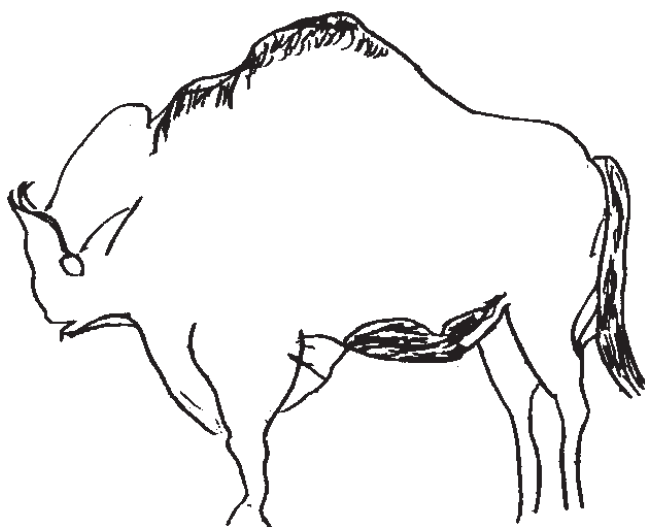


THE DREAM CAVE

Susan Holliday



NOW

‘We’re going to explore caves,’ said Owen, dumping his haversack in the middle of his grandfather’s threadbare carpet. ‘Goat’s Hole, Devil’s Hole, Crow Hole, Sprintsail Tor, all the Gower caves, Grandad. We think there’s more there than meets the eye.’

‘Do you now?’ There was a sudden liveliness in the old man’s blue eyes. ‘Well, I can tell you quite a bit about the caves, and not just in the Gower. You should travel all over, like I did. Further west you come to Hoyle’s Mouth and Coygan cave, and up north, there’s Cefn. And others, that no one knows about.’ His expression became dreamy and lost as if he was no longer sitting in a small, dingy living room in a terrace house in down town Cardiff, surrounded by students and cheap eating houses and cats. As if he was somewhere so compelling and vast it drove him to silence for a few minutes.

Owen looked at his grandfather with compassion. Dad was right. He shouldn’t be living here on his own. ‘Obstinate,’ Mum had said. ‘It’ll take more than the Welfare to move him.’

The old man opened his blue eyes and looked straight at his grandson. 'I don't just live *here*,' he said, as if he had read Owen's thoughts. He tapped his head. 'I live here. Such things I've seen, such sights.'

He shifted towards the small, dingy kitchen. 'It's like that when you live on your own,' he said, half to himself.

'But I like it, do you see? Not like some, always on the move.' He put on the kettle. 'Well, it's natural when you're young, isn't it? Especially when you consider our ancestors.'

Owen moved into the small kitchen and watched his grandfather make the tea. 'I thought the Morgans had lived here for ages!'

'And so they did,' said Grandad, pouring the hot water into a white cracked teapot, 'until your father took it into his head to go away. No, no, boy, I'm talking about our long-ago ancestors. The ones who lived in the caves. Who live in my head.'

'Tell me about them, Grandad.'

'No one believes me nowadays,' the old man grumbled. He picked up a mug and rubbed it with a dirty tea towel. Owen could see the going might be difficult.

'I live in Croydon,' he said gently, 'and I have an English accent, but I see things in my head too.'

‘Do you now? It’s more than your father did. Else he wouldn’t have gone to live in England, would he now?’

‘I see all sorts of things in my head,’ said Owen persistently. ‘That’s why I’m off to Swansea in the autumn to study art. You have to see things in your head if you’re going to paint.’

‘You seem like a painter with all that hair,’ said his grandfather, surprisingly cheerful again. Owen took off the cap that he had been wearing back to front over his long black hair. He had an earring in one ear and looked as if he needed a shave.

‘Dad doesn’t like the look of me either,’ he said with a smile.

‘Oh, I don’t mind,’ said Grandad. ‘Come to think of it, you look just as they did.’

‘Who do you mean?’

‘Your ancestors from a long time ago. They mostly looked like you.’ Grandad poured the tea carefully and handed Owen a mug. They went back into the living room and sat opposite each in the dowdy armchairs. The prehistoric look, thought Owen, Mum would like that one! But a smile might offend his grandfather.

‘How do you know, Grandad, about our ancestors, I mean?’

The old man had the same dreamy expression in his eyes. ‘I’ve seen them, haven’t I?’

He's a bit of a crackpot, Dad had said, before Owen left, but he means well. Give him my love.

