

THREE KEYS



a novel

The Complete
Book Club Kit

AUTHOR OF

Stars Go Blue

LAURA PRITCHETT

Dear Reader,

I was at a writing residency in a remote area in New Mexico, sipping coffee and considering the sunrise and Sangre de Cristo mountains, when I first considered crime. What if I just stayed after my month was up? Besides the two wild horses that rambled by occasionally, I wasn't sure anyone would notice my continued presence in the old bungalow built by environmentalist Aldo Leopold.

This was all a hypothetical daydreamy delight, mind you—I had no plans to really overstay my welcome. I'm fundamentally too polite. But I started considering the anonymity a woman might *want* in certain circumstances and the kind she *gets* from society, whether she wants it or not. What if, in intersecting, they created a thunderclap of conditions that fostered wise elderdom?

By the end of the sunrise, I had the idea for this novel. Like me, Ammalie is going through the transformation into middle age—and confronting the accompanying invisibility situation. Our culture does a fine job of erasing older women—an impulse that must be met with resistance, of course. How satisfying, then, to be playing around with idea of anonymity and the exact opposite, which is really being *seen* as the manifested, powerful, perfect self we are.

Soon after, the pandemic hit, and I became increasingly interested in the ways we adapted to isolation, our newfound awareness of the fragility of all we'd taken for granted, and how the outdoors can serve as a safe haven.

All these themes—remoteness, invisibility, middle age, self-sufficiency, adventuring, the glory of nature, and the responsibility of caretaking of our planet—came together in *Three Keys*. Ammalie takes a "Very Grand Adventure," as Peter Pan puts it, breaking into homes in Colorado, Arizona, and New Zealand. She discovers that by breaking into other people's lives, she can find her own.

I hope you enjoy her trip—both literal and metaphorical—as much as I did writing it. And may we all find our own ways of adventuring forth with humor and mindfulness and grace.

For wild words and wild places,

Laura

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The feminine heroic journey

Let's face it: Women have gotten short shrift in adventure tales. Cultural narratives celebrate the solo male adventurer, but we all know that women too have explored the furthest reaches of our planet and space—all while dealing with body stuff that would send many men to their knees!

- What are some of the “hero’s journey” narratives that come to mind? These tales are often individualistic, external, and violent. (Think Odysseus and Luke Skywalker.)
- What feminine heroic journeys do you know of? These tales involve journeying inward—and often explore community, outreach, the lifting of others.
- Are inward journeys less prevalent? Why so?
- What barriers prevent women from taking solo adventures? Or having their stories celebrated? How can that be changed for the better?

Living in deeper relationship with the natural world

Ammalie is falling in love—with the planet, that is. And when we love something, we yearn to protect it.

- In what ways do you presently engage with nature? What brings you delight? Birdwatching? Clouds? Stars? The sea?
- Has your relationship changed over time? If so, what triggered that change?
- How would you answer Ammalie’s guiding question: “What kind of ancestor do I want to be?”

Survival course, anyone?

Who doesn’t like a good survival story? Especially now! Enrollment in survival courses has increased dramatically since covid—everything from urban survival, naturalist schools, and outdoor survival camps—and this novel attempts to capture the common human impulse to want to feel safe in a time of uncertainty.

- What is your experience with access to water and food? Has it been interrupted? What did you do?
- Have you ever been caught in a storm that scared you? How did you sit with the trauma or uncomfortableness of that?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

On being invisible

Let's face it: TV, magazines, books, and society largely erase the middle-age woman—ugh!

