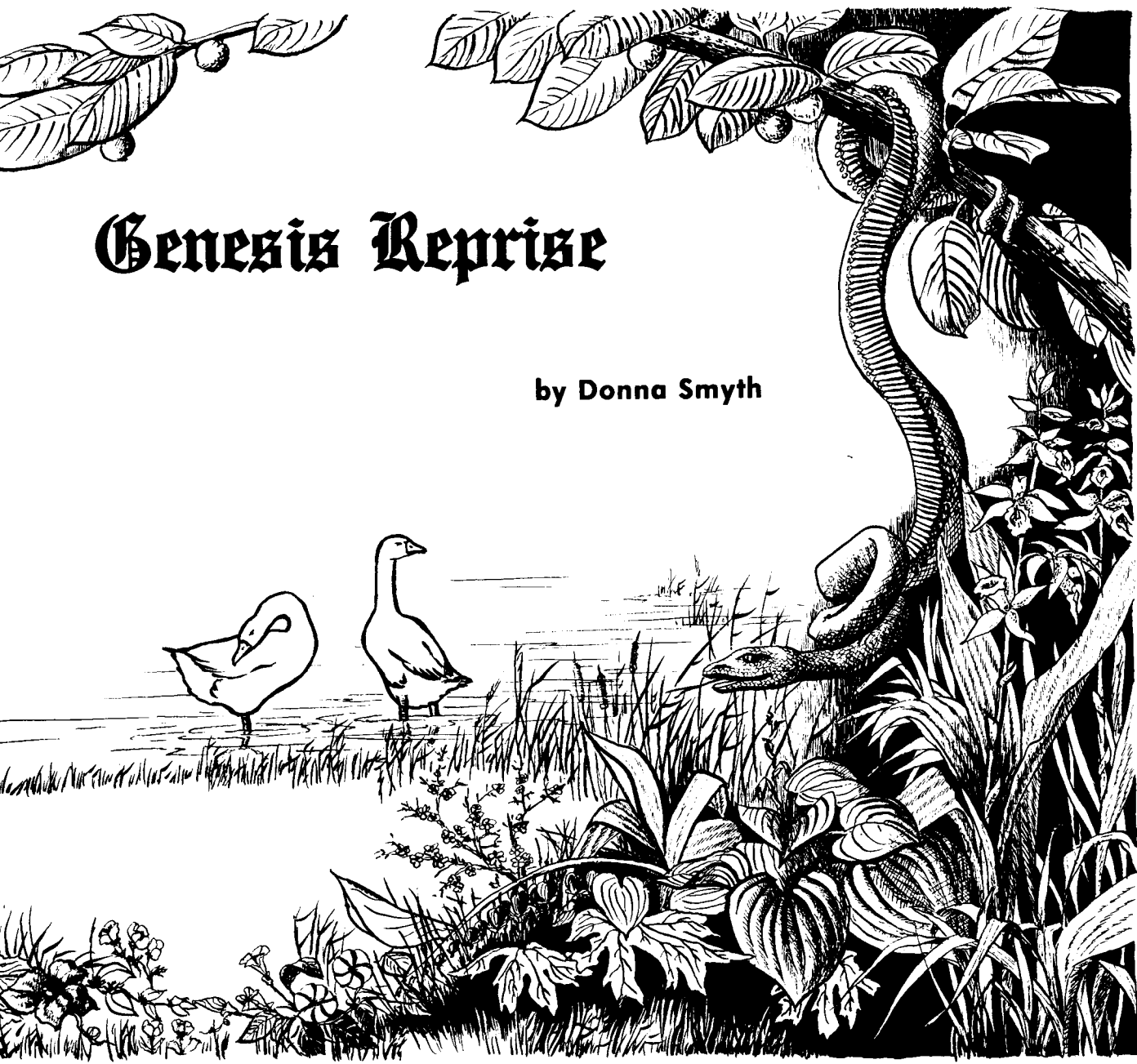


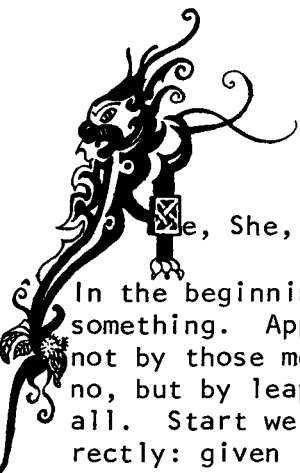


Susanne M.