'Dad sends his love,' said Owen, out of the blue, but he didn't succeed in breaking the old man's dream. They sat in silence for a while until Grandad pulled himself up, drank his tea and began to tap his left foot. His eyes were lively blue again.

'So you're going to explore caves, is that it?'

'That's it, Grandad.'

'On your own?'

'I'm going with David. He lives in Swansea.'

'What colour is his hair?'

So he *isn't* quite right, thought Owen.

'Reddish,' he said kindly. 'He tells me he's growing a moustache. It's a bit straggly, he says.'

'That's it,' said Grandad triumphantly, trembling a little as if he had made a great discovery.

Perhaps it was all too much.

'Do you mind me staying overnight?' said Owen. 'I don't want to get in your way.' He stood up and took the empty mugs into the kitchen and ran them under the tap. 'If it is too much for you I could go to the Youth Hostel,' he shouted back.

'Come and sit down, will you,' said Grandad eagerly, 'and stop talking such nonsense.'

That's better. I don't want you towering over me like they do.'

'Who, Grandad?'

'Juniper and Oak. The ones who looked after me. They were quite tall men in those days, do you see?'

Mum was right, thought Owen. Grandad should be in sheltered accomodation. Someone to look after him would make all the difference.

The late evening sunshine pushed its way through the dusty windows and the drab net curtains. Outside a crowd of youths were shouting at each other, on their way back from a football match. It's normal out there, thought Owen. Good job it's a short visit. But Grandad's eyes were shining again and the sunlight cheered the dusty room as if someone had put a treasure into it. Grandad sat forward in his chair.

'We have a lot in common, you and I. Though you can't see it, I can tell that.'

Owen shifted his feet uncomfortably. Did Grandad know what he had been thinking?

'Now listen to me, sonny. I'm an old man now and when I go they'll clear this all out as if I had never been here. Burn it all, I shouldn't be surprised. That's why I want to give you something. I can tell you will look after it. You're a chip off the old block as my Da used to say. I've kept it in a drawer for

many years but now the right moment has come along. I can tell that,' he said again, looking intently at Owen. 'It's a book I once wrote. It came out of something that happened to me a long, long time ago. In the sixties.'

'The Beatles,' said Owen inconsequentially, but Grandad ignored his comment.

'1967. The year when everything changed for me. I'm not boring you, am I?' he said, his confidence suddenly faltering.

'No, no. I love hearing about the past,' said Owen quickly. 'Dad never speaks about it. He's always full steam ahead, if you see what I mean. I expect he was always like that. But I like to think about things. Slowly. It gets on Dad's nerves.' It occurred to him then that maybe he really was like his grandfather. He began to listen more intently.

Grandad locked into his thoughts. 'In 1967 I was fifty-five years old. That was the year I lost everything. My wife went off with another man. A little while afterwards my son—that's your father, of course—took himself to England to find work. Then the final straw: I was made redundant. I was in the print in those days, do you see, and I didn't have another trade. Everyone seemed to think I was too old to start again, so I

went on the dole. No choice. I liked to write and explore but there was no money in those things.'

So he decided to walk, he told Owen. All over Wales, to get to know the country better. Wales had to become his family. He always did his homework—read books and went to museums before he set out.

At this moment Grandad stood up and disappeared into his bedroom. He came back with a scruffy, much-thumbed note book. He looked at Owen over his glasses. 'This is what began it all. My real project, that is.' With some difficulty he read out a little passage he had scribbled down.

'Professor Sollas: "The Red Lady of Paviland is a Cro-Magnon man. He represents the most westerly outpost of a race which is known to have extended to the east as far as Lautsch and Predmost in Moravia and from Belgium on the north through the Dordogne in France to the margin of the Mediterranean at Mentone."

'Do you see what it means, Owen?'

'Not really,' said Owen, who didn't know where those places were anyway and found it rather boring.

'It means our ancestors were of the same race as the great cave painters of the Dordogne. Just think of that! Just think what that implies.'

From then on Grandad had become obsessed with prehistoric Wales. Now he had a purpose and a project. When he was a young man he had read in the newspaper about some school boys who discovered the great cave paintings at Lascaux. He became convinced there must be a lost cave in Wales where the Ice age animals would have been painted with as much mastery as in the Dordogne. There must be one somewhere, he told himself. If his ancestors were of the same race the chances were that they expressed themselves in the same way as the Lascaux painters. He read everything he could find about the last Ice age in the library, the fluctuations in the climate, the flora and fauna. There was no English Channel then, he told Owen, and much of the Bristol Channel was a wooded fertile plain. Think of that.

