

The Temple of the Sun

Moyra Caldecott



THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN

MOYRA CALDECOTT

a Mushroom eBooks sample

Copyright © 1977, 2006, Moyra Caldecott

Moyra Caldecott has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, to be identified as the Author of this work.

First published by Rex Collings Ltd in 1977.

This Edition published in 2006 by Mushroom eBooks, an imprint of Mushroom Publishing, Bath, BA1 4EB, United Kingdom

www.mushroom-ebooks.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 THE WARNING AND THE JOURNEY.....	2
2 ILLUSIONS.....	41
3 THE BIRTH OF ISAR.....	65
4 THE ARRIVAL.....	95
5 THE DREAM TEST.....	114
6 DIVINATION.....	141
7 THE ARRIVAL OF KHU-REN.....	153
8 THE STAR TEST.....	176
9 THE HAUNTED MOUND.....	186
10 THE RETURN OF WARDYKE.....	195
11 KYRA'S INAUGURATION.....	213
12 ANCIENT RELATIONSHIPS.....	220
13 A WOUNDED FRIEND.....	234
14 WARDYKE'S WAR.....	251
15 THE NEW SPEAR-LORD.....	268
16 PANORA'S WAR.....	298
17 KHU-REN'S INAUGURATION.....	322
ABOUT MOYRA CALDECOTT.....	326
BOOKS BY MOYRA CALDECOTT.....	327

Introduction

This is a story set in Bronze Age Britain, c.1500 BC, when the great circles of standing stones that were such a feature of the Neolithic Age, were already more than a thousand years old, yet still in use as sacred temples. Hundreds of stone circles have been found throughout Britain, the most famous today being Avebury and Stonehenge in Wiltshire. That such a homogeneous culture flourished in communities so widely separated by dense and dangerous forests, mountains, and wild and stormy seas, is extraordinary.

The work of the mighty Temple of the Sun holds the vast complex of smaller temples across the land together under its protection, and its Priesthood has to be constantly on guard against the misuse of psychic powers by disaffected former initiates. The fell magician Wardyke rises again to wreak vengeance on those whom he believes have wronged him.

1

The Warning and the Journey

The High Priest, the Lord Guiron, was in the great circle of the Temple of the Sun by himself, the dawn rituals over, the other priests and initiates departed. He too should have left and be attending to the business of the Temple.

Something held him back.

Something made him break his routine and pace the Tall stones around the circumference, not as a priest drawing energy from them, not as a suppliant speaking with spirits, not as Lord of the Sun in robes of splendour with the power to roam the world at will, but as an old man suddenly lonely and afraid.

It was as though the people leaving the circle after the ceremony this particular morning drained him of his significance. He had not felt this way before, or not for many years. He had been in the circle alone many times, as High Priest it was his right, but it had always sustained him in his confidence and strength.

Now he felt like a peasant who had wandered unwittingly into a Sacred Circle and was overwhelmed by his own smallness and in awe of the giant forces surrounding him.

He, Guiron, Lord High Priest, was afraid.

Afraid in his own Temple?

Afraid of what?

He did not know.

The shoulders he usually carried so straight and proud were bent.

‘What is it?’ he kept asking himself.

But for all his knowledge of the Mysteries, and for all the control of mind and body he had learned through the long years of priesthood, this time he was an ordinary man faced with an uneasiness to which he could not put a name, which he could not define.

He thought of entering one of the two inner circles within the great circle which were reserved for very special occasions. Perhaps their extra strength would give him back his stature as a Priest.

But as he approached the northern one, it was as though he were held back.

‘Not now,’ a voice that was not his own voice spoke within his head. ‘Not now.’

Feeling himself an exile he stumbled slightly and returned to the outer circle. Beyond the immense standing stones that carried the flow of spirit power from earth to sky, from sky to earth, the high ridge, walled with rough chalk blocks, rose above him, cutting him off from the rest of his fellow men. It was designed

to isolate the Temple for its work, to concentrate its energies and keep intruders out, and he now felt as much a prisoner as a small beetle would that had fallen on its back within a steep-sided hole.

There were things in his past that he did not wish to think about. He pushed them back into the darkness. Long years of service as Priest of light had surely undone whatever harm he might have done once long ago!

But from the crevices of darkness in his mind, unease was stirring and this time he could not put it down.

With no one to observe him he allowed himself the luxury of tears and put his head against a Tall stone to the east of the circle, a stone for which he had always felt a particular affinity. He put his arms around it as though it were a man and could give him comfort.

‘Lord,’ he whispered, ‘Lord of light. Help me.’

He tried to clear his head of the irrational and disorderly murmurings of his mind.

Where was his training now?

Slowly order came.

Slowly the clamour of his fear died down.

He tried to visualize, to call before him a picture of what it was that threatened him.

He could feel a low drumming or throbbing in his head. Whether it was from within himself or from within the rock he pressed himself so closely against, he could not tell.

He listened to it and it seemed to him at last that it was the sound of the ocean, beating relentlessly against

the shore, the ocean rising and falling, swelling and subsiding, and upon its vastness there was a small seed, a fragile boat tossed among the waves, that bore within it something that threatened change to him and the Great Temple that lay around him.

The image was not clear.

The menace was not strong.

It was a hint, a stirring, a whisper ... but it was there.

He strained for a clearer vision.

It would not come.

But pain entered his body from the north, so it was from the north that he expected the threat to come.

He pulled back from the stone with a sudden movement and with a surge of great determination he pulled himself to his full height as a Priest, his eyes sparked with his old fire of office and, turning his face to the north, he spoke these words aloud and with great authority.

‘You who come from the north to bring disruption and change to this man and this place, turn back. Turn back! There is no welcome for you here!’

He tried with all the force of will and thought at his command to reject the unknown intruders and turn them from their course.

His will was strong, the beam of his thought powerful, but the deep and featureless blue of the sky into which he thrust his desperate barb gave no sign that it had reached its mark.

‘So be it,’ he thought, and turned to leave the circle. ‘I have tried, and I will try again!’

* * * *

In the north Kyra stood upon the cliff she had just climbed and stared at the sea that lay impassively silver, ominously vast.

They had sailed in their frail homemade boat since the first stirrings of Spring and the journey that lay behind them, which had seemed so long and painful, was nothing to the journey that lay ahead of them.

She could see her brother Karne, tall and fair and bronzed, out beyond the rock line of the shore fishing for their lunch. Fern, his wife, who was heavy with child, was gathering driftwood on the pebbled beach for their cooking fire. When Kyra was with them the community of their love gave them each strength and comfort, but from the height of the cliff top they seemed very small and vulnerable against the immense panorama that stretched as far as she could see and then... beyond...

The joy of purpose that had sustained her in their travels since they first set out suddenly deserted her, and she looked at the huge landscape of impenetrable forest behind her and the seascape that lay forever and forever below her, and a sharp cold feeling of fear stabbed her heart.

‘How is it possible?’ she thought in panic. ‘How dare we venture into this vastness and hope to find our way!’

Appalled at the foolhardiness of their journey, the immense scope of it, and the inadequacy of their preparation for it, she decided they must turn back at once to their comfortable little village where everything

was known and loved, understanding and achievement easier.

‘Karne!’ she called. ‘Fern!’

She must tell them at once before it was too late and they were lost forever!

But no matter how loud she shouted the thin whistle of her voice was blown backwards on to the land and dispersed among the tough coastal grasses and flowers that lived on the thin crust of earth above the unfathomable dark rock.

‘Karne!’ she called again. ‘Fern!’

But there was no way they could hear her.

She started to scramble down the cliff, loose pieces of rock and earth scattering under her feet and hands. Sea birds shrieking with indignation flew up from hidden ledges and her heart began pumping with an urgent and powerful fear.

She must be careful.

On the way up, so intent on the moment by moment examination of the beauty of the rocks and the lichens nearest to her, she had not noticed how sheer the cliff was. Now, looking down, she was shocked at the danger of the descent.

Karne and Fern looked up on hearing the pebbles rolling down the cliff and saw Kyra coming down too fast for safety.

They both gasped and called out.

Fern ran immediately over the sharp and uneven rocks, the child lying within her body making her progress clumsy and painful. Karne, thinking that Kyra

was being pursued, ran back to the boat to fetch his sling catapult and stood high upon a rock where he could see further up the cliff, the stone in his sling held back, the leather thong taut, ready for action.

But it soon became clear Kyra was alone. Whatever was driving her to such careless speed was not visible to their eyes.

She slid the final slope in a flurry of stones and landed in a heap at Fern's feet, considerably bruised and shaken, her skin grazed in many places, but otherwise unharmed.

Karne was angry.

He raged for several moments at her recklessness.

'I am sorry,' she brought out breathlessly, and repeated it when his words continued the bruising she had just suffered from the cliff, as Fern helped her dust herself off and wash the open places clean with sea water.

'What were you trying to do?' Karne demanded at last indignantly.

