

*the Tetradian weblogs*

# Other writing: Travel and fiction

Small stories from travels and more



**Tom Graves**

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# WRITE - TRAVEL AND FICTION: SAMPLE

This is a sample of the content from the Tetradian *Write - Travel and Fiction* anthology.

This anthology from the Tetradian weblog highlights a range of themes beyond my usual domain of architectures and the like. There's a particular emphasis here on travel and fiction.

This sample contains around one-tenth of the content from the full anthology. The complete book includes about 35 posts and 10 images, and is split into two sections:

- *Write: Travel* - centres around travel-experiences in France, Portugal, Mexico, Guatemala, Britain and other countries.
- *Write: Fiction* - presents examples of writing in various fictional styles, for business-stories, alternate-history and science-fiction.

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For further information on enterprise-architectures and more, visit the **Tetradian weblog** at [weblog.tetradian.com](http://weblog.tetradian.com)<sup>1</sup>. The weblog currently includes some 1400 posts and more than a thousand images, and is at present the world's primary source on *whole-enterprise architecture* - methods, principles and practices for architectures that extend beyond IT to the whole enterprise.

For more ebooks and anthologies on enterprise-architecture and more, visit the **Tetradian website on Leanpub** at

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<sup>1</sup><http://weblog.tetradian.com>

[leanpub.com/u/tetradian](https://leanpub.com/u/tetradian)<sup>2</sup>. (Each anthology contains around 30-40 posts from the weblog.)

Some books are also available in print format, from all regular book-retailers. For more details, see the 'Books' section on the main **Tetradian website** at [tetradian.com/books/](http://tetradian.com/books/)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup><https://leanpub.com/u/tetradian>

<sup>3</sup><http://tetradian.com/books/>

# Lourmarin and Cucuron

My cousin Matthew lives in Lourmarin, a pleasant small Provencal town, famous for writers such as Albert Camus and Peter Mayle, which has had the misfortune to become something of a tourist spot. They've at last done something about the traffic, so it's possible for it once again to be a small town in which ordinary people live ordinary lives – children playing in the old main street again, people sitting quietly outside the cafes drinking cafe or a 'pression' (draught beer) or an anise or whatever. The Slow Cities movement is important: it's often hard to see what we've lost in a world sliced apart by speeding cars...

For contrast, I cycled – puff puff wheeze wheeze – up the five miles or so to Cucuron, another typical Provencal town that isn't on a main road to anywhere, and doesn't have a chateau, and isn't the birthplace or living-place of someone famous, and hence isn't on the main tourist drag – with very noticeable differences in energy. It's notable for its 'bassin', the 'L'Etang de Cucuron', which is a huge pool in place of a main square, about 20 metres wide by 80 or so long, and octagonal at one end. Film buffs would know it as the set for the 'first getting together' scene in the film "A Good Year", with Russell Crowe and an excellent French actress whose name I've embarrassingly forgotten. A great meal at the Cafe de l'Etang – a salmon salad, supposedly a single serve though easily big enough for two, for a paltry 7E50 – a few photographs, and a gentle freewheel back to the tourist hubbub of Lourmarin. Where I discussed academia and French linguistic theory and socio-geography with cousin Matt, who teaches at Universite' d'Aix-en-Provence: but that's another story, of course.

And I'm sitting on the step outside the cafe-bookshop where they've kindly left their 'free-to-customers' wi-fi running even though

they're closed, and it's 7pm and it's just getting dark, so I'd better stop for now. See y'all later, I trust?

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**Source** (Tetradian weblog)

- *Date*: 2007/10/01
- *URL*: [lourmarin-and-cucuron](http://weblog.tetradian.com/lourmarin-and-cucuron)<sup>4</sup>
- *Comments*: (none)
- *Categories*: Uncategorized
- *Tags*: travel

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<sup>4</sup><http://weblog.tetradian.com/lourmarin-and-cucuron>

# El dia del diablo

And here I was thinking that it might actually be quieter when I got back to Guatemala... wrong!