He made up his mind to follow the rivers. Conwy and Clwyd, Dee and Severn, Lugg and Arrow, Teme and Clun, Wye and Usk, Teifi and Tywi. He half sung the names of the rivers like a litany. Men always settled near water, he said. The north would tell him about the Ice Age and the south would tell him about the people. He looked at Owen. 'Grief can make you strong as well as weak.'

And then it happened. One day in winter he explored the Coygan cave and afterwards

found himself somewhere along the Tywi river. It was like that for him that year, he told Owen; it was as if there had been gaps in his time.

‘Today the new-fangled doctors would call it a breakdown,’ he said wryly.

When he set out it was a cold day and the sky was low and grey. He didn’t mind—he even *wanted* to experience the cold. For his head was full of ancient times and the difficulties his people must have endured. He should be all right, he thought, for there were plenty of main roads about and he had food in his haversack. He was wearing his weatherproof jacket and his walking boots. He was well-armed against the weather. He would aim to get to that branch in the river. The Afon Duad, wasn’t it?

Then the snow came down, not gently or softly but on a huge wind that swept over the hills. He was soon completely lost. He began to climb a hill because he thought the main road was on the other side. By now he was tired but at the same time he had the feeling he was no longer alone. Two young men seemed to be walking beside him, brought on the wings of the wind and the driven snow. Two companions, come from another age, an ancient Wales. One was Juniper, who looked like Owen, and the other was Oak. He was certain they would protect him.

Grandad stared straight at Owen. 'It's happened to other climbers, you know. The feeling of having a companion. You see, by that time I no longer knew where I was or even who I was, such was the effect of that snow on my poor mind. I believe that day I would have died if we hadn't reached their cave. For that was where they were leading me. The entrance was a small hole sheltered by an overhanging ridge. They told me to go through, that I would be warmer inside. I put on my torch and squeezed my way down a long tunnel.'

Suddenly he was in a vast cave and Juniper told him to shine his torch on the walls. There, out of the shadows leapt the most beautiful paintings he had ever seen. Deer, horses, auroch painted in black and earth red. Overlapping each other, mysterious, magic, absolutely silent. It was like the paintings at Lascaux but this was his own country, his own hill. He wept for joy.

He didn't remember much else. Perhaps he had gone to sleep, he didn't know. At some point he found himself outside, stumbling in the snow again. It was dark by now but it had stopped snowing. The stars were like snow flakes and the moon walked lightly on the top of the hill. 'Walk towards the moon,' said Juniper. 'Don't stop,' said

Oak. His hands were bitterly cold inside his gloves and he longed to lie down but his friends helped him on. It was at dawn the helicopter came over the top of the hill and caught sight of him. Then Juniper and Oak vanished and he was winched up to the helicopter. ‘No fool like an old fool,’ they told him, as they wrapped him up in a big blanket.

‘I was ill after that,’ said Grandad. ‘They put me in hospital and took off my little fingers. My legs never fully recovered so I never went walking again. I tried to tell people about the cave but no one believed me. So in the end I spent my time writing a story. All about my friends, Juniper and Oak, and the long journey they had to take. I wrote about our ancient rivers and forests that flowered in the brief summers of Ice Age Wales and froze in its long winters. For that was how it was then.’

Grandad paused as if he was looking back at that far-off time. Then he looked straight at Owen as he did when he wanted him to listen hard. ‘When you walk and explore I want you to remember how it was all those years ago. And to remember your ancestors—especially Juniper, who was so like you.’

Grandad stood up slowly and went over to the window. He pulled aside the dusty net

curtains. The sun was sinking and in the half light cars and houses and smoke and roads and trains were all he could see or hear.

‘That’s the landscape we’ve made,’ said Grandad as he shuffled back to his chair. He sighed as if he was getting tired. ‘Now listen to me, boy. I’m going to bed now. I always go early, you know. You can slip out for fish and chips. Dai Griff’s Bar is just up the road next to the Chinese. I never eat in the evening.’ He paused. ‘You can read the book tonight in bed if you like. It will give you something to do.’

Owen smiled. ‘It’s been a really cool evening, Grandad. And I *will* read the story.’ He hoped secretly he would be able to read the writing; it would be embarrassing if he couldn’t. He watched his grandfather go to the bedroom and bring back three thick hardback exercise books tied up with a ribbon.