'I tried to call you from the cliff top,' she said miserably, smarting as the salty water touched the open grazes.

'We did not hear you,' Fern said gently.

'Of course we did not!' Karne exclaimed, looking at the height of the cliff. 'How could we possibly have heard you?'

'I know. It was foolish. It just seemed so urgent...'

She hesitated. Things were not so clear at the bottom of the cliff as they had been at the top.

‘What was so urgent?’ Karne asked sternly.

‘I thought ... we ought ... to turn back,’ Kyra said in a low voice, aware that this would not be received well by Karne.

They stared at her.

‘Turn back! Why?’ Karne demanded.

‘It just seemed...’ Kyra’s voice was losing conviction every moment, ‘at the top of the cliff looking at how huge the ocean is and thinking about the journey... it just... all seemed... impossible!’

‘But the Lords of the Sun told you to make the journey!’ Fern cried. She herself would not have been sorry to turn back, but she knew Kyra had been commanded to attend the Temple of the Sun to study for the priesthood. Without Karne’s help and protection she could not make the journey, and without Karne, she, Fern, was not prepared to live. So their journey had become her journey.

* * * *

Kyra was silent.

Karne was silent too. His anger was gone. He knew his sister well and the burdens she had to bear, the fears she faced from time to time.

‘It will not be an easy journey,’ he said, quietly now. ‘But it is necessary.’

‘Karne...’ Kyra said in a very small voice.

‘Yes,’ he said gently.

‘Sometimes I think I am not fit ... It seems to me I may have misunderstood. It is very *possible* that I misunderstood,’ she pleaded.

‘I do not think so, my sister,’ Karne said soberly.

‘Think back on all that has happened,’ Fern said. ‘You *know* you have been chosen! You *know* you have special powers not many people have! Powers that could and should be trained for use within the priesthood.’

‘But,’ Kyra said sadly, ‘there are so many ordinary things I want to do. Surely if I were fit to be a priest I would have my mind on higher matters all the time?’

‘You are not a priest yet,’ Fern reminded her. ‘There will be years of training.’

‘But I do not want to reach the point where ordinary things do not matter to me any more!’

‘And I do not think you ever will reach that point,’ Karne said seriously. ‘You are training to be a priest, not a god. Maal still enjoyed ordinary things. Maal even made mistakes. Remember?’

Maal was their friend and teacher, the old priest of their community whom they had loved and trusted, and who had been cruelly ousted and then destroyed by the false but powerful priest-magician Wardyke.

‘Maal always said the universe is made up of ordinary things,’ Fern said. ‘It is in our seeing of them, our appreciation of them, that they become extra-ordinary, that they take on splendour and magic. So you will not have to give up ordinary things. They will just become for you less ‘ordinary’. You will have more reality, not less!’

Kyra was somewhat comforted, but the sight of all that endless ocean, that endless land, that she had seen from the top of the cliff came back to her. She felt again that sudden cold twinge of fear.

‘How will we ever find our way?’ she said, tears coming to her eyes. ‘Oh, Karne, everything is so huge, and we are so small!’

He put his hands on her shoulders and the warmth of the contact made her feel less small, less alone.

‘There is no point in thinking about it like that,’ he said briskly after a pause, ‘there is a fire to be made, fish to be roasted. I, for one, am starving!’

Kyra could not help smiling.

It was so like him to busy himself with practicalities and take one step at a time! And yet he had vision too and knew when two steps were necessary.

She looked at him with great love and trust, and then turned to help Fern with the fire.

* * * *

After the meal, while the other two made the boat ready for sailing, Kyra clambered over the rocks to the furthest and largest one standing almost like an island in the sea.

She needed to think.

She remembered Maal with aching heart and all that he had taught her before his death.

She called on him for help. She called on the Lords of the Sun, on the spirits who lived in the realms that led to the one God who was nameless but the source of All.

‘Tell me what I must do!’ she cried aloud in pain, her voice becoming part of the water crashing onto the rock, part of the rock, part of the light splintering off its surface and the dark germinating in its depths.

Fern and Karne on the beach packing away the things in the boat simultaneously felt they heard a sound and looked up to see Kyra poised triumphantly on her rock, raised as tall as she could be, pointing with dramatic excitement to the swelling sea.

As the eyes followed her finger they saw, rising from the sea in dark and rhythmic folds, the bodies of innumerable dolphins, plunging, rising, plunging, rising, travelling the ocean with their slow and ancient dance, and all of them moving south. Moving south!

Kyra had her answer.

They launched their little boat of wood and hide and followed the course they had planned to the south, keeping land always in sight to the west of them.

* * * *

It was during Fern’s watch one night that, for the first time, they lost all contact with the land and with their course.

She sat huddled in her fur cape hour after hour while the other two uncomfortably and fitfully snatched some restless sleep. Karne had shown her the star she was to keep always behind them in the north and the others she was to watch progressing across the sky, the dim, dark hump of the land always to the west.

For the first hour of her watch her eyes grew weary with the number of times she checked their direction against those frail points of light.

But during the second hour the moon rose and she was overwhelmed by the splendour of its rising.

Without her realizing it, and perhaps because the wind had subtly altered its direction, their little craft began to move along the spectacular silver path towards the moon. The dark and brooding ocean became transformed into a sparkling, shimmering mist of silver. 'Moon metal' her people often called what we now call silver, and the sea shone now with moon metal.

Darkly the deeps may have been waiting beneath the shining ripples of the surface, but Fern was no longer conscious of them. She no longer noticed the passage of the night, the progress of the stars, the disappearance of the land shadow to the west. She saw only the moon and felt the urge to reach towards it.

As the moon rose higher in the sky Fern urged the little craft faster along the metal path, taking out the paddle and scooping the silver water back to add speed to its progress.

Her first exultant urge to speed turned to despair as the great disk lifted higher and higher, further and further from her reach.

She stood at last, arms uplifted, calling to the moon with a strange and unnatural call.

Kyra jerked awake with the sound, seeing the girl transformed.

'Fern!' she cried in alarm.

Fern did not hear her, but stretched her arms to their limits...

The moonlight caught her eyes and to Kyra they seemed to be made of moon metal.

She seized her and shook her. The boat rocked dangerously and Fern's eyes became pools of dark.

'Come back!' Kyra cried. 'Fern, you are possessed!'

Karne grumblingly awoke now and stared bewildered at the scene.

He saw his sister Kyra shaking Fern violently, felt the boat rocking.

In an instant he was up and in control. He pushed Fern and Kyra down with oaths of command, seized the paddle and righted the spinning and jerking of the boat.

Fern crouched with her head against Kyra's breast sobbing and shivering. Kyra enclosed her with her arms and comforted her with soft sounds.

'What is this?' Karne shouted. 'What have you done?'

Kyra looked above Fern's head and could see no land to the west and the stars they had set their course by were not where they should have been.

They were caught in a sickly white light in the middle of darkness, far from home, far from anywhere they knew. And creeping over the face of the moon was the dark hand of a cloud.

Within a short while the stars had gone out one by one, the whole sky was overcast and they were in absolute darkness.

They sat huddled together, the cold they felt as much from within as from without.

Karne and Kyra had quietened Fern's sobs and had silently agreed to say no more about the incident. What was done was done, and now they must think what to do next.

'There is nothing we can do but wait for morning and the light,' Karne said.

He held Fern close to him, knowing that what she had done she had not done deliberately to bring them into danger, but that something from deep within those mysterious levels we all have within ourselves had stirred, and an urge to reach and follow something she herself could not control or understand had taken over.

In the darkness, drifting with the deep sea currents, the three young people and the unborn child waited.

They saw no sun in the morning, but they knew it had risen because the black pit of darkness in which they had been marooned gave way to a dull and sombre grey, neither sky nor sea distinguished in any way.

Gloomily the three made breakfast of wheat biscuits and water from the goatskin bag. Up to now they had fed off the land each day and had not needed to draw on their emergency store of food.

Karne stared around him at their featureless world.

They had pulled down the rough sail in an attempt not to travel any further off their course, and lowered strings of fibrous rope over the side to watch which way they drifted, hoping their rudimentary knowledge of currents and tides, gleaned from fisherman friends, would help them decide which way land lay.

It was Fern who noticed the first sea bird and after that they concentrated on the sky and noted with desperate attention which way the birds flew. But this at first was not much help as the birds seemed to come and go from many directions.

Kyra buried her face in her hands and tried to 'feel' the presence of the land. Karne kept quiet, knowing this was a power Kyra sometimes had which she was hoping would grow with training as a priest.

Fern joined her in her concentration, thinking of the forests and the growing plants with whom she had lived in close harmony all her life. She needed them now and called on them for help.

* * * *

At first no help came.

The sound of the slap, slapping of the water against the side of the boat was all they were conscious of, that and the coldness of the air that enclosed them.

Karne watched the ropes, counted seagulls and noted the direction of the drift of flotsam.

Gradually through the darkness in her head Fern began to feel little stirrings, hear little sounds like leaves rustling, small animals moving through undergrowth...

