

‘Brendan!’ Aisling grabbed his arm. ‘Come away from this place of evil.’  
‘Evil? What do you mean?’  
‘It is the cave of the Dark One!’ Her voice sank to a whisper.  
‘Crom Cruach? That’s only a story for babies. The Abbot says that you shouldn’t be afraid of stories.’  
‘It’s not a story. The Dark One is *real* – real and waiting for someone to awaken it.’  
Brendan took a step towards the entrance.  
‘Crom Cruach,’ he called.  
‘Oh no! You shouldn’t have done that. Run!’  
It was too late. Black tendrils crept out from the cave and curled around Brendan’s legs. He was being pulled into the cave!

Aisling ran to one of the guard stones and pushed it with all her strength. It rocked, tilted, and then crashed in front of the opening, just as Brendan was about to be sucked in.  
Freed from the clinging vine, he fell backwards.  
Aisling lay on the ground beside the fallen statue.  
‘Aisling! Are you hurt?’  
‘No.’ She lifted her head and for an instant she looked like an old, old woman.  
‘I warned you,’ she said.  
‘I’m sorry, Aisling,’ Brendan apologised. ‘I just didn’t believe it was real.’  
Aisling’s face had returned to normal.  
‘This isn’t your world, Brendan,’ she said. ‘We need to get you home.’

