



ENGLISH HERITAGE
GRIME'S GRAVES

Midnight Flint.

By Sophie Kirtley

I'm Sophie Kirtley and my story is called Midnight Flint. It's set right here in Grime's Graves back in Neolithic times, four and a half thousand years ago. Mining for flint was a very important job and the flint that was mined here was vital, precious, as it was used to make the tools on which everyone's survival depended. To mine for flint workers needed special skills but most importantly they needed to all work together as a community.

This is the story of three Stone Age children who were part of this community, living here, working here, mining for flint. These children's names were Lark and Mole and Owl. And just like all the adults of their clan, each of them had their own job to do:

Owl was a Finder. She was well suited to her job as, even though Owl like the others was eleven summers old, she was small for her age and her shoulders were narrow enough to squeeze into the tiniest of crevices in the underground galleries of the mine. Just like her namesake animal, Owl's eyes were sharp and quick; she was always the first to spot the dark gleam of flint in the tunnels below.

Lark was a Shaper. She worked above ground, knapping the freshly-mined nodules of flint and shaping them into the practical tools that they would become – sometimes it felt like a kind of

magic transforming a shiny black rock from far beneath the ground into something as useful and important as an axehead or a knife.

Mole was a Lifter. He worked at the bottom of the mine shaft, collecting flint from Owl and the other Finders in a wooden sled which he pulled along the tunnels before tipping its contents into a large basket to be winched up on a rope to Lark and the Shapers. Usually being a Lifter was man-work, but Mole was one of only two boys who were strong enough and big enough to do it. The other Lifter boy was Adder - he was big like Mole but, unlike kind Mole, Adder was hard-hearted and cruel.

The day dawned, pink-skied and full of promise. Owl, Lark, Mole and Mole's dog, Smallest, all rose at sunrise with the rest of their clan and together they gathered by the fire to chant the charm to the Spirits – they did this every mealtime through all the mining season giving thanks for what they had and singing of what they hoped would come their way.

The words the clan sang in their charms were always the same:

We give thanks for food to fill our bellies:

For nuts and meat and fish and berries.

Oh Spirits, guide us to the glint

of darkest finest gleaming flint.

But Owl had a hope of her own to add to the charm. She closed her eyes, and held tight to the lucky deer-tooth she wore on a twist of nettle twine around her neck, then she whispered her own secret wish, very quietly under her breath.

'And kindly bring here to my sight,

The flint as dark as moonless night.'

Lark gave Owl a playful nudge in the ribs, making Owl's eyes shoot wide open in surprise.

'Don't tell me you're still hoping to find Midnight Flint, Owl?' said Lark, rolling her eyes. 'I thought you'd given up on that idea!'

'Not quite,' Owl whispered back. She could feel the hotness of a blush rising in her cheeks.

'You do realise that Midnight Flint doesn't exist, don't you Owl?' teased Lark, with a gentle smile. 'It's only a firestory!'

Owl shrugged shyly. The elders told firestories each nightfall and ever since she was small, the *Tale of Midnight Flint* had always been Owl's favourite. It was about a flint mine just like their own but far far away, across the seas and plains (in a land we now call Poland) where the miners had found a seam of flint darker and more precious than any discovered before or since. The flint was darker than a moonless sky so they had named it Midnight Flint and with it the far-off clan in the firestory had been able to make axe heads so sharp they could chop through wood as though it were water and made arrowheads so fine they could fly through the air with the speed of lightning. Ever since Owl had first heard that firestory, she had longed to find Midnight Flint for herself.

'Oh Owl!' smiled Lark. 'We're all old enough now to know that firestories are only smoke and whispers! Midnight Flint is just made up!'

'How would you know, Lark?' grinned Mole, stroking the soft ears of Lark's dog, Smallest.

'You're a shaper! You've never even spent a full day in a mine shaft! There are all sorts of mysteries down here in the deep.'

Now it was Lark's turn to shrug. 'I just prefer to stay overground, shaping things that are practical and useful rather than scurrying about in clouds of chalk dust, filling my mind with daydreams.'

'It's not just about daydreaming, Lark!' smiled Mole. 'Look at what I found in the pit just the other day—'

Smallest wagged his tail as Mole pulled out his own nettle-twine necklet from beneath his tunic and showed his friends the tiny white protection charm tied onto it.

'What is that? Is it a tooth?' asked Owl, pressing her finger onto the point. 'Ow! It's very sharp!'