# Genesis Reprise

by Donna Smyth



He, She, God and Snake.

In the beginning there was a nothing-something. Apprehended, comprehended, not by those means which are limited, no, but by leaps and bounds or not at all. Start we there not to grasp directly: given to us but only if we give that much which is too much; being ardently loved, yet even then the chances of failure are grave and great.

There was a One which was everything and which contained everything but, in a binary world, came to be referred to as He. Part of the story this but obscure as to why and how and, as for who, that is anybody's guess.

Start with elemental chaos and the line drawn between earth and sea. Or before that when there was light and not-light. In Himself He mirrored Himself and a broody spirit too He was. Out of Himself He took them, the sun, the moon and the stars; earth, water and the pretty little creatures. Also behemoth and leviathan (for whom there was no explanation). Butterflies, mosquitoes and black flies. Pine tree, crocus, poison ivy. He conceived them and begot them, upon Himself, out of Himself, fucking Himself day and night without fail.

Took out of Himself: man! (He did it with a flourish and a fanfare and the kiss of life in the nick of time.) Also

at the same time, created He a mate for man, one Lilith of shining hair and a walk that would have stirred the vitals of many a lesser man than Adam, if there had been other men around, which there were not, and that might have been a lucky thing for Adam who was not, after all, experienced in these matters.

The animals liked Lilith and the birds and the plants and Adam liked her too, was in fact crazy about her, a development which did not escape God's attention.

Adam fucked Lilith every chance he got which were many in those days of leisure and garden-dwelling. He fucked her under the banyan tree, under the baobab tree and under the arbutus. Lilith enjoyed it too so perhaps it is more true to say that they fucked each other. In every quarter of the garden, in every corner, and at the centre. It got so bad that every time God came down to visit Adam, He had to separate them and send Lilith off to the pond to watch the ducks and the geese and the swans. Sometimes Lilith wanted to stay and join them in their conversation but God would have none of it. This woman made Him uneasy and her growing power over Adam caused the Almighty certain pangs of regret. As for Adam, he listened to admonitions with a bowed head and a sincere desire to please his Maker but, inevitably, twitch he would and fidget he would, for his thoughts strayed to Lilith. God or no God, the sound of her laughter as she played with the

ducks, the geese and the swans, stirred his bowels to heat.

Thus it was that God got into the habit of administering slaps and pinches in an effort to hold Adam's attention. The first time Adam was shaken and remained alert for the whole of the visit. Well-pleased was God who decided that perhaps He had been too permissive a god, under the circumstances, too loving and kind. Ingrate Adam, however, soon learned to school himself to the blows and still his mind wandered after Lilith, she of the undulating hips and the ululating vulva.

So it came to pass that God grew daily more jealous of Lilith and would have put an end to her instantly had He not feared that Adam would react adversely.

There came a day when He appeared in the garden and found not Adam nor Lilith anywhere. Everywhere He searched and He called and beat the thickets with a stick in case they might be lying there. Flew away, ran away, scurried away the birds and the animals and the insects. God's wrath was terrible to behold. He cursed curses and said things like, may the devil take them! Then it was that He conceived His plan. He would give Lilith to the devil and so be rid of her forever.

At that moment He came upon them locked in the throes of, oh, the tangled throes of passion, of ecstasy. He thundered at them until the earth beneath them

shook and quaked. But they paid no attention. How were they to know it was not they who made the earth move and shake and quake?

In disgust God withdrew into Himself to plot his plan.