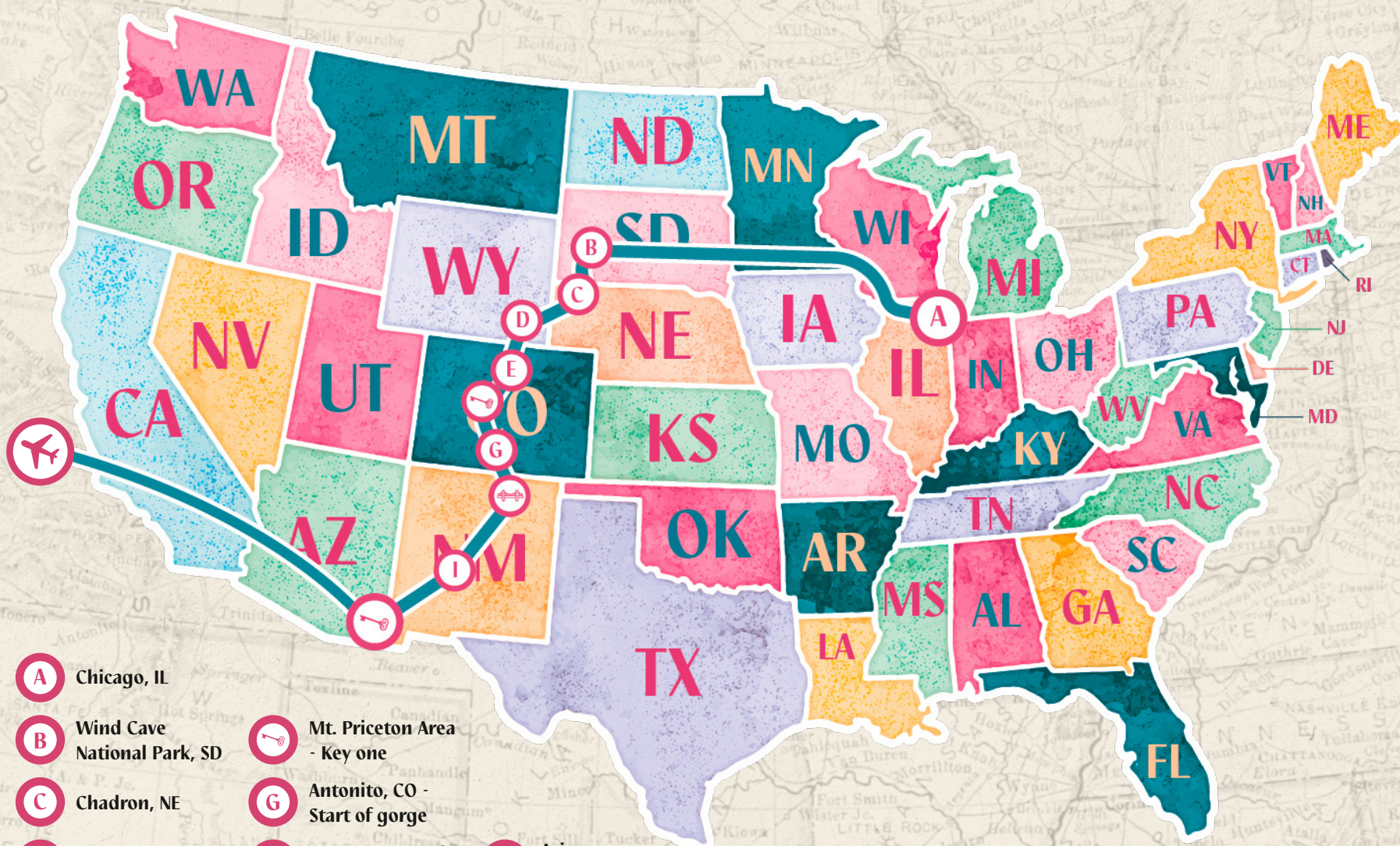
- If you have experienced this, how so?
- Have your roles changed over time? If so, how did that feel?
- In what ways have your priorities shifted?
- What do you find difficult about ageing bodies?
- How have friends helped? Ammalie and Mari discuss some big questions—for example, how do we get better, not bitter, as we age?
- Finding joy and relevancy—that's what many people report worrying about as they age. What does that (or will that) look like for you?
- In what ways can we change and resist the cultural narrative?

Adventure on!

- What adventures do you want to take? External or internal adventures?
- What are your limitations? Not everyone has to be an outdoor sports enthusiast, for example. What do you enjoy?
- Have you ever tried to comb your hair with a fork? I must admit that on occasion, I have. I've come to the conclusion that they don't work well. But also, who cares? Better a full life with crazy windblown hair, I say. What will your next windblown hair adventure be?



MAP



- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| A Chicago, IL | Mt. Princeton Area - Key one |
| B Wind Cave National Park, SD | G Antonito, CO - Start of gorge |
| C Chadron, NE | Taso, NM - Royal Gorge Bridge |
| D Cheyenne, WY | Arizona - Key two |
| E Kenosha Pass, CO | I Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge |
| | To New Zealand |



THREE KEYS

PLAYLIST

[LISTEN HERE ON SPOTIFY](#)