Turns out I've arrived here on El Dia Del Diablo – literally 'The Day of the Devil', which is an early part of the Christmas-season celebrations. It's the day when they burn the Devil in effigy, to celebrate his defeat by the soon-to-come Christ. And yes, English folks may well recognise a certain resemblance here to the now-almost-forgotten tradition of the burning of the Guy, because, yes, it's firework-night. Which means even more bangs and firecrackers than usual. A *lot* more bangs and firecrackers...

First warning of this was when some kids started letting off seriously big firecrackers just down the street (which in a country already overly awash with over-used guns seemed somewhat irresponsible, to say the least). Then when I went out for a walk at lunchtime (yes, I'm getting a *little* braver than my last trip here, though all the guys in the office still reminded me "a cuidado!" before I went out of the gate!) I noticed an indigenous woman not with the usual tortillas or junk children's-toys but a huge table of fireworks. Something going on, methinks. Finally a struggled sort-of-Spanish conversation elicited the information that it's El Dia Del Diablo. At which point everyone in the office went off to their various celebrations, leaving me literally in the dark.

Didn't take long to find out what it meant. The guy from across the street hauls out a large cardboard box containing a smiling bright-red effigy, taller than the rather pudgy daughter who was sort-of assisting him. And when his other children finally turn up – the two elder boys from setting off their own bangers just down the road apiece – he sets fire to it. In the middle of the street. With cars wandering past. Various fireworks follow – one almost landing



on my head as I watch from the balcony above the street. Casual madness, if all in a very everyday Guatemalan style.

I'm an habitual people-watcher, I fear, so the most interesting part for me was the family dynamics. Father, big and loud, pandering to his three podgy, pouting princess-daughters – aged from about six to ten, I'd guess, each posing with their hands over their ears in play-acted fear, and crying and stomping their feet immediately they didn't get their own way in even the most trivial of matters. Three boys, one of them perhaps also six, and hanging around vaguely with the daughters, the two elder ones perhaps twelve and fourteen, off doing their own explosive thing. (Some of the fireworks seriously dangerous – they experimented putting a huge thunderflash into a plastic drainpipe as a crude mortar, but it blasted the drainpipe to pieces. Yikes...) Mother standing around, wandering off, being social with the neighbours, barely interacting with the father at all. And a thin quiet girl, perhaps fifteen, much darker skin – hence presumably indigenous rather than one of this family – standing there in the garage doorway with a hosepipe, quietly putting out the blaze at the end, quietly tidying up the amazing amount of mess, all but shut out of the fun, unacknowledged and ignored by all the others. The maid, I suppose, which seems a bit of a surprise in this relatively lower-middle-class suburb – though with six children in the family the mother would certainly need some help. Yet interestingly she was also the only one who noticed me, shared a smile in the dark as I videoed the scene from above. Another person who lives the life of the Outsider. Nice.

Fortunately it seems to be an early-evening thing – most of the flashes and bangs have eased off now, leaving only the ever-present roar of the traffic on the *periferico*. Who knows, I might even get a good night's sleep for once!

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**Source** (Tetradian weblog)

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- *Tags*: folklore, guatemala, Society, tradition, travels

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<sup>5</sup><http://weblog.tetradian.com/dia-del-diablo>

# On fiction and EA - Marco's plan

I've been saying for a while that I'm moving more towards **fiction** as a way of explaining the core ideas of my work.

This briefish multi-chapter extract is from a ***business-oriented novel*** with a working-title of *The End of Certainty*. (Yeah, I know it's not a good title, but it'll do for now!) The aim is to introduce whole-enterprise thinking and methods, but in a form that makes it all more palatable and 'human'.

The characters we meet here, either in person or indirectly, are as follows:

- **Marco Pellegrini** - the narrator - is the recently-appointed 'Head of Organizational Development' for a large but unnamed multinational in the widget-retail business
- **Margaret Millhouse** is the organisation's CEO
- **Helen Pellegrini** is Marco's wife, a lead analyst for another organisation, MarCom
- **'Mouse'** (Amber Pellegrini) is Marco and Helen's eight-year-old daughter

The context for this extract - chapters 21-27 of the book-so-far - is that Marco has developed a change-plan along the typical ideas and assertions that we'd see in the present-day business-press, as promoted by business-schools and mainstream business-pundits. But as we'll see, the plan, uh, doesn't quite go to plan... - folks here may recognise some of the blatant howlers and the first signs of the screw-ups that arise from them.