She opened her eyes with excitement and found Karne pointing in the same direction, and Kyra looking decisively along the line of both their pointing fingers.

Laughing, they all talked at once.

'I am sure it is that way - I heard forest sounds,' Fern cried.

‘And I saw a gull carrying nesting materials in its mouth travelling that way. It must have been returning to the cliffs!’

‘And I,’ Kyra said dreamily, ‘felt the presence of a Sacred Circle and someone in it calling to us.’

They looked at each other joyfully and set about turning the boat around to head in the direction they had all agreed was the right one.

While Fern was following the moon they must have drifted a long way off course and it took them the best part of a day to reach again the comfort of the land.

Great was their delight to see at last a darker smear of grey upon the western horizon, and even greater was their pleasure to distinguish the tall stones of a Sacred Circle crowning the highest point above the sea as they drew nearer.

They were still a long way from their destination, the Great Temple of the Sun where the Lord Guiron waited so uneasily for them, but as they pulled into the rocky cove at the base of the cliff that housed the stone circle Fern was singing and Kyra’s eyes were shining. People who used the tall stones of a Sacred Circle to communicate with the spirit realms must be of their own kind, and it would be good to be among such people again. Karne, who felt the responsibility of carrying Kyra and Fern safely over so great a distance and through so many dangers, was particularly relieved to break the journey for a while and seek the advice of people who would certainly know these waters and this coast better than he did.

He leapt into the shallow water and hauled the light craft as high out of the sea as he could, the girls joining him with enthusiasm.

It was almost dark but they could still see fairly well, and when they finally drew breath from all the effort of attending to their boat, they found that they were not alone.

Standing on some rocks a short way from them and holding in their hands what looked like clubs stood several men, rough and uncouth, clad in furs and not in woven cloth.

Kyra, Karne and Fern froze, unsure of their next move.

The men stared at them and they stared at the men.

* * * *

The first movement came from Kyra who took a step or two towards them in spite of Karne's warning touch upon her arm. She stood vulnerable, her hands empty and open in front of her, as though showing them that they had nothing to fear from the people from the sea.

At the same time she tried to project friendly thoughts towards them, knowing that all people respond, whether they know it or not, to the thought flow from others.

Her overtures must have succeeded because they approached and there was no menace in the way they came. Their faces were smiling and friendly, though dirty, and as they drew nearer Karne could see that the sticks they carried were not clubs, but bundles of

rushes, probably dipped in fat, to use as torches against the dark of the night that was fast closing in around them.

The men spoke their language but with a more guttural sound. From what they said it became clear that the travellers were expected. Their priest had sensed their presence at sea during the dawn watch in the Sacred Circle and sent greetings and offers of hospitality to the strangers.

Karne accepted with gratitude on their behalf.

While the leader of the group and Karne exchanged these words, two of the men busied themselves making fire with a bow-like tool. It spun fast on a piece of kindling wood until it smouldered and set light to the rushes which became their torches for the climb up the rocky cliff path.

At the top of the cliff the whole village seemed to have gathered to greet the strangers, but the one who stood out among the others was the priest, the only one clad in woven cloth and wearing leather on his feet. He was shorter than his charges but of enormous bulk, the folds of his garments falling over a great belly. He raised his two plump hands to them in salute while the villagers crowding behind him waited eagerly but silently to join their greeting to his.

‘Welcome, my friends. It is not often I have the pleasure of sharing my hearth with one of the brotherhood,’ and he looked straight at Karne who stood tall above the girls and slightly ahead of them.

Karne was puzzled by this, but said nothing more than polite greetings in reply.

‘Come!’ the priest said imperiously but kindly, indicating that Karne should follow him.

Instantly the rest of the villagers closed in on Kyra and Fern and, chattering excitedly, led them off away from Karne, to the group of wooden huts surrounding a small circle of open fires.

‘You will eat with us,’ some said.

‘Our house is your house,’ others cried, and Kyra and Fern could see that they were to be quite smothered with hospitality.

Although the people were very different from their own, the whole atmosphere was so friendly and festive they did not think to feel alarm.

Both girls were glad they would have the comfort of sleeping in a warm house for a change, but both wondered somewhat anxiously what had become of Karne. There was no sign of him or the priest.

When Kyra could at last make herself heard above the hubbub of questions and friendly offers of food, she ventured to ask where her brother might be.

‘He is with the Lord Yealdon, of course,’ she was told as though her question had been a foolish one. ‘He will eat well and sleep soft. You have no cause to be concerned. It is a great day for the Lord when he has someone of equal stature to talk the Mysteries with!’

Again Kyra felt a small twinge of puzzlement, but she was hungry and tired and cramped from the long hours on the boat and soon dismissed thoughts about

her brother and the priest to enjoy the good roast deer and pungent root ale. The firelight flickered from every side, dim figures wove in and out through it and when the light caught their faces she saw nothing but friendliness and pleasure.

* * * *

After the eating and the drinking, when Fern and Kyra were feeling decidedly dizzy from the ale, the villagers performed a dance for them, singing a strange song very different from any the girls had ever heard before. It seemed to be a hunting song accompanied by a ritual dance. Half the dancers had antlers fixed to their heads on strange masks and tails of fur hanging between their legs, while the other half had spears which they pretended to throw from time to time.

The dance started slow, the hunters close to the ground stalking their prey, the 'animals' feeding peacefully and unaware of danger. Almost without Kyra and Fern noticing it the tempo of the slow drumming music and muted song changed, becoming faster and faster, louder and louder. The chase was on! The 'animals' leapt and twisted trying to escape. The 'hunters' circled and pursued, drawing their trap tighter and closer.

Kyra and Fern found themselves caught by the savage rhythm of the beat, so unlike the music of their own peaceful farming community, and began stamping their feet in time to the dance. The impact of so many stamping feet raised the dust and the air seemed to

vibrate with frenzy. Dust and sparks and smoke mingled with the dancers, the heady smell of ale and of roasting meat, the loud and louder chanting of so many throats, began to work on Fern and Kyra so that they found themselves leaping up and joining in, a surge of primitive ecstasy burning them up like the stubble in a field of straw on fire on a windy day.

Kyra could feel the sweat pouring from her, but she could not stop dancing. It was as though she was *being* danced, rather than herself dancing. The drumming of her feet had become her own heartbeat.

On and on the sound went, the movement went faster and faster until at last a composite scream broke from the throats of all the dancers...

‘Kill!’

Ice cold the word like a flung dagger stopped all movement, all frenzy, instantly. Kyra was dimly aware in the immediate and deathly silence of the humming whine of dozens of spears travelling through the air.

‘Oh you gods,’ she cried within herself, ‘they have not killed them!’

She tried to pull herself together enough to see what had happened, but the dancing and the ale and the unaccustomed emotions of the whole evening had told on her and she could feel herself slipping into unconsciousness. Her last thought as the weirdly falling dust disappeared from her sight was for Fern. Fern who carried a child within her body and must surely be feeling even worse than herself.

* * * *

Karne, seated on a thick rich bearskin rug within the priest's comfortable house, which was some way from the feasting and the fires, could hear the sound of singing and the loud thud of stamping feet, but it was very much a background noise and he did not take much notice of it.

He was amazed at what he saw. The dwellings of the villagers he had noticed in the firelight seemed no more than temporary shelters against the weather. In his own village the sturdy circular houses were built of wood and rushes, bound over with hides to keep the weather out. They were built to last a man's lifetime. He wondered if these people were nomadic. He had heard of such people, wanderers who had not learned the way to use the land skilfully so that it yielded year after year the crops needed for sustenance. People who used the land once and then moved on. Hunting people. Restless people.

But the priest's house was sumptuous with the most magnificent furs Karne had ever seen hung from every beam and spread across the floor. He was given a sweet wine made of honey to drink, and bowls of rich and tender meat, spiced with nuts and herbs he had not tasted before, to eat. Several young girls slipped in from time to time silently and discreetly to replenish their goblets and their bowls.

At first he was delighted with it all, but gradually as more and more wine was pressed upon him and his refusals were ignored, he began to have misgivings. The friendly face of the priest seemed to him too friendly. He

smiled too much and his plump hands that had been raised in greeting with such dignity began to look greasy and unclean as he fingered the food.

Karne wondered at the great disparity between the style of living of the priest and his people. He seemed an alien among them. In Karne's own community the priest Maal, who had been with them for many years, had held a position of great respect and, although master of Mysteries that the ordinary people never questioned, had a relationship with them that was friendly and loving.

Karne noticed that the fat priest had many large rings upon each finger, some in silver and some in gold, but one in particular he noticed and disliked. It was of a greyish metal that he had not seen before and was shaped like an eye. As the priest's hands moved the eye seemed to glint and gleam and never take its attention off Karne. He tried to shake himself free of the feeling, telling himself that it could not possibly be an eye that could see, but a blind piece of metal fashioned by a man. But whether it was the wine or the monotonous and softly droning voice of the priest, Karne felt himself slipping further and further away from the reality he knew how to control.