'My ma says it's from a creature of the seas,' said Mole proudly. 'A great big enormous fish with rows of sharp teeth like this, a fish that could crunch up a full grown man in one big bite!' Mole snapped his teeth together so hard it made his friends jump back. They all giggled; even Smallest barked like he was joining in too.

'But, tell me Mole,' asked Lark, her eyebrows raised incredulously. 'How exactly would a creature of the seas get all the way up here onto the land?'

'My Ma says that a great many winters ago, even before the times of the ancestors, all that is land here was once underwater, all the mines and the plains and everything!' Mole's eyes widened. 'And Ma says that there once were creatures of the seas swimming right here in this very spot!'

Lark snorted. 'Whatever you say, Mole! That sounds just about as likely as Midnight Flint, to me!'

'Don't be so sensible, Lark!' said Owl, grabbing a blade of grass and tickling Lark's side with it until she giggled. 'I believe in Midnight Flint! And I believe in Mole's sea-creature tooth! It's important to believe in things, and hope for things and imagine things!'

'Yeah,' agreed Mole, his eyes all bright with visions. 'Who knows? One day, many summers from now, maybe children just like us might be able to breathe underwater like fish or fly through the sky like birds or —'

Lark raised one eyebrow and unenthusiastically flapped her arms like wings. They all collapsed into giggles while Smallest barked and barked, running around them in a circle. Even though Owl and Lark and Mole were all very different, one from the other, they had known each other since they were babies and they had always been the best of friends.

Adder, however, was not their friend. He was sitting on a rock a short way off, sharpening his spear. Adder looked at Lark and Owl and Mole through narrowed eyes. 'What are you three laughing at?' he hissed. 'You'd better not be laughing at me or I'll take this spear and I'll—'

WOOOOOHOOOOOO! WOOOOOHOOOOOO!

The children froze as the eerie music sounded out across the camp. It was Eagle, the clan's leader, playing on the flute he had carved from the hollowed-out bone of a deer.

WOOOOOHOOOOOO! WOOOOOHOOOOOO!

Eagle played his bone flute to summon the clan to work. All the miners – men, women and children, fell immediately silent and, picking up their tools, they made their way the short distance from their camp by the river through the forest until they reached the mine where they worked.

The morning was blue-skied and bright. Before Owl and Mole descended the ladders into the pit shaft they, and all the miners, each lifted the tooth and bone charms on their nettle-twine necklets towards the dazzling sun. In this way they knew that the Spirits would protect them through their long day's work below ground.

Owl grabbed her antler pick, said goodbye to Lark and to Smallest, then followed Mole down the wooden ladder to the first platform.

The rock that lined the pit shaft was mostly white chalk. Each miner paused on the first platform and ran a pale streak of chalk across their own forehead for good luck, before descending deeper.

As Owl daubed her forehead with chalk, she glanced at the fractured seam of dark flint dotted through this part of the mine: one layer of topstone just above her head and one layer of wallstone just below her feet. Yes, this was flint but the flint seam at this depth was not so good; it was broken and bitty and full of flaws. The finest flint was the floorstone flint, down the next ladder, at the very base of the pit – the floorstone flint was one continuous solid sheet of blackness, as thick as Owl's hand was long. This was not only the finest flint in the mine, it was the finest in all of the land – even though the work was hard and the days were long, Owl and Mole and Lark were deeply proud to work these mines. The flint here was special and traders came by river from all over the land to bargain for it.

Owl and Mole climbed down the final ladder to reach the floorstone. This was the deepest shaft here in the mines; Owl paused and gazed up to the circle of blue daylight that was now about seven-men-high up above them. 'It took us so long to dig this shaft, didn't it?' she said, suddenly awestruck with the memory.

'At least seventy sunrises and seventy sunsets!' sighed Mole. 'And that was with all twenty of us working together!'

'But it was worth it!' they both said together and they laughed.

A sudden pain shot through Owl's fingers. 'Ow!' she squealed, as she tugged her hand out from beneath the leather booted foot that had squashed them. 'Watch it!' she called up to the miner who was coming down behind her.

A sneering laugh echoed through the mine shaft. 'That'll teach you not to stop for a chat halfway down the ladder, Owl!' hissed a familiar voice from above them.

Owl looked up and saw the whiteness of Adder's cruel smile glowing down at her.

'Well you need to learn to look where you're going, Adder!' shouted Mole from below. 'You can't push and shove on the ladder! It's dangerous!'