This is what He did. He turned the children of Lilith into demons who plagued and tormented Adam day and night. Thus He made Adam long to be rid of his consort and her tribe. Then God sold Lilith to the devil for a shekel (and on the condition that the devil take all the children who were messing up the garden).

So Adam awoke one fine morning to find himself once more alone. He breathed a sigh of relief and, for a time, was happy in the sight of the Lord who was also happy now that He had Adam to Himself again. Fair Lilith pleased the devil mightily but it is not recorded whether or not he pleased her.

So time passed and Adam did a little gardening and ate and drank and talked with the Lord. But at night his dreams were troubled with memories of Lilith and he tossed and turned and pressed himself against the bed to relieve an aching there. Now it was that he noticed the animals climbing merrily on top of each other, bull on cow elk, ram upon ewe, cock upon hen. Mounting and biting and treading, there was, no doubt of it, an almighty amount of fucking going on. Only Adam had no one

to fuck with. When God found him with his member in his hand, He forbade that little comfort. A couple of evenings later He also warned Adam to leave the sheep alone.

Turned pale did poor Adam and sat disconsolately by the pond whereby of yore Lilith had sat with buttocks trim and true. Lilith, murmured Adam, and, Lilith, murmured back the sighing wind and the ducks and the geese and the swans who came to console him. God came too and tried all sorts of clever things to amuse Adam and entertain him. All was in vain. Then God scolded him and lectured him and told him to pull himself together. Ever-obedient, Adam tried (he really did) but gloom settled around him, gripped and held him. Along with the gloom came boredom, came ennui, and the day when Adam looked sceptically at his Maker.

Then it was that God decided something had to be done.

This is what he did. He performed an operation on Adam and made the woman called Eve. And this time he used a little more forethought. He made a pretty she, innocent and sweet, but definitely not as sexy as Lilith. So delighted was he to have company of his own human kind, Adam did not mind in the least. (Not in the mood for making comparisons was he.) He took her by the hand, led her to his favorite tree and there lost no time.

When they stopped for breath, Adam bade her look up at the branches of the tree, the branches sagging under the load of fruit they bore. This only is forbidden to us, he declared, the rest is ours to do with as we please. Pretty she, she asked him, Why was this so? But already he had his mind on other things and he never did answer her.

Time passed and we are told that more than three there was, a fourth named Snake. He, She, God and Snake as at the beginning.

Difficult to determine is the origin of Snake but we, in the telling, speculate that outside the garden belonged an order of creation prior to the one with which we are concerned. Out of God perhaps before He became God. Another, older order and one of which God, for his own reasons, was not too fond. Hence the wall and the signs which we shall come to. Let us look at Snake.

Snake, he crawls along the ground towards where sits pretty she, combing her hair. Snake, he hides behind a tree, giant tree with fuzzy bark and fruit-laden, so he can watch her. His tongue flicks in and out nervously. Not the first time he has coiled here while she sits there in the warm grass, unaware, combing her long hair.

Snake knows he is not supposed to be here, he does not have a reckless nature, but he has never been in this situation

before. The golden head flecked with green sways gently. If he is caught, he will be killed. There is no doubt about that. The signs are posted at irregular intervals on all four walls: NO TRESPASSING and:

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED TO  
THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW

It was curiosity that caused Snake to make a complete circuit, counting the signs as he went. There were 1,154 of them. He had his suspicions as to who had posted them and so, as he came to the 1,154th sign, he was prepared to leave before there was trouble. Then it was that he heard voices, voices from behind the wall. The sound was not like any sound in Snake's experience, not like the call of the flute-throated birds in the morning, not like the rush and hesitation of wind and water and certainly not like the guttural speech of the other animals.

Snake listened and as he listened he was charmed by the voices. Although the wall was higher than a good-sized tree, Snake began to uncoil his glistening length, spiralling upward, coil by coil, all the time listening.

Higher and higher he went, inspired to uncoil as never before. Finally he was balanced on only the last tight round of his tail. Uncoil he could no further or lose his balance he would and fall. Like a precarious sunflower swayed his head and the taut muscles rippled under the skin.