'It is not often we welcome such a distinguished traveller as yourself,' the man said at last, smiling.

Karne through his confusion knew enough to try to protest that some mistake was being made, but his voice seemed to come out thin and dim and carry no conviction. The priest ignored it.

‘You are too modest,’ he said, still smiling, indicating to the girl that Karne’s cup needed refilling.

‘No...’ said Karne feebly.

‘I insist,’ the priest said, smiling.

He paused a while, and Karne struggled to work out what was happening, but his mind was too confused by the influence of the wine.

‘I must hold on,’ he told himself desperately. ‘Something is not right!’

But the man’s charming voice was speaking again, soothingly, softly.

‘I have been cut off here among these barbarians for longer than I care to remember!’

He said the word ‘barbarian’ with great venom and bitterness. Karne wondered what the girl who stood behind him to serve the wine was thinking. These were her people and although she was poorly clad and possibly not as advanced in knowledge and skill as the girls in his own village were, she was by no means deserving of such scorn.

He had thought it was a priest’s duty to educate and guide his people, not to keep them in a state of savagery and then despise them for it.

‘We could exchange knowledge and ideas,’ the fat priest continued smoothly. ‘It is many years since I learnt the Mysteries, and you are young. There must be many new things taught in the temple schools these days that would add to an old man’s strength. You could teach me these things, while I,’ and here he leaned very close to Karne and his rheumy eyes seemed to leer into

the boy's, 'could teach you things I have learnt over the years of practice as a magician-priest that no school ever taught or ever would. I have powers that would startle you, young priest!'

'I assure you...' Karne began feebly, really worried now, realizing the misunderstanding had been allowed to go too far.

'No, do not protest,' the old man's voice was suddenly sharp. 'I assure you I need to know what they are teaching these days and if...' and here he paused and his face was harsh and cold, 'if you refuse my offer of a peaceful trade ... I have ways of taking what I want...'

There was a cruel and relentless edge beneath the smoothness of his voice now. He raised his right hand slightly, turning the deadly eye of his ring towards Karne so that just briefly, as though it was a taste of things to come, the firelight in the brazier glinted off its metallic surface and pierced his eyes with light so icily inhuman that for a moment he was blinded.

Karne was afraid now, deadly afraid.

He struggled to gather together his bemused wits and think of ways to outwit his formidable foe. Before he had noticed the extent of the man's unpleasantness he had thought to tell him that he himself was not a priest, but that his sister Kyra, although not yet a priest, was at least a candidate on her way to training.

Now he realized he must protect Kyra and somehow deal with this man himself. His heart felt heavy. Not only was his own mind befogged by the wine, but his

adversary was obviously a trained and unscrupulous magician.

Karne tried to remind himself that it was he, Karne, who had finally outfaced Wardyke, the false priest who destroyed their friend Maal and took over their village. But it had not been an easy victory, and he had had the help of Kyra, Fern and the Lords of the Sun behind him.

As his thoughts raced to find a way out, his senses brought him something else to worry about. Kyra and Fern were with the villagers, and the dance and music he had been vaguely conscious of as part of a festival occasion, he noticed now had the same cruel undertones as the voice of the priest before him. It would not take much for Kyra and Fern to become prisoners of these people.

‘Speak,’ the fat priest said now, smiling again, knowing that he had made his point and could afford to hide the barb of his threat once more under his ingratiating manner.

Karne could see a bowl of water to the left of the tent.

He rose and boldly took it in his hands.

The man watched warily, the hand with the ring tensed for action.

But Karne showed no sign of threatening him. Standing as tall and commandingly as he could, he lifted the bowl of water high over his own head and then tipped its icy contents over himself.

The man was puzzled, but said nothing. He continued to watch him like an animal watching its prey.

The shock of the cold water had done what Karne hoped it would do: clear his mind, freshen his body and sharpen his wits.

‘You know as well as I,’ the young man said now as sternly as he could, ‘our brotherhood is sworn to secrecy.’

‘But not among ourselves,’ the man was quick to reply, leaning forward eagerly, knowing that the vows had been instituted to prevent the quite considerable power of the Mysteries from falling into the hands of those not ready to see their full implications and use them wisely.

Karne looked at him coldly, standing tall above the bulky but seated figure.

‘What is it you wish to know?’ he said at last.

The man leant forward, his eyes for the moment failing to hide his real feelings. It was clear to Karne his host needed some specific piece of knowledge very badly, and would kill to get it. His face was twisted with a mixture of greed and anxiety.

‘Of late it has become difficult for me to ... contact ... certain ... people...’

He was trying to choose his words carefully, but every moment Karne was more certain that the man was now the suppliant and he the one in the position of power.

As Karne grew bolder, the fat priest Yealdon grew less sure of himself. Karne remembered what he had learnt – the crux of all power is belief and confidence.

‘What people?’ he said sternly.

‘The Lords of the Sun,’ Yealdon muttered the words so low it was as though he hoped Karne would not hear them.

Karne’s heart leapt. This was good news.

One of the skills a priest was trained to have, vital to his work, was the ability either himself to ‘spirit-travel’ across the world to seek the help and communion of other priests, or in times of stress to call upon the great Lords of the Sun, who were the highest in the hierarchy of priests and who moved most freely about the world in spirit form, most knowledgeable in the Secret Mysteries.

Karne felt almost sorry for the man. A priest who could not communicate with other priests and the Lords of the Sun was cut off in his own isolated village, among people with whom he could not exchange thoughts and ideas, particularly as in this case he had taken no trouble in the past to educate them to any kind of companionable level.

Karne’s own people were simple enough farmers but they were not ignorant savages. The rapport between the old priest Maal and his people had been good, and he had kept the vital elements of priestly wisdom continually renewed and refreshed by contact with his peers across the world. When they were in difficulties and Wardyke had usurped his place and ruined their ancient way of life, Kyra, a mere child, but with training from Maal and a natural aptitude for priestly powers, had called upon the Lords of the Sun for help, and they had generously given it.

‘And what...’ Karne said boldly, ‘will you trade for my help in contacting the Lords of the Sun?’

Yealdon almost crawled forward. He began to look more and more like a toad. The boy could feel the balance of power in his own favour. The man was crawling to him. He needed to know what he thought the boy knew, more than anything else in the world.

‘I can make an enemy die,’ Yealdon said eagerly, ‘by nothing more than the use of this ring!’ And he took the one that had so disturbed Karne off his finger and held it triumphantly aloft.

It glittered balefully in the firelight.

Karne swallowed imperceptibly. He had not conquered his fear of this man completely, though so far he had it well hidden.

‘You mean you will trade your ring for the knowledge I can give you?’

Yealdon smiled and his eyes were evil. He cradled the ring within his hands, holding it close to himself as though it were the most precious thing in the world.

‘I will trade anything you ask,’ he purred, still cradling the ring.

‘I ask the ring!’ Karne spoke loud and clear.

There was a deathly silence between them for what seemed to Karne like a very long time.

‘Certainly,’ Yealdon said at last, but Karne knew it was a lie.

‘First the knowledge, and then the ring.’

‘No,’ Karne said, his heart beating loud against his ribs. ‘First the ring, and *then* the knowledge!’

‘But how do I know that you will not cheat me?’
Yealdon almost spat out the words.

‘How do I know that you will not cheat *me*?’ Karne replied.

Deadlock.

The two eyed each other warily.

‘You may take my knowledge and then kill me with the ring thus keeping both!’ Karne said.

‘You may take my ring and kill me, and so save yourself the trouble of giving me the knowledge,’
Yealdon countered.

‘Why should I do that? Would a priest of the Brotherhood do that?’ Karne asked.

‘Would a priest of the Brotherhood do what you suggested I would do?’ Yealdon snarled.

Again the two watched each other silently.

Apart from the heaviness of the old man’s breathing it was uncannily quiet. The serving girls had left them alone.

Karne became aware that even the sound of stamping and singing had ceased from the direction of the huts.

How he longed for Kyra’s strength to help him at this moment.

He had no plan. He knew only he must keep the balance of power as it was now, and stall for time until he could think of a way of dealing with the situation. He had no secret knowledge to give the man, nor would he have given it if he had.

Karne realized that his own belief that the ring could kill was adding to its power. If only he could doubt enough that it could harm him, he would be safe from it. But the glint of the dull and unusual metal, the acrid smell of some strangely potent herb that was burning in the brazier, the heavy, staring eyes of the man before him, all helped to dull his mind, and primitive fear was gradually undermining his control.

To break the influence of the priest, surrounded by his tricks of power, Karne forced himself to move with a last and desperate effort of will.

‘I will give you the knowledge you ask for, and I take your word as sworn upon the Tall stones of the Temple of the Sun that you will use no treachery,’ Karne spoke at last. ‘Now, follow me.’

‘Where are you going?’ Yealdon spoke sharply and uneasily.

