy green mulch  
 'Massive fish!' Mum points out a shoal, sun-basking  
 How come she doesn't know the names for anything?  
 ...Golden backed with scarlet fins...  
*Roach!*

A pig-squeal has Mum break into a trot  
 'Only a tiny bird! Warding us off,' I laugh  
 'It worked!' Mum croaks  
 Gulps water, strides ahead  
*Water Rail!*

Rucksack dumped on a sandy ridge  
 Arms outstretched against a clear blue sky  
 I fly to Mum to see  
 A huddle of shabby wooden shacks  
 Backs to the sea, with their own salt-water estuary

Mum kicks at blackened ash, heavy sighing  
 Rubbish everywhere  
 Cans float on brackish water  
 Surface covered in oily film  
 Mum's rattled  
 'Maybe we'll find whatever Aunt Ambu's gifted you and be on our way.'

## Dragonfly

Light

fades

Over sand dunes a crystal kite bobs on the breeze  
 Announcing, at least, that the sea's clean  
 Don't care what Mum says  
 I'm swimming by moonlight tonight

Mum hands me the key to  
 NUMBER 1 SANDLINGS

Ratty looking blankets hang off bunkbeds  
 Broken pottery and wizened cores scatter the ground  
 Smells of rot and damp  
 I climb the ladder to the top bunk  
 Find, on a high shelf, a collection  
 Stones with holes, feathers, eggshells  
 No jewels  
 Nothing except a matted nest of plaited reeds  
 Reaching out, my fingers break a giant cobweb

shelf

crashes

down

*feathers drift  
 shimmering light  
 flies out*

I'm sure I heard something else fall  
Under the bottom bunk  
I spy  
A water marbled-covered notebook  
Lying open

## *For Chand*

Is this my water legacy?

Mum hangs back, understands  
I need to read this on my own  
Tuck it in my pocket, heading out  
Mum shouts after me, 'Keep in my sights!'

midnight blue moths

lead the way

fly between shacks

land on a well

voice in my ear

*Drink my dear! I am 70 percent of you. Protect me and I protect you.'*

Ambu?  
I sip then gulp the well-spring water  
Tastes of lemon grass  
Drink and drink until my thirst is quenched

Returning to the estuary

Enfolded in a circle of mid-water-wife wings

I stare in, reading reflections on my face  
Time passes as twilight sky paints the water  
Orange, ruby red, yellow  
Darkening to greys and charcoal  
I read Aunt Ambu's words  
In the bright glow of the full moon



## For Chand

*Moon child of the tides  
Waters that flow through me flow through you  
The youngest member of our family  
Balance in me is the balance in you*

*Way before I moved to Sandlings humans began pouring their poisons into our waterways.  
My family thought I'd grown into a recluse, but truth be told, I've never been alone, in this watery home.  
Apart from all the glorious wildlife. Over time I've had many Midwife Waterweb gatherings along with their families. They  
came from rivers, tarns, wetlands oceans, ponds, lagoons, becks, streams, waterfalls bringing magical news of a new water-hu-  
man adaptation. All had the same crystal-clear vision of a strange creature spotted fleetingly in babies like you - born on the  
night of a full moon.*



*Inside their mouths a creature glowed with moonstone eyes, glassy eel tales and emerald lace wings. Entering this world, not with cries but quirky chordal clicks and echoes... like whale-song. On a baby's first cry these creatures dissolved onto their tiny tongues. So it was that Mid-Water-Wives around the world sensed a new evolution stirring and studied and recorded moonchild traits. They were all:*

- *Drawn to water like moths to light*
- *Emotional - ruled by the tides*
- *Nature lovers*
- *Fierce guardians of home wat erways*
- *Able to sniff out pollution, waste, impurity*
- *Linguists of international echolocation*

*But the most mysterious trait of all is that they told magical tales of meeting strange creatures they named **Water Seers***

*Their stories always ended in exactly the same way...*

*'At the purification of polluted water Moontide children came face to face with their own 'Water Seer' communicating through echolocation its water web song, translated into human words ...*

*We ask only this of you*

*Transfer me to another water course, to continue my purification work*

*I am 70 percent of you. Protect me and I protect you*

*Keep hope alive*

*For on human care we thrive.*

moths shimmer bright

water surges

breath-held

My Water Seer slithers from oily dregs

Struggling to shed its pollution film

I hold it in my palm

Blow life into its matted wings

Emotion courses through my veins

Salt tears

Breathe, please breathe

Open mouth, moon light shoots out

Turning the murky water **crystal clear**



Waterweb song swells to **cosmic choir**

'Wow! Chand! Never heard your voice that strong before!'  
Mum hands me a note from Aunt Ambu  
Praising ME for cleaning up the water

*My last wish is for Chand to gather up all my treasure and float it out to sea*

'Now I know what's meant to be  
Gently cupping my *Water Seer*  
Over the dunes we go to where land meets sea  
Mum dips her toe, shivering, says she's too tired to go in

Cradling my *Water Seer* safe in Ambu's nest  
Held against my chest  
Gasping for breath, swimming frog-legs, on my back following a moonlit path  
An indigo wave rises  
With parting tears, I let my precious *Water Seer*  
Float away to find a newborn  
Moontide child

Back on shore Mum's left her beach combing  
Wild-waving me in, calling 'look what I found in the shingle!'  
I surface, teeth chattering  
Mum drops a *Water Seer* jewel in my palm  
*Dragonfly* in me dances and my ice-chilled bones glow

**moonstone**