

From the Author of **CITYFALL**

BUBBLES OF TIME



LORNA HOPKINS KEITH

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PEACE

THREE YEARS LATER, in the spring, Janni was not happy. Although she was on the council, she had little say in things, she still lived at home with her parents and two younger brothers, and she had not seen the stars again. The clan village of Freedom was too small; she felt stifled. She was a woman with no mate, no place of her own, no purpose to her life.

The only people on the world of Peace, the clan just managed to produce a decent living, with everyone expected to perform their assigned tasks. The village lay between two rivers, and the air smelled fresh and sweet with masses of flowers everywhere.

Janni thought about going exploring, even though only certain people were allowed to go farther than a half day from the clanhome and, even then, not alone.

One day, she *heard* Granlyn's voice in her mind, *summoning* her to come by after she finished with the garment she was mending.

'Okay,' she *sent* back, glancing around the craft hall with its white walls and rows of worktables where people did everything from making clothing to painting clay pots.

Next to Janni, Glori said, "Did you hear that?"

"Granlyn?"

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"Yes. You too?"

Glori nodded and put her mending away.

Janni finished sewing the last button on the tunic she was holding, stood up, and said, "Come on."

"Granlyn wants us," Glori said to Gramma Perri as the older woman looked their way.

She nodded, and the two young women left.

The two walked across the plaza and up the flower-lined path to Granlyn's house with the vines around the porch posts. The old woman welcomed them in, and they found Leona already there. She and her twin, Curtis, were Granlyn's late-middle-age miracle babies, born just before Janni and Glori. Leona had the same square face and black curls as the others in Granlyn's line, but blond Curtis took after his dad, Grampa Larry.

"Welcome," Granlyn said as Janni and Glori sat on the sagging brown couch next to Leona. "I've asked you here because it is time for you gals to set up your own households. Janni, you'll mate with Willie, and Glori, you with Brian."

About time, Janni thought. *Something was finally happening.*

Because the clan was so small, and she was the first born female and Willie the first born male of her generation, Janni always knew she would be mated with him.

"I guess that leaves Richard for me," Leona said, rolling her eyes.

"Unless you want to wait for one of the younger boys to grow up."

Leona shook her head. "I always figured it would be him."

Janni wondered what it would be like to mate with someone you loved, like Granlyn and Grampa Larry did. He and Granlyn had grown up with each other and always been together.

"There are several things we need to discuss," Granlyn began. "First, have any of you discovered any kind of new Talent?"

"No," said Glori.

Leona shook her head.

Janni thought of the stars she'd seen, but that wasn't a Talent. She shook her head.

"Okay. Let me know immediately when you do. Our Talents are creating a big problem. Some of the others in my generation — especially Maria, Chad, and Old Art — are afraid of your generation and want the Talents to go away."

"Do *you* want them to stop?" Janni demanded.

Granlyn smiled. "Yes and no. They do have their uses — the mindlink and teleportation. But Marisa's time thing, no. We don't want to turn into Watchers; we want to stay as we are and make a home here for humans for many generations to come."

"But what can we do?" Janni asked. "I don't want to give up the Talents I have, just not have any more." She thumped the couch.

"No, Janni," Granlyn said. "We need to pull back. The mind Talent would be safe to keep, but not the others." She rocked in her chair.

"But Granlyn ..." Janni began.

"How could we do that?" Leona asked.

"Try not to use them," Glori suggested.

"Glori," Janni cried.

'Calm down,' Glori *sent* on their private mindlink.

Granlyn moved around in her chair. "Janni, control yourself. Glori has a point. Leona, do you have anything to offer?"

"Okay. What if we three don't have babies, or maybe just boys, and the younger ones of our generation can have whatever they want." Leona rubbed the arm of the couch.

"What if the new Talent just goes to the firstborn girl, no matter when she comes?" Janni asked.

Granlyn shook her head. "I think we should simply use our Talents as little as possible. For right now, you three put off having babies for as long as you can. Think about it." Granlyn looked at Janni. "Second, have any of you started on your houses?"

"Willie and Brian have laid out our houses," Janni said. *A safe subject.*

"Good. Go ahead and get started on them." She paused and closed her eyes.

The young women waited.

When Granlyn opened her eyes and sat up, she said, "You do know the history of our people well, don't you?"

Three nods. Janni knew her great-grandfather, Grampa Larry, was Granlyn's cousin on her mother's side and so had no Talent. He was very good at telling what people were thinking by observing their body language.

"Good. We must never forget where we came from. And we must not forget there may be other human colonies on other

worlds. Just because we were taken from Earth when men were barely to the moon, doesn't mean interplanetary spaceships weren't built, and people traveled to other planets later."