‘To the Sacred Circle,’ Karne said as calmly as he could. ‘You must know that knowledge of this kind can only be passed within the Sacred Circle!’

Yealdon was not pleased. He had hoped to find out what he needed without leaving the protective ambience of his house. But he took a rush light from its holder and by its low and flickering flame the two found their way to the top of the cliff where the tall stones rose darkly against the grey surge of the sea. The sky was still overcast but the clouds had thinned considerably in places. A faint and eerie light emanated from the moon behind them, not enough to make the silver path upon the water that had so bemused Fern, but enough to

make the land and the stones of the circle darker than the sky or sea.

The village lay silently behind them, the fires reduced to embers and no sound coming from the dark huts. Karne wondered if Fern and Kyra were safely asleep. He knew they were extremely tired.

How he longed to be far away and safely sleeping too!

* * * *

As they approached the circle, Karne was faced with another problem.

In his community it was an ancient law that no one but the priest, or at special times designated by the same law, village Elders, could enter the circle. It was full of power that ordinary men were not trained to handle or withstand. Kyra had been afraid but she had so far progressed in her apprenticeship that she could enter safely and use its ancient forces.

Karne had no right to tamper with the mysterious forces in the circle.

He was afraid.

But what was he to do?

In despair he called to Kyra for her help, and in that moment of desperation believed implicitly that she would come.

‘Why do you wait?’ Yealdon cried impatiently. ‘The night will not last forever!’

Of that at least Karne was glad.

‘I must first consult with the Lords of the Sun,’ Karne said, trying to hide the tremor in his voice. ‘They may not wish you to have this secret knowledge. There may be a reason they have withdrawn themselves from you.’

Karne caught the glint of the deadly ring as Yealdon raised it warningly.

‘And if I die,’ Karne said loudly and clearly, though in his heart he was feeling very far from bold, ‘my knowledge dies with me!’

He called again for Kyra deep inside himself. Why did she not hear? She had the power to enter men’s minds and see their thoughts. Why did she not now see his?

‘Push me no further, boy!’ Yealdon said with anger in his voice. ‘I have waited a long time for this knowledge, and I can wait a while longer.’

He too was trying to control his face and voice. He did not wish Karne to sense his eagerness and impatience. He did not want to wait longer! How many winters and summers must pass before the sea threw up another priest upon his shore. Maybe never, and he had grown too fat and lazy, used to comfort and routine, to endanger his life by travelling on the sea or through the dark and savage forests that ringed his hunting village to a depth no man had ever measured. For some while now he had not been able either to leave the place in the flesh or in the mind, nor could he reach out to other priests in the world on any spiritual level. He had absolute power in his own small community, but in a

sense he was a prisoner there. This was the first contact he had had for a long, long time with anyone outside his village. It was a kind of miracle. He might never get another chance.

* * * *

Kyra came out of her faint (or was it sleep?) in the dark interior of a foul smelling hut. She could see nothing, but heard snoring and heavy breathing all around her. Her first thought was for Fern and she whispered her name, but received nothing back but further grunts and snores. She tried to still her fears and concentrate as Maal had taught her to, to sense with her inner senses where Fern might be.

She sensed nothing from Fern, but kept half seeing at the corner of her eye in the dark an image of Karne. When she turned to look directly at him he was gone and it was only the dark blankness of the hut she could see.

It seemed as though he were trying to tell her something.

But what?

Fern?

She must find Fern.

She sensed danger but whether it was to Karne or to Fern she could not make out.

She was sure neither of them were in the same hut as herself.

She must crawl out of it somehow.

She must have air.

She almost choked on the staleness of the smell.

It seemed to her as her senses gradually became used to her surroundings and the dark that the hut contained far more people in a more confined space than ever would have been allowed in her home village. The roof was low and as far as she could make out the only opening was a small hole to one side, through which she would have to crawl. No one could go in or out of this noisome hut except on hands and knees.

The task of reaching the hole (she refused to call it a 'doorway') was not an easy one. She was surrounded by gross and noisy sleepers and she dared not wake them.

Tiny movement by tiny movement she prepared to make the journey, pausing every moment to check that the general level of the sleeping noises had not dropped in any way. Luckily for her the excitement of the night and the potency of the root ale had made the rude sleepers sleep heavily and deep.

Her head was aching and her thinking was not as clear as she would have liked, but at least she was conscious and was making progress to the hole.

At one point while she was climbing over a man's body, his arm came up to hold her down to him, his lips muttering something to her. Her heart almost stopped beating and she lay against him as still as stone, feeling the dead weight of his muscular arm upon her. But after a while by the limpness of his limbs she realized he was still asleep and she carefully released herself from his embrace and continued creeping to the hole.

At last she was outside!

She took great gulps of air.

And as her head cleared she heard Karne's cry for help quite distinctly within it.

At the same time she saw Fern sitting on her haunches before the last remnants of a fire, rocking backwards and forwards on her heels, rubbing her arms and trying to warm and comfort herself.

'Oh, Kyra,' she sobbed when her friend put her arm around her shoulders. 'I have been so frightened and alone. I thought you were dead when they carried you off, and I cannot find Karne anywhere.'

'Did they kill anyone?' Kyra asked anxiously.

'I do not think so. It was a mock hunt. The ones with antler-masks fell flat when the spears flew, but I saw them get up afterwards. I have been so frightened! These people are not like our people. I insisted on staying out here by the fire. They wanted me to sleep with them in those horrible huts, but I would not. They could not understand it and were really rough with me.'

'Are you hurt?' Kyra asked quickly.

'Only a bit bruised, I think. I finally made them understand and they left me alone. I think they were too tired to keep it up for too long. Oh, Kyra, I am so thankful you are all right! But Karne! Where is Karne?' Her voice was desperate.

'He is in danger, I fear. I can sense a call from him. Come, we must go to him.'

'Where?'

'Be quiet a moment. I must 'feel' the direction of the call.'

She stood still, concentrating, and felt the flow of Karne's anxiety coming to her from the Sacred Circle on the cliff top.

Compared to the inside of the hut, the night was relatively light. She and Fern stumbled many times, but nevertheless made their way swiftly to the source of his danger.

Within the circle they could make out the figures of two men, one slender and tall and one bulky and gross – her brother and the priest.

Kyra sensed great evil and danger surrounding her brother and stood in the shadows unseen by the men trying to locate the centre of the menace. She held Fern, who wanted immediately to run to Karne, and indicated to her to keep silence and be still. Fern obeyed, though it was painful for her to do so.

Kyra felt the priest was greedy and unclean, but somehow weak. She did not sense the strength in him that Wardyke had had.

No, the menace was not coming entirely from the priest.

What then?

Something the priest wielded?

A dagger perhaps.

She had seen cruel daggers forged of bronze and sharpened to a deadly cutting edge.

No.

Something else.

She heard Karne's voice raised unnaturally high and saw his hands rise up above his head.

‘Lords of the Sun!’ he was declaiming.

What is he doing, she thought with horror! He knew he had no right to be within the circle and certainly no power to raise the Lords of the Sun.

Had her brother gone mad, and was this the menace that she sensed? Karne had always longed to have the powers she had!

She drew nearer, trembling with anxiety.

‘Continue!’ she heard the fat priest’s voice commanding Karne.

‘You, Lords of the Sun,’ Karne repeated and hesitated again.

Yealdon moved closer to him and lifted his right hand with something that glinted in it, but which Kyra could not make out from this distance.

‘You, Lords of the Sun and spirits of the many worlds that lie within our world! ... Come to the aid of one who wishes to preserve your ancient laws against the one who would betray them!’

His voice was loud and ringing.

Kyra caught the message, and in that instant saw with great clarity what the priest held over Karne to make him do what he was doing.

She shut her eyes and formed a mental picture of the ring he held towards her brother. She felt the malevolence of its power and she visualized it shattering in a thousand pieces. At the same time she joined her voice to Karne’s, leaping into the circle and repeating loud and clear the prayer he had just prayed.

Yealdon screamed as the ring he held above his head seemed to burn his fingers. He dropped it, shrieking with the pain, and as it hit the stony ground it shattered and splintered into a thousand fragments, some of them striking his cheeks and causing them to bleed. Tearing at his own face as though it were on fire, Yealdon further ripped his own flesh, convinced the ring had turned against its master.

Quickly Karne seized the hands of Kyra and Fern and they ran fast and low for the path that led down to the bay where their boat was moored. The first glimmerings of the dawn light helped them and they were away, bruised and shaken from the scramble down the cliff path, before the villagers awoke amazed to find their priest crawling on his hands and knees within their Sacred Circle, muttering and sobbing and sifting through the earth to find thin splinters of metal, his face a mess of tears and blood.

He looked up to find them staring at him, and for an instant fear of *them* showed in his eyes.

In that instant he was finished as the tyrant he had been.

Where the splinters of the ring had struck his face, sores festered and never healed.