'It's dangerous!' echoed Adder in a mocking baby-voice. 'I'm not afraid of danger! I'm not afraid of anything!' he boasted.

Owl wished she was more like Lark who could always think of a quick and clever answer to put Adder in his place. But her mind had gone blank as chalk.

They reached the foot of the ladder and Owl checked the sharpness of her antler pick while Mole adjusted his sled. There were four deep-dug, low-ceilinged tunnels called galleries that radiated out from this main pit shaft, from each of these galleries Owl could already hear the echoing sounds of the Finders chip-chip-chipping away at the walls and the ceiling with their antler picks.

They chanted while they worked, and as more and more voices joined in, the chalkwalls echoed with their song:

Green Leaf.

Brown Earth.

White Rock.

FLINT!

The song helped the Finders keep the rhythm going while they crouched down low in the dim of the underground tunnels and each lifted their antler picks in time, scraping away at the crumbly chalk walls to find nuggets of black shiny flint.

Green Leaf.

Brown Earth.

White Rock.

FLINT!

Swing and

Crash and

Swing and

FLINT!

Owl scampered into the deepest gallery and lay on her side, wriggling further into the rock before she too began to dig and chant in time with her clansfolk.

'Green Leaf

Brown Earth

White Rock

FLINT'

As the sun rose higher its beam of light poured into the mine shaft, bouncing off the whiteness of the bright chalk walls. All morning Owl *chip-chip-chipped* away at the rock around her with her sharp antler pick, prising out nuggets of shiny black flint, precious black flint, and placing them in the leather pouch she wore at her waist. Every time her pouch was full of flint, Owl called out 'Ready! Lifter!' into the echoing dimness.

And hearing Owl's call, Mole would crawl to her along the tunnel and they would exchange a grin or a joke or a friendly word as Owl emptied the flint from her pouch into Mole's wooden sled, ready to be winched up to Lark and the Shapers.

Some of the galleries were tall and wide and had many men and women and children all digging together, but the gallery that Owl dug was thin and deep so Owl worked it alone.

However, she was never lonely. The echoing chant filled her ears and made her feel at one with her clansfolk in the other galleries. And besides, Owl liked being alone; down here in the deep she could retell firestories in her own mind and dream of finding Midnight Flint.

Owl sighed. But what if what Lark had said was truly true? What if Midnight Flint was exactly that – only a foolish, made-up dream?

Then Owl heard a noise. Not the *chip-chip-crash* of antler pick on chalk Not the comfort of voices chanting. Not the footsteps of Mole coming to empty her pouch. This noise was different, softer.

A whisper. Like the noise the wind makes amongst the leaves in the forest. But this could not be the wind; there was no wind down here beneath the earth, no whispering leaves. No trees. Owl listened harder, sharpening her ears. The whisper continued, strengthened. Where was it coming from? What could it be? Owl's heart began to beat faster, but she could still hear the whisper even over the pounding sounds of her own fast pulse. She shuffled closer towards the sound, crawling deeper on her forearms.

It felt almost like the whisper was coming from all around her - from the deepest depths of her tunnel. Holding her breath Owl pressed her ear to the damp coolness of the rocky wall. Her eyes widened - the sound was coming from within the wall! As if the very flint was whispering. She felt a tiny icy breeze tickle her cheek, soft as a breath. Owl drew back so fast she bumped her head on the wall behind her.

Heart thudding, Owl explored the whispering wall with her fingertips to find where the breeze had come from. She found a thin crack. Awkwardly, because there was so little space, she wheedled the tip of her antler pick into the tiny gap and she pulled and she wrenched and she twisted until with a sudden tumble and clatter a huge chunk of flint came away.

Owl picked it up. It was as big as two fists, gleaming and black, darker than any flint Owl had ever seen before, perhaps, her eyes widened, even darker than a moonless night...

Breathless with excitement, Owl shimmied back out the way she had come, gripping the gleaming black rock tight. 'Mole!' she called over her shoulder. 'Mole! Come quick!'

And as she reached the wider part of the gallery, she heard running footsteps approaching.

Crouching in the flame light Owl examined the flint and she gasped.

It was magnificent! So dark it almost rippled in its own darkness as though it were endless and eternal like the very sky itself. Owl shivered, goosepimples prickling beneath her skin. With dry lips she whispered the words that named the beautiful and impossible thing she held in her very own hands:

'Midnight Flint!' breathed Owl.

And at that exact moment a dim flickering shadow appeared. 'Mole!' gasped Owl, spinning around.