‘Here we are. I’ve kept it for a long while. It’s time to give it away.’

Owen took the books carefully. ‘I’ll look after the story, Grandad, I promise. I could put it on the computer for you, if you liked.’ It was the best thing he could suggest.

‘Now that would be a good idea,’ said Grandad. ‘But read it first. That’s the important thing, to read it before you start exploring.’

He said goodnight and shuffled off to his bedroom.

‘Don’t forget to put out the lights,’ he shouted back.

Owen couldn’t resist opening the first book. To his surprise the pages were unlined and white and the writing was small and controlled as if Grandad was trying to make his story look as beautiful as he could.

That night he put on the yellow rickety lamp in his attic room and very carefully turned the pages.

**THE STORY OF A JOURNEY
WALES, 16,500 BC
by
DAVID MORGAN**

The Last Glaciation is the background of prehistoric Wales. At its height Wales must have been uninhabitable by man or beast—the whole country covered with a vast sheet of white ice. Nothing lived. The gradual retreat of the ice-sheet was accompanied by a slow and perhaps interrupted approach to more temperate weather. For a long while the climate was like northern Siberia: its tundras or flooded bands froze deeply during the long sub-arctic winters and flowered briefly during the short hot summers. Following the retreating ice, people came to Wales and settled here to hunt and worship mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, cave-bear, cave-lion, wolf, bison, reindeer and horse. Some of them were the same race as the great cave painters of the Dordogne. Juniper was such a one who, with others in the Salvi tribe, practised the art of painting in the marvellous tradition of their forebears.

This story is dedicated to Juniper and Oak who saved my life.

BOOK ONE

GREENWATER 16,500 B.C.

Juniper dragged himself painfully across the scrubby grass. When he could no longer crawl he lay down. Sweat trickled from his body and his broken leg ached. It was icy, much colder than in the valley. In his confusion he felt for a while he was living in the Great Icetime: snow beyond snow, ice beyond ice, no distance because sky and earth merged in never-ending grey and white. They said mists hung over the land and when Sungod travelled through the mist he shone like a yellow snowflake.

He shook himself. Far off he could see a few dwarf willows, still in leaf. He grit his teeth and leaned up on one elbow, peering through the grey early mist. A little way off he saw his deerskins heaped on the ground. It was then he remembered he was in exile, and his tribe wanted him to die. All except Oak. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he thought of his friend. If only Oak was with him.

He rubbed away his tears. At least his father had obeyed the law and left him his

own deer hides. With these he might survive while his leg mended. He listened to the partridges in the birch trees further down the mountain. Soon Sungod would be up and he remembered what old Hornbeam had said to him when he was very small; it was as if the old wise man was beside him, whispering in his ear:

‘If your father exiles you for making marks you must follow Sungod along the unknown river. You must find your other family.’

Juniper sighed. Maybe if he survived, these words would guide him.

He moved painfully, dragging himself towards his deer skins. His bad leg was already stiffening. At last he lay down on one of the hides and spread the other over himself. He could go no further. He shut his eyes.

Now his whole life seemed to crowd in on him and soon Sleepgod came to show him many things that had happened when he was small. Maybe Sleep was the greatest god of all, since he held everything in his hands.

Chapter 1

THE RIVER

Little Juniper drew a fish in the mud. The picture in his head slid easily through his hand and into the stick. His drawing looked as real as the fish he had caught the day before. He was so happy, when his little sister asked him to play stones he didn't ignore her as he so often did. Instead he collected some pebbles from the riverside and threw them up in the air, catching them time and time again.

Lily clapped her hands.

'Juniper, show me how you catch so well.'

It was true, he had no trouble, whereas Lily let pebbles slip through her small fingers like water.

'Keep your eye on them. Like this,' he told her.

He followed the pebble into the air and down into his brown fingers, but out of the corner of his eye he saw Hornbeam watching him from the tree trunk. He stopped to smile, glad to see how softly the wise man was looking at him. Hornbeam's eyes were deep brown like his own, and seemed to

reflect the earth. His lightstone was hanging by a plaited grass cord round his neck. Sometimes when it flashed, as it did now, Hornbeam spoke seriously.

‘Come here.’

Juniper let the pebbles slide out of his fingers and ran across to the tree trunk. When Hornbeam held out his hands he took hold of them. They felt light and dry as the skin of a dead leaf.

Hornbeam spoke in a whisper:

‘I was watching you make marks with a stick.’