2

Illusions

When the time came to leave the ocean and turn their little craft into the wide and muddy estuary of the river that cut deep into the land, the three tired and discouraged travellers felt a surge of new hope and energy.

It marked the end of the first phase of their journey.

Fern was particularly glad. She sat in the front of the boat as they rode in with the tide, her long red-gold hair blowing back with the wind and her voice raised in song. Although they would still travel for many days on water, the land with all its rich profusion of growing things would be near. She could talk with the trees, 'feel' the surge of living sap in growing plants, take guidance and comfort from her familiar green world. The ocean was so cold, so unfamiliar and so vast. She knew the same force that gave life to the land was no less present in the ocean, but somehow she could never feel it there. She who had never been lonely in her life although she had lived most of it alone, tasted loneliness for the first

time on the great and surging deeps. She would have clung to Karne but he was always busy keeping them afloat and moving in the right direction. Lines of concentration from staring into distances were becoming a common feature between his eyes. She turned to Kyra, but Kyra too seemed occupied in ways within herself that Fern could not share.

The land was Fern's medium, the forests and the thickets her domain. She would be happy there.

* * * *

The meeting of the river waters and the sea was not easy to navigate. Several times their little boat nearly capsized in the turbulence, and Karne and Kyra were kept very busy and nearly lost their nerve and balance. But once through this obstacle, the tide and a following breeze carried them easily to where the estuary narrowed and became a river.

Ayrlon, the new priest of their home community, had said that for many days they could travel inland on this waterway. It led west and gently south. But when they found the course turning sharply north as it did at one point, they must leave it and travel overland for a while until they found another south-flowing river. There were many such and he gave them advice on how to choose the best. Luckily their boat was very light and could be carried between them when they had to cross the land, and it would always be useful as shelter in the night.

‘Always keep a fire going,’ Ayrton had advised. ‘The forests are full of animals, some of whom may not be friendly. Fire frightens them and keeps them at a safe distance. Where there are caves use them, but look first that they are not inhabited by man or beast. Make your fire in the mouth of the cave. Many bears, wild cats and wolves seek shelter there from time to time.

‘Where you find villages rest with them awhile. Do not push yourselves too far too fast. You will find many dangers and difficulties on the way, and if you are tired you are that much less able to deal with them.

‘Give my greetings wherever you find people of our faith. I made many friends on my journey north and it is possible you will meet with them and they will give you kinder hospitality for my sake.’

Kyra, Karne and Fern had listened to everything he had said.

It had been a good day for their village when he arrived. The snow was still on the ground but the earliest shoots of spring were beginning to show through it. He came quietly, with none of the dramatic showmanship Wardyke had used that fatal Midsummer’s Day the year before.

The people took Ayrton to their hearts within a few hours of his arrival. He was a quiet man, small in build. He listened more than he spoke, but those who told him of their troubles knew he understood and walked away comforted, though more often than not he had said nothing.

Kyra tested her feelings for him by a long night vigil of prayer and meditation near Maal's grave, and in the morning knew for sure her first feelings had been true. He was to be trusted with her village, and their customary ways of peace would be safe in his hands.

When she left she looked back with pain to leave her much loved home, but with calm in her heart knowing that everything was now as it should be.

* * * *

The first night up the river they camped on high ground on the southern bank in a dull and drizzling rain.

Fern rushed about, ignoring the wet, joyfully gathering special roots and shoots to eat. Karne and Kyra could hear her talking excitedly wherever she went as though she were greeting long lost friends.

They busied themselves by setting up the boat as tent and trying, at first unsuccessfully, to find a place where it was possible to make a fire. They had just succeeded in encouraging a rather damp and smoking version to ignite when Fern returned, still happy, but dripping wet, her hair clinging in long wet strands to her shoulders and back, water trickling off the end of her nose.

The next day they paddled upriver still in rain and camped damply upon the bank again.

The third day was better. The sun came out and their spirits were so uplifted that they made much greater progress and found, when it was time to camp, a

small community of people living on rising land a short way from the water's edge.

After the initial suspicions were allayed, the villagers made them welcome and they enjoyed a real feast of river trout and heard many tall stories of river demons and monstrous forest ogres.

Karne went fishing with the men the following morning and learnt to glide so silently in the water that the fish were not alarmed at his presence. After many attempts he was able to dart his hand out and seize a fat fish before the creature knew that it was in danger.

He shouted and danced with joy at his first success so much they all had to move to another reach of water to continue their fishing, every fish within a great range having been frightened away by his exuberance.

Kyra and Fern took some of the women into the forest and spoke to them of the gentle tree spirits and the living force that flowed through everything and had its source in that which was limited by no name, but had power and energy to drive life's multifarious forms within a great and ever harmonious pattern.

The river women listened attentively, but the girls could see they could not understand what was being said.

'No matter,' Kyra said to Fern. 'It is like planting a seed. The ideas we give them now may lie dormant in their minds for many years, but one day the warmth of some experience will stimulate them into growth.'

'But what about the ogres?' a woman asked fearfully, looking around.

‘You give them their ugly shapes, their terrifying attributes and then cower in the night from them.’

‘But we *feel* them around us in the dark!’ the woman said.

‘What you feel are the urges in your own minds to evil, and you give them shape and form with your imagination. You put them outside yourself so that you need not feel guilty about them, so that you need not fear *yourselves!*’

The woman looked at her with eyes that comprehended nothing of what she was saying.

‘Have you not felt hate for someone and wished him harm?’

‘Yes,’ the woman admitted reluctantly.

‘Then you have felt guilty to feel such hate, to wish such harm. So you have pretended to yourself that it is not you hating, not you wishing harm, but some other creature, some monster, some ogre who has taken possession of you. This image becomes so real you begin to believe it exists apart from you, and when you tell others they join their fears, their hate, their guilt to the image as well. And so it grows and grows in your minds until you have all forgotten how it first began!’

‘But children have gone into the forest and been eaten by the ogres!’ Some of the other women joined in now.

‘The children may have been killed by wild boars or wandered so far they have not been able to find their way back,’ Fern said. ‘There may be a thousand natural

dangers in the forest which could be overcome if you could control your fear of them.'

'fear can kill,' Kyra warned. 'It is very powerful. If a child is fed on stories of monsters and ogres and it goes into the darkness of the forest, the cracking of a twig trampled by a small deer or the whirring of a bird's wings could so destroy the balance of its mind that it might run and stumble deeper into the forest, terrified, no longer taking care, a prey to any natural danger.'

The women looked doubtful, but as though they wanted to believe.

'If you like,' Kyra said after a pause to think, noticing that they were not ready to understand such teaching yet, 'Fern and I will go into the forest and pray to the spirits of light we know and they will drive whatever it is you fear away from this place forever!'

'The forest is not safe!' the women cried.

'Kyra has magic powers,' Fern said, realizing what Kyra was trying to do. 'She has started training as a priest.'

The women were still puzzled. They lived cut off from the rest of the world and had no Sacred Circle and no priest.

'I have magic powers greater than the ogres that you fear,' Kyra said with confidence, 'and I will destroy these monstrous ogres once and for all if you will do exactly what I say.'

They did not fully understand even yet, but knew enough to realize that these strangers were very different from themselves. The one called Kyra spoke

with such authority and conviction they were prepared to believe she was some kind of magician.

The women began to draw back from them a little after this and their friendliness was now tempered with caution.

‘While we are in the forest asking the help of our spirit Gods make me a model of the ogre that you think lives in the forest. Fashion it of river clay and bring it to me at the river bank when it is ready,’ Kyra commanded.

‘There are several types of ogre,’ someone said.

‘Then make them all for me ... in clay ... as nearly as you can to how they look.’

Fern looked at Kyra, but said nothing.

For the rest of the day the women worked busily at the models.

The men returned from fishing and were told the story. Some argued. Some helped. But by mid-afternoon they were all taking part in the activity, even if it was only to offer advice about the look of some particular eye or nose.

Karne took Kyra aside.

‘What on earth...?’ he said.

She put her finger to her lips.

‘It may help to dispel their fears. Why not this way, if they are not ready for the truth as we know it?’

He shrugged and smiled and left her to it, setting about the task of gutting the fish they had caught and roasting them on the fire.

Kyra chose sunset for the staging of her exorcism.

She, Fern and Karne built a small circle of river boulders on the narrow sandy beach just below the bank, and scooped out the sand from within it, allowing the water to seep up from below.

When the models were prepared and the sun was a red and gigantic sphere sinking into the treetops to the west, the villagers gathered to watch with some apprehension as Kyra lowered the hideous clay figures into the little pool of water she had prepared.

She walked round and round the circle many times chanting improvised prayers of exorcism, while Karne and Fern scooped more and more river water over the models.

Gradually the clay softened, the hideous features disintegrated and, as the sun finally set with a shaft of brilliant light catching the ripples in the river close beside them, the last ogre dissolved and was no more than muddy water.

As this happened Karne, Kyra and Fern raised their arms and sang a song from their own village, a moving, rising hymn of praise to light and life and the spirit guardians of the world.