SONG	ARTIST	ALBUM	
Step Inside This House	Lyle Lovett	Step Inside This House	5:29
May I Suggest	Susan Werner	Live at Passim	5:12
Big Yellow Taxi	Joni Mitchell	Ladies of the Canyon	2:16
If I Needed You	Townes Van Zandt	Cimarron	3:37
Mountains O' Things	Tracy Chapman	Tracy Champan	4:49
After the Gold Rush	Neil Young	After the Gold Rush	3:46
Everything is Coming up Roses	Nanci Griffith	Blue Roses from the Moons	2:56
Where Do the Children Play?	Cat Stevens	Tea for the Tillerman	3:52
Rocky Mountain High	John Denver	Rocky Mountain High	4:43
Salt of the Earth	Joan Baez	Blessed Are . . .	3:25
Shiver Me Timbers	Tom Waits	The Heart Of Saturday Night	4:26
Depreston	Courtney Barnett	Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit	4:52
Into the Mystic	Van Morrison	Moondance	3:25
Mercy, Mercy Me	Marvin Gaye	What's Going On	3:13
Life on Earth	Hurray for the Riff Raff	Life on Earth	5:46
San Luis	Gregory Alan Isakov	Evening Machines	4:32
Pokarekare Ana	New Zealand Folk Song	Folk Music	3:01
Walk Through My Door	Spidercat	Breaking Like a New Day	3:56
Butterfly Girl	Rex Dean	Butterflies	3:21
Rats on the CTA	Barbie Army/Mary Dean	Single	2:34

(These last two are my silblings' work - they got the musical talent in the family)

ROADTRIP AUDIO BOOK LIST



Plainsong

by Kent Haruf for Colorado



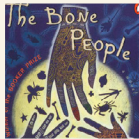
The Bean Trees

Barbara Kingsolver for Arizona



Trace

by Lauret Savoy for all America



The Bone People

by Keri Hulme for New Zealand

AMMALIE'S FAVORITE WORDS

Empyrean

[em-pir-ee-uhl] • Adjective

1. The highest heaven; pertaining to the sky

Plaguy

[pley-gee] • Adjective

1. Vexatious

Perspicacity

[pur-spi-kas-i-tee] • Noun

1. Having a ready insight into things

Beetlekill and dieback

[beet-l [kil]] [dahy-bak] • Noun

1. Two blights affecting trees, one caused by a beetle and the other a fungus

Mira la luna

"Look at the moon"

in Spanish

Whanau

Noun

1. "Family" in Maori

Debitum Naturea

Our debt to nature is to die (dying is natural!)

RECIPE: GRANOLA

Neither Ammalie nor I like to be in the kitchen much—we've got outdoor adventures calling! But there's one thing I've made for decades—granola is super-duper easy, healthy, and more affordable than store-bought. I'm not big on measuring, neither is Ammalie, because it will turn out fine regardless. But here are the basics:



Toss the following in a big pan, i.e., whatever you'd roast a turkey in:

- Canister of old-fashioned oats (not the quick-oats)
- Nuts of various sorts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, cashews, whatever)
- Seeds of various sorts (chia, sunflower, pepitas, whatever)
- Shakes of cinnamon
- Pinch of salt
- Protein powder or wheat germ if you wish
- Give it a stir!

In a pan on the stovetop, melt together:

- Cup or so of honey
- Cup or so of coconut oil or other oil
- Sprinkle of vanilla
- Dash of maple syrup, if it's around

Pour over the dry mixture, stir, bake at 300°F for an hour or till golden, stirring occasionally. Let it cool completely and then add dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, bits of apricot, coconut flakes, whatever) and store. Yum, yum, yum!

COCKTAIL ON THE ROAD

SIMPLE IS BEST:

Gin, tonic, ice, lemon, hot bath under the stars



TEN TIPS FOR THE FEMALE SOLO TRAVELER

Whether your destination is a hotel or a tent, here are Laura's favorite tips for trips:

1. **PEPPER AND A STICK.** Everyone's first concern about solo travel is safety—and I get it, although I believe that dangers have been over-hyped and true crime shows have ruined a lot of potential adventures. Part of it is feeling safe, though, and so I always have pepper spray and a walking stick. I also always know where my keys are, not only to drive off, but to press the alarm on the keypad. My daughter, who is 22 and goes to more remote places by herself, is getting a GPS device, which allows her to ping me with her location nightly, which her mom really appreciates. But let me reiterate: Neither she nor I have ever once had to use either pepper or stick. It could be that the world is safer than we've been led to believe, which makes the most necessary trick to delightful solo travel deflecting the fears that our culture and media fling at us.
2. **KNOW YOUR LIMITS AND DON'T LET SOCIETY TELL YOU THEY'RE DIFFERENT.** Confession: I don't like to drive more than 6 hours in a day. Some of my girlfriends can drive 8, 10, 12. But I cannot and I do not want. My spine and eyes object! So planning a route with my needs in mind is key.
3. **CREATURE COMFORTS.** Part of the fun of travel is going without, making do. You realize how little you need. You realize you truly enjoy being thrown from your life and your schedule. Therein lies the adventure. And yet. We all have something we consider sacred. Please do not ask me to exist without warm coffee and real cream. Sure, yeah, I suppose I could survive without it, but why? It's so delicious when the sun is rising! It's not that hard to make it happen, either: a little cooler with ice and my pour-over coffee kit. My daughter's creature comfort is swapping out a camping pad with a 4"-memory foam cot mattress, and a full-size (not camping) pillow, for when she sleeps in in the back of her car.
4. **THE BODY'S TEMPERATURE.** Cars get very hot. And very cold. Depending. So does the land. So does the body. Temperature regulation is a prime consideration. Foot-warmers and a serious sleeping bag to keep warm. A battery-operated stroller fan with a built-in flashlight and bendy legs to keep cool. Likewise, bug screens for car windows so you can let in cool air but not the biting things—another must.