But it was not Mole.

Standing in the tunnel mouth, with his hands on his hips and a sneer on his face, was Adder.

'Midnight Flint, you say, Owl?' Adder snarled mockingly. 'Let me see!'

'No!' cried Owl. 'It's not yours it's—'

But Adder snatched the chunk of darkest flint from Owl's hands and she was powerless to stop him – Adder was at least two heads taller than she was and his shoulders were almost as broad as a man's.

Adder's expression changed from sneering to marvelment as he examined the rock. Then a greedy smile spread across his cheeks. 'When I show this to Eagle, he'll surely make me one of the Elders.' Hissed Adder as if he spoke his thoughts aloud. 'And I'll get to sleep on soft furs in the Elders' Hut and get the biggest portion when we hunt a fine deer and I'll...'

'You can't be an Elder, Adder!' snorted Owl. 'You're only eleven summers old!'

Adder stared down at her with eyes cold as ice then, sudden as his namesake animal, Adder reached out and grabbed Owl roughly by the neck of her tunic.

'Do. Not. Laugh. At. Me!' he hissed, speaking so close to her face that she could smell the fishy stench of his breath. Then he looked back to the Midnight Flint. 'You do have a point though, Owl. What good would it do me to show this flint to Eagle or to anyone – I'll bring

this flint straight to the river traders myself and fetch a fine reward for it, all for my very own keeping.' And Adder laughed a cruel laugh.

WOOOOHHOOOOOOOOOO! WOOOOHHOOOOOOOO!

The call of the bone flute. It was time to climb to the surface and for the clan to eat their high-sun meal together.

Adder tightened his grip on Owl's tunic so that she could barely breathe. 'Not a word about this to ANYONE, Owl!' growled Adder, waving a chunk of Midnight Flint in front of her nose, his eyes flashing dangerously. 'Not one word, you hear?'

Gasping and choking, Owl nodded, realising she had no choice.

Adder released his grip and laughed his cold laugh, then he strode off towards the main shaft, shoving the nugget of precious Midnight Flint roughly into his waist pouch.

For a few moments Owl just crouched in the shadows, catching her breath and listening to the echoing voices of her clansfolk in the tunnels as they ceased their chanting and prepared to climb and then eat. Tears of fear and fury prickled behind her eyes. All her life she had dreamed of finding Midnight Flint, sharing it with her clan and bringing luck and wealth to them all, but here was Adder – cruel, selfish Adder – taking that dream and tossing it aside as if it were as worthless as dirt.

But what could she do? She knew how merciless Adder could be. This was not a battle she could ever win.

With a heavy heart she climbed the ladder to the first platform and up the next ladder to the surface, where, blinking in the dazzling brightness she took her bowl of broth and flat bread then went to sit with her friends.

Mole and Lark were chattering happily about how Lark's ma had hunted a fine fat boar in the forest that morning and what a great feast there would surely be at sunset. Smallest snapped lazily at flies in the long grass.

When everyone was ready the clan sang together the charms of thanks and of hope:

We give thanks for food to fill our bellies:

For nut and meats and fish and berries.

Oh Spirits, guide us to the glint

Of darkest finest gleaming flint!

Lark gave Owl a little nudge. 'Not going to add a little Midnight Flint charm of your own this time, Owl?' teased Lark playfully. But her eyes widened when she saw Owl's own eyes swim with tears.

'Oh Owl, I'm so sorry!' gasped Lark, grabbing her friend's hand. 'I was only joking; I didn't mean to upset you.'

'No,' sniffed Owl, wiping her eyes with the back of your hand. 'You didn't—it's—' She swallowed. She couldn't tell her friends what had happened; she knew how vicious Adder could be. '—it's nothing—' she whispered.

Smallest whined and laid his head on her lap; Owl stroked his soft ears. She noticed Mole and Lark exchange a look full of confusion and worry.

'You can tell us anything, Owl,' said Mole softly, giving his friend's arm a gentle squeeze.

His kindness made Owl's eyes fill with tears once more.

Suddenly Smallest jumped to his feet and, staring at something deep in the forest, he began to growl.

'What is it, Smallest?' asked Lark, peering in the direction where her dog was looking. But no sooner had she spoken than Smallest was off, barking wildly as he bounded between the trees and the shadows.

'Maybe it's a deer!' said Lark gleefully. She was almost as good a hunter as her ma; grabbing her box and arrows, she ran into the forest after Smallest.