So sweetly did the sound of their voices mingle with the birds homing to their nests, so uncannily did the last shaft of light from the sun fall now upon the little circle of stones and dye the muddy pool of water the colour of blood, that the villagers gave a great gasp of relief and *believed* their ogres were finally dead.

* * * *

That night the villagers sang and danced to the strangers, and this time there was no menace or cruelty in the dance as there had been in the hunting dance of their last host village, where, although no one was actually killed, the lust for killing was in the air.

This dance was only of joy, and the air was filled with feelings of release.

* * * *

A day or two later the three were sorry to move on. They had made friends. The villagers believed that their monsters had been destroyed and they had been taught to pray to the friendly spirits of the river and the forest and the sun for help and comfort in everything they did.

Karne had learnt to fish in a new and exciting way.

Fern had found plants she had not encountered before.

And Kyra had been taught to weave baskets of river reeds far superior to any she had ever seen before.

They parted with warm feelings, villagers and travelers each having benefited in some way from their time together.

* * * *

Overland travel was not easy. The boat became ever more cumbersome and heavy to carry and, after several rivers had degenerated into rocky rapids before they had a chance to make for shore, it became virtually useless as a boat. They decided at last to abandon it and make their way as far as possible by land, crossing

rivers when they found them by inflating their water carrying skins to use as floats and then refilling them with fresh water on the far side.

Kyra was particularly sorry to see the boat go.

The last day before it finally sprang a leak too serious for them to mend had been in many ways idyllic.

For most of the day they had drifted and paddled gently down a very quiet and narrow river, the mossy banks close beside them, honeycombed with the holes of little furry river creatures who came frequently out to swim or bask on floating logs, totally unafraid of the unfamiliar creatures drifting past them.

Karne hummed quietly as he occasionally pulled the paddle through the water to keep it on course and Kyra lay back upon their sleeping rugs and other travelling things, gazing at the sliding slopes of interlocking branches and light new leaves above them.

They were in a kind of green tunnel. The reflections of the trees below them and the trees above, leaning sometimes down to water level, caused reflection and reality to join on an interface that was neither reflection nor reality, but a kind of otherness into which Kyra's thoughts slipped and received a new and deeply stirring peace.

Light played its part, sparkling between the leaves and flickering in the green world reflected in the water and in Kyra's eyes. She hardly dared breathe for fear of dispelling the delicacy of the beauty that moved her spirit through so many levels of awareness.

Karne and Fern were forced to bend their heads to avoid the branches of white hawthorn blossom and their hidden protective thorns.

They were happy too, but in a different way from Kyra.

Fern leant her body against Karne and they felt totally together, absorbed within each other, the green sunlight clothing them in one garment.

Kyra did not notice when the boat stopped and Karne tied it to the brown and knobbled root of a tree. She lay still, gazing upwards in her own secret world, while he and Fern left to find a private place of their own among the tendrils, flowers and grasses.

The day had to end.

But not one of them would ever let it fade in the slightest detail from their memories.

It was one of those precious days, seemingly out of time.

* * * *

The next day was rougher. Rapids battered at their boat, and muscles grew tired with hauling it in and out of the river, climbing banks, cutting through undergrowth. The whole character of the land had changed remarkably with the change in the rock formations.

From the slow and gentle progress through a wide and meandering valley, hills began to close in upon the river and chasms of rock. Small trees and bushes, clutching a precarious living in shallow crevices in their

sides, took the place of the mossy peaceful banks they had loved so much.

By midday they agreed the boat's usefulness was finished. From Ayrton's description, they had about exhausted the navigable rivers leading south. They decided to leave the boat, strapping everything they could carry about themselves, and set off to climb the steep side of the chasm wall, hoping to have a better view of the land still to travel from the top.

With the added weight of her unborn child, Fern found the climb more than she could bear at times, and Karne, noticing this, suggested they make camp for the night on a broad shelf of rocks and grass, little more than half way up. There was a good overhang of rock to shelter them and plenty of dry wood for a fire. Their goatskins were full of fresh water, and they had a plentiful supply of fresh hare meat caught by Karne earlier in the day with his catapult.

While Fern rested and Karne attended the cooking fire, Kyra wandered off to explore. She felt restless and did not want to settle yet to the chores of making camp.

The rocks of these mountains were different from the ones she knew nearer home. She fingered them and brooded, wondering what it was she felt in them that seemed to lead her on and stir some feeling in her that she could not explain.

She kept moving further and further from the camp site, led on by a kind of urge, almost a kind of hunger. Tender and beautiful ferns grew from the cracks in the rocks. Lichens of greater variety than she had ever seen

clung to the long exposed surfaces of stone and the older branches of the trees. Hanging festoons of filigree lichen, reminding her of pale silver-green hair, hung from the twigs high above her.

But it was the rock cliff that was speaking to her.

It was something inside the rock cliff that was calling her name.

Puzzled, she wandered on and on, looking, without realizing it, for an entrance into the cliff. The sun had disappeared behind the hill on the opposite side of the chasm before she found it. The shadow was cold, but it was still light. No doubt on plains beyond the hill the sun was still shining. She knew it was not yet time for night, and looking upwards she could still see the sun shining on the topmost branches of the trees at the top of the cliff face under which she was standing.

The entrance was half closed over with tangled briars, but she felt the darkness and the emptiness behind them and knew that there was a deep cave there.

She thought about it for a while. Should she return to the others and tell them? Perhaps they were meant to use it for their camp.

She felt strongly, but in an undefined way, that she was meant to find this cave.

But it would take her a long time to return to the others and by the time they had carried all their belongings back to the cave night would be upon them.

She decided to have a quick look inside the mountain herself, and then return to the others.

She peered inside and was surprised to see how deeply the cave had eaten into the rock. It was larger and darker than any cave she had ever encountered before, but still she felt the need to explore it.

She ignored the little chill of fear that rippled under her skin and looked around for a suitable branch to serve as a torch. Having found one, she worked to set it alight and finally she was ready to bend the briar bushes back and enter, in some trepidation, but nevertheless impelled by a force she could not control.

The flame of her torch took her through the fairly capacious entrance hall of the cave, the only thing here to startle her being a sudden flight of bats that fell from the roof and swirled like dark and solid smoke about her head. She could not prevent herself screaming and throwing herself at once upon the dry and sandy floor. Luckily, although she dropped her torch in her panic, it did not go out. After the bats had swarmed once or twice in wide arcs and settled back to their places, and she had given herself a stern reprimand for having given way to such a foolish fear, she was ready to continue.

After a while the cave wall showed two separate crevices, wide enough for a human to pass through. She hesitated, knowing that it was foolish to go further but still unable to resist the urge to do so.

She chose the right hand crack and proceeded down a fairly adequate passage way. She became more and more convinced it was leading her to some special place, and so eager was she to find out if she were right and so easy was the passage to follow that she did not notice

that it branched frequently in many directions. She had long since turned off from the main one leading back to the entrance cave. The passage she was following was becoming narrower and narrower, lower and lower, sloping always downwards deeper into the mountain.

The torch light flickered on the walls beside her and suddenly she became aware that it was not bare, smooth rock she was seeing, but that the light and shadow of the guttering flame was throwing up in relief what seemed at first to her to be the most amazing man-made carvings. The walls were full of the shapes of creatures, many of which she recognized from the sea, but some she had never seen or dreamt of before.

She stopped and touched them, staring with astonishment. One came away in her hand and she stood transfixed with the perfection of a sea urchin, each detail of tiny radiating spots where the living spines had been joined to the shell perfectly preserved. But in stone! Cold hard stone.

What skill the carver must have had to bring such detail to his carving!

She gasped again.

The wall was full of them, not only upon the surface, but where she broke them off there were others in the rock behind.

Shells she remembered from the beaches.

But all in stone.

Icily the realization came to her that these were no manmade carvings.

Living things had turned to stone.

She shuddered and touched her own cold flesh.

Would she too turn to stone in this weird place?

Was it some baleful influence, some dark force, that had led her there, and not the spirits of light she was wont to follow?

Fear gripped her now and she began to shiver uncontrollably. As she did so the torch in her hand shook and the creatures in the walls seemed to mock her with a strange dead dance.

She turned and ran, horribly aware that she had come a long way and her torch would not last much longer. The sea urchin was still clutched in her hand. She moved to throw it away, but something made her keep it and she put it in the carrying pouch at her waist. If she ever saw Karne and Fern again, she would show it to them.

She ran and ran, grazing her arms against the narrow jagged walls, scarcely thinking which way to turn as each new gallery of darkness opened its entrance to her blind and hurrying form.

At the peak of her panic she turned the corner in a passage that she now realized she had never been down before, and stood staggered and breathless at what she saw.

Before her, illuminated fitfully by the still burning stump of the torch in her hand, was a gigantic cavern, the far recesses of which disappeared into darkness. But where the light touched, Kyra could see that, from the magnificently high ceiling to the floor, it was hung with spectacular columns of crystal.