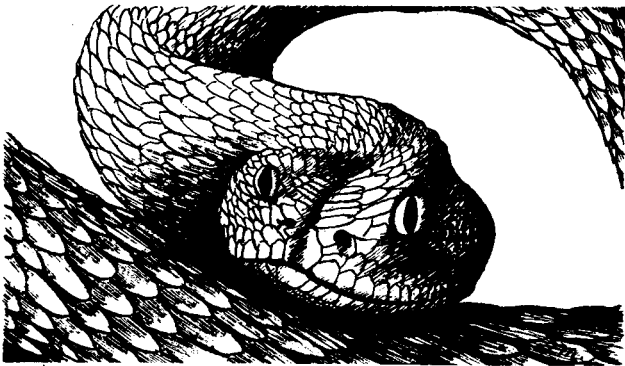
Then it was that he saw them. They were standing upright on their hind legs and walking about easily, gracefully, as if they had always walked in this manner in that garden. There were only two of them but their voices rose and fell through a range of notes that made strange music in Snake's ears. The larger one lacked a tail and was somewhat like an ape but it was the smaller one who fascinated him. Never had Snake seen such a one. She it was whose dimpled haunches moved through the dappled shade with indescribable beauty. Her hair shook out behind her, a copper stream as bright and brighter than Snake's own skin. When she laughed, Snake shuddered as though struck to the very last coil.

Was it Snake's fault or was he already caught in someone else's telling? We leave him, for the moment, stricken there.

Pleased with Eve was Adam, once more grateful to his Maker. The old relationship between them was established with tolerance and good humour on both sides. Sweet child Eve took to domestic duties like the ducks, the geese and the swans to water. During the long evening conversations between God and Adam, she wove rush mats for the bed, the floor and the table. Fatherly felt Adam and protective. Smiled he fondly at her activities and patted her cheek. The image of Lilith was quite forgotten.

So lived they and it should have been happily ever after, that is the way stories are and there was no reason for it not to be. But it was not. Either God did not foresee, in which case He was not as wise as He pretended to be, or He did foresee and was content for it to happen as it happened. Return we to the telling.

After that first dazzling glimpse, Snake was lost. Gone was his habitual caution, gone the wisdom that had won him respect and veneration from the other creatures. Snake it was who languished heart-sick. Each day he dragged himself to the wall, stretched himself to new and dangerous heights and waited for her to appear. Each time he saw her his longing for her increased ten-fold, as did his contempt for the one who walked by her side and who received, so casually, benedictions from her white hand. Often Snake felt that the very force of his passion, of his yearning for her, must cause her to look up, beyond the wall, where she would see two jewelled eyes set in a golden head.



But she did not look up. Silently, desperately, Snake called to her but she did not hear.

So things continued from day to day until Snake thought he could bear it no longer. Listless he was and restless, off-colour, lack-lustre and he could not eat. Soon he would lack the strength to stretch upright and then he would no longer see her. The thought maddened him and his tail lashed furiously as he set out through the forest towards the wall for the second time that day. It was a foolish thing to do because it was evening and the Owner of the garden was known to favour this time of day for sudden appearances, manifestations and tours of inspection. Snake had had no personal experience with this Owner but stories had passed among the creatures about his general instability of temperament. He was not one to be tangled with.

As he tried to probe the dusky thickets and groves of trees inside the garden, the rays of the setting sun drew fire from Snake's ruby eyes. His chin sank down until it rested on the wall. He could see nothing. In fact, he could hear nothing for there was a deathly hush, a solemn silence alien to Snake and chilling also. And yet, and yet how could he leave without seeing her, knowing that each time now might be the last time, dreading the time when Snake would be cut off from her forever behind the wall. A spasm of pain ran through the golden length of him.

Then it was that he knew he must act, that not to act would be a kind of death. Whatever awaited him in the garden could be no worse than the anguish of this perpetual banishment. Thoughtfully Snake sunk to the ground. Having made the decision, his mind was calm and clear.