The Mouse's painting, mentioned in see Chapter 22, turns out to be a key anchor-metaphor throughout the whole story - even if entirely unintentional and unknowing on her part. For example, the targets in the painting symbolise a problem with business-targets that we'll see arising already even in this extract; and 'the Scotsman' is a symbol for a key character in the story whom Marco has already met, but doesn't yet realise that he's done so, or how important the Scotsman will be in helping him to get out of his mess.

This book is perhaps half-written already; if I use it as my main focus for the 'NaNoWriMo<sup>6</sup> Challenge' next month, I should have a first-edit full-draft available for people to play with by around Christmas or New Year.

Hope you enjoy it, anyway!

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## Chapter 21

All right, I've survived that meeting - we have the go-ahead from Margaret.

I'm pleased with what I've done on that plan - she pretty much approved the whole thing as-is, without much change, or even much argument at all. That screaming-match of hers just before our meeting might have had something to do with it, of course.

Ye gods - I got a 'yes' out of the Queen of No! She only made one significant change, but which I know the marketing people won't like: she's vetoed their entire social-media plan, as a waste of time and resources. She says we can just opt out of the whole thing, not bother with it, not let it bother us. I'm inclined to agree with her, though: after all, it's only another marketing-channel, and

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<sup>6</sup><http://nanowrimo.org/>

we're spending more than enough on advertising already. As for the 'reply-channel' that they talked about, all it would be is another way for customers to complain at us. And we need to stop that happening, as much as we can, otherwise our customer-service costs will go through the roof - and that's another overhead we really don't need. No, just opt out of social-media entirely - we don't need it.

Okay, let's go put this into action, and fast: we need to be able to show real returns from at least some of this within the current quarter.

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## Chapter 22

"What's that noise, Daddy?"

We're in the town square, after her school, and there's a guy in full Scots kit playing bagpipes over on the far side. Is it Burns Night coming up again already? - I don't know. Probably.

Personally I think the best part of the sound of the bagpipes is when they stop, but the Mouse is enthralled. She drags me over there, and stands up close, her fingers in her ears and a huge grin on her face.

Finally he stops, at last, my ears get a rest, and I grab the chance to gently drag the Mouse away while I can. She's still way hyped-up over it.

"Wow! I didn't know you could *do* all that loud, from just a thing you blow! *Wow!*"

Of course - she's never seen that kind of live-music before. Music comes out of a loudspeaker, otherwise it's just the tinkly little stuff they do with tambourines and triangles at her school. So yeah, bagpipes would be a bit of a shock to the system, then, wouldn't

it? I have to smile - kids are just amazing, watching them learn new things. Learn new things *from* them, too.

But then she stops dead in her tracks, yanking me to a halt as well. She turns back to look at the piper again, but thankfully doesn't seem to want to go back. Then she lets go of my hand, faces me instead, and settles into her 'I'm thinking about things' pout. She's looking worried: something's not right.

"Why's he wearing a skirt, Daddy? *Girls* wear skirts, *boys* don't. It's *wrong*."

Yeah, she's in the everything's-black-and-white-no-shades-of-grey stage at the moment. Everything's absolute, no context, no complications. Just either right, or wrong. She's going to get a few shocks later, isn't she? - we all do... But at least this one's safe enough to explain to her, even at this age.

"He's dressed like a Scottish soldier, Mouse. And it's not a skirt, it's called a kilt. Some Scotsmen have always worn them, especially the soldiers. Goes a long long way back into history." You gotta be tough to live in that climate, I think to myself. And even tougher to be a big tough guy and wear that stupid skirt in public. So yeah, it kinda figures, I guess?

"Oh." The Mouse is still thinking about it. "I s'pose that 'splains it, then."

"Explains what?"

"In my painting. You know, of you, at work. In the castle, with the dragons and all."