Forgetting her fear, Kyra stood stunned. Tumbling in folds like a waterfall turned to ice, great curtains of dazzling white fell around her, gigantic statues of translucent stone arose on every side, icicles of stone hung from the domed roof to join flowers of stone upon the floor.

This was what she had come for!

Her heart rose and it seemed to her a crescendo of splendour, almost like a song of triumph but using no earthly means of sound, soared around her, through her and above her.

She was in ecstasy with the beauty and the greatness of it.

She moved forward, walking in wonder through the exquisite filaments of crystal.

She could hear water dripping, and in the centre the cavern floor was lower than the rest and filled with a milky liquid.

Staring into it, her light picking out the reflections in it, she was suddenly jerked into fear again as her torch, burnt now to its very end, scorched her hand and dropped into the water.

As suddenly as the darkness had revealed this splendid, dazzling sight to her, as suddenly it snuffed it out and she was in utter blackness.

Fear welled back and she turned her head every way trying to see something, anything, any variation in the dead blackness of the hole in which she was trapped that would give her some idea of what direction she should take to find her way out.

But there was no variation.

She stood very still, listening to her heart beating fast and the drip, drip of the water from the roof. She wondered if there was any way she could make fire, but she had no wood with her and everything in the cavern was wet, the walls, the floor, the rocks, the hanging veils of crystal.

Her own skin felt damp and clammy.

‘I must think,’ she told herself.

But all she could think about was that she was deep inside the earth, deeper than in any tomb.

‘I must move about. I must feel for the entrance,’ she told herself, knowing that if she stood still and thought about her situation any longer the fear that was already clouding her mind would take possession of her completely.

Cautiously she moved.

She established the pool of water was ahead of her by finding her feet and ankles suddenly immersed in icy liquid.

‘good,’ she said to herself, ‘that means the entrance is behind me.’

She turned carefully around. She had never noticed before how difficult it is to be sure how far you have turned when there is absolutely nothing to which you can relate.

But she had to make a decision.

Carefully she eased herself forward, hands held out in front of her, knowing there were many hanging columns in the way. Where was their brilliant, lumi-

nous, crystalline splendour now, she thought bitterly. All their magnificence came from the little flame she had carried in her hand. Darkly they waited now, as no doubt they had waited in the same darkness while the sun a million times a million times shone upon the fortunate creatures of the earth's surface.

How she longed for light!

Gradually she progressed across the cave, bumping herself against rock, feeling her way, slipping and sliding, but at last coming into contact with what she was sure was the wall of the cavern.

She sat awhile to rest, her heart thumping and her breath coming fast. She told herself there was nothing to worry about, she had found the wall and it was just a matter of time as she worked her way round it until she found the entrance. She refused to think about the confusion of passages beyond.

After a while, too cold to be still for long, she started to feel for the entrance. The cold, damp hardness scraped her fingers, but she found no hole. She moved and moved, always in the same direction, always her hand upon the wall. Time passed that there was no measure for. Only her weariness and despair told her that she had been going a long, long time.

At last she paused. She must have been around the full extent of the cavern. She must have been!

She tried again.

Again.

The fear was becoming uncontrollable. She could feel cold sweat upon her forehead.

If only she could see!

She stared and stared into the dark and for a moment fancied that she saw a lighter dimness to one side.

Her heart leaping she moved swiftly towards it, but she missed her footing, slipped and twisted her ankle. Now tears of pain were in her eyes and she was trembling and shivering with cold, pain and fear.

The lighter patch she had thought she had seen was now upon the other side of her. She turned her head and felt there was another lighter patch where she had looked before. It seemed to her the cavern was no longer so dark.

It also seemed to her that she was no longer alone.

‘Who is there?’ she called, her voice rasping with fear.

The sound echoed eerily around the cavern and came back to her as a hiss.

Trembling, still she tried to see, to listen for someone other than herself, and then she felt presences and could see dim figures.

She called to them and raised herself in spite of the pain of her ankle, and they drew nearer.

But as she saw them more clearly she screamed aloud. Sickly vapours they were, in monstrous shapes.

‘No!’ she screamed. ‘No! No! Not you!’

She pressed her hands to her eyes to shut them out. She tried to run and fell again.

Weeping and bleeding and frantic with pain and fear she felt it was the end of everything for her!

And then...

And then somewhere in her mind a thin thread of memory came to her.

‘These are not *real*,’ she told herself. ‘It is my fear that calls them into being!’

She remembered the clay ogres and the water, and felt ashamed that she could presume to teach others about the images of fear and yet fall prey to them herself so easily.

She forced herself to open her eyes.

But they were still there.

The fear was still in her.

No matter how she reasoned with herself, she could not drive them from her presence.

She remembered Maal and prayed for his help. He had told her many times of all the spirit helpers in the endless realms of different realities. They too had no form but that which thought gave them. Humans invented forms for them, just as she had invented forms for her fears and for the evil influences she could feel around her.

She shut her eyes again and forced herself with all the inner strength she had to visualize forms of light and love and kindness, spirits that would help and protect her.

When she opened her eyes again the crystal rocks seemed to glow with inner light.

She forced her mind to obey her will.

She drew herself up to stand as straight as she could.

Her ankle hurt but she ignored it.

She told herself again and again she was not afraid.

She was protected by hierarchies of helpers who came when they were needed.

Her fears had created the others. Her confidence would destroy them.

'I will think only of love and those I love,' she told herself, and thought of Maal, of Karne and Fern, but mostly of ... someone else.

Another figure appeared to her now and the shadowy ones she had hated seemed to draw back and begin to fade.

Standing before her was the one she had called most urgently, one of the powerful Lords of the Sun, the young priest from the desert temple across the sea. The young priest she had met in 'spirit-travel' when she was seeking help against Wardyke.

He held out his hands to her but did not approach, and although she gazed at him with such joy she thought that her heart would burst, she did not dare make a move towards him.

'You have passed the first test,' he said quietly.

She looked her question.

'The illusions of fear are powerful, but you have recognized them for what they are.'

She noticed there was no sign of the demons now, only the beautiful young man shining with the same strange light as the crystal columns.

'Can you do the same for the illusions of love?'

She stared at him.

She longed for him.

She began to reach out her hands, to move forward.

He stood still, appearing very real, watching her with great kindness, but with a question in his eyes.

She paused.

‘The illusions of love?’ she asked herself, and then, ‘What am I doing! As a priest people will come to me for help and I must not fail them.’

‘You are here and not here,’ she said aloud, steadily, looking directly at him, ‘as I am. What we appear to be and what we are, are very different.’

‘This shell I use, called “Kyra”, I can throw away this moment and will suffer no loss. I am more than Kyra. I am God’s creation, and God “creates” by “becoming”. Nothing can be separate from Him.

‘The real me is Forever and Everywhere. I am one with All that Is.’

She was in the dark.

She was not afraid.

* * * *

When Karne and Fern found her the next afternoon, she was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the cavern, her face composed and calm. She looked up at them as they stood, their faces grey with anxiety lit by the torches they carried, as though it had only been a few moments that she had been waiting for them, instead of a whole night and the best part of a day.

**That's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it.
If you would like to find out what happens next, you
can buy the complete Mushroom eBook edition from
the usual online bookshops or through
www.mushroom-ebooks.com.**

**For more information about Mushroom
Publishing, please visit us at
www.mushroompublishing.com.**

About Moyra Caldecott

Moyra Caldecott was born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1927, and moved to London in 1951. She married Oliver Caldecott and raised three children. She has degrees in English and Philosophy and an M.A. in English Literature.

Moyra Caldecott has earned a reputation as a novelist who writes as vividly about the adventures and experiences to be encountered in the inner realms of the human consciousness as she does about those in the outer physical world. To Moyra, reality is multidimensional.

See Moyra's website at www.moyracaldecott.co.uk for more information.

Books by Moyra Caldecott

Titles marked with an asterisk are either available or forthcoming from Mushroom eBooks. Please visit www.mushroom-ebooks.com for more information.

FICTION

Guardians of the Tall Stones:

*The Tall Stones**

*The Temple of the Sun**

*Shadow on the Stones**

*The Silver Vortex**

*Weapons of the Wolfhound**

*The Eye of Callanish**

*The Lily and the Bull**

*The Tower and the Emerald**

*Etheldreda**

*Child of the Dark Star**

*Hatshepsut: Daughter of Amun**

*Akhenaten: Son of the Sun**

*Tutankhamun and the Daughter of Ra**

*The Ghost of Akhenaten**

*The Winged Man**
*The Waters of Sul**
*The Green Lady and the King of Shadows**

NON-FICTION/MYTHS AND LEGENDS

*Crystal Legends**
*Three Celtic Tales**
Women in Celtic Myth
Myths of the Sacred Tree
Mythical Journeys: Legendary Quests

CHILDREN'S STORIES

Adventures by Leaflight