TEN TIPS FOR THE FEMALE SOLO TRAVELER (CONTINUED)

5. **PEOPLE.** Solo adventures are what I love . . . but conversely and strangely, what I find most delightful is connecting with friends who show me around their places. I end up seeing way more than I would have on my own, and I'm also reconnecting with someone I adore. So I make the effort to set up meetings with friends along the route. There's lots of apps and Facebook groups for this, too.
6. **HATCHBACK TENT:** If you're car tripping, and don't have a van or camper, try the handy-dandy tent that attaches to your car. My daughter has one and it's genius: You have the structure (and safety) of a car, but you also have room to spread out and sleep right outside, protected by a tent that fits over your open hatchback. There's a ton of camping gear out there, but this has to be my favorite.
7. **BACKUPS OF THE ESSENTIALS.** One can't live without water, for example. Once, when my daughter and friend were backpacking on the Colorado Divide Trail, their water filter broke. Ut-oh. This is serious business—they were days from anywhere. Although the iodine water purification tablets taste gross, and they hadn't planned on using them, the tablets saved the day. They made it out after a few days, hitchhiked to town, and didn't feel great, but their backup plan proved essential. Another time, while camping in the Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park, she and her friends had a gallon water bottle explode. Thank golly they'd brought extra. It's not like there's just faucets out there in the sand. (Now that I'm writing this, I am realizing I should worry a bit more about this daughter!) Sometimes bad things do happen, and you can't go without water, heat, and food for long. So don't.
8. **THE WEATHER, THE WEATHER.** It's no joke, and not only can harm or kill you, but it can also just make life unpleasant. Once said daughter and I were testing out the said hatchback tent in Vedauwoo, Wyoming, which is this funky, cool place full of rocks that look like they belong on Mars. Except: This trip was not fun or cool, because the clouds were unleashing a fury of hail and rain. What's hilarious is that we'd seen the weather report and decided "it wouldn't be that bad." Well, it was that bad. On the other hand, there's nothing quite as glorious as watching a storm unfold (when you're somewhere safe).

9. **SLEEP.** Sleep is essential to good decision-making and to fun times, but adventures sometimes prevent good zzzs. One of the worst travel adventures of my life entailed driving a mountain pass in the middle of the night, trying to get to a hotel I'd booked. I was getting really tired—and I had 4 more hours to go! I was without my usual car-sleeping bag, having a hotel reservation and all. I ended up pulling over and tilting my seat back and sleeping until daylight, but it wasn't ideal. I wish I hadn't overcommitted by thinking I could drive so far so late in the day, or, if I had, that I'd thrown in a pillow and a bag. Since then, I've prioritized scheduling around sleep needs.
10. **FUN TAKES PREPARATION TOO!** After safety and food and water needs are met, comes the delight! The whole reason we travel! Which leads us to the big question: What is fun for you? For me, it's the adventure quality . . . seeing some strange land formation or spunky little town or the sun set over a new-to-me body of water. But let's face it: not all adventures contain just the adventure parts. Some of travel is the long interludes in between. I download books set in the area, bring a journal and binos, stop at all the little museums and weird places, get in the mindset that while I'm seeking fun, I embrace the whole darn Grand Adventure of it all.

