

HELEN MOORE

Spirit Speaks

May Day, Avebury, c. 2,500 BC

A child of the stones
I was sparked here on May morning
in a bed of Wild Garlic;
then, born beside a wellspring
in early Springtime when udder-milk
begins its flow, Birch sap its rise.

Now, sixteen years on,
I've returned an initiate of women's
mysteries and menses, chosen
as handmaid to the Shaman-priestess.
Of the honour I need barely speak –
it's enough to stand here behind her
in the sanctuary, which is
the Serpent-Dragon's head,
around us the mottled veil of fading
darkness as we wait for dawn.

With spirals of blood-red ochre
my body has been prepared
by the women who stand at my back.
Besides this, I wear stitched deerskin,
amulets, bead-bones, and for courage,
these Boar-tusk totems.

Oak daughter of Dodmen –
a lineage of geomancers,
who brought their measuring rods
to mark the sites where each
of these great boulders
would then raise itself
with just a magick touch –
I can only bow my head
in all humility, and feel the torc
of fear deep within my belly.

*Blessings on the Bone Hag
who hides in the barrows
when the Earth gets the horn –
Her shadow is never far gone.*

Why should courage fail me
when I've washed at the wellspring;
circled it nine times, and chanted
our most sacred songs?

With my kinfolk I've honoured
the greenwoods that clothe the valleys
below me. Haunts of Deer, Elk,
Ox and Boar, we've prayed
to their spirits, offered thanks
for gifts of meat, blood and bone.
Afterwards we lit our beacon fires
on these hilltops, and in the night-time
witnessed many more for miles around.
Driven between the flames
our herds are cleansed
and await lush meadows.

Far from me now my beloved
brothers, sisters, parents
stand with other clans
round the vast earthen ditch
that our forebears dug with antler
picks and ox-bone shovels – this feat
of love and strength to radiate
the power of our cosmic circle.

Everyone is waiting –
for some time the gathered tribes
have held their arms upright in the air,
attuned to the waxing crescent Moon
and web of sacred sites and track-ways
that criss-cross these lands.

A night without sleep
and with much merriment
leaves us undiminished.
Our stones are charged by the conjunctions
of Sun, Moon and vortices of water,
and they lift those who lay hands
on their cool, craggy surface.

I mustn't fear the Bone Hag –
I am woman and am charmed
from the doings of sly, vengeful spirits.
Yet even the bare arms of the Shaman-priestess

tremble like reeds in the wind
as I sense the moment to start
our dawn procession.

Soon I'll offer my crooked elbow
and she'll lean on my sapling frame.
With her thick hide cloak,
horned headdress decked with feathers
and flowers, and the bristle-thin flint dagger
that hangs in the valley of her breasts,
she'll need me as her guide.

Slowly we'll pass through
the long, twisting body of the Serpent–Goddess –
this avenue of two hundred stones
that glisten like giant jaws in the dew.
Then, at the gateway to the outer circle
I'll stand strong –
let the sounds of ringing stones
wash through me.

Proceeding to the first inner circle –
the solar eye that lies beside the lunar –
I'll scan the furthest hills
to see that moment when the Sun limbers
into the eastern sky.
When it comes,
the earthen bank around the circle will rock
with drumming, roaring, clapping,
and the energy will become enormous –
white lights may even dance
amongst the stones, bending stalks
of grasses, tracing cups,
rings, zigzags.

Dragon energy awoken –
beneath my naked feet I'll feel it,
underground springs seeping out to wet
the banks of this temple womb.
Then, as the Sun stirs higher in the sky,
It will strike the central phallus stone,
its long shadow licking at the hollow
of the vulva stone beyond.

*Blessings on the Bone Hag
who hides in the barrows
when the Earth gets the horn –
Her shadow is never far gone.*

Then the Shaman-priestess will throw back
her cloak, and arms splayed like wings
she'll rise into the air, hovering above me
like a Hawk spying out its prey.
In a great thunderclap her voice will boom
around the hills, and her pronouncements
will foretell the year's harvests;
the boons, woes and ills
the people can expect.

When this is done I'll lay myself – shoulders,
left hip, thigh and ankle touching
Earth – sweat gleaming on my neck
like an Otter diving for Salmon,
teeth biting a necklace of garnet,
beads spilling human thanks
into this fertile Earth.
And my eyes will still be open,
fixed on the Great Bear,
who guides my spirit home.