"Oh," said Janni. That had never occurred to her. She looked at the books on the shelf across from her. Old books brought from Old Earth. Some were about people on other worlds.

"Now. You are the first three girls of your generation," Granlyn said. "I expect you to become responsible adults and conduct yourselves as such. You will set an example by not using your Talents unless necessary."

"But ..." Janni began.

"No buts, Janni. It may be that our Talents will atrophy if not used. You three also be thinking of any possible ways to rid ourselves of these Talents."

No way. The thought came from deep within Janni. *I need my Talents.*

"One more thing," Granlyn said. "About your children ..."

Before she could say another word, a loud boom came from the plaza area and, at the same time, screams in their minds.

"Mick," Janni cried. "He's hurt."

Her thirteen-year-old brother worked with Big Art and his son, Uncle Artie, the clan's scientists. She *heard* her mama scream as the three girls ran out the door, followed by Granlyn.

Janni smelled the smoke first. The science lab on the east side of the plaza was on fire. People grabbed buckets and scooped water from the river to throw on the blaze. Uncle Artie and three boys sat on the ground nearby. Mick lay beside them.

She ran to Mick, already being treated by Medic Anne. He had a big gouge on his forehead, blood running into his closed eyes, and burns on his arms and chest. He bit on a stick and moaned.

"Mick," Mama cried. She dropped beside him.

"He'll be okay, Marisa," Medic Anne said. "Poor kid, he got the worst of it."

"You were using Talent, weren't you?" Janni said, *seeing* in his mind what he had been doing.

"Leave him alone," Mama said, holding his hand. "What happened?" she asked Uncle Artie.

"He tried to use a Talent he hadn't fully mastered, moving things without touching them."

Janni's younger brother, Steve, ran up. "What happened? Did he do something bad?"

"Steven, hush," Mama said. "Just be thankful he's still alive."

"Okay." He sat and watched.

Granlyn arrived. "Were you using Talent?" she asked.

"Yes," Janni said.

"Well, that does it." Granlyn sat down carefully. "We must stop this Talent."

"I agree, but how?" Mama asked.

"Or at least do a better job of training the youngsters. He said he knew how to use it." Uncle Artie rubbed his head. "Sometimes Talent's useful, but it takes time for a young one to learn to use it right. The other boys and I only have minor injuries." He ignored Marisa.

"Well, think about it," Granlyn said.

Papa arrived and carried Mick to the clinic, followed by Medic Anne. Before Marisa could go after them, an older woman and her daughter stepped out of the group that had gathered around.

"When are you going to control your brats, Marisa?" the younger one demanded. "Look at the mess."

"Nancy, children — especially boys — are going to make mistakes," Marisa said, balling her fists.

"Tell them not to use Talent until they're grown up and can handle it."

"Now, Nan," the older woman said.

"All right, Mama," Nancy said. "But this has got to stop."

"Don't tell me how to raise my children," Marisa snapped.

Janni had never heard that tone of voice from her mother before. "Go, Mama," she whispered. *About time those old snoops got slapped down.*

"Girls, girls," Granlyn said in her boss tone. "That's enough. You two go on about your business, and you, Marisa, see about your son."

"Yes, Granlyn," Marisa said, and left for the clinic.

Janni tried to follow, but Granlyn held her back. "He'll be taken care of. You need to look after Stevie."

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“Okay.” Janni added, “Come on, Squirt.”

“Smartyass,” he said, and followed her to childcare, behind the schoolhouse. “Why can’t I go home?”

“Because your lesson starts soon so you need to be here.”

Janni returned to her craft project.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorna Hopkins Keith was born in Hollywood, California, earned a B.A. in Mathematics, and has been writing since her teens. Fascinated by both numbers and words, she is also a musician, photographer, and puzzler.

Lorna has self-published a science fiction trilogy, attended many science fiction conventions and writing workshops, and has read science fiction most of her life.

She grew up in California, lived in Colorado, and moved to Florida with her physical therapist husband, where they live by a lake with a chatty calico cat.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

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After Samanda Lar destroys her ex-husband, the Volen hand her the mission of saving the people of City and establishing their new home.



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*When Janni's mindTalent leads her to space,
she discovers other human colonies ...
and a threat to them all.*

*On the world of Peace, Janni must persuade her clan of the danger,
and move the colonists from another, larger planet to her world.*

*On Cityworld, in the community of Starview, leader Samanda Lar,
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disastrous move from dying City, foresees a coming menace and
faces the daunting task of convincing her people to move to
another world.*

*When aliens attack Peace, Janni must convince the Watchers, who
have programmed Janni's clan to replace them, that her clan
should remain human.*



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