‘It was a fish,’ said Juniper quickly, feeling warm as if the sun was inside him. Hornbeam tightened his hold.

‘You must never let others see your marks.’

‘Why not?’

‘You know the stories as well as I.’

Hornbeam glanced towards Juniper’s fish.

‘You know Birch is afraid these marks will offend Icegoddess and she’ll return forever to kill Sungod. And yet you go on doing it. Do you think you’ll escape punishment because you’re his son?’

‘Of course not! I don’t know why I do it. I can’t help it.’

‘Then there’s no hope. You *must* understand what I’m saying.’

Juniper nodded and pictured in his head what it might be like if Icegoddess returned.

No earth, no hills, no river. Ice and snow everywhere, mountains, plains white as Icegoddess. Spring, summer, autumn lost, only great winds driving through pale valleys and mountains. Hornbeam had often told them stories about the whitetime that never ended until their tribe stayed by the river and obeyed the laws. Above all, no-one must make marks—marks had power to bring back Icegoddess and chain up Greenwater forever.

Juniper shook his hands free and sighed.

‘But my marks make me feel as if Sungod is inside me.’

Tears came into Hornbeam’s eyes and glinted like his lightstone.

‘When you’re a little older I’ll help you to understand. Your father has pictures in his head that frighten him. One day I’ll tell you of the time when—’ but he wouldn’t say more. Instead he whispered urgently in Juniper’s ear, ‘I tell you again. You’re Birch’s elected son. One day he’ll want you to lead the family as he leads it. If you disobey him he’ll punish you because of his pain.’

Juniper was still defiant. ‘What pain?’

To his surprise Hornbeam laughed briefly.

‘I like to hear a boy turn answers into questions. Off you go then and play with your sister. There’s nothing more I can say.’

Juniper looked back at Lily who was still playing with the pebbles. She was stamping

her feet and shaking her fair hair. As he moved off Hornbeam spoke loudly, almost angrily.

‘When you’ve grown and won your deerskins, then you’ll understand. Here.’

The old man put his hands over his chest in the gesture that meant he spoke the truth.

But Juniper was already looking round at the shelter where they put up their skin homes, at the forest where men were away hunting and the grasslands where women and children were gathering seeds. His gaze moved to the river where he caught fish. Greenwater was the sweetest thing of all. It never stopped running and calling and keeping alive the fish he learned to catch with his hands. He wasn’t afraid, like all the others. The river would protect him and wash away the marks.

Chapter 2

PUNISHMENTS

When winter was at hand the river grew big like Juniper's mother who was cradling a baby in her belly.

Windgod blew loudly over the earth and branches were wrenched from the trees. The men picked them up to make fire and left behind the damp twigs that wouldn't burn.

There was a corner of the river bank where no-one went because it gave way to a forbidden cave. Juniper wandered there alone and picked up all sorts of twigs. He still wasn't afraid, even though he remembered what Hornbeam had said. Surely there was nothing wrong in picking up a few sticks and making marks? How could Ice Goddess ever see him? She was nowhere in sight. He felt so certain of himself when his father asked him what he had done he threw all caution to the winds:

'I've found lots of green twigs that make patterns in the mud . . .'

His mother looked on aghast while his father ran down to the quiet bank of the

river. For a long time Birch stared at the patterns Juniper had drawn in the mud. He was too angry to speak, his eyes darkened and shone at the same time. Suddenly he picked up the green twigs and beat Juniper until his son collapsed at his feet.

‘You stay here. You stay here until you obey me.’

Birch threw all the sticks in the river where they floated slowly away. He scuffed the mud until there was no sign of what Juniper had done. Then he turned his back on his son and walked angrily back to the camp.

Juniper didn’t know how long he sat with his head in his arms. Night came and he would have been overwhelmed with fear if an old fox hadn’t come down to the water’s edge and sat with him for a while. No one else came near him, not even his mother. At last Sungod came back and walked above the hills. But his arms were no longer warm and Juniper shivered. He felt hot and cold at the same time. He caught fish and ate them raw and when darkness returned he curled up in a hole he found further along the bank. He felt confused, overpowered by his longing to go back to the warm crowded cave. How could he get back to the camp? How could he please his father again? He had no answer.

But then, early the next morning, he caught a marvellous fish, the biggest he had ever seen. It had silver brown skin and eyes that shone like Hornbeam's lightstone. With great care Juniper carried the fish back to his father and asked to be forgiven.