What painting? Oh, ah, right, yeah, *that* painting. Just before the weekend. Got it.

"The woman in the market, with the frying-pan, hitting the dragon. You 'member? When I drew it, I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't work it out."

Like I said, even she has to stop for breath sometimes.

“That music-man’s kilt ‘splains it, you see. I knew it had to be a skirt, but it’s not a she, it’s a he. The frying-pan woman is a Scotsman, like the music-man.”

Scotsman? What’s she on about? Why on earth would it matter? She’s my own kid, sure, but I gotta admit that sometimes I really don’t understand her at all.

But at least the worry’s vanished from her face; she breaks into a grin that’s so like her mother’s that it almost hurts. She grabs hold of my hand, and tugs me along with her as she breaks into a happy little skipping walk. She looks down at the ground for a moment, then turns her face toward me.

“Come on, Daddy, come *on*! We promised to cook the dinner for Mummy, we *promised*, and she’ll be home soon!”

Kids: you gotta laugh, right? At least *they* don’t have the worries that we do, from the real world. Our job to shield them from that, for as long as we can.

But yeah, she’s right, let’s get the shopping done, and get home. I want to have everything right for my beautiful woman when she comes in from the cold.

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## Chapter 23

The plan: it’s working!

Everything’s in place: the targets, the metrics, all the outsource-arrangements, databases, dashboards, the lot.

The roll-out is going really well - no problems so far, anywhere. A small cost on setting it up, of course, but we’re well on track to big savings even by the end of this quarter.

Might be a few union-hassles with all of the layoffs, but that's about it: not expecting anything else.

Kind of a triumph, really, though I say it myself. Feels good.

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## Chapter 24

I think it's working.

A few hiccups around some of the IT-systems, but that's nothing to be surprised about. Teething-problems, that's all.

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## Chapter 25

I hope it's working...

But I can't tell. That's what's driving me nuts.

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## Chapter 26

It's not working.

I don't know how it's not working, but it isn't.

We did everything by the book, but there's something weird going on. Everyone's hitting their targets just fine, but it isn't getting any better. If anything, it's getting worse - all sorts of odd problems



popping up in unexpected places, kind of somewhere in the cracks *between* things. Every time we fix a problem, something else just pops up somewhere else instead. It just doesn't make sense.

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## Chapter 27

I know it's not working.

But everyone else believes that it is working - or *wants* to believe it is, perhaps.

And I can't *prove* it, so they won't listen to me anyway - especially as our figures for this quarter show everything as a resounding success.

All I've got is a hunch - a *feel*, I suppose you'd call it - and a bunch of little stories that just don't add up.

Some of them are things that are just too good. Look at the call-centre logs, for instance. The target for customer-service calls is two minutes max: the operator has to have dealt with the call by then, or passed it on to someone who *can* fix the problem for the customer. Fair enough. And if you only look at the summaries, at the traffic-light set - green, amber, red - it all looks fine: we very rarely get anything outside of the green. If it's outside the green, we come down on them like a ton of bricks anyway, so it's not a great surprise: they *ought* to do it well, to the target, and they know it.

But if you look at the *detail* - like I did the other day - it just doesn't add up: the number of calls climbs steeper and steeper towards the two-minute mark, and then there's just nothing, nada, zilch. Not many pass-ons, either: it's like almost everything gets magically fixed exactly at the two-minute mark. And I don't trust that kind of magic. I *especially* don't trust it when our call-volume is going

up so steeply that we'll soon need another call-centre, and maybe more.

Something wrong there, I'm *sure* of it. The problem is that it's only visible if you dig right down into the detail - and for much of it, look for what *isn't* there, like a more sensible bell-curve distribution for call-durations, not this magic cut-off exactly at the target. But how do I explain it to anyone else? They only look at the aggregated summaries and the traffic-light flags, and everything's just fine and dandy up there. Or *looks* fine and dandy, but actually isn't: and we have no way to find out *how much* it isn't. Or *why*, for that matter. That's what's worrying me right now.