Owl and Mole followed as Smallest led them all down and down through the forest towards the trading post on the river, where boats stopped to collect the flint and take it onward to be finished into fine axes or fast arrowheads.

As they drew near to the trading post, they realised that someone was standing there and they crept closer with caution until they could see who it was.

'Is that Adder?' whispered Mole. And they all watched from behind a tree as Adder peered upstream and downstream, his eyes shining with furtive greed.

Owl, Lark and Mole hid themselves low in the undergrowth. 'What's Adder doing at the trading post?' whispered Lark, her eyebrows furrowed in puzzlement.

Owl bit her lip. She desperately wanted to tell her friends about Adder's selfish plan but she didn't dare – if they knew what he was up to then they too would be in danger.

Suddenly Smallest burst out of the trees by the water's edge and leapt at Adder, snatching at him with her jaws and knocking him off balance so that his feet slid in the mud and he landed with a splash in the river.

'Smallest!' gasped Lark, clapping her hand over her mouth and trying not to giggle. But the dog just ignored her and ran back into the forest.

'Are you all right, Adder?' called Mole, running towards him and offering him a hand up as he spluttered and flailed and slipped and slid in the muddy shallows.

'Get away from me, Mole!' growled Adder.

'Oh well, at least we tried,' said Mole, shrugging to Owl who had turned as pale as birch bark.

Adder had shifted his cold gaze to Owl. 'You'll be sorry,' he said in a voice like ice.

Mole looked from Adder to Owl in confusion.

WOOOOHOOOOO WOOOOHOOOOO!

The bone flute call was distant but its meaning was clear. It was time to return to the mine.

The children ran through the forest and, grabbing their tools, Owl and Mole descended once more into the tunnels beneath the ground.

Green Leaf.

Brown Earth.

White Rock.

FLINT!

Owl chose to work in the larger gallery that afternoon where there were others all around her, but still she shuddered when Adder was near, sensing the sharpness of his cruel eyes watching her. But as soon as her mind wandered from her own fear her thoughts were full of Midnight Flint, so close but now even more impossible to reach.

Green Leaf.

Brown Earth.

White Rock.

FLIN—

WOOOOHOOOOOOO! WOOOOHOOOO!

WOOOOHOOOOOOO! WOOOOHOOOO!

WOOOOHOOOOOOO! WOOOOHOOOO!

What was happening? The bone flute call at this hour? When the afternoon had barely begun?

Perhaps there was some sort of an emergency? Perhaps the Spirits were angry?

All the workers dropped their tools and hurried up the ladders, whispering worriedly amongst themselves.

In the dazzling daylight, Eagle and the Elders stood upon the highest mound. Owl could see immediately that Eagle's eyes were full of fire and thunder.

'What's happened?' whispered Mole, coming to stand at her side.

And that's when Owl spied Smallest. The little grey dog stood next to Eagle on the mound, his tongue lolling, looking very pleased with himself indeed.

Eagle held something high above his head. Owl's eyes widened when she realised what it was – it was a leather waist pouch. Then Eagle began to speak:

'Shapers! Lifters! Finders!

Hunters! Farmers! Traders!

Men! Women! Children!

Pay heed!

Today this dog has brought this pouch to me. Within it is something we each of us doubted we would ever behold.'

Eagle opened the strings of the pouch and lifted out a huge chunk of darkest flint, black as moonless sky. He held it aloft and everyone gasped together – a sound like a wild wind whistling in the reeds.

'It is Midnight Flint,' said Eagle, low voiced with awe.

A ripple of wordless wonder passed through the clan.

'I would like to know whose pouch is this? Who found this Midnight Flint?'

For several breaths the crowd were still. Owl lowered her eyes.

Then a shrill voice sounded out. 'Me, Eagle!' called Adder. 'It was me! That's my pouch! That's my Midnight Flint! I found it! That stupid dog must have snatched it from me!' He elbowed his way towards the front and stood proudly on the mound while all the clan made joy noises all around – whooping and cheering and whistling wildly.

Eagle held up his hand for silence. And silence fell.

'You have done well, Adder,' he said and Adder's chest swelled big with pride. 'Now tell us.

Where did you find this Midnight Flint? And is there more here beneath the ground?'

Adder swallowed, blinking. 'Oh yes... er yes...it is...underground...in the pit...er in the gallery...errr...' Adder's face grew redder and redder.

The clansfolk began to whisper and shift.

'He's lying.'

'He's not to be trusted!'

