

# Lynda Bennett

## Thirteen Paths

“**W**hat do you want to do?” I had gone to the psychic reader for an answer, not to be questioned.

“I don’t know whether to do it or not, that’s what I’ve come to ask you.”

“No wonder you need help. Is that what you believe? That it’s an either/or decision?”

“Of course. You either walk a path or you don’t.”

I was getting a bit testy by now. I had paid good money, and had to tell a few not-quite-truths about my whereabouts to be here. Her plentiful breasts shook with laughter as she patted my perfectly manicured hand with her stocky, wrinkled fingers. Not only were my childhood fears stoked into little flames, but the small wooden chair she pulled out was blocking my exit.

Before I could set her straight about treating me like some gawky, over-imaginative schoolgirl, she spoke as she lowered herself, eyes glued to mine. In the same tone as my maths teacher, she informed me that there were actually thirteen paths from which to choose and they all end up in the same place. Ah, I got it then. That was her technique: to make you ask where? Once lured into feeling she has the answers, you’ll pay again and again for her secret knowledge. I told her I wasn’t in the business of party games and if my friends were wrong about her being able to help, maybe I should leave now. Silence permeated my skin. A soft, warm voice surrounded me.

“There are always thirteen paths for every footstep.”

I wanted to object; I breathed out forcefully, but the vocal chords would not respond. Despite my ‘But . . . ’ that floated uselessly across the room.

“You can choose to act well or badly in five ways each, or do nothing in three.” She continued.

“I want to do what’s right,” I whispered.

“Right and wrong, my dear, are only points of view.” Her wide pupils and green irises fluoresced, mine were held captive.

“Let me explain your choices, then you can choose a card.” I nodded irrelevantly, as she launched into her spiel.

“Whenever we are aware of a choice, we can choose to help or hurt, in five ways. They are; to willingly and actively participate, to engage reluctantly, to act with the sole aim of impressing others, to act out of fear or under threat and finally for purely personal gain.” I looked at her, confused but focused. She continued.

“You may choose to do nothing in three ways, being; to watch, to walk away or to observe and use the information to your own advantage.”

As I emerged into awareness of the phones ringing and the customers in the main office, I shook my determination into responding with my only defence.

“And what if you just don’t know?”

The cards had shuffled themselves and spread into an odd wheel shape. I counted—thirteen, not twelve. The voice in the air said to choose, and suddenly there was a hand reaching across the table and I touched one worn, slightly frayed and faded card.

“Before I turn it over, what did you mean that they all end up in the same place?”

“In death, of course,” came the answer in professorial tone, this time. Swirling silence. My fingers jerked away from their choice.

“If it all ends in death, then why bother choosing? Who cares?” The gentle laugh was followed by

“You don’t think you’re going to live forever do you?”

Death, forever, good and evil: these were not what I had come to ask about.

“Anyway, isn’t thirteen supposed to be unlucky? The Chinese say that 3 plus 1 is four, and 4 sounds the same as “death”. And everyone knows

about Friday the thirteenth. So how can everything I do spin around the number thirteen?" I don't think I saw her stand, but there she was, turning back towards me with one arm crooked, offering me lustrous scarves. She reverently laid them over a soft padded bar immediately to my left, that I had previously not noticed.

"Feel them. One of them will feel comfortable in your soul when you hold it." Well, it was better than discussing death, so I reached out.

"They are silk and cotton, from nature, and reflect the thirteen colours of the rainbow—the seven basic colours of Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet, plus the six exactly between them, where they merge to become more of one or the other."

Whilst remonstrating that I had never heard that before, my hand was drawn to the yellow—not the bright one, but the yellowy-gold next to the orange one. The sensuous texture persuaded itself to smooth around my neck.

"Ah," She said in an annoyingly knowledgeable tone.

"Can we get to my question now?" I refused to be seduced by the scarf. "Let's do those cards."

"But you have already answered yourself."

Defeated and confused, I meekly asked her what was going on.

"The rainbow colours are also chakra colours. Your question has been uppermost in your mind since walking in my door. You have chosen a middle path between the yellow of self drive and the orange of relationships or reproduction."

"But . . . ?"

"Of the thirteen choices, you don't want to hurt anyone, including yourself. Neither do you want to do nothing, or you wouldn't be here." I could only nod and frown.

"So to act positively, there are only the first two choices for you—to act willingly or reluctantly. Yes?" More stupid nodding. And the stupid eyes were getting like I might need a tissue soon. As she held the cloud-soft ends of the scarf with her small hands, I suddenly appreciated the understated strength they emitted.

"This is my favourite one. I want you to have it; to remember who you are."

This was totally weird, and I'm not sure I should even tell anyone this, but I immediately felt yellow like the scarf.

“Do you see?” she asked patiently. The little flickering flames of doubt and fear began to glow with a warmth of knowing that I still could not quite acknowledge.

“You can do both, my dear. It is not either/or. You can go to University and marry the boy. You will be strong, smart and happy. The children will come when they are ready.” The really weird part is that I knew inside me that she was right. I wanted to learn more about the thirteen colours, and would never forget those thirteen paths.