And then there's what happened to Helen in our store over near the Marcom office. She went in, picked up a bunch of stuff, and went over to the checkout in the usual way: nothing unusual there. Halfway through, the checkout-chick stops dead at one item, and tells Helen she can't have it. What's wrong, says Helen - why can't I have it? It's 'cos it doesn't exist, says the chick. What do you mean, 'it doesn't exist'? says Helen - you're *holding* it, in your hand, right now. I know, says the chick, but the computer says we haven't got any in stock - and I can't sell it to you if we haven't got any in stock.

Helen starts losing her rag a bit at this point, and says, look, it's right here, it exists, and I want to buy it - are you going to let me buy it? I can't, says the chick, the computer won't let me add it to the tally if it says we haven't got any stock. But you *have* got stock, says Helen. I know, says the chick, but there's nothing I can do - computer says no, and I can't do nothing else.

At which Helen just throws her hands up in the air, she told me, and just walks out, without buying anything at all. And frankly I don't blame her: I'd do the same. But she's told a lot of people about that screw-up: I've even had a couple of so-called joking emails about it from some of her guys at Marcom. She says she won't bother trying to buy anything from there again, and as far as I know, she hasn't - which doesn't do me much good at home, either, because it's *my*

company's store that's screwed her around in this way. She had a bit of a go at me about it when she first came back from that trip, which I thought was a bit unfair, because it's nothing to do with me: but she said that logically it *was* my fault, because it was *my* change-plan that pushed through the changes that made everything fall apart in that stupid way. And in that sense, yeah, she's right - which is a real worry.

It's stuff like that. On the surface, everything all looks like it's working really well. According to the figures, according to everything that we're measuring, it *is* working well. And yet I *know* it isn't. I'm worried, I really am. And I don't know what to do about it - which is worrying me even more.

Ye gods...

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(That's it for now: comments welcome!)

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### **Source** (Tetradian weblog)

- *Date*: 2016/10/17
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- *Tags*: Business, enterprise, Enterprise architecture, fiction, organisational change, sense-making, strategy

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<sup>7</sup><http://weblog.tetradian.com/on-fiction-and-ea-marcos-plan>

# Fiction: Elizabeth's question

*(Given how difficult the times are for so many of us at present, it seems the right time to throw in a bit of somewhat lighter relief. This short standalone story comes from the fictional Commonwealth of my 'Viner Codex' storyworld - see the [Viner-Codex website](http://vinercodex.com/)<sup>8</sup> for more details on that. There's also another sort-of-story about this storyworld that you'll find on WattPad as an ongoing serial: to read that online, see '[The Viner Dimension](https://www.wattpad.com/story/253687428-the-viner-dimension)'<sup>9</sup> on WattPad.*

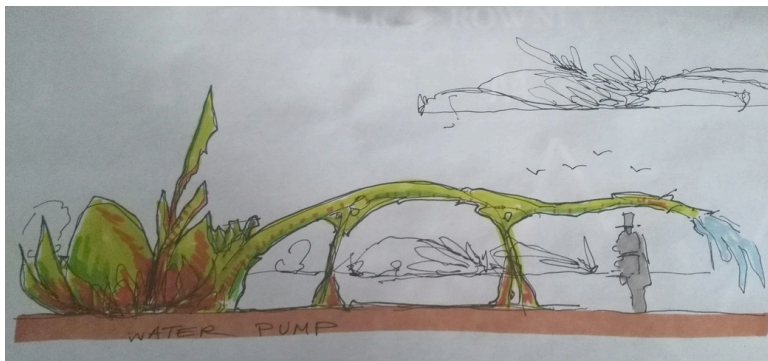
*This story is about innovation, and is set in an equivalent of 18th-century England - though as you'll see, there are quite a few differences compared to our world. Chief among those differences, perhaps, is that in the story you'll see a few references to a professional discipline called vinery. It's best described as 'gene-splicing with 17th century technology' - the results of which are the 'weird plant-things' that forms one of the key themes in the storyworld's tagline 'Weird politics; weird plant-things; weird battles where nobody dies'. For the other two themes, well, you'll have to wait for another story-fragment, won't you?*

*Hope it's fun, anyway - Share And Enjoy!*

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<sup>8</sup><http://vinercodex.com/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.wattpad.com/story/253687428-the-viner-dimension>



Elizabeth Thompson had a question: “Why do plants stay in one place?” “Don’t be silly, dear”, was her mother’s reply. “Plants stay where they’re planted. You’ll learn more about that when you go to school next year.”