All that night Snake travelled through the forest, only pausing for rest when the trees became grey ghosts in the early light. Ahead of him was the hillside, rocky and barren, where once he had been born, where now lived only his grandmother, wisest and oldest of snakes. She lived with the oracles deep in the earth. Once all the creatures had consulted her and listened to her but the old beliefs were dying and her children and her grandchildren were scattered to the four quarters of the earth. Seldom it was that she came forth these days but Snake knew how to drum on the rock with his tail. He set the message three times and then lay and waited while the sun warmed his poor, tired body.

When she appeared she said nothing, she simply looked at him. The skin hung on her old bones as though she were about to shed it for the last time but her eyes had lost none of their fire. Sunk into her skull, they burned and flashed so that even Snake hesitated before he looked into them. There, dancing in the fire, he saw himself and he spoke. It was such a relief at last to confess to someone about the long hours,

the pain, the waiting, that Snake told her everything. Then he waited for her reply.

--You know that you go to certain death in the garden? The Owner is powerful, more powerful than you can imagine.

--I have no choice, my heart tells me I must go to her. I come to bid you farewell and to ask for the protection of the oracles.

She looked at him testily.

--There is no protection against the Owner. He is of the new order, for that reason alone you are doomed.

--So be it. Will you give me your blessing?

--The oracles sleep in the depths of the earth. You and I are the last of the old order and you choose to die a reckless death rather than preserve the wisdom of your ancestors.

--It is not I who chooses this thing but something inside me.

--Go quickly then and do not look back. One warning the oracles give: Do not forget who you are.

When he arrived at the garden, it was dark again. It was a cold, unfriendly night with the moon half-obscured and the stars blotted out. At the foot of the eucalyptus tree, Snake paused to observe these omens. He looked towards the forest where once he had been sage and counsellor to the creatures. It was best that no one saw him leave.

Snake slithered up the trunk of the tree, then slid along one of the branches which reached over the top of the wall.



For a moment he hung there, suspended in the darkness. There might be thorn bushes beneath him, there might be traps set by the Owner. Down he dropped. Snake was in the garden.

Theological web is thicker ever than we can weave. Judgments passed on Snake, on Eve, not part of the telling. Let the discriminating mind go hang itself and turn us to Eve's lamentation many years afterwards.

Beside me, he is grey, is grizzled. Not always thus nor me with soft folds, fat folds, and feet that swell and legs that ache. In retrospect the garden and us in it, firm flesh, quick step. Of that no more. Snake says to me, Bite, and I bite. Pay we now, he and I do, and forever. He blames me, I blame Snake and Snake is driven away with rocks, with bitter words.

It is time for a little rest, a little peace and quiet, but always there is something that will not let us rest. Food, drink, children quarrel, to the fields, back from the fields. In that place it was not so. Snake says to me, Bite, and I bite. No going back, eyes wide open.

I said, Punish me alone, I am the transgressor. But He did not listen, not He, and the terrible anger pressed upon us, hot and dark as the desert wind. We clung together, trembled like young birds when the hawk is overhead. Not destroy you, He said, I will not, but

kick you out of here. You may never return.

No forgiveness.

We hid from him, crouching in the grass, behind the trees. My heart pounded so that I could hear nothing but the sound of my heart. Be still, be still, there is no need to start away like the hare through the grass.

Snake says to me, Bite, and I bite. Why should I not bite? Snake says to be like unto God so He will love you more. But He did not.

After that, no more loving but anger and punishment and a quick departure.

I tell my children that somewhere is that place. I tell them they must search it out and walk through fire to get to it. Then they turn on me, reproaching me for doing what I did. They blame me and I blame Snake. But sometimes I think to myself, Who knows? Snake may have been as innocent as I.

Conscious searching of Eve's conscience throws us back where we began. Dilemma of the split mind crying for judgment when we have dispensed with the judge. Let it cry, ignore it, there is no need for it. Think feelingly of what we have heard--Eve, mother, bears us one by one in her cavernous womb. Return we to the story of the telling (as to how it might have been).

