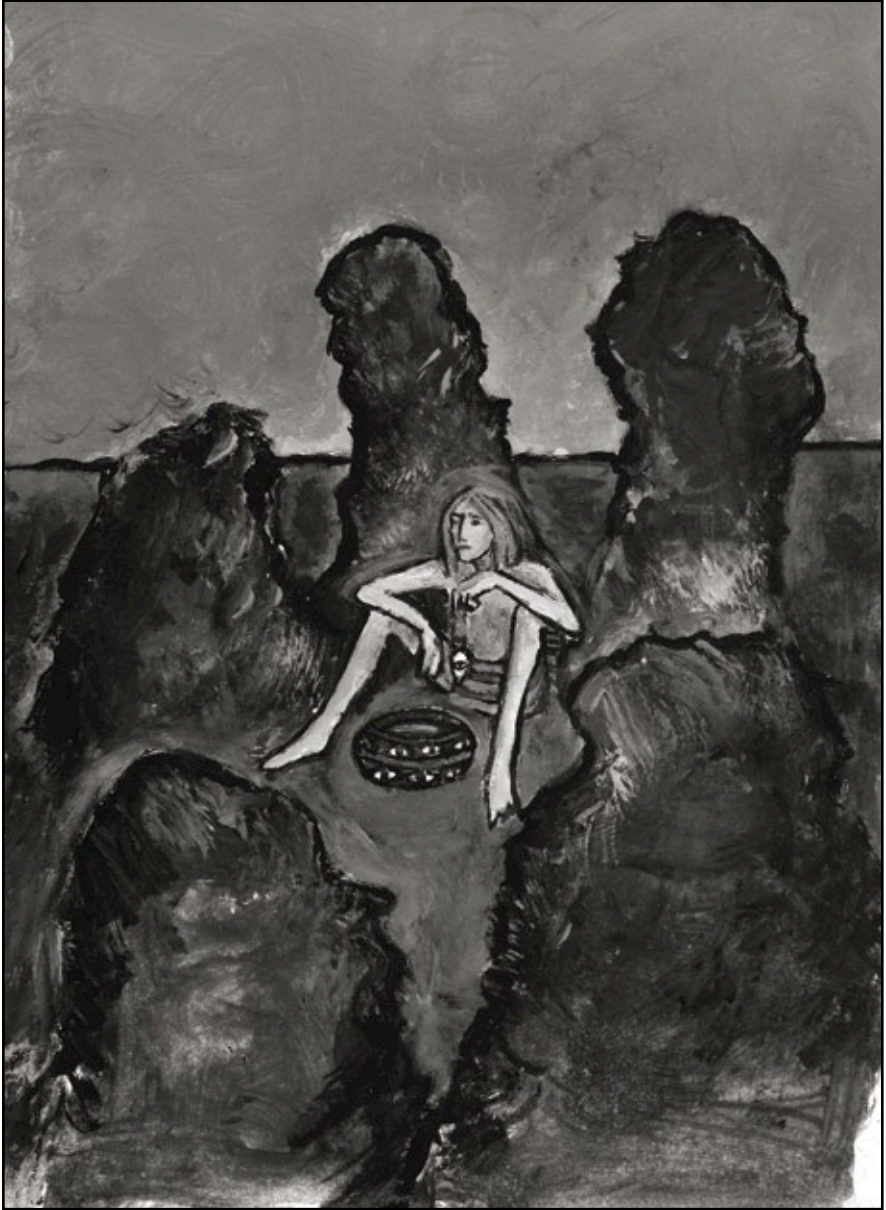


The Seer's Stone



He set the Seer's Bowl in the centre, filled it with water from the sacred spring and added a little dragon's blood.

The Seer's Stone

Caldera de Taburiente, May 2nd 1493.

Chedey watched the women feeding the fire long after dinner had been cooked. Everybody stayed in the circle of stones used for meetings, the tagoror. People shivered, although it was a warm evening, and peered out at the shadows for all the world as though the Spanish invaders might be lurking just outside the circle of the firelight, rather than outside the mountains which encircled the Caldera de Taburiente.

King Tanausú said, "But we have to make peace with them. No-one doubts the courage and strength of our warriors, but we cannot defeat these guns any more than they can bring their cannons into our land."

Chedey's father growled, "But these cannons have conquered the rest of the island, and if you go to talk peace, you will be on their ground. We know very little about these people. Perhaps their oaths mean little to them. At least wait until I can search the future."

Tanausú sighed. "I wish you could, Seer. But the weather on the summit is still dangerous, as we all know too well—"

There were groans and mutterings, and an older girl called Daida started to weep. Her whole family had died in the late blizzard which had frozen most of the very young and old of the tribe as they hid on the peaks where the Spanish would never find them.

"—and I trust my brother, Juan, even though he has taken a Spanish name. I will go, because the people of the Caldera cannot vanquish the Spanish, but perhaps we can keep our freedom. You



have argued: I have listened, but I will go.”

Soon after that each family went to their own cave to sleep, or at least to try to sleep while fear permeated the settlement like a fog rising from the river.

As soon as they were alone, Papa told Chedey, “You are NOT to follow us tomorrow. Don’t follow me. Don’t follow Tanausú. Don’t follow anyone. Stay here.”

Chedey glowered.

Papa grabbed Chedey’s shoulders and shook him. “Do you understand, boy?”

Granny would have known better. She was always telling Papa, “The more you shout, the less the boy listens. Try explaining. Try saying please.” But Granny was dead.

“Understood,” muttered Chedey.

Papa used to say that it would be nice to become Seer. Now that Granddad had died in the big blizzard, Papa had his wish. But he’d gone from tetchy to a permanent foul temper.

*

After breakfast, everyone watched in silence as Tanausú and the warriors left the settlement. Would their luck finally change?

As the last warrior disappeared down the bend on the path, Chedey followed. He’d understood Papa perfectly well, but he was determined to see what happened.

At each bend in the path, Chedey peeped cautiously to see that the warriors were well ahead. Several times he had to duck hastily when his father suddenly turned around, for all the world as though he expected see Chedey following.

Chedey had been skulking along for what felt like hours when he heard shouts of alarm ahead, followed by bangs and screams.



He sprinted towards the noise. As he came around a bush he saw warriors lying on the ground three hundred metres ahead.

A Spanish soldier stood up out of the bushes, and raised a stick to his shoulder.

CRACK!

The warrior next to Papa screamed and collapsed. Papa leapt and whacked the Spaniard across the face with his shepherd's pole. Then Papa continued spinning and looked straight at Chedey. He didn't look at all surprised to see Chedey running towards him to join the fight.

Papa's arm jerked.

Pain flashed through Chedey's head, and the world went black.

*

When he woke, it was quiet and the sun was high in the sky. His head ached fiercely and he was thirsty. He sat up cautiously, trying to remember where he was and what had happened.

The Seer's Stone lay beside him, with blood encrusted on one side, covering the eye carved onto its side, almost as though the eye were weeping.

He'd never touched the Seer's Stone, because only the tribe's Seer—his father—was allowed to touch it. Even father had never laid a finger on it until he took it from Grandpa's frozen body. He had to find his father and tell him where it was.

Memory came crashing back. The warriors had been ambushed, and he'd done nothing to help.

And father had knocked him unconscious. Why?

To keep him safely out of the fight. But the ground was covered with stones. Why use the Seer's Stone? The tribe's Seer only