For a long time Birch sat in silence and stared at the fish. It wasn't until Sungod walked across the hill and shone in his eyes that he moved. That was the sign he had been waiting for. He took the fish from Juniper and nodded. Then everyone crowded round and Juniper began to cry. He hoped he would never be alone again.

After that he caught a fish everyday and brought it back to Birch. But he didn't tell his father what he was feeling. He would never do that again. Nor would he ever tell him about the pictures he kept inside his head.

He was back with his family but he was still being punished. The other children were told to stay away from him. Even Oak, who was born at the same time and felt like his brother, kept his distance. Sometimes Lily sidled up to him and whispered in his ear. But she worried Juniper, she was becoming so pale and thin. Perhaps it was his fault. Perhaps he should keep away from her as well.

Only the river was his true friend. She slithered and arched and rolled and dipped

and sometimes flattened out over the earth like an animal who was trying to hide.

‘Like me,’ thought Juniper.

Then when Spring came and all the grass and trees and leaves were unfolding, he felt defiant as if he wanted to stretch out like the earth. Hardly aware of what he was doing, he went back to the secret bank and began to make little mud animals and pack them into a hollow tree where they would never be found. But this time Oak followed him and surprised him as he turned round.

‘You must be mad,’ whispered Oak, running his hands through his reddish fair hair. ‘You’ll get caught again.’

Juniper stared defiantly at his friend. He was tall and thickset and looked bold, but he was always afraid.

‘I am mad,’ said Juniper, ‘I can’t help it.’

To his surprise Oak told no one. From now on he kept close by and comforted him when Lily fell ill and didn’t come out of the cave again. Juniper needed Oak for now his mother hardly spoke to him. Then she also became sick and pale and spent all day with her new baby, Gentian. Perhaps she had no strength for anything else.

There were times when Oak was helping his own mother and was forced to stay away for a long time. Then Juniper wandered off on his own and once more became careless.

He no longer covered his marks with twigs and leaves or caught a big fish everyday to please his father. What was the use? His mother and father would never like him again.

One day he made a little clay Gintian and flung it in the river and watched it sink. It was *her* fault his mother had become so pale and feeble and never spoke to him. He scrawled angrily in the mud and was so taken up with his thoughts he heard and smelt nothing. It was only when Birch's shadow ran up the wet earth that he threw down his stick and tried to scuff away the marks with his foot. It was too late.

His father's silence was worse than angry words or a beating. Birch pushed him backwards with his big hands and kicked out the marks with his broad feet. Then he dragged Juniper by the hair to the shelter, where his mother lay, pale and sick, stretched out on the flat rock that was only used for people who were struck down by illness.

Birch forced his son to kneel down.

'It's your fault. Her sickness is your fault. Your marks are killing her.'

'I don't mean to—'

Juniper thought his father would forget their law and kill him. Instead he held him by the hair and kicked him nearer his mother.

She lay as still as a log under her deerskin. The baby was beside her, crying helplessly. Juniper squatted down and peered sadly into her face. He could tell by her expression she had already caught a glimpse of Stonegod. Yet her eyes were open, and a little light was there as if she was trying to tell him something. His father spoke quietly and angrily:

‘See what your marks have done. They’ve called Stonegod to your mother’s side. Now only you can ask him to go away, a wicked, wicked child who has not yet won his manhood!’

Birch covered his eyes with his hands. After a long silence he spoke again.

‘Why do you go on making marks when you know they change everything—and lead us to—’ but even his anger would not allow him to speak the word of darkness.

Juniper stopped listening. His head was filled with the little light in his mother’s eyes. It gave him strength and a belief he could do something. When Birch commanded him to go he went confidently outside to the sacred place where Stonegod had been standing forever.

Not far from the shelter there was a huge rock by the river where Stonegod lived. His nose was immense and his eyes hollow and sightless because they looked not on the

river but on the land of stone. A cloak of stone covered his arms and legs and one of his feet jutted out of the rock.

Juniper touched Stonegod's foot with his forehead.

He knelt down for a long time, picturing the light in his mother's eyes and mouthing the same words over and over again:

'Make my mother well, make my mother well!'

When he opened his eyes it was dark but the air glowed with reflections from the fire where the others were sitting, his father and all the family. He knew they were picturing his mother as she was before she fell ill, as they had done when Lily was dying and there no longer seemed to be any hope. Then their silent pictures had not been answered.

He must try harder than ever. He knew that he must save his mother if he was to save himself.