'But Adder's a Lifter, not a Finder!'

'How could he have found Midnight Flint?'

'The spirits will frown on Adder if he is telling an untruth.'

Owl felt her cheeks burning but she kept her gaze low.

Then beside her Mole gave a sudden gasp. 'Look up there!' he called out.

And Owl looked skyward where a flock of birds flew by; nothing unusual in that you might think, but this flock had feathers as red as blood. As Owl and Mole watched them, trembling at the sight, something even more terrifying happened.

One of the blood-red birds suddenly fell to earth and landed, dead, at Adder's feet.

All the clansfolk fell to their knees and pressed their faces to the earth.

'It is a message from the Spirits,' whispered Lark. 'A sign that Adder is lying.'

And then Adder in trembles and sobs told the whole cruel truth to Eagle and the Elders while the clan listened, shaking their heads at the shame of it.

'Come, Owl!' called Eagle.

Chewing her lip, cheeks aflame, Owl went shyly to the mound where Smallest greeted her with a waggy tail and a lick on the hand.

'Owl,' asked Eagle. 'Can you tell us where you found this Midnight Flint?'

And, blushing bright as sunset, Owl nodded.

She led Eagle and the Elders down the ladders and through the galleries, all the way to the whispering rock. Only Owl was small enough to squeeze within the narrow space but with her antler pick she prized up another hunk of Midnight Flint, even finer than the first and presented it to Eagle.

'You have done well, Owl' declared Eagle. 'Let us make an offering to the Spirits to thank them for their kindness.'

The clansfolk gathered in a circle around the mouth of the mineshaft where they sang and chanted and played bone-flute music and beat a steady pulse on their big deep drums, even the little ones banged upon rocks with sticks and stones. Deep in the earth beneath them, Eagle laid his own ancient green-stone axe upon the ground and gave thanks to the Spirits of plenty.

Later, when night had fallen and all was quiet, Owl and Mole and Lark tiptoed from the fireside with Smallest padding at their heels. They walked through the moonlit trees to the mine and in calm and in quiet climbed down the first ladder.

But when they reached the platform, Mole gave a gasp of surprise. 'Look!' he whispered, pointing down to the floorstone below. 'It's Adder!'

And he was right because Adder was down there; kneeling, with his forehead to the ground, all alone in the darkness. They watched as Adder laid the body of the blood red bird next to Eagle's offering, chanting softly to the Spirits. ~~promi to the spirits that he would cease his cruel ways.~~ 'What's *he* doing here?' hissed Lark.

On hearing her whisper, Adder lifted his face and Owl noticed the tears that glistened on his cheeks in the moonlight.

By the time they all climbed down Adder had scrambled to his feet and stood, hanging his head low in shame; Owl thought he seemed smaller suddenly. 'Owl,' he said in a shaky voice. 'I'm so sorry for what I did and for what I said and I-I-I—' his voice stuttered to silence as Lark snorted contemptuously, her hands on her hips.

Owl put her hand on her friend's arm. Even in the dim moonlight she could see that something in Adder's eyes was different – their cold selfish gleam had vanished clean away.

'I'm sorry Lark and Mole too...I made a mistake...a lot of mistakes,' sniffed Adder. 'I can see that now and I promise I'll change.'

Owl, Mole and Lark looked at each other.

'Peace?' asked Adder, shyly almost, offering them the sign of the open hand that showed he meant no harm.

'Peace,' said Owl, laying her warm palm upon Adder's cool one.

'Peace,' said Mole, doing the same.

Lark shrugged. 'Peace,' she said.

And from somewhere they heard a soft dim whisper as a fine mist of chalk dust stirred and swirled in a haze around them.

'I've come here to make a Spirit offering too,' said Owl softly to Adder who smiled in return as she showed him the two finest antler picks she had brought with her.

Owl held her antler picks high then she laid them carefully alongside the offerings of Adder and of Eagle. Lark and Mole and Adder hummed softly while she chanted.

'Oh Spirits of Water, of Earth and of Air,

I give thanks for the secret you chose to share

For the darkest gleam, for the moonless glint

Of this, most precious, Midnight Flint.'

And as their chanting faded a swoop of bats rose softly from the mine shaft into the starry night. Tired now, the four children slowly climbed the ladders to where Smallest waited, his head on his paws, his tail wagging.

Full-hearted, Owl, Mole, Lark, Adder and Smallest walked together back to their camp which still danced with flickering flames, firestories, and the magic of flint.