

on it. It was almost a caress, Zena noticed, as if he was touching a human being. He stepped back when he saw she was watching him and put his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

'How long do you think they've been here?' she asked.

'Five or six thousand years.'

'Do you think people have been coming to visit them all that time?'

'Certainly. It will have been a sacred spot for many generations. Still is for some people.' He held up the metal casing of a night-light candle which had been placed in a crevice on the side of the stone. 'The legend says they're two lovers turned to stone by a priest who found them here. He tried to lead the girl home to her family but she broke away from him and was running back to her man when the priest's curse fell on them both.'

He laughed uneasily, as if unsure about having shared the story, but Zena looked at the two menhirs again and saw the scene vividly in her mind's eye.

'It seems rather an excessive punishment for something quite natural!'

Ian shrugged. 'Slight to the moral authority of the church couldn't be ignored. They were always on guard against the old paganism with its 'natural' forces.'

'So is it modern pagans who still revere this spot?'

She was half-joking.

'Why not? It has a very special atmosphere, don't you think?'

Something stirred in her memory.

'And do you think there's still a connection – a living one, I mean – between the past and now? Something that

can be sort of tapped into?'

He looked at her in surprise.

'Yes, I do. I've experienced it myself around the stones sometimes. Why do you ask?'

'Something strange happened to me the first day I arrived here.'

She laughed deprecatingly, a little embarrassed now it came to it.

'Go on.'

'There's a cave in the woods just across the river from the house I'm renting. I thought I saw a young girl dancing among the trees but then she disappeared. I went on up to this cave and heard the oddest noises there, as if I had fallen into another time... it only lasted a couple of seconds. I know it sounds stupid.'

Ian looked at her searchingly.

'Hardly. You're highly receptive to certain atmospheres by the sound of it. Artists, creative people often are.'

'I don't think I am. Nothing like that's ever happened before.'

'It's this place,' he said. 'The earth energies are so strong here that memories – no, more than memories of the past linger. Tiny pockets of ancient reality. I don't know about the cave, but one theory is that the megaliths were constructed with sound vibrations in mind - sort of neolithic acoustics. It might have been some prehistoric echo that you heard. Where did this happen?'

'The hamlet - all two houses of it - is called Kerroch. Do you know the roadside calvaire about five kilometres from La Folle in the Morlaix direction?' He nodded. 'Turn right just before, past the dead end sign, and I'm at the bottom of the hill by the river. You cross on a footbridge

and the woods are right there.’ She hesitated. ‘So you don’t find this sort of thing... well, extraordinary.’

‘No, I don’t think it’s extraordinary at all. It’s perfectly natural, this connection between man – and woman – and the land, so certain places bring out responses from our unconscious, if we’re sensitive in that way.’

‘I’m not going mad then?’

He laughed.

‘Maybe, but I’d put my money on the land. It’s alive, every inch of it...’

At that moment Frodo lunged back down the bank, took a flying leap and planted two paws filthy with yellow mud on Ian’s chest, knocking him to the ground. Ian leapt back up at once, cursing and brushing great clods of mud from his clothes, but Zena could see how embarrassed he was and tried to conceal the laughter that had risen spontaneously at the ridiculous sight.

The dog, suddenly calm and quiet, stood watching them both.

‘Are you OK?’

‘I’m fine.’ He rubbed his chest gently. ‘Probably just a few broken ribs.’

‘It’s a variation on dog bites man anyway.’

‘Oh, he’s certainly original. I’ll say that for him. It was what made me get him actually. The others were climbing over each other to jump up and lick me through the wire, show how affectionate and lovable they all were.’

‘And Frodo?’

‘He sat at the back of the cage staring at the wall. He was shaking too. I noticed that.’

Ian ran a muddy hand over his hair. ‘It was a terrible

place. I mean, the people there obviously love the dogs and give their time and all that, but all those animals packed into cages, all desperate to be rescued, to be chosen by someone...’ He turned away, so she couldn’t see his face. ‘It’s very sad.’

‘But you chose the one who didn’t want to go?’

He turned back to face her momentarily.

‘I chose the one who wanted to go more than he could express. But it’s freedom he was after, I think, not being some foreign idiot’s pet.’

‘Nonsense.’ This picture was more than Zena could bear. ‘I’m sure he’s deeply grateful.’

‘That’s why he knocked me over, you mean?’

He was smiling now.

‘Of course. He just needs to learn how to express his gratitude and devotion a little less boisterously. Why did you call him Frodo?’

Ian clipped the lead onto Frodo’s collar.

‘It seemed like a good idea at the time. I wanted something original.’

‘You’ve certainly got it. I’m sorry about the Fido bit.’

‘Sometimes I feel he does have some sort of manic Frodo-type quest going on. Maybe his former master is out here somewhere, although from the physical state of him when he was brought into the rescue centre, I hope not. Come on, boy. Enough excitement for one day. We’ll leave you in peace now.’

‘I’ve enjoyed talking to you.’

Zena meant it as she smiled and said good bye. She even patted Frodo’s now docile head as they passed and received a surprisingly shrewd glance from the sad brown eyes.