So lived Adam and Eve, frisked they, frolicked they, until one day Adam went off to gather fruit and vegetables for their larder. It being a hot day, he returned earlier than usual and thus saw Eve as she was biting into the fruit of the forbidden tree. He rushed towards her to knock it away but it was too late. Uttered he a cry of dismay and flung up his hands as though already to shield them from the sight of the Lord. Calmly Eve gazed at him.

--Adam, why do you stare so?

--You have disobeyed our Lord.

--I have obeyed myself.

The cogency of Eve's reply startled both of them. It was not at all like pretty she, it was so unlike pretty she that Adam did not know what to say. Then he remembered the disappearance of Lilith and panic seized him. Whatever the Lord had done, He would do again and Adam would again be left alone. He grabbed the fruit from Eve and ate of it. It looked like an ordinary apple and tasted like one too. Perhaps it was an ordinary apple. Eve took his hand and pressed it to her cheek.

--Now we are bound together. The Lord's anger will be assuaged when He sees that both of us have done this thing. Why do you look so sad?

--I have done what I ought not to have done. I have betrayed his trust.

Accusing was his look at her and full of bitterness. Eve was stung to reply.

--His trust! His love! Do you care

nothing about mine?

--You are only a woman, you do not understand these things.

Under the circumstances it was an unfair argument but Adam was upset and close to tears. His evident suffering touched Eve's heart. Took she his hand and led him to the place of comfort.

Snake watched them go. He thought of the many nights and days when it would always be so, they two together, him solitary. Resigned he was and sad. She would never know the risks he had taken to seek her out, to counsel her and teach her the old wisdom. It was time for him to sneak off, he knew that well. She was not worth it. Yet he lingered and was annoyed with himself for doing so, chided and scolded himself for doing so but could not leave.

It is probably true to say that never had the garden looked more idyllic than on this last afternoon. Shone the sun with mellow light, the colour of liquid honey, and the wind was a cool ripple through the grass, the trees, across the pond. The deer and the cougar lay down together; peace was with the animals, the birds, the insects. In the center of it all, for the last time, Adam and Eve also lay together. Snake stood guard, his golden head alert to any sound, only his tongue flickering.

Shadows lengthened and a stillness came upon the garden. Eve shivered

and sat up in the bed, her arms crossed over her breasts.

--Let us go away someplace.

--Where would we go?

--Beyond the walls, into the world outside.

--What are you talking about?

Before she could explain, Eve heard Snake's warning hiss.

--He's coming! We must hide.

--But how? Where?

The three of them took off for the denser bush in the south section of the garden. Adam and Eve, hand in hand, running, and Snake in the lead, moving so quickly they could only see him as a golden streak before them. The faster they ran, the more fear possessed them. The very air was sullen and oppressive. Finally they were under cover and rested there, squatting and panting.

He came.

He found the apple core and anger hardened His heart. He did not give way to passionate and destructive action as He might have done and was later to do. Instead He searched them out and found them and told them they had twenty-four hours to leave the garden. They begged and pleaded with Him but His ears were shut against them. Eve even took it upon herself to argue with Him. She put their case with great skill but He remained steadfast, immov-

able, and immutable.

Snake it was who felt he suffered the most. He did not mind being tossed out of the garden but the Lord had forbidden him to return to the forest and had, moreover, decreed that henceforth Snake was to be feared and despised by Adam and Eve and all their descendents. Even before they left, Eve turned on him and accused him of beguiling her. Snake's once proud head drooped and a mortal weariness overcame him. Alone he crawled to the gate and through it and beyond it.

Adam and Eve gathered up their meagre belongings and took a last look around while three angels waited to shepherd them to the gate. Then it was that pretty she and sad he joined hands and walked out of that place to face whatever might become of them.

Of the old wisdom, nothing much has been said from that day to this. Alive the grandmother might be, if we could find the place and knew how to drum the message on the rock.