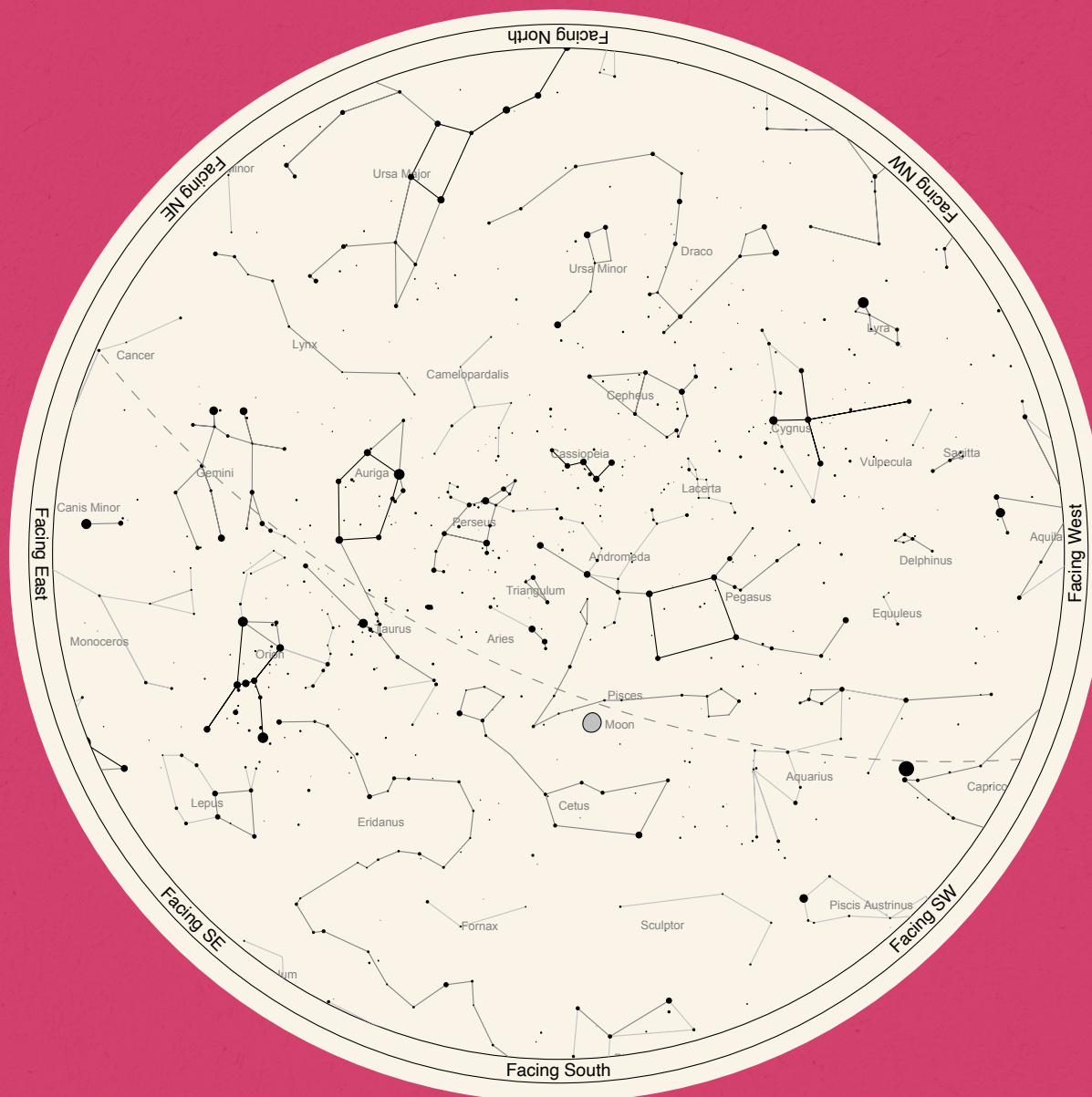
From climbing in bear dens in Colorado to sleeping on the beaches of New Zealand or the park benches of Barcelona, I have had the most wonderful life of loving on the wonders of our truly astonishing planet. I wouldn't change a thing—all this adventuring has allowed me to figure out who I am, what my limitations are, what strength I possess, and yet taught me a deep humility and gratitude. Above all, my adventures have inspired awe, and awe is perhaps the most wonderous of emotions.



ACTIVITY: SKY CHART

One delightful activity is a “sky chart” for upcoming travel or a meaningful night in your life. My original draft of this novel included one for Ammalie’s star-gazing night. Tools for this are available on the internet for free, such as:

skyandtelescope.org/observing/interactive-sky-watching-tools/



Location: Set from geolocation service

Latitude: 40° 36° N, longitude: 105° 05° W

Time: 2021 November 15, 22:00 (UTC - 07:00)

Sky & Telescope: www.skyandtelescope.com
Powered by: Heavens-Above.com



DELL