Elizabeth would indeed go to school in her seventh year. There she learnt her alphabet and her times-tables and that this was the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred And Fifty Two Of Our Lord And Lady, and about the countries of the world and that this part of the world was called the Commonwealth which was part of the Greater Commonwealth but much of the world still wasn’t though they didn’t explain why or why not or what the difference was, and all kinds of other clever things too. But she didn’t get any answer to her question. The only response that she’d had, from crusty old Mr Hansall who’d wanted to be a priest but there weren’t any priests any more, he’d snapped at her and said, “Don’t be stupid, girl! That’s why plants are called ‘plants’!” Which wasn’t an answer. She knew that. But she also knew that when grown-ups talked like that, they didn’t want a different answer. So she kept her question to herself - but kept it like a treasure, wrapped up in cloth and cotton wool in its own private box, so that she could bring it out to share with someone else when the right day came.

Four years later, a bigger girl now, and allowed to have opinions of her own at times, she moved, unlike a plant, to the larger school in the larger town, a whole two miles away, travelling on the slow school coach behind its two slow plodding horses. It was time to unwrap her question once more, but this time with an addendum: why should plants not just move, but move *fast*? By this time she knew, for certain, that most plants had legs, of a kind, though in their case they were called 'roots'. Big trees had enormous legs like these, so strong that the foresters had to leave them in the ground when they cut the tree down. Yet these legs *did* move: they burrowed through the ground as the plant grew. It was only because they dug so deep into the ground that the plant stayed still. But why was that so? Not all trees were like that: when it was blown over in that great storm two years ago, the beech tree at the house where Mr Collison lived had roots that looked more like a flat disk. So if some roots were shallow like that, why could they not lift out of the ground altogether, and let the plant move?

She tried her question again, this time with her new teachers at the new school. Still no answer as such from any of them, though at least this time there was no snarl of disparagement. "I don't know, Miss Thompson", said Mistress Collery, her teacher in the sciences, as the old Natural Philosophies were now known. "I'm sorry if I've let you down", she said, though she hadn't let Elizabeth down at all because she'd been the first grown-up who'd actually listened to her question. "But it does sound like something that the viners might know", added Mistress Collery. "Perhaps try the nursery on Calendar Street, close to the hay-store. Ask for Penelope Urchin - she'd help you, I think."

Viners? She'd heard of them, of course, though she didn't know much about what they did. Something to do with plants, was all she could glean from her school-books, but that was all. Strange plants, though; unusual plants. Plants that couldn't be grown in the usual way, like in the vegetable-garden or the fruit-orchard or out in the fields. Plants like the pump-tree at the village well, and the

fuel-plant that could heat the water and make a house warm for the winter, and the crane-tree that they used to lift heavy things at Mr Murchland's forge. Those kinds of plants. So yes, the people who grew those plants might have an answer for her.

They didn't, unfortunately. Not then. But they did show her how to start looking for an answer to her question.

Twenty years later, now a grown-up herself, and now known to her colleagues, her husband, her children and all of her family and all of the villagers and townsfolk and more for at least twenty miles around, as Master-Viner Knotswoman Beth Harrow, she did at last have her answer. No-one else had given her that answer: she'd had to create it for herself, through years and years of experiments, failure, dogged determination and sheer hard work. And this was her answer: "Yes, plants do usually stay where they're planted: that's why they're called plants. But if you learn how to be a viner, you can make it different. You can make it otherwise."

While the gathered crowd watched and cheered, she stood up on the back of this strange flat tree that she had grown, as it lifted each of its own large leg-like roots out of the ground, and walked away down the road, as fast and then faster than any horse could run. And then came back home again for tea.

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### **Source** (Tetradian weblog)

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<sup>10</sup><http://weblog.tetradian.com/fiction-elizabeths-question>